Student transfers

Experimental statistics on students changing course from 2012-13 to 2017-18

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Enquiries to official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk

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Contents

Summary

1. There are many reasons and circumstances in which a student may choose to transfer from the course that they originally started to study at a different provider or to study a different course at the same provider. But there may also be barriers to students' opportunities to transfer. This report:

    - introduces the numbers and proportions of students who transfer, both within the same provider and to a different provider, from 2012-13 to 2017-18
    - examines the number of students who change to a different course and were not reported to have carried credit from the previous study with them
    - examines the proportions of student transfers by certain characteristics.

2. Our analysis does not include all students in higher education, due to data limitations, and so may not be representative of all students. However, the methodology we have used can identify course change and credit transfer and is applicable to the population included in the analysis.

3. In 2017-18, the proportion of full-time first degree students who transfer internally with credit (within the same provider) is the same as the proportion of students who transfer externally with credit (to a different provider) at 0.5 per cent. This equates to roughly the same number of students who carried credit in their transfer between students at the same provider and students moving to a different provider. Historically, these proportions have been reducing for internal transfers and stable for external transfers, indicating that the decreasing trend for the overall proportion of student transfers is largely driven by decreasing internal transfers.

4. There are fewer full-time first degree students who transfer with credit two years after entry compared with one year after entry. This number does not change significantly across the time series. There are more students who transfer externally at this stage of their course (0.3 per cent) compared to internally (0.1 per cent).

5. Students who want to change course but were not reported to have carried credit may have to restart a course. For students studying at the same provider, there is more than triple the number of students who restart a different course without carrying credit (1.7 per cent) than students who transfer to a different course with credit (0.5 per cent) in 2017-18. Moreover, this gap has been increasing across time as the proportion of students who restart increases and the proportion of students who transfer decreases.

6. For students studying at a different provider, there is just over double the number of students who were studying in the same subject area who did not carry credit (1.0 per cent) than students studying in the same subject area who carried credit (0.4 per cent). This difference has been increasing slightly in the time series.

Introduction

7. The OfS has a legal duty to monitor the availability of schemes or other arrangements provided by registered higher education providers for student transfers. Section 38 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) defines student transfers as students who have changed from a higher education course, 'course X', to a different higher education course, 'course Y', provided by the same or different UK higher education provider. To be considered a student transfer, the receiving higher education provider must recognise, or take account of, the study undertaken, or level of achievement attained, on course X or another course from the transferring provider.

8. This report provides an analysis of student transfers and is an experimental official statistic which falls under the official statistics' Code of Practice. We are actively seeking feedback for this analysis. Please email comments to official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk.

9. Within the report we refer to those students who have transferred within a higher education provider as 'internal transfers' and those who have transferred between different higher education providers as 'external transfers'. Although HERA's definition of student transfers requires the receiving higher education provider to recognise the level of achievement of the students' original course, this report will show both transfers with credit and transfers without credit for both internal and external transfers. By monitoring the number of students who were able to transfer with credit and students who were not, we can improve our understanding of patterns of student behaviour in this area, and whether there are differences between students with different characteristics to transfer or take credit with them.

10. While this report attempts to capture credit and non-credit transfer, there are a number of limitations in the data which may affect the results reported here including:

    a. Our analysis is limited to students entering courses at English higher education providers who report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). We do not currently have the necessary data collected in the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) Individualised Learner Record to facilitate comparable analysis for students entering further education providers. The overview of student transfers may not, therefore, be representative of student transfers across the entire higher education sector in England.

    b. There is some ambiguity around the precise definition of a course, meaning that our identification of changes of course may not be comprehensive in all circumstances. It is possible that the definition used may apply differently across different providers, and that our assumptions overlook some of the more nuanced configurations of student transfers.

    c. As our data collection occurs on an annual basis, we are not able to identify students who transfer courses at the same provider within their first year and these will therefore not be considered as internal transfers.

    d. We are not able to identify partial credit that students may obtain through certain elements of their course (such as passing certain modules in their course but not others). As a result, students who have partial credit but are still required to substantially repeat a year of study will be treated as non-credit transfer despite carrying partial credit.

11. Bearing these limitations in mind, we still remain confident that all of the student transfers we have identified can be considered as such, but acknowledge that this may understate the true volume of student transfers overall.

12. By monitoring both internal and external student transfers we can examine whether student transfers have changed over time, as well as examine whether students with certain characteristics may be more likely to transfer than others. From the data alone it is not possible to distinguish the underlying reason behind the number of student transfers, which may depend on both the providers' policy surrounding transfers as well as students' own preferences. However, this analysis goes some way to establishing an evidence base that can inform guidance to support improved monitoring of student transfers.

13. In this analysis we examine the outcomes for full-time students entering courses at higher education providers between 2012-13 and 2017-18, both one year and two years after entry. We identify the number of students who were studying at the same or different provider in the following year(s), or whether they qualified or were inactive in higher education. For those students studying in the following year(s) either internally or externally, we identify whether they take credit with them, whether they are studying the same course or subject area, and consider whether students with certain characteristics transfer more than others.

Population

14. The population considered in this analysis includes all full-time higher education entrants on the first year of programme studying a course expected to last longer than 15 months at a registered higher education provider as of 29 October 2020 between the academic years 2012-13 to 2017-18. It includes entrants at all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate), before focusing on first-degree entrants, which includes both students studying 'first degree' and 'first degree with postgraduate component' courses. Students of all domiciles are part of the entrant population, which includes both UK and overseas students.

