

Outcomes for learners in post-16 education affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: August 2020 to July 2021¹ (experimental statistics)

These statistics are published as experimental statistics because they use new methods to understand the academic outcomes for post-16 learners during the pandemic. There have been several improvements in methods from the last year. Historic figures have been recalculated in this release with the new methods. The statistics in this release are not comparable to the '[consistent performance measures for post-16 learning](#)', nor the '[learner outcome measures for work-based learning and adult learning](#)'.

Main points

- There were large improvements in outcomes for learners in general education (A levels) compared to before the pandemic, but outcomes have been worse for learners on non-level 3 vocational programmes, apprenticeships and adult learning.
- Most of the increase in A2 outcomes came at the higher grades. 27% of A2 learners achieved at least three As, compared to 21% in 2019/20 and 12% in 2018/19.
- Many inequalities in post-16 outcomes widened or resurfaced in 2020/21.
- A2 outcomes fell steeply for learners with Black, African, Caribbean, Black British ethnic backgrounds, undoing much of the rise in grades in 2019/20, leading to a large gap in outcomes.
- The rise in A level grades was equivalent to 5 times as many learners living in the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods going up a grade boundary compared to learners living in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods.
- Year 11 learners were more likely to take A level programmes and go into sixth forms than before the pandemic, but they were also more likely to move to a different programme or provider, or to drop out of post-16 learning in 2021/22.
- Vocational learners were more likely to stay in post-16 learning than the previous year, and AS completers in colleges were still more likely to continue onto A2 than they were before the pandemic.

Date of Publication: 16/02/2022

Author: Thomas Rose, Post-16 education statistics, Knowledge and Analytical Services

E-mail: post16ed.stats@gov.wales

Telephone: 0300 025 9895

Twitter: www.twitter.com/statisticswales | www.twitter.com/ystadegaucymru

¹ Notes on the use of statistical articles can be found at the end of this document.

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1. Context

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak spread to the UK in January 2020. Throughout the 2020/21 academic year Welsh school sixth forms, colleges and other post-16 learning providers continued to face disruption to learning.

Exams for AS and A2 levels were cancelled in the summer of 2019/20 and 2020/21. All A levels that would have been sat as examinations in 2020/21 were awarded through a [centre determined grade model](#). Grades were determined by schools and colleges, based on their assessment of learners' work, using a range of evidence (including non-examination assessments, mock exams and classwork).

Examinations that would have been sat in 2019/20 were replaced with the best of either a centre assessment grade or a standardised grade calculated by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

Vocational qualifications were split into several categories:

- Learners on qualifications mainly used for progression to further or higher education similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels, such as BTECs, used alternative arrangements such as teacher-assessed grades.
- Learners on qualifications mainly used for progression that are not similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels continued to sit exams where possible, and when not possible alternatives such as teacher-assessed grades were used.
- Qualifications used to signal occupational competence were adapted so assessments could take place where this was not possible, some assessments were delayed.

Apprenticeships continued throughout the pandemic, but some apprentices continued to be affected by furlough until the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ended in September 2021. More information can be found in the reports '[Apprentices furloughed or made redundant during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)'.

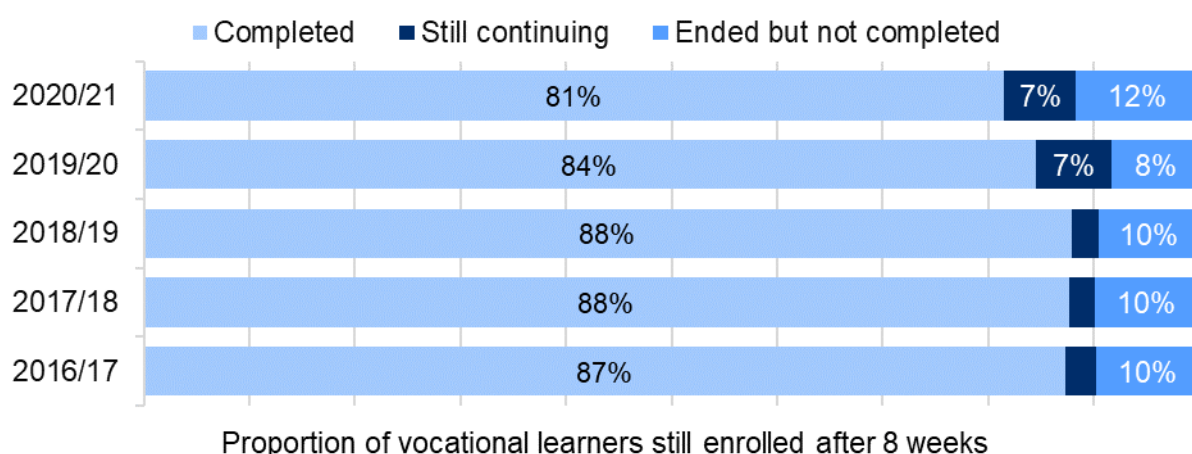
Due to the changes in how grades were awarded in 2020 and 2021, and the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, the Welsh Government did not produce its usual performance measures for schools or post-16 learning in 2019/20 or 2020/21.

These statistics have been calculated using improved versions of methods used last year to assess how learners' outcomes were affected for all type of post-16 learning. Datasets have been combined to examine the whole learner journey, as well as the final results. They are not performance measures, and are not comparable with previously published statistics.

2. Vocational education

- The number of vocational learners completing their programme was down to 81%, from 88% in 2018/19 before the pandemic.
- Another 7% of learners were still continuing past their original expected end date when the data was collected in December 2021.
- Achievement rates moved slightly closer to pre-pandemic patterns, but there were still big differences and level 3 programmes had higher achievement rates than others.
- Part time learners were less likely than full time learners to complete their programmes, as they were in 2019/20.
- More 2020/21 vocational completers stayed on to take another vocational programme in 2021/22 than in any of the previous 4 years.
- The average delay for learners who finished late rose from 68 days to 89 days.

Chart 2.1: Outcomes for vocational learners by academic year



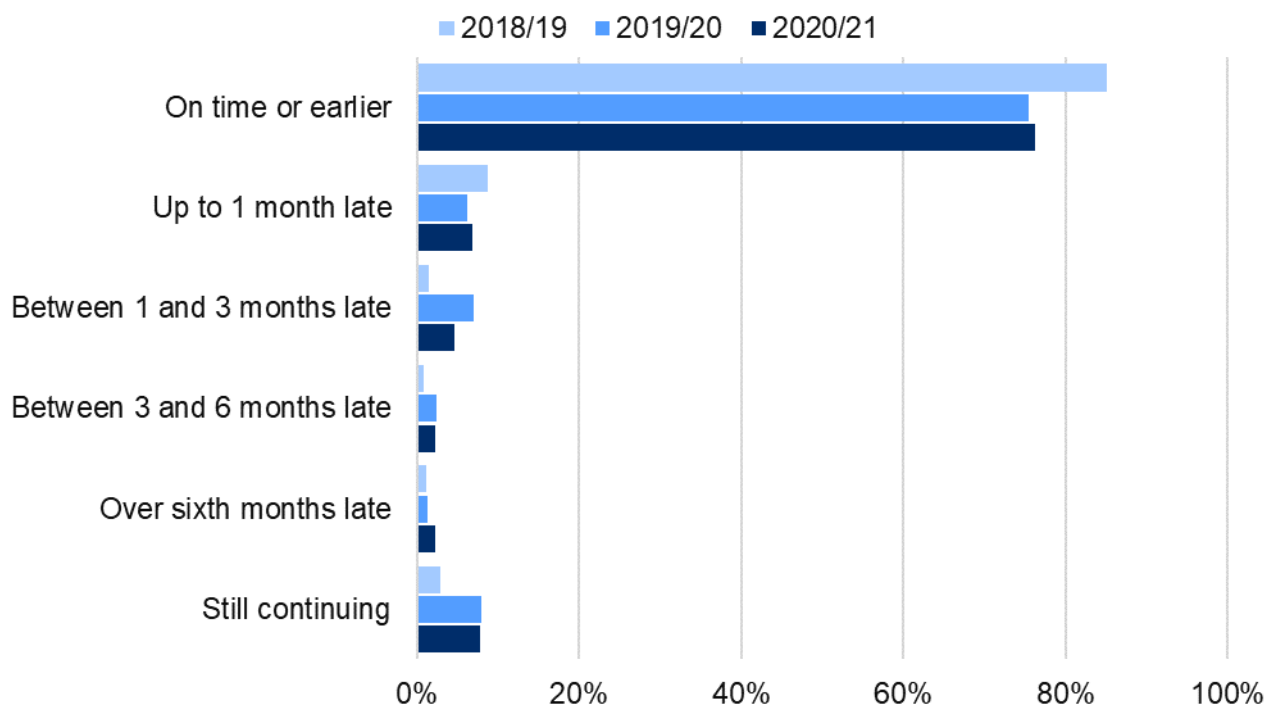
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

52,100 learners completed their vocational programme in 2020/21, over 3,000 less than the previous year. This was a combination of fewer learners taking vocational programmes and over 2,000 more learners ending their programme before completing it.

Learners were still being affected by delays in 2020/21. When the data was collected in December 2021, almost 4,400 learners were still continuing on programmes that were meant to finish before August 2021.

Some courses which were meant to assess occupational competence and had a practical component had their assessments delayed due to restrictions caused by the pandemic.

Chart 2.2: Timeliness of vocational programmes, by academic year

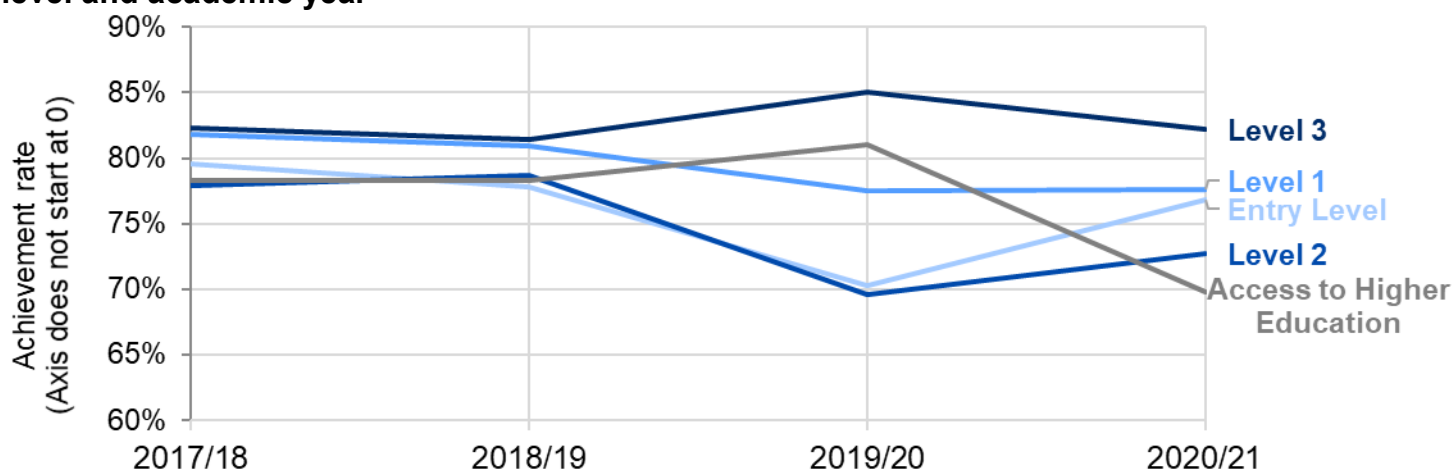


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

The proportion of learners in 2020/21 finishing their programme on time was similar to 2019/20. But the average delay for learners who finished their programme late rose to 89 days, from 68 days in the previous year.

The cause of the increase was in the group of 1,300 learners who finished over sixth months late. 145 more learners finished over a year late in 2020/21 than in the year before.

Chart 2.3: Achievement rate of main qualifications in full time vocational programmes by level and academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

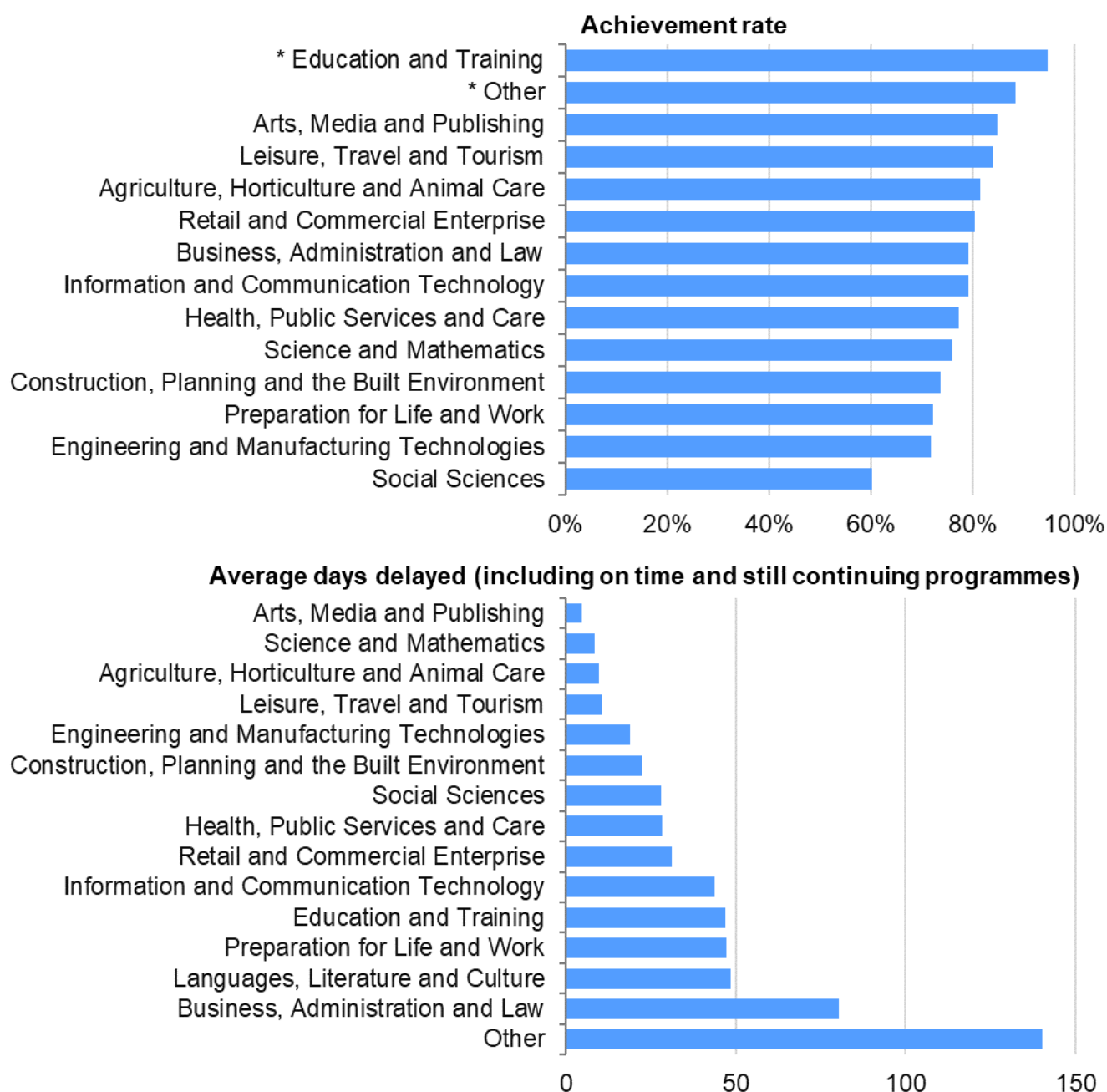
The achievement rate is the percentage of main qualifications that were 1) achieved and 2) part of a completed programme.

