



Foundation Apprenticeship Report

Published July 2026

Incorporating SCQF Levels 6, 5 and 4

For Cohorts 1- 8 (up to academic year 2023/24)

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Introduction

Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) are available at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6 and the offer was extended through pilot work to SCQF levels 4 and 5. These qualifications enable pupils to embark upon work-based learning while still at secondary school. Introduced in 2016, there are now twelve FA frameworks available at SCQF level 6, two at SCQF level 5 and three at SCQF level 4. Each FA framework has been developed and mapped to key sectors in the Scottish economy where there are current or projected skills gaps and future job growth.

FAs are designed to enhance and expand existing pathways from school, with multiple progression routes to work, on completion, including Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships, college, or university. Pupils have scheduled periods during their school timetables to undertake their FA. Delivery of FA learning takes place in college or learning provider premises with the practical, work-based, element undertaken with a participating employer.

This is the third year that this report has been jointly published by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), following the Code of Practice for Statistics. Detailed supplementary data tables are available in Microsoft Excel format on the [SDS website](#). This is the second year that data from SDS and SFC systems has been combined for reporting.

Development of Foundation Apprenticeships

The Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers have overall accountability for the apprenticeship system in Scotland and for the public funding invested in it. The development of FA frameworks is led by the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) in response to demand from industry in key occupational areas. SAAB facilitates feedback from employers and learners, ensuring FAs are clearly aligned to economic growth and job opportunities.

Responsibility for the funding of FAs was split between SDS and SFC, for any new enrolments, from academic year 2021/22 onwards. SFC is accountable for the funding it allocates to colleges in relation to FAs. SDS is accountable for the FA funding it allocates to Local Authorities and Independent Learning Providers. SFC and SDS are working in collaboration to support the delivery of FAs.

From academic year 2027/28, in line with the Scottish Government's Tertiary Education and Training Act, funding, development and delivery of all Scottish apprenticeships (including FAs) will transfer to the SFC.

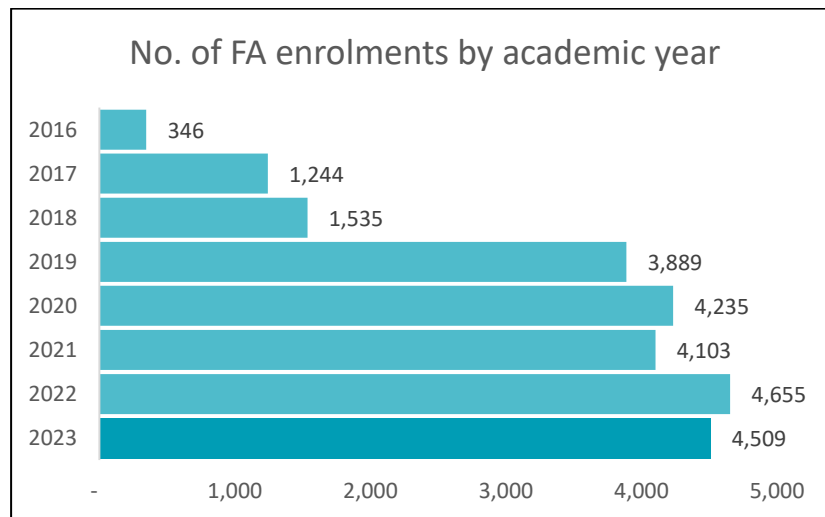
Economic context

Despite the backdrop of high inflationary pressure affecting both individuals and businesses alike, strong demand for labour persisted during 2023/24.

FAs offer a means for participating businesses to access a pipeline of young talent, who may be their workforce of the future, and for pupils to gain a meaningful work placement offering experiential learning at a key decision-making point in their education.

Key Results 2023/24

- Since their introduction in 2016 over 24,500 school pupils have enrolled on a Foundation Apprenticeship.
- In academic year 2023, there were 4,509 enrolments, of which 39% were college funded, and 61% were funded by local authorities and independent learning providers.¹



- Social Services Children and Young People framework accounted for nearly one third of enrolments at SCQF level 6 in 2023.
- Construction frameworks made up more than half of all enrolments at SCQF level 4/5.
- The proportion of female enrolments at SCQF level 6 remains similar to last year, now at 62.7%.
- At SCQF level 6, the proportion of FAs who self-identified as having a disability is in line with the previous year, now at 24.9%
- Achievement at SCQF level 4/5 continues to increase, with 75.4% of pupils achieving their full qualification.

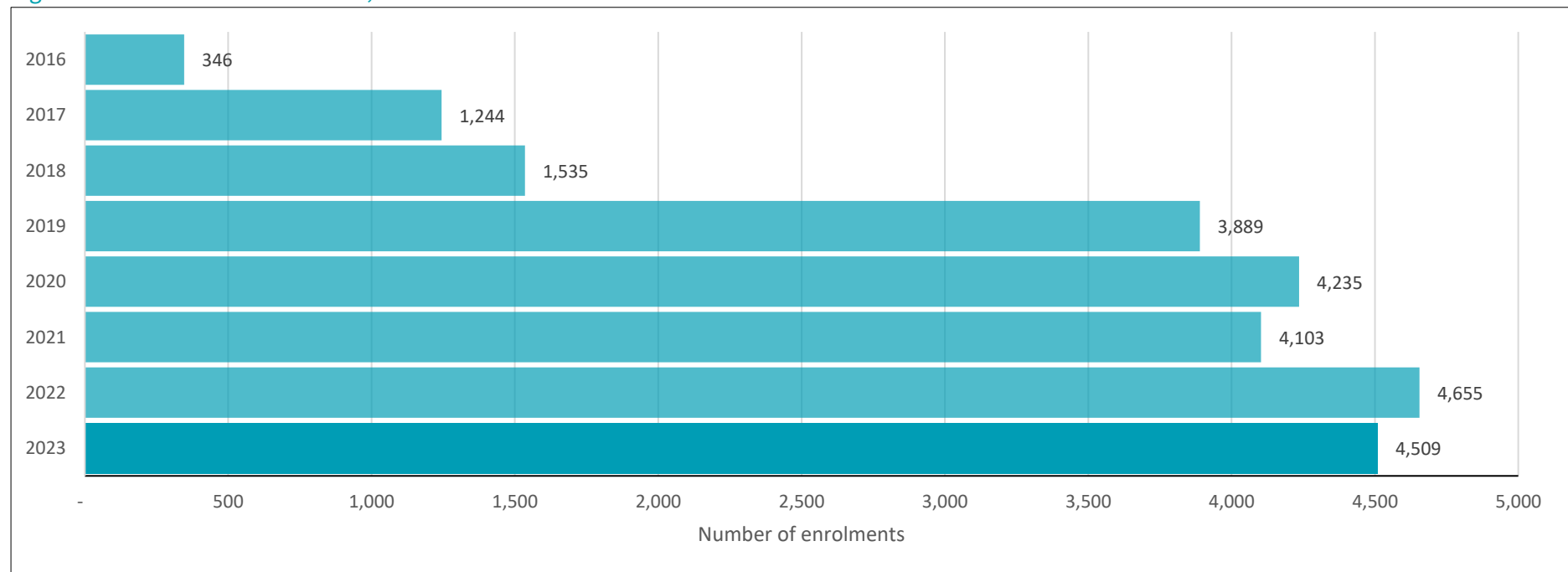
¹ More information on independent learning provider funded provision can be found [here](#).

Enrolments

Number of pupils enrolled on a Foundation Apprenticeship

Figure 1 illustrates the total number of FA enrolments by academic year. Figure 2 shows FA enrolments by SCQF level.