15. Because of the requirements above, students on the Individualised Learner Records (ILR) cannot be included in our entrant population because we do not have data indicating the year of programme for this group of students. The year of programme is a crucial field for the analysis, because it is used to indicate whether a student transfer includes credit transfer. This also means that students in our population who transfer to a further education college (FEC) will be counted as changing provider, but with 'credit unknown'.

16. Only entrants on full-time courses are included in the analysis due to data quality issues for students studying part-time. Our investigation suggests inconsistencies in the reporting of year of programme data for part-time students, and so to ensure the quality and reliability of our findings, part-time students are excluded from the analysis. However, students on full-time courses who change to part-time courses are still included, and are not considered to have changed course unless the characteristics of their course, such as subject, changes.

17. Although the definition of student transfers as defined by Section 38 of HERA suggests that students at non-registered providers are included as well as students at registered providers, entrants studying at non-registered providers are excluded from this analysis because we do not have substantial data for non-registered providers. Similarly, students studying courses overseas which articulate into a UK degree (such as dual-degrees) are excluded, as they are

not studying at a registered provider in their first year of programme. Entrants who are included in the analysis include both students studying at registered providers with and without the fee cap.

18. The 15-month restriction on the length of the course only includes students who are studying courses longer than 15 months, because we would not typically expect students to have transferred in courses which are expected to only last a year. The definition is extended to 15 months from 12 months to allow for courses which finish after slightly more than a year.

Methodology

19. This section sets out how course change and credit transfer is identified, taking account of the data availability and reliability.

20. There is no specific definition of what a "different higher education course" or what recognition of "level of achievement attained" refers to in section 38 of HERA. Proxy measures are required to identify a change in course and whether there is credit transfer.

21. The methodology for identifying student transfers is built on existing OfS methodology[1] in classifying continuation for the purpose of constructing institutional measures. Under this existing continuation methodology, students are classified as 'continuing' (studying at the same provider) or 'transferring' (studying at a different provider), which allows for further categorisation of these students as internal or external transfers, depending on whether they changed course. We also examine whether they carried credit with them in their transfer. We apply our methodology by building on the existing continuation methodology, where only students who are studying at the same level or higher will be considered a transfer. For instance, students moving from a foundation degree[2] to a first degree will be considered a transfer as they are moving to a higher level of study.

22. The methodology for identifying transfers ensures that all students categorised as transfers are as accurately classified as possible given the data availability, with the possibility that other student transfers exist who are not captured by the methodology.

Identification of course change

23. The methodology behind identifying a change in course is different for internal and external transfers. If a student is changing providers, that is by definition a change of course and an external transfer, because the structure of the course such as modules, lecturers, and examination would be different between providers. However, for a student at the same provider the following year, not all aspects of a course may change, but some could. This makes the process for detecting internal transfers more complex.

[1] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/.

[2] A foundation degree is not to be confused with a foundation year, where the former is its own course and the latter an initial year which exists before commencing some first degree courses. A change from a foundation year to first degree is considered a transfer, while a student progressing from a foundation year to their first year is not a transfer.

24. Identifying a change in course within a provider is more challenging because many providers allow some flexibility as part of the course. Providers may also take different approaches as to whether or not the various course pathways and delivery options constitute different courses for the purposes of data reporting. This means we must examine the different aspects and types of courses, and identify what elements observed often change year to year for someone who is simply continuing on the same course. We have identified a change in course for internal transfers using several criteria. For a course to have been identified as different, it must satisfy all of the following criteria (also see Figure 1):

    a. Not have the same course title

    b. Not be the same subject area, considered at two levels of classification:

        i. CAH3[3] subject classification for all students

        ii. CAH2 (broader classification) for students on courses classified as non-specific under CAH3

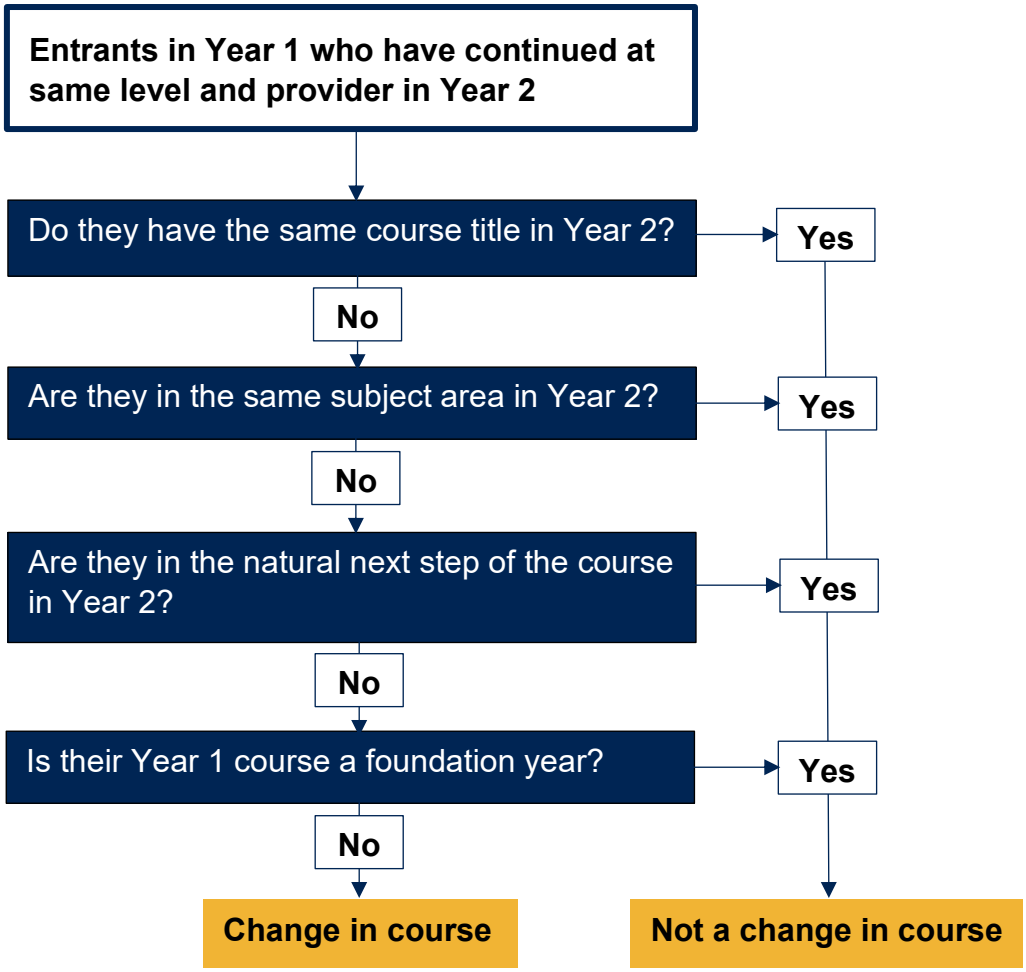
    c. Not be considered a natural next step[4] in the course, identified by looking at typical routes taken by other students on the same course

