Cookies on Explore Education Statistics

We use some essential cookies to make this service work.

We'd also like to use analytics cookies so we can understand how you use the service and make improvements.

Accept analytics cookies | Reject analytics cookies | View cookies

Shape the future of Explore education statistics Close

Share your feedback to help us improve this service (opens in new tab)

You are viewing the new design of the Release page - if you would like to provide feedback, please complete our feedback form (opens in new window)

Department for Education

Academic year 2024/25

Higher Level Learners in England

Participation in higher level learning at Further Education Providers (FEPs) and Higher Education Providers (HEPs) for English-domiciled learners in England.

Quick links

Download all data (ZIP)

Create your own tables

Get email alerts

Latest release All releases in this series

Official statistics
Department for Education
Published
8 October 2026

Release home
Explore and download data
Methodology
Help and related information

On this page

Headline facts and figures

About this release

Type of higher-level learning

Level of study

Mode of study (in OfS-recognised HE)

Provider type

Qualification aim

Characteristics

Region of domicile

Disadvantage (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD)

Subject

Technical education route for level 4 and 5 courses

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

Contact us

Back to top

Headline facts and figures

Summary | Chart | Table

▶ Export options

There are over two million English learners studying towards a level 4+ qualification across English HE and FE providers

	Number of entrants	Total number of enrolments	Number of qualifiers
2015/16	728,145	1,657,845	502,660
2016/17	745,515	1,701,850	514,085
2017/18	750,385	1,729,105	533,060
2018/19	765,165	1,752,040	536,160
2019/20	769,215	1,790,800	507,200
2020/21	859,750	1,949,085	550,985
2021/22	844,090	1,985,960	558,535
2022/23	843,230	1,993,185	569,565
2023/24	842,370	2,004,730	583,140
2024/25	863,275	2,040,275	601,280

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record

information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Back to top

About this release

About this release

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 new tab).

The statistics show how higher-level skills provision was organised in 2024/25 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), collected by the Department for Education.

Statistics on learning in further education (opens in new tab) and higher education (opens in 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 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 2024/25. 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.

Changes for the 2024/25 publication

- Skills Bootcamps at levels 4 and 5 are captured in the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) from the 2023/24

academic year onwards, and are included in this release for the first time. A more comprehensive overview of statistics relating to Skills Bootcamps learners at levels 2 to 5 is published in the 'Skills bootcamps starts, completions and outcomes' publication which should be used as the source for official statistics on Skills Bootcamps.

- This release includes an additional breakdown of learner domicile by Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) area. This can be found in the **Explore and download data** section above.
- This release includes more detailed information around ethnicity characteristics. This can be found in the **Explore and download data** section above.
- All underlying data included in this release can now be further broken down by region of domicile.
- Due to ongoing quality concerns around the field used to record a student's majority source of tuition fee funding in the HESA Student Record (opens in new tab), data has not been published on funding source for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. We will look to publish breakdowns by funding source in future iterations of the release should data quality improve. Funding source data up to and including academic year 2022/23 can be found in the **Explore and download data** section above. Further information can be found in the Methodologies section of this release.

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.

COVID-19 impacts

HESA published a COVID-19 insight brief (opens in 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.

Back to top

Back to top

Type of higher-level learning

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 new tab) and generally eligible for student loan support
- **Apprenticeships** - paid jobs funded by government and employers that combine on-the-job and off-the-job training with a formal end-point assessment. As an employee, apprentices earn as they learn
- **Institutional credits in higher education providers** - bite-sized, standalone modules of learning which are not regarded as full qualifications
- **Other higher level - Funded** - other courses that are generally not eligible for student loan support, but could be eligible for other financial support. This includes courses that could be eligible for Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs) (opens in new tab), Skills Bootcamps, or HE regulated by Ofqual that can be funded by government
- **Other higher level - Unfunded** - all other courses at levels 4 to 8 that are not eligible for funding

Entrants

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

Between the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled entrants to higher-

level learning in England has risen for the first time in four years to 863,275. This is an increase of 2.5% over 2023/24, and an increase of 18.6% from 2015/16.

The increase in higher-level entrants in 2024/25 can largely be attributed to an increase in learners starting apprenticeships. Compared to 2023/24, the number of English-domiciled entrants to apprenticeships has increased by 15.1% from 120,425 to 138,600 in 2024/25.

The number of entrants to apprenticeships in 2024/25 is over five times greater than the number in 2015/16 (26,875). In comparison, between 2015/16 and 2024/25, the number of entrants to higher education (not including apprenticeships) rose by 6.4% to 663,305.

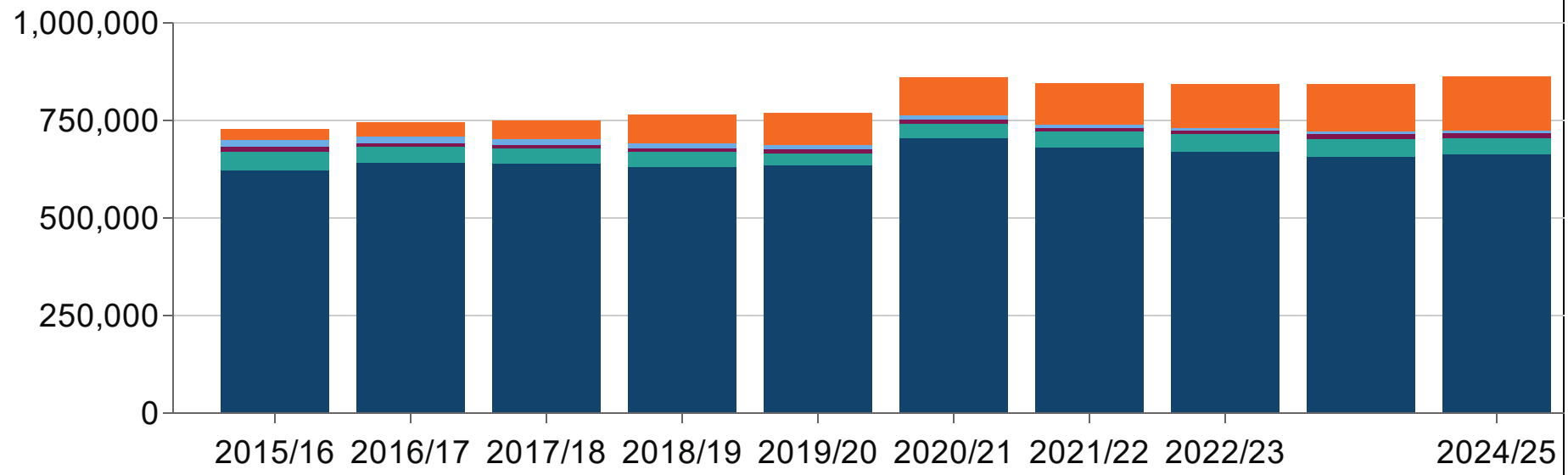
Further information on apprenticeships, including statistics for below level 4, is available in DfE's apprenticeships publication.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

The number of entrants to OfS-recognised HE has increased to 663,305 in 2024/25

Figure 2: Number of entrants to higher-level learning in England by type of learning from academic year 2015/16 to 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Total enrolments

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

Between the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled enrolments to higher-level learning in England has increased by 1.8%, from 2,004,730 to 2,040,275. This is mostly driven by increases in enrolments in apprenticeships.

Across the timeseries between academic years 2015/16 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled enrolments to higher-level learning in England has increased by 23.1%, from 1,657,845 in 2015/16. This is mostly driven by increases in higher education at levels 6 and 7 and apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7.

