

SLC SP07/2022

24 November 2022

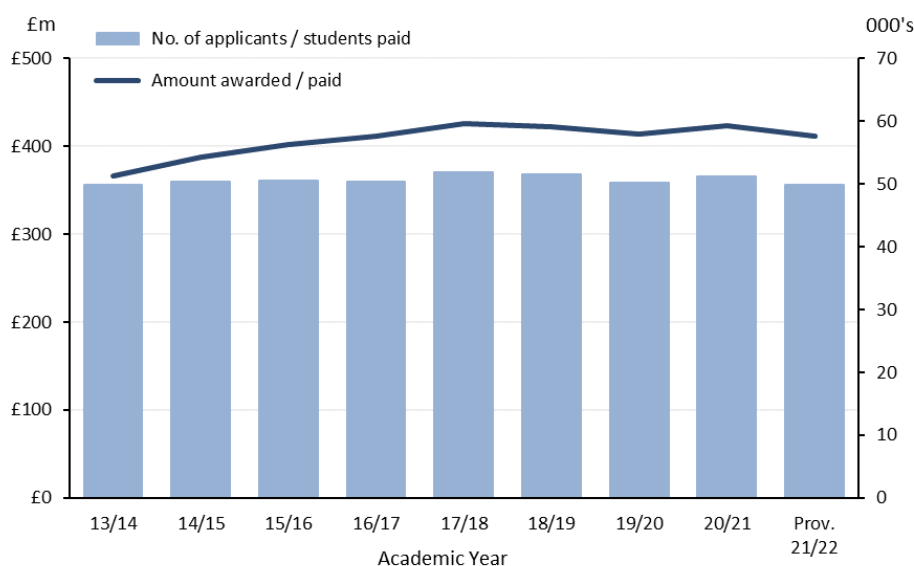
Coverage: Northern Ireland

Theme: Children, Education
and Skills

Student Support for Higher Education in Northern Ireland 2022: 2021/22 full year and 2022/23 early in year

3.0% decrease in higher education student support in academic year 2021/22, at £411.2 million

Figure 1: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) receiving higher education support and amount awarded/paid



The amount paid out in supporting full-time, part-time and postgraduate higher education students totaled £411.2 million in academic year 2021/22, a 3.0% decrease from the £424.1 million paid out in 2020/21. *Table 2*

The number of students paid/awarded funding decreased from 51,200 to 49,900 (- 2.6%).

A downward trend in student support began in 2017/18, but figures increased in 2020/21, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this first academic year that new EU (outside UK) domiciled students were no longer eligible for student finance, numbers decreased by 8.5% to 480 and the amount paid out reduced by 7.6%, to £2.0 million.

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Introduction

This statistics publication presents figures and observations on the student support awarded to applicants and paid to students or their higher education provider. Figures are shown for the nine academic years up to and including 2021/22. Section 7 gives a high-level, early indication of academic year 2022/23 figures, along with emerging trends of any new policy products. The publication covers applicants and students domiciled in Northern Ireland taking a designated higher education (HE) course at a university or further education (FE) college in the UK, as well as EU (outside UK) applicants and students taking a designated course in Northern Ireland.

What can you use these statistics for?

These statistics can be used as a reference to the number of students awarded/paid and the amount awarded/paid out by the Students Loans Company for students studying in higher education between academic years 2013/14 and 2021/22, along with an early view of academic year 2022/23. The data used in this publication is from Student Loans Company's administrative systems. These systems only hold information on students who have applied for and/or receive funding. Due to this, these statistics cannot be used to analyse trends or to draw conclusions regarding the full UK student population.

Things you need to know

Payments vs. awards

The main aim of this publication is to measure payments to student support recipients funded by Northern Ireland over the course of each academic year. This is effectively what is paid in regard to Maintenance Loans, Tuition Fee Loans, postgraduate loans and Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

Awards differ from payments as they refer to the decision on how much will be paid if the applicant is present for study for the full academic year. As payments refer to the actual amounts received by students, they can be lower if the student is not in attendance for the full academic year, if the applicant does not attend at all, or if they do not draw down the full amount which was awarded (e.g. they drop out mid-year). For all new types of support an early indication of what has been paid/awarded two months into the latest academic year, in this publication, 2022/23 is provided in Section 7 of the tables. The number of payments/awards made will change markedly between this point and the end of the academic year as current students will receive further payments and additional students apply for student support.

There are data reporting limitations in regard to separating out grant product payments by individual product. For this reason, the breakdowns of spend allocations of Maintenance Grants and other targeted support products e.g. Adult Dependant Grant and Travel Grants etc. are reported as awards.

Executive summary - 2021/22 full year and 2022/23 early in year

For more detail, please click on the individual headline....

- 3.0% decrease in **higher education student support** in academic year 2021/22, at £411.2 million
- Marginal decrease of **Maintenance Loan take-up** continues in academic year 2021/22
- Following three years of stability, a lower percentage of eligible **full-time** undergraduate students are taking out **Maintenance Loans**
- Slight decrease in numbers taking out **full-time Tuition Fee Loans** and resulting amount paid out
- Small reduction in the number of **Northern Ireland students taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans** in academic year 2021/22
- Following a substantial increase in 2020/21, a 7.9% decrease was noted in **Tuition Fee Loans** paid on behalf of **part-time** students in academic year 2021/22
- 18.6% decrease in the number of **Tuition Fee Loans** paid on behalf of **postgraduate** students in 2021/22
- Significant reduction in amount paid out in **Disabled Student Allowance 'Travel'** claims in academic year 2020/21, but provisional figures for 2021/22 show spend has returned to pre-pandemic levels
- By end-October 2022, a total of 42,400 undergraduate and postgraduate students have been paid/awarded a total of £104.6 million for **AY 2022/23**
- Early look at academic year **2022/23** shows a 3.7% decrease in the number of **undergraduate** students awarded/paid
- £1.2 million paid to 1,000 **postgraduate** students by end-October for academic year **2022/23**
- Notable increase in the number of **EU (outside UK)** students awarded/paid for academic year **2022/23** so far
- Early view of academic year **2022/23** indicates a reduction in both '**new**' and '**returning**' students

Undergraduate Maintenance Loans

An undergraduate Maintenance Loan is funding to help with day-to-day costs, such as rent or food, whilst studying. These loans are available to those studying an eligible undergraduate, initial teacher training or Postgraduate Certificate of Education course, at an eligible higher education provider on a full-time basis. The amount awarded is dependent on household income.