    d. Not be a foundation year for the year of entry.

[3] CAH refers to the Common Aggregation Hierarchy, a standard subject grouping system developed by HESA (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/hecos).

[4] 'Natural next step' refers to progression onto the next year of the course which may seem like a different course due to the way the course is structured (e.g. different course title, different subject, courses with intercalation, etc.). Please see Annex A for more information on how this is determined.

Figure 1: Flow chart of the criteria for identifying course change for internal transfers



25. If the student does not satisfy at least one of the criteria, they are considered to have undergone a change in course and would therefore be a transfer. For more detailed information on the methodology in identifying course change for internal transfers, please see Annex A.

Identification of credit transfer

26. We have used the year of programme[5] the student is in to determine whether the student appears to have taken credit from their previous course into the new course. For example, an entrant on the first year of their course would have their year of programme as one. If there is credit transfer, their year of programme for the next year would be two, which suggests a progression. If there is no credit transfer, their year of programme for the next year would be one, in which the student has to restart in a new course and cannot carry over credit from their previous course into the new one.

27. Our definition of credit transfer only captures instances where there is enough credit to result in progression of an entire year of programme. Partial credit transfer, which is also included in the

[5] Year of programme is a field available on HESA's records indicating the year number of course the student is studying in. Although there is a heavy reliance on the field used in the methodology, there is no evidence that suggests the year of programme field to be unreliable, and so the field is expected to give a reasonable approximation in the identification of student transfers.

definition of student transfers in HERA, is not included in this analysis because we do not have in-year data available to distinguish whether partial credit was carried when changing course.

28. Different years of programmes are used to signify credit transfer for internal and external transfers two years after entry. For internal transfers, a two-year outcome refers to the outcome of students who are studying at the same provider after one year, and so the year of programme which indicates credit transfer would be two. Two-year outcomes for external transfers refer to two groups of students:

    a. Students who were studying at the same provider after one year

    b. Students who either qualified at a lower level or were inactive after one year.

    For group a., their year of programme would have to be three to indicate credit transfer. For group b., their year of programme can be either two or three, because the student taking a year off and returning to their second year of programme would still be a natural progression.

29. If a student has a lower year of programme than expected, then we can assume no credit was carried across when the student changed course. There are some cases where the year of programme may be higher, which may be a result of data quality issues or rare cases where the student has progressed beyond expected. We classify these students as ‘unidentified’ instead, because we cannot be certain whether they have experienced credit transfer.

Limitations and stability

Limitations

30. One of the limitations of the analysis is its representativeness. Because data on the year of programme of a student is required to classify students' ability to carry credit, many students who are missing this indicator are excluded from the analysis. Students at colleges, who report on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), cannot be included as this does not record the year of programme. Similarly, students on courses whose structure does not have years of programme cannot be included. This means that the analysis may be less representative of the sector as a whole, because some significant groups of students are not included.

31. Another limitation is the reliance on year of programme to identify whether credit transfer has taken place. There are cases where credit is transferred which enables a student to skip some modules in the first year but take the remained of the first year course – these would not be identified as successful credit transfer in this analysis. Similarly this analysis does not identify how far students progressed in their first year before they changed course – some students may have left their initial course before reaching the end or failed their first year exams and so not had enough credit to transfer.

32. There is also uncertainty in the definition of course change when students are transferring internally. It is not always clear when a student has changed to a different course title whether this was a natural progression or specialisation from their original course or a conscious choice to move to a new course. This analysis errs on the side of understating course changes, so there are likely to be cases where students have consciously chosen to change course, but because it is in a very similar subject it has not been counted as a different course in this analysis.

Stability

33. One way of assessing whether this is a coherent measure of successful credit transfer is to consider the stability. We would expect that the proportions of students transferring internally or externally would not often significantly change year to year at a provider.

34. We have investigated any fluctuations from year to year by examining the proportion of transfers between years for each provider, and have concluded that only a small number of providers seem to change significantly. This shows that the measure is not overly prone to inconsistent reporting by providers between years.