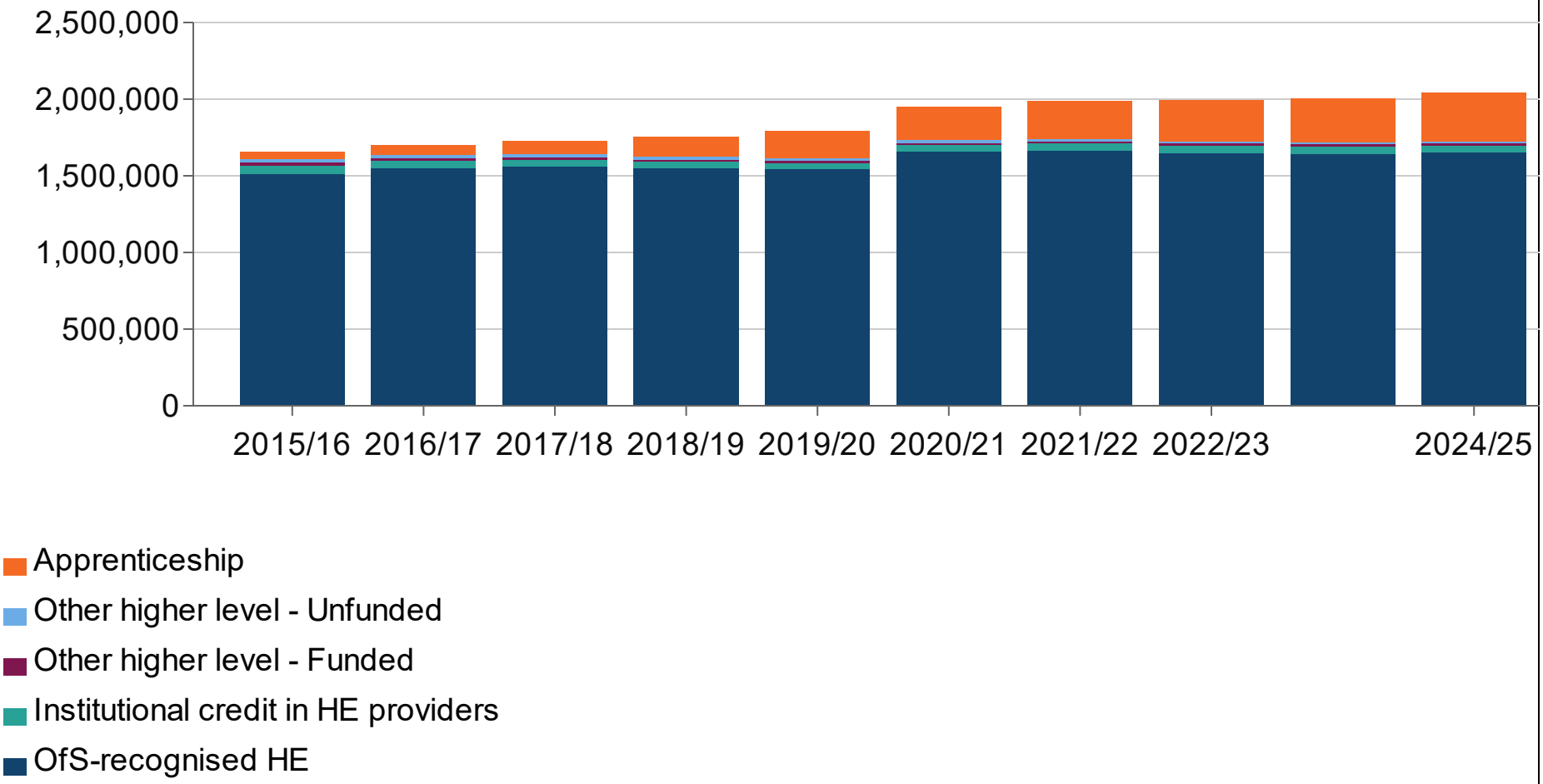
Compared to 2015/16, enrolments in apprenticeships have increased by over six times, from 46,490 to 315,935 in 2024/25.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

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 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on

apprenticeships and higher education.

2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Qualifiers

> A qualifier refers to a learner that obtained a qualification at some point during the stated academic year. HESA do not count those that hold institutional credits as their highest qualification awarded during the stated academic year as part of their qualifiers obtained population. See here for more information: Definitions: Students | HESA (opens in new tab).

Between academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled qualifiers in higher-level learning in England has increased by 3.1%, from 583,140 to 601,280. This was almost entirely driven by an increase in apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7.

Across the timeseries between academic years 2015/16 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled qualifiers in higher-level learning in England has increased by 19.6%, from 502,660 to 601,280. This was mostly driven by increases in qualifiers in HE at level 7 and apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7.

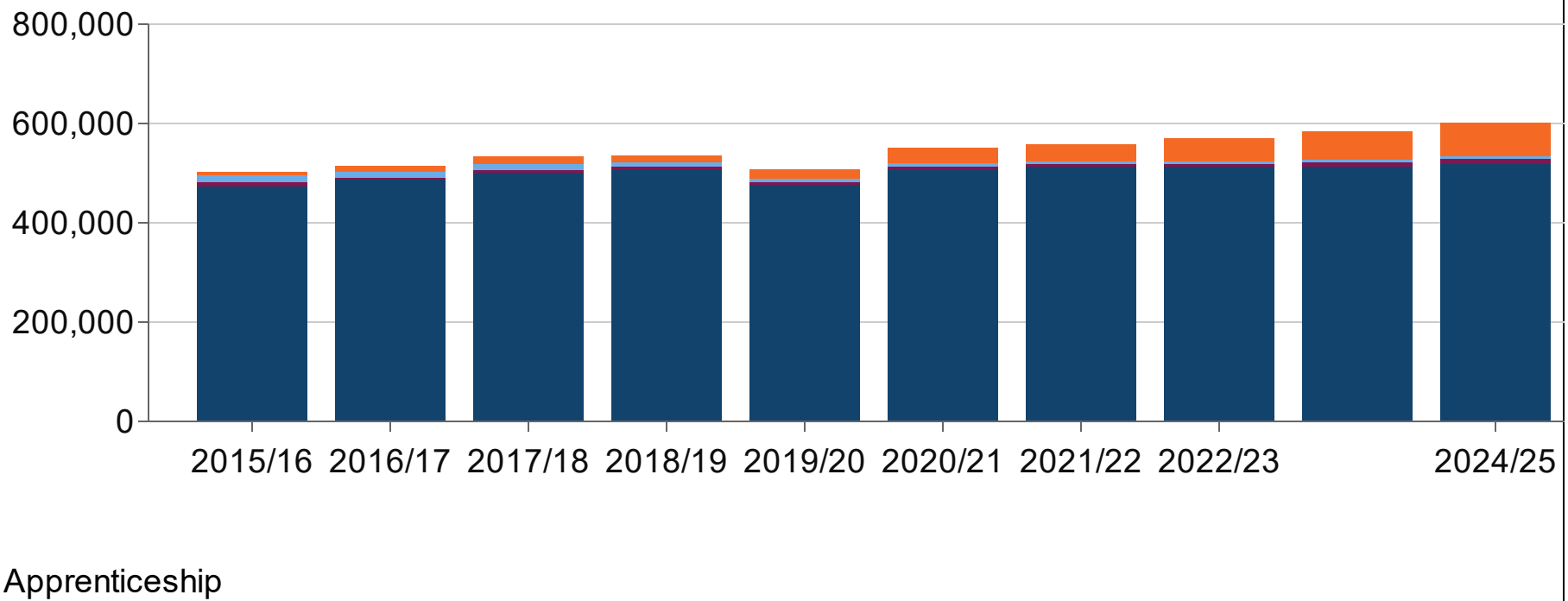
The number of learners to complete an apprenticeship is over nine times higher in 2024/25 than in 2015/16 (rising from 6,885 in 2015/16 to 67,280 in 2024/25).

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

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 2024/25



- Other higher level - Unfunded
- Other higher level - Funded
- OfS-recognised HE

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Level of study

> In previous iterations of this release, the qualification aim ‘Masters degree that meets the criteria for a research-based higher degree’ (L0000/L00) was classified as Level 7. To better align with statistics published by the Office for Students, this qualification aim has been reclassified as Level 8 for all academic years included in this release.

In the academic year 2024/25, 863,275 English-domiciled entrants started a qualification at an English HE provider or FE provider, with the majority doing so at level 6 (471,065), representing 54.6% of entrants in 2024/25.

Between the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, the total number of English-domiciled entrants to higher-level learning in England rose for all levels except for level 5, which decreased by 4.4%.

Between the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, entrants to level 4 rose by 6.2%, entrants to level 6 rose by 1.5%, entrants to level 7 rose by 5.7% and entrants to level 8 rose by 0.7%.

The rise in level 7 study was driven mainly by a 40.5% rise in entrants to level 7 apprenticeships. This is likely linked to changes to funding rules in January 2026, which restricted funding for level 7 apprenticeships to those aged 16 to 21, as well as care leavers and those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who are under 25 at the start of their apprenticeship.