Achievement rates remained below pre-pandemic figures for all levels of programme, except level 3 (equivalent to A level).

Level 3 programmes includes many qualifications that received teacher-assessed grades. These are often qualifications that are used to go onto another level of education.

145 less qualifications were achieved on Access to Higher Education programmes than the year before. This is a drop from 8 in 10 qualifications being passed to only 7 in 10.

Chart 2.4: Outcomes for vocational programmes by Sector Subject Area (SSA), 2020/21



* Based on a denominator of 50 or less

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

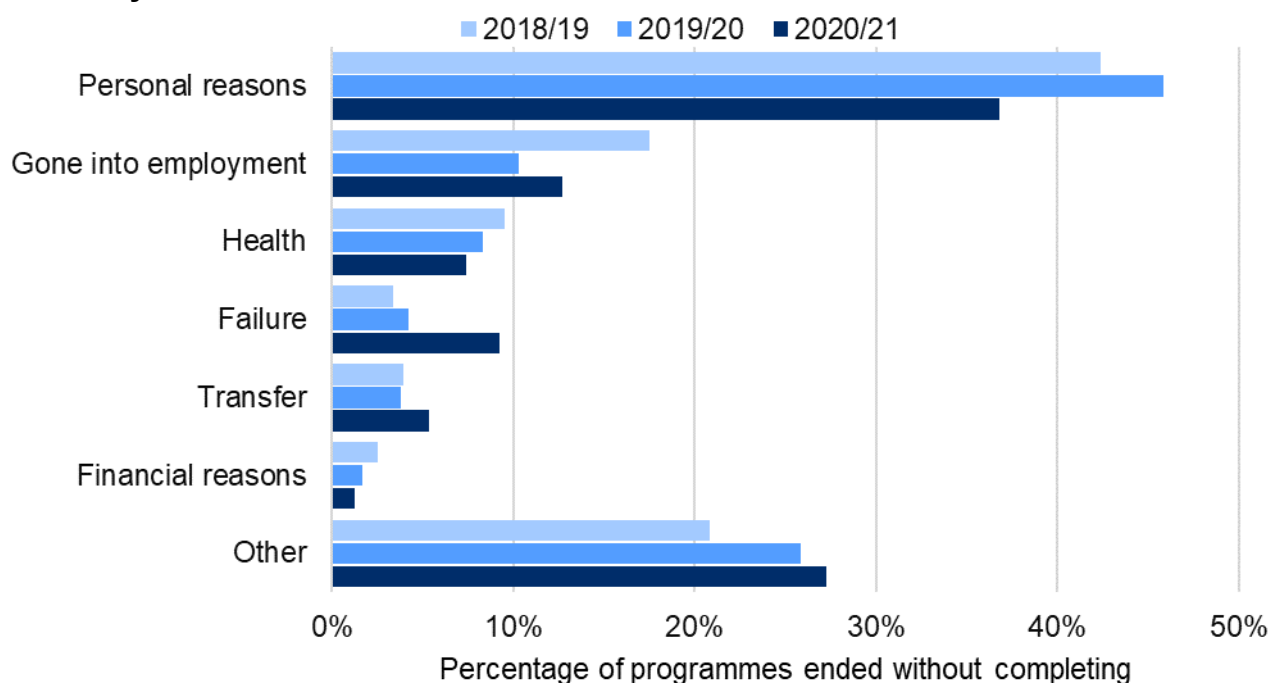
Arts, Media and Publishing; Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care; and Leisure, Travel and Tourism all had high achievement rates and smaller delays.

Business, Administration and Law, and Other (mainly comprising NVQs in the Workplace and LearnDirect programmes) had longer delays.

Only 120 Social Sciences qualifications were achieved for completed programmes out of 200 taken.

The sector subject area refers to the subject of the overall vocational programme taken, not the subject of all of the qualifications within that programme.

Chart 2.5: Reasons for ending non-completed vocational programmes in colleges, by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

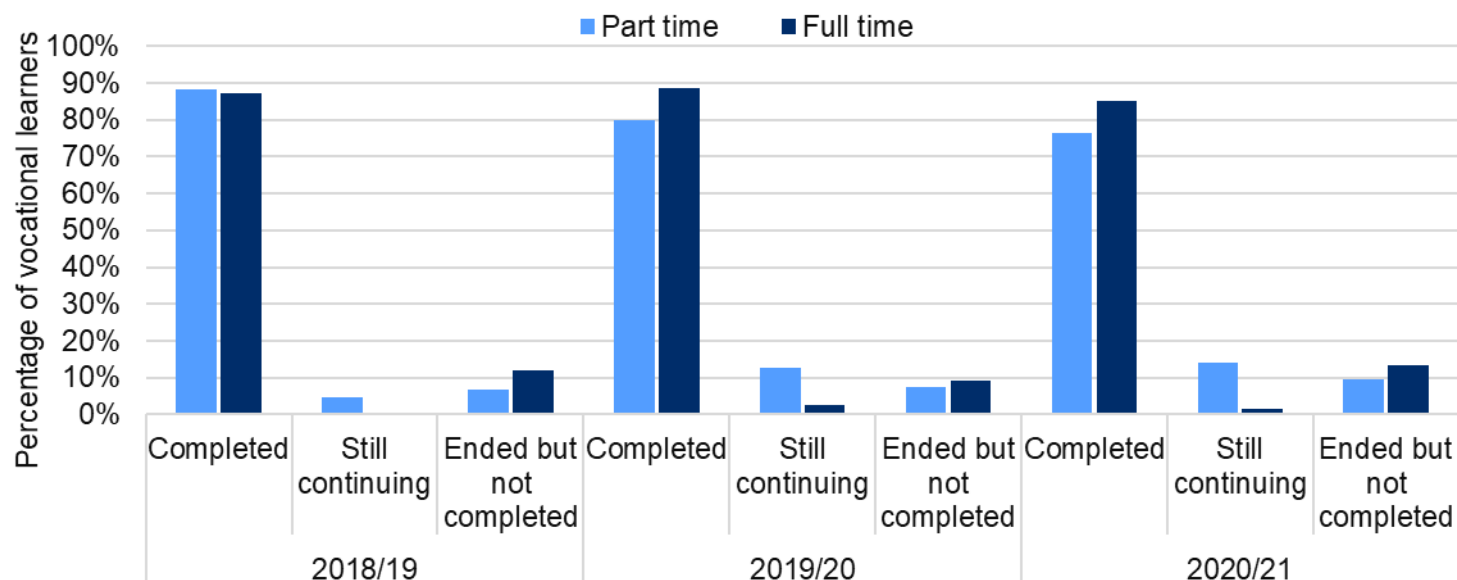
Learners were more likely to fail in 2020/21, more likely to transfer to another programme and less likely to drop out due to personal reasons.

There was also a rise in learners dropping out to go into employment, but the rate was still lower than the pre-pandemic rate.

There was no increase in learners ending their programmes due to health or financial reasons.

The reason for ending a qualification is not collected in the school post-16 data collection so these figures relate to further education colleges only.

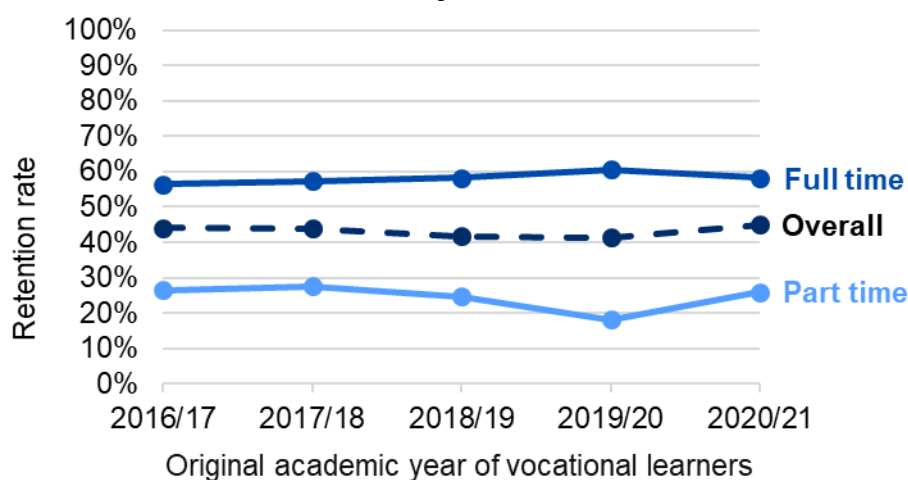
Chart 2.6: Outcomes for part time and full time vocational learners, by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

Part time vocational learners were still less likely to complete their programme than full time learners in 2020/21. This is the reverse of the pattern in 2018/19. The majority of part time learners who did not complete, did not end their course, but were still continuing. This is not true for full time learners.

Chart 2.7: Percentage of vocational completers that stayed in post-16 learning, by part time status and academic year^a



a) Access to higher education programmes are excluded because completers aim to progress to higher education.

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, school attendance data

More 2020/21 vocational completers stayed on to take another vocational programme in 2021/22 than any year in the last 4 years. The retention rate for part time completers increased from 18% in 2019/20 to 26%. The retention rate for full time completers fell from 61% in 2019/20, back to its pre-pandemic levels.

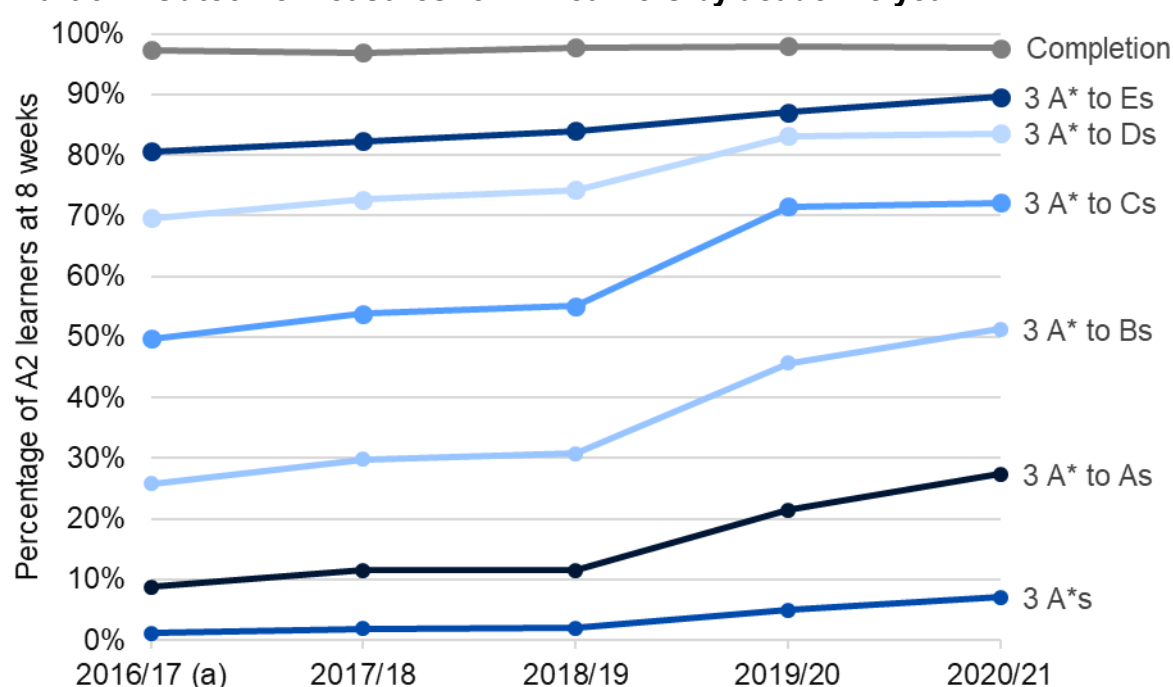
Vocational learners may typically stay in post-16 learning because they were taking qualifications that allowed them to progress to a higher level of qualification. Not all vocational learners would be expected to stay in post-16 learning. Some learners go into employment or higher education.

3. General education

- Grades increased again compared to last year, most of the increase was in the higher grades.
- 27% of A2 learners achieved at least three As at A level, compared to 21% in 2019/20 and 12% in 2018/19.
- The percentage of learners getting at least three Cs was similar to last year, 72% up from 71%.
- College students who completed their AS were still more likely to continue onto their A2 programme than before the pandemic.

The general education statistics cover learners who started studying a programme of three or more A levels or equivalents, and look at the learner's outcomes as a whole across their three best A levels. This is different to other analyses of A levels in 2020/21 which looked at individual A levels.

Chart 3.1: Outcome measures for A2 learners by academic year



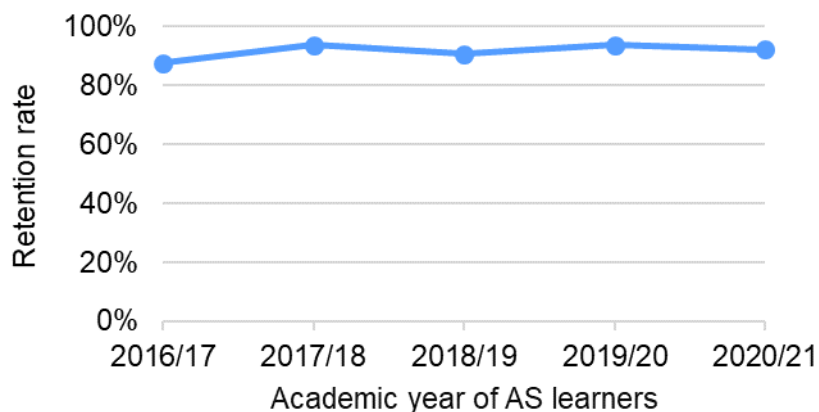
(a) Some providers were removed in 2016/17 due to data quality issues.

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The grade distribution of A levels shifted upwards again in 2020/21. The increase was equivalent to 1 in 5 learners going up a grade boundary compared to 2019/20. For example, going from getting three Cs or higher to getting three Bs or higher.

The increase in grades was distributed differently than in the previous year. The number of learners receiving three As or A*s increased from 21% to 27%. However the number of learners getting at least three Cs barely changed, and as did the number of learners completing their A2s overall.

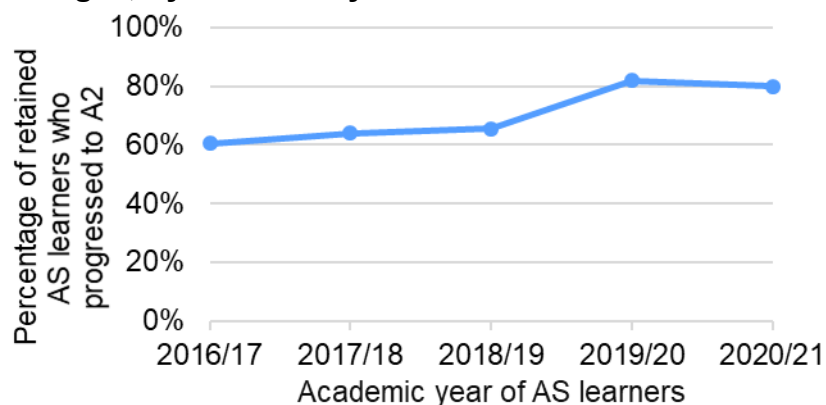
Chart 3.2: Percentage of AS completers that stayed in post-16 learning, by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, school attendance data

The percentage of 2020/21 AS completers staying on in post-16 learning was below 2019/20 but similar to previous years. 92% of learners stayed on, compared to 94% the year before.

