

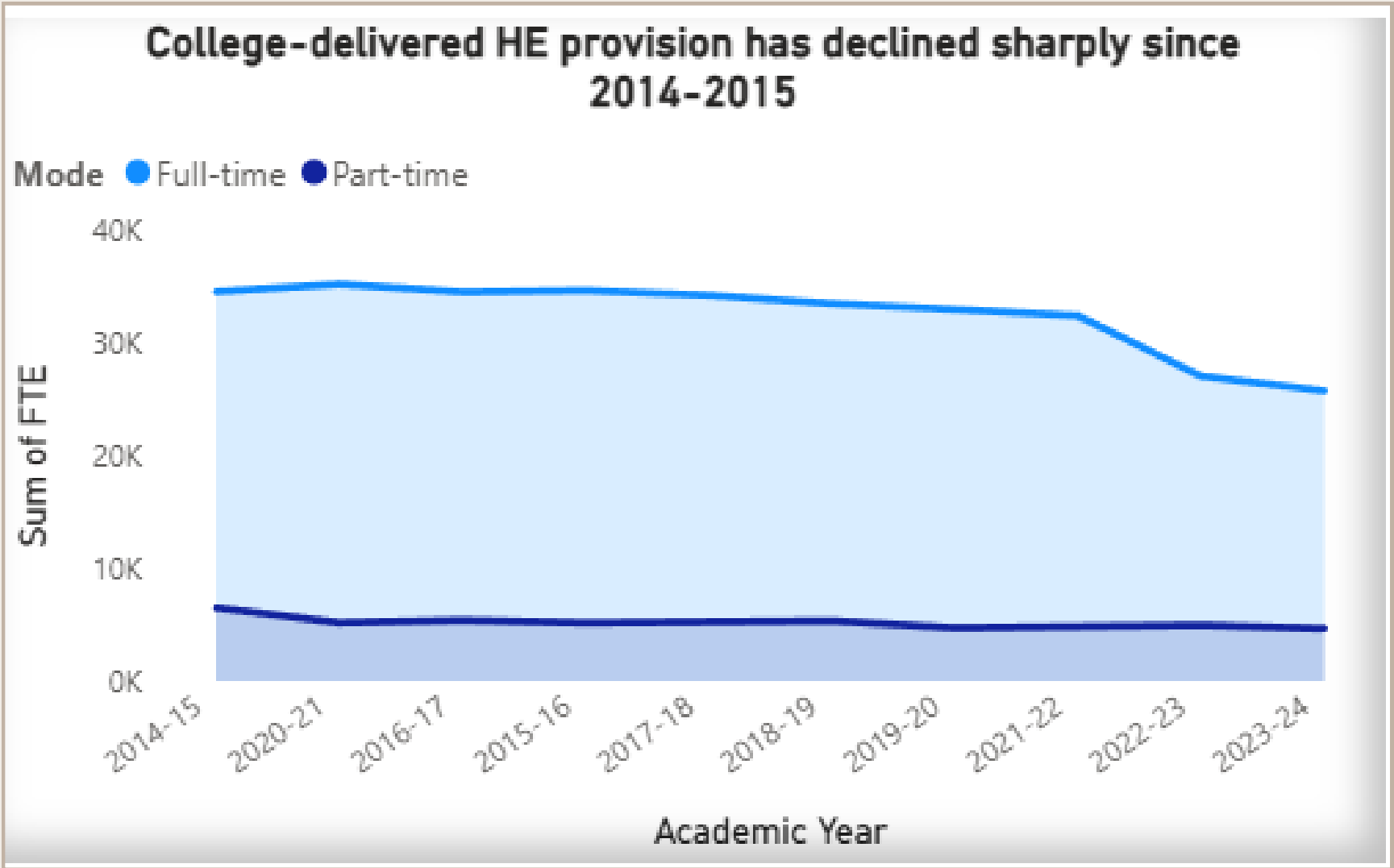