35. Annex D displays the investigation into the stability of providers over time in more detail.

Overall analysis

36. This section presents the overall outcomes for students, before focusing in more detail on the course changes for those students on first degree[6] courses. Later sections consider how this varies by different student characteristics.

37. The proportion of students included in this analysis differs by level. Table 1 shows that students on some course levels included in the analysis, such as 'PGCE', 'Postgraduate taught masters', 'Other qualifications with a postgraduate component', 'Other undergraduate' and 'Other postgraduate taught', may not be representative of all entrants studying at these course levels, because the proportion included in the analysis is low. Additionally, the number of entrants to 'PGCE' (55 students) and 'Other postgraduate research' (100 students) courses is also low.

Table 1: Analysis population as a proportion of total entrants in 2017-18

Course level	Number of students in analysis population	Total number of entrants	% of entrants in analysis population
Postgraduate research	20,175	23,795	84.8%
Other postgraduate research	100	125	81.5%
Postgraduate taught masters	15,260	159,150	9.6%
Other postgraduate taught	3,255	11,040	29.5%
Other qualifications with a postgraduate component	545	5,200	10.5%
Degrees including a postgraduate component	29,130	31,200	93.4%
First degree	338,145	413,175	81.8%
Other undergraduate	12,835	40,715	31.5%
PGCE	55	20,685	0.3%

Overview of outcomes

38. Table 2 shows the outcomes one year after entry for entrants on the first year of programme studying a course expected to last longer than 15 months at a registered higher education provider for each year, grouped by course level. Of those who started in 2017-18, 88.2 per cent (302,060 entrants) of first degree students were studying at the same provider, 3.0 per cent

[6] First degree, more commonly known as bachelor's degree, refers to both students studying 'first degree' and 'first degree with postgraduate component' courses. Please see HESA definitions for more details: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions.

(10,250 entrants) were at a different provider[7], 0.1 per cent (470 entrants) qualified, and the remaining 8.7 per cent (29,720 entrants) were either inactive or studying at a lower level.

39. The proportion of students who study at a different provider differs by course level. Compared to students studying for a first degree where 3.0 per cent study at a different provider one year after entry, students on course levels other than first degree are less likely to do so, ranging from 0.8 to 2.2 per cent. Students in 'Postgraduate research' and 'Other postgraduate research' courses are more likely to continue studying at the same provider.

Table 2: Proportions of students studying at the same and different providers one year after entry in 2017-18, grouped by course level[8]

Course level	Studying at a lower level or inactive	Qualified	Studying at different provider	Studying at same provider	Total entrants
Postgraduate research	3.7%	0.1%	1.2%	95.0%	20,175
Other postgraduate research	4.0%	0%	2.0%	94.1%	100
Postgraduate taught masters	6.8%	6.5%	0.6%	86.1%	15,260
Other postgraduate taught	8.0%	1.2%	0.8%	89.9%	3,255
Other qualifications with a postgraduate component	12.9%	0.6%	5.9%	80.7%	545
Degrees including a postgraduate component	3.9%	0%	1.8%	94.3%	29,130
First degree	8.4%	0.1%	3.0%	88.5%	338,145
Other undergraduate	13.8%	2.9%	1.9%	81.3%	12,835
PGCE	12.5%	76.8%	0%	10.7%	55

Credit transfer and course restarts

40. For students in 2017-18, we examine the number and proportions of students in each category of course or subject change and credit transfer status. Table 3 displays these categories for students studying at the same provider, and Table 4 displays these categories for students

[7] Only study at the same level or higher is included. Studying at a lower level is counted in the 'studying at a lower level or inactive' category.

[8] These figures are restricted to the analysis population used in this report, which includes the removal of students on courses lasting less than 15 months. This explains the small number of 'PGCE' and 'Other postgraduate research' entrants. See Table 2 for more details.

studying at a different provider. Note that students on a course at the same provider which meets our criteria to count as a natural progression from their original course is counted as the same course even if the course title is different (see Methodology section for more detail). For students studying at a different provider, we do not examine whether their course has changed because changing providers will by definition result in a new course, but we will examine whether they are studying in the same subject area and explore whether the student has carried credit onto their new course.

41. The definition of 'credit' for courses which do not have a large taught component, such as 'Postgraduate research', refers to the experiences gained as part of the course rather than numerical credits normally achieved in courses which have taught modules. A 'postgraduate research student who has carried credit' then refers to a student who has achieved recognition for their work and experiences in their previous year.

Table 3: Categories of student outcomes for students studying at the same provider

	Credit	No credit
Studying same course	Continuer	Same course restarter
Studying different course	Internal credit transfer	Different course restarter

Table 4: Categories of student outcomes for students studying at a different provider

	Credit	No credit
Studying same subject area	External credit transfer in same subject area	External transfer without credit in same subject area
Studying different subject area	External credit transfer in different subject area	External transfer without credit in different subject area

42. Because there are very few students studying course levels other than first degree who are studying at a different provider, we can only examine these detailed outcomes for students who are studying at the same provider. Table 5 shows that the proportion of students studying at the same provider who fall under each category of changing course and carrying credit varies by course level. Students studying for a 'PGCE' and 'Other postgraduate research' are omitted because there are too few students in these categories.