Chart 3.3: Progression of full time AS completers that stayed in post-16 learning at colleges, by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection

AS learners who stayed in post-16 education were still much more likely to be taking an A2 programme than before the pandemic.

8 in 10 full time AS learners in 2020/21 who stayed on did an A2 programme. In 2018/19 less than 7 in 10 did.

The increase in progression may be due to the rise in grades. Before the pandemic, 8% of full time AS learners at colleges repeated an AS programme. In 2019/20 and 2020/21, only 4% of learners did. The percentage of AS learners who subsequently started a vocational programme instead of continuing with their A levels nearly halved from 24% to 13% in colleges.

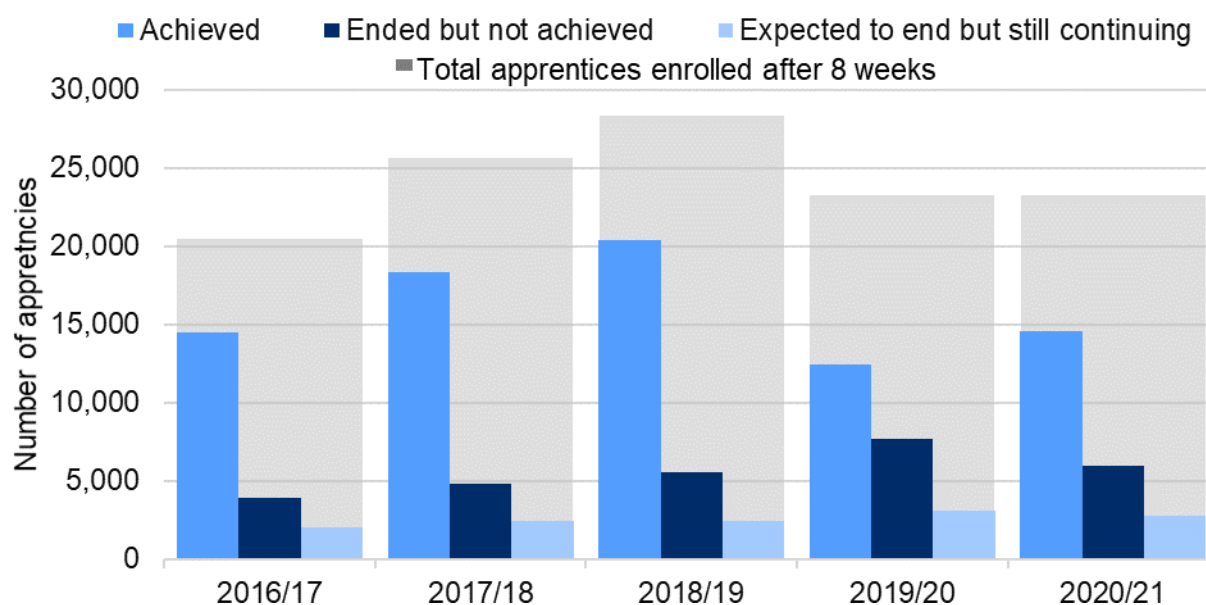
These statistics are calculated for learners who took their second programme in a college or at another apprenticeship learning provider, because the data on the programmes taken by learners in sixth forms for 2021/22 is collected after the end of the academic year.

4. Apprenticeships

- Fewer apprentices completed their apprenticeship and achieved all the required learning outcomes than before the pandemic.
- 1 in 5 apprentices ended their apprenticeship without completing it.
- 2,725 apprentices were still continuing past their expected end date when the data was collected in December.
- Apprenticeships which did finish, finished 86 days late on average.
- Less than half of completed apprenticeships ended on time.
- Learners on foundation apprenticeships were still most affected, the achievement rate for learners on higher apprenticeships was higher than before the pandemic.
- Outcomes were very dependent on the sector. 3 in 4 apprenticeships in business administration were achieved, compared to just over half of apprenticeships in health care and public services.

The statistics in this section focus on the apprenticeships which ended or were expected to end during the academic year.

Chart 4.1: Outcomes for apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end by academic year



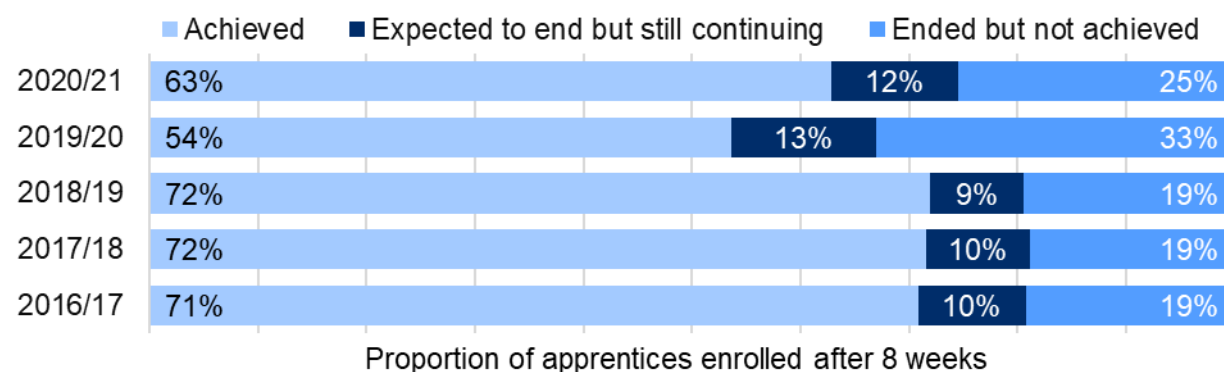
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

14,600 apprentices successfully completed their apprenticeship in 2020/21. This is 2,130 more than in 2019/20, but still 5,790 fewer than 2018/19. Fewer learners were on apprenticeships, and more learners were dropping out or continuing past their expected end date than before the pandemic.

1,060 learners completed their apprenticeship but hadn't yet been recorded as achieving all the required outcomes (known as the 'apprenticeship framework'). Some of these apprentices may have achieved the learning but the provider was waiting on confirmation of their results at the time the data was collected.

More information on the number of learners starting apprenticeships will be published in the report '[Further education, work-based learning and adult learning: August 2020 to July 2021](#)' on 24th February.

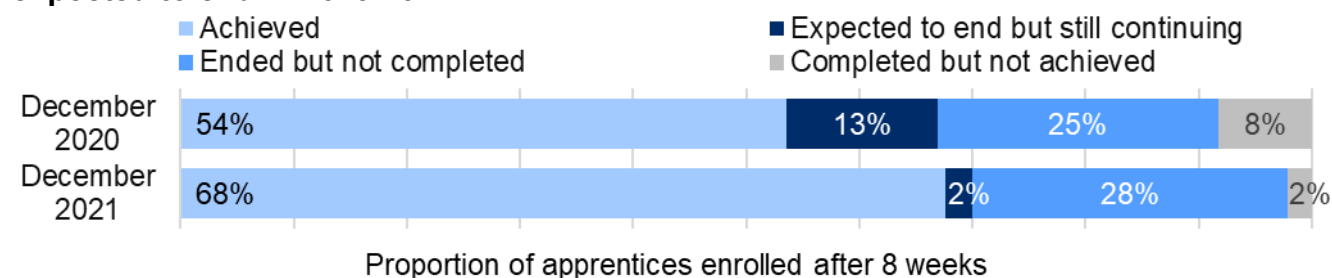
Chart 4.2: Outcomes as a percentage of apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end, by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The achievement rate for apprentices increased by 9 percentage points compared to the previous year. Fewer learners dropped out of their apprenticeship early, and more of the apprentices who did complete their apprenticeship had achieved the required outcomes by the time of the data collection in December. But 21% of apprentices had ended their apprenticeship without completing it.

Chart 4.3: Difference in outcomes one year later for apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end in 2019/20

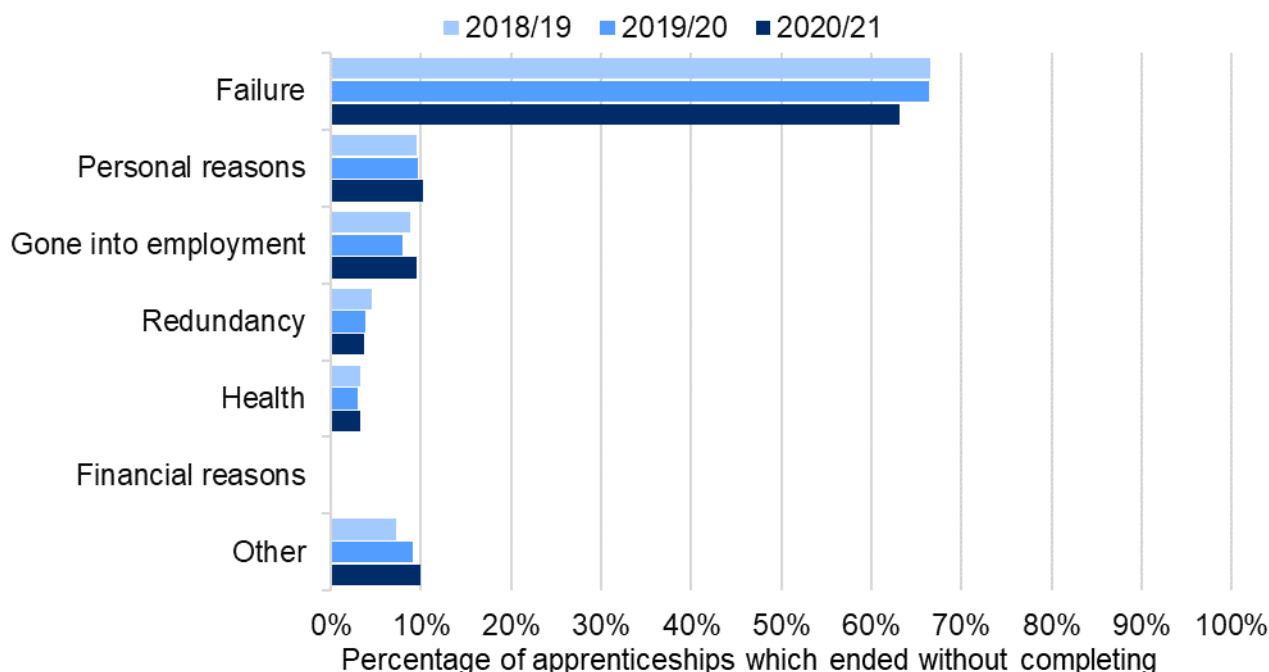


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

One year after the data was collected, the achievement rate of 2019/20 apprentices rose from 54% to 68%. The vast majority of apprentices who still hadn't achieved their apprenticeship in December 2020, had achieved it by December 2021.

The group of apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship but hadn't been recorded as achieving the required apprenticeship outcomes by December 2020 had mostly disappeared by the following December. Just under 5% of 2020/21 apprenticeships fell into this category of completed but not yet achieved.

Chart 4.4: Reasons for ending apprenticeship without completing it, by academic year

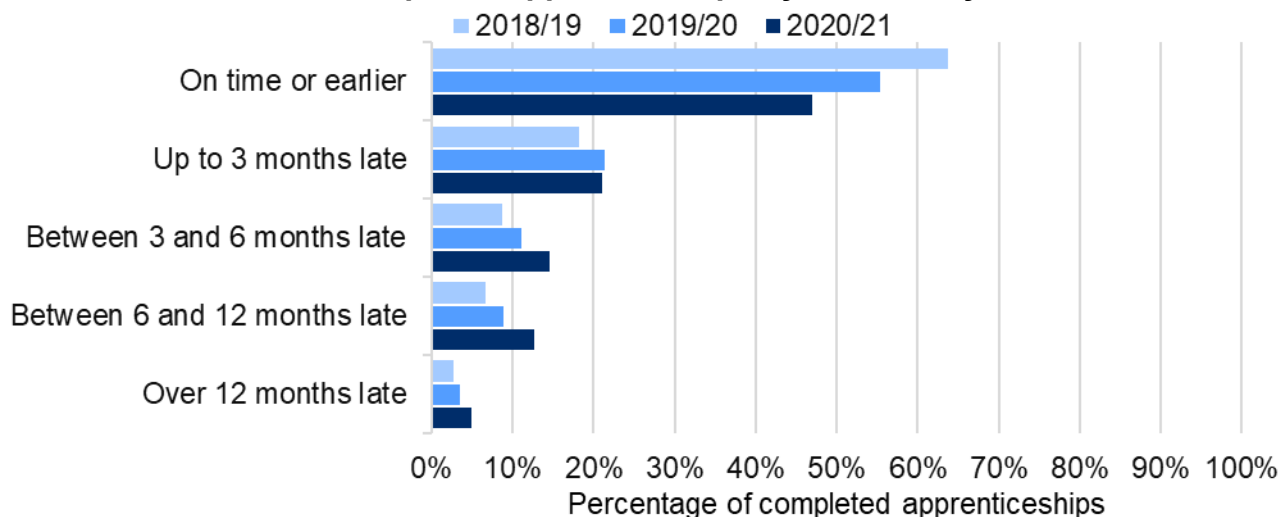


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

A lower proportion of apprenticeships were recorded as ending due to failure in 2020/21 than in the previous two years. The proportion of apprentices that left to go into employment increased from 8% in the previous year to 10%.

There was no notable rise in redundancies or learners ending their apprenticeship due to health reasons.

Chart 4.5: Timeliness of completed apprenticeships by academic year

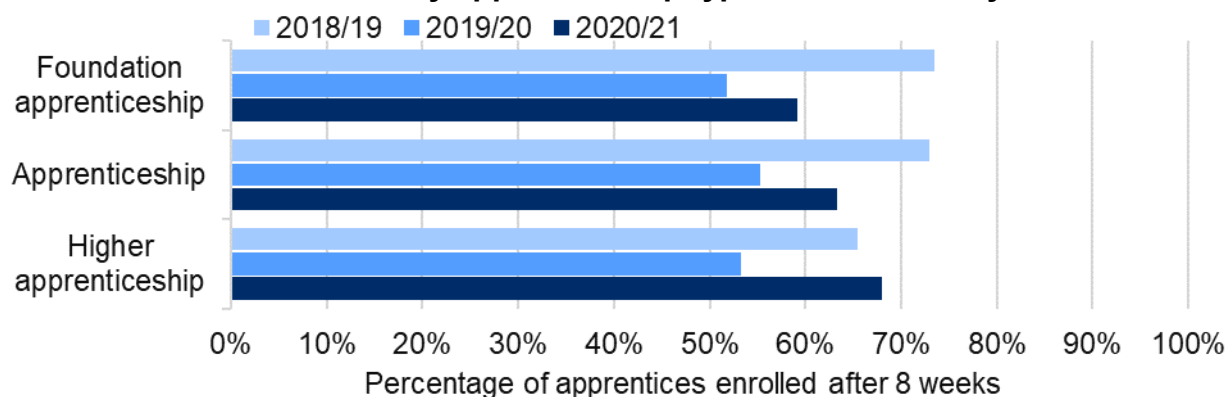


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Less than half of completed apprenticeships in 2020/21 ended on time. The average apprenticeship ended 86 days late, 37 days more than in 2018/19.

