

SLC SP07/2023

30 November 2023

Coverage: Northern Ireland

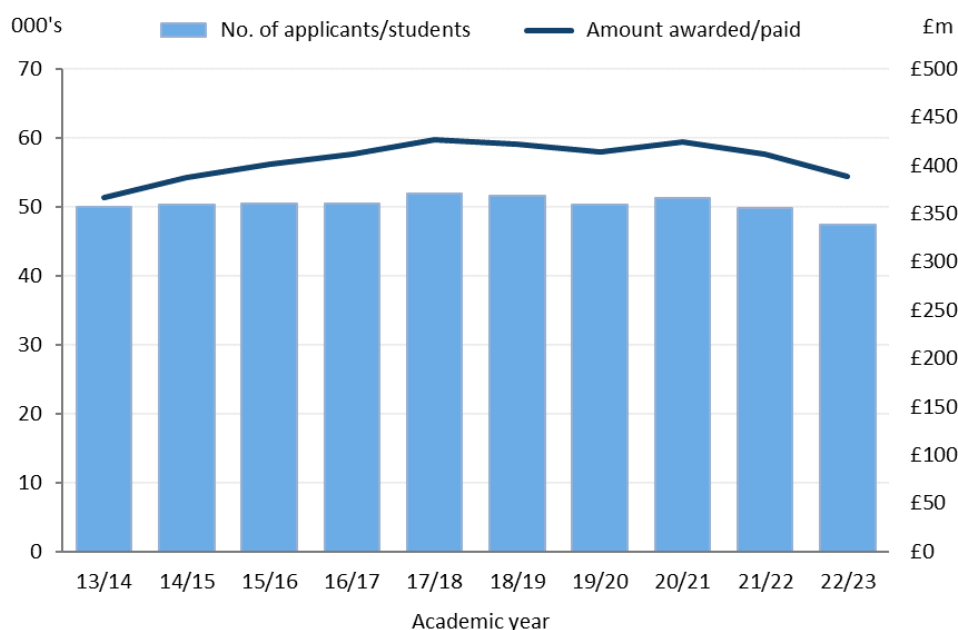
Theme: Children, Education
and Skills

Student Support for Higher Education in Northern Ireland 2023: 2022/23 full year and 2023/24 early in year

5.7% decrease in higher education student support in academic year 2022/23, at £388.1 million

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

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount awarded/paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 2**

Download the data for Figure 1 (ODS, 6KB)

Figure 1 shows that 49,900 full-time, part-time and postgraduate applicants/students were awarded/paid student finance in academic year 2013/14. Numbers averaged at 50,400 until 2017/18 when a 2.9% increase was reported to peak at 51,900. This was followed by two years of decreases (of 0.7% to 2.4% respectively).

In 2020/21, an outlying increase of 1.9% was reported, lifting numbers to 51,200. This was likely a result of the perceived reduced employment opportunity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, encouraging new students to pursue higher education and current students to continue their education.

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This was made up of a 0.9% increase in undergraduates and a significant 20.4% increase in postgraduates receiving funding.

In 2021/22, the reducing trend resumed, with numbers awarded/paid falling by 2.6% to 49,900.

Academic year 2022/23 indicates a further decrease of 5.1%, down to 47,300. This is made up of a 4.4% decrease in undergraduates and an 18.5% decrease in postgraduates receiving funding.

Figure 1 also shows that the total amount awarded/paid in student support across full-time, part-time and postgraduate students in academic year 2013/14 was £366.1 million. This increased steadily until 2017/18 to peak at £426.2 million. 2018/19 reported the first decrease albeit by just 0.9% with a further, more significant reduction in the following year, by 1.9% to £414.4 million.

In 2020/21 the amount awarded/paid increased by 2.4% to reach £424.1 million. This was made up of a 1.7% increase in undergraduate funding and a significant 29.1% increase in postgraduate funding. As previously mentioned, this was likely a result of the perceived reduced employment opportunity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, encouraging new students to pursue higher education and current students to continue their education.

Following a similar trend to that of the number of applicants/students, the downward trend in the awarded/paid resumed in 2021/22 with a 3.0% decrease. A further decrease was reported in the latest academic year (2022/23), down 5.7% to £388.1 million.

The average full-time Maintenance Loan paid to a Northern Ireland-domiciled student in academic year 2013/14 was £3,120. There has been minimal change to this average since (at just £10 higher in 2022/23 at £3,130).

For more information on **Maintenance Loans**, please refer to the relevant section later in this publication.

The average full-time Tuition Fee Loan paid on behalf of a Northern Ireland-domiciled student in 2013/14 was £3,940. Following a 10.9% increase in the following year, increases slowed to just 0.2% by 2021/22 (omitting the outlying increase of 2.6% to £5,440 in 2020/21 due to effects of the pandemic).

In 2022/23, the average Tuition Fee Loan paid was £5,490, 0.7% higher than in the previous year.

For more information on **Tuition Fee Loans**, please refer to the relevant section later in this publication.

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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 ten academic years up to and including 2022/23. Section 7 gives a high-level, early indication of academic year 2023/24 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.

Accessibility

Public Sector Accessibility Regulations mean that all public sector organisations have a legal duty to make their websites accessible for everyone, including those with disabilities. As part of SLC's ongoing commitment to improving accessibility of our websites and content, we've made changes to the way we publish our statistics.

The changes in this publication mainly affect the way we provide visual information. This includes:

- including descriptive information of the full time-series for each graph within the main body of the statistics publication.
- providing data used to form each graph in accessible/downloadable tables.
- changing the way we present charts and graphs to be more accessible, including changes to colour, labels and legends.

We create our statistics publications in a way that helps to ensure that the department's statistical outputs are accessible, while continuing to meet the statistical needs of our users.

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 Student Loans Company for students studying in higher education between academic years 2013/14 and 2022/23, along with an early view of academic year 2023/24. 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

Changes included in this publication

With ten academic years' worth of data displayed in the 2023 version of this publication, some tables are becoming too large to view on one screen or print on a single page. As a result, the main data tables (with the exception of Table 4B and 5B) have been restructured. The tables have been divided each into separate sections below one another i.e., the number of applicants/students, followed by the amount awarded/paid, then the average paid.

The changes make these tables easier to read and align them with the tables within our '**Student Loans for Higher Education**' publication series.

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, 2023/24) is provided in the early-in-year section of the accompanying excel tables (Tables 7A to 7C (ii)). 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 Dependents Grant and Travel Grants etc. are reported as awards.

