

Exploring School-College Partnership Provision in Scotland

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Abbreviations

ASN – Additional Support Needs

CfE - Curriculum for Excellence

FA – Foundation Apprenticeship

HNC – Higher National Certificate

LA – Local Authority

NPA – National Progression Awards

QS – Qualifications Scotland (formerly the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SQA)

S4, S5, S6 – Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Year of Secondary school

SfW – Skills for Work

SCP – School-College Partnership

SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

UHI – University of the Highlands and Islands

Executive summary

Young people in Scotland follow the Curriculum for Excellence and can attend secondary school for up to 6 years. The first 3 years, called S1 to S3, are part of the ‘Broad General Education (BGE)’ phase with S4 to S6 known as the ‘Senior Phase’. During the Senior Phase, young people can study towards a variety of qualifications ranging from levels 1 to 7 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) though most undertake qualifications from SCQF levels 5 to 6 during this time¹.

During their Senior Phase, young people can opt to select a course from a ‘School College Partnership’ (hereafter SCP) which typically means that they attend college for part of their school week and undertake some vocational learning alongside their other school subjects. It is this SCP provision that we focus on here and the paper contains an analysis of the subjects and levels available as well as qualification type and size. The paper is part of a [wider project](#) on SCP provision which will also explore the characteristics of young people who undertake SCPs and how SCPs are experienced by learners and teaching staff.

Our findings reveal new insights about what is on offer through SCP provision – specifically:

Scale and variability

- Colleges, on average, have around 50 distinct opportunities for SCP provision. However, this number masks a significant variability in structure, qualifications, levels, and delivery approaches.
- High-volume providers are typically colleges with multiple campuses or those operating in rural areas with established remote delivery models. Low-volume providers include rural colleges without significant online offers and those in dense urban areas with more colleges nearby.

Access and progression pathways

- Most colleges concentrate their SCP offerings at SCQF Levels 5 and 6, with more limited provision available at other levels, though the specific mix varies by institution.
- The majority (54%) of SCP provision does not have entry requirements based on school year and is open to anyone in S4 to S6 (subject to other entry requirements). The rest is restricted to young people in particular school years – mostly S5 or S6.

¹ See Appendix 1 for information on how these levels compare to those in other parts of the UK and Europe.

- In general, the SCQF level of qualifications available corresponds to what would typically be available in schools for the majority of the cohort. However, around 38% of the overall SCP offer includes options at levels not typically available in school-based subjects for that school year.
- In-person delivery on college premises is typical however around 13% of SCP provision is available fully or partially remotely.

Qualification mix and “Locally Devised Options”

- The most common qualifications available in SCP provision are National Progression Awards (NPAs) (25%) and Skills for Work (SfW) courses (15%). Foundation Apprenticeships make up 12% of the national offer.

Vocational Qualifications – key facts

NPAs and **SfW** courses are internally assessed, ungraded vocational qualifications.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are externally assessed, ungraded vocational qualifications.

NPAs and **SVQs** are linked to National Occupational Standards in a particular vocational area.

Foundation Apprenticeships comprise an NPA, some units from an allied SVQ and a work placement.

- Qualifications on offer as part of SCPs vary in size with many options smaller and much larger than the typical 24 SCQF credit points for school-based qualifications.
- Around 25% of the offer comprises what we term “locally devised options” - programmes of study that have been specially constructed for SCP groups. These include programmes made up of two or more separate qualifications, partial qualifications and bespoke courses.

Subject breath and strategic gaps

- Over 50% of all opportunities are concentrated in four areas: Health, Public Services and Care; Retail and Commercial Enterprise; Arts, Media and Publishing; and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.
- Some of the other less well-represented subject areas are typically available to those undertaking SCPs via academic qualifications in schools (e.g., Languages, Sciences, and Social Sciences) but others (such as options in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care) can typically only be accessed via full-time college provision if not available via SCPs.

Introduction

This report presents findings from an in-depth analysis of School-College Partnership (SCP) provision across Scotland. In Scotland, SCPs have been in place since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2011. They offer opportunities for learners to combine academic and vocational study during the Senior Phase of their education (during school years S4 to S6) and typically involve young people being based at school for part of their week and at college for the other part.

As part of a broader research project examining SCPs for Senior Phase pupils, this paper presents an analysis of what qualifications, subject and levels are typically available from colleges in their SCP provision. Our analysis draws on publicly available information from college websites and publications, supplemented by interviews with SCP coordinators across Scotland conducted between May and August 2025. This paper contains important insights for policymakers and practitioners about SCP provision. A subsequent paper will expand on this picture by turning to the 'why' and the 'how', examining reasons the provision looks the way it does, and how a range of factors, including system-level structures and constraints, shape and challenge it. The wider project will explore these dynamics further in a series of specific case studies.

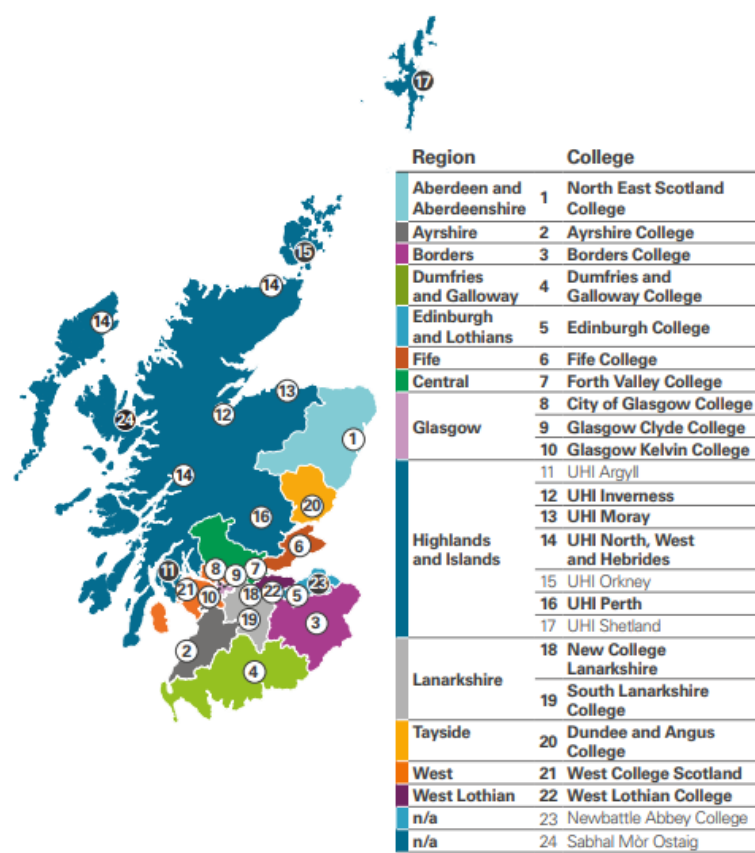
Our approach

We constructed a database of provision containing details of each unique course/programme available to young people as part of a college-based Senior Phase offer. We used a two-step process to do this, starting with consulting college web-pages and booklets and recording the information in these and second, checking this information with local college contacts. We recorded details of provision using public-facing college web-pages between January and August 2025 and, for each college, recorded what was available for academic year 2024/25.

Scotland has 25 colleges offering FE provision. Structural reforms to the sector in 2013 created 13 regions – most of which contain one general FE college (which may have multiple sites). There are 3 areas with multi-college arrangements – Glasgow, Lanarkshire and Highlands. The colleges in the Highland region are part of the larger tertiary institution University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Most of the 25 colleges offer a range of general FE provision but some are specialist and/or tertiary institutions – these are Newbattle Abbey College (specialising in adult residential education), Scotland's Rural College (tertiary institution specialising in land-based education) and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (tertiary institution specialising in Gaelic-medium education).

In practice, this means that most SCP provision in a given area will be arranged through one general FE college though sometimes different arrangements occur at the boundaries of regional areas and in the Glasgow and Lanarkshire regions. We have included any SCP provision being offered by any FE colleges in Scotland in our analysis but concentrate most on the provision being offered by the general FE colleges and those that are part of UHI. In practice, some colleges offer no SCP provision (Newbattle Abbey College) or very limited provision (Scotland’s Rural College and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig). For this reason, any reporting at the college level in this paper will exclude these 3 providers (but overall totals will include any opportunities they do offer). Figure 1 shows the locations of Scotland’s FE colleges and the wider regions they serve.²

Figure 1: Map of Scotland’s FE colleges (adapted from [Audit Scotland 2025, p8](#))



For each opportunity, we recorded the name of the course, the qualification and level associated with it (if applicable), the location of the provision (including the campus of the college, if applicable) and any

² Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) does not appear on this as it is classified as a Higher Education provider for funding purposes. It has campuses in West Lothian, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dumfries and Fife.

entry requirements or age/school stage restrictions on entry. From this, we were also able to derive a subject sector classification using the [Ofqual](#) (n.d.) subject sector codes.