When comparing the period after the 20th March (when the first lockdown began in 2020) for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, the proportion of apprenticeships ending on time in 2020/21 was the same as 2019/20. Apprenticeships that ended between 20th March and 31st July in 2021 were delayed for 22 more days on average than in the same period in 2020.

Chart 4.6: Achievement rate by apprenticeship type and academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

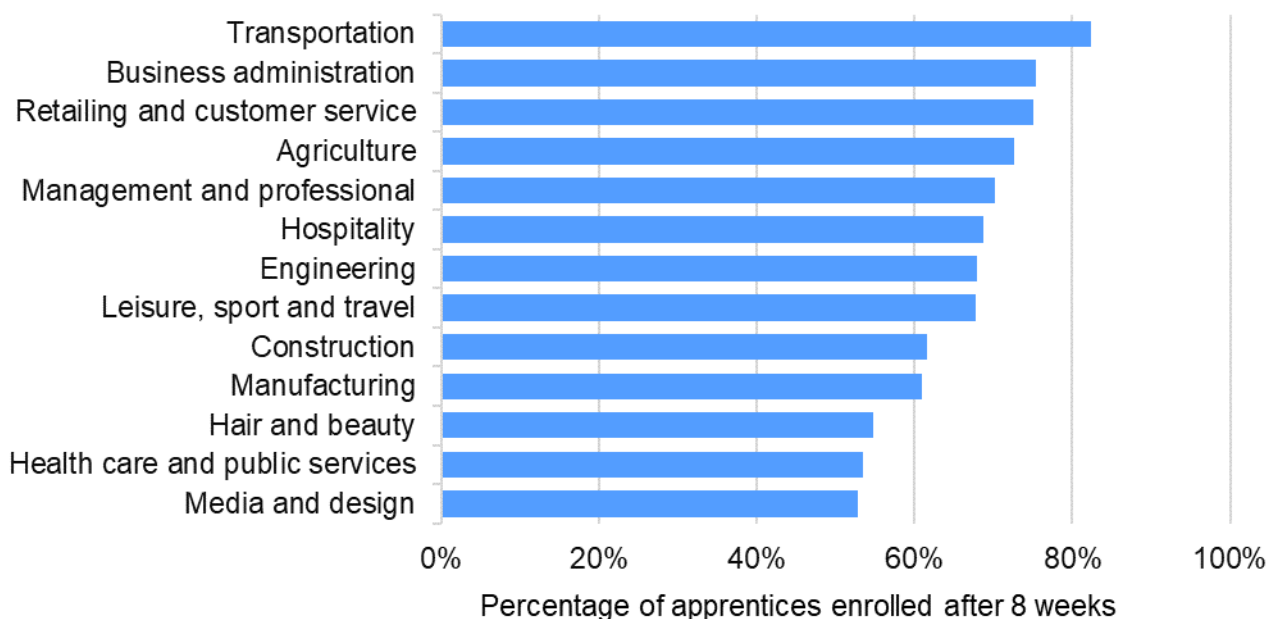
The achievement rate for higher apprenticeships is now higher than it was before the pandemic in 2018/19. The same is not true for foundation and level 3 apprenticeships.

More learners are achieving foundation and level 3 apprenticeships than the previous year, but still not as many as in 2018/19.

1 in 4 learners on foundation apprenticeships didn't complete their apprenticeship. This is similar to the year before.

Learners on higher apprenticeships were the least likely to be furloughed, as outlined in the monthly report '[Apprentices furloughed or made redundant during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)'.

Chart 4.7: Achievement rate of apprenticeships by sector in 2020/21



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The lowest achievement rates in 2020/21 were for apprenticeships in media and design; health care and public services; and hair and beauty.

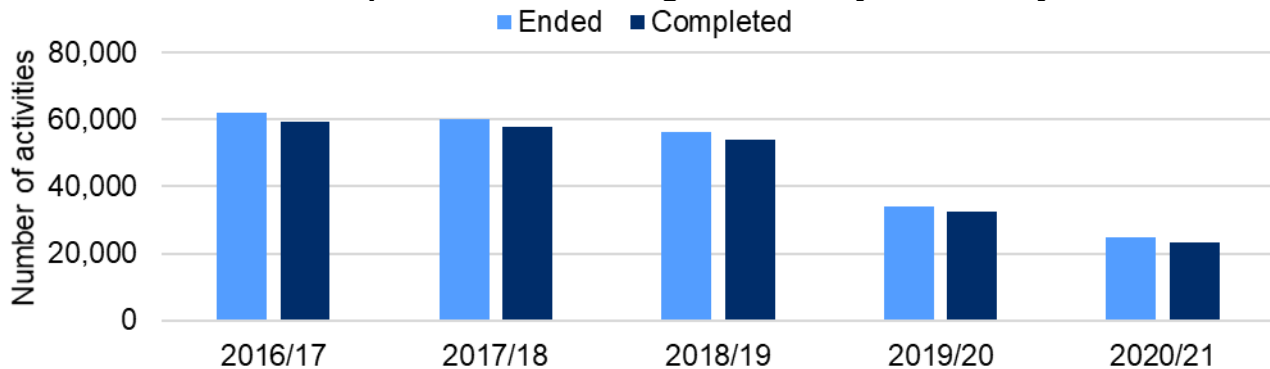
There were 8,230 health care and public service apprenticeships achieved in 2018/19, but only 4,545 in 2020/21. The majority of the drop was because fewer people started apprenticeships in that sector, but the achievement rate also fell from 71% in 2018/19 to 53% in the last two years.

5. Adult learning

- Less than half as much adult learning was taken than before the pandemic, so any change in outcomes described in this section should be treated with caution.
- The range of adult learning qualifications taken during the pandemic was very different than in previous years.
- The achievement rate of assessable adult learning qualifications fell.

More information on the number of learners starting adult learning will be published in the report '[Further education, work-based learning and adult learning: August 2020 to July 2021](#)' on 24th February.

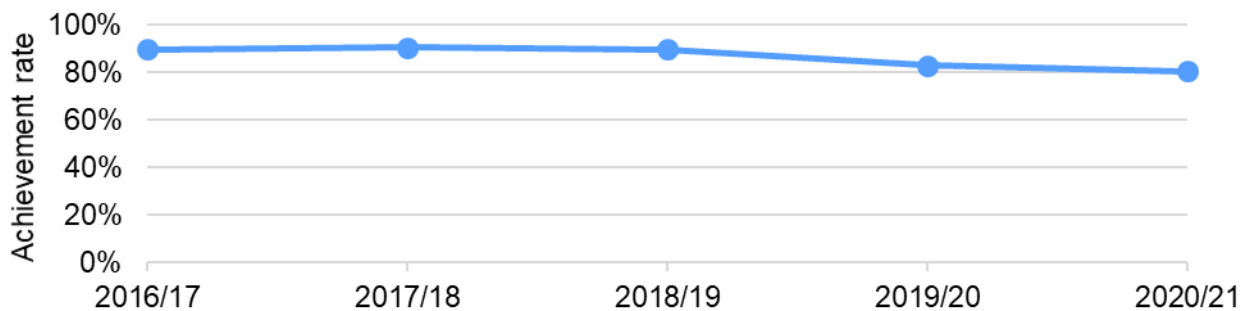
Chart 5.1: Ended and completed adult learning activities by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Less than half as many adult learning activities were taken in 2020/21 compared to 2018/19. 94% of those activities were completed compared to 96% in previous years.

Chart 5.2: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications taken by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The achievement rate of assessable adult learning qualifications dropped from around 90% before the pandemic to 80% in 2020/21.

The drop could be caused by learners taking assessments and failing them, but learners who completed their programme yet did not attempt the assessment also affect the achievement rate. The balance of activities being taken during the pandemic also changed. The 10 most common activities made up 18% of all activities that ended in 2020/21, but those only made up 9% of activities in 2018/19.

When comparing to the period after the first lockdown begun (after 20th March 2020), the achievement rate for that same period in 2020/21 was higher by 6 percentage points.

6. Year 11 learners going on to post-16 education in the following year

The method for this section has been changed since the previous year.

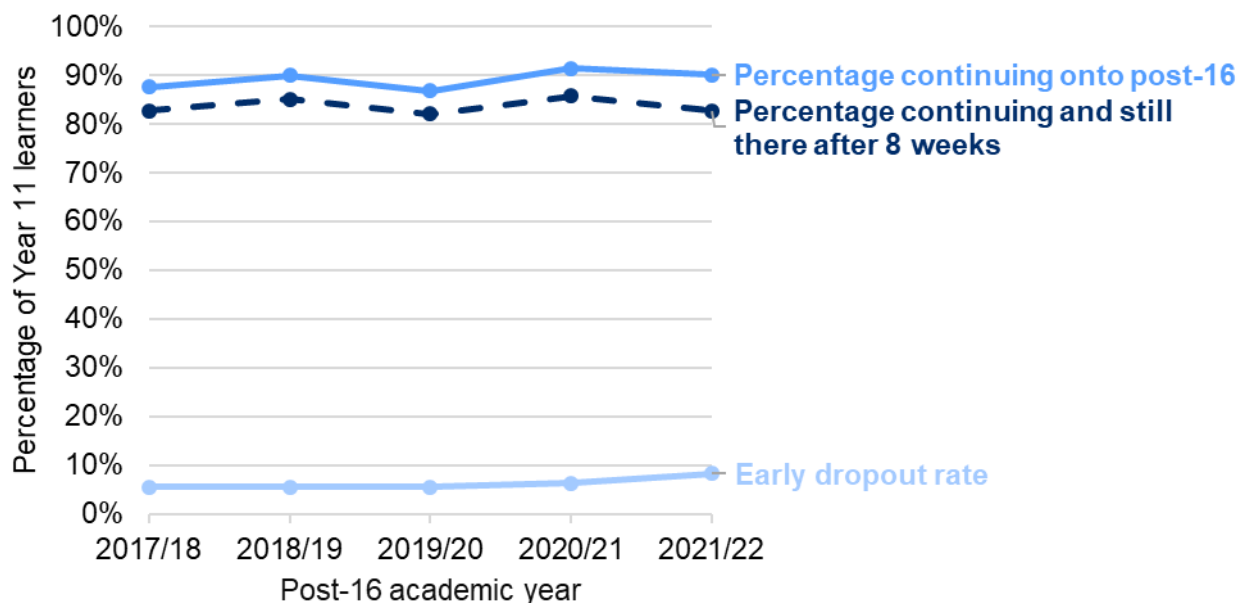
The statistics for 2021/22 in this section are an undercount. Due to a technical error, there was no attendance data for two school sixth forms in Cardiff in 2021/22. These sixth forms had 265 post-16 learners continuing from Year 11 in the previous year, which represented 0.9% of the Year 11 cohort.

- Pupils in Year 11 were similarly likely to continue onto post-16 learning in 2021/22 as in 2020/21.
- There was an increase in Year 11s going on to take AS levels, and going to sixth forms.
- Learners were more likely to drop out of their first post-16 programme, and those who switched to a different programme were more likely to take a lower level programme and move from a sixth form to a college.
- The percentage of Year 11s taking apprenticeships more than recovered after the first year of the pandemic.

Learners continuing on to post-16 education includes learners who started vocational or general education or work-based learning by December after their compulsory education ended. It does not include learners taking adult learning courses.

The figures for Year 11s starting post-16 education in 2020/21 and 2021/22 use a different dataset than previous years to identify learners attending sixth forms in 2021/22. Previous years use the post-16 data collection, which is not yet available for 2021/22, so school attendance data was used instead.

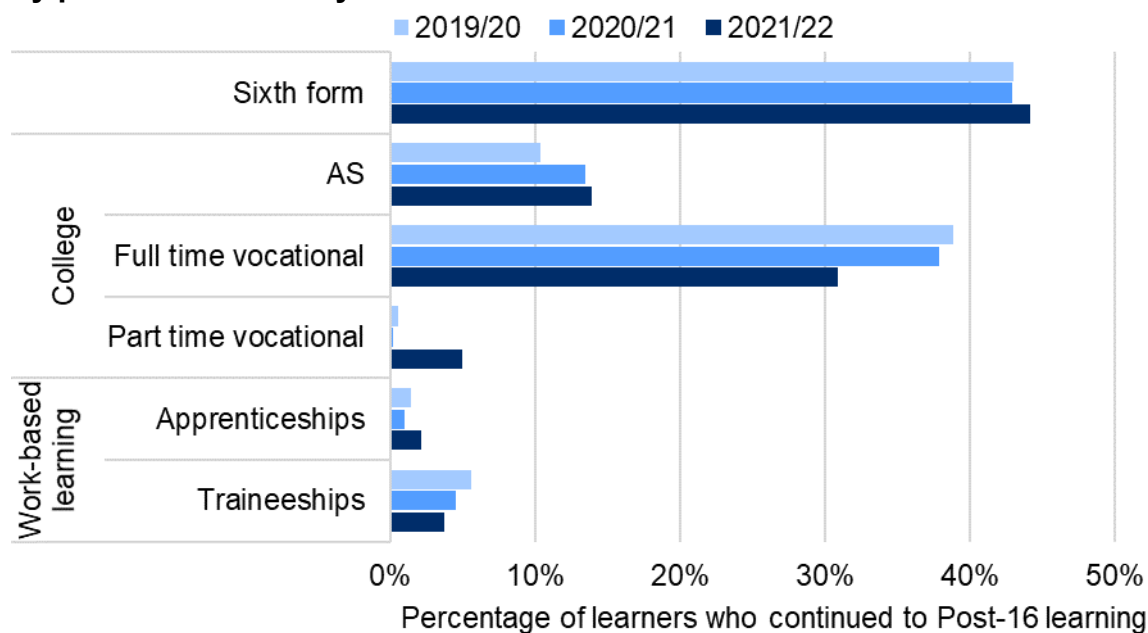
Chart 6.1: Percentage of year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales and their status after 8 weeks by post-16 academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

28,890 Year 11 learners went onto post-16 education in 2021/22, compared to 28,250 the previous year. The overall percentage of Year 11s continuing onto post-16 is similar for both years.

