Outcomes for learners in Post-16 education affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: August 2019 to July 2020[1] (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 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. 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

- Outcomes for learners in post-16 learning were very different depending on the type of learning being taken.

- There were large improvements in outcomes for learners in general education (A levels) and level 3 vocational education, but outcomes have been worse during the pandemic for learners on other vocational programmes and apprenticeships, and most adult learning stopped altogether.

- Full time post-16 completers in 2019/20 were as likely to stay in post-16 learning as in previous years, but AS completers were more likely to continue onto A2 than in previous years.

- Part time vocational learners were less likely to stay in post-16 learning after completing their programme. 27% of part time learners in 2018/19 stayed on the next year, 17% did in 2019/20.

- There was no change in the proportion of learners who went on to post-16 learning after completing Year 11 in 2020, but they were more likely to be doing AS levels, or level 3 vocational programmes than in previous years.

- The largest changes in A2 outcomes was the increase in learners getting at least three Bs or Cs.

- The changes in outcomes for learners of different ages, deprivation, ethnicity and gender also depended on the type of learning being taken. This is explored in sections 7 to 10.

- More A2 learners got at least three As across all ages, ethnicities, genders and levels of deprivation, but groups that tended to get high grades previously saw bigger increases. Groups that tended to get lower grades saw bigger increases in learners getting at least three Cs.

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

Tables of Contents

1. Context

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak spread to the UK in January 2020. During spring 2020, the UK and Welsh Governments gradually increased measures designed to slow the spread of coronavirus.

Welsh school sixth forms, colleges and other post-16 learning providers closed for face-to-face learning on 20th March 2020. Learning moved online where possible. Some face-to-face learning resumed over the summer term, but the majority of learning remained online for the rest of the academic year.

Exams for AS and A2 levels were cancelled in the summer. All A levels that would have been sat as examinations in the 2019/20 summer term were replaced with the best of either a centre assessment grade or a standardised grade calculated by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC). Centre assessment grades are often called teacher assessed grades.

Vocational qualifications were split into several categories:

- learners on qualifications mainly used for progression to further or higher education, such as BTECs, received centre assessment grades where possible

- qualifications used to signal occupational competence were adapted so assessments could take place

- where this was not possible, some assessments were delayed.

Some vocational grades were re-issued after centre assessment grades were used for GCSEs and A levels.

Apprenticeships continued throughout the pandemic, but some apprentices were affected by furlough and redundancies.

Adult learning took place in available venues where they existed, otherwise learning was moved online.

The Welsh Government carried out a survey of learners aged 16 or older to improve understanding of the impact of the pandemic on learners in Wales. The 'Effect of COVID-19 on learners survey: results summary' provides an overview of respondents' experiences of remote learning during the first national lockdown in March 2020 and their learning into the 2020/21 academic year.

The number of new apprentices, adult learners and part-time further education learners fell sharply from March onwards. More information on how the pandemic affected the amount of post-16 learning taken can be found in the report 'Further education, work-based learning and adult learning: August 2019 to July 2020'.

Due to the changes in how grades were awarded in 2020 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.

These statistics have been calculated using new methods 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 majority of learners completed their programme, 85% completed compared to 88% in the previous year.

- Another 7% of learners were still continuing past their original expected end date when the data was collected in December 2020.

- Outcomes for learners were very different depending on the type of programme they were taking.

- Achievement rates rose for level 3 and access to higher education programmes, but fell for entry, level 1 and level 2 programmes.

- Full time learners who completed were as likely to stay in post-16 learning as they were in previous years, but 1 in 10 fewer part time completers stayed on in 2020/21 than did in 2019/20.

- 15% of learners completed their programme but were delayed beyond their original intended end date.

- Half as many learners dropped out of their programme to go into employment in 2019/20 compared to the year before.

Chart 2.1: Outcomes for vocational learners by academic year

Proportion of vocational learners still enrolled after 8 weeks
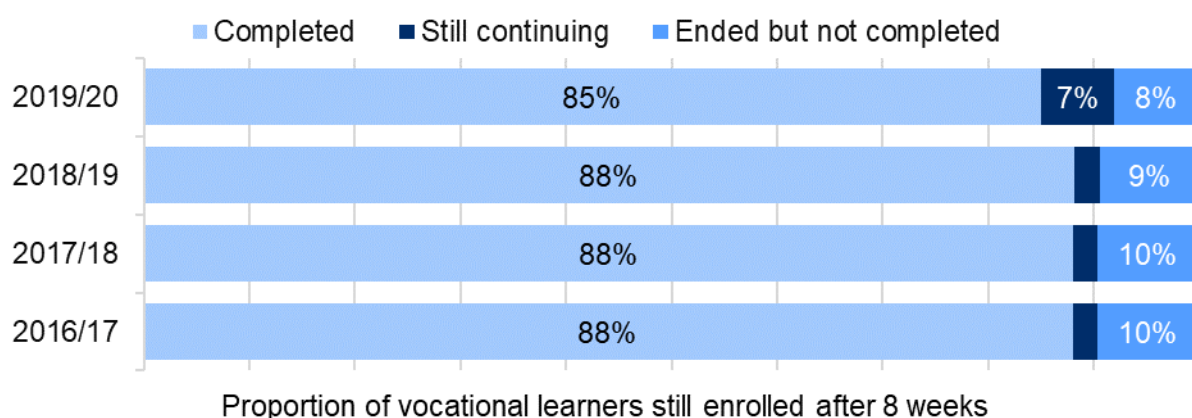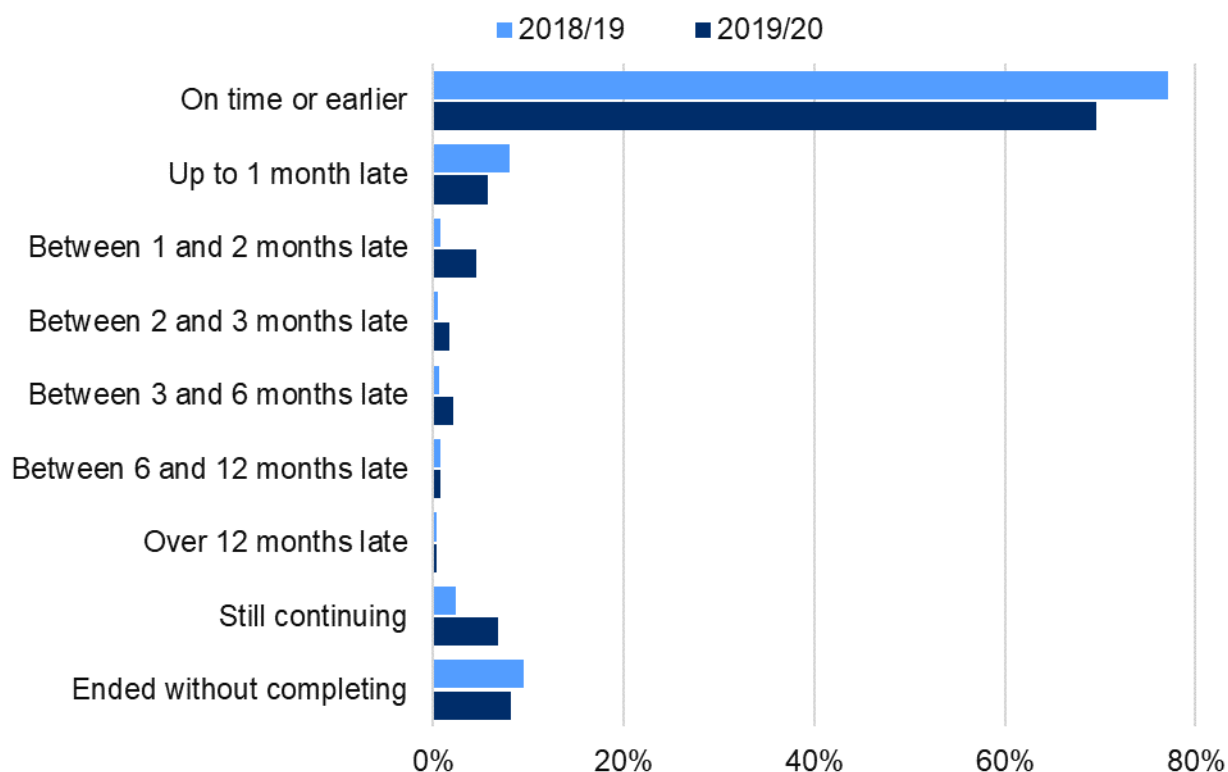
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

Fewer learners completed their vocational programmes in 2019/20, but there were also slightly fewer learners ending their programme without completing.

The pandemic saw a large increase in learners who could not finish their course or had their course delayed, because their qualification included practical elements that could not be delivered online. 7% of vocational learners who were expected to end their programme in 2019/20 were still continuing at the time of the data collection in the following December. This amounts to 4,400 learners, and is nearly three times the proportion last year, where only 2% of learners were still continuing by December.

Chart 2.2: Timeliness of vocational programmes, by academic year

Legend: ■ 2018/19 ■ 2019/20

Categories (top to bottom):
- On time or earlier
- Up to 1 month late
- Between 1 and 2 months late
- Between 2 and 3 months late
- Between 3 and 6 months late
- Between 6 and 12 months late
- Over 12 months late
- Still continuing
- Ended without completing
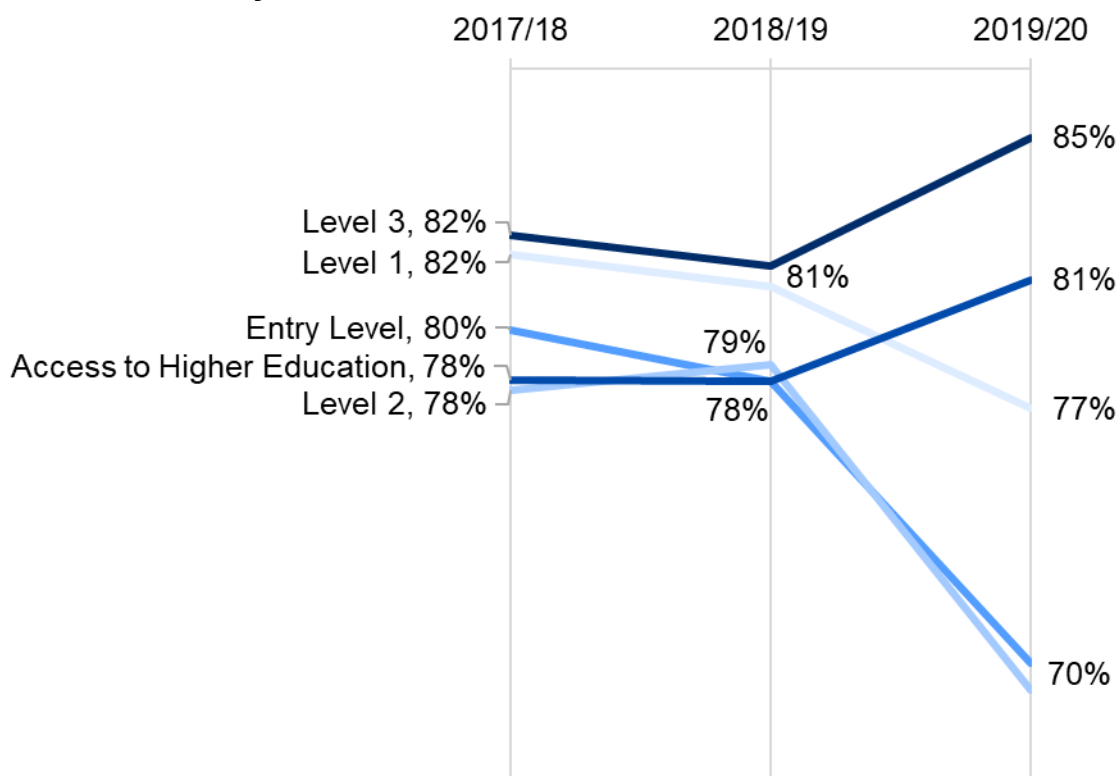
X-axis: 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%

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

The majority of vocational learning programmes were still completed on time in 2019/20 but the proportion of learners completing late increased. The length of the delay before completing also increased compared to the previous year.

6% of learners finished up to 1 month late, a little less than the year before, but 5% finished between 1 and 2 months late compared to 1% in the previous year. 2% of learners finished between 3 and 6 months late, which was triple the proportion in the previous year. These figures could rise even higher when the learners still continuing complete their programmes.

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 proportion of main qualifications that were passed for programmes that were completed, divided by all the main qualifications which ended, for any reason. 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.

The achievement rate for vocational learners varied wildly depending on the type of programme taken.

The achievement rate for level 3 (equivalent to A level) and access to higher education programmes increased compared to previous years. These programmes include many vocational qualifications used for progression to another level of education. Many of these received centre assessment grades.

The achievement rate for entry level and level 2 programmes dropped steeply. The drop for both equates to nearly 1 fewer main qualification being passed for every 10 main qualifications taken.

Learners on entry level and level 2 programmes were also more likely to be still continuing by the following December than learners on other programmes.

Delays for vocational qualifications were probably due to assessments being delayed which had a practical component and were meant to assess occupational competence.

Qualifications being taken during the pandemic might not be the same as in previous years. Certain qualifications had to be delayed due to difficulties with carrying out assessments during the pandemic, and were still continuing at the time of the data collection. Qualifications which were part of continuing programmes are not included in the analysis. These qualifications could have different achievement rates than the qualifications that were included, which would influence the overall achievement rate. The change in the achievement rate should be considered with this in mind.

Chart 2.4: Achievement rate of qualifications in vocational programmes by Sector Subject Area (SSA) and academic year
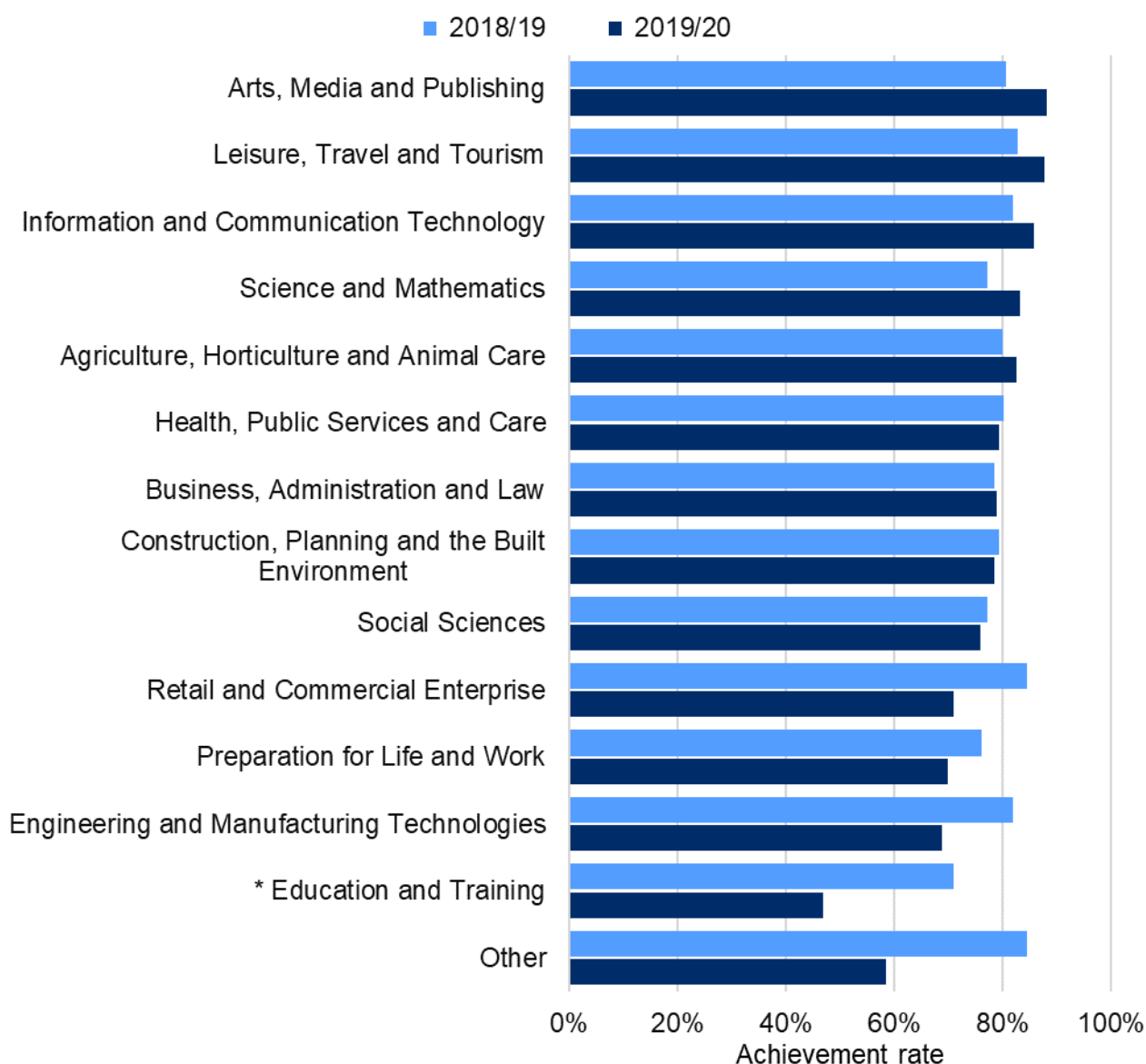
* Achievement rate in 2019/20 is based on less than 50 learners

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

The outcomes for vocational learners differed depending on the subject area they studied. In the previous year, achievement rates for all subjects were between 71% and 85%. In 2019/20, achievement rates for subjects ranged from 47% to 88%.

The lowest achievement rates were for Education and Training. Fewer than half of these qualifications were achieved.

The next four subject areas with the lowest achievement rates were also subjects associated with practical and work-related components – Other (mainly comprised of NVQs in the Workplace and LearnDirect programmes); Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies; Preparation for Life and Work; and Retail and Commercial Enterprise.

Several subject areas saw an increase in achievement compared to the previous year, including Arts, Media and Publishing; Information and Communication Technology; Leisure, Travel and Tourism; and Science and Mathematics.