We defined an opportunity as a course available **at one level at a single location** so that we could capture the full range of opportunities available to young people in different places and understand what levels, qualifications and subjects were available in different colleges. In many colleges, there are multiple campuses or arrangements with individual schools which can mean that the same qualification may be offered in different physical locations. For these cases, we recorded each instance as a separate opportunity to reflect the fact that those opportunities were being made available to different groups of young people. Some colleges also offer different qualifications within the same subject area as part of their Senior Phase offer and, even where there was evidence that this was being offered as part of a mixed-level class, we have recorded these as separate rows in the database. This was to ensure that we properly reflected the different levels available but does mean that the total number of opportunities we have recorded in our database does not exactly map on to the total number of classes or groups in SCPs nationally. Similarly, our database does not include student numbers and so all analysis refers to the share of opportunities rather than the proportions of pupils undertaking study at, for example, different levels. The number of places that are available is not typically publicised and so we were unable to include this in our analysis. In a further phase of the project, we will analyse administrative data which will allow us to determine more accurately how many places are taken up in each kind of SCP provision.

Scotland also has a national e-learning offer available to students across secondary education. This comprises resources for students to support self-study and revision, and it also includes some courses run by colleges for Senior Phase pupils which are available via the online learning platform e-Sgoil. We have included these courses in our database and classified them by the partner college.

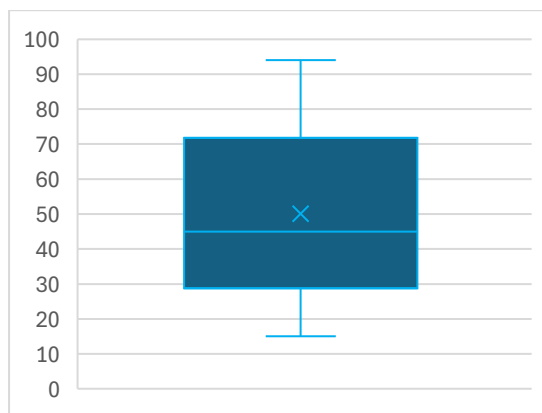
In general, most of our calculations (unless stated) refer to standard SCP provision that is open to any eligible learner. In most colleges, there are also supported education programmes for Senior Phase learners but these tend to operate on a referral and selective basis and are reserved for those with significant additional support needs (ASN).

1. Opportunities overall

1.1. Number of opportunities

All general FE colleges in Scotland offer some form of SCP provision. Our analysis shows that, on average, colleges have around 50 distinct opportunities in their school-college partnership provision. However, Figure 2 shows the high variability in the number of opportunities available. Those colleges with the highest numbers of opportunities tend to be those with multiple campuses where similar courses are run in different geographic locations and/or in rural areas where a higher percentage of provision is delivered remotely. Colleges with the smallest number of opportunities are a more heterogeneous group but include those in rural areas without significant online offers and those in areas close to other colleges (where, for example, schools may have SCP arrangements with more than one college).

Figure 2: Number of Opportunities per college (n=22 colleges)



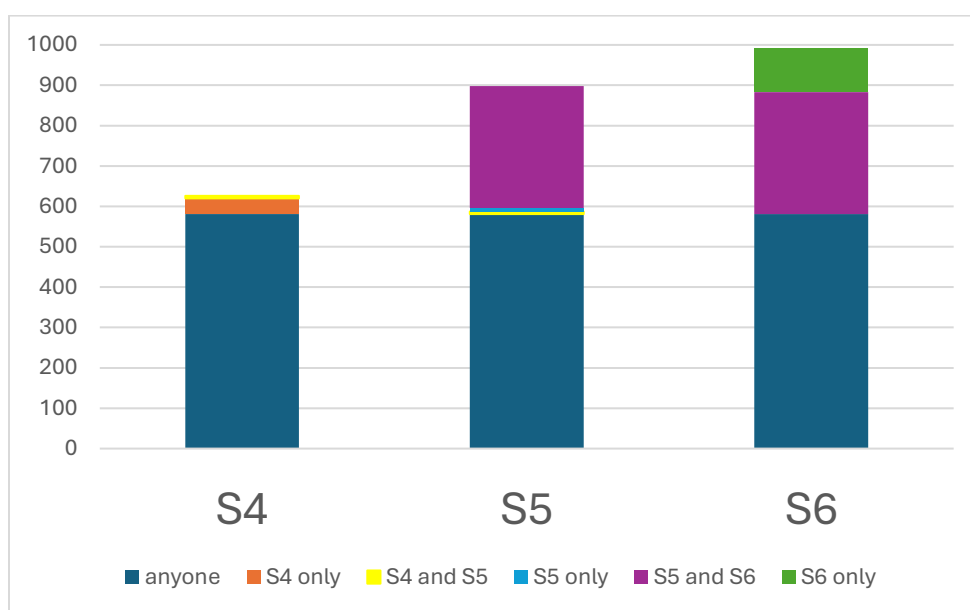
1.2. Opportunities by school year

Next, we examined the SCP provision available to those in different school years in the Senior Phase. Some of the provision mentioned school-year directly as part of entry conditions but, in other cases, we have derived this from qualification-based entry requirements. For example, some provision mentions having passed National 5 qualifications as a pre-requisite for entry and these are typically undertaken at the end of S4. Therefore, the majority of those in S4 would not meet these entry requirements.

From this analysis, we calculated that around 54% of SCP provision was open to anyone from S4 to S6. A further 30% was open to those in either S5 or S6 with around 11% open to those in S6 only. A small number of opportunities (a combined total of around 5%) were restricted to one school year only.

Figure 3 shows the number of opportunities, by school year, classified by age-based entry requirements. From Figure 3, we see that most provision accessible to those in S4 is open to anyone in the Senior Phase with a very small amount of provision classified as being for S4 only. For S5, we can see that almost all the opportunities are either open to any school year or deemed suitable for those in S5 or S6. Those in S6 have access to the greatest number of opportunities with around 11% of this S6 only provision.

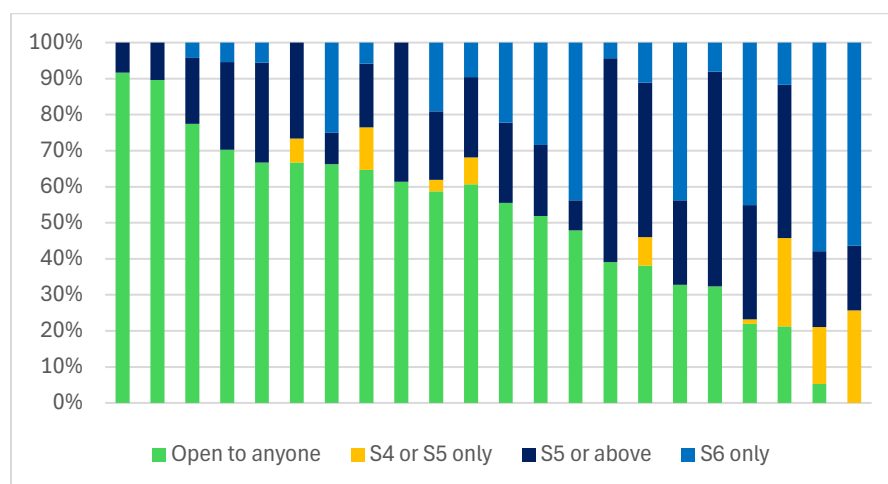
Figure 3: Number of opportunities open to students in each school year



In the case of S6 only provision, whilst there is a relationship between this restriction and the level of qualification on offer, it is not simply that all the highest-level SCP provision is restricted to this age group nor that all this provision is at the highest SCQF levels. We can see some evidence of that here, in Figure 3, as the majority of provision open to S6 is available to those in lower school years too. Later in the paper, in Section 3, we explore the overlap between these age-based restriction and the levels of qualifications available as part of SCP provision in more detail.