Chart 6.2: Type of programme for Year 11 learners who continued into post-16 learning, by post-16 academic year



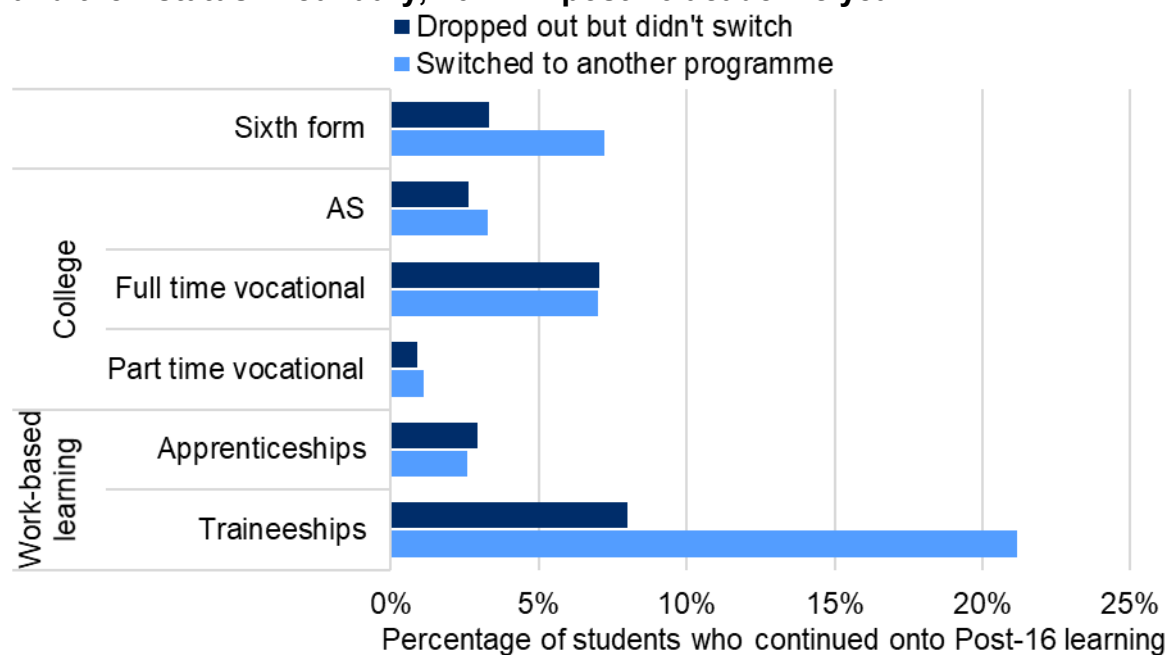
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

More Year 11s went onto sixth forms in 2021/22, where the vast majority of learners take A level programmes. The number of Year 11s going on to take AS levels at colleges also rose from 2,755 in 2019/20, to 4,015 in 2021/22. This could be partly due to more learners getting the GCSE grades they needed in the summer.

There was a fall in the proportion of learners taking full time vocational programmes and an increase in part time vocational programmes. However overall there were less learners taking vocational programmes than the previous year.

The number of learners taking apprenticeships increased. The rise in apprenticeships could be a sign of a strengthening job market and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ending.

Chart 6.3: Percentage of year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales and their status in January, 2021/22 post-16 academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

In total 3,220 learners had dropped out of their first programme by the time the data was collected in January. However 60% of these learners did not leave post-16 education but switched to another provider or a different type of programme.

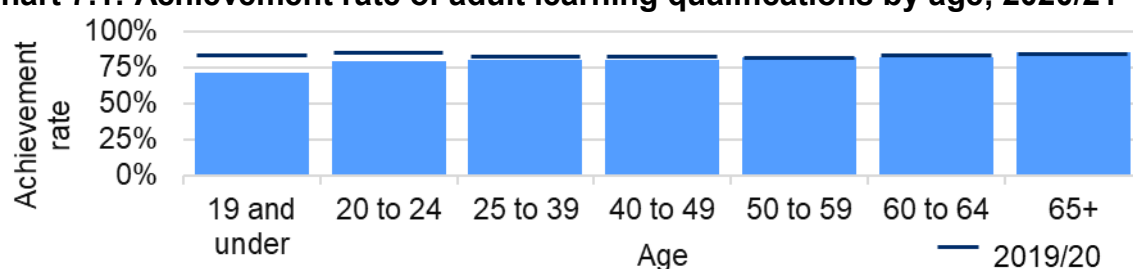
Part of the reason for the increase in dropouts could be because more learners were taking higher level programmes than usual. 40% of switchers went to a lower level programme, compared to 30% in 2019/20. Switchers were also more likely to move from a sixth form to a college than in previous years.

7. Age

- The achievement gap in A levels between 17 year olds and older learners widened in 2020/21, even compared to 2019/20.
- Younger learners on adult learning courses saw the biggest fall in achievement, a reverse of the year before.
- The pattern of outcomes across age groups in vocational programmes and apprenticeships was similar in 2020/21 to 2019/20.
- Learners aged 20 and older were less likely to achieve their main vocational qualifications than younger learners during the pandemic.
- Younger apprentices saw a larger drop in achievement rates in 2020/21 when compared to 2018/19, particularly for learners under the age of 19.

Tables on outcomes for different age groups for all the areas of post-16 learning can be found in the data section of the [Outcomes for learners in post-16 education affected by the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic, August 2020 to July 2021](#) webpage.

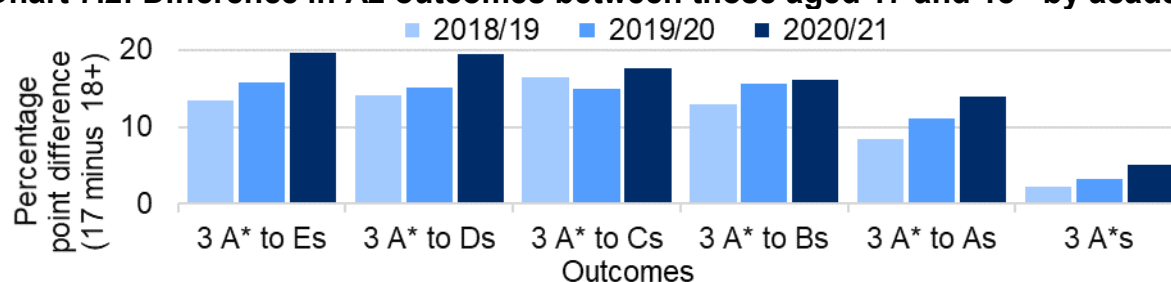
Chart 7.1: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by age, 2020/21



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The achievement rate for learners aged 19 and under taking adult learning courses was 71% in 2020/21, it had been 84% in the two years before. For learners aged 20 to 24, the achievement rate was 79%.

Chart 7.2: Difference in A2 outcomes between those aged 17 and 18+ by academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

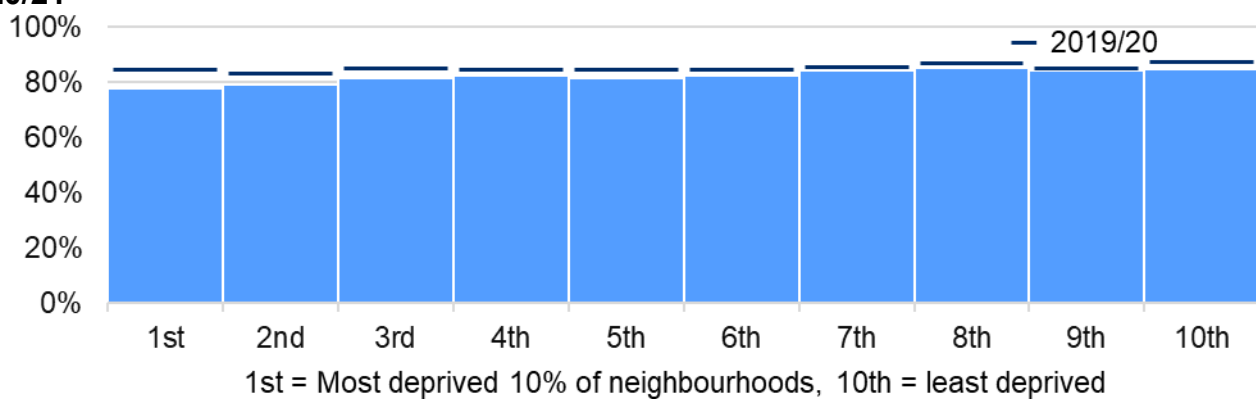
The increase in A2 outcomes for 17 year olds between 2018/19 and 2020/21 was equivalent to 76% of learners going up a grade boundary. For those aged 18 or over, it was equivalent to 58% going up a grade boundary. A higher proportion of 17 year olds got at least three Cs than the proportion of learners aged 18 or over who got three A levels of any grade.

8. Deprivation

Deprivation in this release is based on the deprivation of the neighbourhood the learner lives in, not on the deprivation of the learners themselves. The measure of deprivation is the main index of the [2019 Welsh Index of Multiple of Deprivation](#).

- The deprivation gap widened in general education programmes, level 3 vocational programmes, apprenticeships and adult learning.
- The rise in A level grades was equivalent to 5 times as many learners living in the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods going up a grade boundary compared to learners living in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods.
- There was a 7 percentage point gap in achievement between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods for full time level 3 vocational programmes, a 6 point gap for apprenticeships and an 8 point gap in achievement for adult learning.
- The proportion of free school meal eligible Year 11 learners going into post-16 learning has increased, but the proportion of learners dropping out or moving programmes also increased.

Chart 8.1: Achievement rate for full time level 3 vocational programmes by deprivation, 2020/21

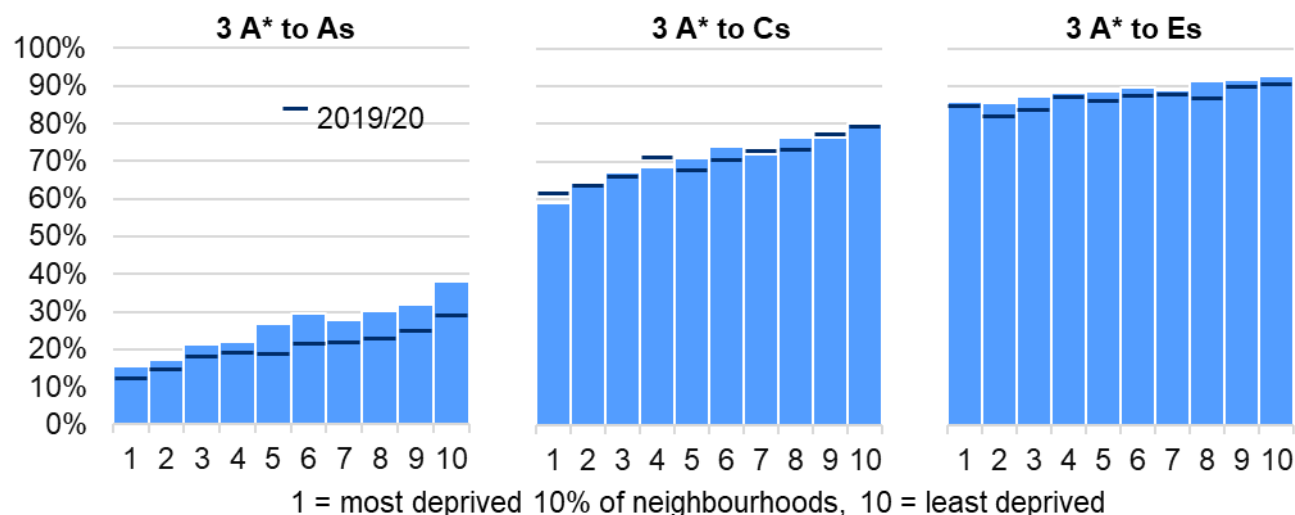


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

The deprivation gap shrank in 2019/20 for full time learners on level 3 programmes. In 2020/21 the gap opened up again. Learners living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in Wales had achieved 78% of their main qualifications, compared to 85% for learners living in the least deprived neighbourhoods.

There was a similar deprivation gap for non-level 3 programmes, but the gap had been slightly higher in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Chart 8.2: General education outcomes for A2 learners by deprivation, 2020/21

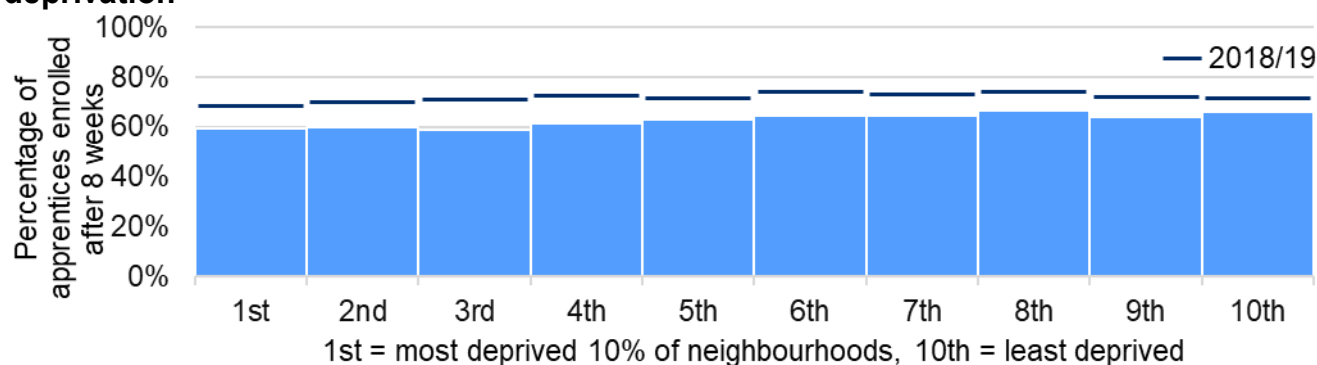


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The deprivation gap in general education widened in 2020/21, particularly for the top end of grades. The rise in grades for learners living in the most deprived neighbourhoods was equivalent to 5% of learners going up one grade boundary. The rise in grades for learners in the least deprived neighbourhoods was 5 times higher – equivalent to 26% of learners going up a grade boundary.

In 2019/20 the gap had closed a little, but in 2020/21 the gap was even wider than it had been before the pandemic.

Chart 8.3: Achievement rate of apprentices that ended or expected to end in 2020/21, by deprivation



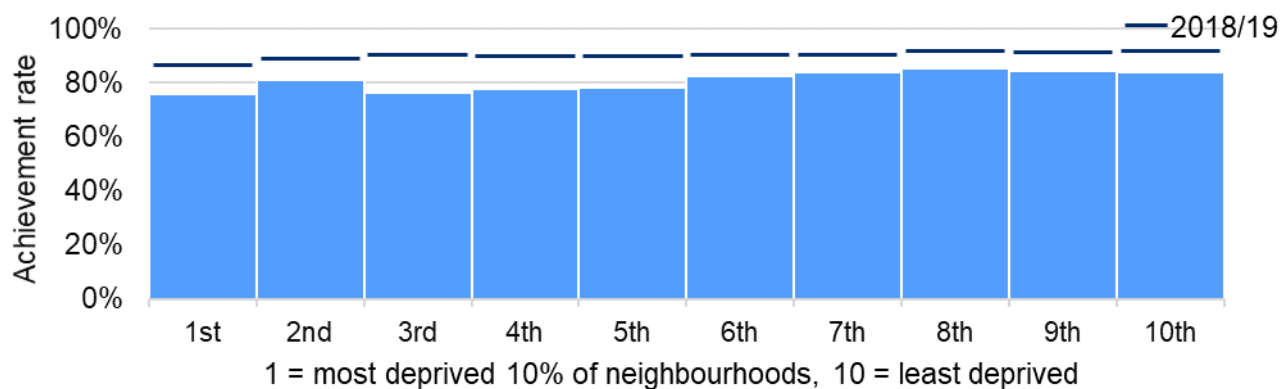
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Learners from more deprived neighbourhoods were less likely to achieve their apprenticeship in 2019/20. In 2020/21 this gap widened.

60% of learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods achieved their apprenticeship during the pandemic, compared to 66% from the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods.

The gap goes beyond the level of programme being taken. For foundation apprenticeships, the achievement rate for learners from the most deprived neighbourhoods was 10 percentage points lower than it was for learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods.