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
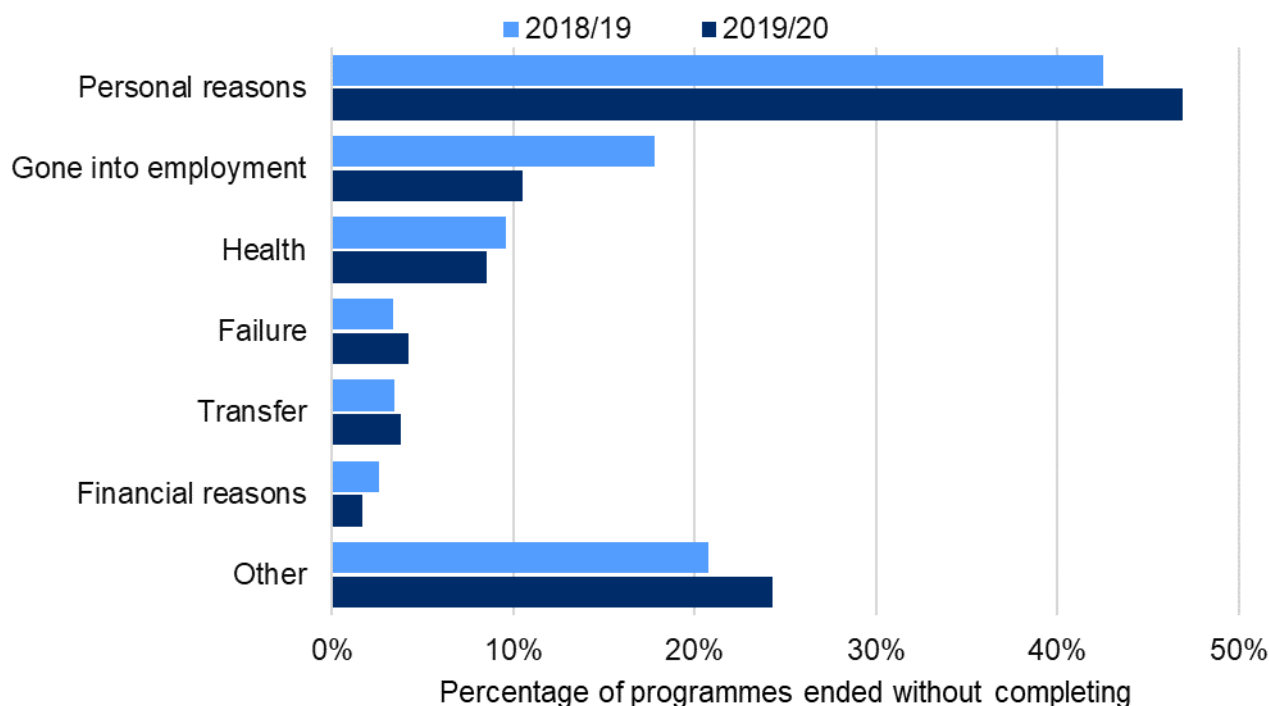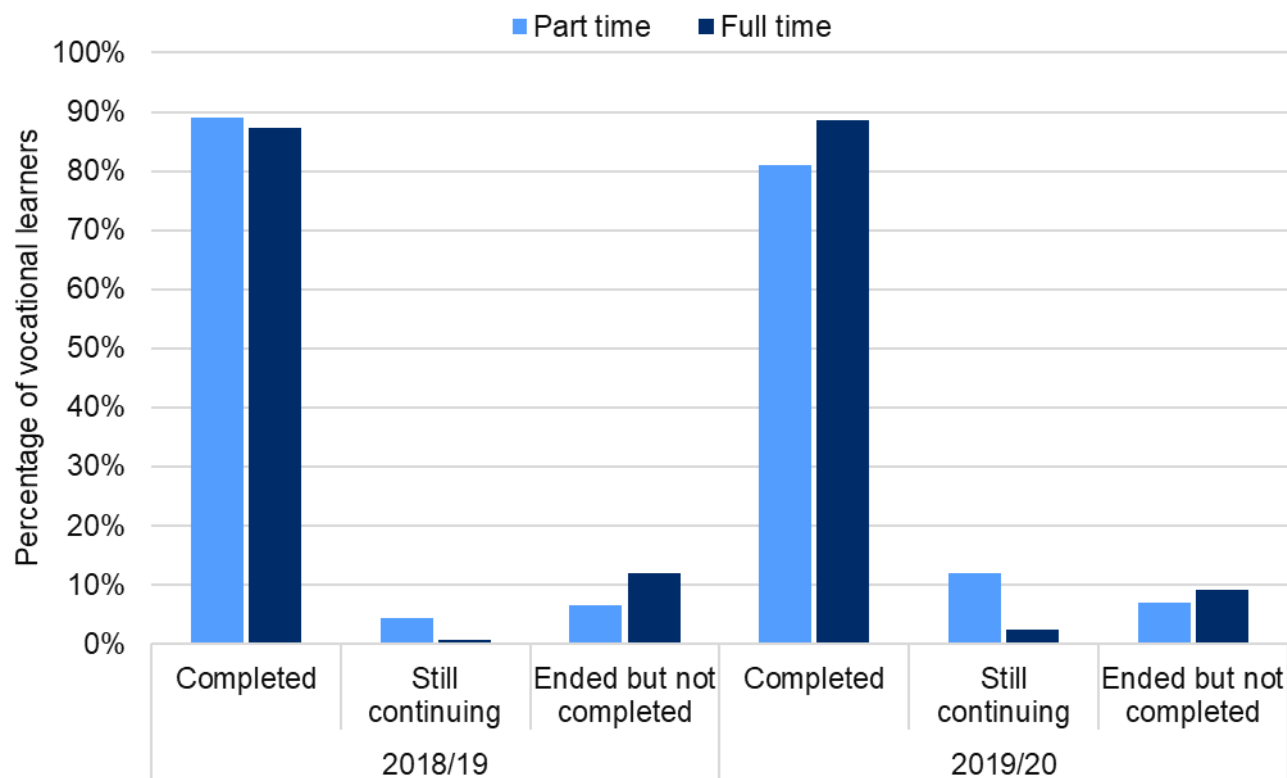

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Learners were less likely to drop out of their programmes to go into employment during the pandemic. This may partly explain why fewer learners ended their course without completing than in previous years.

There was no increase in learners ending their programmes due to health or financial reasons, but learners were more likely to end their courses due to other personal reasons or because they failed before the end of their programme.

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
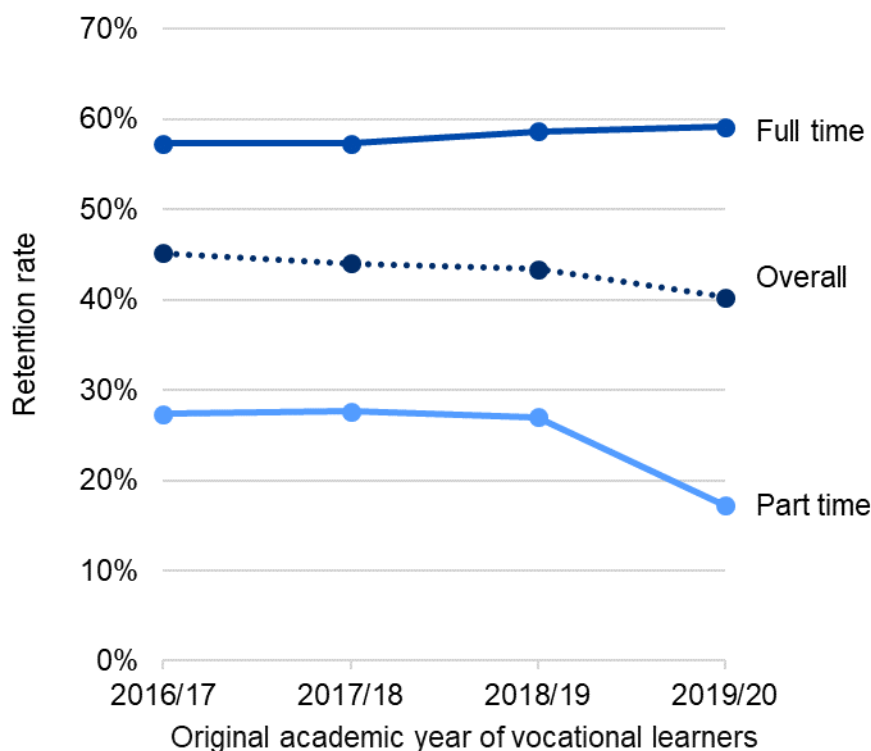

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

Part time vocational learners were less likely to complete their programme than full time learners in 2019/20. This is reverse of the pattern in the previous year.

7 fewer part time vocational learners in every 100 completed their programme in 2019/20 compared to full time learners. In 2018/19 it was 2 more part time learners in every 100 completing their programme.

The majority of part time learners who did not complete, did not end their course. Instead they were still continuing in December when the data was collected. 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 are expected to progress to higher education.

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

Overall the retention rate of vocational learners fell in 2019/20. 40% of learners in 2019/20 who completed a vocational programme stayed on to take another post-16 learning programme in 2020/21. 43% stayed on in the previous year.

However the results for full time and part time learners are very different. In 2018/19, 27% of time completers stayed on to do another programme. In 2019/20 only 17% did.

The drop in part time retention might correspond with the large drop in people starting part time further education programmes during the pandemic. One factor might be that people who would normally do part time programmes linked to their job were affected by the lockdowns and furlough.

Full time learners stayed on at a similar rate to previous years, 59% stayed on in 2019/20.

There were around 30,000 full time learners who completed a vocational programme in 2019/20 compared to around 24,000 part time learners, which is why the overall drop in retention is smaller than the drop in retention for part time.

Vocational learners may typically stay in post-16 learning because they are 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.

Chart 2.8: Percentage of retained full time vocational completers in colleges who progressed, by academic year
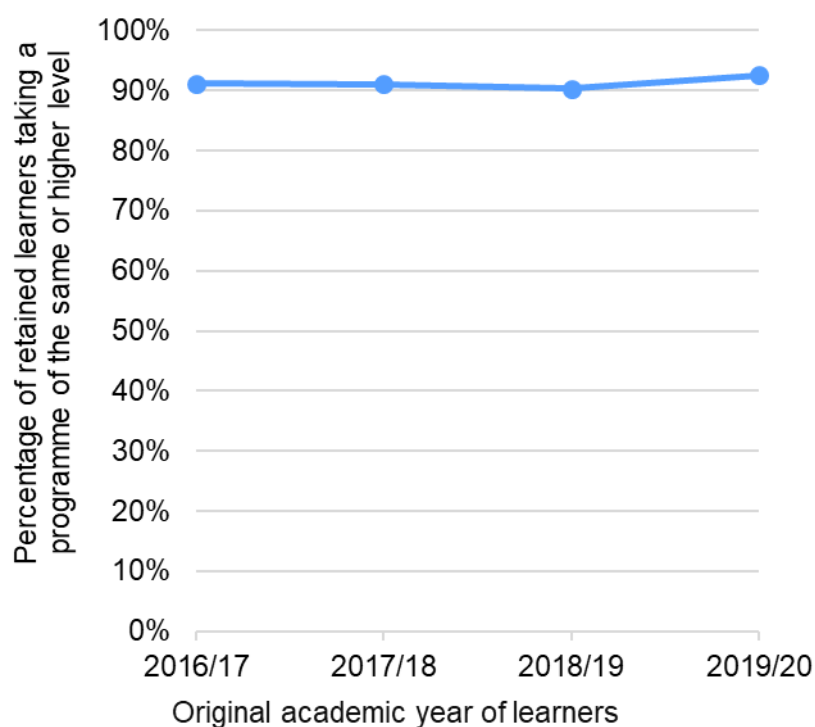
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

Progression is defined as learners taking a programme or apprenticeship of the same level or higher in the following year. There are many vocational qualifications where there is a natural progression to another programme that is the same level as the original programme.

Not only were full time vocational learners as likely to stay on in post-16 learning as previous years, but they were slightly more likely to progress when they did. In colleges, 92% of retained learners had progressed, compared to 90% the year before.

The increase in progression was seen at all levels even though the achievement rates were very different in 2019/20 depending on the level of vocational programme.

The types of programmes learners were going onto also changed. In 2018/19, 9% of vocational learners went on to take an apprenticeship in the next year, in 2019/20 only 4% did. This did not greatly affect the progression rate, as the vast majority of learners who went onto apprenticeships took an apprenticeship of the same or higher level as their vocational programme.

These statistics are calculated for learners who took their second programme in a college, because the data on the programmes taken by learners in sixth forms for 2020/21 is collected after the end of the academic year.

3. General education

- 22% of A2 learners achieved at least 3 As at A level, compared to 12% of A2 learners in 2018/19.

- 72% of A2 learners achieved at least 3 Cs at A level, only 55% did in 2018/19.

- The change in A2 learners achieving 3 A levels at any grade is in line with previous years, and there was no change in the percentage of learners who completed their A levels.

- The biggest increase was in the middle grades, particularly students getting at least three Bs or three Cs.

- Students who complete their AS were as likely to stay on in post-16 learning in 2020/21 as they were in previous years, but they were more likely to continue onto an A2 programme.

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 2019/20 which looked at individual A levels.

Chart 3.1: Outcome measures for A2 learners by academic year
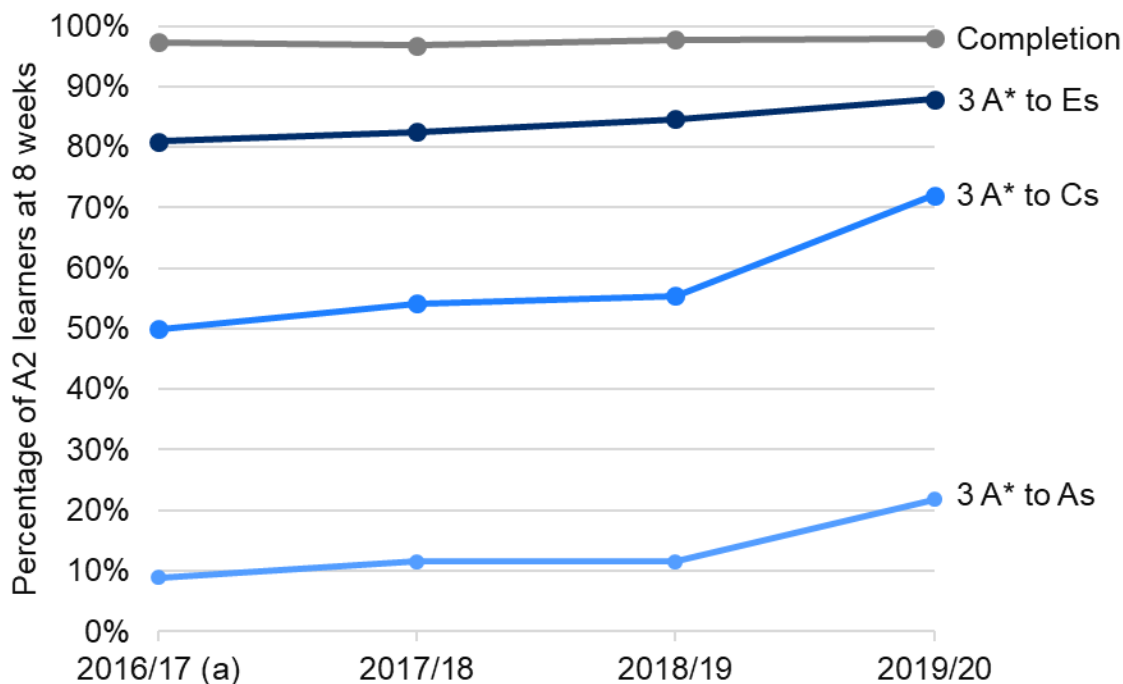
(a) Some providers were removed in 2016/17 due to data quality issues, see the cohort of learners part of the quality and methodology section for more information.

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

The grade distribution of A levels shifted upwards steeply in 2019/20. The number of learners getting three Cs or higher increased from 55% to 72%.

Over 1 in 5 students received three As or A*s, compared to 1 in 9 students in previous years. This is considerably higher than in previous years.

On the other hand the increase in the number of learners getting at least 3 A levels at any grade was much smaller. The increase in learners getting three A levels of any grade was roughly in line with increases in other years, and the completion rate of A2 level programmes was unchanged.

The shift in grades is equivalent to 58% of students going up by a whole grade group. For example, going from getting three Ds or higher to getting three Cs or higher.

Chart 3.2: Change in outcomes for A2 completers in academic year 2019/20 compared to 2018/19
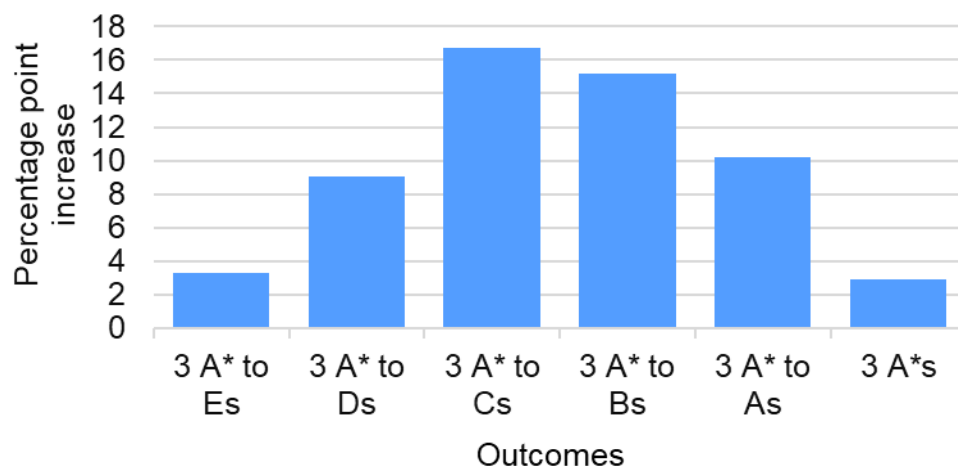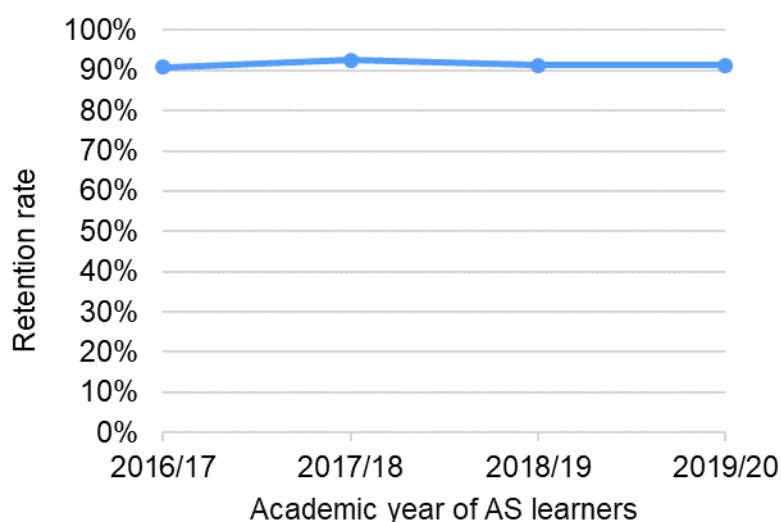

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The distribution of grades has grouped towards the middle grades. A larger proportion of learners got at least three Cs but did not get three A*s.