Executive summary - 2022/23 full year and 2023/24 early in year

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

- 5.7% decrease in **higher education student support** in academic year 2022/23, at £388.1 million
- 5.5% decrease in **full-time Maintenance Loan** take-up
- 1.9% decrease in the **eligible full-time undergraduate student population** in 2021/22, consistent with the reduction in take-up of Maintenance Loans in the same year
- **% take-up of full-time Maintenance Loans** remains at 91.1% for academic year 2021/22
- 4.5% decrease in the number of **Tuition Fee Loans** paid on behalf of **full-time** students in academic year 2022/23
- Reduction in the number of students taking **full-time Tuition Fee Loans**, irrespective of country of study
- Proportion of students taking **full-time Tuition Fee Loans to study outside of Northern Ireland** remains relatively stable, at 30.8%
- **Average full-time Tuition Fee Loan** paid on behalf of those studying both within, and outside of Northern Ireland remains largely consistent to the previous year
- Significant 30.3% increase in the number of **full-time Tuition Fee Loans** paid on behalf of **EU (outside UK) students**
- 14.0% increase in the amount paid out in **Tuition Fee Loans** on behalf of **part-time** students
- 18.4% decrease in the number of **Tuition Fee Loans** paid on behalf of **postgraduate students**
- Finalised figures confirm a 5.0% decrease in the amount paid out in **full-time students Disabled Students' Allowance** for academic year 2021/22
- By end-October 2023, a total of 41,300 **undergraduates** and **postgraduates** have been awarded/paid a total of £116.4 million for **academic year 2023/24**
- Early look at **academic year 2023/24** shows a continuing increase in the number of **EU (outside UK) students** awarded/paid for academic year 2023/24
- Early view of **academic year 2023/24** indicates a 4.2% reduction in **'returning'** students, whereas **'new'** students remain relatively consistent with the previous year

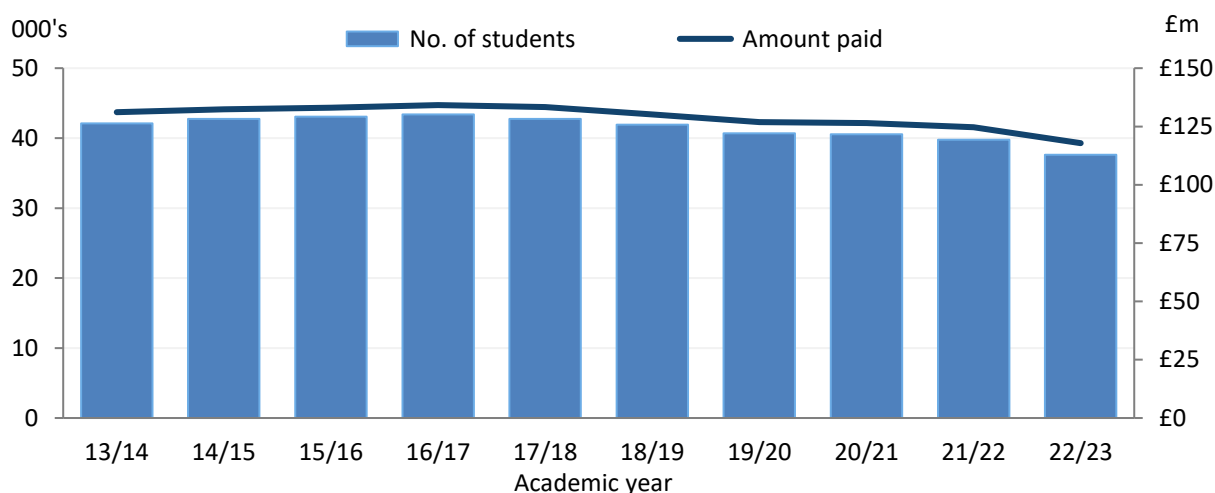
Undergraduate Maintenance Loans

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.

5.5% decrease in full-time Maintenance Loan take-up in academic year 2022/23

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

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 3A (i)**

[Download the data for Figure 2 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Figure 2 indicates that in academic year 2013/14, Maintenance Loans were paid out to 42,100 full-time students.

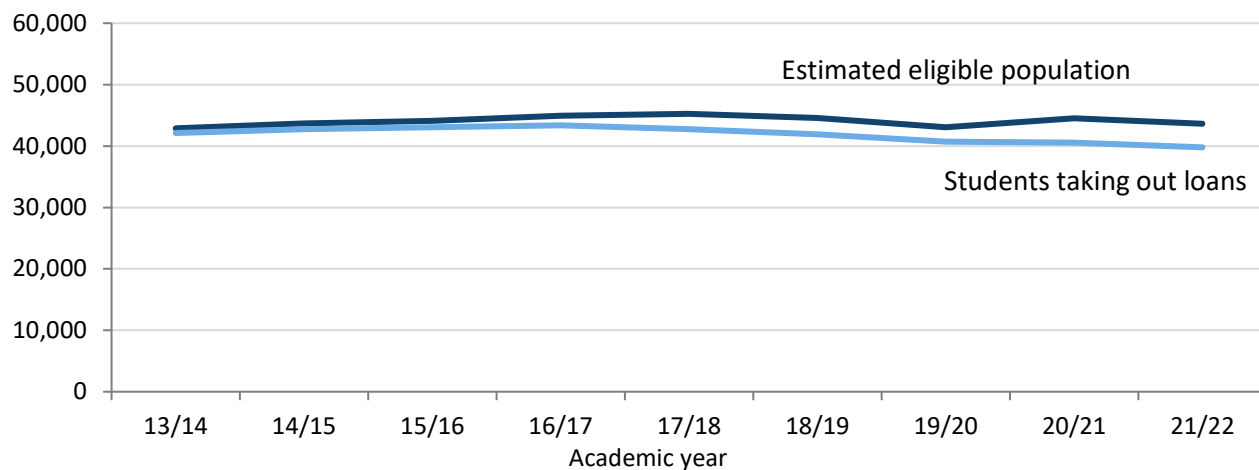
Following small annual increases until academic year 2016/17 to reach 43,400, numbers have gradually decreased over the subsequent six academic years, down to 37,600 in 2022/23 (a 5.5% decrease in comparison to the previous year).

Mirroring the trend in the number of Maintenance Loan borrowers, the amount paid out in 2013/14 was £131.2 million, slowly increasing to peak at £134.2 million in 2016/17.

Amounts paid out then began to gradually decline from 2017/18, down to £117.8 million in 2022/23 (a 5.5% decrease on 2021/22).

1.9% decrease in the eligible full-time undergraduate student population in 2021/22, consistent with the reduction in take-up of Maintenance Loans in the same year

Figure 3: Full-time estimated eligible population and students in receipt of full-time Maintenance Loans in Northern Ireland



Source: **Table 3A(ii)**

[Download the data for Figure 3](#) (ODS, 6KB)

The 'estimated eligible population' figures express the number of students that are eligible to apply for student finance (and includes those who do not apply). These figures are supplied to Student Loans Company by the Department for the Economy. Due to the data availability, figures for the 2022/23 academic year will be presented in our next publication, planned for November 2024.

The estimated eligible population in 2013/14 was 42,900. This increased year-on-year to reach 45,200 by 2017/18. The population first reduced in 2018/19, then again in the subsequent year (by 1.5% and 3.4% respectively) to arrive at 43,100.