Marginal decrease of Maintenance Loan take-up continues in academic year 2021/22

Figure 2: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland receiving full-time Maintenance Loans

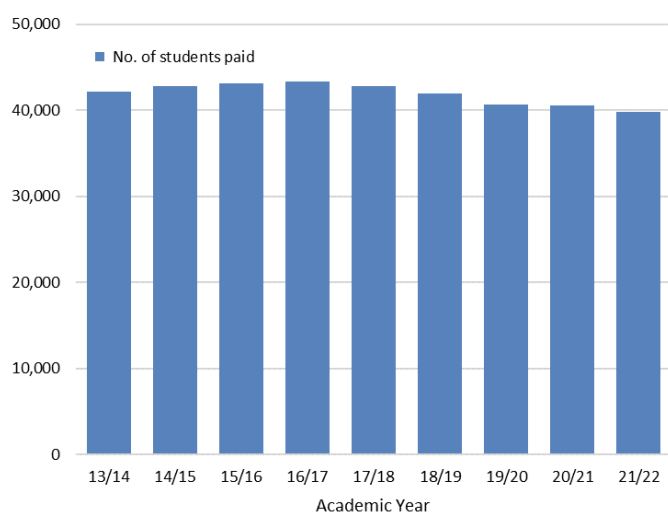
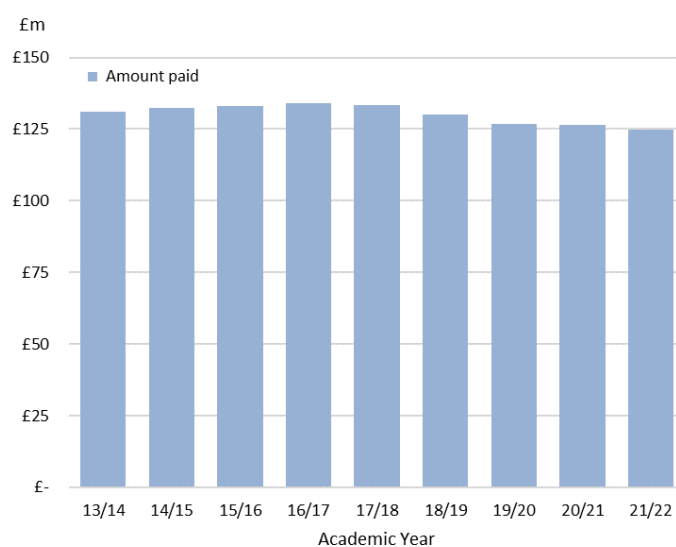


Figure 3: Amount paid out in full-time Maintenance Loans for students domiciled in Northern Ireland



Following an accumulative increase until academic year 2016/17, the number of students taking full-time Maintenance Loans has gradually decreased over the subsequent five academic years.

Academic year 2021/22 saw a 1.9% decrease in the number of students taking a Maintenance Loan, from 40,500 down to 39,800. *Table 3A(i)*

Mirroring the trend in full-time Maintenance Loan borrower numbers, payments also peaked in academic year 2016/17 (at £134.2 million), reducing gradually year-on-year until 2021/22 to £124.7 million (- 1.4% in comparison to 2020/21).

Following three years of stability, a lower percentage of eligible full-time undergraduate students are taking out Maintenance Loans

Figure 4: Full-time estimated eligible population and students in receipt of full-time Maintenance Loans in Northern Ireland

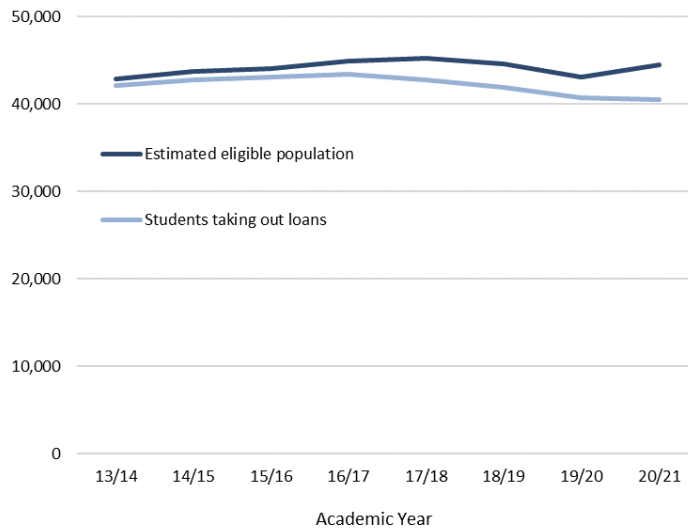
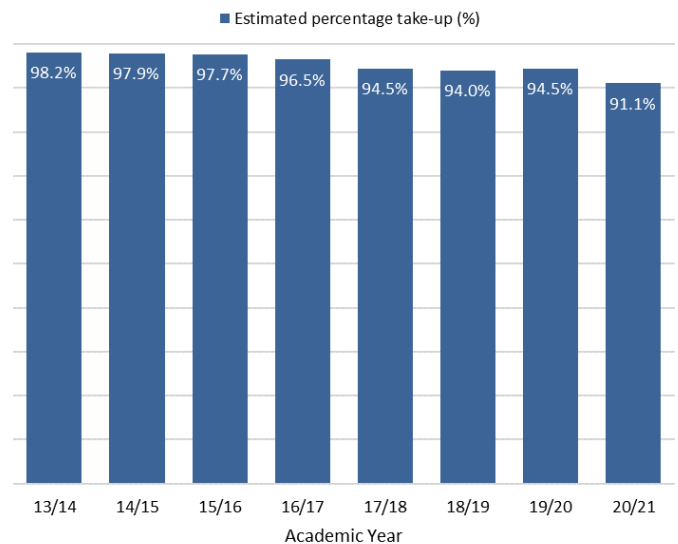


Figure 5: Estimated percentage take-up of full-time Maintenance Loans in Northern Ireland



The 'estimated eligible population' figures indicate the number of students that are eligible to apply for student finance (including those who do not apply). These figures are supplied to Student Loans Company by the Department for the Economy (DfE). The take-up rate is calculated from the number of eligible students who choose to apply for a Maintenance Loan.