The increase in the number of learners getting three A*s is a small number of learners compared to the number of learners who get three As and above, but still represents well over twice as many people getting three A*s than in 2018/19.

Chart 3.3: 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 2019/20 AS learners staying on in post-16 learning was similar to previous years. 91% of learners stayed on, the same as the percentage of 2018/19 learners staying on.

Chart 3.4: Progression of full time AS completers that stayed in post-16 learning at colleges, by academic year
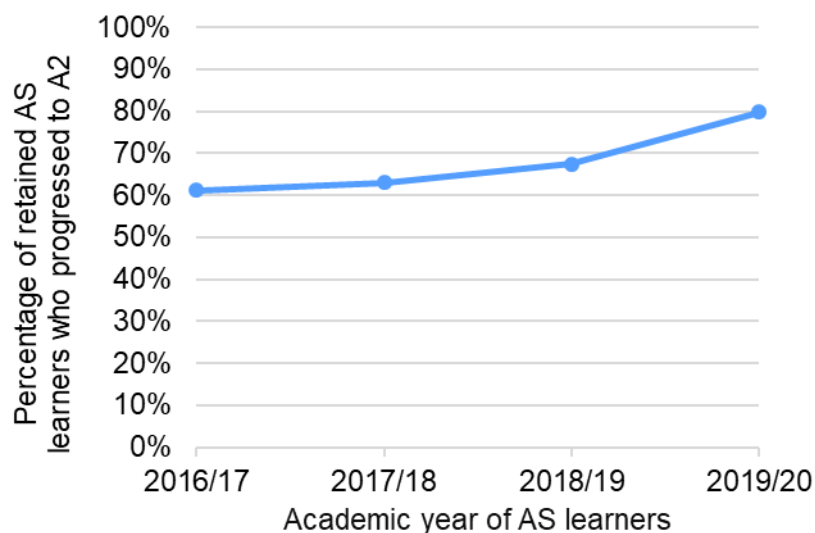
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection

Although retention did not change much for full time AS learners, those who did stay on were much more likely to be continuing with their A2 programme.

8 in 10 full time AS learners in 2019/20 who stayed on did an A2 programme. In 2018/19 less than 7 in 10 did.

The increase in progression is likely to be because of the change in how exams were handled in 2019/20. In the previous year, 9% of full time AS learners at colleges repeated an AS programme. In 2019/20, only 4% of learners did. The percentage of AS learners who subsequently started a vocational programme instead of continuing with their A levels dropped from 21% 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 2020/21 is collected after the end of the academic year.
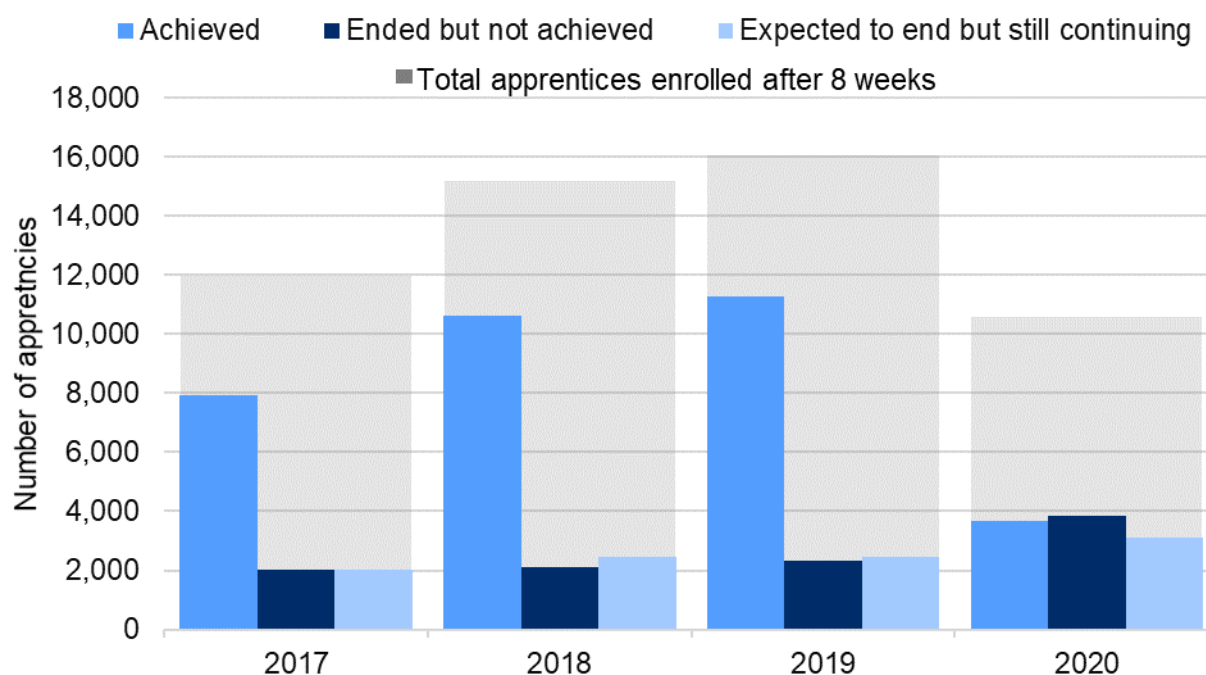
4. Apprenticeships

- 35% of apprentices who ended their apprenticeship or were originally expected to end their apprenticeship between 20th March and 31st July 2020 completed their apprenticeship and achieved all the required learning outcomes. This is half the equivalent rate in 2019 (70%).

- 36% of apprentices ended their apprenticeship without achieving all the required learning. Of these, just under half had completed their apprenticeship but not yet achieved all the outcomes. This number should be treated with caution, as some providers may have been waiting for confirmation of their learners' results at the time the data was collected.

- 29% of apprentices were still continuing past their expected end date when the data was collected in December.

- Apprenticeships who did finish, finished 99 days late on average, this was 39 days later than the previous year.

- However the delay affected some apprentices more than others. 1 in 5 apprentices finished at least 6 months later than originally expected.

- Learners on foundation apprenticeships were most affected, learners on higher apprenticeships were the least affected.

- Outcomes were very dependent on the sector. Only 1 in 5 apprentices working in hair and beauty were able to achieve their apprenticeship by December. Engineering; agriculture; and construction were also heavily affected.

Apprenticeships don't follow a standard academic year. They can start at any point unlike, for example, further education programmes which tend to start at the beginning of the academic year. Learners often continue working towards their apprenticeship into the following academic year.

The statistics in this section focus on the apprenticeships active during the pandemic, between 20th March and 31st July, which ended or were expected to end. Apprentices expecting to finish their apprenticeship after 31st July who were still continuing after this date are not included in the base cohort. Comparisons are made to apprentices in the same time period in previous years.

Chart 4.1: Outcomes for apprentices that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July by year
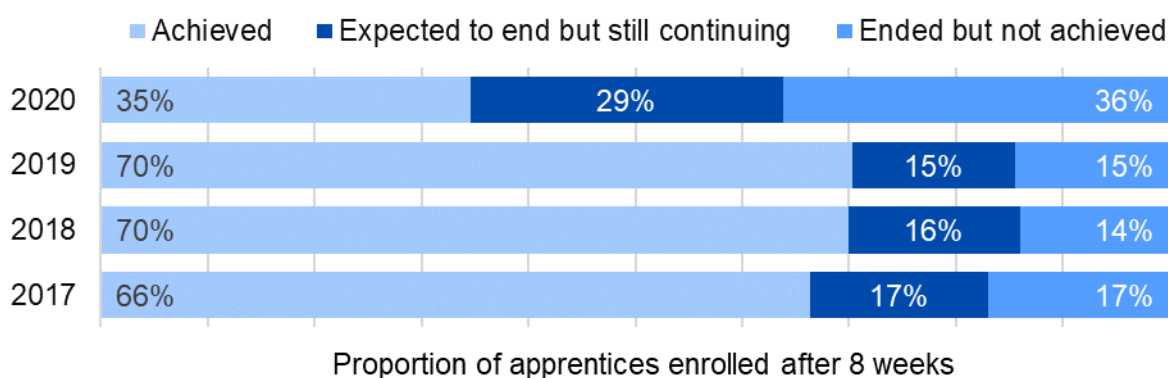

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

There were considerably fewer apprentices in 2020 than in other years. Despite this decrease, more apprentices ended their apprenticeship without achieving the expected learning than in previous years. This includes apprentices who did not complete their apprenticeships, and those who completed their apprenticeship but are yet to achieve all of 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.

There was also a large increase in the number of apprentices who were initially expected to end their apprenticeship by 31st July 2020, but were still continuing in December that year, when the data was collected.

More information on the fall in apprentices starting apprenticeships during the pandemic can be found in the report 'Further education, work-based learning and adult learning: August 2019 to July 2020'.

Chart 4.2: Outcomes as a percentage of apprentices that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July by year
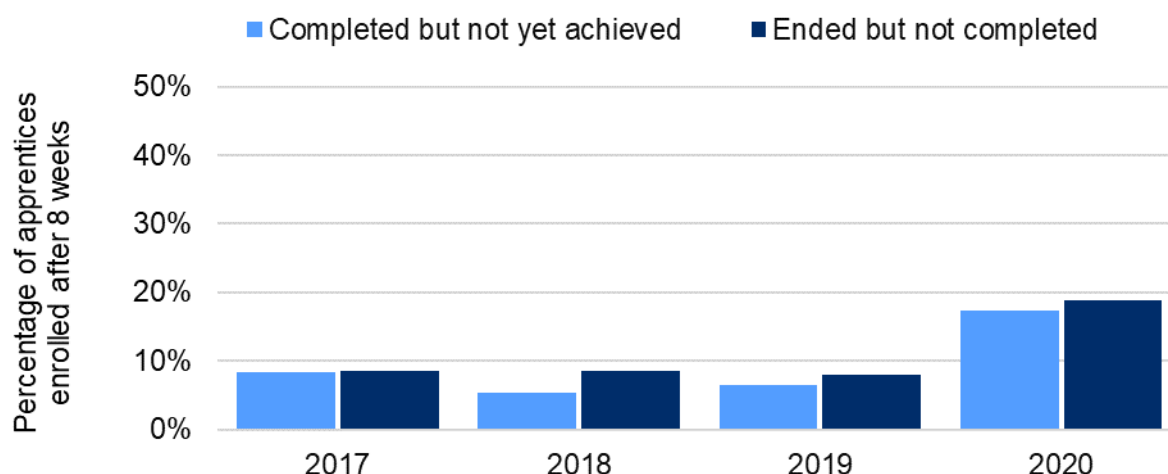

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

When looking at the outcomes as a proportion of apprentices who ended or were expected to end their apprenticeship between 20th March and 31st July, the percentage of apprenticeships achieving all their required learning outcomes dropped by half, going from 70% in 2019 to 35% in 2020.

Many of those apprentices may not have achieved their apprenticeship because of delays caused by the pandemic. There was a 36 percentage point drop in achievement, and a 14 percentage point increase in apprentices who were still continuing their apprenticeship when the data was collected in December.

There was also a 22 percentage point increase in the number of apprentices who ended their apprenticeship without yet achieving their required learning outcomes.

Chart 4.3: Proportion of apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July that ended without being achieved
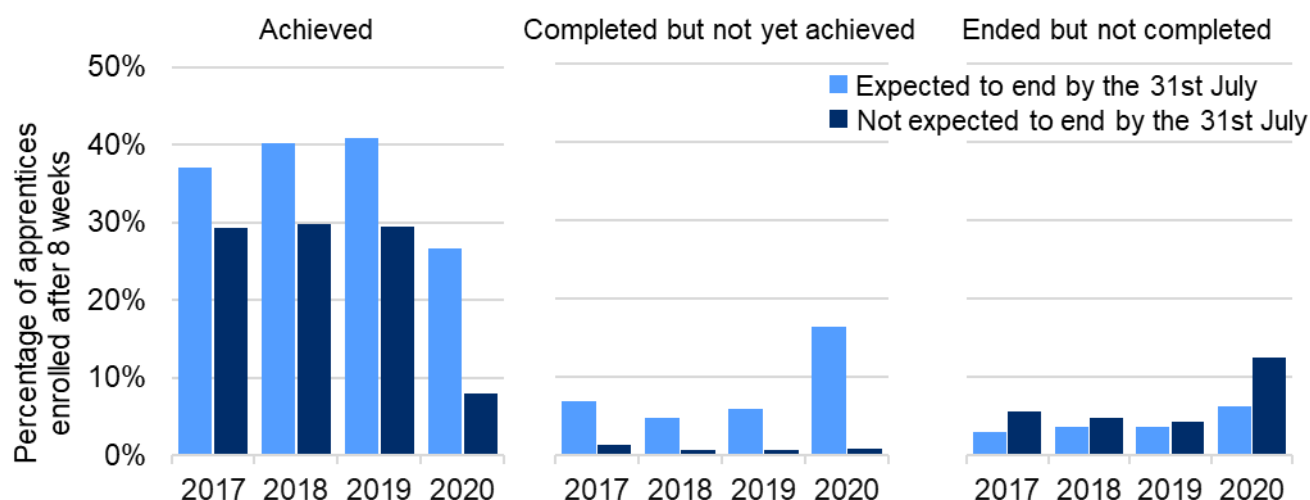

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

If an apprentices finished all the required learning outcomes, but did not successfully achieve them all, they are categorised as having completed the apprenticeship but not achieving the 'apprenticeship framework'. The percentage of learners completing their apprenticeship without yet achieving all the required outcomes more than doubled from 7% to 17%. This increase explains most of the increase in learners ending their apprenticeship without achieving, but not all of it.

In cases where the learner had finished all their learning activities, but the provider was still waiting for confirmation of their results, they would be included in the 'completed but not yet achieved' category. These apprentices may or may not turn out to be successful when their results are known. Because more apprentices were completing later during the pandemic, it is possible that providers were waiting for confirmation of more learners' results than in previous years.

There was also an 11 percentage point increase in learners leaving their apprenticeship without completing it.

Chart 4.4: Apprenticeship outcomes as a proportion of apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July, by expected end date
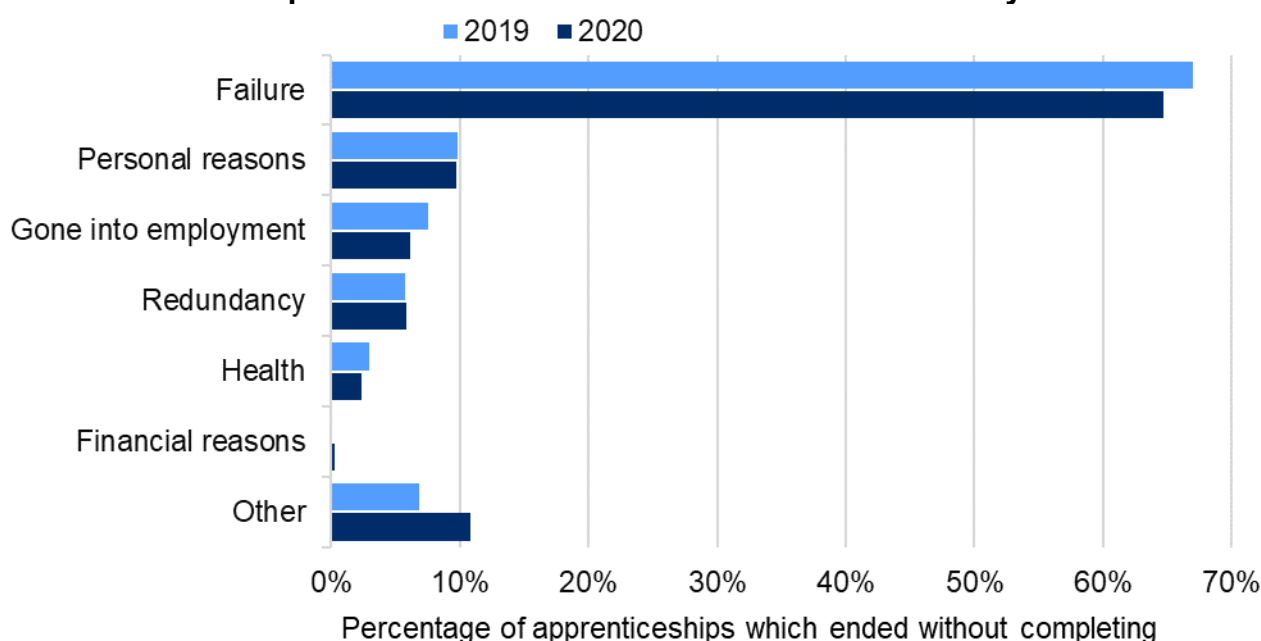

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Between 20th March and 31st July 2020 there was a big increase in apprenticeships ending without completing that were not originally intended to end by the 31st July. This increase contributed to the low achievement rates in 2020.

There were also only a fifth as many learners during the pandemic who completed their apprenticeship who were not originally expected to end compared to 2019.

However the increase in apprenticeships which ended before 31st July, which were not intended to end by 31st July, does not fully explain the drop in achievement. For every 10 apprentices who were originally expected to end by the 31st July, 1 more completed their apprenticeship without yet achieving their required outcomes in 2020 than in 2019. There was also an increase in the proportion of these apprentices ending without completing.