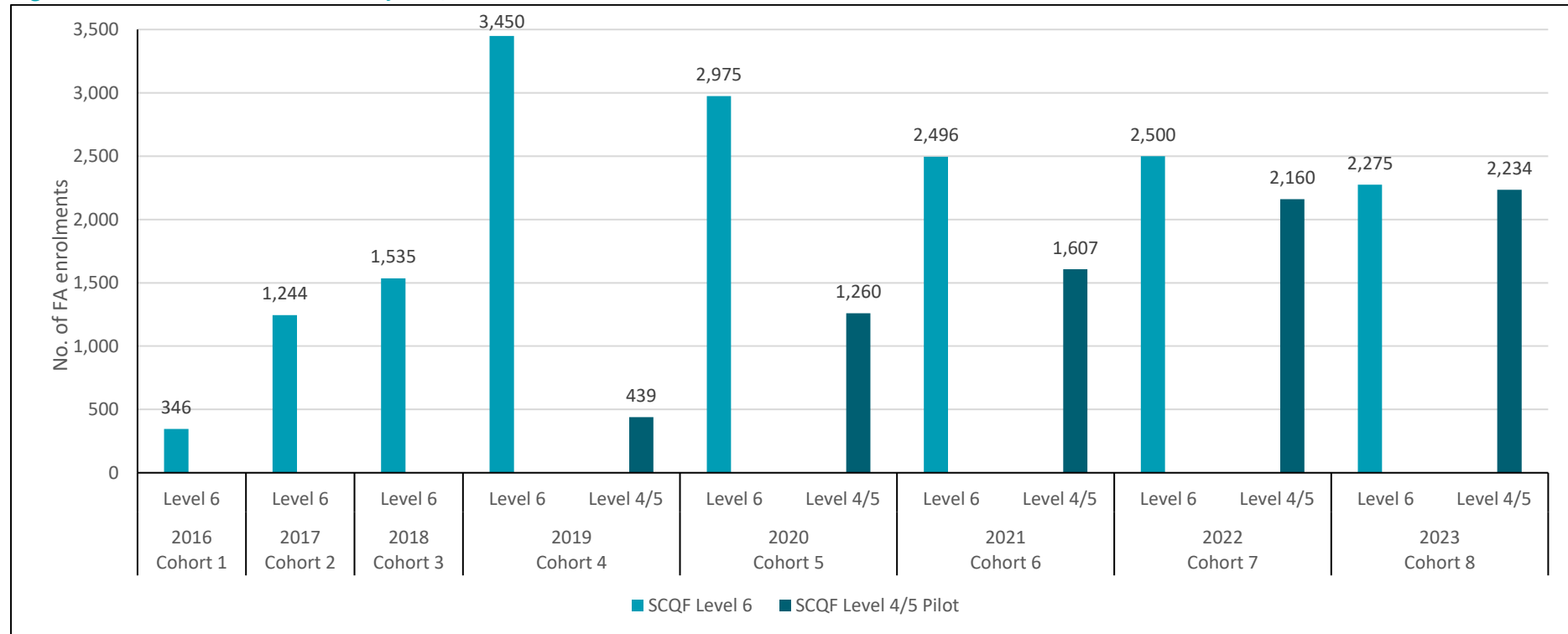
Figure 1: Number of FA enrolments, 2016-2023²



Every year, FAs are offered through colleges, local authorities, and independent learning providers based on their expected levels of demand from schools. Figure 1 shows the total number of FA enrolments each year, with the total for 2023 reaching 4,509 (146 fewer than 2022, or -3%).

² For academic year 2023 there were 4,509 enrolments funded via either SDS or SFC. A further 275 were self-funded by local authorities to meet demand in their area.

Figure 2: Number of FA enrolments by SCQF level, 2016-2023



FAs form part of subject choices for school pupils, largely undertaken in S4, S5 or S6. In 2019, to respond to skills gaps in additional sectors and widen access to more experiential learning for school pupils, three new frameworks were offered at SCQF levels 4 and 5. The SFC and SDS currently, collectively, provide funding for up to 5,000 FA enrolments each year and, over time, the take up across FAs at levels 4, 5 and 6 has shifted, with enrolments falling at level 6 to accommodate the increase in uptake at levels 4 and 5.

Table 1 and Figures 3A and 3B show the number and proportions of FA enrolments by gender.

At SCQF level 6, the proportion of females starting a FA in 2023/24 is broadly similar to the previous year's figure, accounting for 62.7% of enrolments. This is largely due to the two Social Services frameworks which, in line with industry trends, tend to be female dominated and accounted for around 47% of enrolments in 2023. FA enrolments by framework are provided in Table 2.

Table 1: Gender balance across all FA cohorts³

Year/ Cohort	SCQF level	Male enrolments	Female enrolments	Total enrolments where gender known
2016 Cohort 1	L6	174	172	346
2017 Cohort 2	L6	576	668	1,244
2018 Cohort 3	L6	666	869	1,535
2019 Cohort 4	L6	1,484	1,966	3,450
	L4/5	389	50	439
2020 Cohort 5	L6	1,251	1,724	2,975
	L4/5	1,037	222	1,259
2021 Cohort 6	L6	953	1,500	2,453
	L4/5	1,336	256	1,592
2022 Cohort 7	L6	915	1,540	2,455
	L4/5	1,770	360	2,130
2023 Cohort 8	L6	839	1,412	2,251
	L4/5	1,822	387	2,209

³ In 2021, 58 pupils selected the option prefer not to say/in another way. In 2022, 70 pupils selected the option of prefer not to say/in another way. In 2023, 49 pupils selected the option of prefer not to say/in another way. These have been removed from the total when calculating percentages in this section.

Figure 3A: Change in balance over time at SCQF level 6

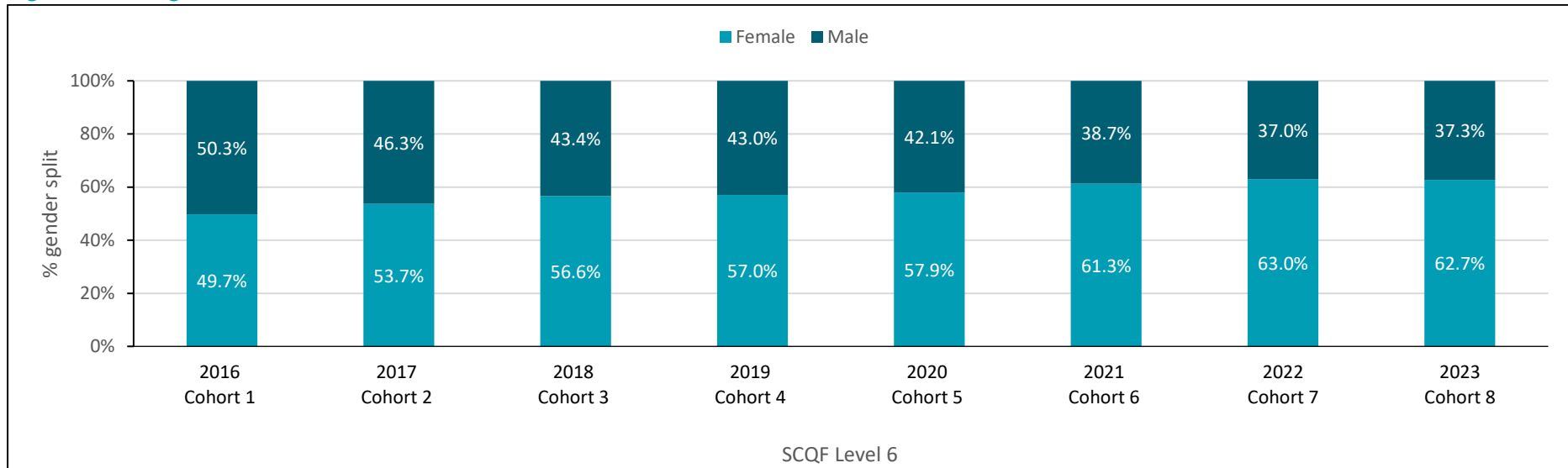
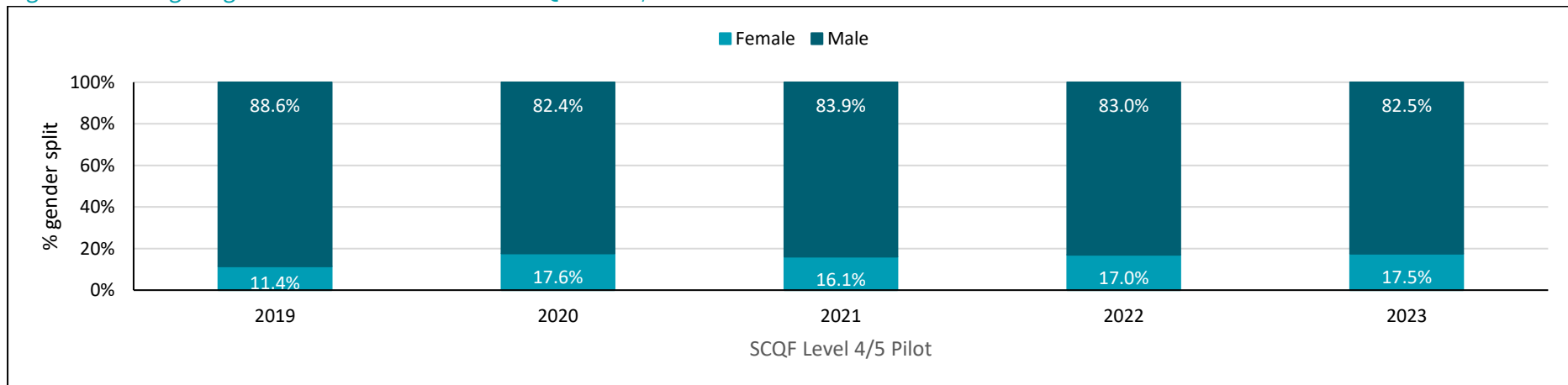


Figure 3B: Change in gender balance over time at SCQF level 4/5



Gender balance in FAs at SCQF level 6 has changed over the eight years of delivery. As new frameworks, representing a broader range of industry sectors, have been introduced this balance has altered with females now accounting for almost 63% of enrolments in 2023, as shown in figure 3A.