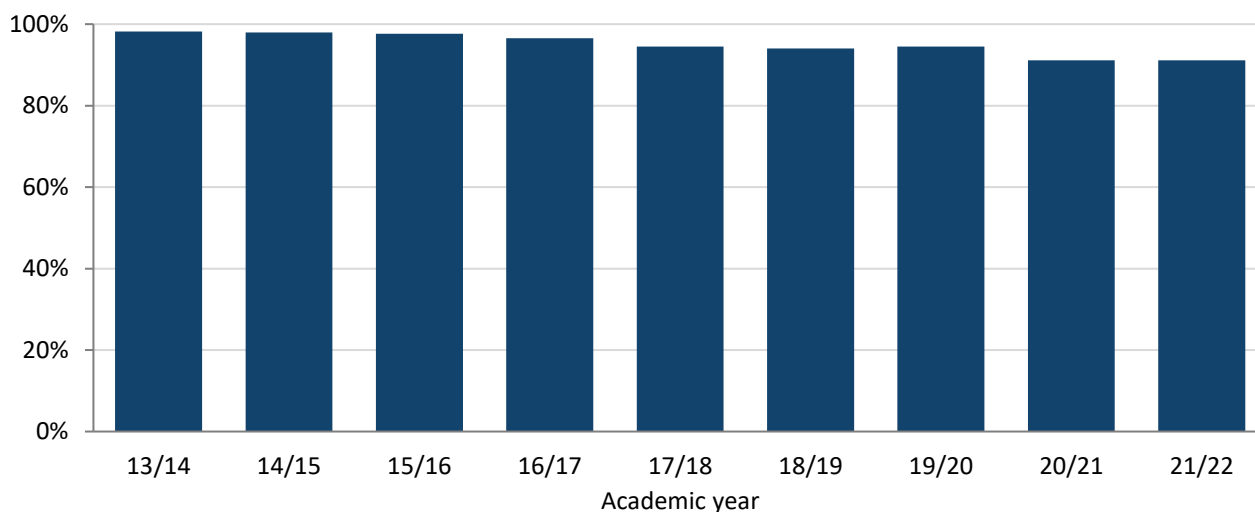
A notable increase was reported in 2020/21 (up 3.3%) likely as a result of the increased number of local university places made available to Northern Ireland-domiciled students, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021/22, there was a 1.9% decrease (down to 43,700). This reduction can be attributed to higher education places at further education colleges (places in higher education institutes have remained relatively stable).

The reduction in the eligible population in 2021/22 is mirrored by the 1.9% reduction in the number of full-time students taking Maintenance Loans in that academic year.

% take-up of full-time Maintenance Loans remains at 91.1% for academic year 2021/22

Figure 4: Estimated percentage take-up of full-time Maintenance Loans in Northern Ireland



Source: **Table 3A(ii)**

[Download the data for Figure 4](#) (ODS, 6KB)

Figure 4 indicates that in academic year 2013/14, full-time Maintenance Loan take-up was 98.2% of those eligible to apply. This decreased steadily down to 94.0% by 2018/19.

The following year noted the first (albeit small) increase in take-up, up 0.5% to peak at 94.5%. This was due to a more considerable reduction in the estimated population (down 3.4%), than the reduction in the number of students who took a Maintenance Loan (down 2.9%) in academic year 2019/20.

2020/21 reported the most significant decrease, down to 91.1% (the lowest % on record). Yet due to the same percentage reduction in both the estimated population and the number taking out Maintenance Loans in 2021/22, take-up has remained at 91.1%.

Due to the data availability, figures for the 2022/23 academic year will be presented in our next publication, planned for November 2024.

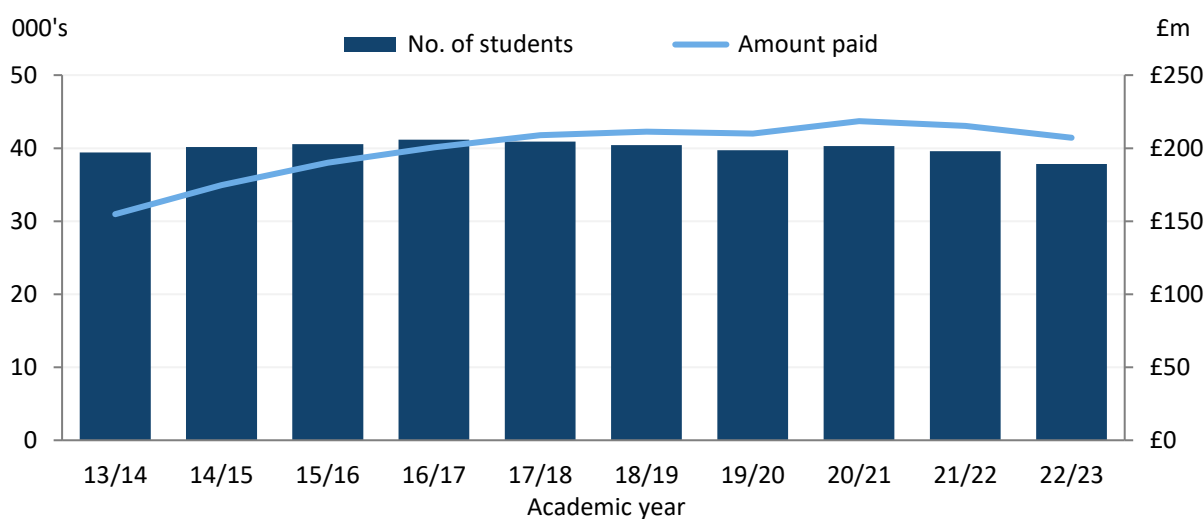
Undergraduate Tuition Fee Loans

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.

4.5% decrease in the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time students in academic year 2022/23

Figure 5: Number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) domiciled students and amount paid

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 3B**

[Download the data for Figure 5](#) (ODS, 6KB)

Figure 5 indicates that in academic year 2013/14, Tuition Fee Loans were paid out on behalf of 39,400 full-time students. Numbers increased gradually to peak at 41,200 in 2016/17. In the subsequent three academic years levels marginally decreased down to 39,700 by 2019/20.

An outlying increase was reported in 2020/21 with an additional 600 Tuition Fee Loans paid out on behalf of full-time students (up 1.5%). However, from 2021/22 the declining trend resumed, falling by 1.7%, then by a more significant 4.5% in 2022/23, down to 37,800.