Chart 8.4: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by deprivation, 2020/21

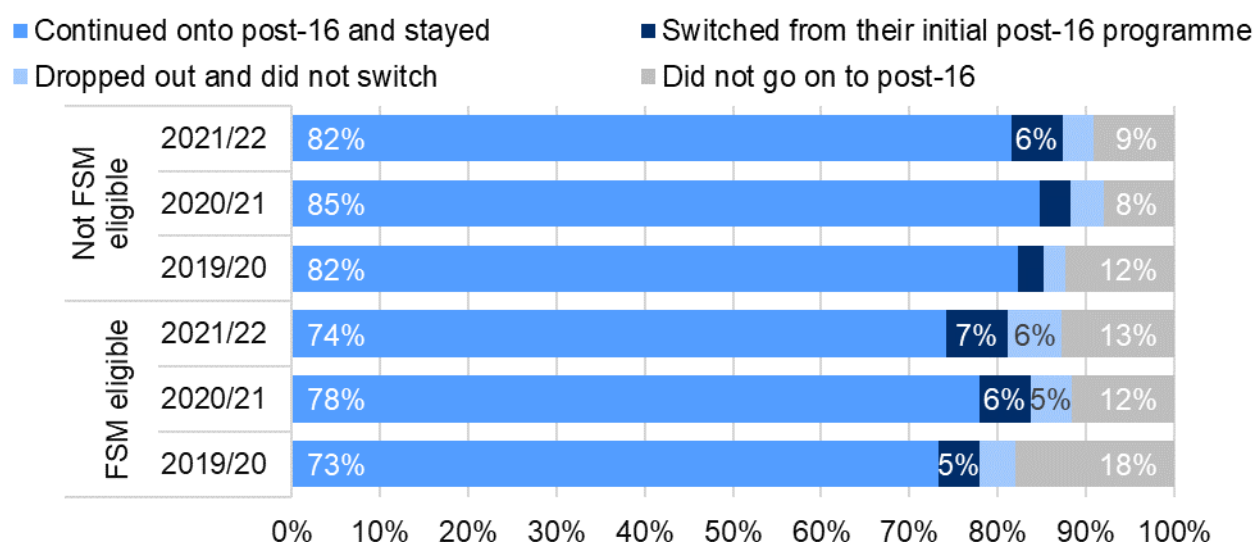


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The deprivation gap in adult learning widened slightly during the first year of the pandemic, and this widened further in 2020/21.

Learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods achieved 76% of their qualifications, that rate was 84% for learners from the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods.

Chart 8.5: Percentage of Year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales by their Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, by post-16 academic year



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

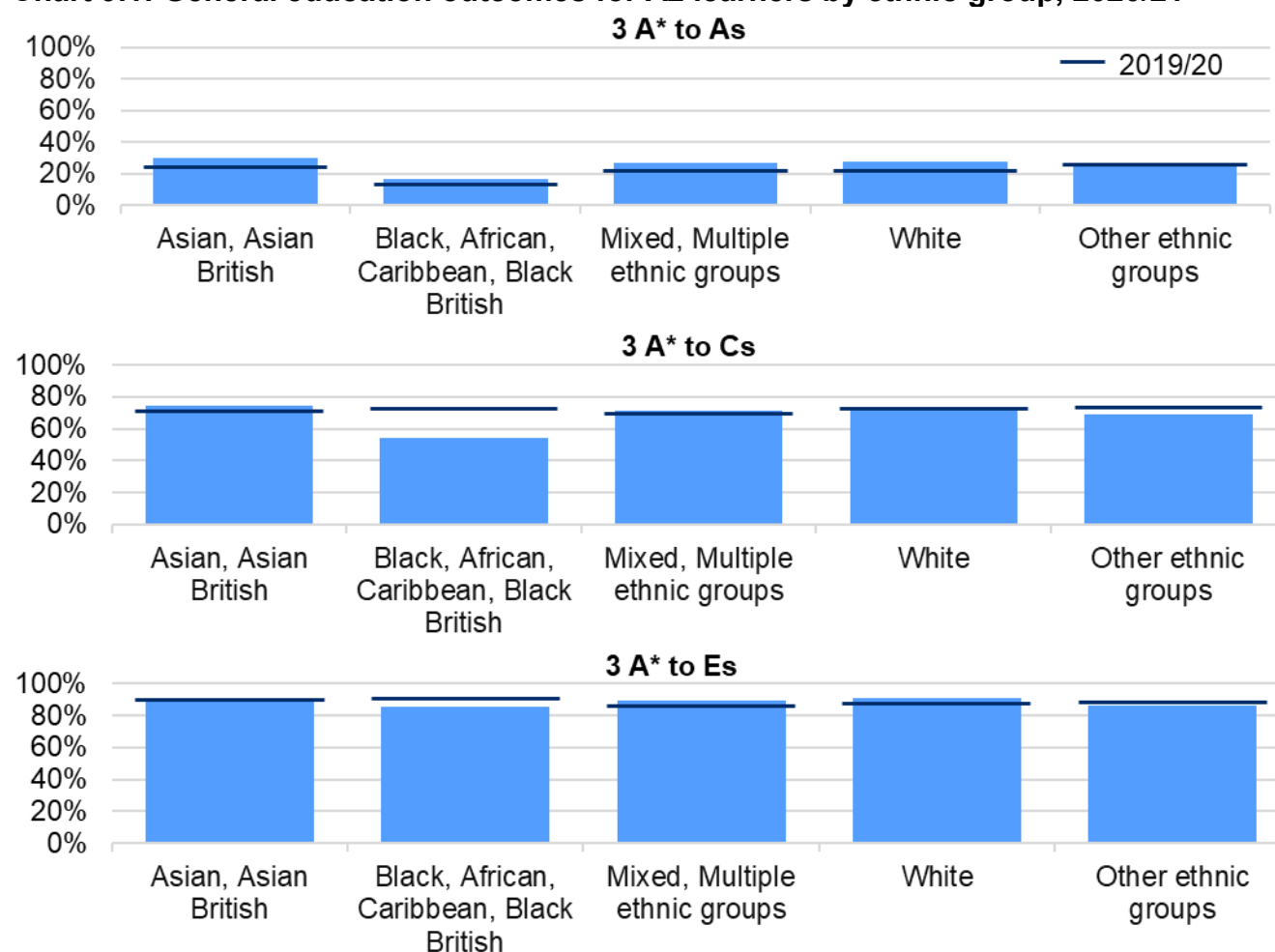
Learners who were eligible for free school meals in Year 11 have been more likely to go onto post-16 learning in the last two years than previously. The gap between FSM and non-FSM learners going on to sixth forms closed slightly.

FSM eligible pupils who went onto post-16 learning were more likely to switch from their initial programme and more likely to drop out of post-16 learning.

9. Ethnic group

- Grades fell steeply for A2 learners with Black, African, Caribbean, Black British backgrounds, undoing much of the rise in grades in 2019/20, leading to a large gap in outcomes.
- A2 outcomes for learners from Other ethnic groups also declined slightly in 2019/20, counter to the trend for most learners.
- There was strong improvement in the proportion of Year 11s enrolling in post-16 learning across many ethnic groups, except amongst White Welsh / English / Scottish / Northern Irish / British learners and learners in the White and Asian ethnic group.
- The achievement rate for apprentices rose across all broad ethnic groups, except for learners with Mixed or Multiple backgrounds.

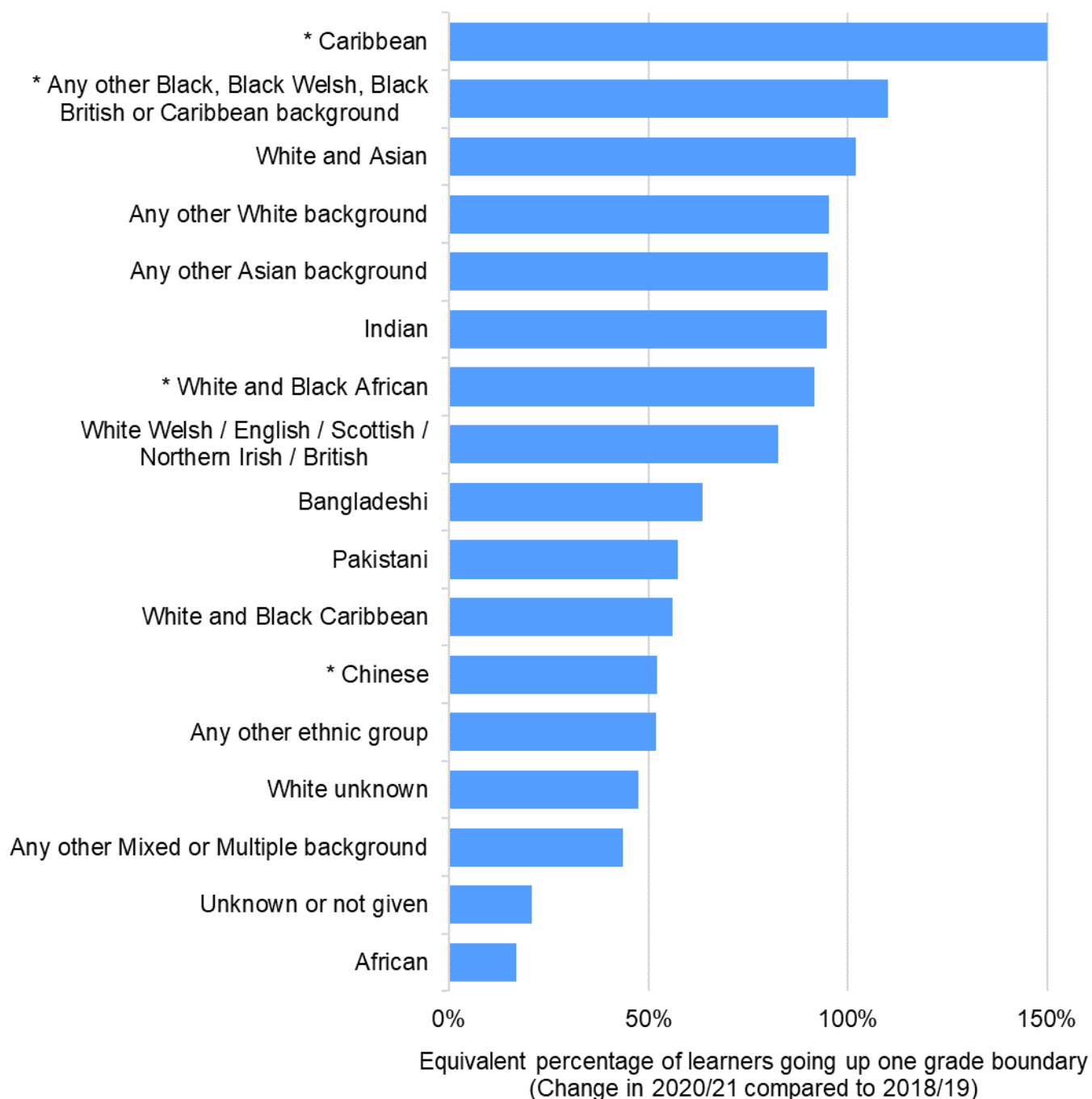
Chart 9.1: General education outcomes for A2 learners by ethnic group, 2020/21



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

Only 90 out of 170 A2 learners with Black, African, Caribbean, Black British backgrounds got at least three Cs. That is a drop from 72% in 2019/20 to 54% in 2020/21. At the top end of the scale, the proportion of Black, African, Caribbean, Black British learners getting at least three As rose slightly, but was still below other ethnic groups.

Chart 9.2: Overall change in A2 grades between 2018/19 and 2020/21 (Earth mover's distance), by ethnic group



* Based on a denominator of 50 or less

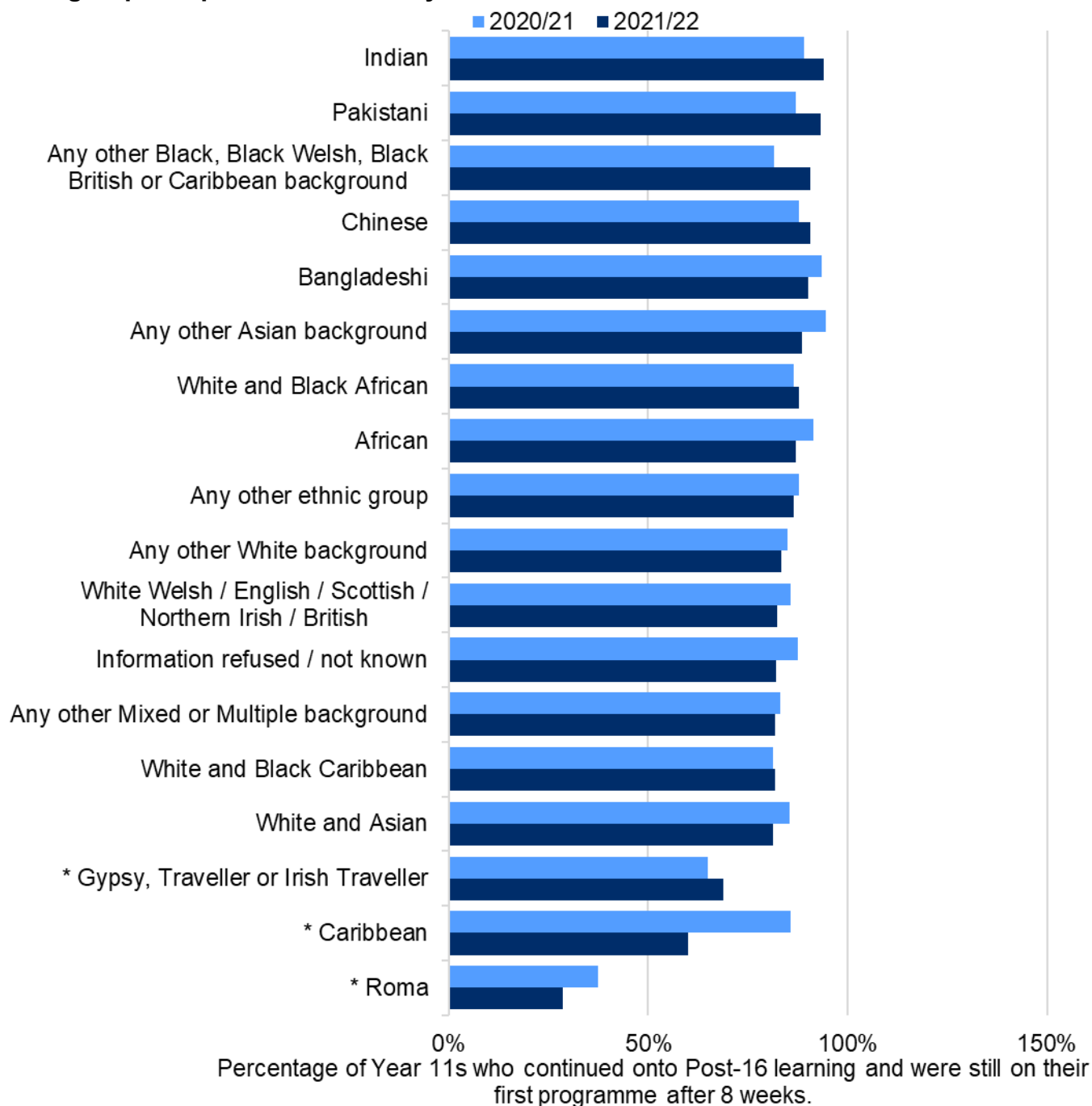
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The decline in grades for learners with an African ethnic group was enough to almost entirely reverse the rise in grades seen the year before. Across all learners the rise in grades between 2018/19 and 2020/21 was equivalent to 75% of learners going up a grade boundary. For learners with an African ethnic group, it was only equivalent to 17% of learners going up a grade boundary.