In 2019, new pilot frameworks were introduced at SCQF levels 4 and 5. These are one-year FAs and are available in Hospitality and Construction at SCQF level 4 and 5, and Automotive at SCQF level 4. These qualifications have proven popular, with enrolments increasing almost five-fold between 2019 and 2023. They have attracted more male pupils, largely due to Automotive and Construction frameworks, which accounted for 75% of SCQF level 4/5 enrolments in 2023.

FA frameworks

There are twelve FA frameworks currently available for pupils to study at SCQF level 6, three frameworks at SCQF level 4, and two at SCQF level 5.

FA frameworks – highest number of enrolments (SCQF level 6) in 2023/24

Social Services – Children and Young People (740 enrolments)

Business Skills (353 enrolments)

Social Services and Healthcare (335 enrolments)

Tables 2A and 2B show the number of FA enrolments by framework over the last 8 years as FAs have become more widely available as part of school subject choices.

Table 2A: FA enrolments by framework (SCQF level 6), 2016-2023

FAs at SCQF level 6	2016 Cohort 1	2017 Cohort 2	2018 Cohort 3	2019 Cohort 4	2020 Cohort 5	2021 Cohort 6	2022 Cohort 7	2023 Cohort 8
Accountancy	-	-	28	131	119	67	70	59
Business Skills	5	67	84	316	338	265	280	353
Civil Engineering	47	87	95	185	215	151	135	47
Creative and Digital Media	-	43	135	355	305	292	290	275
Engineering	71	232	304	470	327	257	215	194
Financial Services	38	54	13	41	26	16	15	30
Food and Drink Technologies	-	-	10	61	43	29	30	32
IT: Hardware/System Support	13	40	35	69	40	6	15	7
IT: Software Development	30	130	104	190	146	145	125	90
Scientific Technologies	-	20	39	108	97	90	105	89
Social Services and Healthcare	85	105	186	493	508	460	415	335
Social Services Children and Young People	57	466	502	1,031	811	675	795	740
Undisclosed frameworks ⁴	-	-	-	-	-	43	-	24
Total – SCQF level 6	346	1,244	1,535	3,450	2,975	2,496	2,500	2,275

Table 2B: FA enrolments by framework (SCQF level 4/5 Pilot), 2019-2023

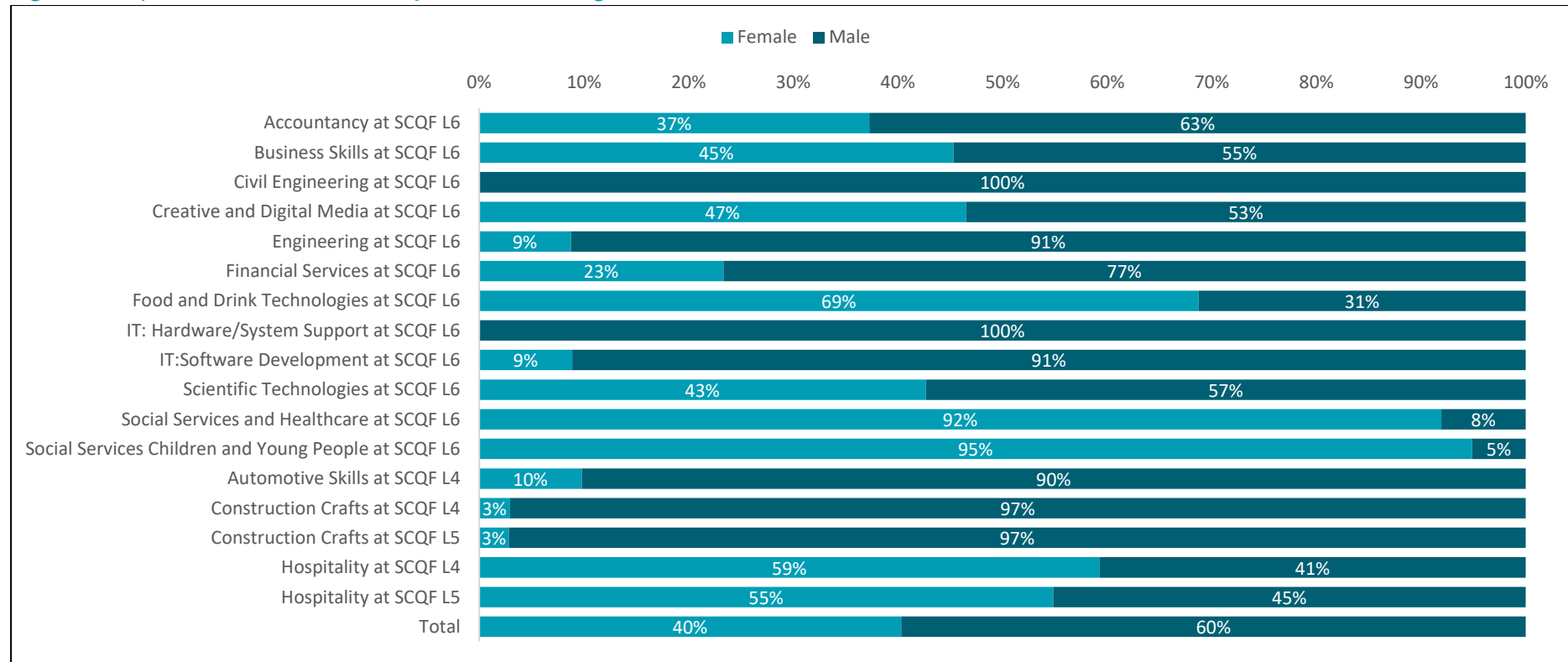
FAs at SCQF level 4/5 Pilot	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Automotive L4	30	273	323	485	489
Automotive L5 ⁵	88	-	-	-	-
Construction L4	141	326	286	480	578
Construction L5	132	340	647	750	600
Hospitality L4	32	200	193	130	172
Hospitality L5	16	121	143	310	370
Undisclosed frameworks	-	-	15	-	25
Total – SCQF level 4/5	439	1,260	1,607	2,160	2,234

⁴ In 2021/22, 58 pupils (43 at SCQF level 6 and 15 on SCQF level 4/5 Pilot) recorded their gender as either ‘prefer not to say’ or ‘in another way’. Similarly In 2023/24 49 pupils (24 at SCQF level 6 and 25 on SCQF level 4/5 Pilot) did the same. To ensure that they cannot be identified, the frameworks on which they enrolled are not disclosed.

⁵ Automotive at level 5 was not offered after 2019.

There continues to be significant gender imbalance across frameworks with males more likely to study Automotive, Construction, Engineering and IT and females more likely to study Social Services, as illustrated in Figure 4. This is representative of the ongoing gender imbalance challenges within these sectors.