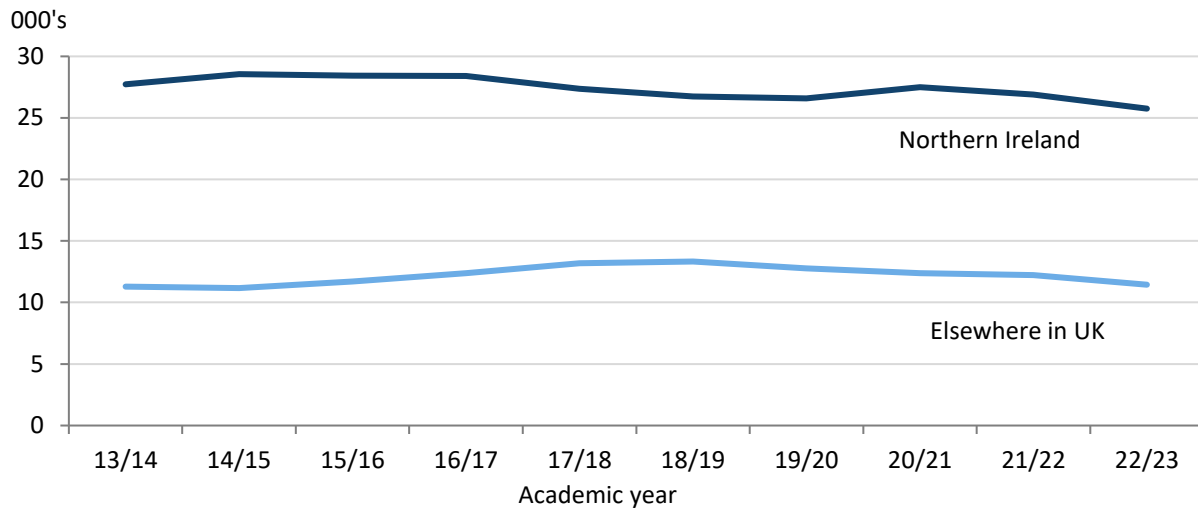
The amount paid out on behalf of full-time students in 2013/14 was £154.8 million. Somewhat contrary to the trend in borrower numbers, this increased significantly in the following year (up 12.9%) to £174.8 million. This can be attributed to a 10.9% increase in the average Tuition Fee Loan taken by Northern-Ireland domiciled students (up from £3,940 to £4,370).

Further year-on-year increases were noted up until 2018/19, reaching £211.3 million, likely as a result of a growing proportion of students studying outside of Northern Ireland, e.g., in England, where providers charge much higher Tuition Fees (in 2018/19 the maximum full-time Tuition Fee Loan available for study in England was £9,250, compared to £5,097 for within Northern Ireland). For more information on the maximum loans by academic year, please refer to **Table 1A**.

Following a small reduction in the amount paid out in 2019/20, a further increase of 4.1% was reported in the following year to peak at £218.5 million, likely due to the increase in take-up. Since 2021/22 the amount paid out has declined, reducing first by 1.5%, then by a more significant 3.8% in 2022/23, down to £207.1 million.

Reduction in the number of students taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans, irrespective of country of study in academic year 2022/23

Figure 6: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans by country of study



Source: **Table 3C**

[Download the data for Figure 6 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Figure 6 shows that in academic year 2013/14, the subset of Northern Ireland domiciled students opting to take a Tuition Fee Loan to study within Northern Ireland was 27,700. Following a small increase in the following year, numbers have decreased year-on-year down to 26,600 in 2019/20.

In academic year 2020/21 an outlying increase of 3.5% was reported (likely attributed to COVID-19 restrictions, reducing the opportunity to travel elsewhere in the UK).

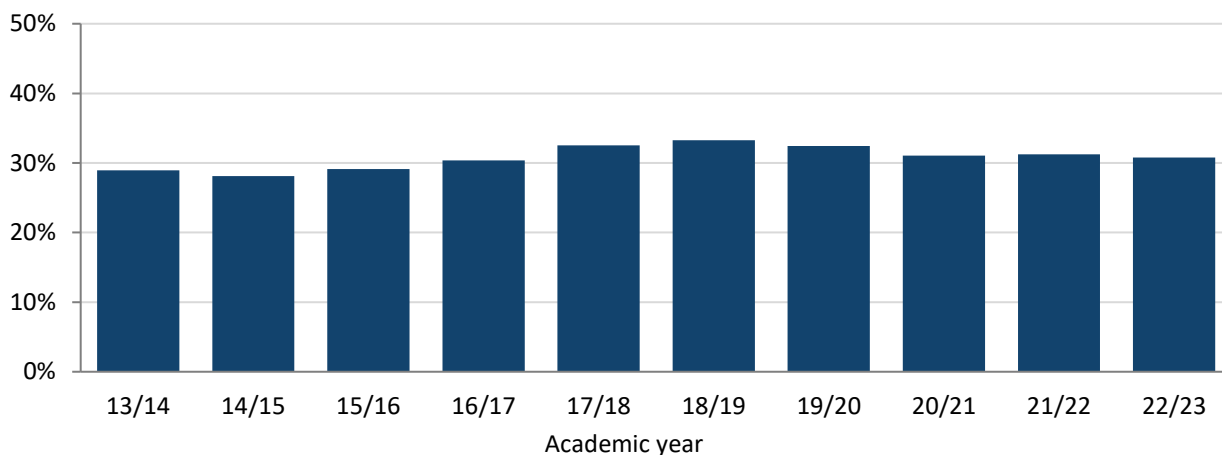
Since 2021/22 numbers again declined, first by 2.1% then by a more significant 4.3% in 2022/23, down to 25,800.

In 2013/14 the number of students opting to take a Tuition Fee Loan to study outside of Northern Ireland equated to 11,300. Following a small decrease in the following academic year, numbers increased year-on-year up to peak at 13,300 in 2018/19.

Since this point numbers have declined, most significantly in the most recent year, falling to 11,500 (down 6.3%).

Proportion of students taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans to study outside of Northern Ireland remains relatively stable, at 30.8%

Figure 7: Percentage of students domiciled in Northern Ireland taking full-time Tuition Fee Loans to study elsewhere in UK



Source: **Table 3C**

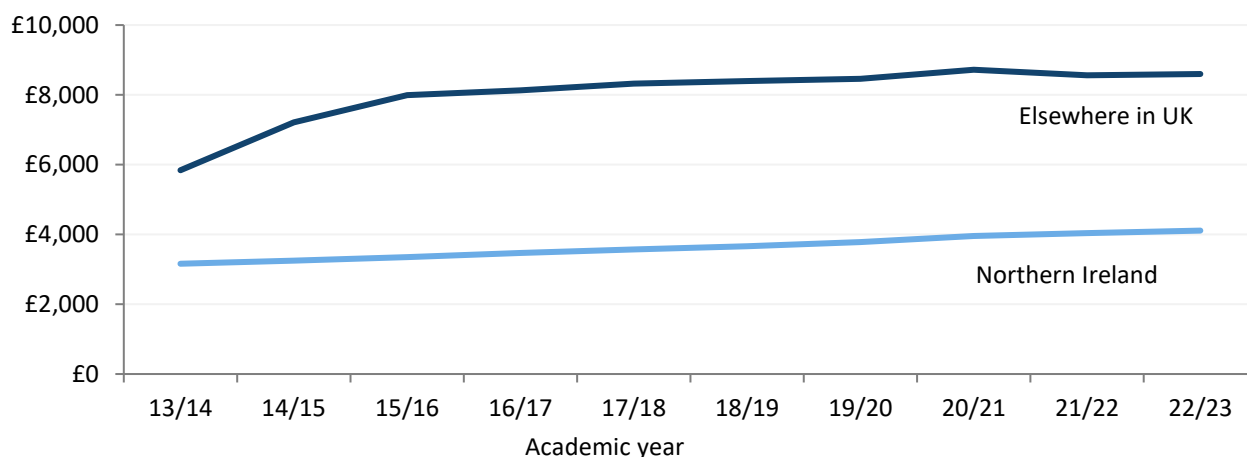
Download the data for Figure 7 (ODS, 6KB)

Figure 7 indicates that in academic year 2013/14 the proportion of students taking a loan and opting to study outside of Northern Ireland was 28.9%. This increased to peak at 33.3% in 2018/19. Since this point, the proportion has reduced down to 30.8% by 2022/23 (a 0.5% decrease in the most recent year).