Chart 4.5: Reasons for apprentices not completing their apprenticeship, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July
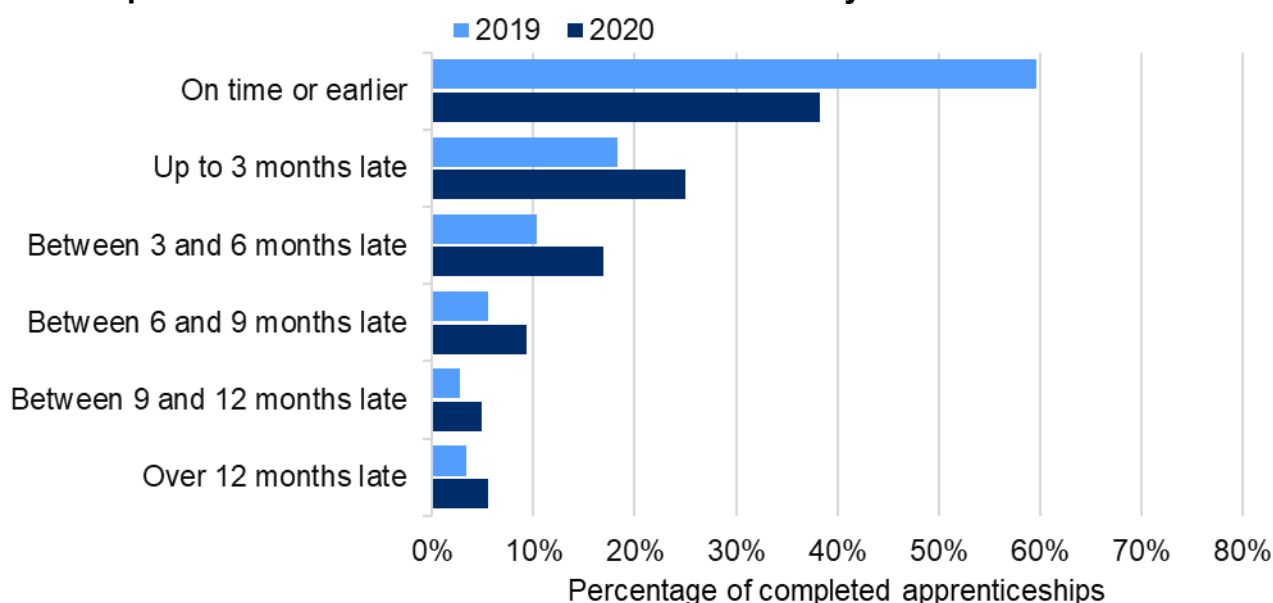

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Failure was the most common reason for apprentices ending their apprenticeship before it was complete, the same as the year before. A slightly lower proportion of learners ended due to failure in 2020 than in 2019. The total number of apprenticeships ended due to failure in 2020 increased, but the proportion shrank, because more apprenticeships ended without being completed for other reasons in 2020.

115 apprentices had their apprenticeship ended because they were made redundant (6% of learners that ended without completing their programme, the same as the year before). This represents 1% of apprentices in learning during the pandemic. More than 115 apprentices were made redundant, but some remained in learning whilst their provider tried to source an alternative employer.

Apprentices were less likely to leave their programme to go into other employment during the pandemic. Only 6% went into other employment, compared to 8% in 2019. This drop is less steep than the drop in vocational learners leaving to go into employment.

Chart 4.6: Timeliness of completed apprenticeships by year, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Due to the pandemic, many apprentices were still continuing their apprenticeship after it was originally expected to end. But the apprentices who did complete their apprenticeship were affected by delays too.

38% of completed apprenticeships that were being undertaken during the pandemic were completed on time, compared to 60% in the same period in the previous year.

Apprentices finished 99 days late on average. This is 39 days later than in 2019.

The delay wasn't evenly spread out across apprentices. 1 in 5 completers finished 6 or more months late in 2020, compared to 1 in 9 completers in 2019.

10% of apprentices finished over 9 months later than originally expected. These apprentices were already behind schedule before the first lockdown, but some experienced further delays due to the pandemic.

Chart 4.7: Percentage of apprentices achieving by apprenticeship type and year, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July
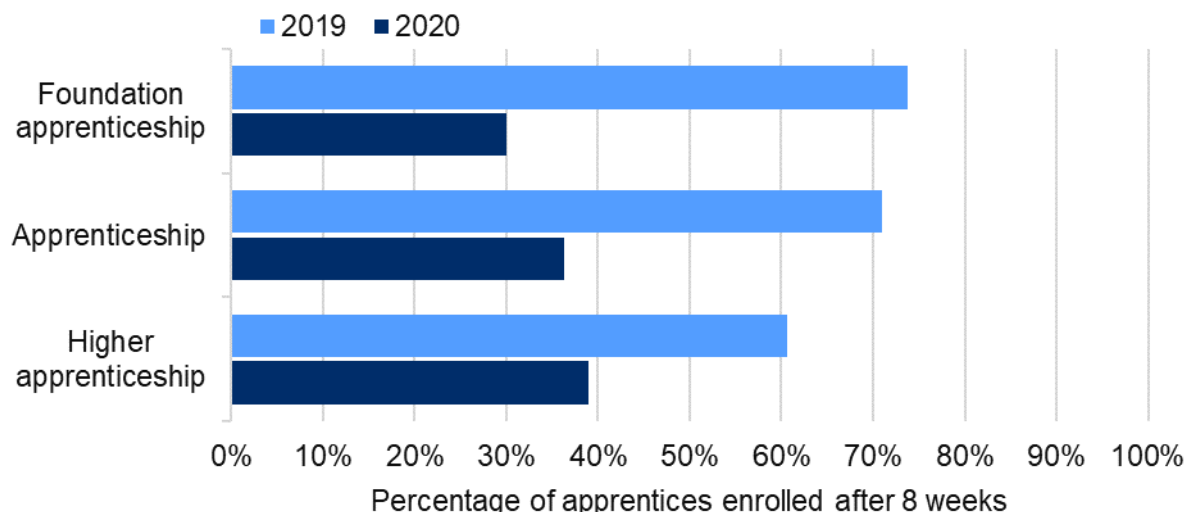
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

All types of apprenticeships saw a fall in the number of apprentices achieving their framework, but learners on higher apprenticeships were the least affected, and learners on foundation apprenticeships were the most affected.

Higher apprenticeships had the highest proportion of apprentices achieving their framework during the pandemic. Before the pandemic they had the lowest achievement rate.

Over 7 in 10 foundation apprentices active between 20th March and 31st July in 2019 achieved their apprenticeship by the time of data collection. In the same period in 2020, 3 in 10 did.

There was a 13 percentage point rise in foundation apprentices who completed their apprenticeship but did not yet achieve all the required outcomes. There was also an 18 percentage point rise in the number of foundation apprentices still continuing at the time of the data collection in December, and a 10 percentage point rise in apprentices who ended their foundation apprenticeship without completing.

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'.

Higher apprenticeships are more likely to be office based jobs that can be taken from home. Higher apprenticeships are less likely to be in the areas most affected by the pandemic such as hair and beauty.

Chart 4.8: Percentage of apprentices achieving by sector and year, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July
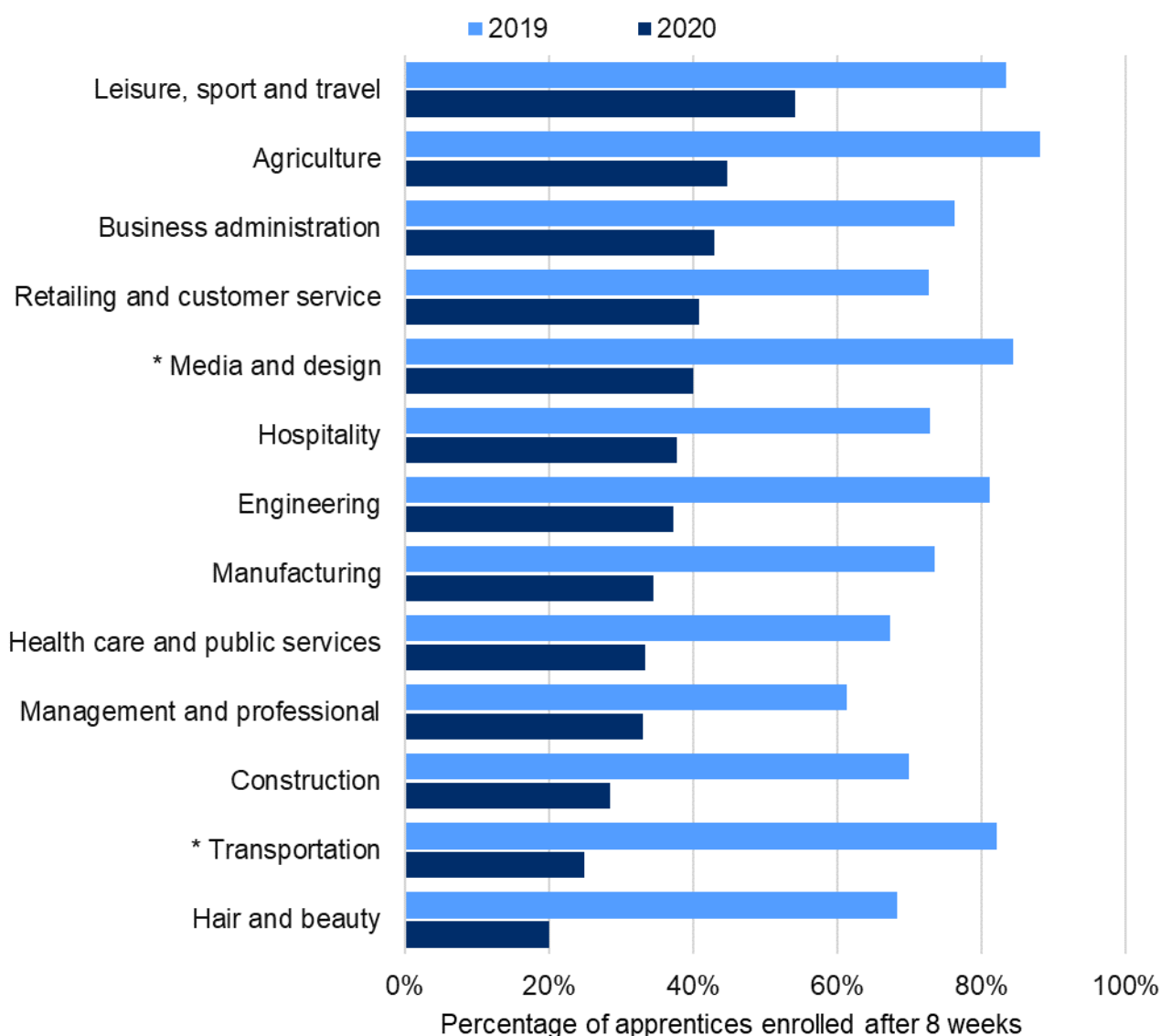
* Percentage in 2020 is based on less than 50 learners

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The achievement rate for apprenticeships fell for all subject areas, but some were more affected than others.

The apprenticeships with the lowest achievement rates during the pandemic were in hair and beauty; and construction.

Only 1 in 5 apprentices working in hair and beauty during the pandemic were able to achieve their apprenticeship by December.

The number of hair and beauty apprenticeships still continuing is not higher than average. Instead hair and beauty apprentices were more likely to end their apprenticeships without completing them.

Transportation apprentices also had a low achievement rate, but there were only 30 apprentices in this sector learning during the pandemic, and so the very low achievement rate could be due to natural variation.

The engineering; media and design; and agriculture sectors also saw steep falls in achievement. Although the achievement rate for agriculture dropped by 43 percentage points, the overall achievement rate was still high, because agriculture had the highest achievement rate in 2018/19. The apprentices most likely to still complete and achieve their apprenticeships were in leisure, sport and travel; and business administration.

The high achievement rate in leisure, sport and travel is interesting, because apprentices in that sector were some of the most likely to be furloughed. At one point nearly half the apprentices in the sector were on furlough, and furlough rates remained relatively high even in 2021. Chart 2.4 in the vocational education section showed that leisure, travel and tourism vocational programmes had higher achievement rates in 2019/20 compared to previous years.
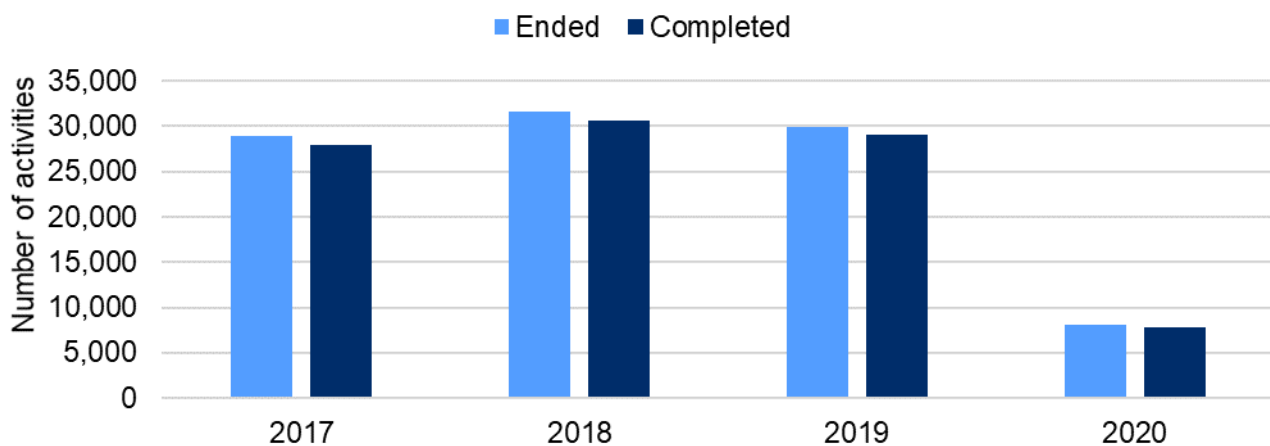
5. Adult learning

- Only a quarter as much adult learning was taken during 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 dropped from 90% to 75%.

More information on the fall in learners starting adult learning can be found in the report 'Further education, work-based learning and adult learning: August 2019 to July 2020'.

Although adult learning is planned on an academic year basis, learning may start at different points through the year including during holiday periods e.g. Easter, and Summer, unlike, for example, further education programmes which tend to start at the beginning of the academic year. Learning may continue into the following academic year.

The statistics in this section focus on the adult learning taking place during the pandemic, between 20th March and 31st July 2020, which ended or was expected to end. Comparisons are made to adult learning in the same time period in previous years.

Chart 5.1: Ended and completed adult learning activities, 20th March to 31st July

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Just over a quarter as many adult learning activities were taken between 20th March and 31st July compared to the previous years. But completion of the activities that were taken was slightly better than past years. 98% of activities taken were completed.

Chart 5.2: Types of assessable adult learning qualifications taken between 20th March and 31st July
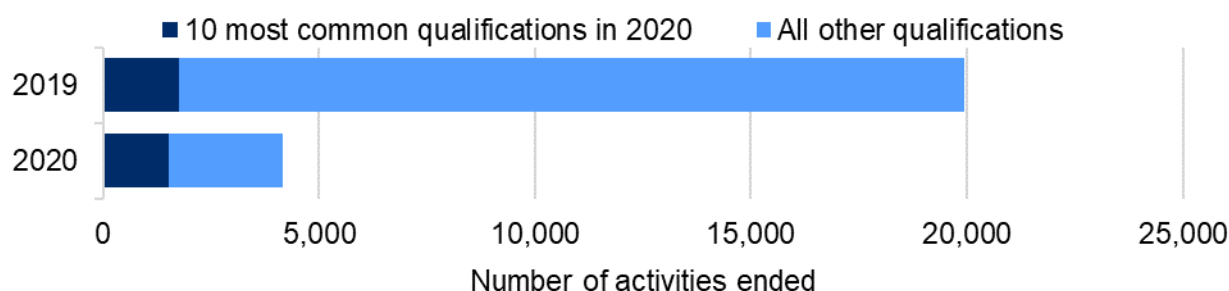
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The range of activity being taken during the pandemic was different to other years.

The 10 most common assessable adult learning qualifications taken during the pandemic were, from most taken to least:

- entry level Essential Skills
- entry level English for Speakers of Other Languages
- entry level Literacy
- adult basic education
- languages, literature and culture
- level 1 / level 2 GCSE in Mathematics
- LearnDirect
- entry level Numeracy
- level 1 Numeracy
- level 1 / level 2 GCSE in English Language

The number of these qualifications taken only dropped slightly during the pandemic, but they became a bigger proportion of all the qualifications taken.

These 10 qualifications account for over a third of the adult learning qualifications taken during the pandemic, whereas they only represented a tenth of the qualifications taken in the same period in 2019.

69% of assessable activities were in the sector subject area 'Preparation for life and work' in 2020, compared to 46% in 2019.

Chart 5.3: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications taken between 20th March and 31st July
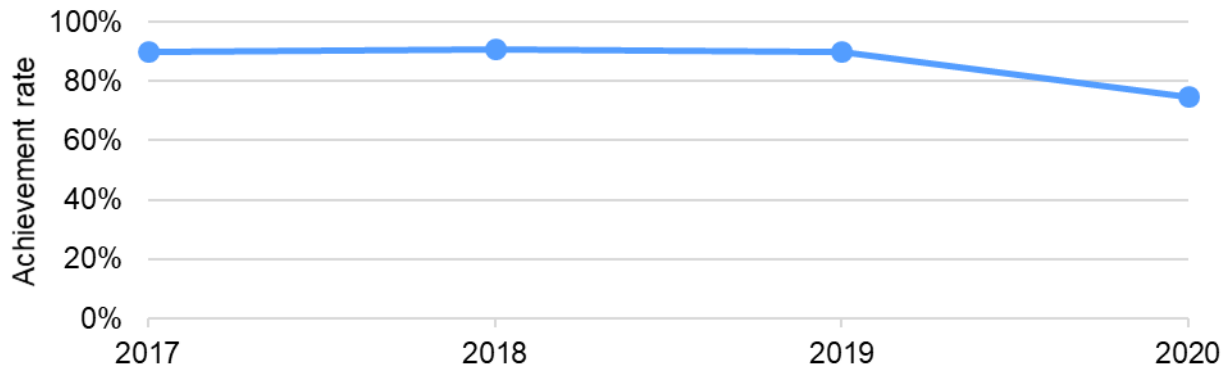
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The achievement rate of assessable adult learning qualifications dropped from 90% to 75%.