The estimated eligible population increased by 3.3% in 2020/21, to 44,500 following decreases in both 2018/19 and 2019/20. This is likely as a result of the increased number of local university places made available to Northern Ireland-domiciled students, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Table 3A(ii)*

In 2020/21, the number of full-time students taking a Maintenance Loan remained relatively constant in comparison to 2019/20, with a small decrease of 0.4%. This continues the downward trend noted since 2017/18, but to a much lesser extent than in previous years.

Academic year 2013/14 saw a take-up percentage of 98.2% which has steadily decreased down to 94.5% in 2019/20. In 2020/21, this reduced more significantly to 91.1%, the lowest % on record.

Despite the increase in the eligible population, as these students reside within Northern Ireland, they may have been less likely to have required maintenance support due to their proximity to home.

Due to the data availability, figures for the 2021/22 academic year will be presented in our next publication, planned for November 2023.

Undergraduate Tuition Fee Loans

An undergraduate Tuition Fee Loan covers the cost of the tuition fees charged by the university or college. These loans are available to those studying an eligible undergraduate, initial teacher training or Postgraduate Certificate of Education course, at an eligible higher education provider on a full or part-time basis. Tuition Fee Loans are not dependent on household income.

Slight decrease in numbers taking out full-time Tuition Fee Loans and resulting amount paid out

In line with the overall trend noted within full-time undergraduate student funding in Northern Ireland in academic year 2021/22, the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of students has slightly decreased. *Table 3B*

Academic year 2021/22 saw a 1.7% decrease in the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time students, from 40,300 to 39,600.

Year-on-year variances have fluctuated (between -1.8% and + 1.5% since academic year 2016/17 when student numbers taking Tuition Fee Loans were at their highest (at 41,200).

2021/22 saw the total paid out in full-time Tuition Fee Loans of £215.2 million. This is a 1.5% decrease on 2020/21's figure of £218.5 million.

Figure 6: Number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) domiciled students and amount paid

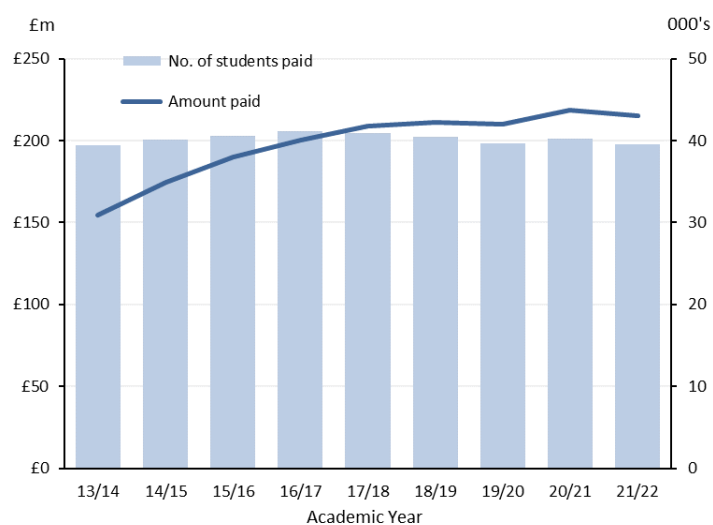


Figure 7: Number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time EU (outside UK) domiciled students

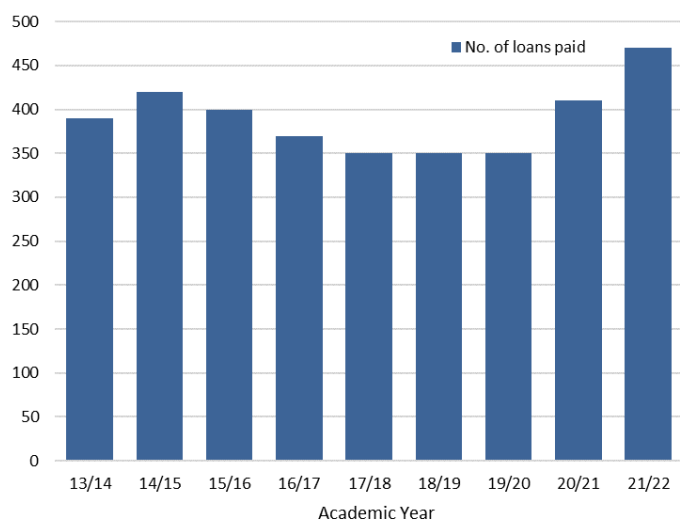


Figure 7 shows levels of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of EU (outside UK) students.

The number of loans paid to these students increased by 15.0% in academic year 2021/22 to 470 (in line with the 15.3% increase reported in the previous year).

Despite the policy change in 2021/22 in that new EU (outside UK) students were no longer eligible for student finance, the EU students studying in Northern Ireland are primarily from Ireland, and their eligibility remains unchanged.

Therefore, figures relating to non-Irish students will only include returning/continuing students.