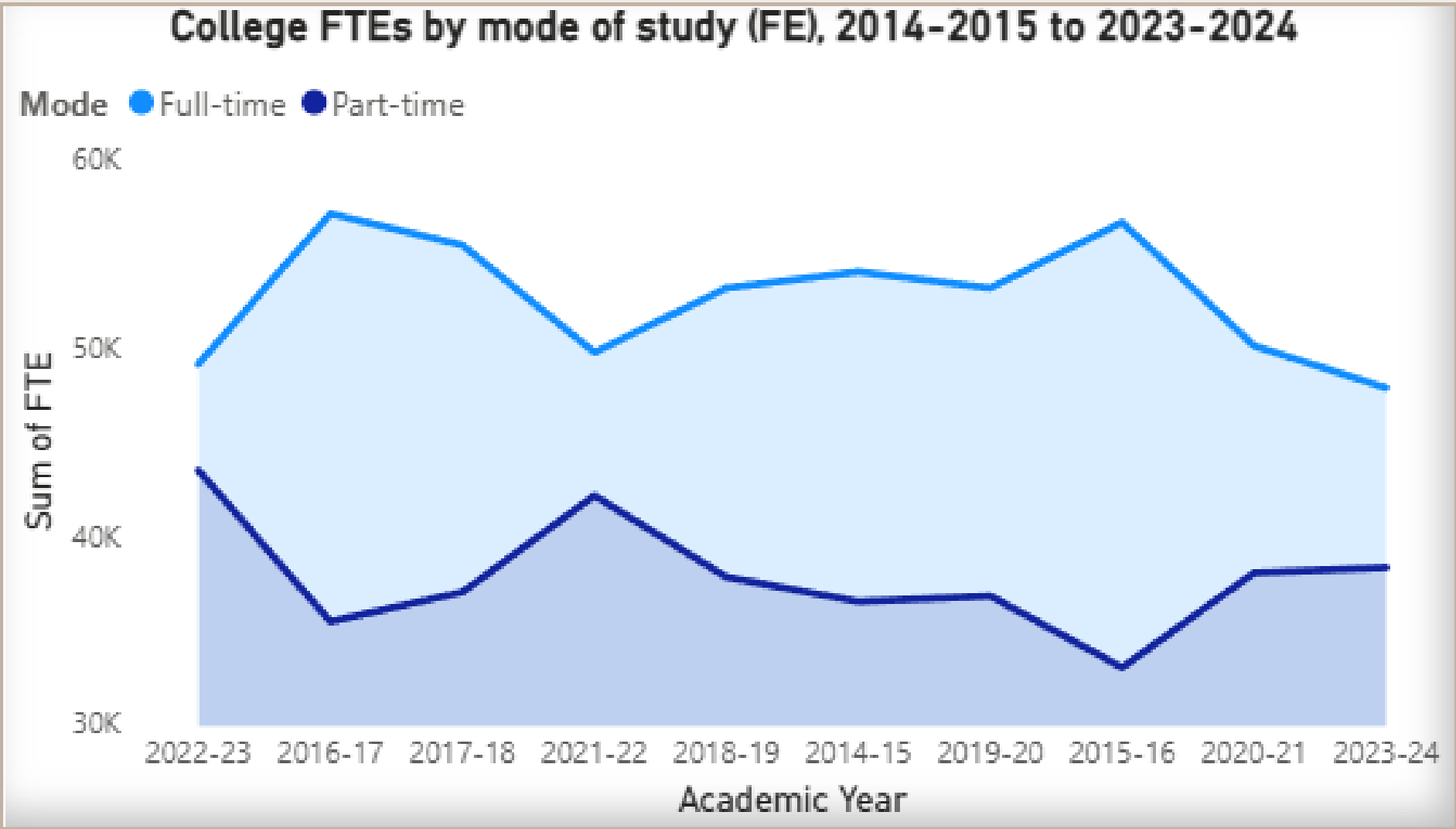