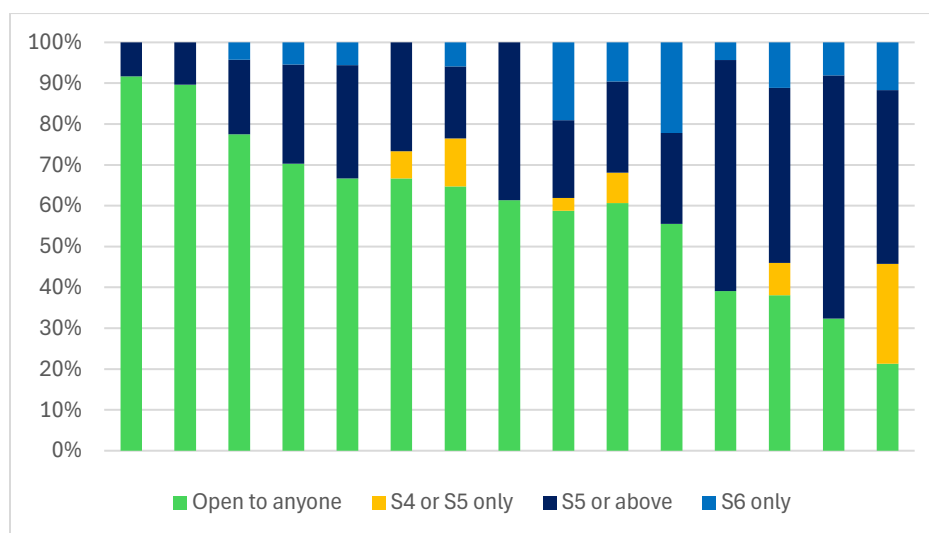
Next, we explore (in Figure 4) the extent to which the mix of provision, by age restriction, in individual colleges mirrors this national pattern. Figure 4 shows that all colleges have some provision available for S4, S5 and S6 but the precise mix of this is very variable. Most colleges have no age restriction for at least 50% of their provision and one has age restrictions attached to all its provision. In some colleges, the majority of their provision is restricted to those in S5 or S6. This will have implications for who is attending SCP provision in different colleges and shows that, whilst some are aiming to provide a range of options for those in S4-6, others are concentrating on providing options for those in S5 and S6.

Figure 4: Mix of provision by age-based access policy, per college



In the colleges that make up the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), a large percentage of the opportunities restricted to S6 only are degree modules offered as a remote learning option. UHI is an integrated tertiary institution with degree-awarding powers made up of a network of colleges and institutes. As a result, it has the capability to offer some of its own undergraduate modules as an option rather than standard QS qualifications that most other colleges use. To help us better understand how predominant S6 only provision is in the other colleges around Scotland, we have created Figure 5 – showing the mix of provision by age in colleges other than UHI. From Figure 5, we can see that over two thirds of other colleges have provision that is restricted to S6 only and, for some, this makes up around 20% of their total offer.

Figure 5: Mix of provision by age-based access policy, per college (excluding UHI colleges)



1.3. Remote options in the provision

In general, most SCP provision is offered as in-person learning on college premises. A very small amount (less than 2%) takes place in schools – mainly in rural areas and for classroom-based subjects or those where only limited equipment is needed. However, there are some online learning opportunities available as SCPs. Overall, around 13% of SCP opportunities are available wholly or predominantly online. The vast majority of this provision, around 85%, is offered by colleges that are part of UHI and young people typically join classes from their school premises as an alternative to travelling long distances in rural areas. Very few SCP options are run as hybrid online/in-person courses.

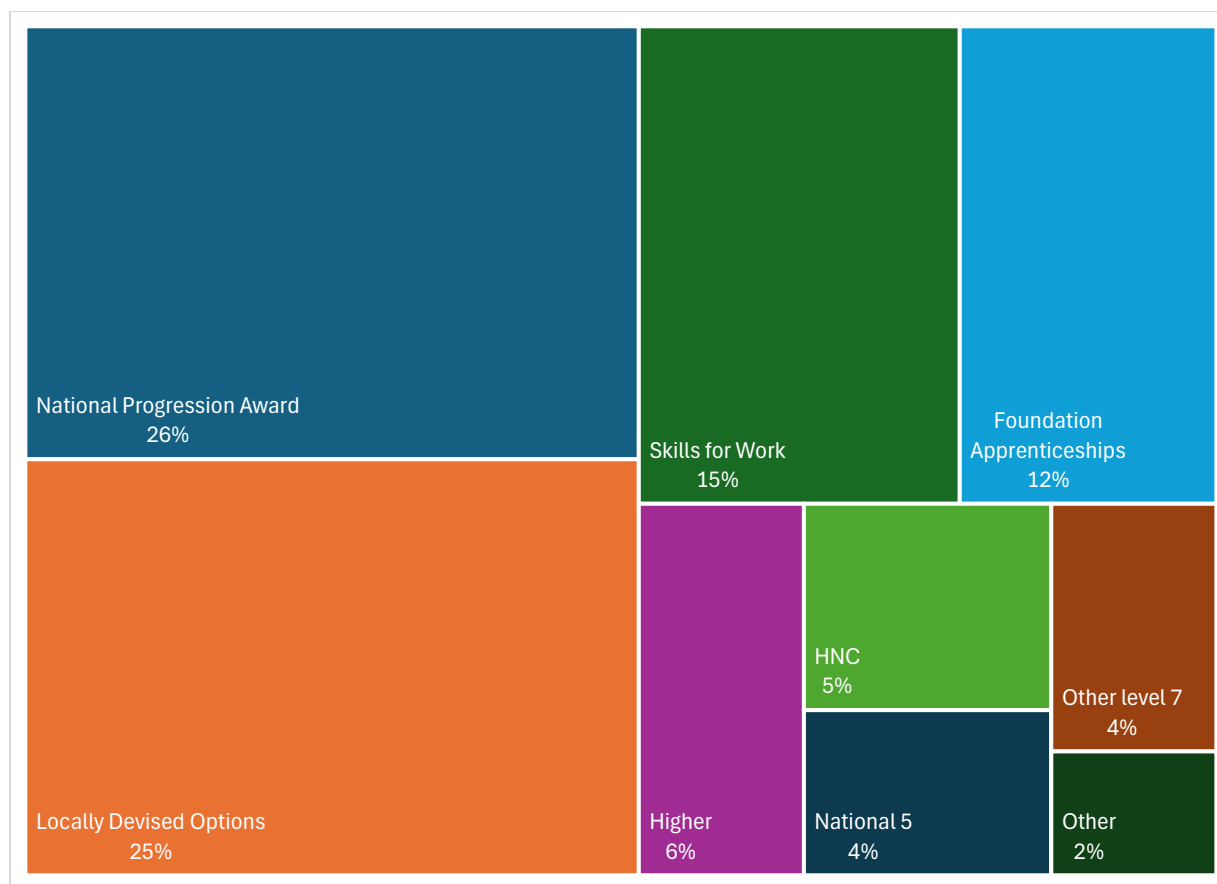
Some of this online provision operates in the same way as in-person classes i.e. the sessions are timetabled at the regular time for SCP in that area, classes are synchronous with a dedicated tutor and young people are part of a clear cohort which may include some others in their own school. However, some online SCP provision operates more asynchronously, is open to any young person in Scotland and can be accessed in addition to another SCP option. In the companion paper to this one, which explores why SCP offers are constructed as they are, we also discuss emerging evidence that some online SCP provision is being accessed by those who are being home educated and not part of a regular school cohort.

2. Qualifications available in SCP provision

In this section, we explore the qualifications available in SCP provision. Scotland has one main awarding body for examinations, Qualifications Scotland (previously the Scottish Qualifications Authority), and most of the options for young people in the Senior Phase, regardless of whether they undertake an SCP or not, will involve Qualifications Scotland (QS) qualifications. These can include more traditional, academic qualifications such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher but also vocational qualifications such as National Progression Awards (NPA), Skills for Work (SfW) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ). Colleges also use other awarding bodies for some of their subject areas and may, therefore, have moved away from offering QS qualifications in some departments. We explore here what is on offer as part of SCP provision. Figure 6 shows the percentage of the total SCP offer by qualification type. From this, we can see that 58% of the opportunities are complete vocational qualifications including NPA, SfW, Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Foundation Apprenticeships. Foundation Apprenticeships in Scotland are a route that combines an NPA, units from a related SVQ and a work

placement. Around 14% of the opportunities, however, involve academic qualification types such as National 5 and Higher. Typically, these are offered in subjects that are often not available in school such as childcare. A small number of these academic opportunities at higher levels are remote learning degree modules offered by UHI.