The drop could be caused by learners taking assessments and failing them, but learners who completed their programme but did not attempt or withdrew from the assessment also affect the achievement rate.

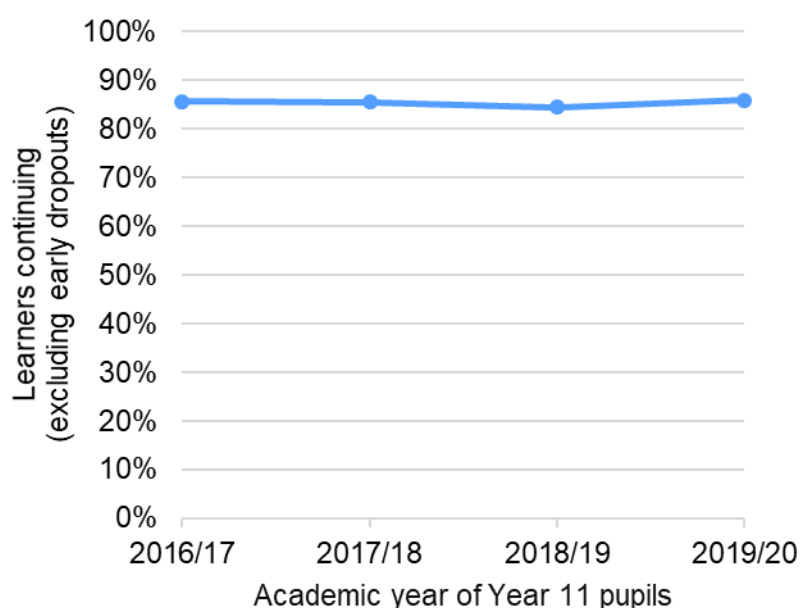## 6. Year 11 learners going on to post-16 education in the following year

- Pupils in Year 11 in 2019/20 were as likely to continue onto post-16 learning in 2020/21 as in past years.

- Year 11s who did continue onto post-16 learning were more likely to take AS levels, or level 3 vocational programmes than in previous years (45% did, compared to 36% of Year 11s in 2018/19).

- The proportion of year 11s taking apprenticeships fell by a third.

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 in 2019/20 use a different dataset than previous years to identify learners attending sixth forms in 2020/21. Previous years use the post-16 data collection, which is not yet available for 2020/21, so school attendance data was used instead.

Learners who dropped out within the first 8 weeks of their post-16 study are excluded from the calculations, unless otherwise stated.

Chart 6.1: Percentage of year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales by academic year

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

The number of Year 11 pupils continuing onto post-16 education in 2020/21 was similar to other years. 86% of Year 11 pupils went into post-16 education and hadn't dropped out in the first 8 weeks.

There was no sizeable change in the number of learners dropping out within the first 8 weeks of post-16 learning. Only 2.2% of continuers dropped out in the first few weeks of post-16 learning in 2020/21, compared to between 2.4% and 2.5% in previous years.

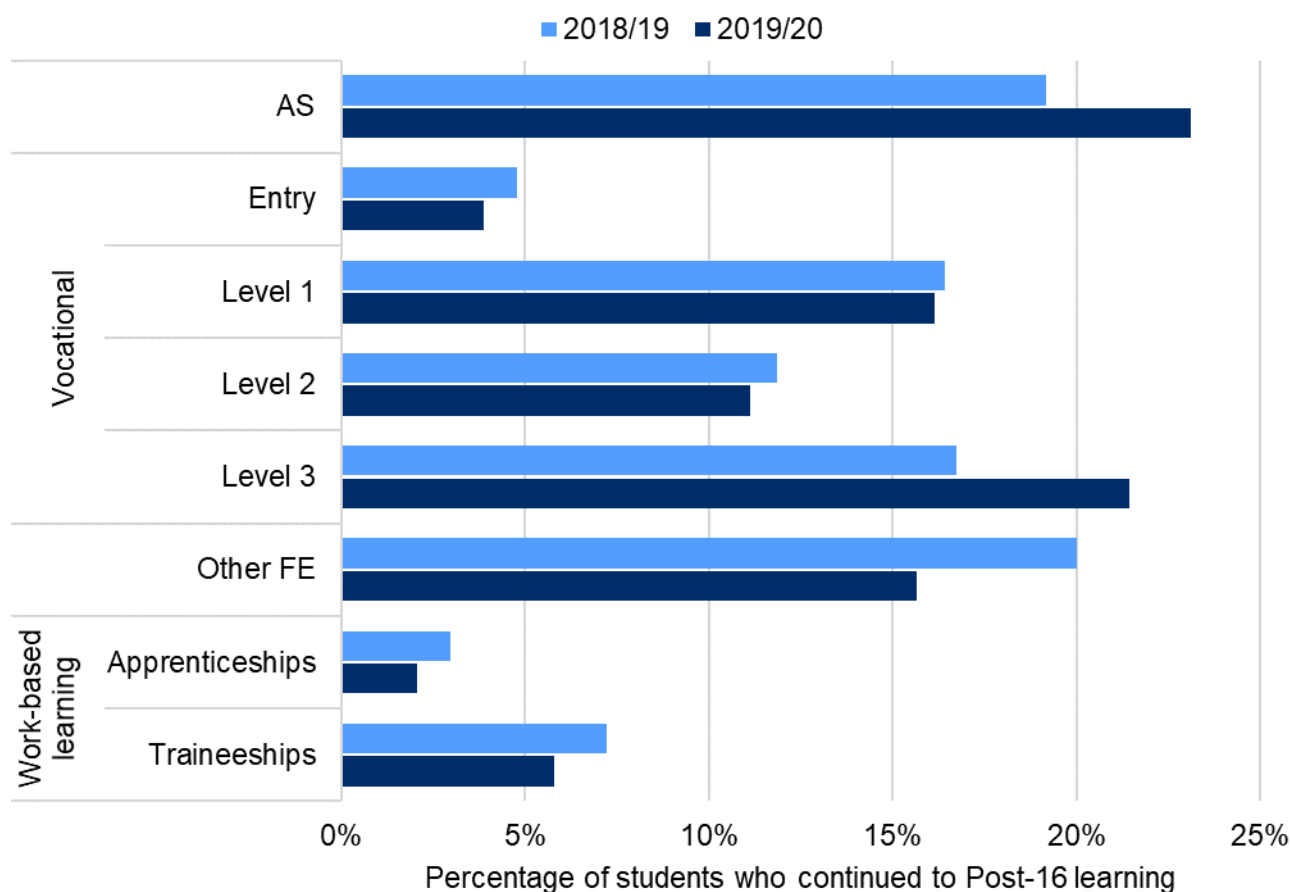**Chart 6.2: Type of programme for Year 11 pupils who continued into post-16 learning at a college, by Year 11 academic year**

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

More Year 11s started AS level programmes, and the equivalent level 3 vocational programmes in 2020/21. This could be partly due to more pupils getting the GCSE grades they needed in the summer.

There was a corresponding fall in the proportion learners taking lower level vocational programmes. These programmes include more qualifications that are there to assess occupational competency, which have faced more issues moving learning and assessments online.

The proportion of learners taking apprenticeships fell by nearly a third. This perhaps could be a sign of the weaker jobs market and a high rate of furlough in many traditional apprenticeship sectors. This could be another reason for the increase in learners studying AS and level 3 programmes.

7. Age

- Learners older than 25 taking vocational programmes and adult learning generally had worse outcomes than younger learners.

- All ages had better general education outcomes than previous years, but the increase was slightly bigger for those taking their A levels immediately after compulsory education.

- Younger apprentices saw the biggest drop in achievement compared to 2018/19.

Chart 7.1: Achievement rates of vocational programmes by age, by academic year
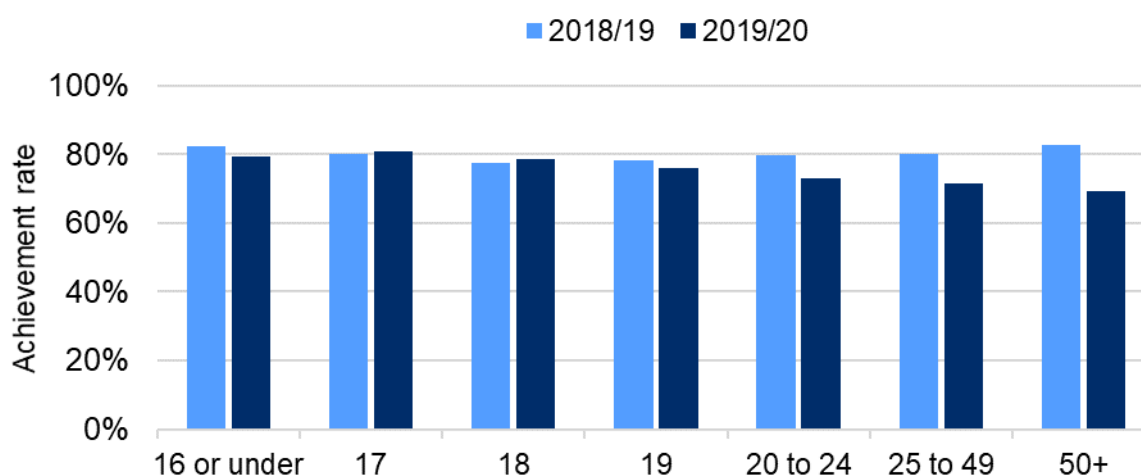
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

Outcomes for vocational learners aged 20 or older were more affected by the pandemic, along with learners aged 16 or under. Learners aged 17 or 18 had achievement rates slightly higher than previous years, and their completion rates were slightly higher than in previous years.

For every 100 main qualifications taken by learners aged 50 or older, 14 fewer were achieved in 2019/20 compared to previous years.

Chart 7.2: Achievement rates of level 3 vocational programmes by age, by academic year
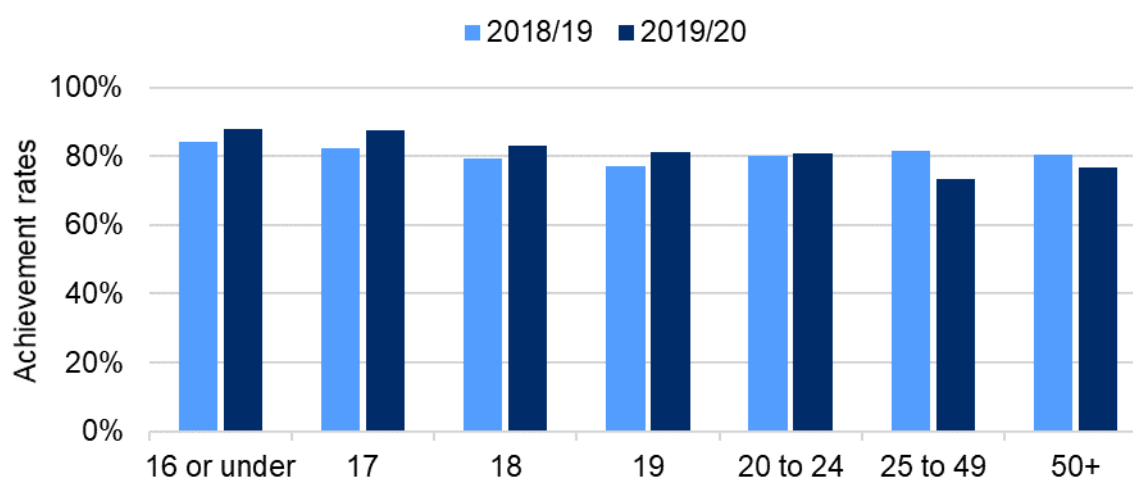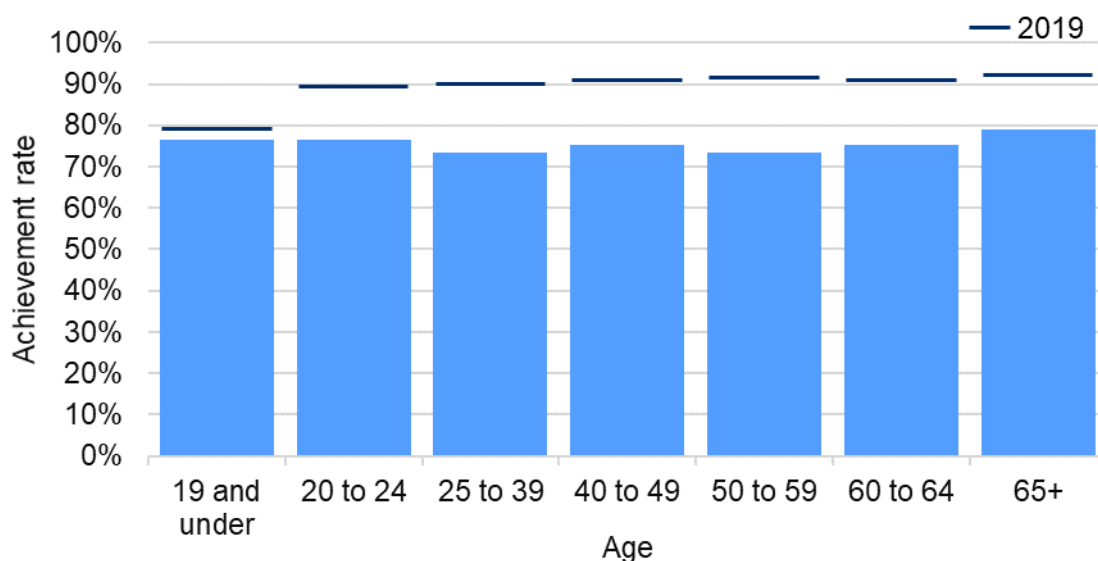

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

The gap for vocational learners aged 16 or under may be explained by the different type of vocational programmes taken by learners in that age range. Only 32% of full time learners aged 16 or under took level 3 programmes, whereas 56% of learners aged 17 did. These level 3 programmes had higher achievement rates than other programmes in 2019/20.

Learners aged 20-24 were in a similar situation to learners aged 16 or under. Only 35% of full time learners in this age range were studying level 3 programmes.

The same explanation does not apply to learners above the age of 25+. Although learners in these age brackets were the least likely to be taking level 3 programmes, those learners who did take level 3 programmes were also less likely to achieve their qualifications in 2019/20.

Chart 7.3: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by age, 20th March to 31st July 2020

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Learners between the age of 25 and 64 saw the biggest fall in achieving adult learning qualifications. Age groups in that range dropped from achievement rates between 90% and 91% to rates between 73% and 75%.

Young learners had the lowest achievement rates in past years, but now are amongst some of the highest, as other age groups dropped below them.

Learners aged 19 and under saw a much smaller fall in achievement, but the achievement rates for younger learners were already low.

Chart 7.4: Change in outcomes for A2 learners in the 2019/20 academic year compared to 2018/19, by age
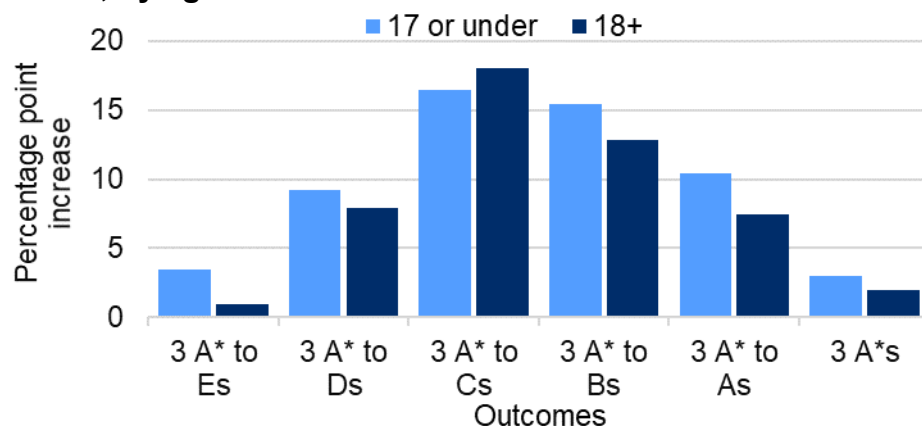
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

Older A2 learners tend to have lower outcomes than A2 learners who do their AS and A2 immediately after the end of compulsory education. This gap increased in the pandemic. Outcomes for both young and older learners improved dramatically, but the increase was slightly bigger for students aged 17 or under in almost every category.

The only exception to the pattern was the number of learners getting at least three Cs, where the increase was slightly larger for those aged 18+. There were still more young learners getting three Cs overall, 74% of learners aged 17 or under got three Cs compared to 58% of learners aged 18 or over, but the gap was slightly smaller than in previous years.

Most A2 learners over the age of 18 study in colleges, whereas the majority of A2 learning for students aged 17 or under takes place in school sixth forms. When looking only at A2 learners studying at colleges, the age gap decreased.

Chart 7.5: Percentage of apprentices who achieved by age and year, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July
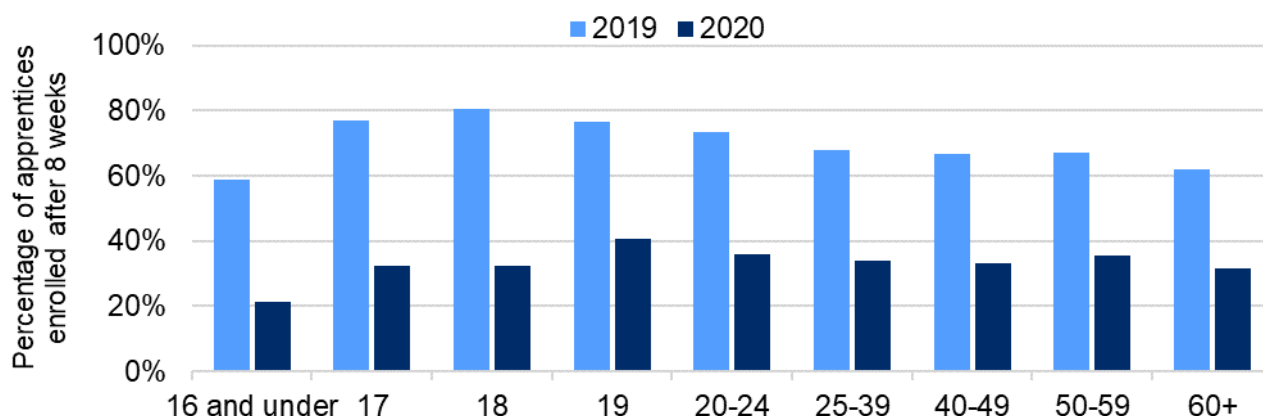
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

Apprentices aged 17 and 18 saw bigger drops in their achievement rate in the pandemic.