Figure 4: Proportion of FA enrolments by framework and gender, 2023

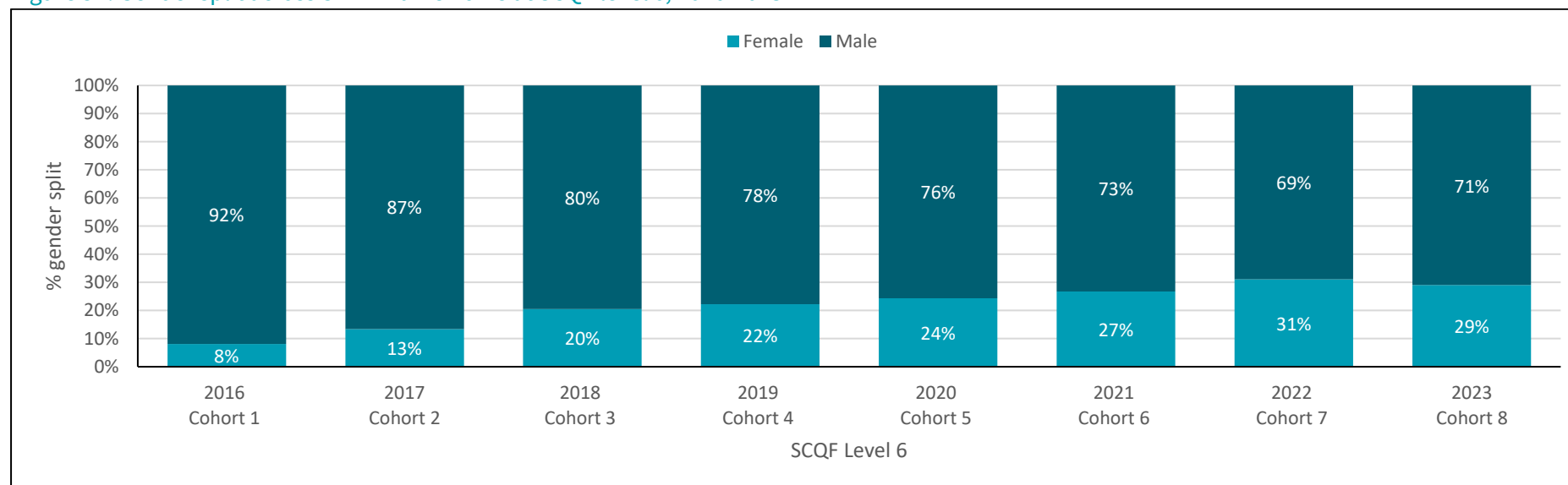


STEM opportunities

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) related study continues to be a Scottish Government policy focus, with particular focus on the gender balance across STEM subjects. Based on the Scottish Government definition, most FA frameworks are STEM related other than Accountancy, Business Skills, Financial Services, Hospitality, and the two Social Services frameworks.⁶

Figure 5A demonstrates that most STEM enrolments at SCQF level 6 were male. While the longer-term trend shows increasing female participation in STEM frameworks, 2023 showed a small decrease, falling from 31% to 29%.

Figure 5A: Gender split across STEM frameworks at SCQF level 6, 2016-2023⁷



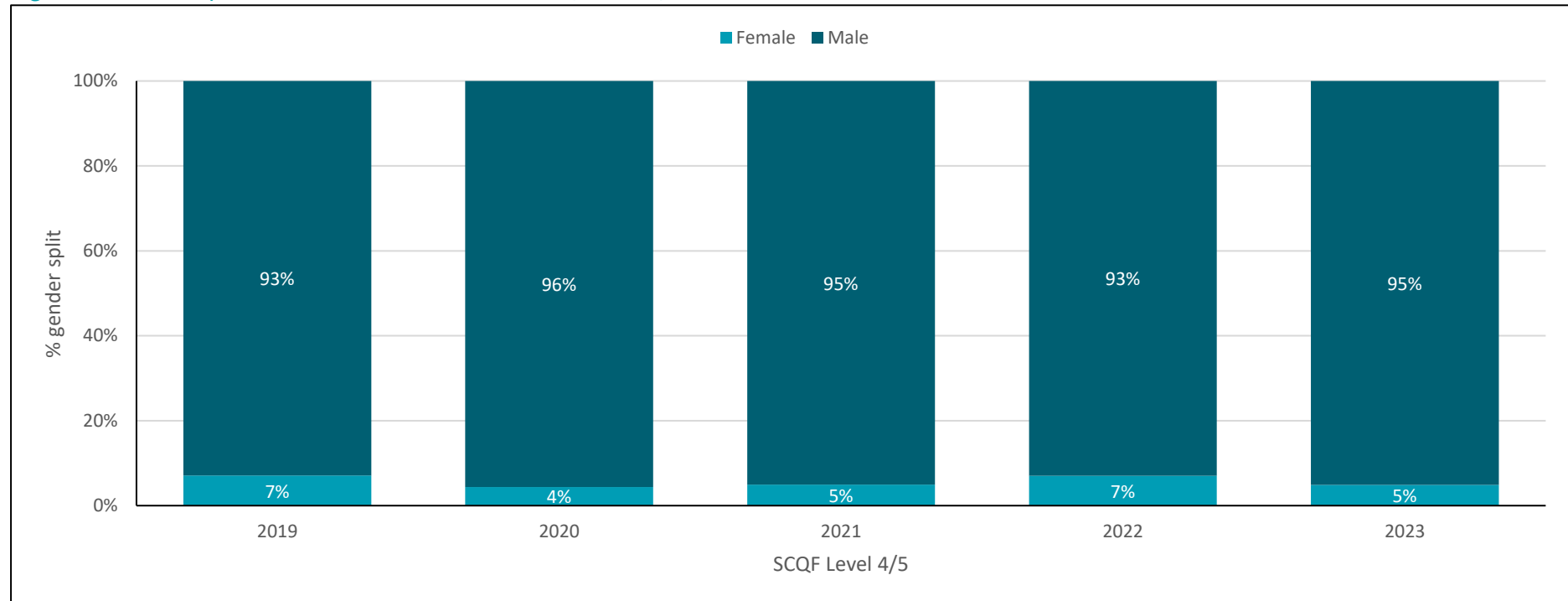
With three of the five frameworks at SCQF levels 4/5 defined as STEM (Automotive and both Construction frameworks), the total proportion of enrolments in STEM frameworks in 2023 was 77%, a decrease on the proportion recorded in 2022 (80%). As in previous years, most enrolments at SCQF

⁶ Social Services and Healthcare at SCQF level 6 and Social Services Children and Young People at SCQF level 6.

⁷ To protect confidentiality, individuals who chose to record their gender as 'prefer not to say' or 'in another way' have been removed from the totals.

levels 4/5 were male, as shown in Figure 5B. Whilst female participation in STEM frameworks increased in 2022, this was followed by a decrease in 2023, with the proportion of females decreasing from 7% to 5%, in line with 2021 results.

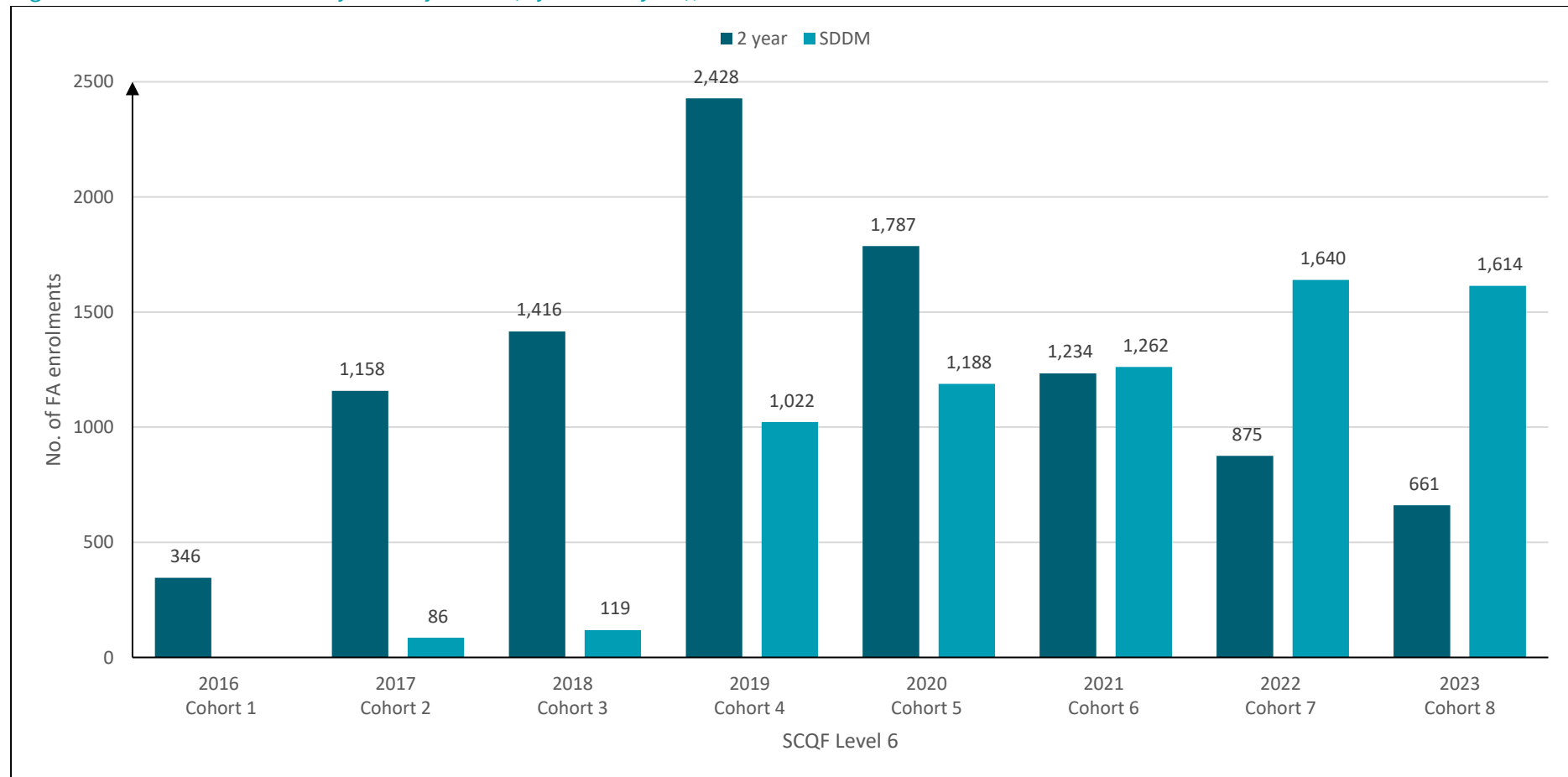
Figure 5B: Gender split across STEM frameworks at SCQF level 4/5, 2019-2023