The proportion of students taking a loan and opting to study within Northern Ireland was 71.1% in academic year 2013/14. This increased to peak at 71.9% in the following year and has since reduced overall to rest at 69.2% in 2022/23 (a 0.5% increase on the previous year).

Average full-time Tuition Fee Loan paid on behalf of those studying both within, and outside of Northern Ireland in academic year 2022/23 remains largely consistent to the previous year

Figure 8: Average full-time Tuition Fee Loan paid out for students domiciled in Northern Ireland by country of study



Source: **Table 3C**

[Download the data for Figure 8 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

The average Tuition Fee Loan paid out on behalf of a full-time student differs depending on the 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) since 2014/15 the average full-time Tuition Fee Loan paid on behalf of a student studying outside of Northern Ireland has been more than double that of those studying at providers within Northern Ireland (averaging 125% higher).

Figure 8 indicates that in academic year 2013/14, the average loan paid for study outside of Northern Ireland (elsewhere in the UK) was £5,840, compared to £3,160 for those choosing to study within Northern Ireland. These averages have increased year-on-year (except for a small decrease relating to those studying elsewhere in the UK in 2021/22).

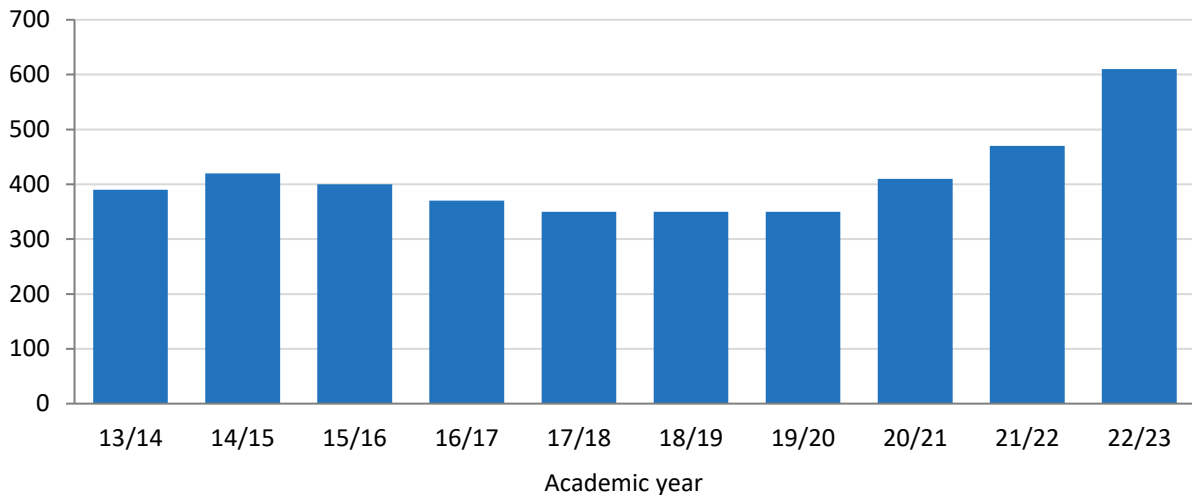
In the most recent year, the average Tuition Fee Loan paid out on behalf of a full-time student studying within Northern Ireland increased by 1.7% to £4,110. For those studying elsewhere in the UK, there was a 0.5% increase to £8,600.

Whilst in academic year 2022/23, 30.8% of Tuition Fee Loan borrowers are in study outside of Northern Ireland, due to the higher tuition fees charged by providers elsewhere in the UK, the total amount paid out equates to almost half of the total amount paid out in Tuition Fee Loans (48.2%).

In academic year 2022/23, £98.5 million of the £204.4 million paid out on behalf of Northern Ireland domiciled students was paid to providers in England, Wales and Scotland.

Significant 30.3% increase in the number of full-time Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of EU (outside UK) students in 2022/23

Figure 9: Number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of full-time EU (outside UK) domiciled students



Source: **Table 3B**

[Download the data for Figure 9 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Figure 9 shows that in 2013/14, 390 Tuition Fee Loans were paid on behalf of EU (outside UK) students. Following a 7.8% increase in the subsequent year, numbers decreased gradually until 2017/18, to the lowest reported point of 345.

Since 2018/19, increases of varying levels have been recorded, becoming more significant since 2020/21. A significant 30.3% was evident in 2022/23, to reach 610 EU (outside UK) students.

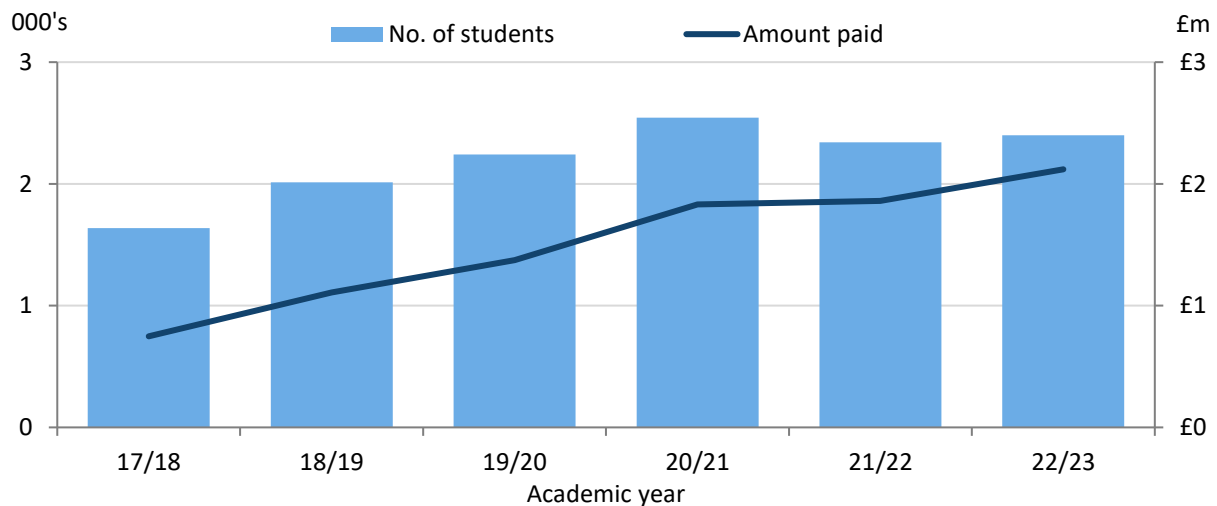
The policy change in 2021/22, in that new EU (outside UK) students funded by Student Finance Northern Ireland were no longer eligible for student finance, has had minimal effect on overall figures, as these figures include students who are primarily and increasingly from the Republic of Ireland (93% in 2022/23) and their eligibility remains unchanged.