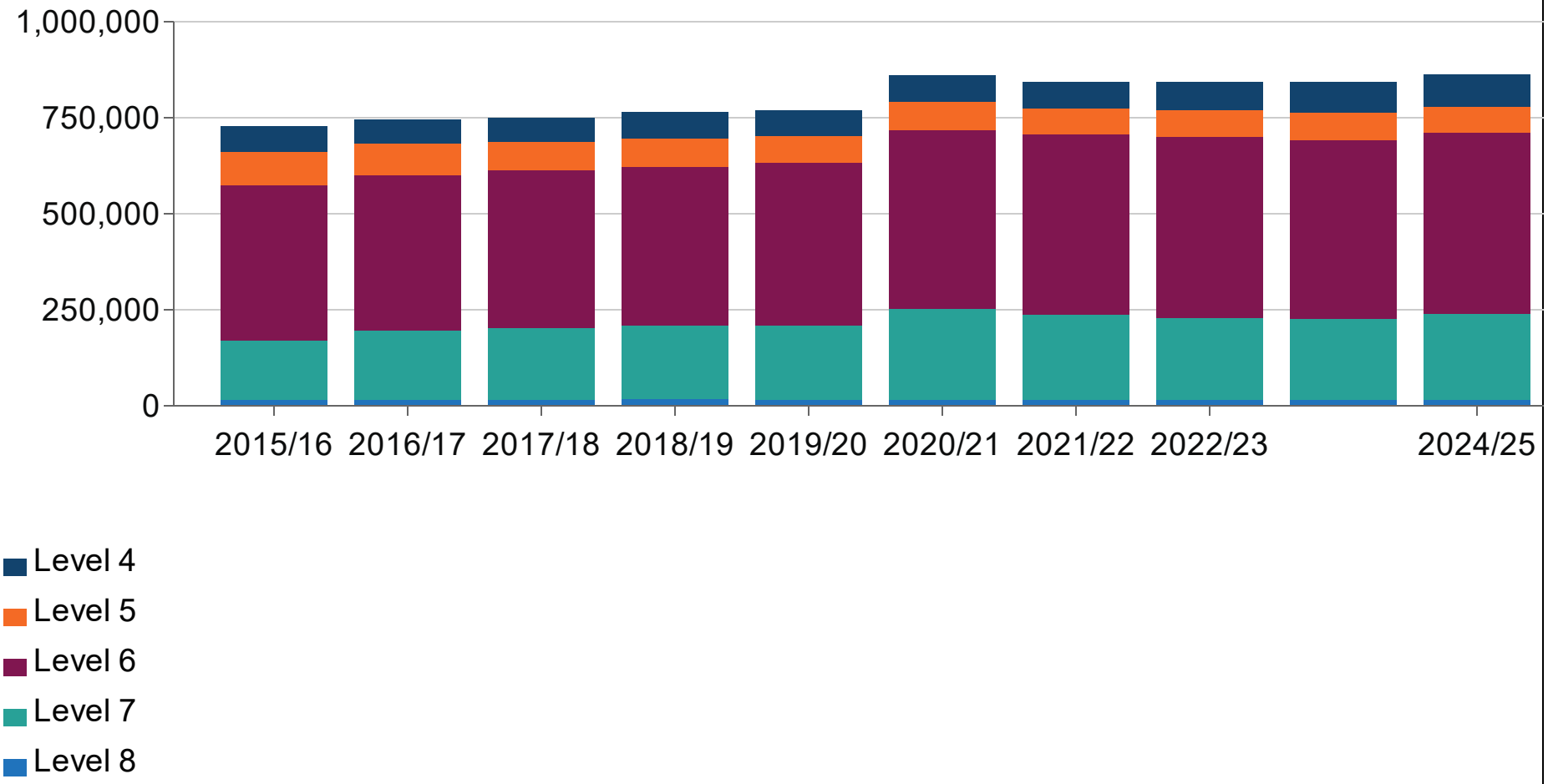
Further information on apprenticeships, including statistics for below level 4, is available in DfE’s apprenticeships publication.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

Entrants increased in 2024/25 across all levels apart from Level 5, which fell by 4.4% to its lowest level since 2021/22

Figure 5: Number of entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study between academic year 2015/16 and 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record

information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Mode of study (in OfS-recognised HE)

> 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 15.4% since 2015/16 (from 474,815 to 547,705 in 2024/25), while part-time entrants decreased by 22.3% (from 148,870 to 115,600 over the same period).

Between 2015/16 and 2024/25, entrants to part-time OfS-recognised HE at levels 4 and 5 saw decreases of 66.0% and 69.3% respectively. Part-time entrants to level 6 and level 8 also decreased between 2015/16 and 2024/25 but to a lesser extent compared to levels 4 and 5. Part-time entrants at level 7 increased over this time, rising from 60,325 in 2015/16 to 65,925 in 2024/25 (a 9.3% increase).

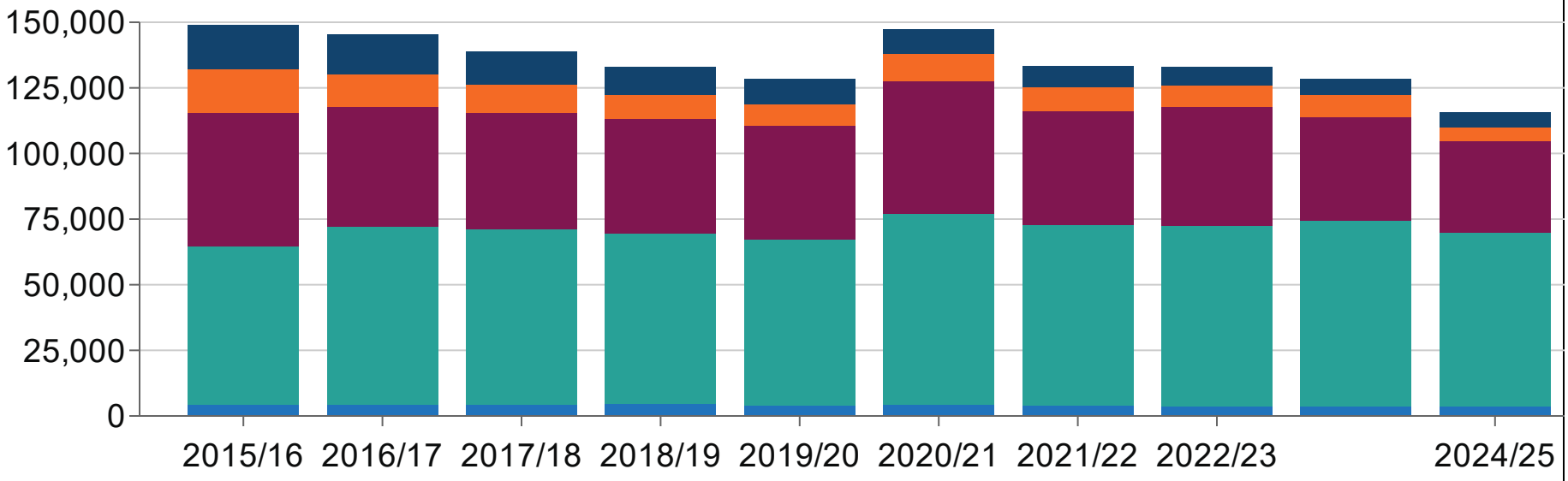
Across all levels of study, part-time entrants to OfS-recognised HE decreased by 13.8% between 2015/16 and 2019/20 from 148,870 to 128,340. Part-time entrants subsequently increased by 14.8% to 147,305 in 2020/21, before falling again by 21.5% to 115,600 in 2024/25.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

The number of entrants to part-time OfS-recognised higher education has fallen over the last year to 115,600 in 2024/25

Figure 6: Number of part-time entrants to OfS-recognised HE in England by level of study between academic year 2015/16 and 2024/25



- Level 4
- Level 5
- Level 6
- Level 7
- Level 8

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

The proportion of English-domiciled entrants to OfS-recognised HE at levels 4 to 8 that were part-time decreased from 19.6% in 2023/24 to 17.4% in 2024/25. This is a 2.2 percentage point difference, the largest year-on-year decrease across the time series.

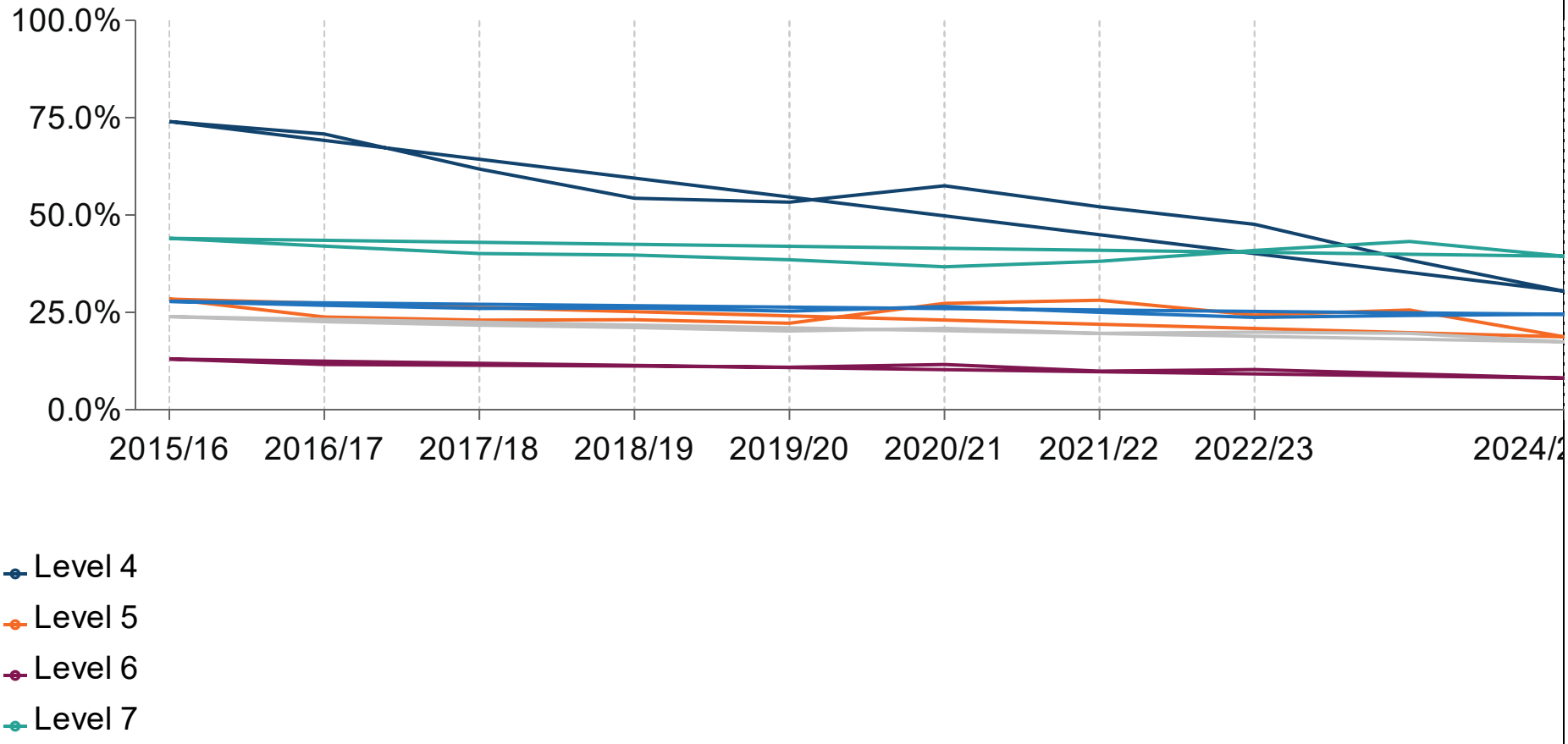
In 2024/25, just 8.1% of entrants to HE at level 6 studied part-time, compared to 39.4% of entrants to a level 7 qualification.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