LIFELONG LEARNING

This short data story explores trends in college-delivered lifelong learning in Scotland, using Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) data to highlight changes in provision over time. The focus is on understanding how declining volumes, changing subject availability, and reduced flexibility may affect adult and lifelong learners, with particular relevance for policymakers considering access, reskilling, and inclusive growth.



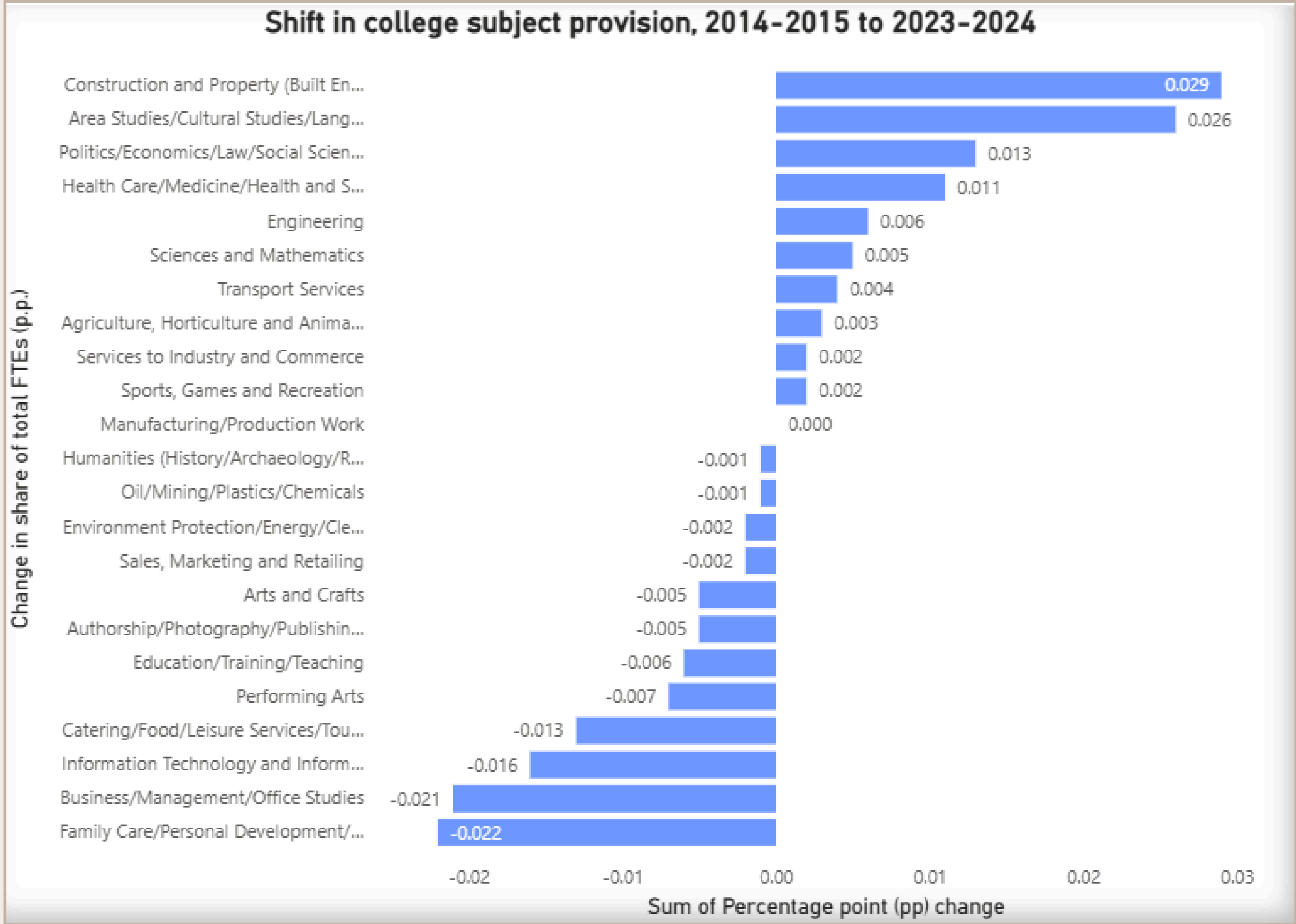
DECLINING LIFELONG LEARNING PROVISION



College-delivered lifelong learning has declined steadily since 2014-2015. While full-time further education FE provision shows a long-term downward trend, part-time FE, a key route for adult and lifelong learners, fell sharply in 2023-2024. College-delivered higher education (HE) provision has also reduced over the decade.

Part-time and college-based routes are essential for learners balancing employment, caring responsibilities, or returning to education later in life. Sustained reductions in these pathways risk limiting access to lifelong learning for those most reliant on flexible provision.