Delivery model

When FAs at SCQF level 6 were first introduced, they were all two-year courses. From 2017 the introduction of the shorter duration delivery model (SDDM), enabled pupils to complete their FA in one rather than two years. This model has been increasingly popular, with the number of pupils choosing this option increasing year on year. Figure 6 shows the number of enrolments at SCQF level 6 and whether pupils have opted to complete their study over one or two years.

Figure 6: No. of FA enrolments by delivery model (2 years or 1 year), 2016 to 2023



In 2023, almost 71% of pupils opted to complete their SCQF level 6 FA in one year, an increase of 6 percentage points relative to the previous year.

Figures 7A and 7B show the number of enrolments by school year group. At SCQF level 6, the proportion of enrolments for S5 pupils continued to decline, falling from 59% in 2022 to 54.9% in 2023. The proportion for S6 pupils increased relative to 2022. Pupils in S5 may be choosing to delay starting an FA until their sixth year, potentially driven by university entry requirements stipulating five Highers in one sitting.

The number of enrolments at SCQF level 4/5 Pilot increased steadily year on year across the S4 and S5 year groups, with an additional increase in the number of enrolments at S3 in 2023 (+47 on last year).

Figure 7A: No. of FA enrolments by school year group at SCQF level 6, 2016 to 2023

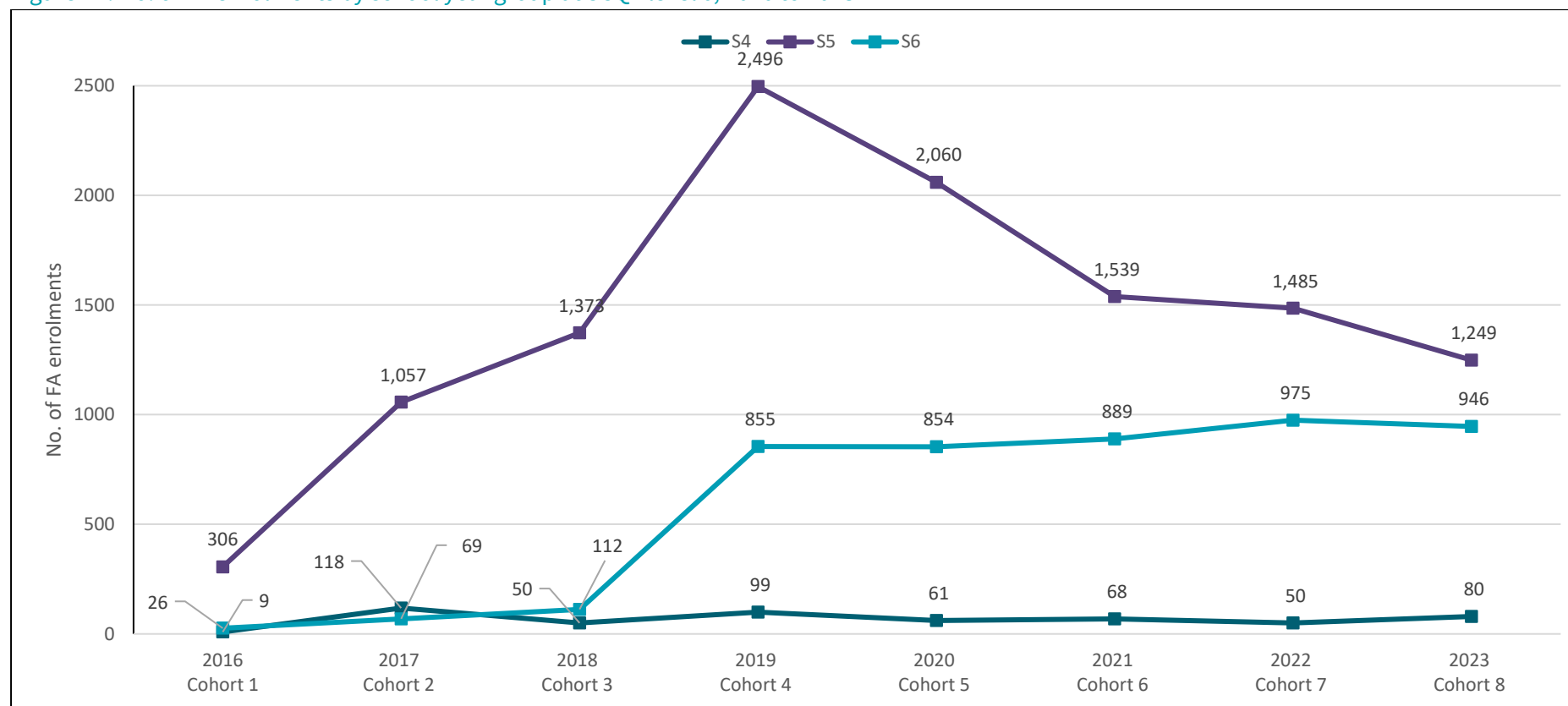
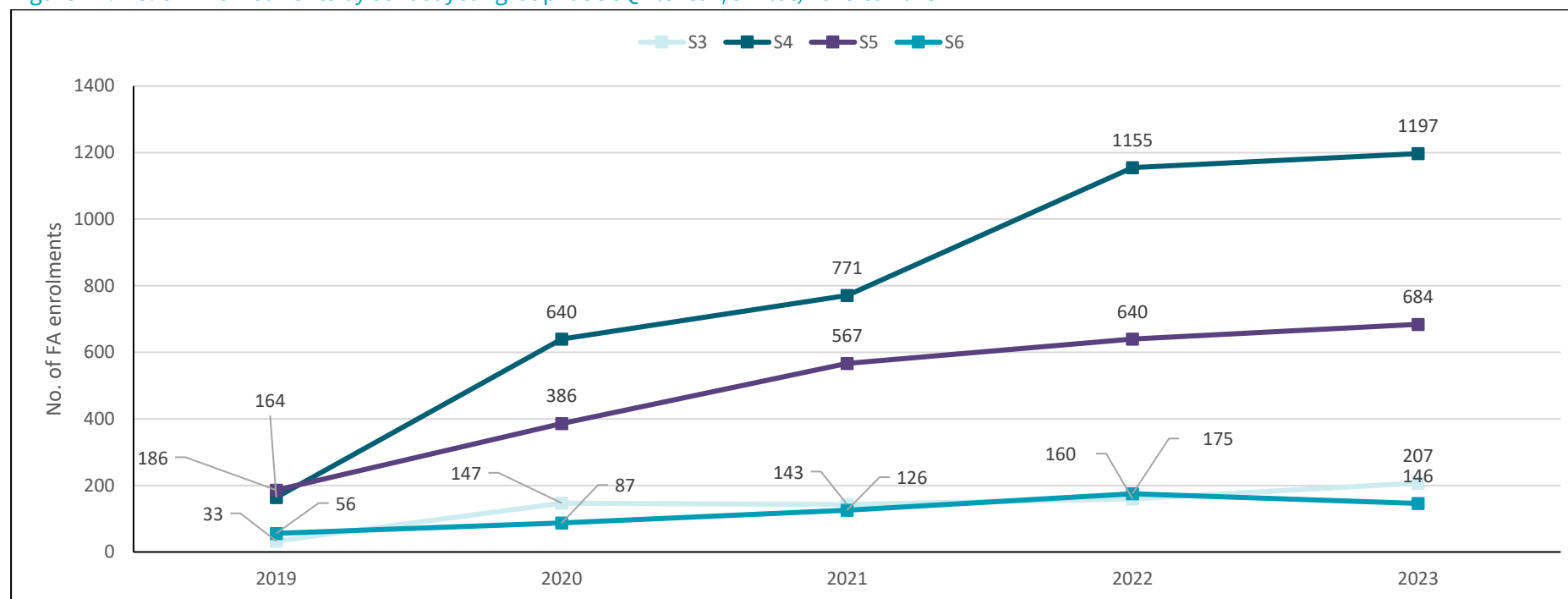