For apprentices aged 18, only 3 in 10 apprentices achieved their apprenticeship between 20th March and 31st July 2020, compared to 8 in 10 in the same period the year before.

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.

- There was an increase in year 11s from the most deprived neighbourhoods continuing onto post-16 learning, and continuing in post-16 learning after completing their AS levels.

- The achievement gap between learners from the most deprived and least deprived neighbourhoods shrank for full time level 3 vocational programmes, but increased for apprenticeships and adult learning.

- All learners saw a similar increase in general education (A level) outcomes, but the biggest improvements for more deprived learners were at the lower grades whilst the difference between percentage of the most and least deprived learners getting high grades increased. This follows the pattern of grade distributions in previous years.

- For every extra learner from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods who got three As or better, two extra learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods did.

Chart 8.1: Difference in achievement rates for full time vocational programmes by the deprivation of the learners' home neighbourhood, by academic year
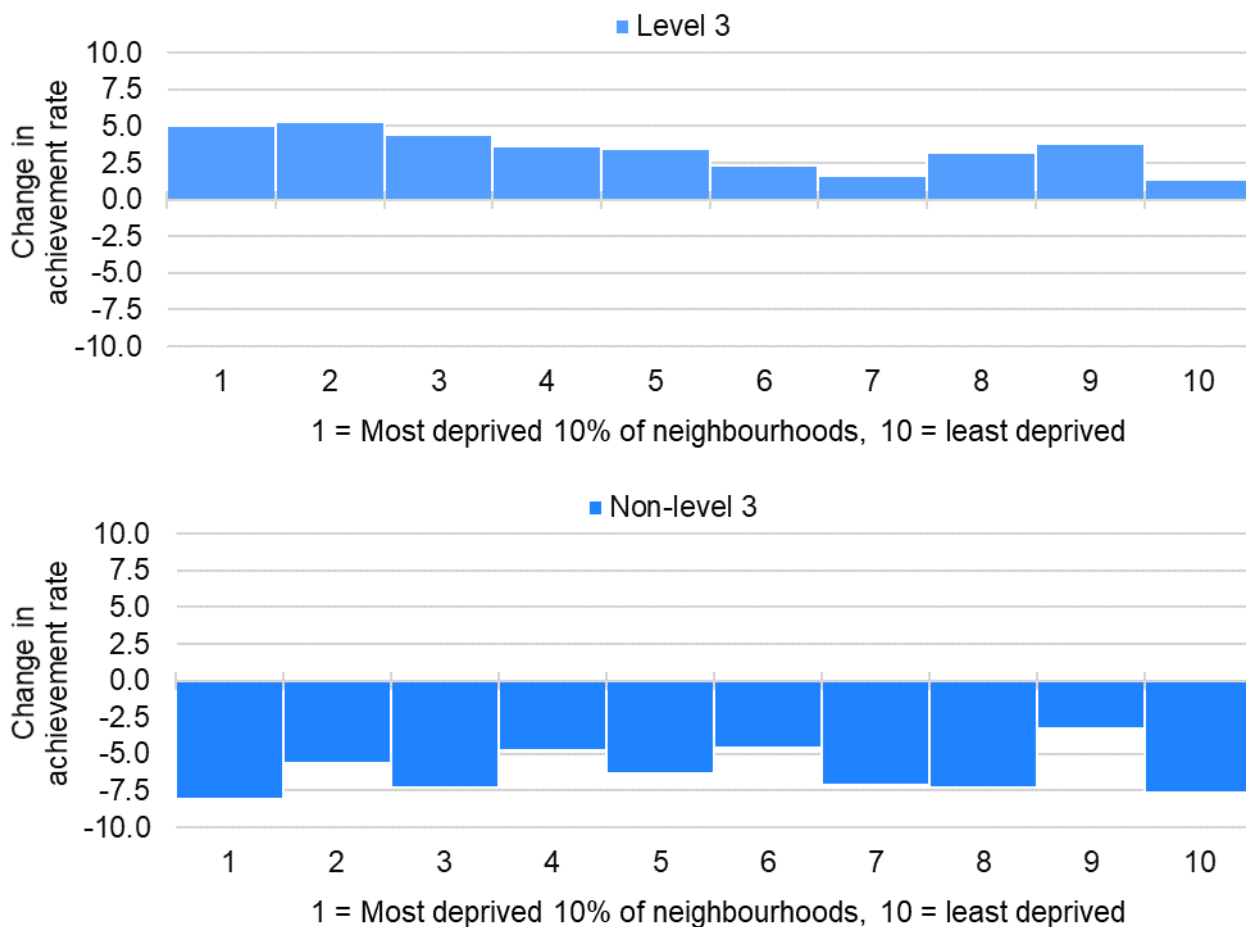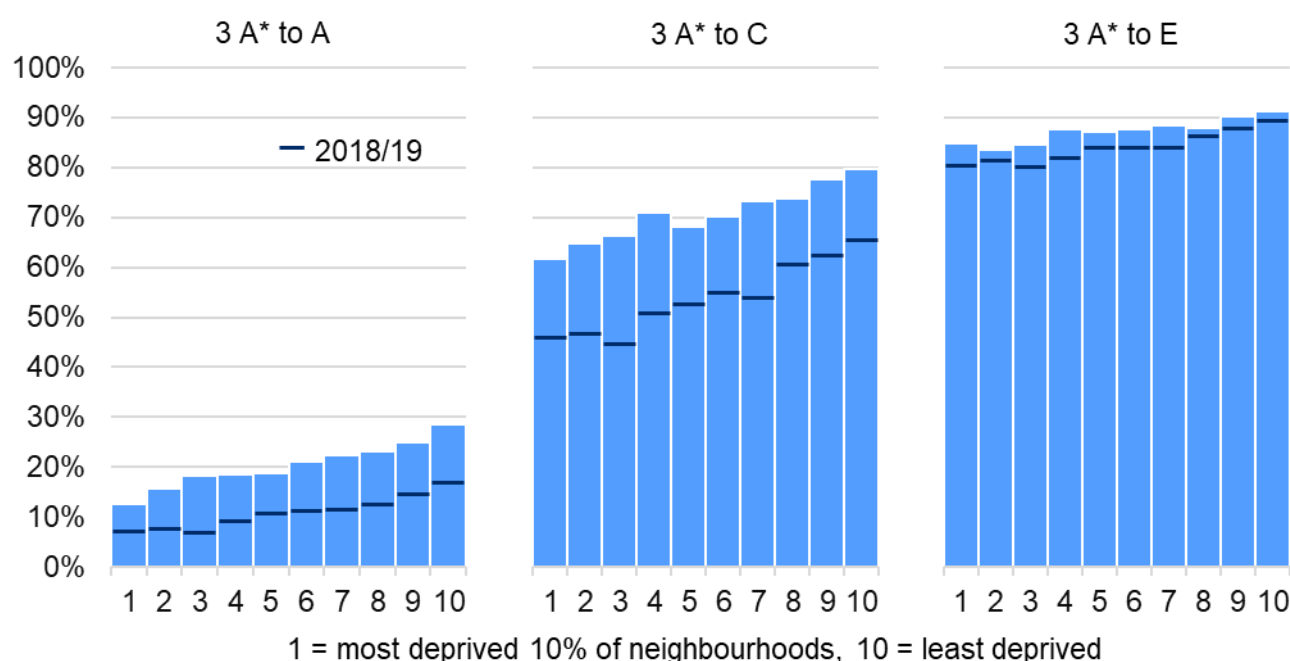

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection

The change in the deprivation gap for full time learners on vocational programmes was volatile. The gap shrank for learners on level 3 programmes (equivalent to A level) but was mostly unchanged for other levels.

For level 3 programmes in 2018/19, the achievement rate was 6 percentage points lower for learners living in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods compared to learners in the least deprived neighbourhoods. This gap fell to just 2 percentage points in 2019/20.

For non-level 3 programmes, learners in the most deprived neighbourhoods were 8 percentage points less likely to achieve than learners in the least deprived neighbourhoods in 2018/19. They were also 8 percentage points less likely to achieve in 2019/20.

Chart 8.2: General education outcomes for A2 learners by deprivation, 2019/20

1 = most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, 10 = least deprived

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

Overall the deprivation gap in general education was unchanged in 2019/20. Outcomes improved for all learners, but it was still true that learners from less deprived neighbourhoods tended to see better outcomes than learners from more deprived neighbourhoods.

Learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods saw an increase in grades equivalent to 52% of learners going up one category (for example from getting at least three Cs to getting at least three Bs). For learners in the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods the increase was equivalent to 53% of learners going up one category.

The biggest gains were for learners in the middle. Learners from the 3rd, 4th and 7th most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods saw increases equivalent to between 65% and 70% of learners going up one grade category.

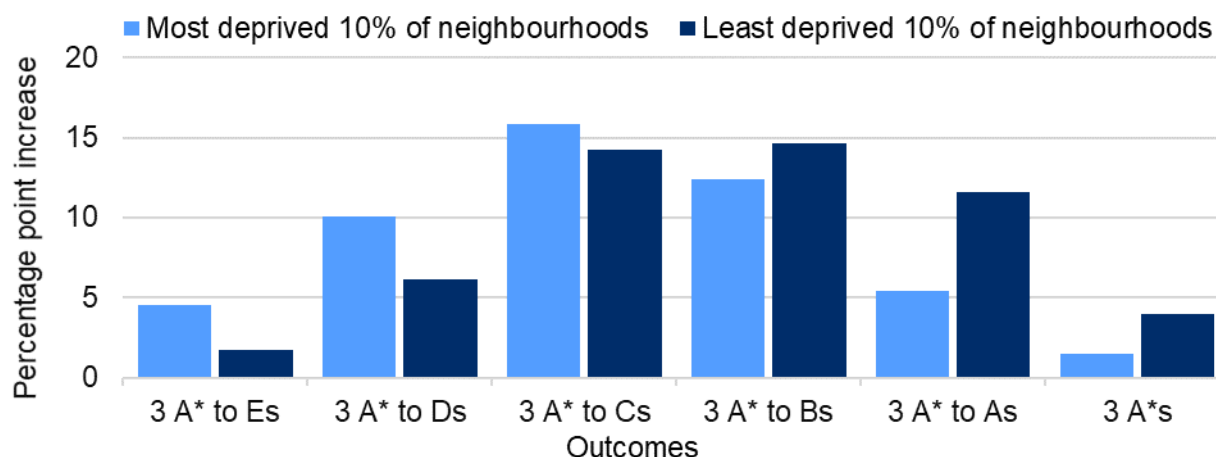**Chart 8.3: Change in outcomes for A2 learners in most and least deprived neighbourhoods, 2019/20 compared to 2018/19**

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

The overall increase in grades may have been similar for learners in the most and least deprived neighbourhoods, but where those increases came from was very different.

The gap in learners getting at least three A levels shrank, as did the gap in learners getting at least three Cs at A level. But the gap in learners getting at least three As increased considerably.

In 2019/20, 85% of learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods got at least three A levels, compared to 80% in the previous year. For learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods, 91% got at least three A levels in 2019/20, compared to 90% in 2018/19.

The percentage of learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods getting at least three As nearly doubled, going up 5 percentage points from 7% to 13%. However the percentage increased more for learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods, rising 12 percentage points from 17% to 29%.

For every extra learner from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods who got three As or better, two extra learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods did.

Chart 8.4: Distribution of learners' lowest grade achieved out of 3 A levels in 2018/19, by deprivation
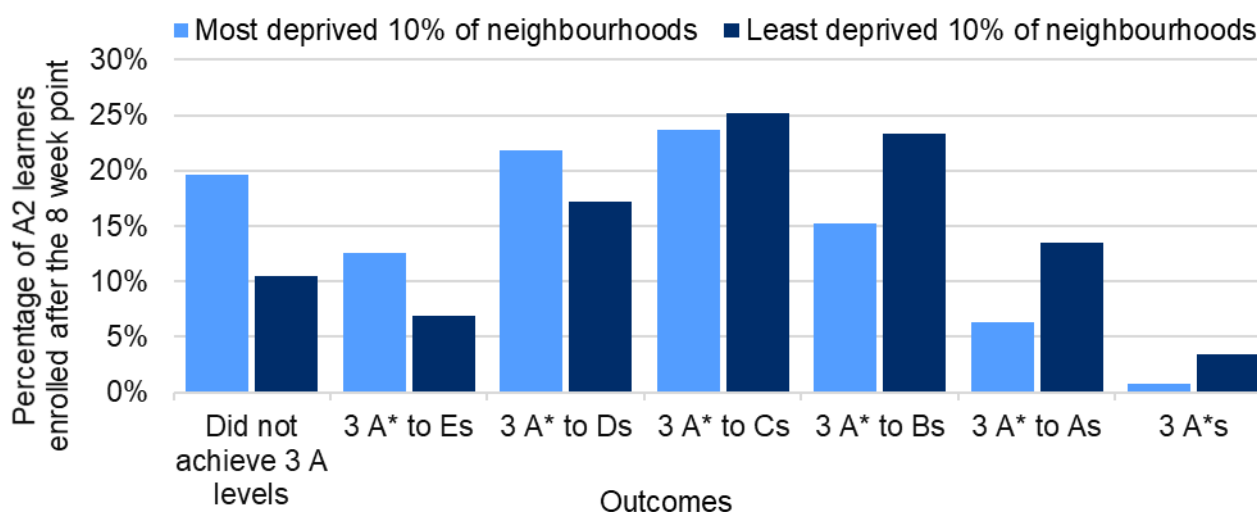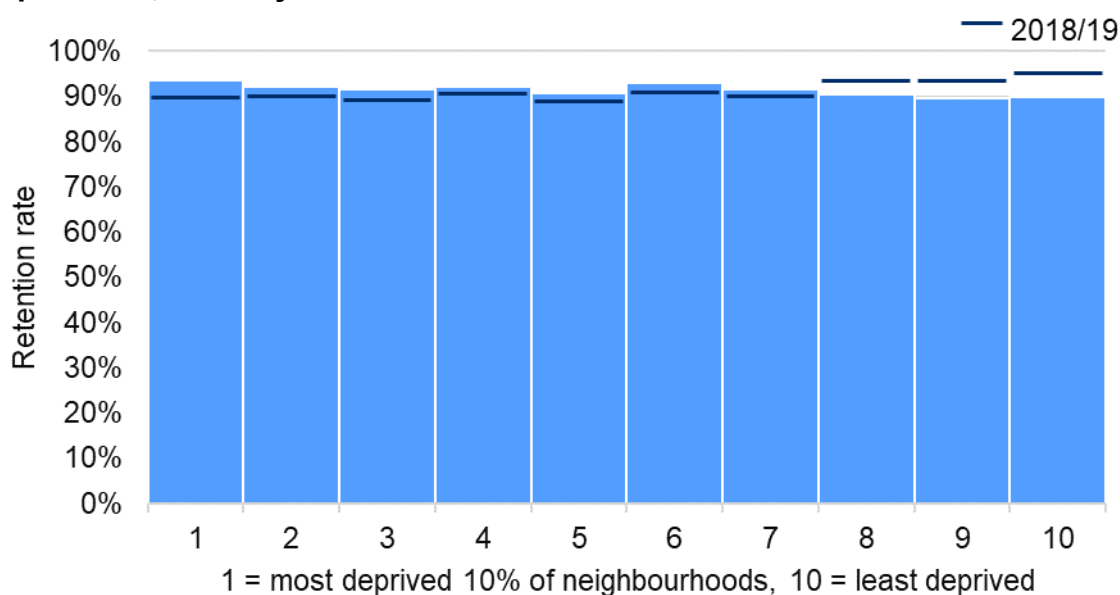

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The pattern in the change of grades for learners from deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods reflects the grade distribution for learners in previous years. Chart 8.3 and chart 8.4 follow similar shapes.

In 2018/19, learners from more deprived neighbourhoods were more likely to have at least one E or D, and in 2019/20 there was a bigger increase in learners from the most deprived neighbourhoods getting at least three Ds or three Cs.

Similarly, in 2018/19 there were more learners from less deprived neighbourhoods whose lowest grade was a B or an A, and that reflects the bigger increase in learners getting at least three As or three A*s in 2019/20.

Chart 8.5: Percentage of full time AS completers that stayed in post-16 learning by deprivation, for AS year 2019/20

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

The deprivation gap in retention for full time AS learners completely reversed itself in 2019/20. Students from more deprived neighbourhoods were more likely to stay in post-16 learning in 2020/21 than students from less deprived neighbourhoods.

Full time AS learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods were less likely to stay in post-16 learning during the pandemic than they were in previous years.

In 2019/20, 94% of AS students from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods carried on with post-16 learning in 2020/21. Only 90% of students from the 10% least deprived neighbourhoods did. Last year 90% of learners from the most deprived neighbourhoods were retained, compared to 95% of learners from the least deprived neighbourhoods.

One important note is that the data available is only for retention into publicly funded education.