CHANGING ACCESS TO LEARNING

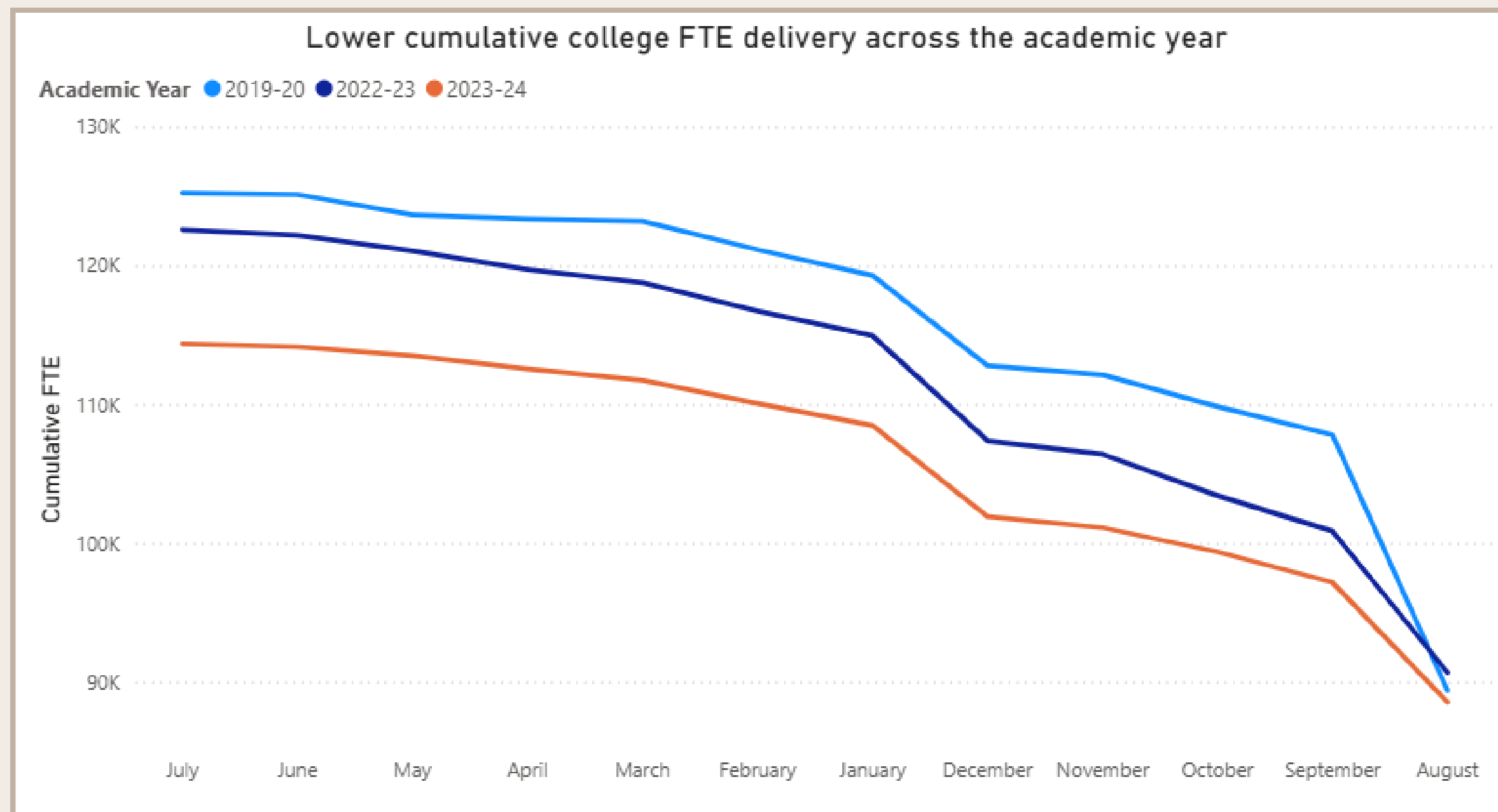


Over the last decade, the mix of subjects delivered by colleges has shifted. Provision has expanded in areas such as construction, health, engineering, and languages, while subjects linked to business, IT, tourism, and personal services have declined as a share of total FTEs.

While growth in priority sectors supports workforce demand, declining provision in business, IT, and service-related subjects may reduce reskilling and career-change opportunities for adult learners, particularly those seeking transferable or entry-level qualifications.

SOURCE: SCOTTISH COLLEGE STATISTICS, FTES BY SUBJECT AREA, AY 2014–15 AND AY 2023–24.

REDUCED FLEXIBILITY ACROSS YEAR



Cumulative FTE delivery in 2023-2024 remains consistently lower than in earlier academic years across the entire year. The gap widens toward the end of the academic cycle, indicating fewer late-entry learning opportunities.

Adult and lifelong learners are more likely to enter education outside traditional start dates. Lower cumulative delivery suggests reduced flexibility in when learning is available, potentially excluding learners who rely on non-standard entry points.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Flexible college routes are essential for adult participation in lifelong learning.

- Adult learners returning to education
- Career changers seeking reskilling
- Learners balancing study with work or caring

Policy Insight

Declining part-time FE and college-based HE provision risks widening access gaps and limiting reskilling opportunities.



Ensuring lifelong learning requires not only sufficient volume, but flexible, accessible, and diverse provision.