Grades also fell in 2019/20 for learners in the any other Black, Black Welsh, Black British or Caribbean background ethnic group, which is smaller than the African ethnic group. However the overall increase on 2018/19 was still large.

Learners with an Indian background or White and Asian backgrounds had a larger rise in grades than learners from Chinese, Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds. Pakistani learners still saw grades rise compared to 2019/20, but overall grades fell slightly for Bangladeshi learners from the previous year.

Chart 9.3: Percentage of Year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales by ethnic group and post-16 academic year



* Based on a denominator of 50 or less

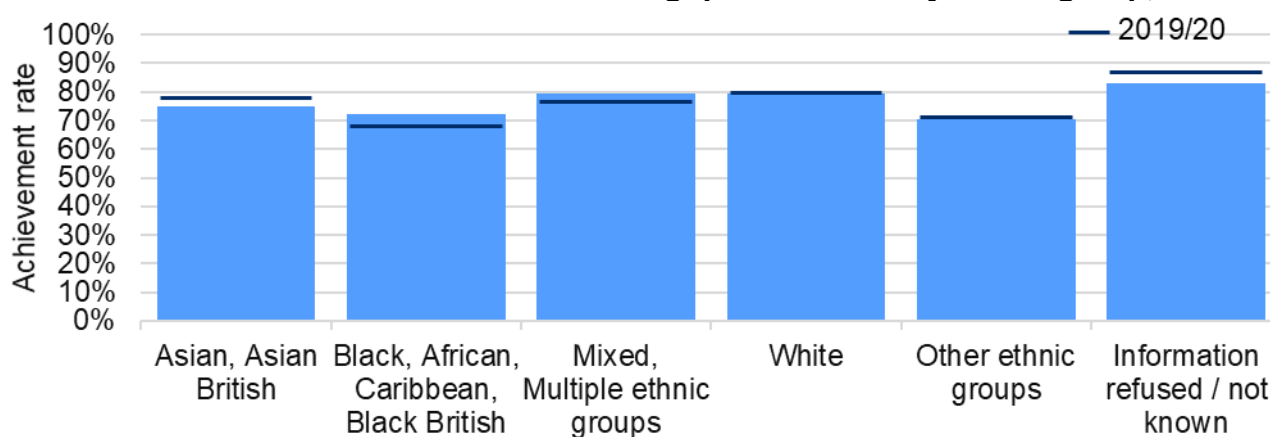
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

In 2019/20, 115 out of 135 Indian Year 11 pupils started post-16 learning. In 2021/22, 155 out of 165 did.

Since 2019/20, the percentage of Year 11s going onto post-16 learning has increased by 10 percentage points or more for learners from with the following ethnic backgrounds: Indian; Pakistani; Chinese; White and Black African; African; and any other Black, Black Welsh, Black British or Caribbean background.

The percentage of White Welsh / English / Scottish / Northern Irish / British learners continuing onto post-16 is similar to pre-pandemic levels. The percentage of learners continuing in the White and Asian ethnic group decreased by 4 percentage points.

Chart 9.4: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by ethnic group, 2020/21

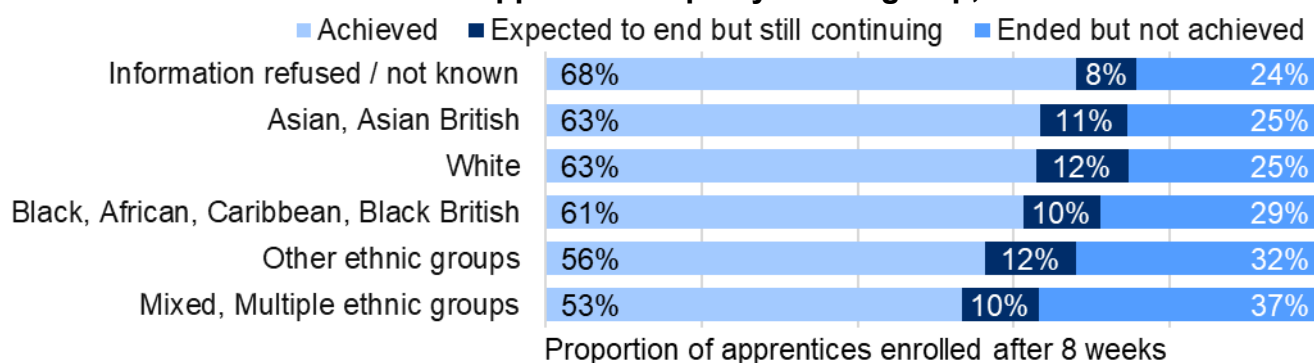


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Only 8 out of 18 of the detailed ethnic group categories had learners that took more than 50 adult learning qualifications in 2020/21, so a broader grouping is used. Statistics on the detailed grouping can be found in the tables accompanying this report.

For learners where their ethnic group was not known or they chose not to give it, the achievement rate dropped from 87% to 83%, but this is still the highest achievement rate of all ethnic groups.

Chart 9.5: Achievement rate for apprenticeships by ethnic group, 2020/21

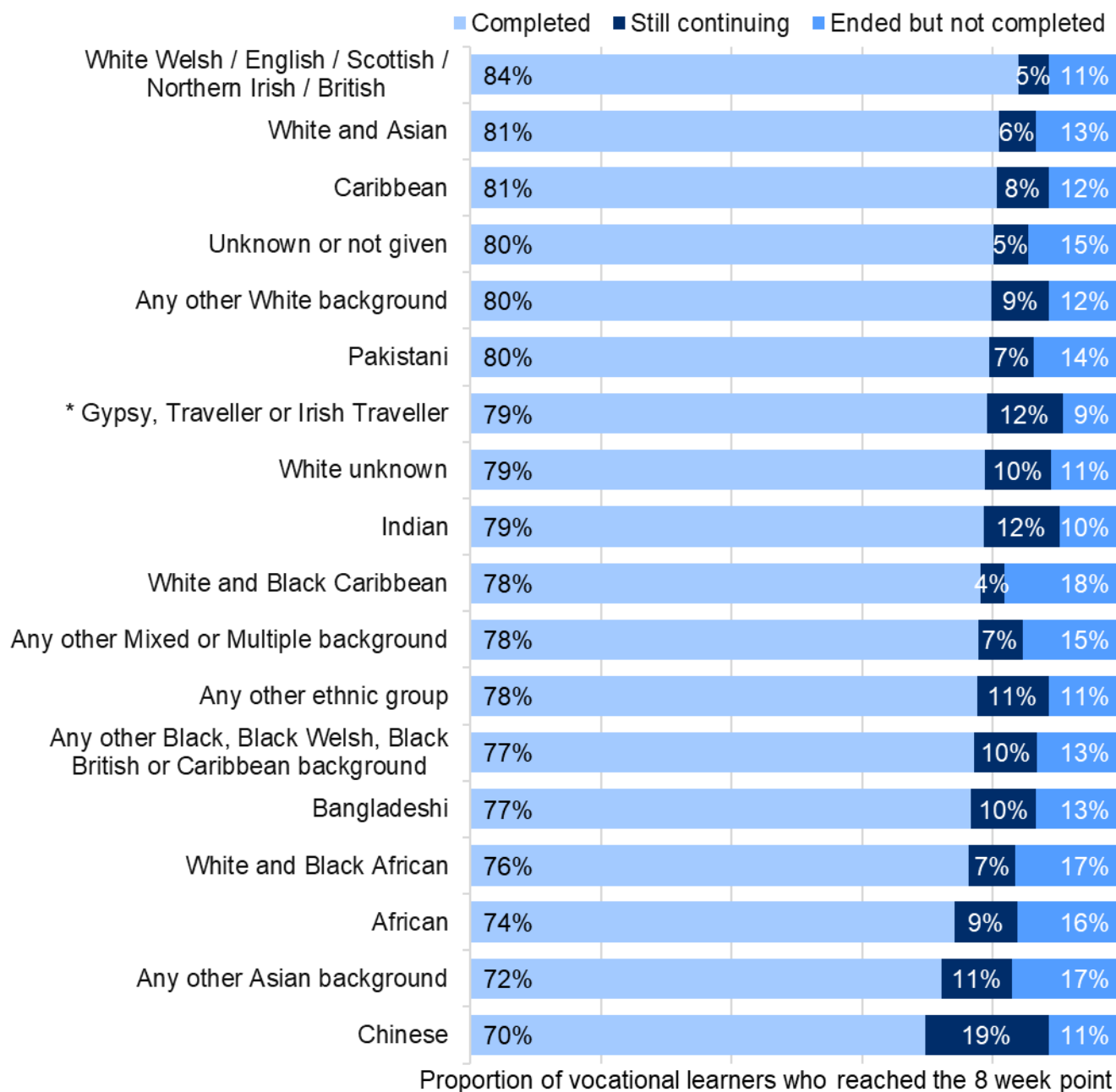


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Only 5 out of 18 of the detailed ethnic group categories had learners that took more than 50 adult learning qualifications in 2020/21, so a broader grouping is used. Statistics on the detailed grouping can be found in the tables accompanying this report.

The achievement rate for learners with Mixed or Multiple ethnic backgrounds was similar to 2019/20. Only 95 apprenticeships out of 180 were achieved in 2020/21. The achievement rate increased in 2020/21 for all other ethnic groups.

Chart 9.6: Outcomes for vocational learners by ethnic group, 2020/21



* Based on a denominator of 50 or less

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection

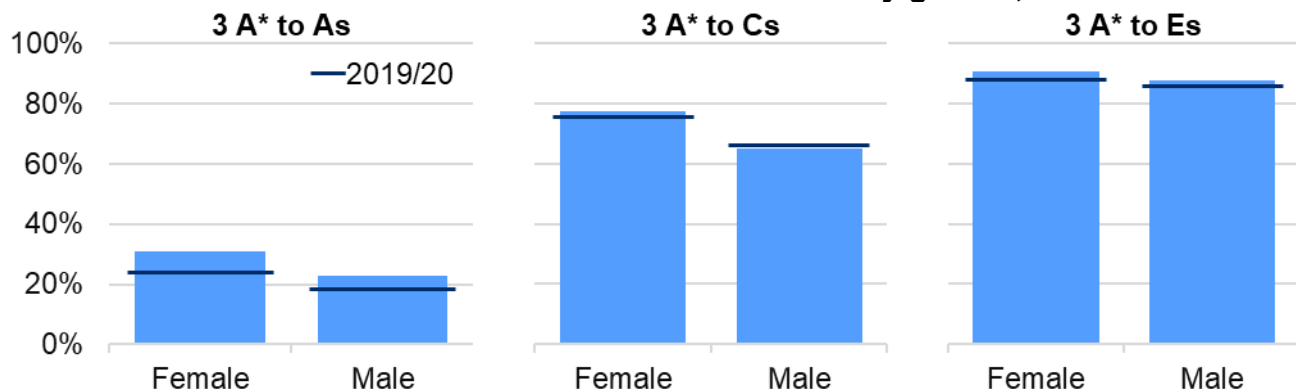
Learners with White Welsh / English / Scottish / Northern Irish / British backgrounds were the mostly likely to complete vocational programmes in 2020/21, followed by learners in the White and Asian ethnic group and learners with Caribbean backgrounds.

Learners with Chinese backgrounds were the least likely to have completed their programmes. 35 out of 185 learners with Chinese backgrounds were still continuing past their expected end date when the data was collected in December.

10. Gender

- Grades for female A2 learners increased more than grades for males, widening the overall gap in outcomes.
- Outcomes for male apprentices recovered faster in 2020/21, creating a gender gap.
- Outcomes were similar across genders in adult learning and on vocational programmes.

Chart 10.1: General education outcomes for A2 learners by gender, 2020/21

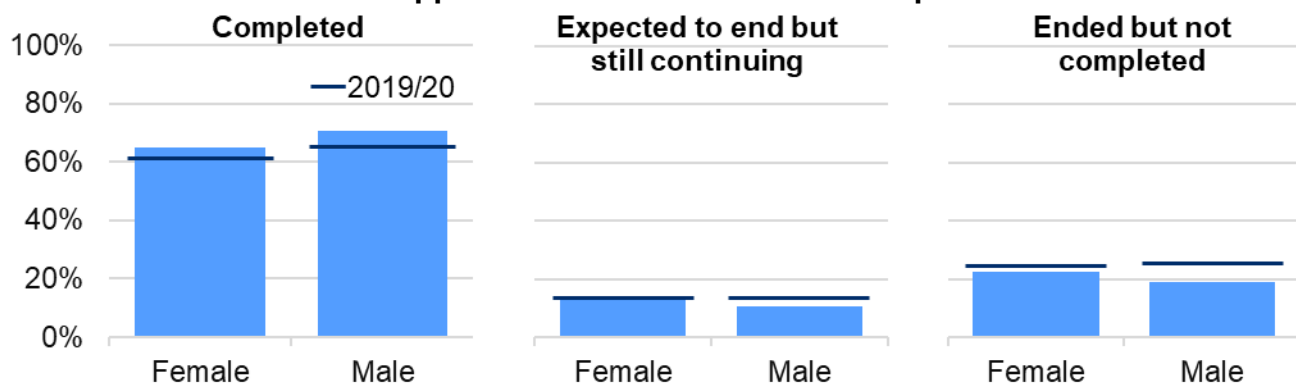


Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The rise in grades for female learners was equivalent to 24% of learners going up a grade boundary, compared to 2019/20. For male learners the rise was equivalent to 12% of learners going up a grade boundary.

31% of female learners achieved at least three As, compared to 23% of males.

Chart 10.2: Outcomes for apprentices that ended or were expected in 2020/21



Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

71% of male learners completed their apprenticeship in 2020/21, compared to 65% of female learners.

The percentage of male learners ending their apprenticeship without completing it dropped from 25% in 2019/20 to 19%. The percentage for female learners only dropped from 24% to 22%. Male learners were also less likely to be continuing past their expected end date.

11. Glossary

Academic year

For schools the academic year is from 1st September to 31st August. For colleges the academic year is 1st August to 31st July.

Adult learning

Adult learning is also referred to as 'Adult Community Learning'. Adult Learning (AL) learning activities are typically aimed at people who have not studied for some time. They are offered in a variety of community venues and some colleges.

Learners can gain a variety of different qualifications of different levels depending on what they study.

Age

Age is defined as the age of the learner on 31st August at the beginning of the academic year.

Colleges and school sixth forms

In this release, 'colleges' means further education institutions, also known as FEIs. Some further education institutions are a group of several colleges. 'School sixth forms' refers to maintained school sixth forms.

St David's Catholic Sixth Form College is defined as a college. Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen is a school sixth form.

Early dropouts

Learners are defined as early dropouts if they:

- end their programme within 8 weeks of their start date,
- and did not complete that programme,
- and the programme had an expected length of 24 weeks or greater.

Early dropouts are excluded from subsequent calculations.

Main qualifications

Each programme comprises one or more main qualifications (such as A Levels or a BTEC Diploma), together with additional qualifications which support the development of essential skills and help ensure that the individual learner's needs are met. Please see the 'Vocational education' part of the 'Quality and methodology information' for detail on how main qualifications are defined.