Figure 7B: No. of FA enrolments by school year group⁸ at SCQF level 4/5 Pilot, 2019 to 2023⁹



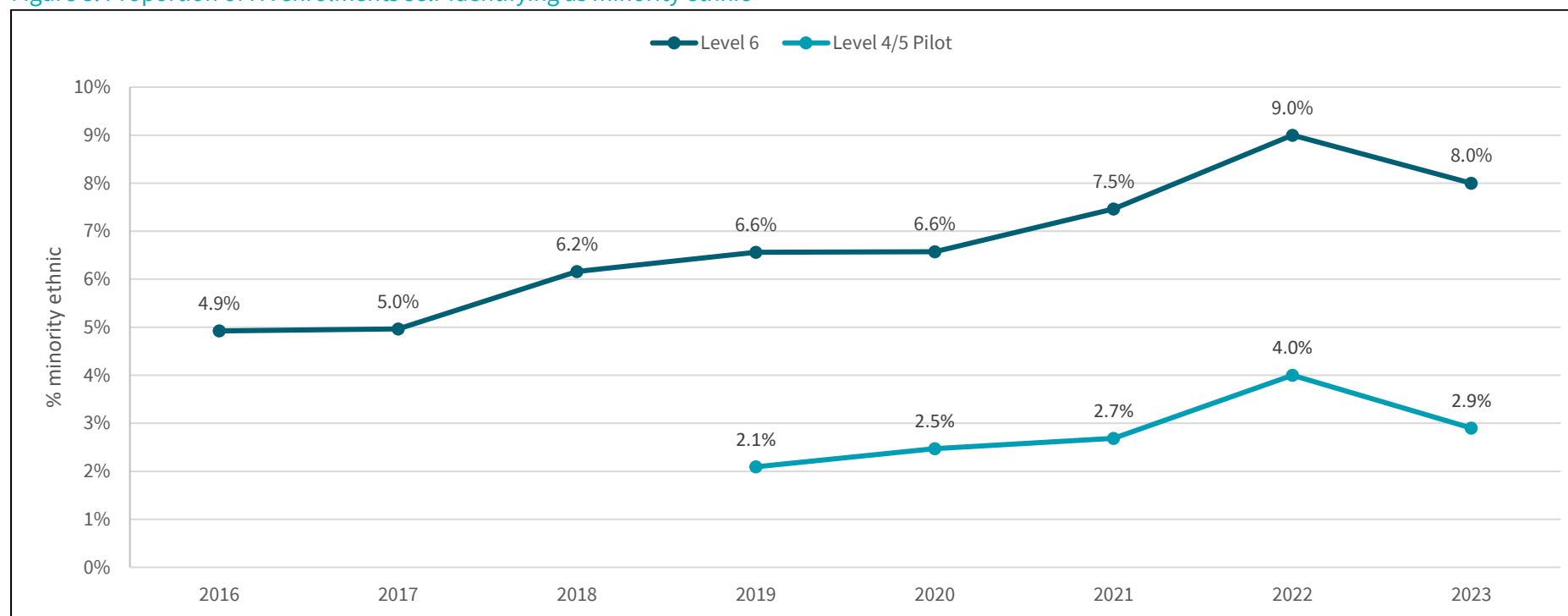
⁸ At SCQF levels 4/5, pupils can opt to undertake the qualification from S3, as part of their school senior phase subject choices.

⁹ In 2022, there were 15 pupils whose year group was unknown.

Ethnicity¹⁰

At SCQF level 6, the four-year increasing trend in the proportion of FA enrolments self-identifying as minority ethnic dropped slightly, from 9% in 2022 to 8.0% in 2023. A similar trend is true for the SCQF level 4/5 Pilot, which also decreased from 4% in 2022 to 2.9% in 2023. In Scottish secondary schools, 18% of pupils were recorded as from a minority ethnic background in 2023.¹¹

Figure 8: Proportion of FA enrolments self-identifying as minority ethnic¹²¹³



¹⁰ Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the total known which excludes any unknown and those recorded their ethnicity as 'prefer not to say'.

¹¹ [School education: statistics 2023, supplementary tables \(1.10\)](#) accessed via [summary statistics for schools in scotland](#)

¹² Minority ethnic: Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; Arab; and Other ethnic group.

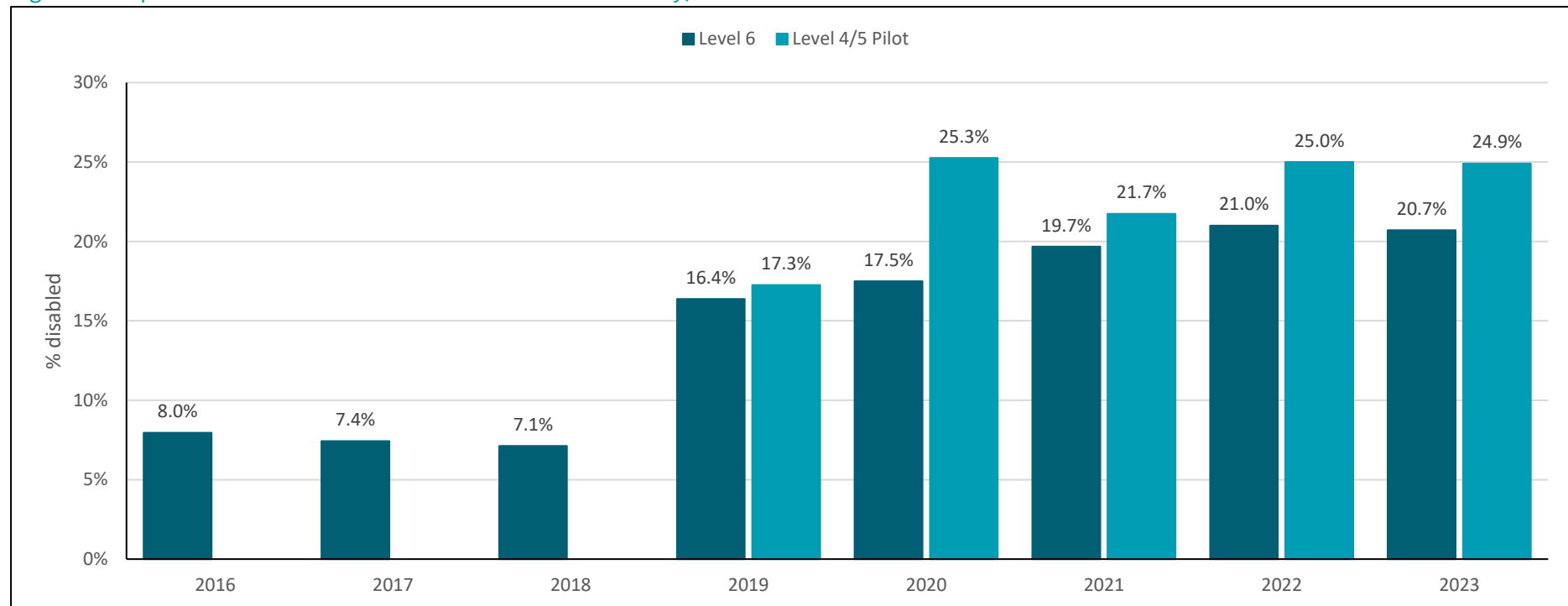
¹³ Please note level 4/5 Pilot did not start until 2019.

Disability

Like ethnicity, the proportion of FAs at SCQF level 6 self-identifying a disability decreased slightly this year, following an upward trend over the previous four years, recorded at 20.7% in 2023 down 0.3 percentage points from the previous year. Representation is similar at SCQF levels 4/5 at 24.9%, in line with results from the previous year.

Definitions of disability vary, and within this report Additional Support Needs and Learning Difficulties are included (incorporating dyslexia, dyspraxia, and any mental health issues). Learning providers have also improved how this data is collected from pupils. These figures are in line with the proportion of students at university (23.3%) and college (21.1%)¹⁴ who self-identified a disability in 2023.