Figures from 2021/22 relating to non-Irish students will only include returning/continuing students who began their studies prior to the policy change. This proportion will decrease year-on-year as they conclude their courses. In the most recent year, this has reduced from 28% down to 7%.

14.0% increase in the amount paid out in Tuition Fee Loans on behalf of part-time students in academic year 2022/23

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

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 5A**

[Download the data for Figure 10 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Tuition Fee Loans for part-time study were made available to new students in academic year 2017/18.

Figure 10 shows that in this first year of availability, the number of loans paid out was 1,600. This notably increased over the following three years to peak at 2,500 in 2020/21.

The 13.5% increase in academic year 2020/21 was potentially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting some employment sectors when an additional 300 entrants enrolled in Open University courses.

The first, and only decrease was reported in 2021/22 (of 7.9% down to 2,300). Numbers have since risen by 2.5% to reach 2,400 in the most recent year.

The amount paid out on behalf of part-time students was £0.7 million in 2017/18. This was followed by significant increases in the subsequent three academic years, up to £1.8 million. Despite the fall in the number of loans paid out in 2021/22, the amount paid out increased slightly (up 1.5%). A notable 14% increase was reported in 2022/23, bringing the amount paid out up to £2.1 million.

The more significant annual increases in the total amount paid out in comparison to the number of loans issued is as a result of the average loan increasing year-on-year, up by an average of 13.9% per academic year since 2018/19.

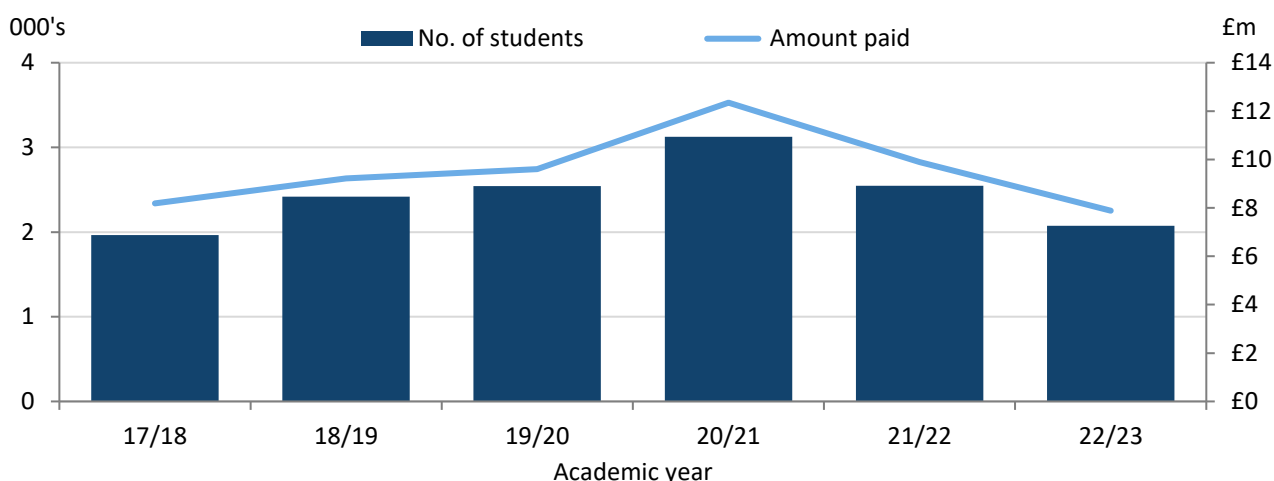
Postgraduate Tuition Fee Loans

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.

18.4% decrease in the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of postgraduate students in 2022/23

Figure 11: Number of postgraduate students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) receiving Tuition Fee Loans and the amount paid

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 6A**

[Download the data for Figure 11 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Tuition Fee Loans were made available for postgraduate students in academic year 2017/18.

Figure 11 shows that in the first year of availability, the number of Tuition Fee Loans paid on behalf of postgraduate students was 2,000. Numbers considerably increased in the following year (up 23.2% to 2,400). Following a much smaller increase in 2019/20, a significant 22.8% rise was noted in 2020/21 to peak at 3,100. This could be attributed to a 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. It was therefore reasonable to expect a reduction in the following year when take-up normalised against an outlying year; with numbers reducing by 18.6% down to 2,500.

Academic year 2022/23 reported a further, similar decrease, of 18.4% bringing take-up back down to near levels reported in the first year of availability, at 2,100.

The amount paid out on behalf of postgraduate students follows a very similar trend increasing year-on-year from £8.2 million in 2013/14 to peak in 2020/21 at £12.3 million. This has since reduced to £7.9 million by 2022/23 (down 20.3% on 2021/22).

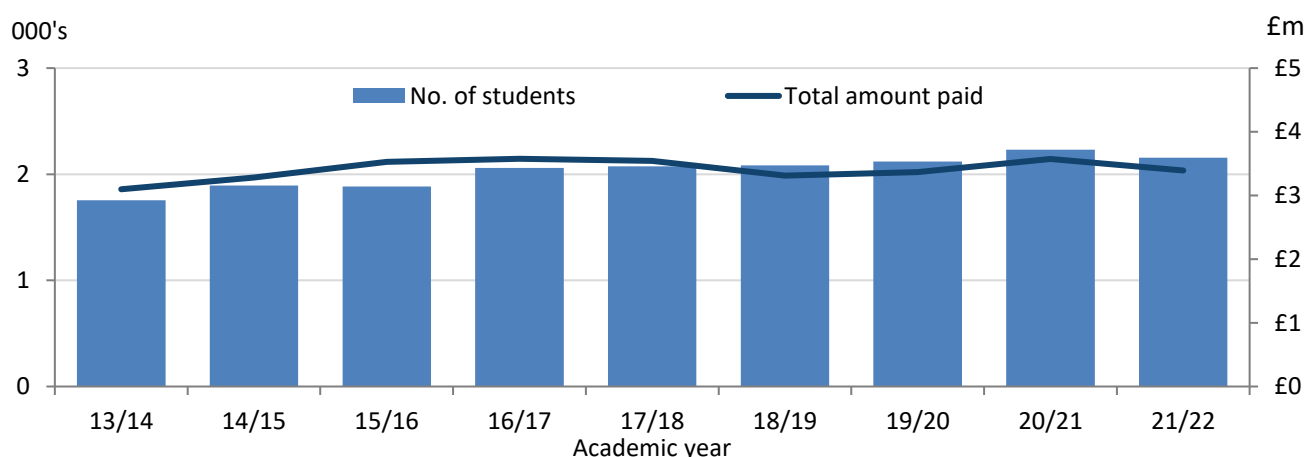
Disabled Students' Allowance

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.

Finalised figures confirm a 5.0% decrease in the amount paid out in full-time students Disabled Students' Allowance for academic year 2021/22

Figure 12: Amount of DSA paid on behalf of full-time students by category and academic year (effective one year later)

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 4B**

[Download the data for Figure 12 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

The vast majority of DSA is paid to suppliers once the Student Loans Company receive the invoices for equipment or services. As invoices continue to be received well after the end of the academic year, we capture a more finalised position by quoting figures an academic year later than much of this publication.