Small reduction in the number of Northern Ireland students taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans in academic year 2021/22

In 2021/22, the subset of Northern Ireland domiciled students opting to take a Tuition Fee Loan to study within Northern Ireland decreased by 2.1% (from 27,500 to 26,900) in comparison to the previous year. This follows the first increase since 2014/15 noted in 2020/21. *Table 3C*

The outlying increase in 2020/21 could have been attributed to COVID-19 restrictions, reducing the opportunity to travel elsewhere in the UK.

In academic year 2021/22 Northern Ireland domiciled students studying outside of Northern Ireland accounted for approximately one third of those taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans funded by Student Finance Northern Ireland. This has remained relatively constant to 2020/21 (circa. 31%).

Figure 8: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans by country of study

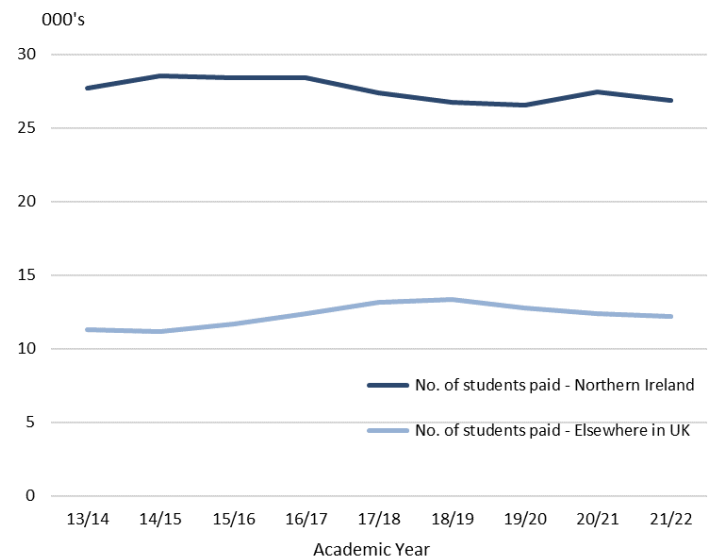
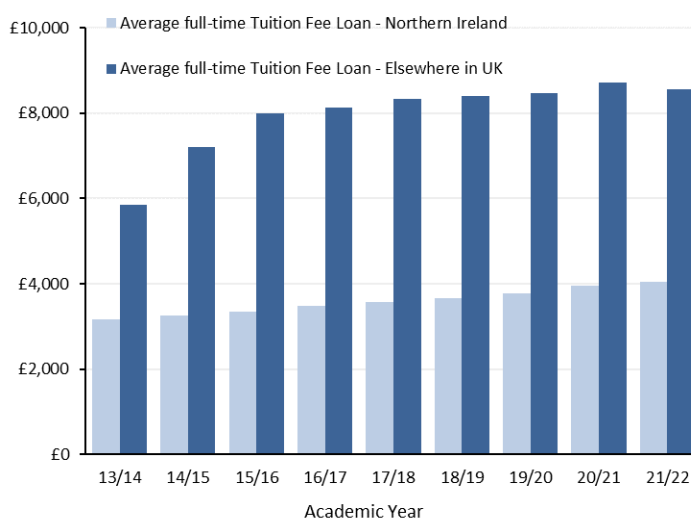


Figure 9: Average full-time Tuition Fee Loan amounts for students domiciled in Northern Ireland by country of study



The average amount paid in full-time higher education Tuition Fee Loans differs depending on amounts that the country/provider-type in the UK are able to charge for tuition fees.

As tuition fees are much lower in Northern Ireland in comparison to the rest of the UK, (particularly England) the average full-time Tuition Fee Loan paid on behalf of a student studying outside of Northern Ireland is more than double than those studying at providers within.

In academic year 2021/22, the average loan paid for study elsewhere in the UK was £8,560, compared to £4,040 for those choosing to study within Northern Ireland.

Whilst in 2021/22, 31.2% of Tuition Fee Loan borrowers studied outside of Northern Ireland, the higher tuition fee charged by providers elsewhere in the UK resulted in the total amount paid out being almost half of the total amount loaned for tuition fees (49.1%).

£104.7 million of the £213.3 million paid out on behalf Northern Ireland domiciled students were to providers in England, Wales and Scotland.

Following a substantial increase in 2020/21, a 7.9% decrease was noted in Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of part-time students in academic year 2021/22

Figure 10: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland & EU (outside UK) receiving part-time Tuition Fee Loans

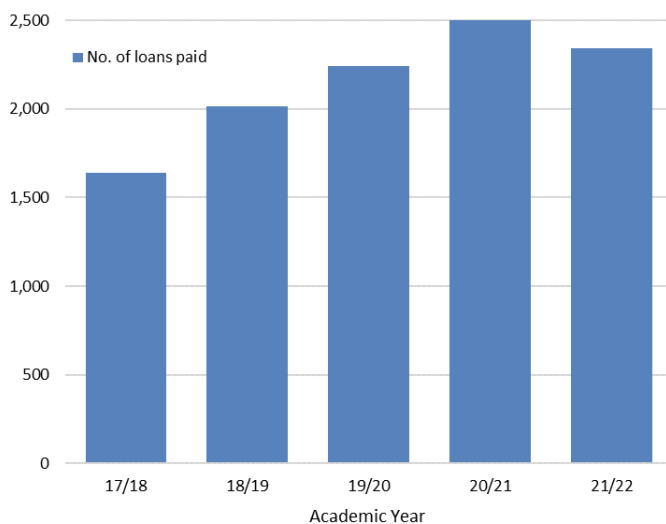
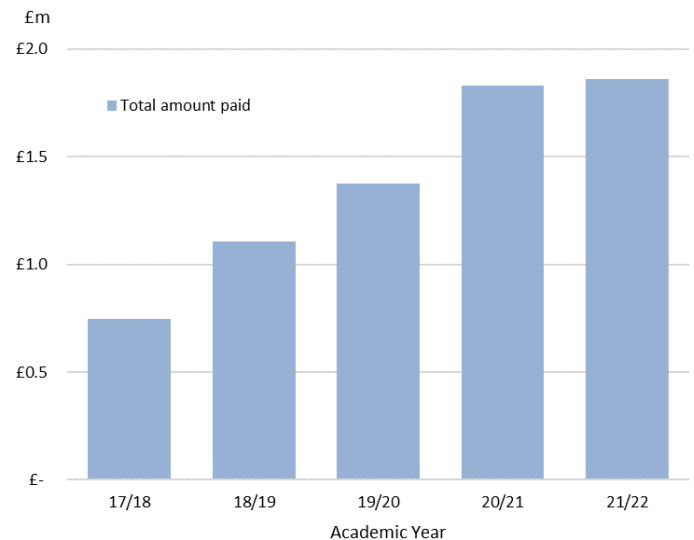