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 2024/25



- Level 8
- Total

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Provider type

> 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 2024/25 there were around 182,320 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 Size and shape of provision data dashboard: Data dashboard - Office for Students (opens in new tab).

Of the 863,275 English-domiciled higher-level entrants in England in 2024/25:

- 83.7% (722,295) were registered at HEPs,
- 5.1% (44,225) were registered at general FE colleges,
- 10.4% (90,005) were registered at private sector public funded providers, and
- 0.8% (6,750) were registered at schools, sixth form colleges, special colleges 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 2024/25, 30.9% of higher-level entrants at level 4 were registered at HEPs and 31.9% of higher-level entrants at level 5 were registered at HEPs, compared with 96.8% of higher-level entrants at level 6 and 90.5% 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

▶ Export options

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 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Qualification aim

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 levels 4 to 8.

There were 84,290 English-domiciled learners entering level 4 in England in 2024/25. At this level, the most common qualification aim was apprenticeships (53.8%).

There were 68,095 English-domiciled learners entering level 5 in England in 2024/25. At this level, the most common qualification aims were apprenticeships (49.8%), foundation degrees (18.8%) and Higher National Diplomas (15.9%).

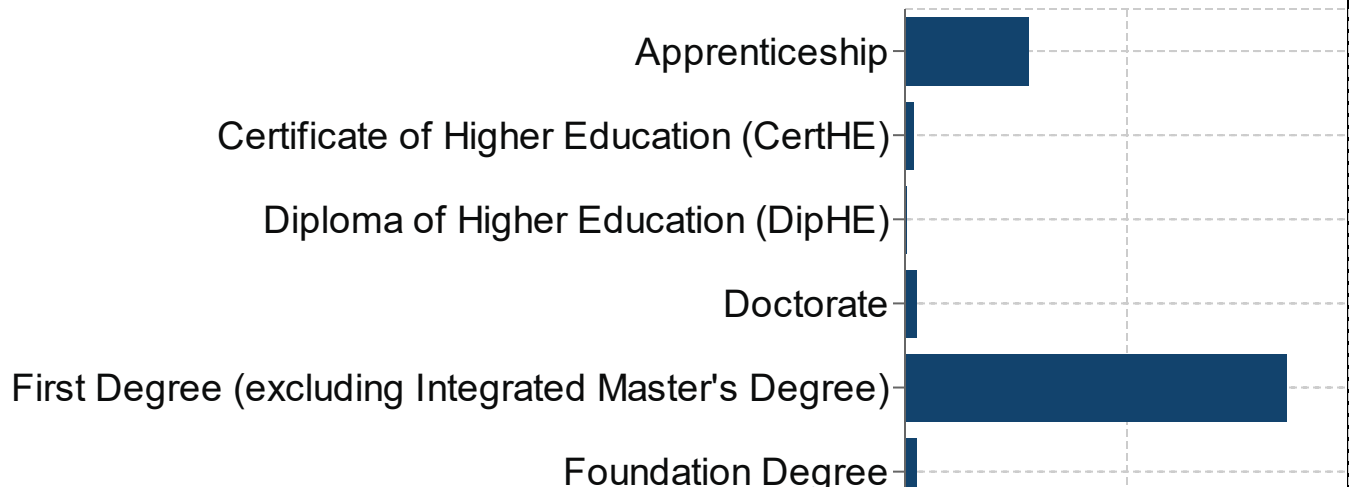
In 2024/25, 91.3% of the 471,065 English-domiciled learners entering level 6 in England were aiming for a first degree (excluding integrated master's degree).