Table 5: Credit transfer and course change status of 2017-18 entrants studying at the same provider one year after entry, by level of study

Course level	Not studying at same provider	Studying at same provider					Total entrants
		Unknown credit	Credit		No credit		
			Continuer	Internal credit transfer	Different course restarter	Same course restarter	
Degrees including a postgraduate component	5.7%	0.3%	89.1%	0.4%	1.3%	3.2%	29,130
First degree	11.5%	0.1%	82.0%	0.5%	1.7%	4.2%	338,145
Other postgraduate taught	10.1%	0.3%	81.6%	0.2%	0.1%	7.9%	3,255
Other qualifications with a postgraduate component	19.3%	13.1%	64.5%	0%	0.2%	2.9%	545
Other undergraduate	18.7%	0.1%	72%	0.1%	1.3%	7.8%	12,835
Postgraduate research	5.0%	0.6%	86.4%	0.9%	0%	7.0%	20,175
Postgraduate taught masters	13.9%	0.3%	74.8%	0%	0.3%	10.6%	15,260

43. Comparing the proportion of students who are credit transfers with students who are restarts allows us to examine the relationship between the desire of students to change course and the approval of providers to do so for different course levels.

- ‘Postgraduate research’ students have the highest proportion of internal credit transfers (0.9 per cent, 180 entrants), while also having the lowest proportion of different course restarters (0 per cent), suggesting that most students who want to change course can carry credit with them, and do not have to restart their course again.

- The proportion of same course restarters is higher for students in ‘Other undergraduate’, ‘Other postgraduate taught’, ‘Postgraduate research’, and ‘Postgraduate taught masters’, ranging from 7.0 to 10.6 per cent.

However, because of the lower number of students in courses other than first degree and degrees including a postgraduate component, we cannot be fully confident in these numbers. For this reason, these degree level courses will be the focus of the remainder of the report.

First degree students

44. The remainder of this report will focus on full-time first degree students[9], which includes students studying first degrees with postgraduate components. This population was chosen because there are enough students to derive insight into whether students with different characteristics are equally likely to transfer successfully. Additionally, first degree provision commonly lasts longer than one year, and often will have a defined course structure, which makes movement between courses more identifiable.

45. We compare the number of entrants continuing at the same provider who are successful credit transfers with those who restarted their course. We examine these numbers separately for full-time and part-time students, as there may be different patterns in their likelihood to transfer and/or take credit, bearing in mind that the number of students on part-time courses is much lower.

46. Figure 2 focuses on first degree entrants studying at the same provider in the next year. The proportion who restarted the same course (4.1 per cent in 2017-18) is much higher than the proportion who restarted a different course (1.7 per cent). Only 0.5 per cent of entrants successfully took enough credit to miss a year when changing to a different course at their provider. This means of those who changed course three times as many restarted as transferred credit, indicating that more students want to change course than the proportion of credit transfers on its own would suggest.

[9] First degree, more commonly known as bachelor's degree, refers to both students studying 'first degree' and 'first degree with postgraduate component' courses. Please see HESA definitions for more details: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions.

Figure 2: Proportion of first degree students studying at the same provider from 2012-13 to 2017-18

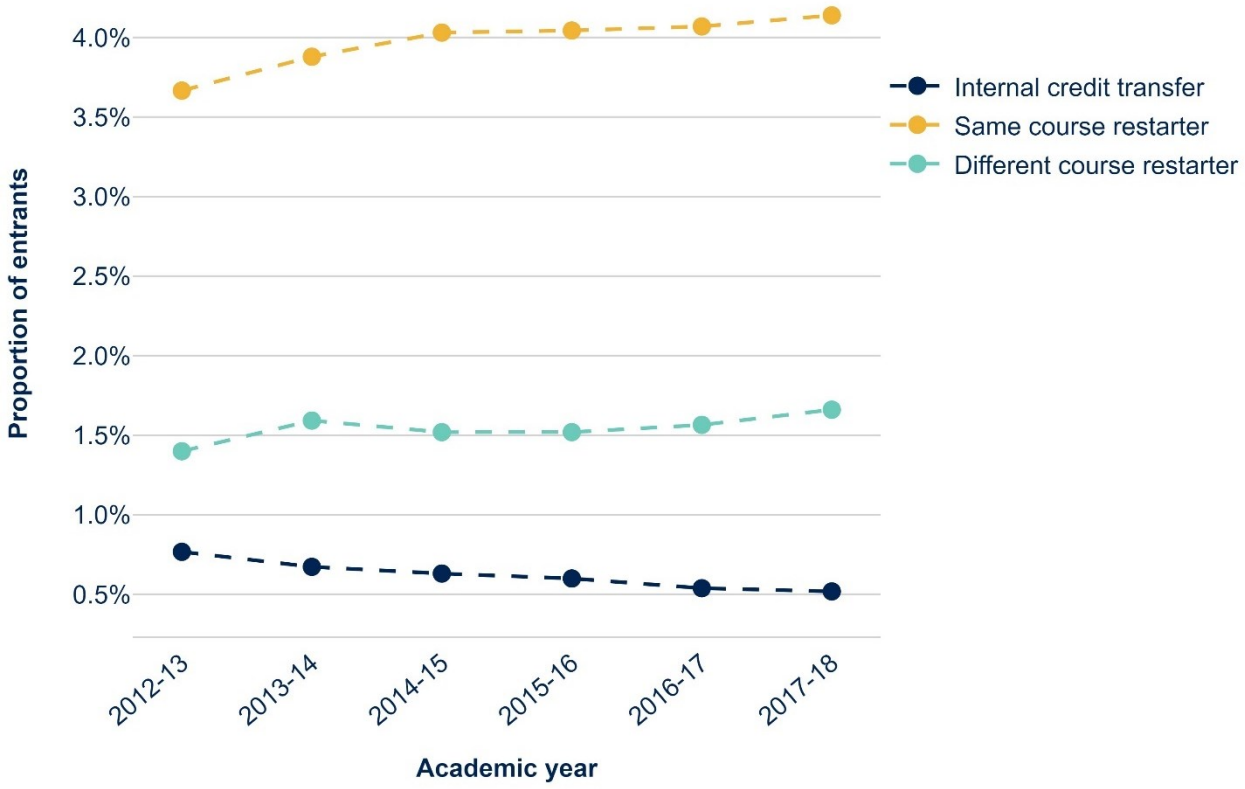


Table 6: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2017-18 studying at the same provider one year after entry