Figure 11: Amount paid in part-time Tuition Fees Loans for students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK)



2,340 Tuition Fee Loans were paid on behalf of part-time students in academic year 2021/22. This is 200 fewer than in the previous year (- 7.9%). *Table 5A*

This decrease follows a significant increase of + 13.5% in 2020/21, potentially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting some employment sectors when an additional 300 entrants enrolled in Open University courses. Both the decrease in 2021/22 and the increase in the previous year can be attributed to Northern Ireland-domiciled students.

In contrast, the amount paid out on behalf of part-time students increased from £1.8 million in academic year 2020/21 to £1.9 million (+ 1.5%). This is far less sizeable than the 33.2% increase reported in the previous year.

Tuition Fee payments made on behalf of Northern Ireland-domiciled students increased by 1.5% (to £1.8 million) and for EU (outside UK) students, payments increased by 3.3% (variances here are volatile due to very low numbers).

In comparison to academic year 2020/21, the average part-time Tuition Fee Loan paid on behalf of a Northern Ireland domiciled student has increased by 9.7% to £790. The average for an EU (outside UK) student increased by 3.2%, to £1,600.

Postgraduate Tuition Fee Loan

A postgraduate Tuition Fee Loan is funding to help with course and living costs whilst studying an eligible postgraduate level course. They are paid directly to the student and are not based on their income or the income of their household. Students studying either a Postgraduate Certificate of Education or an initial teacher training course are not eligible for postgraduate funding, they can alternatively apply for undergraduate finance.

18.6% decrease in the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of postgraduate students in 2021/22

Figure 12: Number of postgraduate students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) receiving Tuition Fee Loans

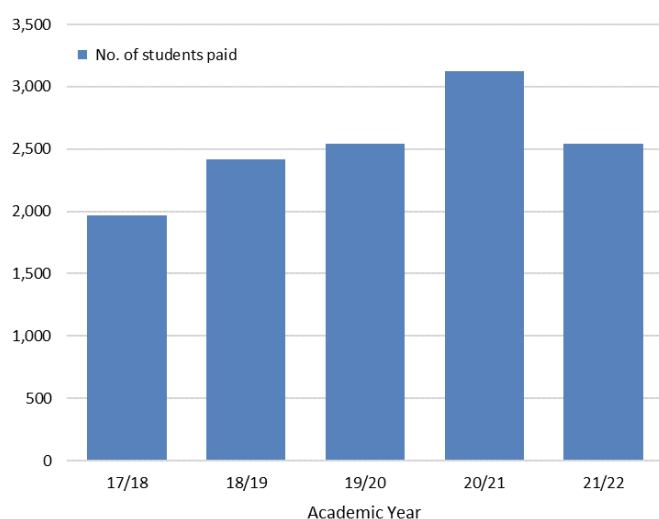
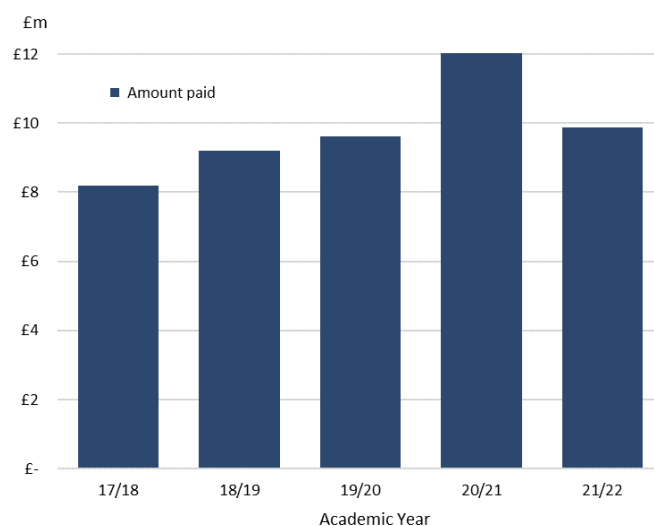


Figure 13: Amount paid to postgraduate students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) receiving Tuition Fee Loans



The number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of postgraduate students reduced to 2,545 in academic year 2021/22 (- 18.6%). This contrasts with the 22.8% increase in 2020/21. *Table 6A*

The amount paid out similarly decreased by 19.9% (- £2.5 million) to £9.9 million, also opposing the trend reported in the previous year where payments increased by 28.6% in comparison to 2019/20.

The significant increases in the previous year could have been as a result of perceived reduced employment opportunity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, either encouraging undergraduates to continue to postgraduate level, or non-students to return to study, therefore it is reasonable to expect a reduction in comparison to this outlying year.