Figure 6: Percentage of the overall SCP offer by qualification or programme type



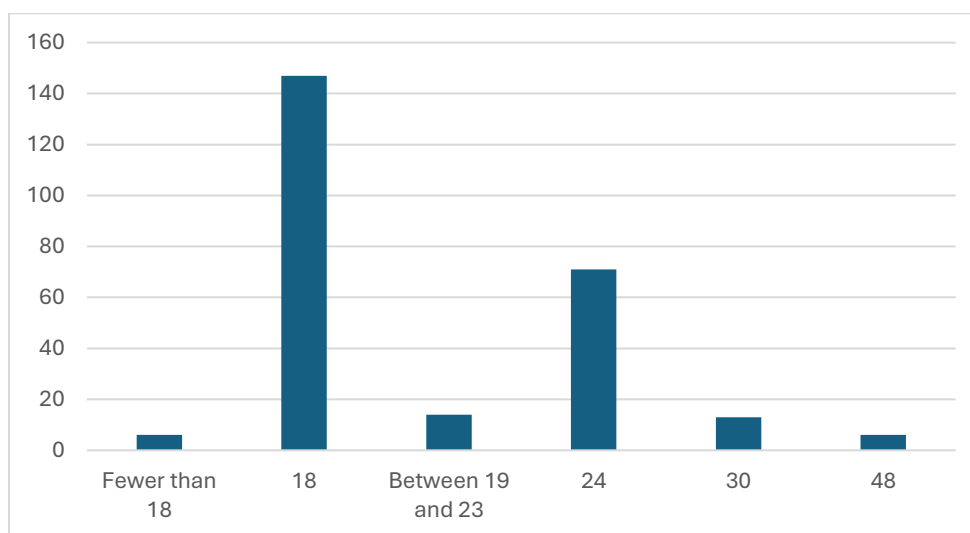
However, around a quarter of the opportunities do not map exactly on to one qualification. We term these ‘Locally Devised Options’. In practice, this is quite a heterogeneous category and includes partial qualifications, combinations of more than one qualification and programmes that have been devised by the college specially for learners on SCP routes and often these are introductory programmes to particular vocational areas. Some specific examples in our database include programmes of study comprising: an NPA in Software Development and an NPA in Cyber Security; a City and Guilds Entry Level 1 Award in Construction plus additional activities; and some units from the HNC in Childcare. All of these Locally Devised Options in our database have a formal SCQF level attached to them. Many schools and local authorities require all SCP provision to carry an official level and size so that it can be factored into measures of attainment at school and LA level.

For some locally devised options, it has been quite difficult to ascertain whether they contain units from other qualifications or have been entirely locally devised by the college. For others, the guidance to learners includes explicit reference to units or the qualification for which the SCP provision forms part. What we are able to say with certainty, however, is that a sizeable amount of the SCP provision has had to be devised because suitable whole qualifications were not available, not appropriate or did not fit the time available for SCP well. A particular example of this concerns SVQ qualifications which are generally not possible to deliver in their entirety within a SCP framework meaning that some colleges choose to use some of their component units to make up their SCP provision in particular subject areas.

Many of the qualifications within the types shown in Figure 6 are the same 'size'. In Scotland, the size of most qualifications can be expressed as a number of SCQF points where one SCQF credit point equates to a notional 10 learning hours. Skills for Work courses, National 5 and Higher courses, in all subjects, are all 24 SCQF credit points. Foundation Apprenticeships (FA), because they contain more than one qualification, are larger – ranging from 51 to 87 SCQF credit points. HNCs are larger still at 96 SCQF credit points. As best we can tell, the range of offers in the category Locally Devised Options vary in size from some relatively small awards to ones almost as large as FAs and HNCs.

National Progression Awards also vary in size. They must be a minimum of 12 SCQF credit points but can be more than four times the size of this. Figure 7 shows the size of these in the SCP offer by SCQF credit point value. It shows that the majority are 18 SCQF credit points and that most others are between 19 and 24 credit points. There are a small number of options under 18 credit points but this is uncommon. The larger NPAs are also relatively uncommon. The largest available, at 48 credit points, would represent an additional 300 hours of learning compared to one of 18 credit points which may explain why these are only available in a small number of colleges. It is likely that special timetabling measures will be in place to allow learners to complete these larger qualifications and this may not be possible in many colleges.

Figure 7: Number of NPAs in the SCP overall offer by SCQF point size

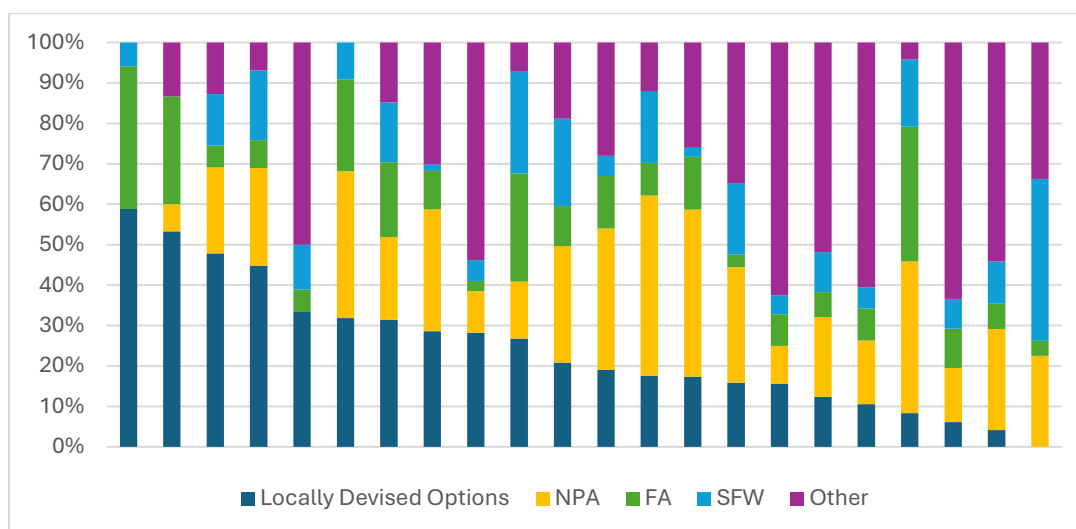


A final thing to note about many of the qualifications on offer from Qualifications Scotland is that they have a 'group award' structure which usually stipulates that a collection of mandatory and sometimes also optional units are taken up to the group award's total SCQF credit point value. This can mean that the combinations of units taken whilst studying an NPA, for example, may differ. There are only a very small number of cases where this would affect the SCQF credit points awarded to a learner but, in cases where optional units are a possibility, it can affect the overall content and orientation of the qualification. We can see evidence from our database of some colleges trying to signal this to learners in the names they give to their courses (e.g. by not simply using the qualification's formal name) and/or by specifying the units that they will be studying. As this information is not available for most entries in the database, however, it has not been possible to investigate it more systematically but this is an area that we plan to explore in more depth in the case study phase of the research.

If we look now at the mix of qualification types on offer by college, we can explore how similar or different the offers are. Figure 8 shows the mix of the most common qualification types and percentage of Locally Devised Options, by college. It shows that individual colleges have very different mixes of qualification types on offer. For example, even though NPAs make up around a quarter of the overall SCP offer, in some colleges they account for around 40% of the offer whilst in other colleges, they barely feature at all. Colleges also make differing use of 'Other' qualifications as part of their SCP offer. To make Figure 8 more interpretable, we have put all other qualifications from

Figure 6 into a larger 'Other' category. These make up just under 20% of the total national offer but we can see from Figure 8 that they form a very large part of some colleges' SCP offers.

Figure 8: Mix of provision by qualification/programme type, per college



The ‘other’ category here predominantly contains qualifications of 24 SCQF credit points and above. This could mean that some colleges’ SCP offers contain, on average, much larger qualifications than others. We explored this as best we could given that it is not possible to accurately estimate the size of Locally Devised Options across the whole database. Using SCQF credit points for known qualifications, we calculated the average size of qualifications on offer by college (excluding Locally Devised Options) and a summary of this is available in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Average size, in SCQF points, of qualifications in SCP offers, per college

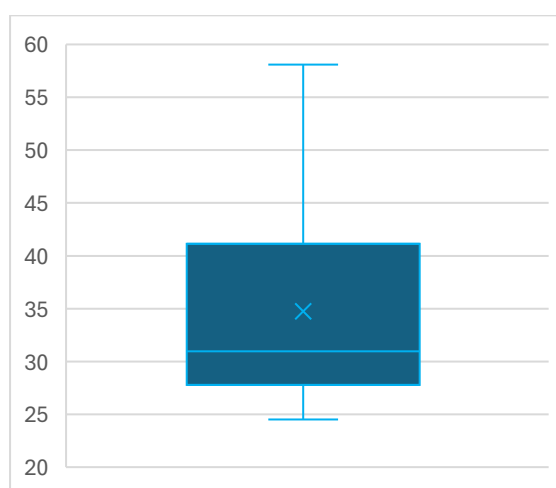


Figure 9 is a boxplot of the average size, in SCQF points, of each college’s SCP opportunities. It shows that the average size of standard qualifications offered as part of SCP provision, in SCQF tariff points, is around 34 (the blue cross) and that most providers have opportunities, on average, that range from

around 27 to 41 SCQF points (the dark blue box). However, some colleges offer opportunities that are, on average, much larger – up to around 58 SCQF points – and others much smaller at around 24 SCQF points. In places where the average is higher, there tends to be a large proportion of Foundation Apprenticeship provision which typically has to be timetabled differently, over multiple days, to account for the larger sizes of its underpinning qualifications and the need to undertake a work placement.