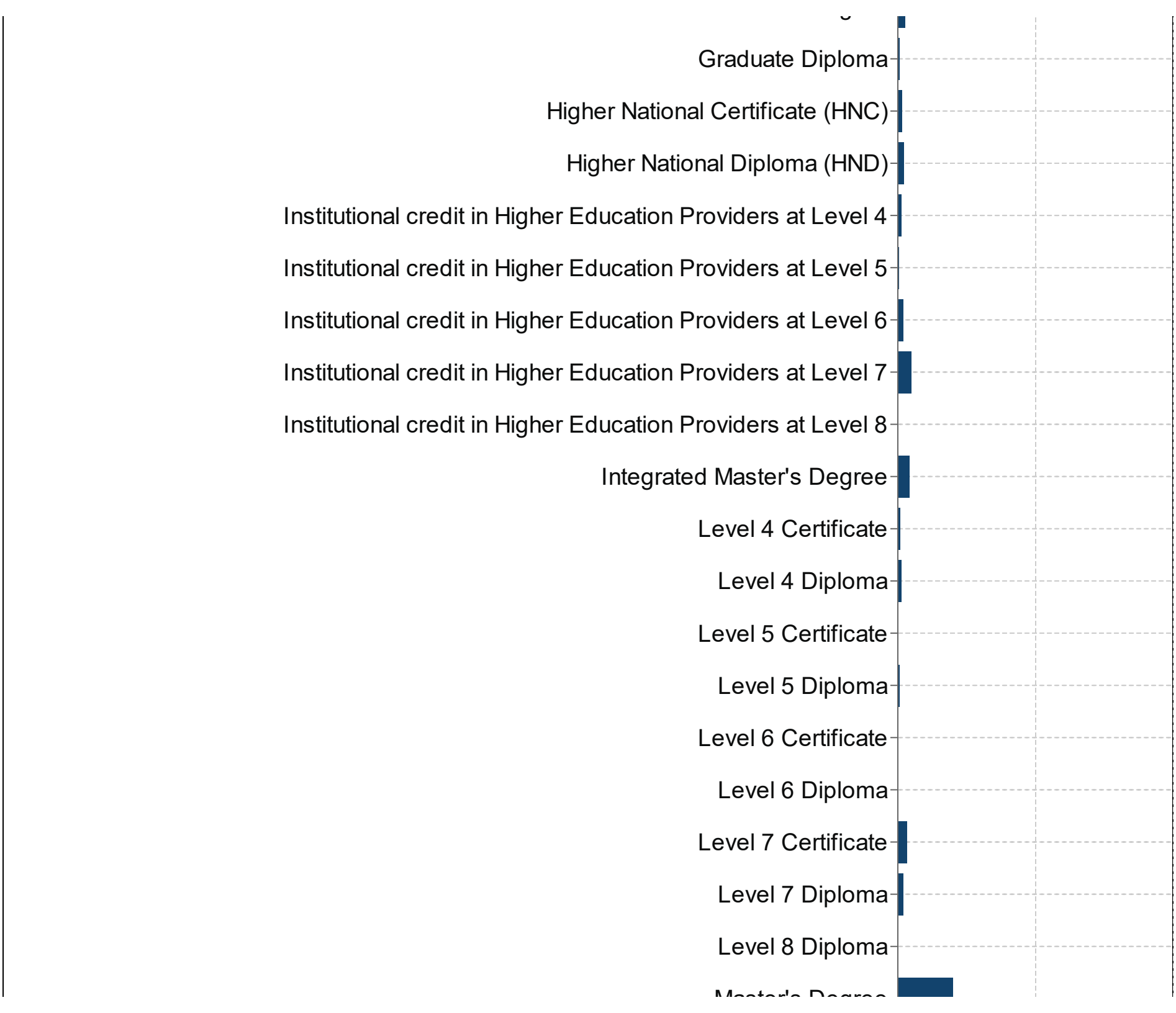
Chart | Table

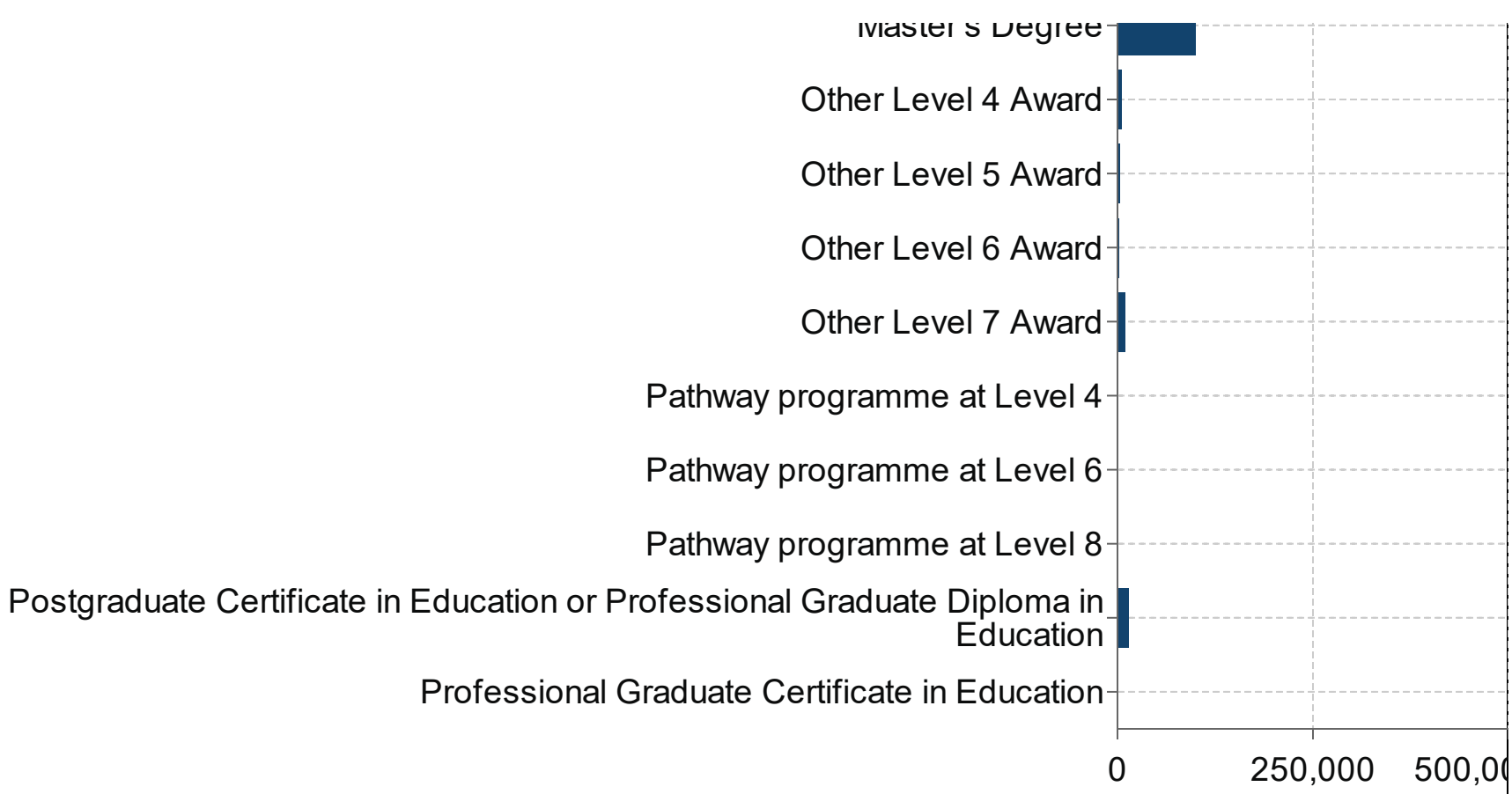
▶ Export options

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 2024/25




Graduate Diploma
Higher National Certificate (HNC)
Higher National Diploma (HND)
Institutional credit in Higher Education Providers at Level 4
Institutional credit in Higher Education Providers at Level 5
Institutional credit in Higher Education Providers at Level 6
Institutional credit in Higher Education Providers at Level 7
Institutional credit in Higher Education Providers at Level 8
Integrated Master's Degree
Level 4 Certificate
Level 4 Diploma
Level 5 Certificate
Level 5 Diploma
Level 6 Certificate
Level 6 Diploma
Level 7 Certificate
Level 7 Diploma
Level 8 Diploma



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Characteristics

Age

> Age refers to the learner's age at the start of the academic year. A very small number of learners (25 entrants) had unknown age. The following percentages are based on learners where age is known.

There were 863,250 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning in England in 2024/25 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 (79.7%) and level 5 (86.6%) were aged 21 and above, compared to 37.5% of entrants at level 6.
- Entrants to higher education were more likely to be younger than those entering apprenticeships. In 2024/25, 44.7% of HE entrants were aged 20 and under, compared to 12.6% for apprenticeships.

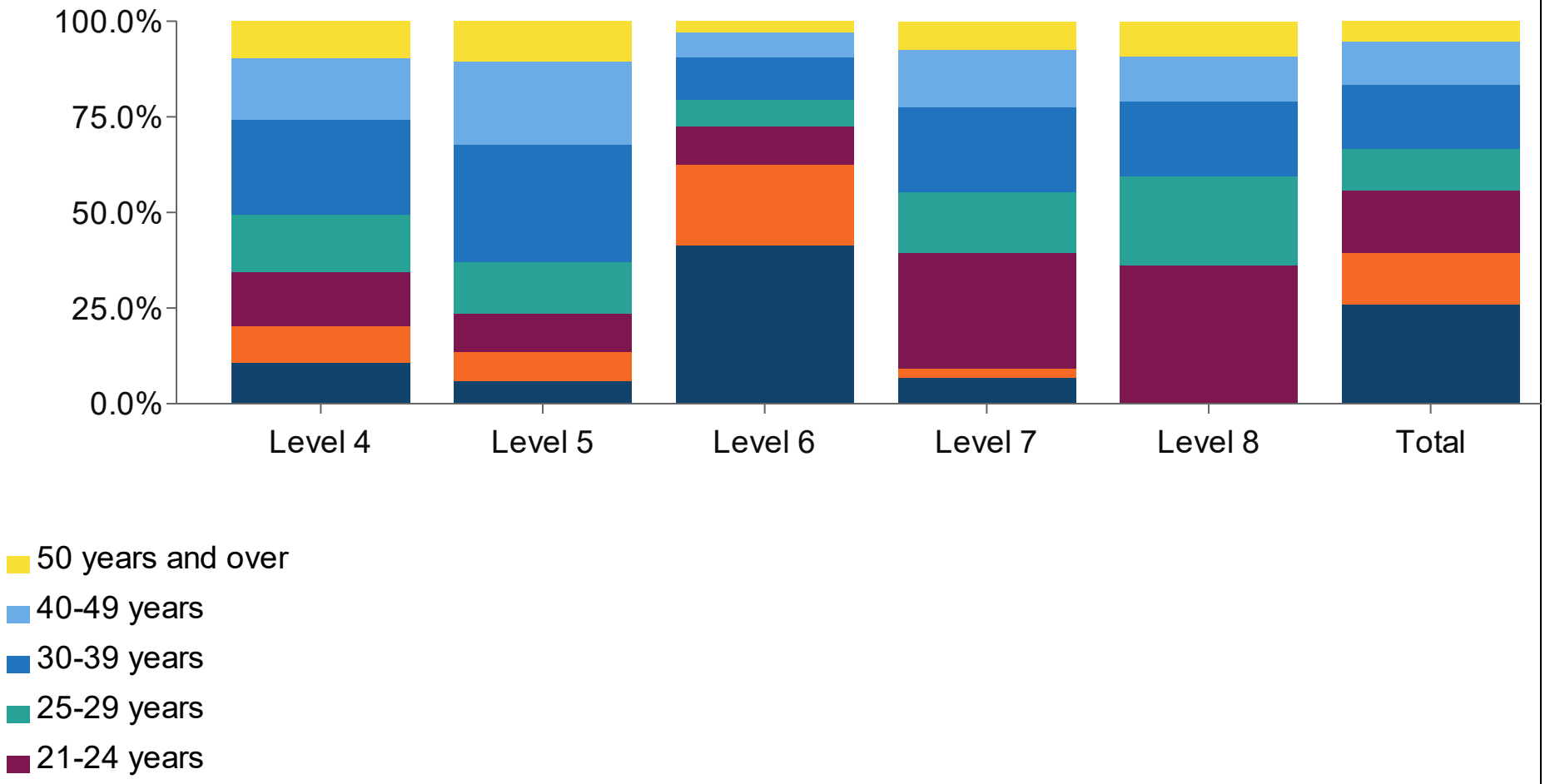
- Almost all of the level 5 and level 7 apprenticeship starts were aged 21 and above (96.9% and 94.5% respectively), compared to 84.0% for level 4 apprenticeship starts and 71.9% for level 6 apprenticeship starts.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