Figure 12 demonstrates that the total number of full-time students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) for the 2013/14 academic year was 1,800. This increased overall to peak at 2,200 for 2020/21. The finalised figure for academic year 2021/22 reported the first decrease since 2015/16, when 75 less students submitted claims than in the previous year.

The amount claimed in full-time DSA equated to £3.1 million for the 2013/14 academic year. This has fluctuated over the years arriving at £3.6 million for 2020/21. £3.4 million was paid out in regard to academic year 2021/22, a 5.0% decrease on the previous year. This can be predominantly attributed to the 3.4% reduction in the number of full-time students making DSA claims for that academic year.

As at 31 August 2023, a total of £3.5 million has been paid out so far for academic year 2022/23. This is 6.9% higher than the £3.3 million paid out by the same point in 2022 for the 2021/22 academic year.

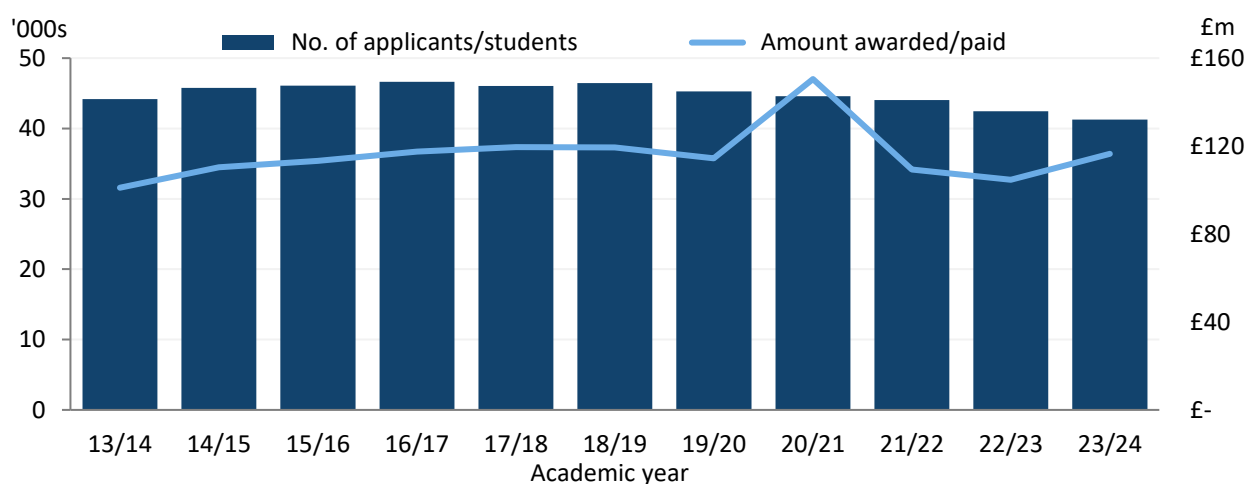
Early in year overview – academic year 2023/24

Table 7C (i) shows an early view of academic year 2023/24 at effective date 31 October 2023. This would be approximately two months into a typical academic year. These figures will be near-finalised in Table 2 of the next update of this publication, due to be released in November 2024.

By end-October 2023, a total of 41,300 undergraduates and postgraduates have been awarded/paid a total of £116.4 million for academic year 2023/24

Figure 13. Early-in-year: Number of students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) receiving higher education support and amount awarded/paid

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: Table 7C (i)

[Download the data for Figure 13 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Figure 13 shows that by end-October in the 2013/14 academic year, a total of 44,200 undergraduates and postgraduates had been awarded/paid. This early position increased steadily over the subsequent five years to reach 46,500 by 2018/19. The total amount awarded/paid by this early point of the same academic years followed a similar trend, growing from £101.1 million in 2013/14 to £119.4 million by 2018/19. Academic year 2019/20 saw the first reduction in both numbers paid and the amount paid, down by 2.6% and 4.1% respectively.

As at end-October 2020, a total of £150.5 million had been awarded/paid to 44,600 students for the 2020/21 academic year. Despite a 1.4% reduction in the number of students awarded/paid, the amount awarded/paid was 31.4% higher than at the same point in the previous year. This can be predominantly attributed to an **early second instalment** of undergraduate tuition fee payments made to higher education providers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (two payments made in October 2020, instead of the typical schedule of one instalment paid in October and one in the following February). For further detail, please refer to our **Additional Information section**. Figures normalised in the following year with the amount awarded/paid reducing to £109.3 million. However, the number of students continued to decrease (by a further 1.2%).

The early-look at academic year 2022/23 indicated further decreases in both the number awarded/paid and the amount awarded/paid (down 3.7% and 4.3% respectively).

As at 31 October 2023, a total of 41,300 applicants/students have been awarded/paid for academic year 2023/24. This continued the downward trend beginning in 2019/20 (by a further 2.8%). Full-time

undergraduate numbers have reduced by 2.3% down to 38,800 (900 less) and part-time undergraduate numbers have reduced by a more significant 13.2%, to 1,500 (down by 200).

Despite the decrease in the number of applicants/students, the amount awarded/paid increased by 11.3% to £116.4 million. This can be attributed to a 40.0% increase in the maximum Maintenance Loan available for academic year 2023/24. For more detail on the maximum loans, please refer to **Table 7A**.

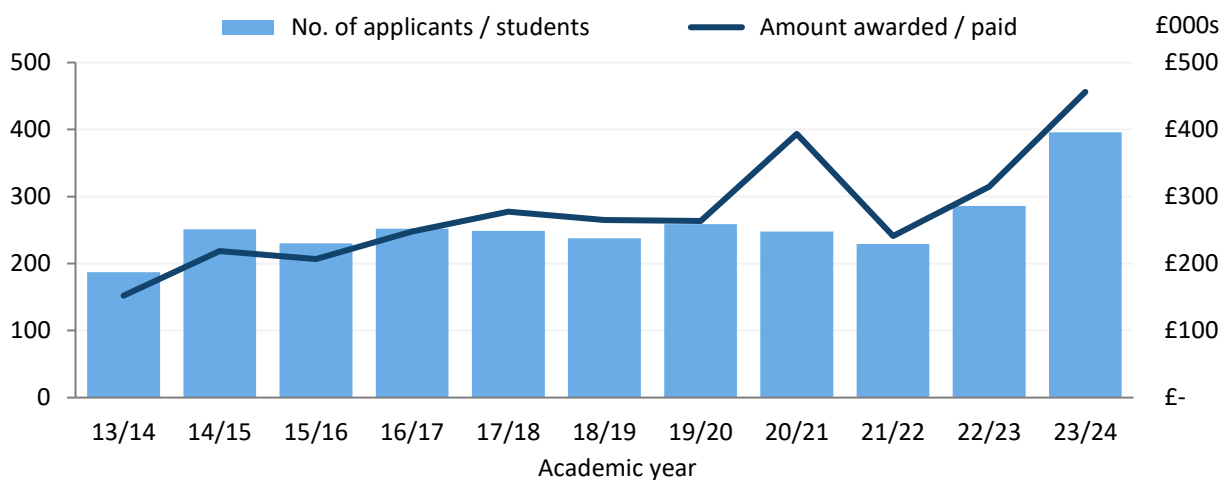
Of this, £115.1 million had been awarded/paid so far to 40,200 undergraduate students. The number awarded/paid is 2.8% below the end-October position in the previous year (1,100 fewer) yet the amount awarded/paid has increased by 11.3% (up by £11.7 million).