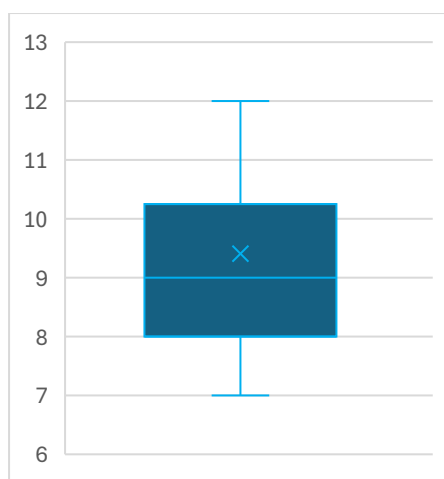
Whilst many options available will be of a similar size to other qualifications young people are taking at school, many of the options available as part of SCP are of different sizes. Overall, we can see that some options available as part of SCP provision involve significantly more learning and assessment than others. Part of what we hope to explore in the case studies is how young people are experiencing this and whether balancing qualifications of different sizes, sometimes with different assessment loads, is something that is challenging for them and/or whether participation in an SCP gives them the opportunity to focus their attention on larger qualifications in subjects of interest.

3. Organisation of provision by subject category

In this section, we explore the subject areas on offer as part of SCP provision. We used the Ofqual subject sector categories to classify opportunities by subject area to help us to understand which broad subject areas are typically available in SCP provision. For this analysis, we have excluded ‘Preparation for Life and Work (PLW)’ as, for SCP provision, this tends to mainly comprise supported education provision for young people with additional support needs (ASN). Whilst some of this provision was advertised on college websites with details available that could be added to our database, in other areas, this provision operates more on a referral basis and the young people attending it may have been in some form of college-supported education before their Senior Phase. We were also able to determine that only a very small number of opportunities in SCP provision could be classified in the subject category of ‘Education and Training’ and so we have removed this as well. There was some SCP provision available in each of the other 12 subject categories.

Figure 10 shows the number of subject categories (excluding PLW and ‘Education and Training’) available as part of SCP provision in different colleges. The majority have between 8 and 11 subject categories on offer – indicating that a wide range of subject types are typically available. Two colleges’ SCP provision had something in all 12 subject categories available.

Figure 10: Number of subject areas in SCP provision, per college

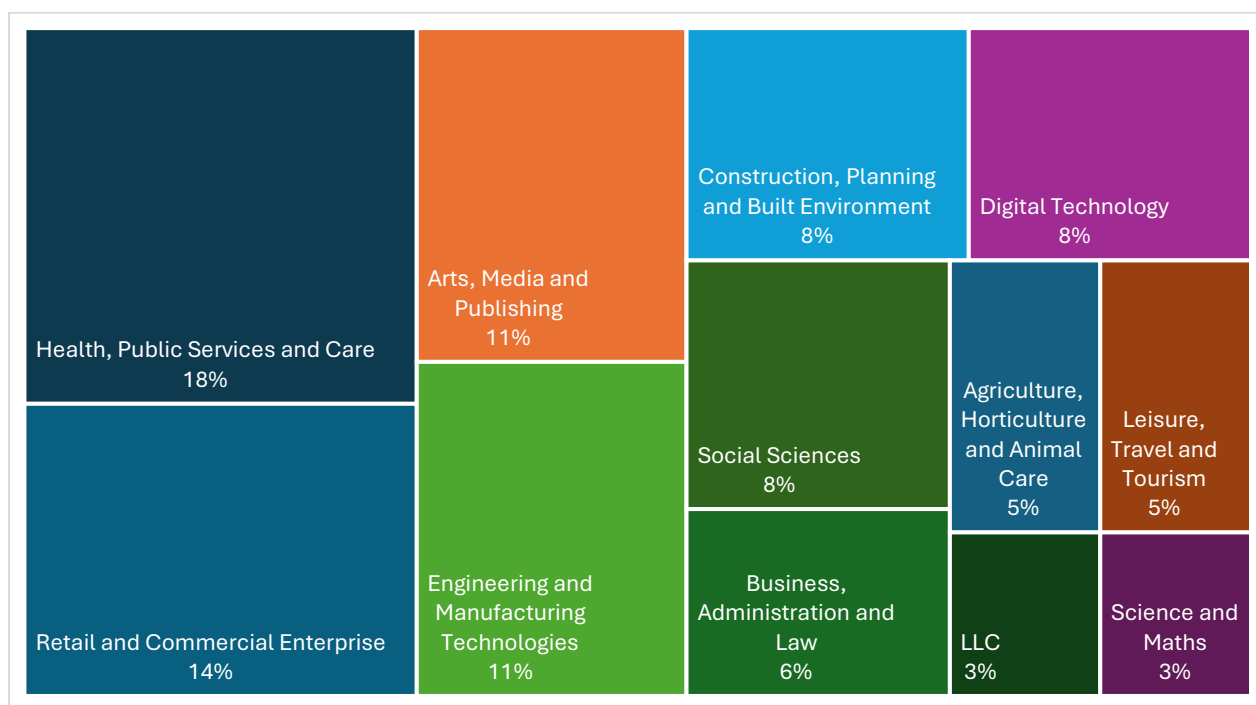


Some subject areas, because they are available in almost all colleges’ SCP provision, accounted for a greater share of the opportunities on offer. Figure 11 shows over half the opportunities in SCP provision were in four main subject areas: ‘Health, Public Services and Care’, ‘Retail and Commercial Enterprise’,

‘Engineering and Manufacturing and Technologies’ and ‘Arts, Media and Publishing’. Most other subject areas accounted for between 5 and 8% of the total with ‘Science and Mathematics’ and ‘Languages, Literature and Culture (LLC)’ accounting for 3% each.

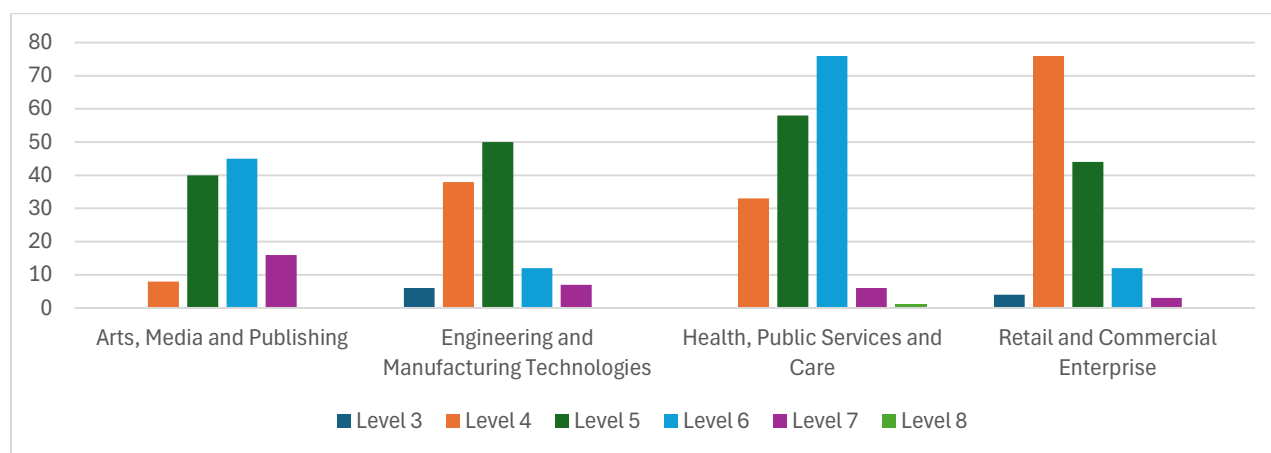
It is perhaps not surprising that these subject areas account for the lowest percentages of SCP opportunities since these are subject areas that are more likely to be offered in school. Therefore an absence of these in SCP provision should not be taken as a sign that these subjects are not generally available for young people during Senior Phase. However, for subject areas such as ‘Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care’, which includes qualifications related to the land-based and aquaculture sectors, there is unlikely to be an equivalent available in school meaning that, where SCP provision in this is not available, a young person would need to access a full-time college course instead.