Programme

A programme is a collection of learning activities that a learner will study. For example, a typical general education programme would involve studying 3 AS levels and a Welsh Bacc.

An example of a vocational programme might be 'Carpentry & Joinery Level 1', which involves studying a 'Diploma in Carpentry and Joinery' as the main qualification, along with any supporting qualifications, such as pre-GCSE mathematics.

Qualification levels

Qualification levels range from entry level to level 8.

A level 1 qualification is equivalent to grades D to G at GCSE, a level 2 qualification is equivalent to grades A* to C at GCSE, and a level 3 qualification is equivalent to an AS or A level.

The '[Credit and Qualification Framework learner guide](#)' has a diagram outlining the levels of different qualifications.

12. Quality and methodology information

Datasets

The main data sources used in this release are as follows:

- a. [Post-16 Data Collection](#): every October, all maintained schools with sixth forms and middle schools with pupils in years 12, 13 and/or 14, are required to report all learning programmes and activities undertaken by pupils in the previous academic year.
- b. [Lifelong Learning Wales Record \(LLWR\)](#): contains data on further education, work-based learning and adult learning. It's collected on a 'rolling' basis throughout the year with regular statistical freezes. It is the official source of statistics on learners in further education institutions (colleges) in Wales.
- c. Welsh Examinations Database (WED): contains data on examination entries and outcomes collected from a number of awarding organisations.
- d. [Pupil level annual school census \(PLASC\)](#): an electronic collection of pupil and school level data provided by all maintained sector primary, middle, secondary, nursery and special schools in January each year, excluding sixth-forms.
- e. [School attendance data](#): weekly data extracted directly from school management information systems started in Autumn 2020. The data is collected from all maintained nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special schools and any pupil referral units that have such management information systems and routinely record their information electronically.

All data for further education institutions and work-based learning providers comes from LLWR. For school sixth forms, learner data is from the Post-16 data collection, and qualification attainment data is taken by matching learners to WED. Year 11 data is taken from PLASC.

Experimental statistics status

The statistics in this article are published as experimental statistics because they use new methods developed last year to understand the academic outcomes for post-16 learners during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Statistics in the consistent performance measures and learner outcomes reports published in previous years used methodologies that were well established and had been iterated on over several years with frequent consultation with data providers and stakeholders.

The statistics on this article have been developed over a short time period to show how learners have been affected by the pandemic. To try and capture the range of ways learners were affected entirely new measures were developed and datasets were used and combined in ways that they have not before.

The methods have continued to be improved and adapted this year. As a result historical figures in this publication may not match the year before.

Changes in methodology

The following changes have been made to the methodology since last year:

- Statistics on apprenticeships and adult learning now cover the full academic year.

- The general education programmes analysis no longer includes part time A levels.
- The prioritisation of programmes was improved where a learner started or transferred between multiple general education or vocational programmes.
- For data on Year 11s continuing onto post-16 learning and post-16 learners staying on, data for 2019/20 and earlier was treated as if it were school attendance data.
- The Year 11s continuing onto post-16 learning data was overhauled to provide more granular information about the destinations of learners from sixth forms as well as colleges.
- Apprenticeship statistics are presented on an apprenticeship basis instead of on a learner basis. One learner may have been on multiple apprenticeships within a year.
- A new analysis on the outcomes for apprentices one year after the December data collection was created.
- Level 4 or higher vocational programmes were included in the analysis.

Timeliness

All statistics are reporting on the academic year as the situation stood at the following December when the LLWR dataset was collected.

Learners marked as continuing were still continuing as of the 1st December but may have finished their programme in the time since.

Statistics for previous years have been calculated for comparable time periods to 2019/20. So those statistics are as they stood in the December following the end of the academic year.

Cohort of learners

The cohort of learners for these statistics were learners attending publicly funded post-16 learning in Wales, not including Higher Education.

Learners were included if they were taking part in learning that ended or that was originally expected to end within the academic year. Learners who expected to finish their learning after the end of the time period, and were still continuing at the end of the academic year, are not included in the base cohorts.

Learners who were expected to end within the academic year, but ended afterwards were counted as ended as long as it ended before 1st December. These learners could be counted in statistics for two different years.

Learners who drop out within the first 8 weeks without completing their programme are counted as early dropouts and excluded from other statistics. Learners on short courses expected to end within 24 weeks of starting are not included as early dropouts.

Traineeships were not included in the work-based learning statistics due to the way traineeship data was recorded during the pandemic.

Junior apprenticeships, independent living skills and higher education programmes studied in colleges were not included in the analysis. Learners who died during their programme were not included in the statistics.

In 2016/17 there were known or strongly suspected data quality issues in the post-16 data collection for some schools. These schools were removed from the post-16 consistent performance measures in 2016/17. The schools have been removed from the general education and vocational outcome measures in this article. Due to the low amount of vocational learners in schools this only has a noticeable effect on the general education outcomes. These schools have been removed from the initial cohort of the retention measures, but not the cohort of learners matched to in the second year.

Vocational education

Vocational education statistics include all learners, part time or full time, taking a vocational programme within the academic year that ended or that was expected to end within that time period.

The achievement rate is calculated as the number of main qualifications achieved, divided by the number of main qualifications undertaken, across all programmes that have ended. Qualifications which were delayed beyond the academic year, but ended before the data collection in December are included. Qualifications taken as part of programmes which were still continuing are not included.

If a learner completed their programme but withdrew from a particular qualification in that programme, that would count against achievement.

A learner can have multiple main qualifications in one programme. The Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate is included as a main qualification but not the Welsh Baccalaureate itself.

Main qualifications are reported by the provider and differ depending on the learners. All qualifications for entry level programmes are considered main qualifications. Qualifications which are of a lower level than the overall programme are not counted as main qualifications in these statistics. Only qualifications designated in Wales are included.

A small number of learners were recorded as complete in the data collection when they may have not completed. This occurred when a learner's assessment was delayed past the start of their new programme in 2020/21 and 2021/22. These learners were treated as having completed if they'd received an award for their remaining activity, and as continuing if they hadn't. An additional 85 learners in 2020/21 were marked as still continuing because of this.

Some of the differences between these statistics and the achievement consistent performance measures for post-16 learning include:

- part time learners, and learners on programmes that have lasted longer than two years are included
- learners still continuing on programmes which were expected to end were included in the base number of learners
- activities marked continuing on a programme which had ended were not treated as having ended.

General education

General education statistics include all full time A2 learners taking a general education programme which aims to achieve 3 or more A levels, with programmes that ended or were expected to end within the academic year.

The statistics look at the overall qualifications a learner achieved as part of their programme. If they achieved some qualifications before the summer period, those would be included.

The A level achievement statistics include qualifications of comparable size and value. This includes BTEC subsidiary diplomas and the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate. An AS level is counted as half of an A level.

The statistics only include qualifications approved or designated for use in Wales. An exam is discounted when a learner achieves a higher grade or a higher level qualification in the same subject group.

Some of the differences between these statistics and the achievement consistent performance measures for post-16 learning include:

- A2 learners are used for the base cohort, not AS learners
- A2 learners who drop out within the first 8 weeks are excluded from the calculations.

Vocational and general education retention and progression

Retention statistics on the number of vocational and general education learners who stayed on in post-16 learning after completing include all AS level and vocational learners, part time and full time, who completed their programme.

These learners are matched to learners in the following academic year across all school sixth forms, further education institutions, and apprenticeship providers. Higher education and any non-publicly funded learning is not included.

Learners are matched by their provider's learner identifier, their unique learner identifier (ULI), their unique pupil number (UPN), or by name and date of birth. An algorithm is used to account for spelling errors and variations in the learner's name, which means a small number of learners may be misidentified if they have similar names and dates of birth. Some learners may be missed by the matching process.

The post-16 data collection for school sixth forms begins in September after the academic year has ended. Therefore there was no 2021/22 school data to match learners to. Instead learners were matched to the school attendance dataset, which includes a record of all learners enrolled at a school, whether or not they were attending. The school attendance data for 2020/21 was also used for the sake of comparison.

A learner is defined as having stayed on in post-16 learning (retained), if:

- they were matched to a post-16 learning programme or apprenticeship in the following year
- that started by December (the time of the data collection for the LLWR data)
- which was not an adult learning course

- which did not end before they completed their original programme
- and they did not drop out within the first 8 weeks of that programme.

A learner who stayed in post-16 learning is not necessarily taking the same type of learning as the programme they had completed. They may be studying at a new provider, or undertaking an apprenticeship. If they were part time their new programme may not be part time and vice versa.

An AS learner is defined as having progressed if they stayed on in post-16 learning and their new programme was an A2. It may not be at the same provider where they completed their AS.

A vocational learner is defined as having progressed if they were undertaking post-16 programme which was the same or higher level than the programme they had completed. This includes general education programmes, vocational education programmes and apprenticeships.

The school attendance dataset does not have information on the programme a learner is studying. For this reason, statistics on progression only include learners who studied their new programme at a further education institution or apprenticeship provider.

The home neighbourhood of a learner which is used in the deprivation statistics is where they were living during their original programme. Their age is the age in the year they completed their original programme.

Year 11s continuing onto post-16 learning

Year 11 statistics include all Year 11 pupils present in the Wales January PLASC data collection taken during their academic year. Guest pupils, for example foreign exchange students, are excluded.

Year 11 pupils are matched to post-16 learning in the following academic year in the same way they are matched for retention and progression. A description of this is in the retention and progression section above.

Unlike other measures, independent living skills programmes are included.

The Year 11 statistics are based on the position at the time of the January LLWR freeze, one month later than the rest of the data in this release. This is because 2021/22 attendance is an evolving situation.

A Year 11 learner is defined as continuing onto post-16 learning, if:

- they were matched to a post-16 learning programme or apprenticeship in the following year
- that started by December (the time of the data collection for the LLWR data)
- which was not an adult learning course
- and they did not drop out within the first 8 weeks of that programme.

Learners are recorded as having switched programmes if they change the type or level of programme they initially took, or if they moved to a different provider. Switches within the same level and type of programme (i.e. level 3 vocational programmes) are not included.

For the purpose of statistics on whether a learner switched to a different type of programme and to a higher programme, it is assumed that all sixth form learners are studying level 3 general education programmes. This was true for over 95% of learners in 2020/21.

The age and deprivation of a learner's home neighbourhood are defined for when the pupil was in Year 11.

Two Cardiff schools were missing from the attendance data in 2021/22 due to a technical error. This will lead to the number of learners continuing onto a school sixth form being underestimated.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship statistics include all apprentices taking place between 1st August and 31st July that ended or that were originally expected to end within that time period. Transfers are excluded.

If an apprenticeship was achieved, but an end date was not reported, the award date of their apprenticeship framework was used.

If a learner was active on multiple apprenticeship within an academic year, all apprenticeships are included in the statistics.

Some of the difference between these apprenticeship statistics and the annual learner outcomes release are:

- statistics are presented on an apprenticeship basis instead of a learner basis
- apprentices expected to end but still continuing are included, including in the denominator for achievement and completion rates.

Adult learning

Adult learning statistics includes all adult learning activities taking place between 1st August and 31st July that ended, or that were originally expected to end within that time period.

Adult learning provision is also known as Adult Community Learning (ACL) and Local Authority Community Learning. It was defined in the [Adult Learning in Wales policy](#) as "Flexible learning opportunities for adults, delivered in community venues to meet local needs".

Adult learning provision is based on an activity basis rather than a programme basis, unlike the other statistics in this release. One learner may take several adult learning activities within an academic year.

The measures for adult learning are defined this way:

- the completion rate is the number of completed activities divided by the number of ended activities, this excludes activities still continuing
- the continuation rate is the number of activities expected to end in the time period but were still continuing at the time of data collection in December divided by the number of activities where learners were not early dropouts
- the achievement rate is the number of assessable activities that were passed, divided by the number of assessable activities that ended.

Assessable activities are activities that lead to an associated award, and are sometimes referred to in this release as 'qualifications'.

Assessable activities where the result was unknown are excluded from the achievement rate calculations.

Higher education provision and Welsh for Adults activities are not included as part of adult learning.

Expected end date

Some providers amended the expected end dates of their learners due to the pandemic after some of the effects of the pandemic were known. The expected end date used in this release is the original expected end date of the learning without any alterations due to the pandemic, where possible.

For further education institutions and apprenticeship providers, the expected end date was taken from data collected in February 2020 for 2019/20 data, and from December 2020 for 2020/21 data. The expected end date at the time of the data collection was used if the learning programme or activity could not be matched to these earlier dates. In this case the expected end date may have accounted for the effects of the pandemic.

School sixth form data is only collected once a year, so an earlier expected end date could not be used. However the vast majority of sixth form learners are full time general education learners who were unlikely to have been delayed by the pandemic.

For comparability, previous years also used expected end dates recorded before March, although the expected end dates were less likely to have been changed. However the data collection used to calculate the original expected end date was different for 2017/18 and 2018/19. These years used data collected in December 2017 and December 2018 respectively.

Rounding

All figures are rounded to the nearest 5. Numbers less than 5 are suppressed. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages based on a denominator of less than 23 are suppressed.

Differences between values are calculated using unrounded values, so there may be small discrepancies when compared with the rounded figures.

Percentage of learners going up one grade category

The statistics in the general education section and others, for 'the shift in grades is equivalent to a percentage of students going up by a whole grade group' is calculated using the Earth Mover's Distance. One way of calculating the Earth Mover's Distance is to sum the percentage of completers in each cumulative grade distribution (A*, A* to A, A* to B...) and subtract the sum of the percentage of completers in each cumulative grade distribution from the year being compared.

The calculations are made using A2 completers as the base cohort, so the statistics represent the equivalent percentage of A2 completers who have gone up one grade boundary.

Notes on the use of statistical articles

Statistical articles generally relate to one-off analyses for which there are no updates planned, at least in the short-term, and serve to make such analyses available to a wider audience than might otherwise be the case. They are mainly used to publish analyses that are exploratory in some way, for example:

- introducing a new experimental series of data
- a partial analysis of an issue which provides a useful starting point for further research but that nevertheless is a useful analysis in its own right
- drawing attention to research undertaken by other organisations, either commissioned by the Welsh Government or otherwise, where it is useful to highlight the conclusions, or to build further upon the research
- an analysis where the results may not be of as high quality as those in our routine statistical releases and bulletins, but where meaningful conclusions can still be drawn from the results.

Where quality is an issue, this may arise in one or more of the following ways:

- being unable to accurately specify the timeframe used (as can be the case when using an administrative source)
- the quality of the data source or data used
- other specified reasons.

However, the level of quality will be such that it does not significantly impact upon the conclusions. For example, the exact timeframe may not be central to the conclusions that can be drawn, or it is the order of magnitude of the results, rather than the exact results, that are of interest to the audience.

The analysis presented does not constitute a National Statistic, but may be based on National Statistics outputs and will nevertheless have been subject to careful consideration and detailed checking before publication. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the analysis will be included in the article, for example comparisons with other sources, along with guidance on how the analysis might be used, and a description of the methodology applied.

Articles are subject to the release practices as defined by the release practices protocol, and so, for example, are published on a pre-announced date in the same way as other statistical outputs.

Missing value symbols used in the article follow the standards used in other statistical outputs, as outlined below.

- .. The data item is not available
- . The data item is not applicable
- The data item is not exactly zero, but estimated as zero or less than half the final digit shown
- * The data item is disclosive or not sufficiently robust for publication



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