Figure 9: Proportion of FA enrolments with self-declared disability, 2016 to 2023



¹⁴ <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/sfcst052023/>

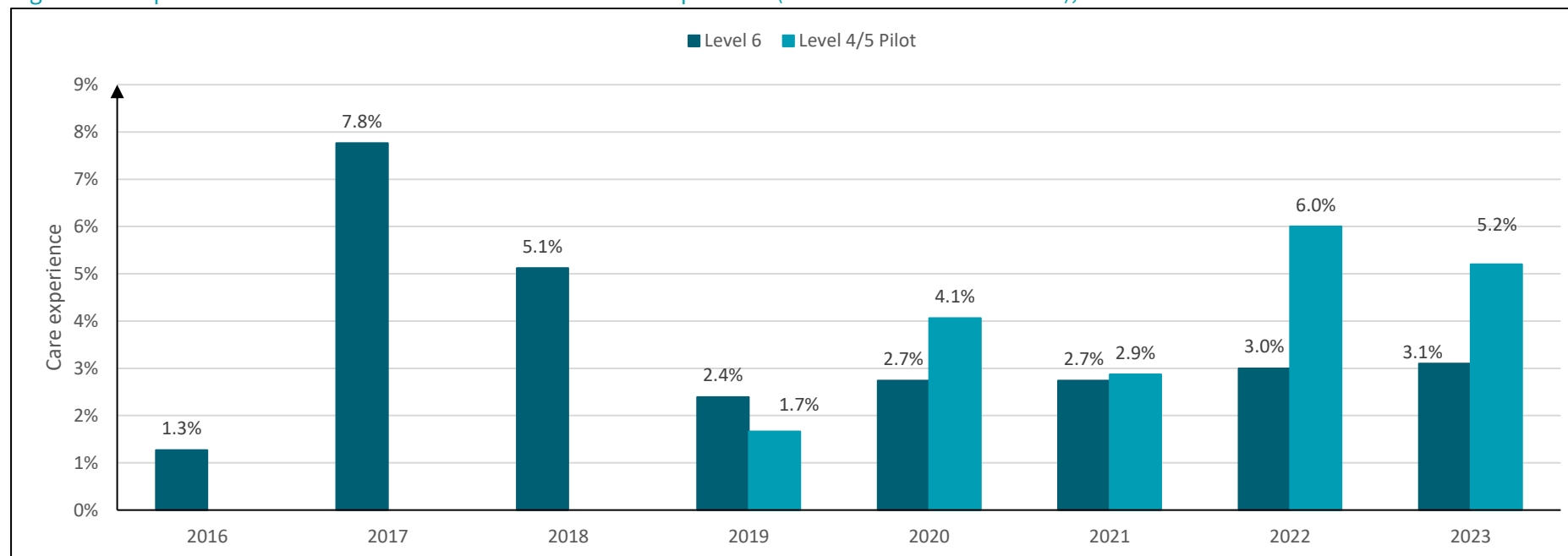
Care experience

In Scotland, 1.2%¹⁵ of the under 18 population is defined as ‘Looked After Children’.

In 2022, due to changes in the method of data capture, there was a high volume of pupils marked as ‘unknown’. Although still significant, this number reduced slightly in 2023. At SCQF level 6, around 15% of the total enrolments were marked as unknown and at SCQF level 4/5 Pilot the proportion was higher at 26%.

The percentage of care experienced FAs is calculated as a proportion of the total of pupils responding ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the set question. Those who do not answer or choose ‘prefer not to say’ (the unknowns) are excluded from that total. Therefore, caution is advised when comparing figures with previous years (prior to 2022), where the number of unknowns was considerably lower.

Figure 10: Proportion of FA enrolments with self-declared care experience (calculated as a % of known), 2016 to 2023



¹⁵ Children’s Social Work Statistics 2023-24 – Looked After Children - gov.scot

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of deprivation across all areas of Scotland, using a combination of financial and socio-economic indicators. It was updated in 2020, replacing the previous SIMD that was based on 2016 area data.¹⁶

It is important to note that the SIMD focuses on geographic areas and does not directly relate to individuals. Not all individuals who live in a deprived area will be deprived, while not all individuals who live in affluent areas will be affluent. Analysis of FA uptake by SIMD involved matching home address postcodes to SIMD data.

The primary driver of change has been the gradual increase in the number of schools and local authorities engaged in FA delivery, which increased from 113 schools in 2016 to 254 in 2023 for SCQF level 6 provision (see supplementary tables for full breakdown of school participation for levels 4, 5 and 6). As schools have designated catchment areas, enrolments by SIMD area are contingent on those schools offering FAs as part of subject choices.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of enrolments by SIMD area, ranked from most deprived (SIMD 1) to least deprived (SIMD 10). Historically, pupils studying at SCQF levels 4 and 5 were more likely to be from the most deprived areas. In 2023, however, this pattern shifted, with the greatest proportion of FAs (24%) coming from SIMD areas 6 and 7. At SCQF level 6, pupils undertaking SCQF level 6 FAs continued to be more likely to come from the least deprived areas.

¹⁶ SDS only started to report SIMD data for Foundation Apprentices in 2020.

Table 3: Number and proportion of FA enrolments by SIMD area

	2021				2022				2023			
	Cohort 6 level 6		Level 4/5 Pilot		Cohort 7 level 6		Level 4/5 Pilot		Cohort 8 level 6		Level 4/5 Pilot	
SIMD area	No. of FAs	% of total known	No. of FAs	% of total known	No. of FAs	% of total known	No. of FAs	% of total known	No. of FAs	% of total known	No. of FAs	% of total known
1 – most deprived	199	8.0%	227	14.2%	205	8%	260	12%	154	6.8%	208	9.3%
2	219	8.8%	214	13.3%	205	8%	250	12%	149	6.6%	231	10.4%
3	258	10.3%	186	11.6%	225	9%	235	11%	181	8.0%	234	10.5%
4	223	8.9%	164	10.5%	225	9%	235	11%	201	8.8%	260	11.7%
5	267	10.7%	168	10.8%	235	9%	235	11%	192	8.4%	250	11.2%
6	252	10.1%	174	9.4%	270	11%	220	10%	233	10.3%	269	12.1%
7	274	11.0%	151	8.9%	260	10%	245	11%	283	12.5%	264	11.8%
8	303	12.1%	143	9.1%	350	14%	215	10%	319	14.0%	257	11.5%
9	302	12.1%	125	7.8%	280	11%	180	8%	343	15.1%	165	7.4%
10 – least deprived	199	8.0%	52	3.2%	230	9%	75	3%	218	9.6%	92	4.1%
Unknown	-	-	3	-	5	-	10		2	-	4	-
Total	2,496		1,607		2,500		2,160		2,275		2,234	

Completion and achievement

This section provides details on the number of pupils who have completed their FA, relative to the number who began their FA in each cohort or year. Figures 11A and 11B show the proportion of pupils who achieved either their full FA qualification (meaning they did not leave their study early), achieved a partial qualification, or left without any achievement. Table 4 shows the breakdown of achievement data for cohorts 7 and 8. Achievement data for cohort 8 does not include pupils undertaking their SCQF Level 6 FA over two years as they had not completed their studies at the point of data capture.¹⁷ Data for these pupils is categorised as ‘Unknown – outcome not yet known’.

As with any programme of learning in school, we would expect to see pupils dropping out within the first few months as they change their minds about what they are interested in studying or where to focus their time and this has consistently accounted for around 20% of pupils each year, higher in 2020 due to COVID. In the last two years of reporting, this proportion dropped - currently recorded as 14.6% for 2023, with potential to fall further as more outcome data becomes available.