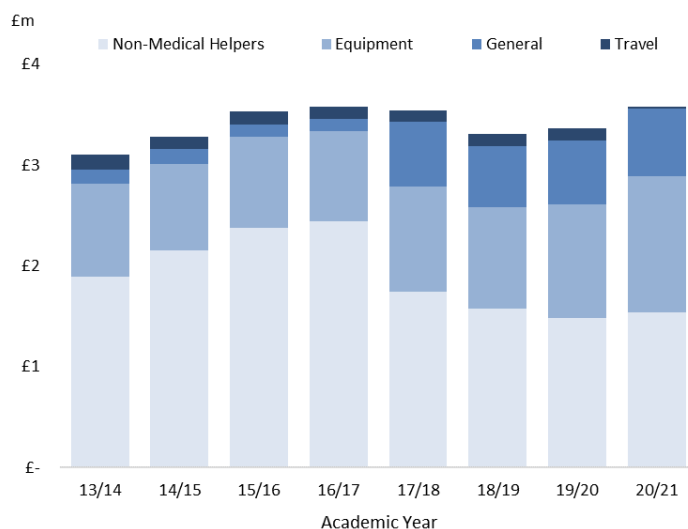
Disabled Students' Allowance

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is an additional part of the student finance package and helps pay for extra costs a student might incur in higher education as a direct result of their disability. This includes long-term health conditions, mental health difficulties, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or dyspraxia etc. The allowance is non repayable and does not depend on household income. The individual's condition must meet the definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Generally, Disabled Students' Allowance is paid direct to the providers of equipment and services covered by the allowance although students may receive some funding paid directly to them, depending on their circumstances.

The vast majority of DSA is paid to suppliers once the Student Loans Company receive the invoices for equipment or services. Invoices continue to be received well after the end of the academic year which is why we quote figures a year later.

Significant reduction in amount paid out in Disabled Student Allowance 'Travel' claims in academic year 2020/21, but provisional figures for 2021/22 show spend has returned to pre-pandemic levels

Figure 14: Amount paid in Disabled Students' Allowance to full-time students by category and academic year



The total number of claimants receiving full-time Disabled Students' Allowance for the 2020/21 academic year increased by 5.2% to 2,230 in comparison to the previous academic year. The total amount paid out also increased by 6.1% (to £3.6 million). Table 4B

Despite the overall increase in the total amount paid out for academic year 2020/21 in comparison to 2019/20 (+ 6.1%), the number of those in receipt of 'Travel' DSA has reduced by 68.4% (to 30). The amount paid out in regard to 'Travel' claims reduced by 87.5%, to £16,000.

This is likely due to the fact that much higher education provision in academic year 2020/21 took place remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that journeys to and from providers would have been significantly reduced.

As at 31 August 2022, a total of £3.3 million has been paid for academic year 2021/22 for full-time students. This is 5.6% lower than the £3.5 million paid by the same point for 2020/21. This is partially driven by an 3.6% decrease in the number of students claiming DSA.

This provisional position for 2021/22 shows that 'Travel' payments are 545.0% higher than the same point for 2020/21 (+ £0.1 million). This is likely a result of the notably reduced pandemic-related disruption at higher education providers in 2021/22 compared to in the previous year. This provisional position is more in line with the provisional figure for academic year 2019/20.

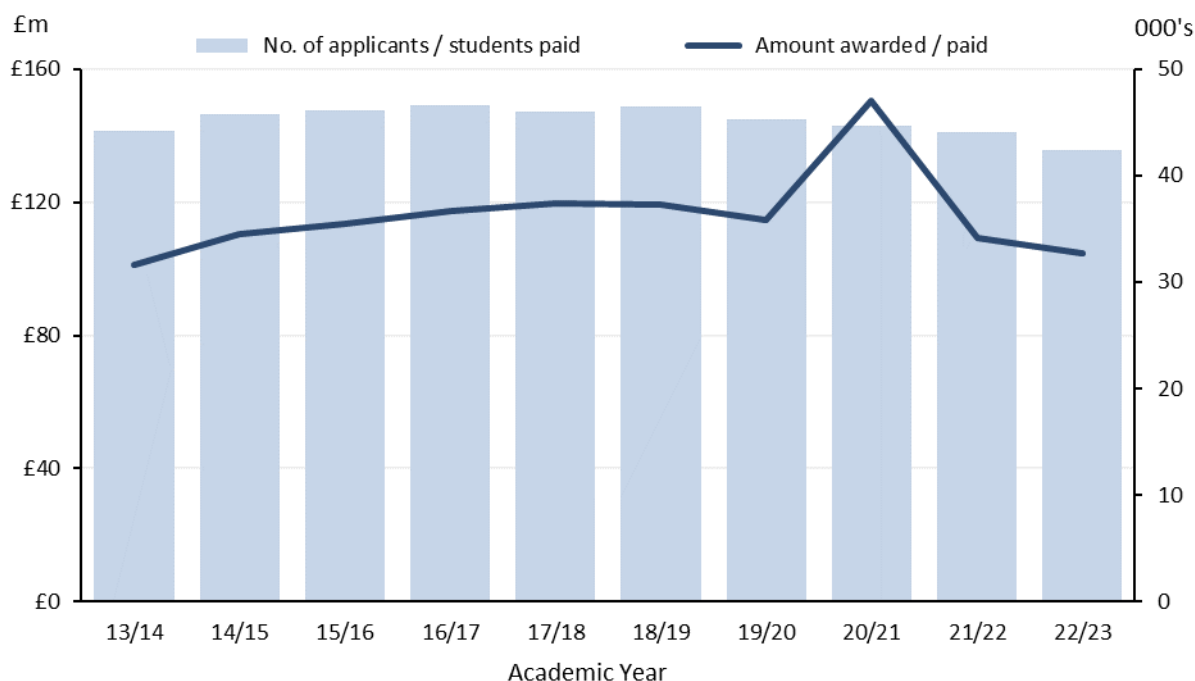
Early in year overview – academic year 2022/23

Table 7C(i) shows an early view of academic year 2022/23 at effective date 31 October 2022. This would be approximately two months into a typical academic year.

These figures will be near-finalised in Table 2 of the publication, due to be released in November 2023.