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

Figure 10: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and age group in academic year 2024/25



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. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Sex

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 858,265 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning in England in 2024/25 with their sex recorded as either male or female:

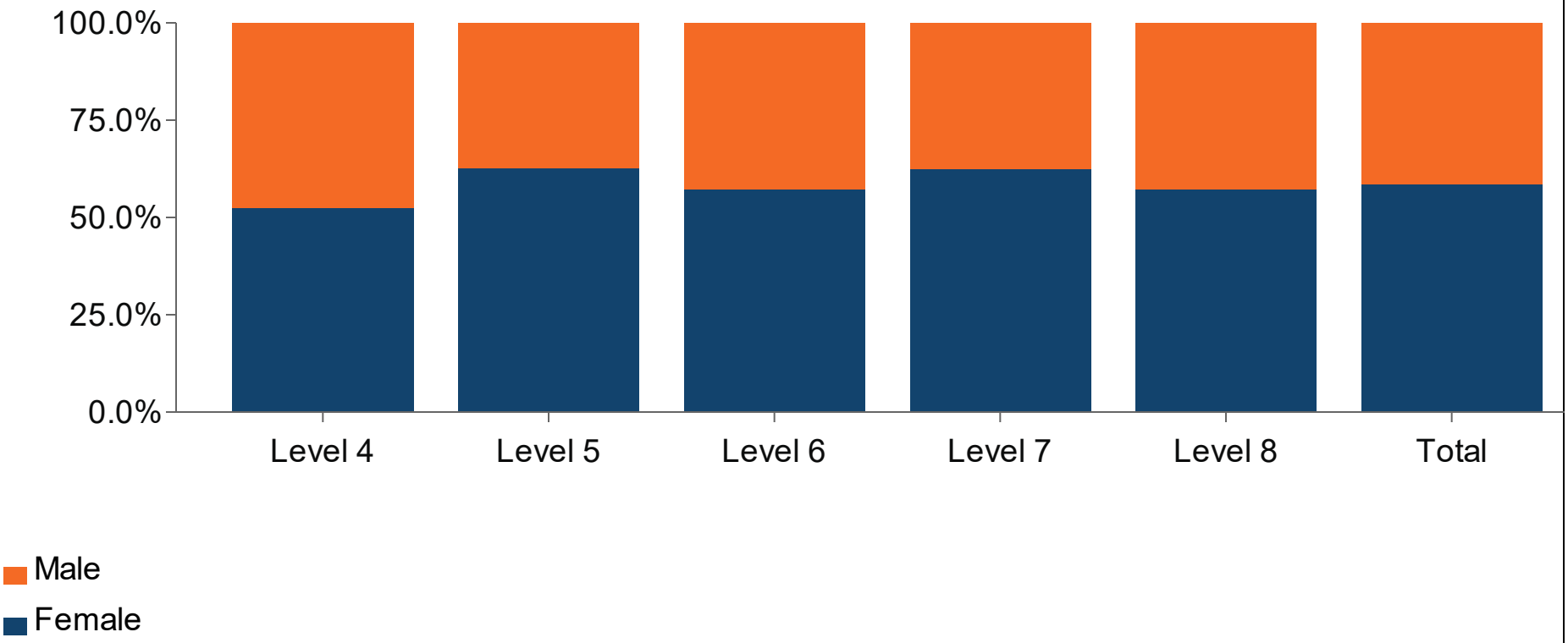
- Entrants were more likely to be female at every level of study. Levels 5 (62.7%) and 7 (62.4%) had the highest proportion of female entrants.
- Both apprenticeships and higher education had a higher proportion of entrants that were female. In 2024/25, 56.2% of apprenticeship entrants were female, while 59.0% of entrants to HE were female.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

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

Figure 11: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and sex in academic year 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 3 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Ethnicity

> For the first time, the underlying data accompanying this release includes a more detailed breakdown by ethnicity. This can be found in the **Explore and download data** section above. Further information can be found in the Methodologies section of this release.
>
> Some learners are recorded as having unknown ethnicity. In 2024/25, 2.3% (20,265) 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 843,010 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2024/25 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 61.8%, while the level with the highest was level 5, with 77.5%.
- Level 6 had a higher proportion of entrants from a black (12.0%), Asian (16.8%) or mixed (6.2%) background and level 8 had a higher proportion of entrants from other (3.3%) backgrounds compared to all other levels.
- Higher education had higher proportions of entrants from Asian (16.7%), black (11.6%), mixed (5.8%) and other (3.1%) ethnic backgrounds compared to apprenticeships. Almost two thirds (62.7%) of entrants to HE were from white backgrounds, which is lower than the proportion of entrants to apprenticeships from white

backgrounds (79.1%).

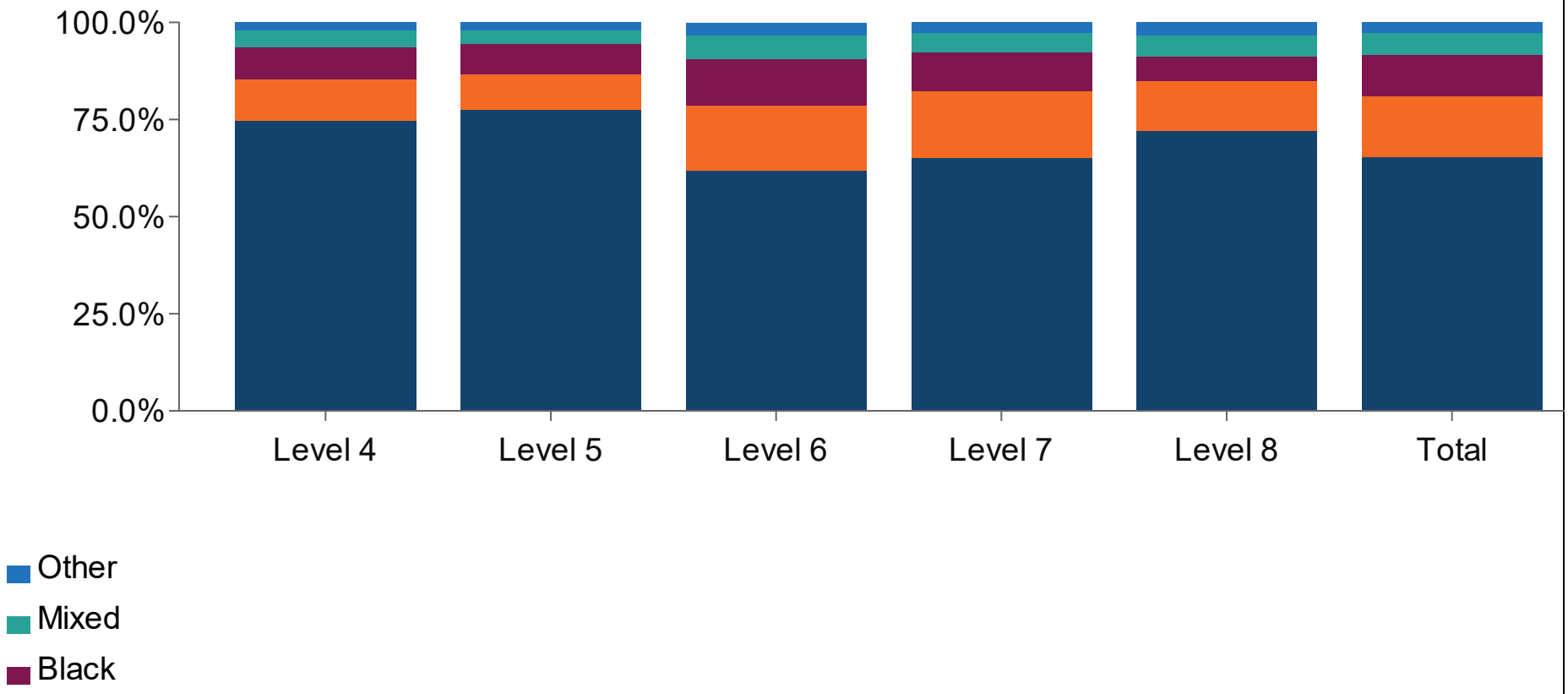
- The majority (79.1%) of entrants to apprenticeships in 2024/25 were from white backgrounds. Just 10.1% of entrants were from an Asian background, 5.8% of entrants were from a black background, 3.7% were from a mixed background and 1.2% were from any other ethnic background.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

Proportionally, level 6 had the fewest white entrants in academic year 2024/25

Figure 12: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by level of study and ethnicity group in academic year 2024/25



Asian

White

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 3 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Disability

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 863,275 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2024/25.