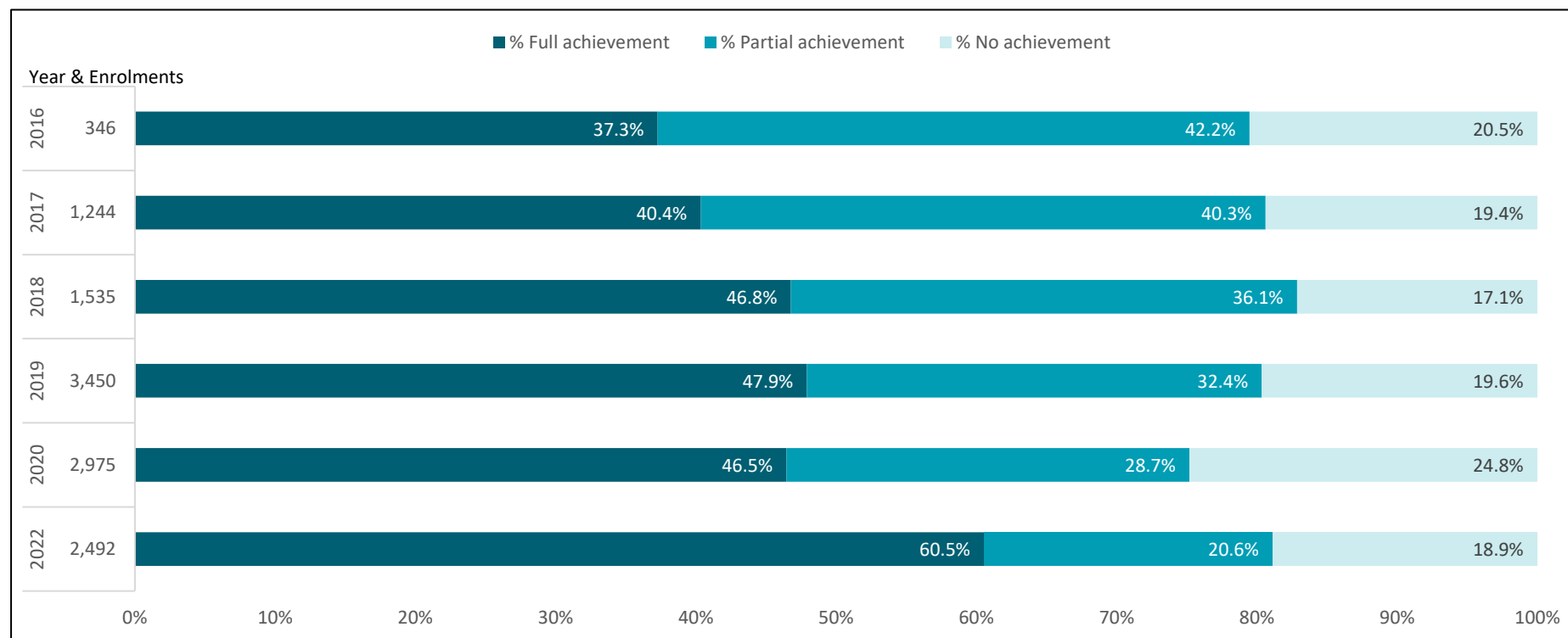
As achievement rates are expressed as a percentage of all enrolments, they include pupils who leave their FA early. We know that school pupils change their minds about the subjects they choose to study and, in some cases, leave before they have completed any component units or have completed only part of the qualification. In previous years, where data was collected about leaver destinations, it was found that most pupils remained in school or moved into further education.

Any enrolments that were funded by local authorities have been excluded from this section. As these enrolments are self-funded, local authorities are not required to provide data beyond enrolment information to SDS. Consequently, outcome data for these pupils is not available and therefore the total enrolment figure / denominator in the achievement data charts excludes them.

It has not been possible to fully reconcile achievement data for those pupils enrolled in 2021. This reflects the transition of college-delivered FAs from SDS to the SFC systems, leading to changes in data collection methodologies. As a result, 2021 achievement data is not included in this report.

¹⁷ The data for 2023/24 will be updated in future reports.

Figure 11A: FA known results at SCQF level 6, relative to enrolments, 2016 to 2022¹⁸¹⁹



When pupils either do not complete the course, or complete but do not achieve their full FA qualification, they are certificated through Qualifications Scotland for the components they have achieved. All achievement data is captured by learning providers and submitted to Qualifications Scotland.

¹⁸ Due to only a small number of pupils from 2020 having unknown results, they have been included in the denominator for disclosure control.

¹⁹ Full achievement includes Letters of Recognition, issued in lieu of some pupils being unable to complete 100% of the work-based elements of their FA due to COVID restrictions.

Figure 11B: Pilot FA known results at SCQF levels 4/5, relative to enrolments, 2019 to 2022²⁰

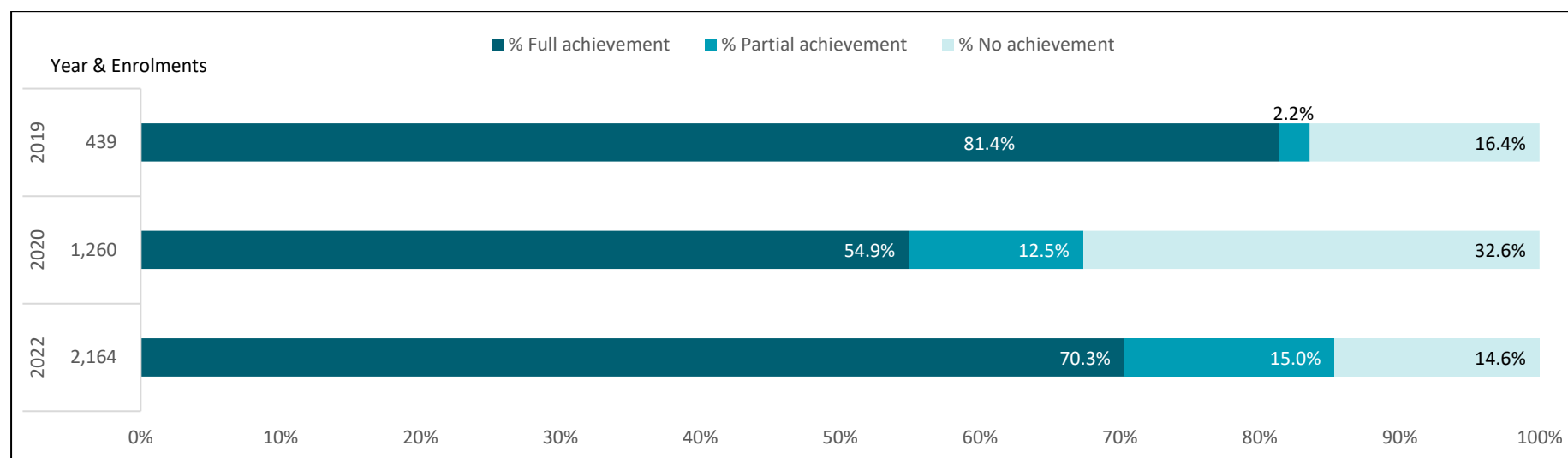


Table 4: FA Qualifications Cohort 7 and 8 (2022-2023)

Achievement	2022		2023	
	Cohort 7 level 6	Level 4/5 Pilot	Cohort 8 level 6	Level 4/5 Pilot
Full Qualification Achieved	1,504	1,455	1,194	1,627
Partial Achievement	511	311	247	150
No Achievement	469	303	304	369
Unknown – Outcome Not Known Yet	-	-	332	11
Unknown – No Student Outcome	8	-	-	-
Total	2,492	2,069	2,077	2,157

²⁰ Due to only a small number of pupils from 2019 and 2020 having unknown results, they have been included in the denominator for disclosure control.

Notes for readers

FA statistics in this report are provided in summary. More detailed information can be found within the supplementary tables, in line with our official statistics publications. Previously published reports can also be accessed via SDS's website.

It is important to note that pilot FAs at SCQF levels 4/5 and FAs at level 6, are part of the school curriculum and should not be directly compared to Modern Apprenticeships. School pupils choose to study a FA in the same way as they choose any other school subject.

Comparisons with other senior phase school qualifications are not possible as statistics for other school qualifications are calculated based on those presented for an exam, rather than those who enrol in a subject.

For the period covered in this report, due to the changes in delivery and accountability from 2021, SFC provided the data for college funded FAs and SDS provided the data for non-college funded FAs. Both organisations have conducted quality assurance exercises.

Please note that as our annual FA publication is based on a snapshot of data at a particular point in time, data is subject to minor change.

In 2022 all pupil numbers were rounded (either up or down) to the nearest multiple of 5. Therefore, the sum of a table column may not equal the total number of reported enrolments. Care should also be taken in comparing 2022 to previous years (and to 2023/24), as changes may be disguised by the rounded figures.

Percentages in this report may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Throughout the report, disclosure control is applied to figures less than

5 or where such figures can be identified through differencing. Where disclosure control has been applied an asterisk (*) is used in place of the actual figure.

Where individuals have ticked 'prefer not to say' or data is unknown, this is removed from percentage calculations. All percentage calculations therefore are based on known totals.

Any comments or suggestions regarding the content of this report are welcome and can be emailed to: user_feedback@sds.co.uk

Definitions for terminology used in this report:

- **Enrolments:** The number of new pupils registered on a FA or pilot FA framework at the beginning of each academic year.
- **Partial achievers:** Any apprentice who does not achieve the full qualification they were registered for but is recognised and certificated for achieving quantifiable component parts of their qualification.
- **Achievers:** Those who successfully complete all components of their FA or pilot FA group award.