By end-October 2022, a total of 42,400 undergraduate and postgraduate students have been paid/awarded a total of £104.6 million for AY 2022/23

Figure 15. Early in year - number of students receiving funding and the amount awarded/paid



In comparison to the same point in the 2021/22 academic year, the number of students awarded/paid student finance has reduced by 3.7% from 44,100, and the amount paid/awarded has decreased by 4.3% from £109.3 million.

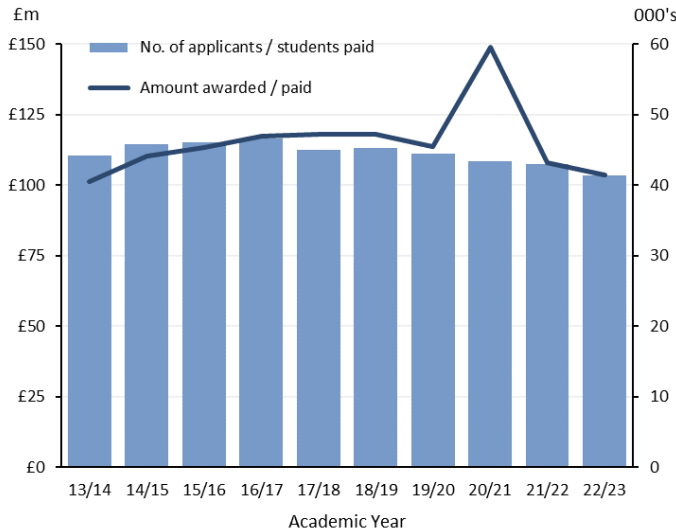
Aside from a small increase of 0.9% in 2018/19, the number of students awarded/paid has experienced a downward trend since academic year 2017/18, from 46,000.

The significant increase in the amount awarded/paid in 2020/21 can predominantly be attributed to the early payment of the second instalment of undergraduate tuition fees payments made to higher education (HE) providers for the 2020/21 academic year. In October 2020, two payments were made instead of the second being made in February 2021. As a result, variances in amounts awarded/paid for undergraduates are less representative in comparison to previous years. For more information on factors affecting 2020/21 early-in-year figures, please refer to the **Additional Information** section of this document.

Omitting this outlying year of 2020/21, the amounts awarded/paid has experienced a downward trend since academic year 2018/19, from £119.4 million.

Early look at academic year 2022/23 shows a 3.7% decrease in the number of undergraduate students awarded/paid

Figure 16. Early in year - Number undergraduate students awarded/paid, and amount awarded/paid



As at 31 October 2022, a total of £103.4 million had been paid/awarded to 41,400 full and part-time undergraduate students for the 2022/23 academic year.

The number of those paid/awarded is 3.7% below the end-October position in academic year 2021/22 (- 1,600) and the amount paid/awarded is 4.2% less (- £4.5 million).

Whilst full-time student paid/awarded numbers reduced by 4.0% to 39,700, part-time students increased by 4.7%, to 1,700.

Aside from a small increase of 0.7% in 2018/19, the number of undergraduate students awarded/paid, has experienced a downward trend since academic year 2017/18, from 44,900.

Omitting the **outlying year** of 2020/21, the amounts awarded/paid has undergone a downward trend since academic year 2018/19, from £118.0 million.

£1.2 million paid to 1,000 postgraduate students by end-October for academic year 2022/23

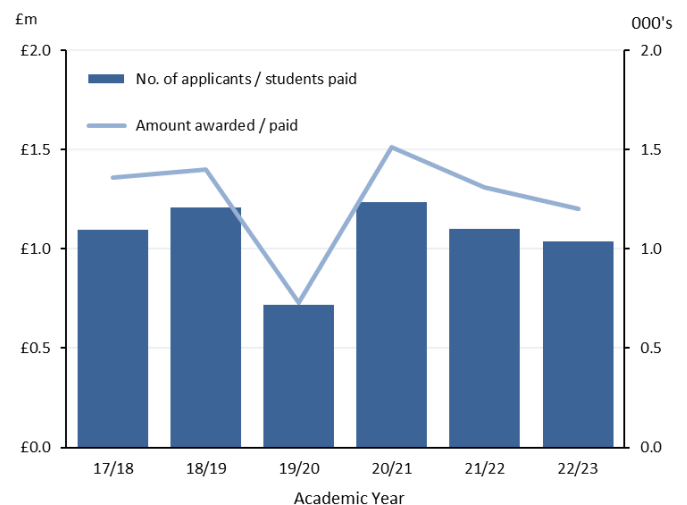
In comparison to the same point in the 2021/22 academic year, the number of postgraduate students awarded/paid student finance has reduced by 6.1% and the amount awarded/paid has decreased by 8.3%.

Due to the later start-dates of postgraduate courses in comparison to undergraduate courses, an enhanced picture of each academic year is not evident until much later.

It is also possible that these decreases may be due to the fact that figures are compared to an outlying year that experienced some significant increases caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

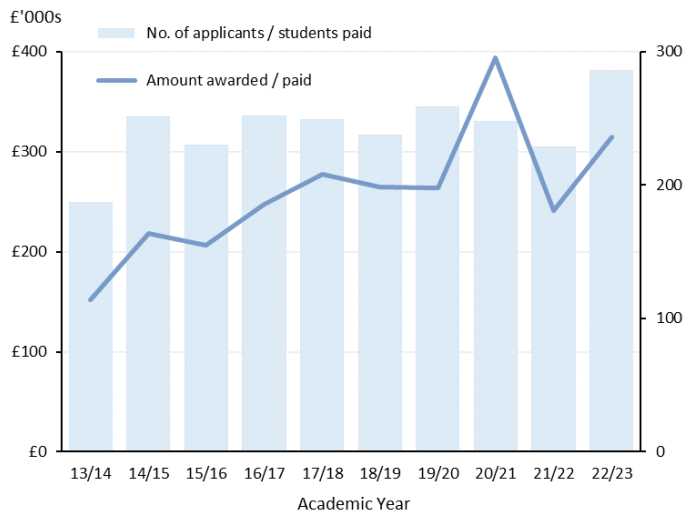
A near-finalised view of 2022/23 will feature in *Table 2* and *Section 6* of the 2023 version of this publication.