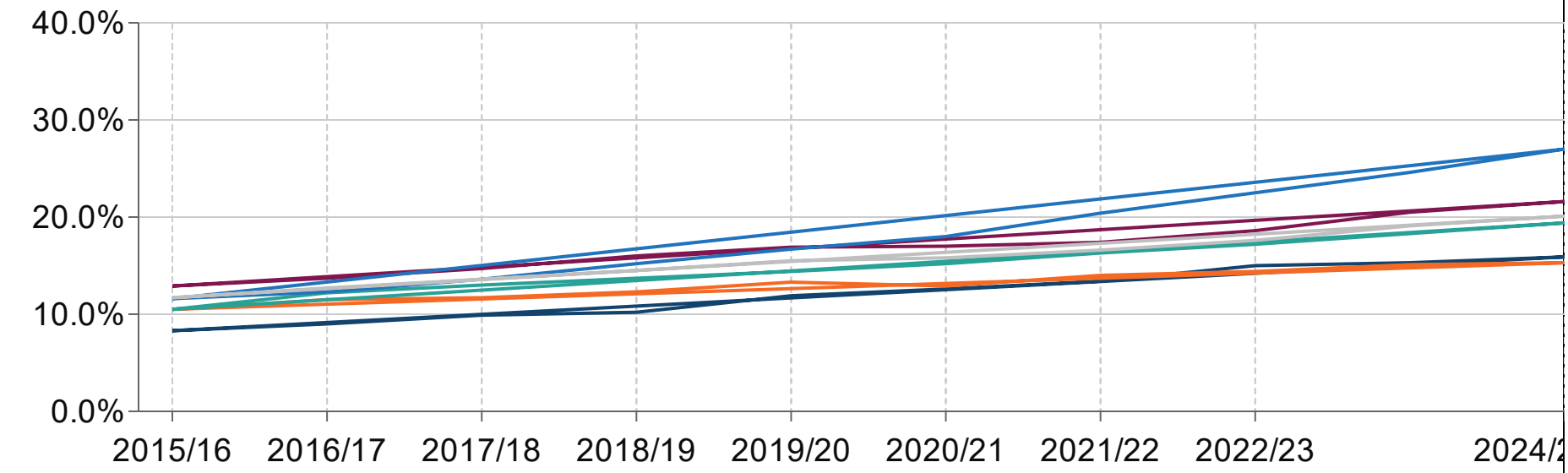
- Of these entrants, 20.1% had self-reported a disability, an increase from 19.1% in 2023/24 and 11.7% in 2015/16.
- Proportionally fewer entrants to apprenticeships reported a disability compared to entrants to higher education. In 2024/25, 13.4% of entrants to apprenticeships reported a disability, compared to 21.3% of entrants to HE.
- Proportionally fewer entrants to levels 4 and 5 reported a disability compared to higher levels. In 2024/25, 15.9% of entrants to level 4 and 15.3% of entrants to level 5 had reported a disability, compared to 21.6% for level 6, 19.4% for entrants to level 7 and 27.0% for entrants to level 8.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

The proportion of entrants to higher-level learning that declared a disability has increased across all levels of study since 2015/16

Figure 13: Proportion of entrants to higher-level learning in England with a self-reported disability between academic year 2015/16 and 2024/25



- Level 4
- Level 5
- Level 6
- Level 7
- Level 8
- Total

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Region of domicile

> Region of domicile has been derived from the location of the learner's permanent home address before starting their course. In 2024/25, around 235 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 863,040 English-domiciled learners with a known permanent address entering higher-level learning in England in 2024/25. Of these entrants:

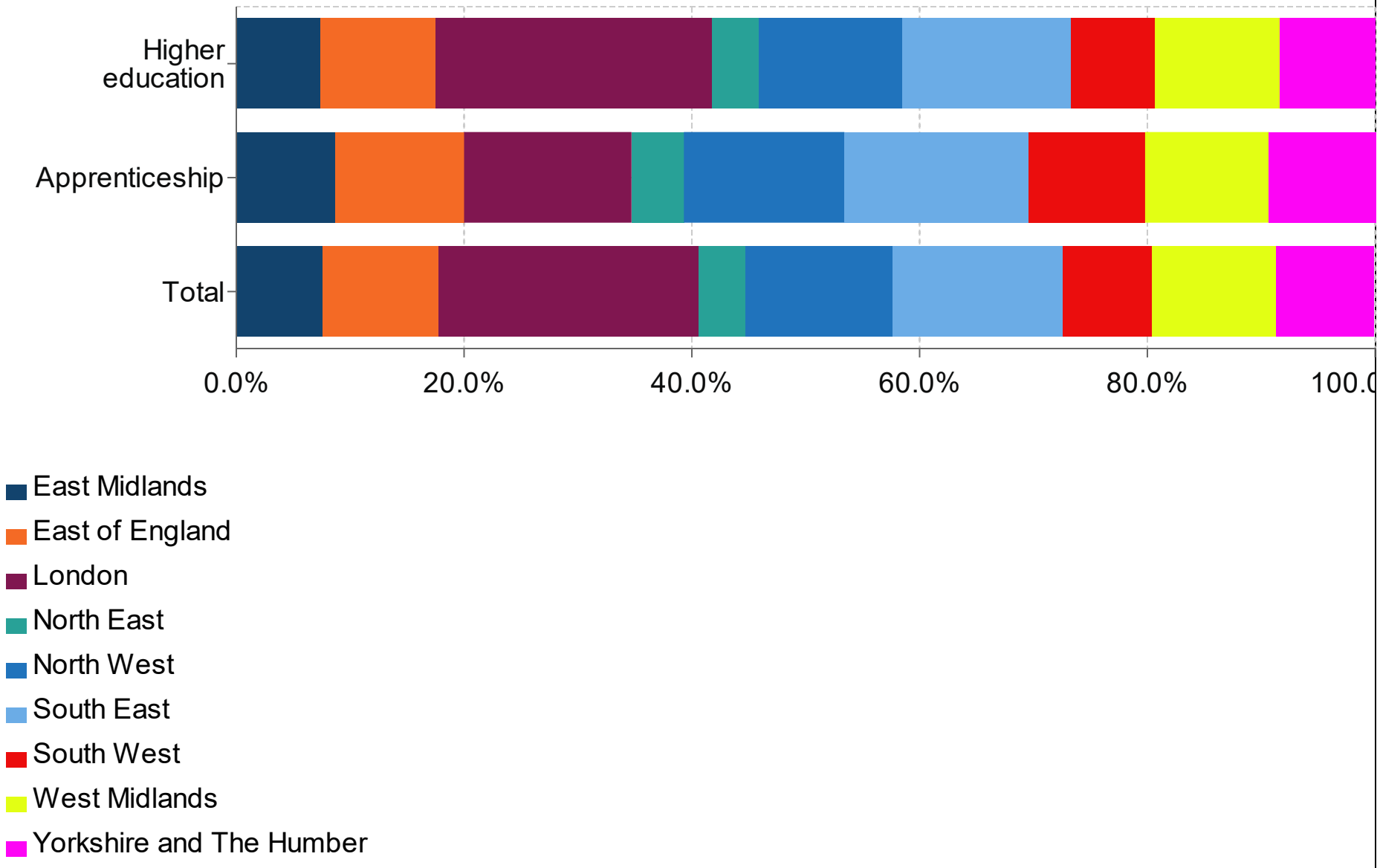
- London was the region of domicile with the highest proportion of entrants to all levels of study. In 2024/25, 22.8% of all entrants to higher-level learning were domiciled in London.
- The North East was the region of domicile with the lowest proportion of entrants. In 2024/25, 4.1% of all entrants were domiciled in the North East.
- The regions of domicile with the highest proportions of apprenticeship starts were the South East (16.2%), London (14.7%) and the North West (14.1%). Just 4.6% of apprenticeship starts were domiciled in the North East.
- Proportionally fewer learners starting apprenticeships came from London when compared to those entering higher education. In 2024/25, 14.7% of apprenticeship entrants came from London, compared to 24.3% of HE entrants.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

London is the most common region of permanent address for entrants to higher education whereas it is second to the South East for entrants to apprenticeships

Figure 14: Entrants to higher-level learning in England by type of higher-level learning and region of permanent address prior to study in academic year 2024/25



Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record

information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Disadvantage (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD)

> 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 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. Quintile 1 areas are considered to be the most deprived, while quintile 5 areas

which are considered to be the least deprived.