Chart 8.6: Percentage of Year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales by deprivation, for Year 11s in 2019/20
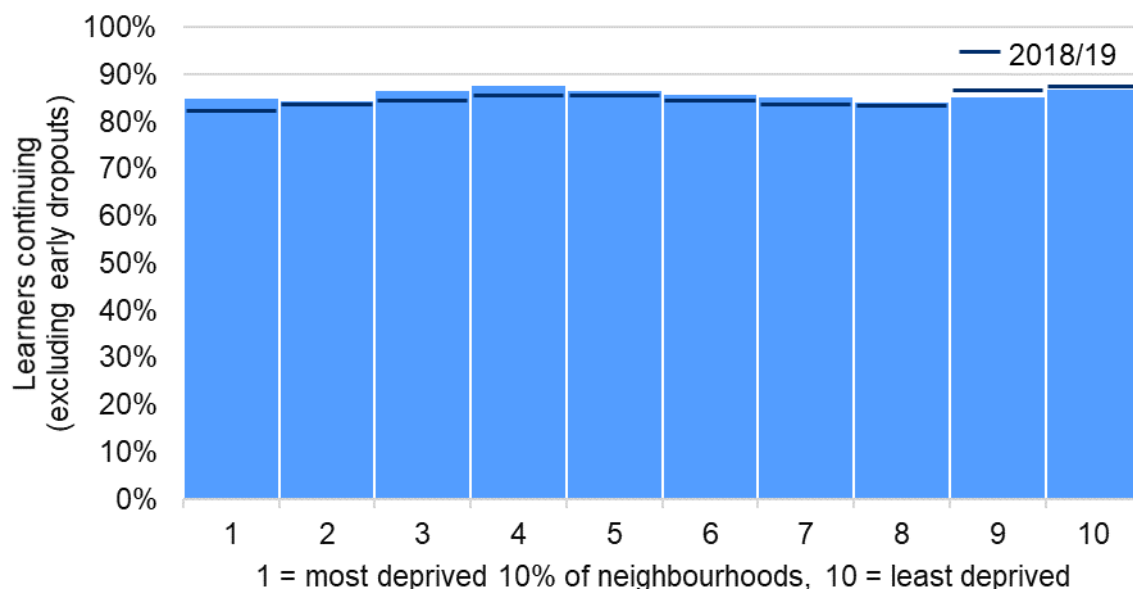
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

The deprivation gap in Year 11 pupils going onto post-16 learning shrank for Years 11s in 2019/20. There was an increase in the percentage of learners continuing onto post-16 for learners from the most deprived neighbourhoods and a small drop off in the least deprived neighbourhoods.

In 2019/20, 87% of pupils from the least deprived neighbourhoods went onto post-16 learning, and 85% of pupils from the most deprived neighbourhoods. For 2018/19, Year 11s, that figure was 88% from the least deprived neighbourhoods and 82% from the most deprived.

It is important to note that these statistics only include publicly funded education, which could affect the continuation rate more for learners in less deprived neighbourhoods.

Chart 8.7: Percentage of apprentices who achieved by deprivation, apprenticeships that ended or were expected to end between 20th March and 31st July 2020
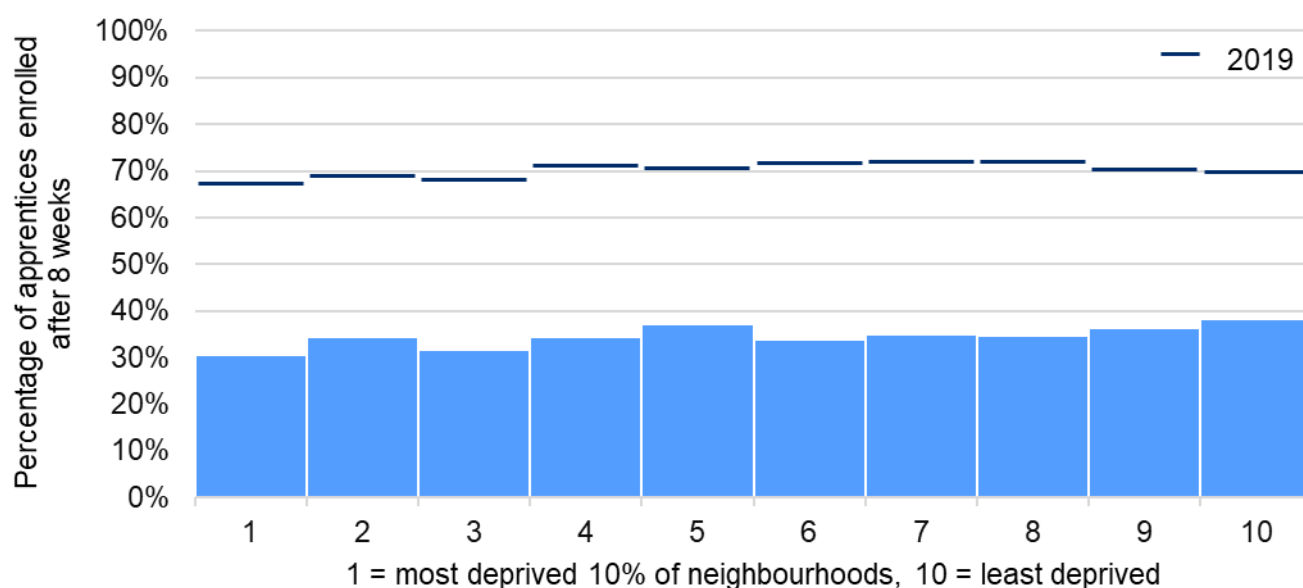
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The deprivation gap increased in achievement for apprenticeships during the pandemic. Apprentices from more deprived neighbourhoods were less likely to achieve the required learning outcomes.

31% of learners from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods achieved their apprenticeship during the pandemic, compared to 38% from the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods.

The gap goes beyond differences in the level of programme being taken. Within foundation apprenticeships, the achievement rate for learners from the most deprivation neighbourhood is still 5 percentage points lower than that for learners from the least deprived neighbourhood.

Chart 8.8: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by deprivation, 20th March to 31st July 2020
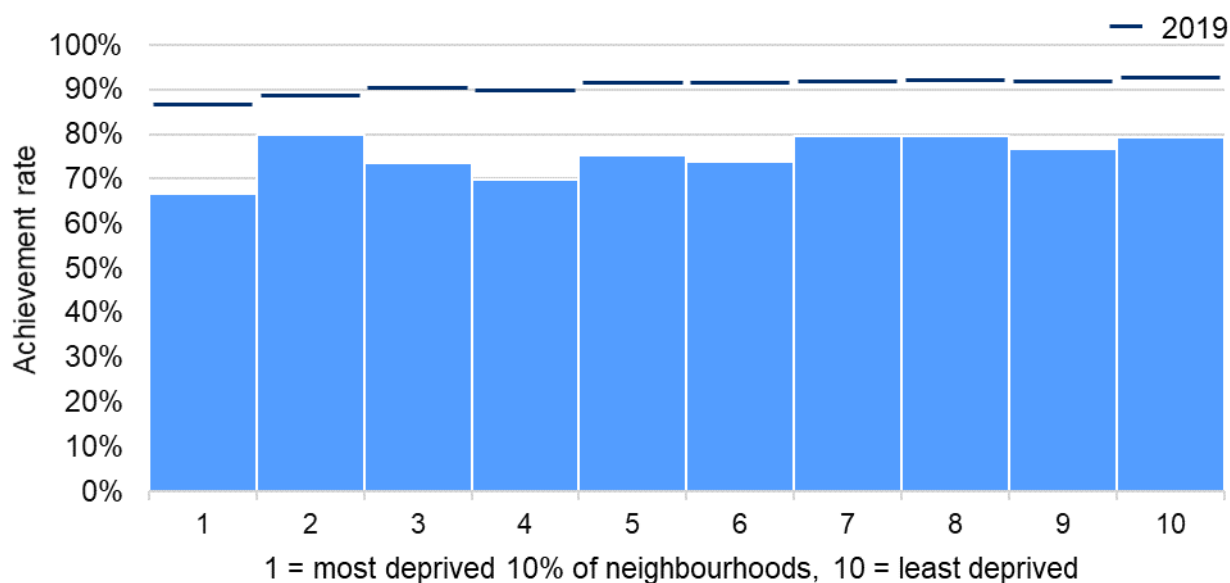
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The deprivation gap in adult learning widened during the pandemic.

The deprivation gap in achievement rates doubled between the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods and the least deprived 10%. Only two thirds of learners in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods achieved their adult learning qualification.

Despite the gap widening for the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, learners in the second most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods had the highest achievement rate of any group.

9. Ethnicity

- A2 learners of all ethnicities saw an increase in outcomes in 2019/20, and the difference between ethnicities getting three A levels, and getting three Cs or higher at A level largely disappeared.

- The percentage of learners getting three As or higher increased for all ethnicities, but particularly for Asian learners.

- Full time Black and Asian learners were less likely to stay in post-16 learning after completing a vocational programme than in 2018/19, but they had previously had a higher retention rate than other ethnicities.

- Fewer than half of Black learners who completed an adult learning course achieved their outcomes during the pandemic.

Chart 9.1: General education outcomes for A2 learners by ethnicity, 2019/20
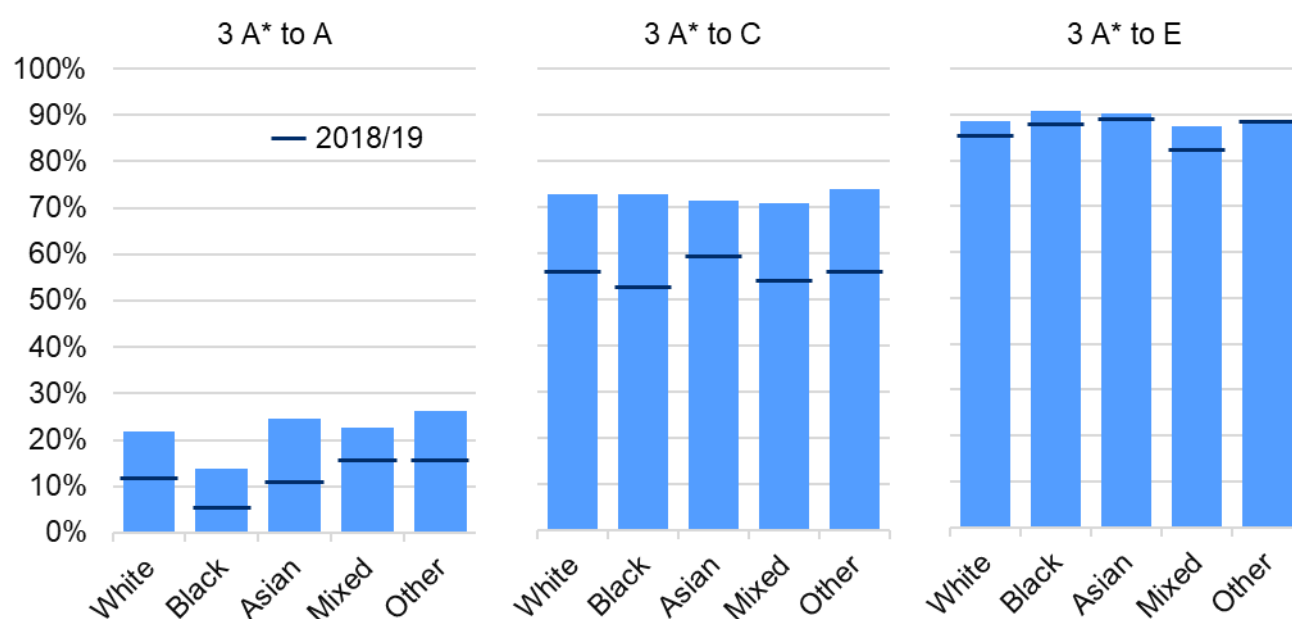
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The A level outcomes gap between ethnicities narrowed under the centre assessment grades, but only for the lower grades.

Black learners saw the largest improvement in learners getting at least three Cs at A level. The gap between Black learners and learners of other ethnicities entirely disappeared. 2 in 10 more Black learners got at least three Cs compared to the previous year.

The picture is similar for learners achieving three A levels of any grade, although learners with ethnicities other than White, Black, Asian or mixed saw a small decrease compared to the past year.

However for learners getting at least three As, the gap increased for Black learners and for learners with a mixed ethnicity.

Although 14% of Black learners got three As or above, more than any year before, White and Asian learners saw even bigger increases.

Asian learners saw the largest increase in students getting three A*s or As. 1 in 4 Asian learners got three As or above, compared to 1 in 9 in 2018/19.

Chart 9.2: Percentage of year 11 learners continuing on to post-16 education in Wales by ethnicity for Year 11s in 2019/20
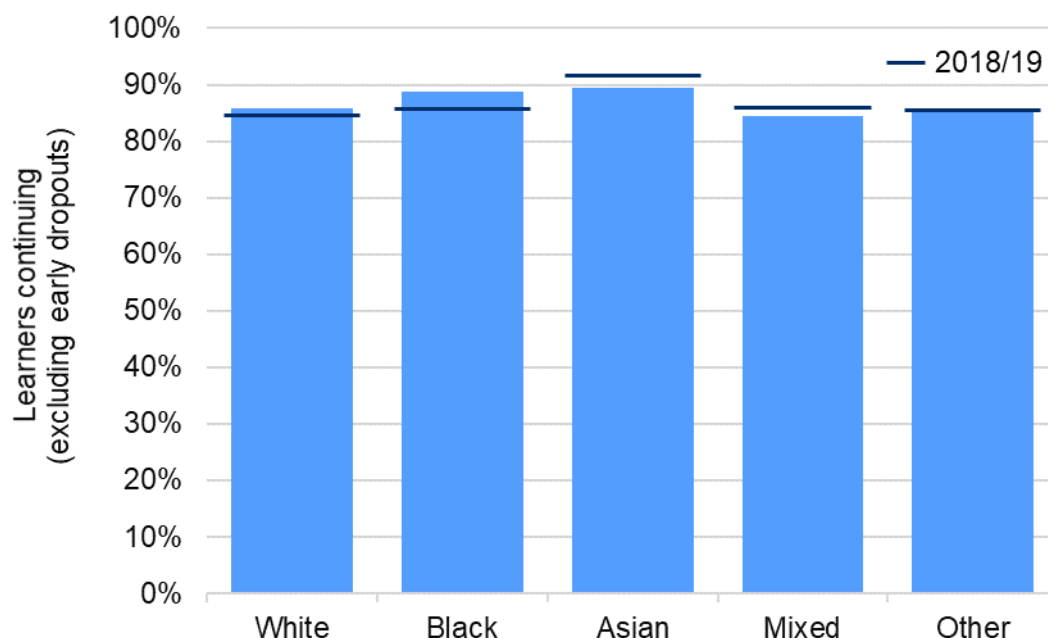
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), school attendance data

Black and White Year 11 pupils in 2019/20 were more likely to continue onto post-16 learning compared to the previous year. There was a decrease in Asian pupils and pupils with a mixed ethnicity continuing onto to publicly funded post-16 learning.

Black learners saw the biggest increase overall, with 89% of Black learners going onto post-16 learning, which is the joint highest of any ethnicity.

The overall differences between different ethnicities shrank. The largest gap for Year 11s in 2018/19 was between White pupils and Asian pupils, where 7 in 100 more Asian learners went onto post-16 than White learners. In 2019/20 that gap shrank to 3 in 100 learners.

For White and Black learners there was a small decrease in learners dropping out in the first 8 weeks – although not enough to explain the rise in continuation. Learners of other ethnicities saw between a 0.3 and 1 percentage point increase in early drop outs.

Chart 9.3: Achievement rate of adult learning qualifications by ethnicity 20th March to 31st July 2020
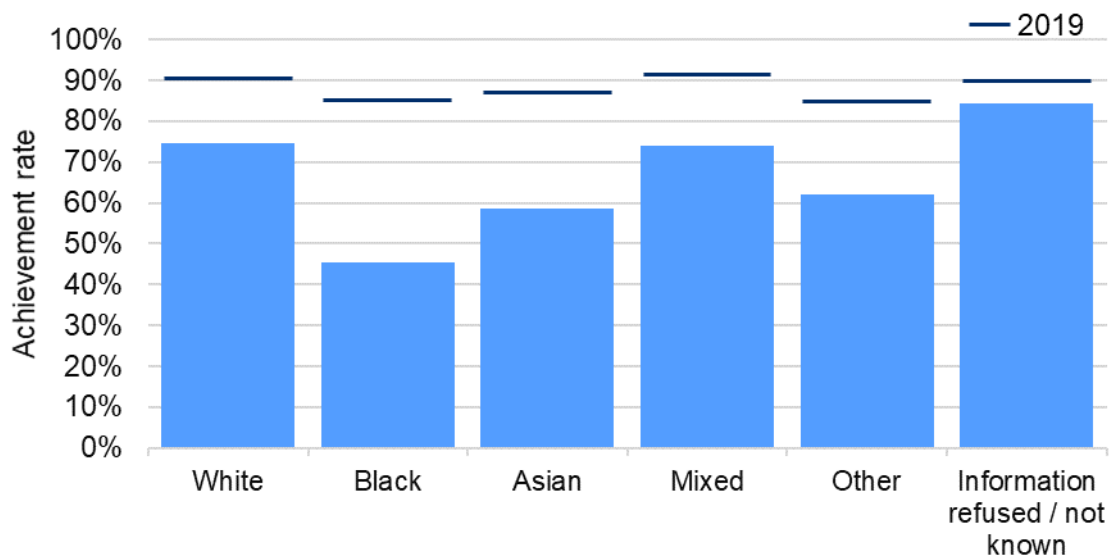
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

The adult learning outcomes for Black learners were much worse during the pandemic. Fewer than half of Black learners who completed an assessable adult learning course achieved the qualification. Black learners were also less likely to be taking adult learning during the pandemic. The number of Black learners ending an assessable qualification dropped from 420 to just 55. This was the steepest percentage drop of any ethnicity.

Asian learners also saw a drop in outcomes. For every 10 main qualifications undertaken by Asian learners between 20th March and 31st July, 3 fewer were achieved than in the same period the year before. Similar to Black learners, there was also a steep drop in the number of Asian learners taking assessable adult learning qualifications in the first place.