Year	Not studying at same provider	Studying at same provider					Total first degree entrants
		Credit		No credit		Unknown credit	
		Continuer	Internal credit transfer	Different course restarter	Same course restarter		
2012-13	10.3%	83.7%	0.8%	1.4%	3.7%	0.1%	310,865
2013-14	10.3%	83.5%	0.7%	1.6%	3.9%	0.1%	339,220
2014-15	10.6%	83.1%	0.6%	1.5%	4.0%	0.1%	356,515
2015-16	10.8%	82.9%	0.6%	1.5%	4.0%	0.2%	368,520
2016-17	10.7%	83.0%	0.5%	1.6%	4.1%	0.2%	370,580
2017-18	11.0%	82.6%	0.5%	1.7%	4.1%	0.1%	367,275

47. Table 6 shows that while the proportion of credit transfers has decreased each year, the proportion of restarts has increased. This means over time fewer students gained recognition for their previous work when transferring to a different course. There is also an increasing proportion of those who restarted the same course each year, to 4.1 per cent (15,205 entrants) in 2017-18. For a small proportion of students we were unable to identify whether they changed course or took credit.

48. Figure 3 and Table 7 consider instead the credit transfer status for those who changed provider, and whether they also changed subject. They show that the proportion of students who successfully took enough credit to miss a year of their new course is lower than the proportion who started from the beginning.

Figure 3: Proportion of first degree students studying at a different provider from 2012-13 to 2017-18

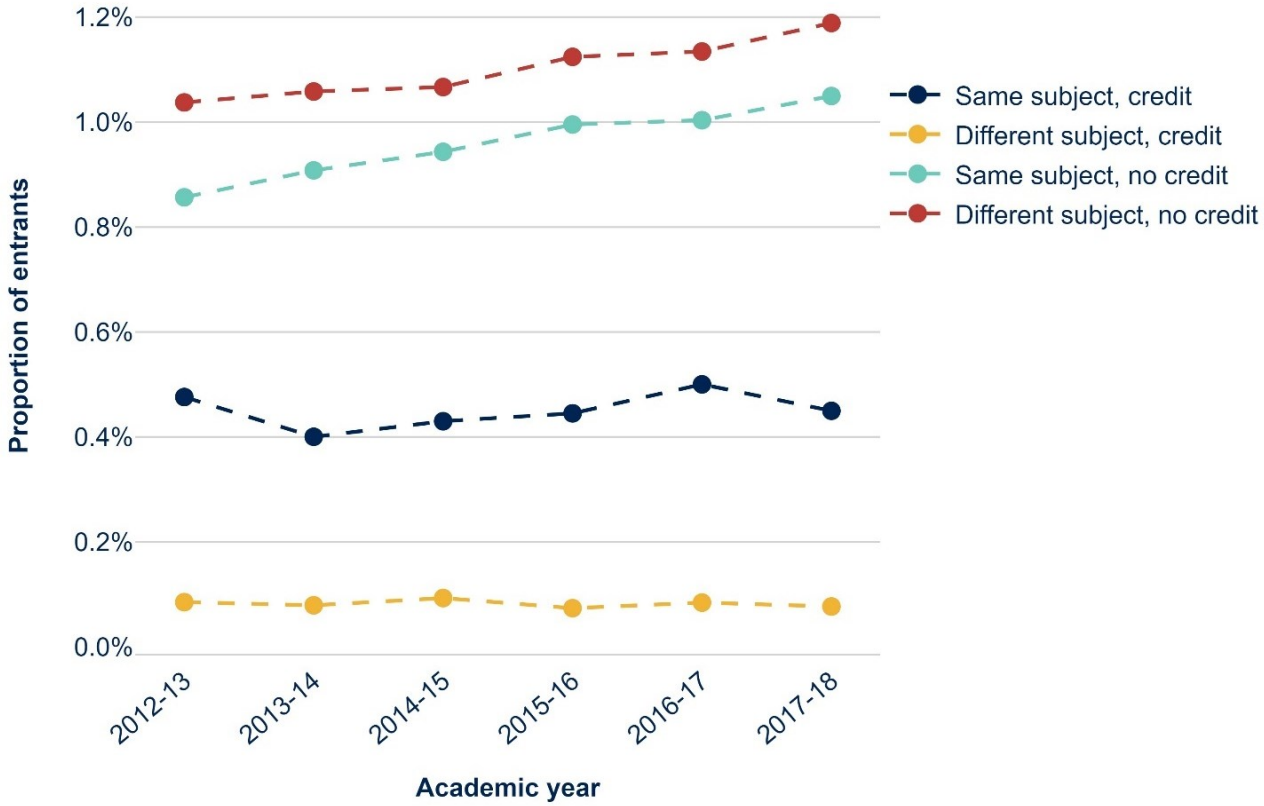


Table 7: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2017-18 studying at a different provider one year after entry