There were 863,040 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level learning in England in 2024/25 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 2024/25, 23.8% of entrants from level 4 to 6 came from IMD quintile 1 neighbourhoods compared to 16.1% 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 2024/25, 22.7% of entrants to HE learning came from IMD quintile 1 neighbourhoods compared to 16.5% for apprenticeship starts.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

Just 12.4% of entrants to level 8 were from IMD quintile 1 areas (most deprived), compared to 24.2% for level 5

		Quintile 1	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5
Higher education	**Level 4**	27.6%	22.9%	18.7%	16.2%	14.6%
	Level 5	29.8%	24.9%	18.9%	14.6%	11.7%
	Level 6	24.4%	21.6%	18.4%	17.2%	18.3%
	Level 7	17.1%	20.8%	20.5%	20.4%	21.1%
	Level 8	12.4%	19.7%	21.6%	22.0%	24.2%

	Total	22.7%	21.6%	19.1%	18.0%	18.7%
Apprenticeship	**Level 4**	19.4%	20.7%	20.5%	20.1%	19.3%
	Level 5	18.6%	20.8%	21.3%	20.7%	18.6%
	Level 6	15.1%	19.2%	21.0%	21.9%	22.8%
	Level 7	11.6%	18.0%	20.7%	23.2%	26.4%
	Total	16.5%	19.8%	20.8%	21.3%	21.5%
Total	**Level 4**	23.2%	21.7%	19.6%	18.3%	17.2%
	Level 5	24.2%	22.9%	20.1%	17.6%	15.1%
	Level 6	23.9%	21.5%	18.6%	17.5%	18.5%
	Level 7	16.3%	20.4%	20.6%	20.8%	21.9%
	Level 8	12.4%	19.7%	21.6%	22.0%	24.2%
	Total	21.7%	21.3%	19.4%	18.5%	19.1%

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Back to top

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on

apprenticeships and higher education.

2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Subject

Subjects have been categorised using the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) (opens in new tab), which is the classification used by HESA for study in 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 863,275 English-domiciled learners entering higher-level study in England in 2024/25:

- 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 2024/25, 45.3% of apprenticeship starts were in Business and management, compared to 18.4% of higher education entrants.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

The most common subjects undertaken by entrants to higher-level learning in 2024/25 were Business and management, Social sciences and Subjects allied to medicine

	Higher education	Apprenticeship	Total
Agriculture, food and related studies	5,680	135	5,810
Architecture, building and planning	15,500	5,770	21,270
Biological and sport sciences	27,300	665	27,965
Business and management	133,585	62,720	196,300
Combined and general studies	11,210	4,420	15,630

Combined and general studies	11,210	4,420	15,630
Computing	45,275	18,550	63,825
Design, and creative and performing arts	50,660	70	50,730
Education and teaching	42,130	5,335	47,465
Engineering and technology	33,005	5,350	38,355
Geography, earth and environmental studies (natural sciences)	6,325	120	6,445
Geography, earth and environmental studies (social sciences)	2,590	no data	2,590
Historical, philosophical and religious studies	18,405	0	18,405
Language and area studies	16,305	no data	16,305
Law	38,475	2,250	40,725
Mathematical sciences	8,545	45	8,590
Media, journalism and communications	10,905	290	11,195
Medicine and dentistry	16,075	2,480	18,555
Physical sciences	13,805	515	14,320
Psychology	39,650	no data	39,650
Social sciences	78,615	19,740	98,355
Subjects allied to medicine	108,090	10,150	118,240

Veterinary sciences	2,515	no data	2,515
Unknown	30	no data	30
Total	724,675	138,600	863,275

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Back to top

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 3 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Technical education route for level 4 and 5 courses

The Sainsbury Review and Post-16 Skills Plan (opens in new tab) set out fifteen technical routes describing occupations that require technical and higher technical education. Reforms to higher technical education (opens in 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 new tab) (formerly the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education) to meet employer-led occupational standards within the technical routes.

In the 2024/25 academic year, FEPs reported a total of 4,275 English-domiciled entrants on HTQs according to data submitted through the ILR. The HTQ data from HEPs for academic year 2024/25 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 2024/25 is not yet available. By analysing the HESA student record, DfE estimates that the number of entrants to HTQs in the 2024/25 academic year across both HEPs and FEPs in England to be around 5,615.

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 DfE guidance (opens in new tab).

There were 32,295 English-domiciled learners entering level 4 study in England in 2024/25 (excluding apprenticeships and institutional credits). At this level, 92.1% were in a technical education route, of which the most popular subject areas were Business and Administration (21.7%) and Digital (13.5%).

For the 32,260 English-domiciled learners entering level 5 in England in 2024/25 (excluding apprenticeships and institutional credits), 93.4% were in a technical education route, of which the most popular subject area was Business and administration (33.7%), followed by Health and science (13.0%).

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

The most common technical route undertaken by entrants to higher-level learning in England was Business and administration

		Level 4	Level 5
Higher education	**Agriculture, environmental and animal care**	215	1,080
	Business and administration	6,445	10,155
	Care services	3,600	2,580
	Catering and hospitality	75	350
	Construction and the built environment	1,310	515

Creative and design	2,850	2,320
Digital	4,020	2,235
Education and childcare	1,900	2,870
Engineering and manufacturing	3,255	1,895
Hair and beauty	1,565	180
Health and science	2,575	3,910
Legal, finance and accounting	1,375	265
Not a technical route	2,545	2,145
Protective Services	350	210
Sales, marketing and procurement	180	180
Transport and logistics	40	1,380

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Back to top

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.

2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 3 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

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

> 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 a learner's 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 2024/25, 9.6% of OfS-recognised HE entrants were recorded as having an unknown ELQ status. However, 23.9% of level 4 and 25.6% of level 5 entrants had an unknown ELQ status compared to 2.7% 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 599,880 English-domiciled learners entering OfS-recognised HE in England in 2024/25 that have a known ELQ status. Level 4 (14.7%), 5 (11.6%) and Level 7 (18.7%) entrants were more likely to be aiming for an ELQ that they already held compared to level 6 (3.7%) 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. However, despite also being on average older than entrants to level 6, only 1.3% of entrants to level 8 were aiming for an ELQ that they already held.

The rise and subsequent fall in the proportion of entrants to level 5 who already held a qualification at this level or higher was largely driven by a small number of HE providers offering Diplomas in education and training. Entrant numbers to these courses peaked in 2022/23, before the providers were removed from the Office for Students register (opens in new tab) and ceased to be required to submit data to HESA. Caution is therefore advised when interpreting trends over time.

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

In 2024/25, about one fifth of OfS-recognised HE entrants to qualifications at level 7 already held a qualification at an equivalent or higher level

	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Total
2015/16	23.8%	16.4%	5.3%	19.9%	1.3%	10.1%
2016/17	21.7%	13.4%	5.5%	18.4%	1.3%	9.8%
2017/18	21.0%	13.4%	5.0%	18.1%	1.1%	9.5%
2018/19	19.3%	12.5%	4.6%	17.4%	1.1%	8.8%
2019/20	18.4%	10.8%	4.5%	17.2%	1.1%	8.6%
2020/21	19.2%	12.9%	5.1%	16.4%	1.2%	9.1%
2021/22	18.3%	17.2%	4.9%	17.4%	1.0%	9.2%
2022/23	18.6%	22.2%	4.6%	19.5%	1.0%	9.7%
2023/24	16.6%	17.2%	3.9%	19.7%	1.2%	8.9%
2024/25	14.7%	11.6%	3.7%	18.7%	1.3%	8.3%

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record

information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 3 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

In 2024/25, 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 (65.1%), and entrants to level 8 were most likely to be qualified to level 7 (70.8%).

Chart | Table

▶ Export options

In 2024/25, 75.0% of entrants to OfS-recognised HE at level 6 in England entered with a level 3 qualification

	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Total
Level 1	3.4%	0.9%	0.3%	0.1%	no data	0.3%
Level 2	13.2%	7.9%	3.1%	0.1%	0.0%	2.8%
Level 3	49.4%	49.0%	75.0%	12.6%	0.5%	55.9%
Level 4	3.3%	8.8%	3.0%	0.9%	0.2%	2.7%
Level 5	1.8%	2.4%	4.6%	1.2%	0.1%	3.5%
Level 6	3.9%	4.6%	2.6%	65.1%	26.7%	19.0%
Level 7	2.1%	1.7%	0.6%	16.8%	70.8%	6.4%
Level 8	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%	1.3%	0.5%
Other	13.6%	20.5%	9.9%	1.5%	0.3%	8.1%
No Prior Qualifications	9.1%	4.1%	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	0.9%

Show full screen table

Data symbols

Footnotes

1. See the publication Methodology for explanation of differences from other official statistics on apprenticeships and higher education.
2. The “Other higher level - Unfunded” category is a lower bound estimate. There is likely to be some unfunded-learning in FE providers that is not recorded as it is only mandatory for providers to record

information in the ILR for their government-funded learners. There may also be higher level learning in the private sector that is not recorded in administrative data held by government.

Show 2 more footnotes

Source: Higher Level Learners in England, 2024/25

Explore and edit this data online

Use our table tool to explore this data.

Explore data

Back to top

Contact us

If you have a specific enquiry about Higher Level Learners in England statistics and data:

HE Participation and Provider Statistics Team
Email: he.statistics@education.gov.uk
Contact name: Louis Erritt

Press office

If you have a media enquiry:
Telephone: 020 7783 8300

Public enquiries
If you have a general enquiry about the Department for Education (DfE) or education:
Phone: 0370 000 2288

Opening times
Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 5.30pm (closed on bank holidays)

Back to top

Is this page useful?

Yes | No

Report a problem with this page

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated

Build: 20261016.10



© Crown copyright