Chart 9.4: Outcomes for vocational learners by ethnicity, 2019/20
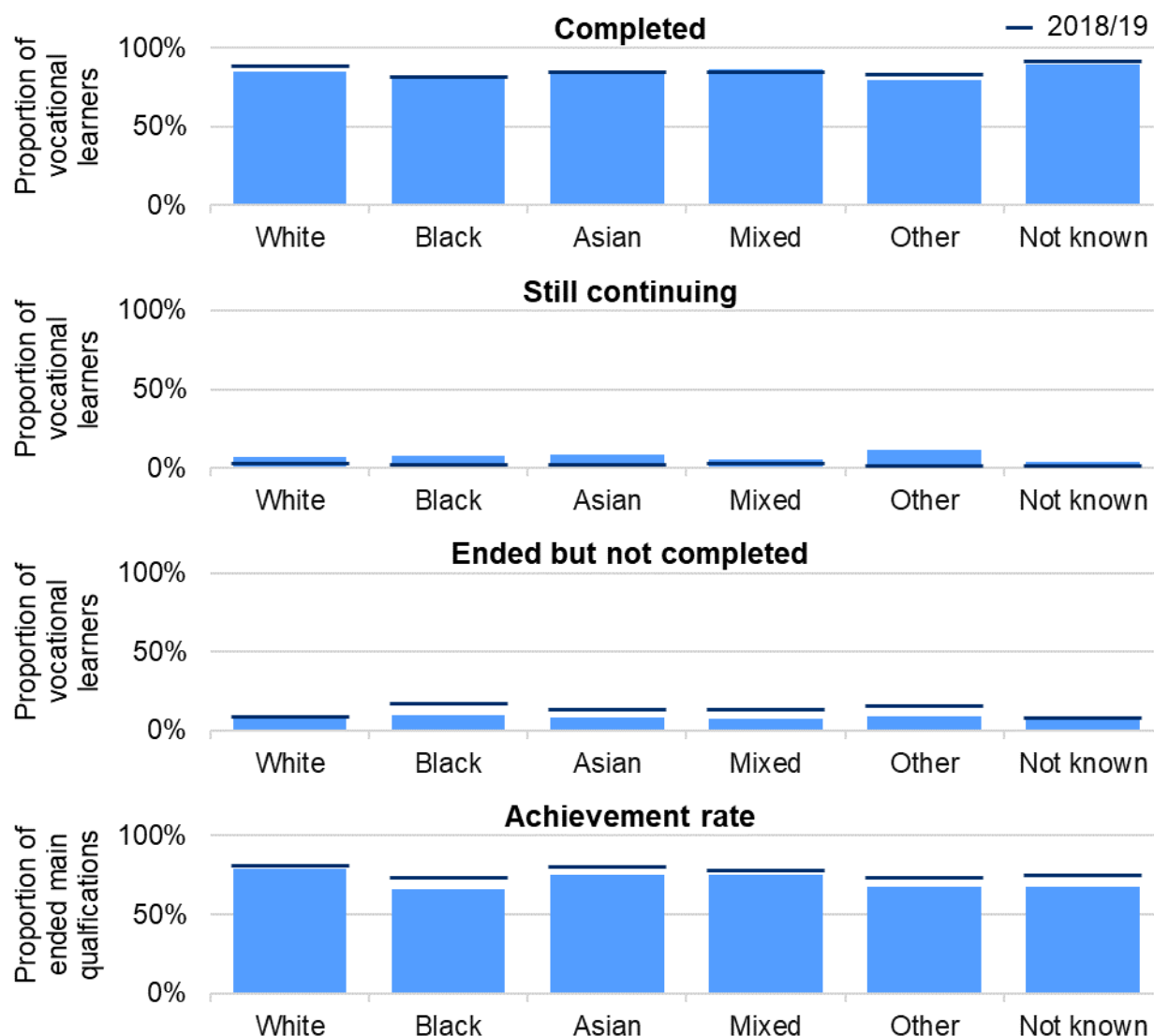
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection

There was a 3 percentage point fall in the number of White vocational learners completing in 2019/20, but there was also a 1 percentage point increase in Black learners completing, and a 2 percentage point increase for learners with a mixed ethnicity.

The fall in completion for White, Asian and learners of other ethnicities was entirely due to more learners who were still continuing their programme past the data collection in December. This is probably due to assessments being delayed because of COVID-19.

There was a small increase in Black and mixed ethnicity learners completing even though a higher proportion of Black and mixed ethnicity learners were still continuing their course as well. Overall the percentage of Black learners who ended their programme without completing it was 7 points lower than the previous year. Black learners were still the ethnicity group most likely to end without completing, but the gap was much reduced compared to previous years.

However, although Black learners were more likely to complete their programme, they were less likely to achieve their main qualifications compared to previous years. The achievement rate for Black learners dropped from 73% to 66% in 2019/20, widening an already existing gap. Learners of ethnicities other than White, Black, Asian or mixed also saw the achievement gap widen compared to other learners.

Chart 9.5: Percentage of full time vocational completers in 2019/20 that stayed in post-16 learning, by ethnicity[a]
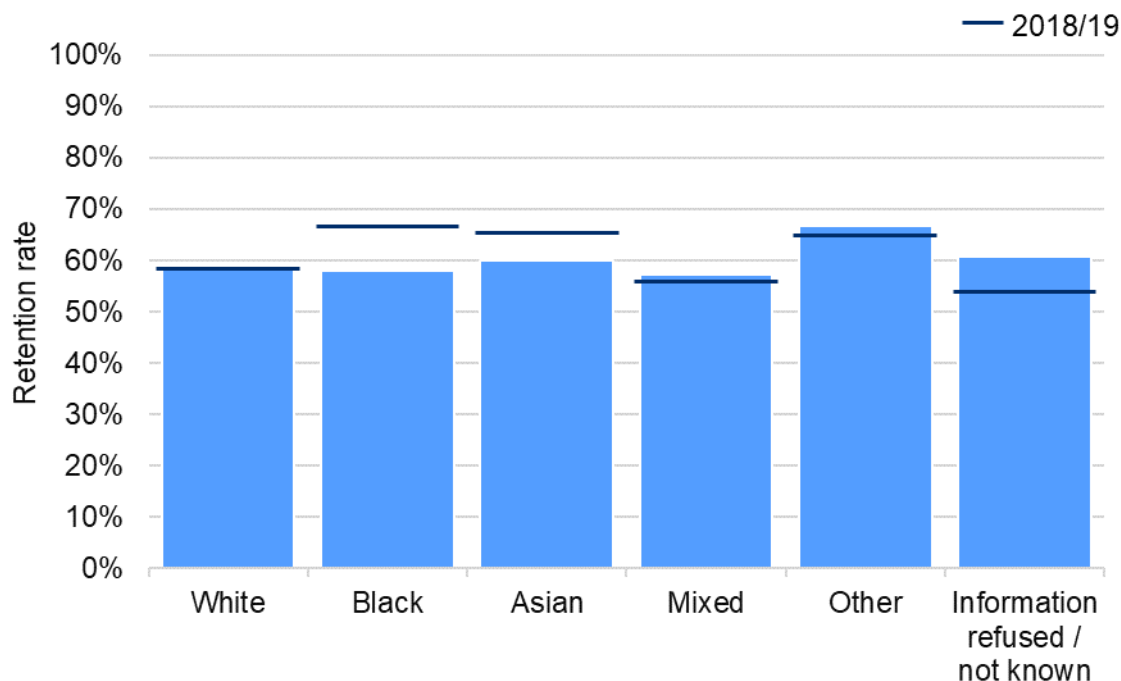
a) Access to Higher Education programmes are excluded because completers are expected to progress to higher education.

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

The percentage of full time vocational learners who stayed in post-16 learning in the following year was similar for most ethnicities. However the percentage of Black and Asian vocational learners staying on fell in 2019/20. Previously Black and Asian learners had stayed on in post-16 learning at a much higher rate than White or mixed ethnicity learners.

10.   Gender

- Female and male A2 learners saw a similar increase in grades in 2019/20, with female learners having higher outcomes overall, as was true in the previous year.

- 92% of female AS learners in stayed in post-16 learning after completing their AS, compared to 90% of male learners, which was a slightly bigger gap than the previous year.

- 86% of male vocational learners completed their programme, compared to 84% of female learners.

Chart 10.1: General education outcomes for A2 learners by ethnicity, 2019/20
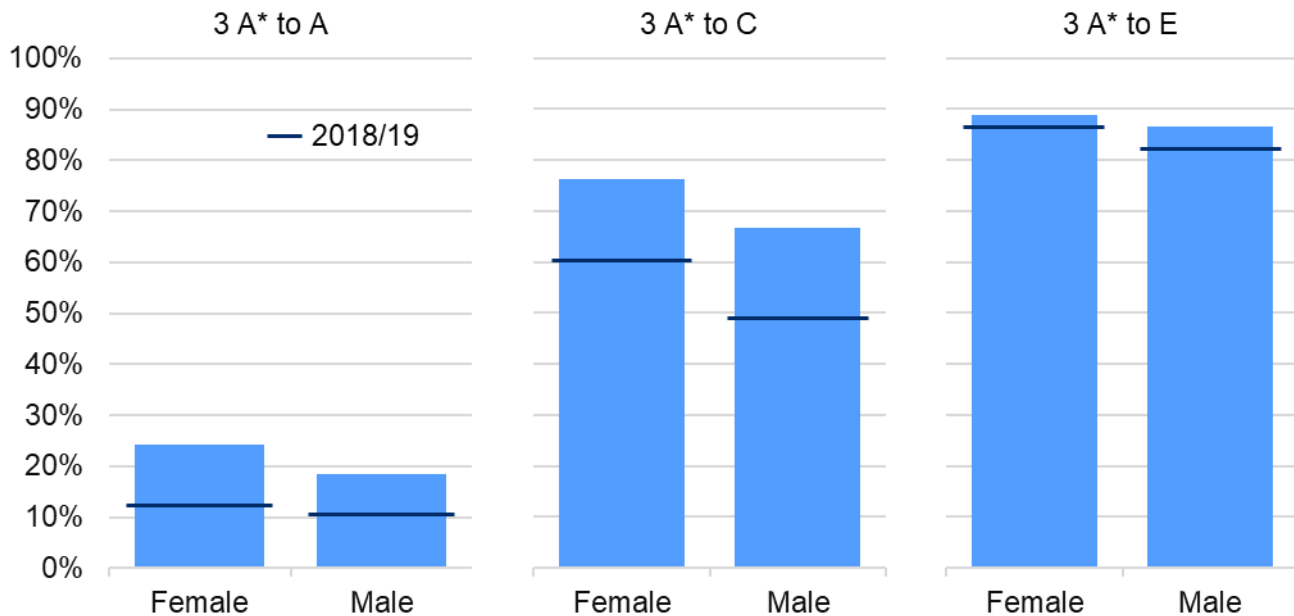
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

The overall increase in grades was similar for female and male learners. The overall achievement gap between female and male learners was unchanged. Generally female students have higher A2 outcomes than male students.

Whilst the overall grade increase was the same for both genders, it widened some inequalities at specific grades, and reduced inequalities at other grades. This is because of the differences in grade distributions that already existed.

Chart 10.2: Change in outcomes for A2 learners in the 2019/20 academic year compared to 2018/19, by gender
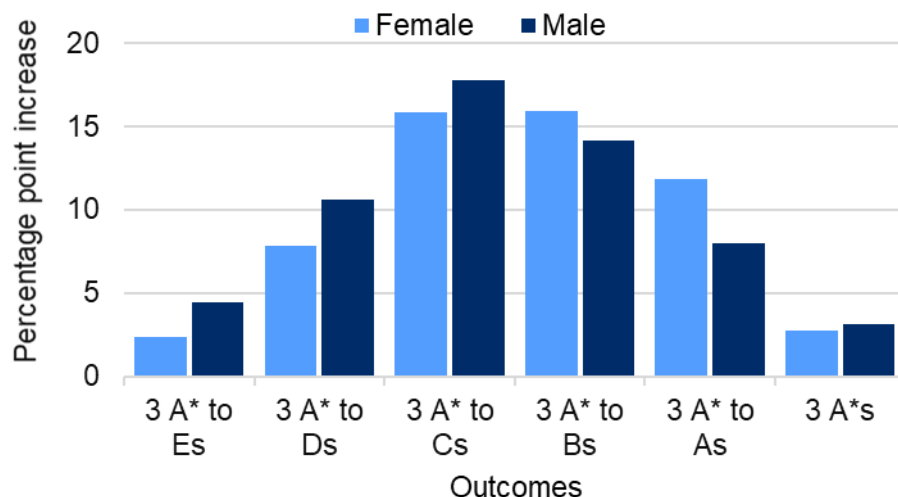
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 Data Collection, Welsh Examination Database (WED)

Male learners saw a bigger increase than females in getting at least three Es, Ds or Cs. The reverse was true for learners getting at least three Bs or three As.

As a result the gap in learners getting at least three Es closed. 89% of female students got at least three Es, compared to 87% of male students in 2019/20. In 2018/19, 86% of females got at least three Es, and only 82% of males did.

However the gender gap for learners getting at least three As widened. 12% of females and 11% of males got at least three As in 2018/19. In 2019/20, the gap was almost three times bigger. 24% of female and 19% of males three As or better.

These results follow from grade distributions in previous years where female learners were more likely to get at least three Bs.

Chart 10.3: Percentage of AS completers that stayed in post-16 learning by gender, AS year 2019/20
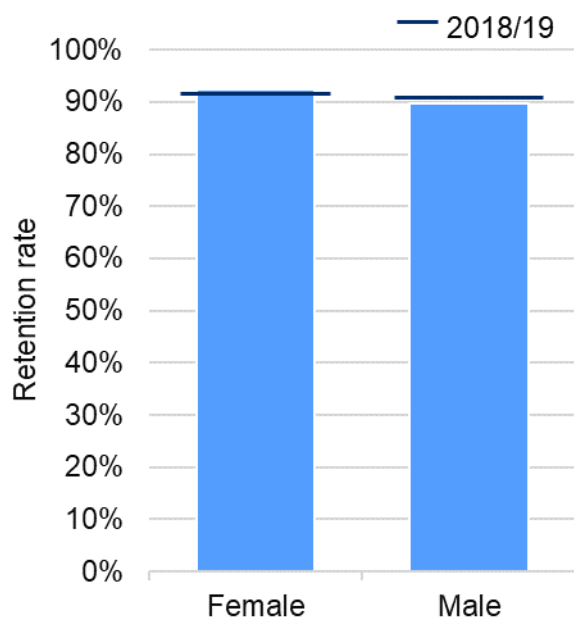
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection, school attendance data

The gender gap widened slightly in retention for AS learners in 2019/20. 92% of female learners were still in post-16 learning in 2020/21, compared to 90% of male learners.

Chart 10.4: Outcomes for vocational learners by gender, 2019/20
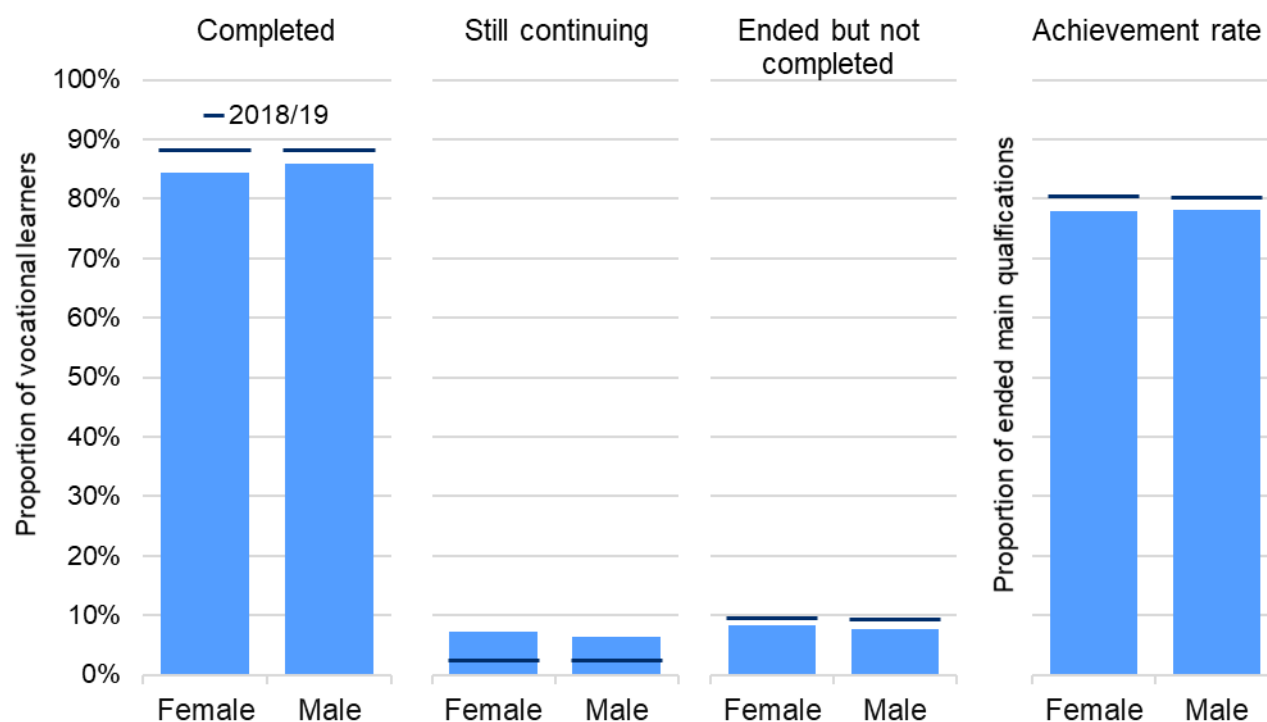
Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR), Post-16 data collection

The fall in completion was slightly smaller for male vocational learners than female vocational learners. This meant male learners had slightly better outcomes in 2019/20. Outcomes were equal across the genders previously in 2018/19.

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 a D to G at GCSE, a level 2 qualification is equivalent to an 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 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.

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. Statistics calculated for the period between 20th March and 31st July are calculated across that time period in each of the past years too.

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 in the relevant time period or that was originally expected to end within that time period. The time period used was the academic year for vocational and general education, and between the 20th March and 31st July for adult learning and apprenticeships. Learners who expected to finish their learning after the end of the time period, and were still continuing after the end of the time period, are not included in the base cohorts.

Learners who were expected to end within the time period, 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 when the relevant time period is the academic year.

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 due to the way traineeship data was recorded during the pandemic.

Junior apprenticeships, independent living skills, higher education programmes studied in colleges, and other programmes which were level 4 or greater 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.

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. 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 345 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 A2 learners, part time or full time, 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.

Where the learner's 'lowest grade out of three A levels' is calculated, this is the lowest grade of a learners best three A levels. If a learner achieved four A levels at ABBC, then their 'lowest grade out of three A levels' would be a B.

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

- part time learners aiming to achieve 3 A levels are included

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 2020/21 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.

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, like 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 and vocational programmes that are level 4 or higher are included.

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.

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

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship statistics include all apprentices taking place between 20th March 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.

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

- the time period for the statistics is 20th March to 31st July rather than the academic year

- 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 20th March 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 between 20th March and 31st July 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. In 2020 there were 310 activities with an unknown result, which was much higher than previous years.

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

The main difference between these adult learning statistics and the annual learner outcomes release is that the time period for the statistics is 20th March to 31st July rather than the academic year.

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 and matched to the data collected in December 2020. The expected end date recorded in December was used if the learning programme or activity started after February 2020, or if the learning couldn't be matched to the February data collection. 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 under chart 3.1, and in other sections, 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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