Year	Not studying at different provider	Studying at different provider					Total first degree entrants
		Credit		No credit		Unknown credit	
		Different subject area	Same subject area	Different subject area	Same subject area		
2012-13	97.4%	0.1%	0.5%	1.0%	0.9%	0.2%	310,865
2013-14	97.5%	0.1%	0.4%	1.1%	0.9%	0.1%	339,220
2014-15	97.4%	0.1%	0.4%	1.1%	0.9%	0.1%	356,515
2015-16	97.3%	0.1%	0.4%	1.1%	1.0%	0.1%	368,520
2016-17	97.2%	0.1%	0.5%	1.1%	1.0%	0.1%	370,580
2017-18	97.1%	0.1%	0.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.1%	367,275

49. Table 7 shows the proportion of students studying at a different provider. In 2017-18, 0.4 per cent (1,650 entrants) of entrants were able to take credit when moving to a course in the same subject area[10] compared with 0.1 per cent (285 entrants) who were able to take credit for a course in a different subject area. This is consistent across the time series.

50. Looking at 2017-18 entrants who changed provider without carrying credit, 1.2 per cent (4,365 entrants) were in a different subject area, similar to the proportion (1.0 per cent, 3,855 entrants) who were studying the same subject.

51. Comparing students studying the same subject area who did not carry credit with the smaller proportion of those who did suggests that some students were restricted in their ability to carry credit. This restriction could be due to the student not having enough credit in the specific subject to transfer to their new provider, but it may also be that they faced barriers in having their credit recognised between providers.

52. The proportion of students who did not carry credit to their new provider has been steadily increasing since 2012-13.

Transfers two years after entry

53. In addition to examining how students may transfer to a different course or provider in the year after entry, we can also examine whether students may change course or provider two years after entry. This allows us to identify students who have changed course or provider who were previously uncaptured, and to understand more about the patterns behind student transfers. This section will also only include students studying a first degree in the analysis, because there are few students on long enough courses at other levels for insightful analysis of outcomes two years after entry.

54. The proportion of students with each outcome does not change much throughout the time series. As a result, we will examine the course change and credit status for students two years after entry only for those who started in 2016-17.

55. Compared to the proportions one year after entry, students are much less likely to transfer both externally and internally, regardless of whether credit was carried. That is, students who are between the second and third year of their degree are less likely to change course or transfer to a different provider.

56. Table 8 shows the proportion of 2016-17 entrants studying at the same provider two years after entry in each outcome category. There is a smaller proportion of entrants who are internal credit transfers two years after entry (0.1 per cent) than one year after entry (0.5 per cent).

57. For students who did not carry credit, we are able to further distinguish whether they are resitting just their previous year of study (possibly students who may have failed some component of their previous year of study), or whether they are restarting their course from the

[10] For transfers to a different provider, subject area change is considered instead of course change, as a transfer to a different provider would automatically result in a course change as all aspects of the course, such as structure, modules, and content will have changed. Subject area is considered as a determinant of whether a student should have been able to carry credit, because a course in the same subject area should roughly be transferable across providers.

first year of the programme. There are more same course re-sitters (6.8 per cent) two years after entry in comparison to same course restarters one year after entry (4.1 per cent).

Table 8: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants in 2016-17 studying at the same provider two years after entry

Not studying at same provider	Studying at same provider							
	Credit		No credit				Unknown credit	Total entrants
	Continuer	Internal transfer	Different course resitter	Same course resitter	Different course restarter	Same course restarter		
16.4%	75.3%	0.1%	0.2%	6.8%	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	370,580

58. Table 9 shows the proportion of 2016-17 entrants studying at a different provider two years after entry in each outcome category. There are fewer students who transfer to a different provider two years after entry than one year after entry, with only 0.3 per cent carrying credit (0.1 per cent in a different subject area and 0.2 per cent in the same subject area). It is worth noting that the proportion of students with 'Unknown credit' is higher in Table 9 because the methodology is unable to identify the credit transfer status of students who transferred one year after entry.

Table 9: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants in 2016-17 studying at the different provider two years after entry

Not studying at different provider	Studying at different provider					
	Credit		No credit		Unknown credit	Total entrants
	Different subject area	Same subject area	Different subject area	Same subject area		
95.6%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	0.6%	3.0%	370,580

59. Only a small number of students changed course two years after entry. As a result, we have decided to focus on outcomes after one year for the rest of this report.

Student characteristics

60. This section considers whether certain groups of students were more likely to transfer with credit than others. As previously discussed, we **included only full-time students on first degree courses**[11], and students of all domiciles are included. We have analysed as comprehensive a range of student characteristics as is currently possible using the available data[12].

61. As a reminder, there are eight possible outcomes explored in the section, as visualised earlier in Tables 3 and 4:

    a. Continuer – students who are studying at the same provider in the same course with credit

    b. Internal credit transfer – students who are studying at the same provider in a different course with credit

    c. Same course restarter– students who are studying at the same provider in the same course, but have not carried credit

    d. Different course restarter – students who are studying at the same provider in a different course and have not carried credit

    e. External credit transfer in same subject area – students who are studying at a different provider in the same subject area and have carried credit

    f. External credit transfer in different subject area – students who are studying at a different provider in a different subject area and have carried credit

    g. External transfer without credit in same subject area – students who are studying at a different provider in the same subject area but have not carried credit

    h. External transfer without credit in different subject area – students who are studying at a different provider in a different subject area but have not carried credit

62. In all these cases, if students have carried credit it means they were able to miss the first year of their new course, while those who did not carry credit started the course from the beginning.