Figure 11: Percentage of the overall SCP offer by subject area



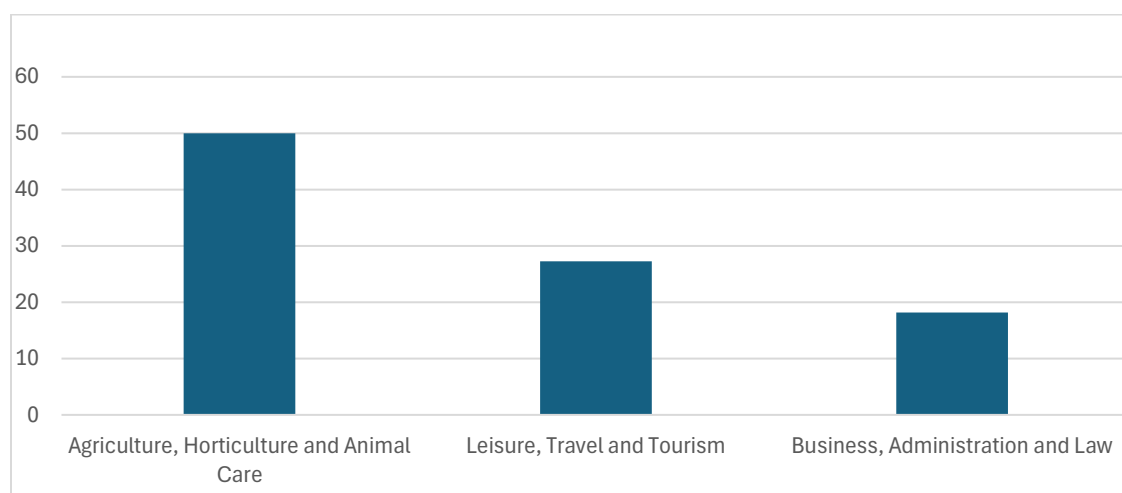
Part of the reason for the large number of opportunities in the four most predominant subject areas is that these subject areas are being offered at a range of levels across SCP provision. Figure 12 shows the range of levels available for the most common SCP subject areas. From this, we can see, for example, that courses are available at SCQF levels 4-7 somewhere in all of these areas and also sometimes at levels 3 and 8. By contrast, in subject areas such as ‘Business...’ and ‘Social Sciences’, a narrower range of levels is available (SCQF 5-7).

Figure 12: Levels available in the most common subject areas



Some of the most predominant subject categories are found in all SCP provision but there are specific subject categories not available in some colleges at all. Figure 13 shows, for a selection of subject categories, the percentage of colleges without something in this category in their SCP provision. We have focussed on those most aligned to vocational subject areas for the purposes of this discussion and have excluded subject categories included in all SCP provision ('Health, Public Services and Care' and 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise') or where only one college does not provide this ('Arts, Media and Publishing', 'Digital Technology' and 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies').

Figure 13: Percentage of colleges without this subject in their SCP provision



From this, we can see that 50% of colleges do not have options in 'Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care'. Where this is available, it tends to be in rural areas and this may relate to challenges of funding this kind of provision when there is inconsistent uptake as mentioned in the [Independent Commission for](#)

[Land-Based Learning Review](#). Almost 30% do not have options in ‘Leisure, Travel and Tourism’ which not only includes ‘Travel and Tourism’ courses themselves but also Sport, Exercise and Fitness courses which, in the areas where this is not offered as part of SCP, will likely be offered in schools instead. Similarly, though there are a variety of vocational qualifications in Business and Administration type subjects available, around 20% of SCP provision does not include this which, again, may suggest that, in some areas, that this provision is being offered in school.

So far, we have explored the qualifications and subjects available in SCP provision as well as the numbers of opportunities available and how these are (or are not) restricted to certain school years. Of course, there are some dependencies between these features that are worth exploring here too. One of these is the relationship between subject area and qualification size. We have seen already that qualifications on offer in SCP provision vary in size and whilst this is partly related to their level and qualification type, it is also related to their subject area.

Figure 14 shows the average size of SCP opportunities by subject area as compared with the overall average size of SCP options. As before, we have excluded Locally Devised Options from these calculations and focussed only on qualifications where the size is known. We can see that qualifications in Engineering particularly tend to be larger than those in other subject areas but this is also the case for those in Business subjects and, to a lesser extent, in Leisure subjects, Science and Maths and Arts subjects. At the other end of the scale, those opportunities in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care tend to be smaller – mainly because a large number of these opportunities are aligned to an 18 SCQF credit NPA in Rural Skills.

Figure 14: Average size of qualifications available in SCP provision, by subject area (overall average shown by orange line)

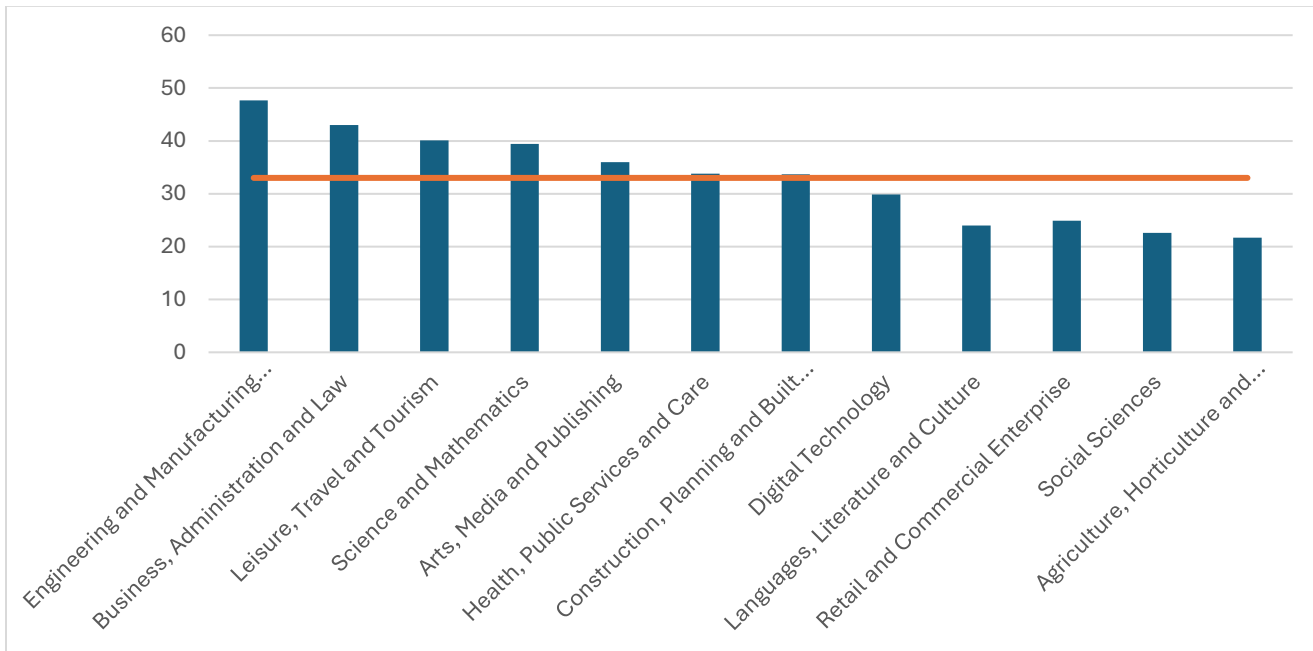


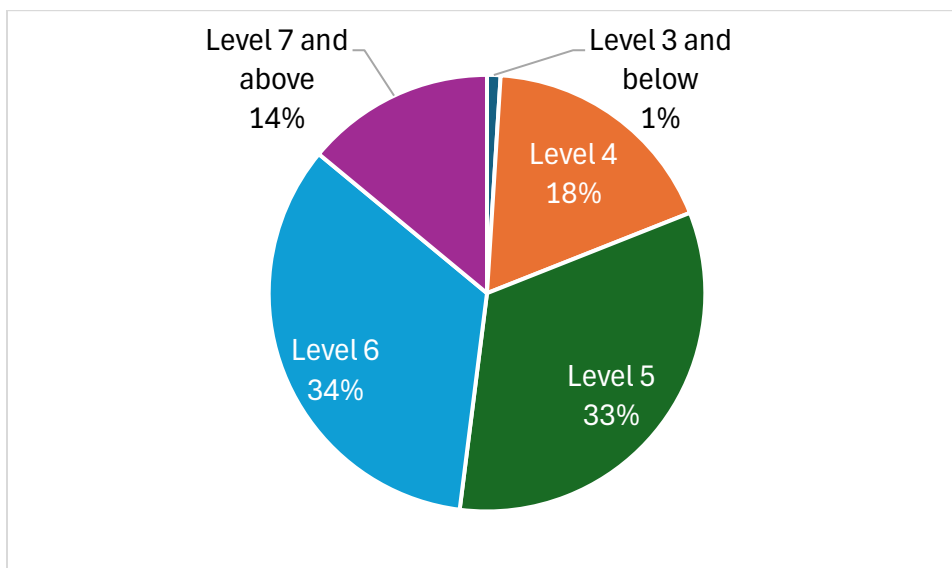
Figure 14 suggests that available qualifications and their size may partially explain the subjects on offer as part of SCP provision. In the companion paper to this, which explores the rationale for the design of the SCP offer in different colleges, we discuss the logistical challenges of including larger qualifications as part of SCPs. Several coordinators explained that, once travel and school holidays were factored in, it could be challenging to offer larger qualifications. In part, this could explain why Engineering courses, for example, make up a relatively small amount of SCP provision despite having no obvious analogue in school provision. In our case study phase, we aim to explore to what extent these logistical factors are affecting the nature of provision in different areas.