This early look at the 2023/24 academic year also indicates a total of £1.3 million has been paid to 1,000 postgraduate students so far. In comparison to the same point in 2022/23, this is a 1.8% decrease in the number of postgraduates paid (down by 20) yet a 11.0% increase in the amount paid out (up by £0.1 million).

Early look at academic year 2023/24 shows a continuing increase in the number of EU (outside UK) students awarded/paid for academic year 2023/24

Figure 14. Early-in-year: Number of students domiciled in EU (outside UK) receiving higher education support and amount awarded/paid

The columns in this chart depict the number of students against the left-hand axis, and the line illustrates the amount paid against the right-hand axis.



Source: **Table 7C(i)**

[Download the data for Figure 14 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

Figure 14 shows that the number of EU (outside UK) undergraduate and postgraduate students paid by end-October for academic year 2013/14 was 190. This has fluctuated over the years, reaching 260 by 2019/20. The amount paid out has shown a similar trend over the same period, from £152,100 to reach £263,500.

An early look at 2020/21 reported a decrease in the number of EU (outside UK) students paid, down 4.2% to 250. However, due to the previously mentioned **early second instalment** of undergraduate tuition fee payments made to higher education providers, the amount paid out by this point in academic year 2020/21 was 49.3% higher than in the previous year at £393,300.

In academic year 2021/22, new EU (outside UK) students in Northern Ireland (without a 'settled' or 'pre-settled status') were no longer eligible for tuition fee funding. However, as the significant majority of these

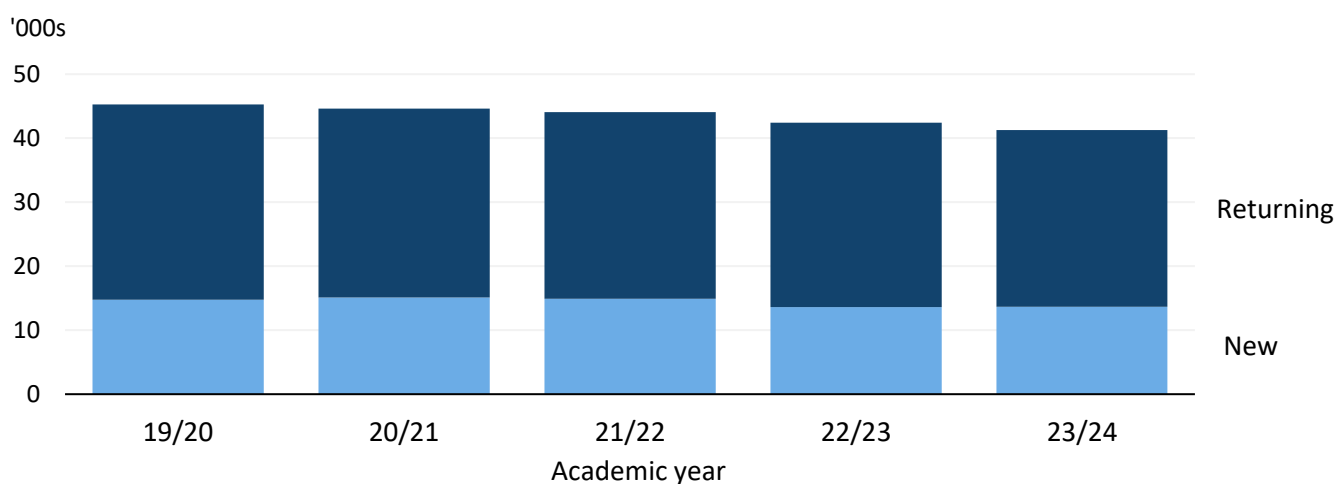
students were primarily from the Republic of Ireland (whose eligibility remains unchanged), there was not a significant decrease in the number of EU (outside UK) students paid (down by 7.7%). The amount paid out in the same year was 38.7% (down to £241,100), more likely due to figures normalising against an outlying year.

The early look at 2022/23 showed a considerable increase in take-up with an additional 24.9% students (at 290) paid a total of £314,700 (up by 30.5%). This can be attributed to an increase in students from the Republic of Ireland.

As at end-October 2023, 400 EU (outside UK) undergraduate and postgraduate students have been paid. This is 38.5% higher than at the same point in academic year 2022/23. £456,200 has been paid out so far for the 2023/24 academic year. This is 45.0% more than paid out at the same point for 2022/23.

Early view of academic year 2023/24 indicates a 4.2% reduction in ‘returning’ students, whereas ‘new’ students remain relatively consistent with the previous year

Figure 15: Early-in-year: Number of new and returning students domiciled in Northern Ireland and EU (outside UK) awarded/paid student support



Source: **Table 7C(ii)**

[Download the data for Figure 15 \(ODS, 6KB\)](#)

‘New’ students are defined as those who have not previously received student support from the Student Loans Company (SLC). ‘Returning’ students are defined as those who have.

Figure 15 indicates that the number of ‘new’ students awarded/paid student support by the end-October position for academic year 2019/20 was 14,700. This increased to peak at 15,100 (up 2.5%) by the same point in the following year. In 2021/22 numbers began to decline, first by 1.5%, then by a further and more significant 8.7% in 2022/23. As at end-October 2023, the number of ‘new’ students awarded/paid for academic year 2023/24 has remained relatively stable (up by 0.3%) at 13,600.

The trend in ‘returning’ students differs in that it has declined each year. In 2019/20 30,500 ‘returning’ students were awarded/paid support. This reduced by 3.3% down to 29,500 followed by two 1.1% decreases over the subsequent two years (down to 28,800). The number of ‘returning’ students has continued to decrease, yet by a more significant 4.2%, down to 27,600.

As a proportion of all awarded/paid students at this early point in the academic year, ‘new’ students have fluctuated between 32.0% (in 2022/23) and 33.9% (in 2020/21) and ‘returning’ students have fluctuated between 68.0% and 66.1% in the same years noted.

Additional Information

Available student financial support

Details on student support available in academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24 can be found on the Student Finance Northern Ireland [website](#).

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. This is evident on Table 7C (i) and (ii). The normal schedule resumed in academic year 2021/22.

These early in year 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 refer to [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 2022-23 was published on 15 June 2023.

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 2023 covering academic session 2022/23.

National Statistics

This is a National Statistics publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

This publication series (publications for England, Wales & Northern Ireland) was awarded **National Statistics status** in October 2011 following a **full assessment** against their Code of Practice.

Since the assessments by the Office for Statistics Regulation we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics and have made several improvements. For more information, please refer to our **National Statistics** page.