Figure 17. Early in year - Number of postgraduate students receiving funding and the amount awarded/paid



Notable increase in the number of EU (outside UK) students awarded/paid for academic year 2022/23 so far

Figure 18. Early in year - Number of students domiciled in EU (outside UK) receiving funding and the amount awarded/paid



As at end-October 2023, 290 EU (outside UK) students have been paid a total of £314,700.

In comparison to the same point in academic year 2021/22, the number of students paid increased from 230 (+ 24.9%). The amount paid increased by 30.5% from £241,100.

Despite the policy change in 2021/22 in that new EU (outside UK) students were no longer eligible for student finance, the majority of EU students studying in Northern Ireland are primarily from Ireland, and their eligibility remains unchanged.

The significant increase in 2020/21 was as a result of the **early payment** of the second instalment of undergraduate tuition fee payments.

Early view of academic year 2022/23 indicates a reduction in both 'new' and 'returning' students

'Returning' students are defined as any student who has received funding from Student Finance Northern Ireland within the same mode of study (i.e., full-time, part-time, postgraduate) in the immediately preceding academic year. Any student who has changed study modes between academic years, or who were not in study/not funded in the preceding academic year would be included as a 'new' student.

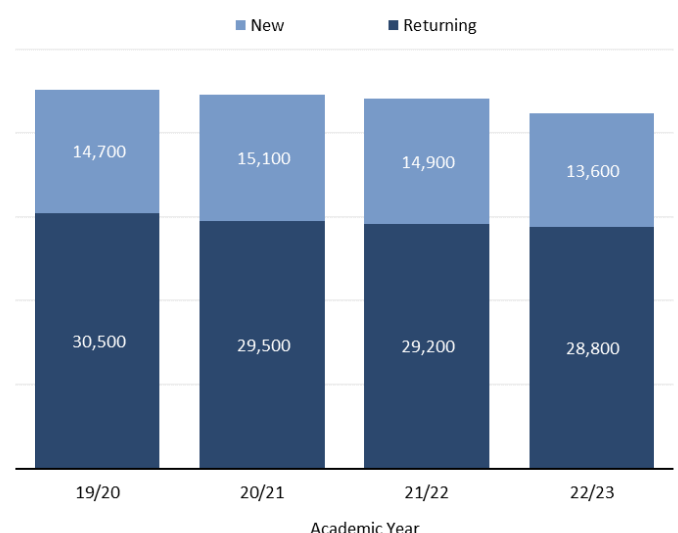
As shown in *Table 7C(ii)*, as at 31 October 2022, the number of 'returning' students awarded/paid decreased by 1.1%, the same as in the previous year. There was an 8.7% decrease in the number of 'new' students awarded/paid, a far greater reduction than the - 1.5% recorded in 2021/22.

At end-October 2022, the number of 'new' undergraduate students awarded/paid for the

2022/23 academic year is 8.7% lower than at the same point in previous academic year (compared to a 0.1% decrease in 2021/22). The number of 'returning' students is 1.2% lower (the same as in 2021/22).

9.1% fewer 'new' postgraduates were awarded/paid for 2022/23. However, this is a lesser decrease than noted in 2021/22 (of - 17.6%). In contrast, the number of awarded/paid 'returning' postgraduates is 17.2% higher than at the same point in 2021/22. This is a smaller increase than the 30.2% noted in 2021/22.

Figure 19: Early in year - Total number of 'new' and 'returning' students by academic year



Additional Information

Available student financial support

Details on student support available in academic year 2021/22 and 2022/23 can be found [here](#).

Factors affecting early in year figures academic year 2020/21

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education and devolved administrations of Wales and Northern Ireland requested that the Student Loans Company revised the schedule of undergraduate tuition fee payments to higher education providers for the 2020/21 academic year. This revision enabled providers to access the second instalment of tuition fee payments early (two paid in October 2020, instead of first paid October 2020 and second in February 2021), while ensuring that students were not impacted by the change. The normal schedule resumed in academic year 2021/22.

Figures for academic year 2020/21 may also have been affected by the Ofqual standardisation of grades, allowing students whose exams were cancelled in the summer of 2020 to receive calculated grades enabling them to progress to further study. For more information please [gov.uk](#).

Definitions

For definitions of terms used in our publication, please refer to our [Definitions](#) page.

Data Sources

This publication uses data from Student Loans Company (SLC)'s administrative systems. For details of the administrative data sources used in our publications please refer to our [Statement of Administrative Sources](#).

Data Quality

Student Loans Company has published the quality guidelines that it follows. As per those guidelines a quality plan is produced for each publication. The quality plan stipulates two stages of quality assurance. Data is extracted from the administrative systems then reviewed using a standard quality assurance checklist. The statistical tables created using that data are quality assured using the statistical quality guidelines. Please refer to our [Quality Guidelines](#) for further information.

Related Statistics Publications

Student Loans Company publish statistics on higher education funding for England and Wales as part of the same series this publication belongs to. These are published at the same time as part of the series [Student Support for Higher Education](#).

In December 2020, owing to the significant public interest, SLC took the decision to publish data on the withdrawal notifications it receives from higher education providers (HEPs) in order to contribute towards an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic may be impacting students. Due to ongoing interest, SLC continues to publish this series. These publications are housed within our [Other Statistics](#) section of [gov.uk](#).

Student Loans Company also publish statistics on the repayment of student loans for higher education in the series 'Student Loans in Northern Ireland'. The **latest release** of this series, covering tax year 2021-22 was published on 16 June 2022.

The Student Awards Agency for Scotland publish details of higher education funding in Scotland in their publication 'Higher Education Student Support in Scotland'. The **latest release** of this series was published in August 2022 covering academic session 2020/21.

National Statistics

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