4. Levels available in SCP provision

As noted earlier, SCP provision, in line with other Senior Phase provision, is mainly available at SCQF levels 4 to 6 (see Appendix 1 for a comparison to the RQF and EQF). There is some provision at Levels 1-3 but the majority of this is supported education provision for young people with additional support needs (ASN). Not all of this is advertised in the same way as other SCP provision and some operates on a more referral basis and some operates across a wider age range than S4-S6. For the rest of this section, we focus on SCP provision that is not reserved for those with additional support needs (ASN).

Figure 15 shows that, nationally, around 85% of provision is available at SCQF levels 4-6 with around 14% available at SCQF levels 7 or above. This distribution reflects decisions by some colleges not to offer much or any provision at levels 4 or below or at levels 7 and higher whilst all have some provision at levels 5 and 6. A very small amount of provision (around 1%) is available at Level 3 or below.

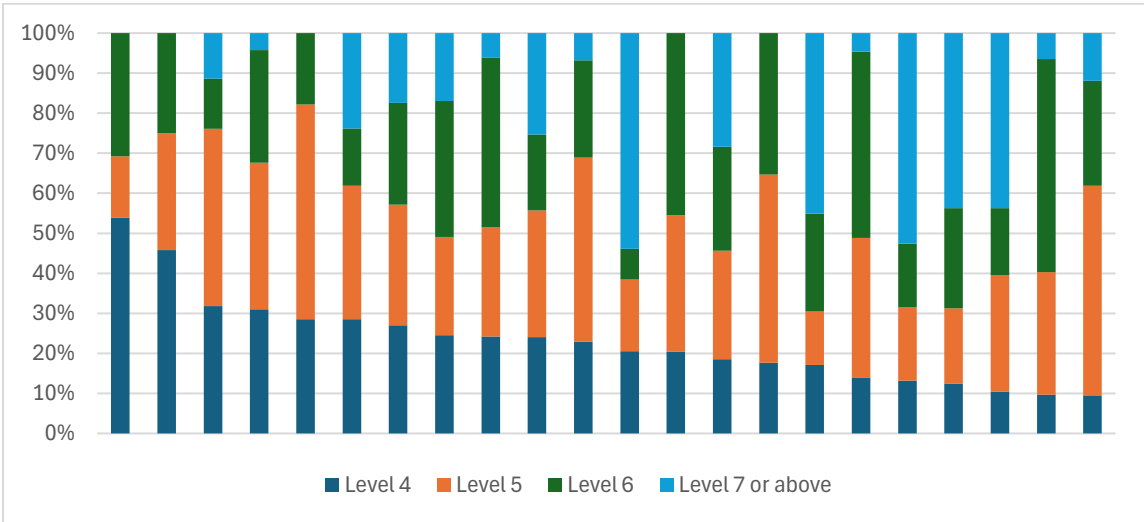
Figure 15: Percentage of overall SCP provision by SCQF level



To explore whether these national figures reflect local mixes of provision by level, we constructed Figure 16 which shows the percentage of each college's SCP offer at Levels 4 and above. We have excluded provision at Levels 3 and below from this figure to allow us to concentrate on standard provision that is open to any learner and because some colleges may erroneously appear to have no provision at Levels 3 and below but they will have supported education that may not be advertised as part of their wider SCP offer. From Figure 15, we see different approaches to offering provision at the highest and lowest levels typical for SCP. In some colleges, more than 50% of their provision is Level 4 but in others, there is no

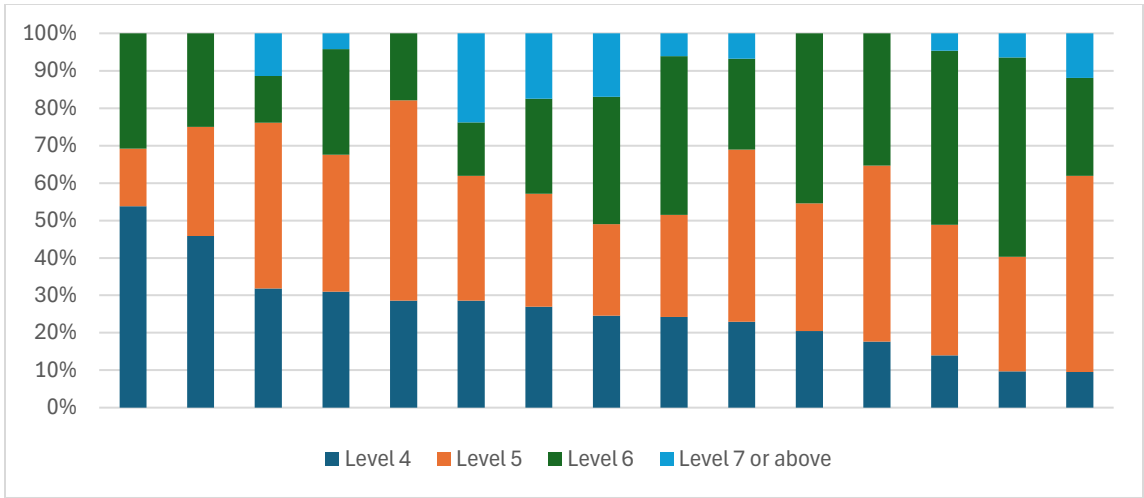
level 4 provision. Similarly, some colleges do not offer any provision at Level 7 but, for others, it is a significant part of their offer.

Figure 16: Mix of provision by SCQF level, per college



As before, we have also created a version of the figure that excludes UHI colleges, to help us better understand how predominant Level 7 provision is in the other colleges around Scotland. In Figure 17, we can see that, for around one third of these colleges, there is no Level 7 provision, for another third it makes up between 1 and 10% of the offer and for the other third it makes up over 10% of the SCP offer. For those with more than 10% of the offer at Level 7, there are different overall mixes of levels in their provision. In one case, most of the provision is at Level 5 with similar amounts at Levels 6 and 7. In two others, there is a comparatively small amount of provision at Level 6. The other two cases have a more even spread of options at Levels 4 to 7.

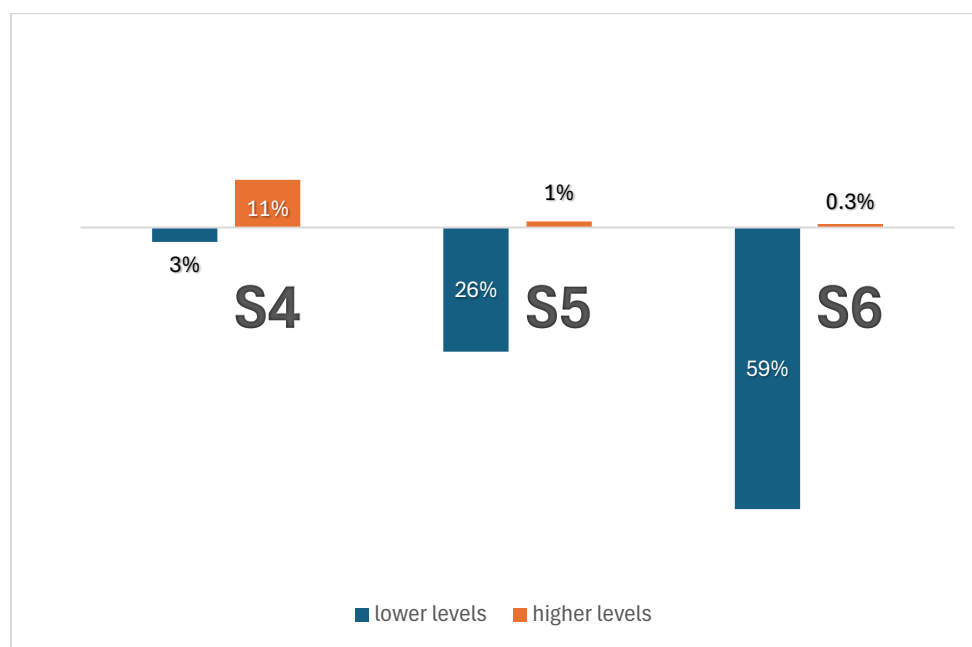
Figure 17: Mix of provision by SCQF level, per college (excluding UHI colleges)



Overall, we see that the mixes of provision by level are very different in each college but there are some general points worth noting. First, in those colleges with lower percentages of Level 4 provision, there tends to be higher percentage of Level 5 provision. This may reflect a deliberate policy around levels of course offered or may simply arise because of the particular qualifications and subjects that are being offered in their SCP provision. Similarly, in places with high percentages of Level 6 provision, there tends to be a lower proportion of Level 7 provision which may also reflect a deliberate decision around levels offered or the result of subject/qualification decisions. We discuss the particular qualifications on offer in more detail in Section 4 but the vast majority of those available at Level 7 (around 92%) are vocational qualifications which would not typically be available in schools meaning that decisions to offer/not offer these will be affecting the nature of Level 7 provision available in different areas. Where SCP options at Level 7 are not available, the most likely Level 7 options available to young people who are still at school will be academic qualifications such as Advanced Highers.

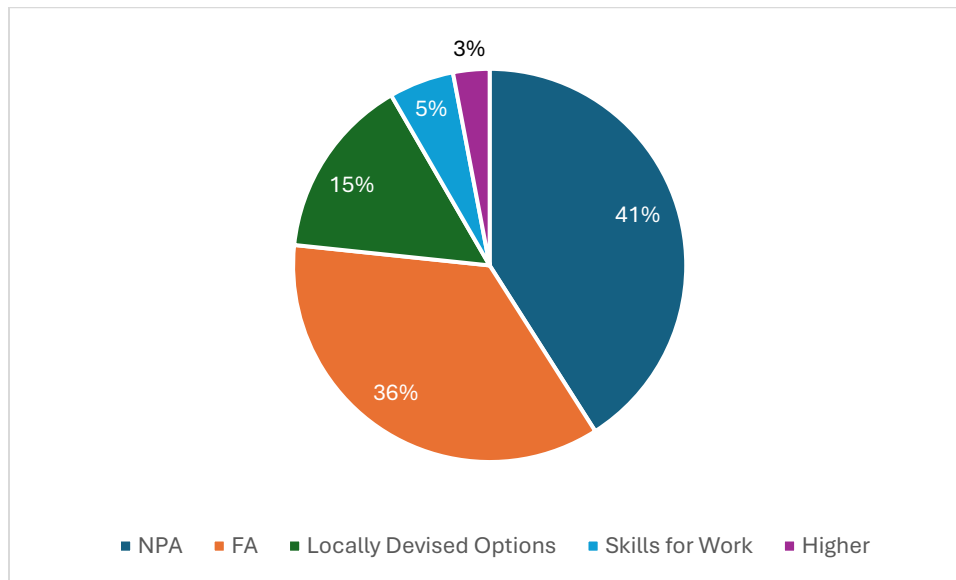
Next, we explore to what extent SCP provision is making different levels of study available to young people that would be typically available in school. For pupils with no significant Additional Support Needs (ASN) who undertake their Senior Phase in a wholly school-based route, it would be typical to undertake qualifications/study at SCQF levels 4-5 in S4, at levels 5-6 in S5 and at levels 6-7 in S6. Given this, we can examine the SCP provision open to students in S4, S5 and S6 to understand whether this provision is creating the possibility to study at levels that might not be typically available at school. For these calculations, we have again excluded all provision that is specifically for learners with additional support needs (ASN) as this not typically available to any student. In practice, this means that there are only a small number of options at level 3 included in the calculations and none at levels 2 or below. We show the percentage of provision open to students in different Senior Phase school years that is available at levels lower and higher than typically available in school in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Percentage of provision available at levels 'different' to usual, by school year



Overall, 38% of SCP provision is available at levels different from those typically available in school. In Figure 17, we see that around 11% of the SCP provision that is accessible to those in S4 is available at levels that are higher than is typical in school but very little provision that is open to those in S5 and S6 is available at levels typically higher than school. For S6 pupils, this is perhaps not surprising as provision would need to be SCQF level 8 or higher, equivalent to 2nd year of university or above, to qualify for this. There are a small number of SCP options at SCQF level 8 but these are very rare (and are all Locally Devised Options comprising some units at Level 8 rather than full qualifications). For S5 pupils, however, provision at SCQF level 7 would qualify but there is only a small amount of this that is not restricted to S6 pupils only. All of the opportunities open to S4 at Levels higher than usual are at Level 6. If we exclude ESOL courses, Figure 19 shows that around 41% of these are NPA courses, 36% are Foundation Apprenticeships and the rest are Locally Devised Options, Skills for Work courses or Highers. These are all qualifications that can be and are offered by schools and local authorities, to varying extents despite being vocational qualifications. As part of the continuing work on the wider project, we are exploring to what extent NPAs are typically available in schools as data from [Qualifications Scotland](#) suggests NPA entries at Level 6 have increased 350% between 2019 and 2025 which suggests that these are making up an increasing part of Senior Phase provision, not just in SCPs.

Figure 19: Percentage of Level 6 courses available to those in S4 by qualification/programme type



If we return to Figure 18, we see that a larger percentage of SCP provision is available at levels that are typically lower than those in the equivalent school year. For S5 pupils, around 26% of the provision available to them is available at levels lower than typically available in school. Most of these are courses at level 4 that are open to anyone in the Senior Phase. For S6 pupils, a much larger number of options are available at levels lower than is typical for school – amounting to around 59% of the total available to them. Similar to the S5 figures, this is largely driven by the number of opportunities at levels 4 and 5 that are open to anyone in the Senior Phase. However, there are also some options restricted to S5 and S6 at levels 4 and 5. This is an interesting finding and exploring more closely shows that 62% are either NPAs or Skills for Work courses that could, in terms of their qualification-based entry requirements, be accessed by someone in S4 but they are being restricted to those in S5 or S6.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have undertaken a detailed exploration of SCP provision. We have shown that the range of provision available as part of SCPs is vast with different qualification types, size of qualifications, subjects, levels and modes of delivery available. In some respects, the provision available as part of SCPs is similar to other school-based Senior Phase provision. For example, the majority of SCP provision is available at the same levels as would be accessible in schools and many familiar qualification types are available. In other respects, however, the provision available in SCPs is quite different and it provides access to vocational subject areas, larger qualifications and different levels of qualifications than would typically be available in school.

SCP provision, nationally, is managing to serve a number of different kinds of young person including those who are interested in studying subjects not available at school, those who want to add a vocational option to their existing academic subjects (perhaps as part of a deliberate career strategy), those who find school difficult and those who want to study in a different way. It is challenging for colleges to cater to all these different types of young people within their SCP offer and we have seen evidence here that some are targeting particular parts of the local Senior Phase cohort.

The specific mix of SCP provision on offer in any particular place will reflect a combination of local circumstances including timetabling arrangements for SCP, travel time to colleges, subject availability in colleges, previous popularity of options and options available in school. All SCP provision, to be viable, must offer something different to what is available in school but how it is different will vary. We have explored how, for some subject areas, levels and qualifications available in SCPs, there are unlikely to be analogues available in school meaning that, where these are available, young people have access to something that those in other areas do not. This can mean, for example, young people having the opportunity to study at SCQF level 7 in a vocational subject rather than this only being available via academic subjects or having the possibility of trying out a vocational area without the commitment of leaving school for a full-time college course. The differences we have identified in available provision suggest that there is not always equality of opportunity in the Senior Phase and that some young people have access to a wider range of options than others.

The creation and analysis of the database has also revealed the sizeable amount of work that goes into the design of SCP provision. A key finding is that many SCP options are not single qualifications but Locally Devised Options which have been created to meet a local need. In the case study phase of the

project, these will be of particular interest to us as we have not, so far, seen evidence of the features of these being shared or discussed between providers. Their existence indicates that single, existing qualifications were either not deemed suitable for the Senior Phase cohort these programmes target or were not possible to deliver under particular sets of circumstances. Understanding these better will be important for understanding the overall SCP landscape as they offer bespoke experiences for young people but sometimes without an externally recognised qualification. They speak to the tension, in the Scottish system, between offering meaningful vocational learning experiences and the need to certificate these somehow to facilitate progression and the challenges of supporting young people to undertake vocational learning whilst they are still at school.

Appendix 1: SCQF levels compared to RQF (England) and EQF

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	Regulated Qualifications Framework England (RQF)	European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
8	5	5
7	4	5
6	3	4
5	2	3
4	1	2
3	E3	1
2	E2	
1	E1	

See [here](#) for a helpful summary of what qualification levels mean.