[11] First degree courses include first degree and first degree with postgraduate component. Only students in full-time first degree courses are included because there are too few students in other modes and levels to draw meaningful conclusions.

[12] The student characteristics considered in this analysis includes all groups of potential or current students where the OfS can identify gaps in equality of opportunity in different parts of the student lifecycle. In determining the characteristics included in this analysis, the OfS has given due regard to students who share particular characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010 as well as students who are otherwise underrepresented or disadvantaged. There are some student groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 where the OfS has been prevented from including them in this analysis because either a) data is collected at a national level but there are gaps in disclosure and absence of comprehensive data (for example in relation to religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment); or b) data is not collected at a national level (for example in relation to marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity).

63. We identified a number of differences in the outcomes of different groups. Some of the main findings are listed below:

    a. Students from the areas of lowest higher education participation (POLAR4[13] quintile 1) are the most likely to transfer without credit. The most underrepresented students studying at the same provider are more likely to restart their course (4.7 per cent) than more represented students (3.1 per cent of quintile 5 students).

    b. The same trend is present for when considering students from economically deprived areas (measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[14]). Quintile 1 students (most deprived areas) are more likely to restart on a different course (2.3 per cent) or restart the same course (6.6 per cent) compared with 1.5 per cent and 2.6 per cent of quintile 5 students (least deprived areas) respectively. Quintile 1 students also change provider more than quintile 5 students, with or without credit.

    c. Mature students (21 years and over) are more likely to start their course again (6.2 per cent) than young students (3.8 per cent). Similar proportions of mature and young students transfer externally with credit, but young students are more likely to transfer externally without credit (1.1 per cent in the same subject area, and 1.3 in a different subject) than mature students (0.6 per cent in the same subject area, and 0.7 in a different subject).

    d. Black students are the ethnic group most likely to start again when studying the same course at the same provider or the same subject area at a different provider. 9.1 per cent of black students restart the same course, and 2.0 per cent repeat their year when moving to a different provider.

    e. Male students are more likely to transfer within a provider than female students. However, male students transferring to a different provider are more likely to carry credit in a different subject area, but less likely to do so in the same subject area.

    f. Students with BTECs as their main entry qualification are the group most likely to restart a course at the same provider (2.5 per cent on a different course and 7.2 per cent on the same course). They are also the least likely to transfer internally with credit (0.4 per cent).

    g. Students with a reported disability studying at the same provider are more likely to change course than students with no reported disability. Similar proportions of students with and without a reported disability transfer to a different provider.

[13] POLAR4 is area-based measure of participation in higher education for students who are under 21 years old. The measure assigns students to one of five quintiles, where quintile 1 consists of students from the least represented areas and quintile 5 consists of those from the most represented.

[14] IMD is an area-based measure of deprivation, where quintile 1 students are the most disadvantaged group, and quintile 5 students the most advantaged group.

h. Local students[15] are more likely to restart the same course (5.3 per cent) than non-local students (4.0 per cent). Local students are also less likely to transfer to a different provider, regardless of credit and whether it was the same or different subject.

i. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)[16] students are more likely to restart in a different course without credit, and students with other sexual orientation are more likely to restart the same course without credit than heterosexual students.

j. Students who have been in care are more likely to restart their original course or a different course at their provider than other students. For students studying at a different provider, a higher proportion of care experienced students have to start from the beginning, whether or not the subject area was different.

k. Providers in the East and North East of England have the highest proportion of internal credit transfers (0.8 per cent) compared to other regions (0.4–0.6 per cent). Students at providers in the North East are the least likely to transfer to a different provider, regardless of credit.

64. From these initial findings we can see that there are differences between student groups in the ability to carry credit into their new course and the proportion restarting courses. It is worth noting that while there may be interesting relationships between the different characteristics explored here, we currently do not explore these interactions. The differences for each group are further investigated below.

Age group and underrepresented neighbourhoods (POLAR4)

Students from the areas of lowest higher education participation (POLAR4 quintile 1) were the most likely to transfer without credit. The most underrepresented students studying at the same provider were more likely to restart their course (4.7 per cent) than more represented students (3.1 per cent of quintile 5 students).

65. POLAR4 (participation of local areas) is an area-based measure of participation in higher education for students who are under 21 years old. The measure assigns students to one of five quintiles, where quintile 1 consists of students from the least represented areas and quintile 5 consists of those from the most represented.

66. This section also includes the comparison of mature students (21 years and over) to these POLAR4 quintiles, which are applicable to only young students.

[15] Local students are defined as students who are studying in the same region as the region they are domiciled in.

[16] This definition of 'lesbian, gay and bisexual' students aligns with our definition in the 'Differences in student outcomes: further characteristics' work. For more details please see: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

67. Table 10 shows outcomes for students one year after entry for each POLAR4 quintile in 2017-18. Students in quintile 1 have the highest proportion who are studying at a lower level or are inactive (10.0 per cent), while only 5.4 per cent of quintile 5 students have that outcome.

68. Mature students have the highest proportion of students studying at a lower level or inactive (13.1 per cent), even higher than young students from the least represented areas (10.0 per cent).

Table 10: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 entrants, split by age and POLAR4 quintile

	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
Quintile	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Mature	7,430	13.1	145	0.3	1,205	2.1	48,125	84.6	56,900
Quintile 1	2,915	10.0	5	0	975	3.3	25,265	86.6	29,160
Quintile 2	3,240	8.3	10	0	1,220	3.1	34,680	88.6	39,145
Quintile 3	3,805	7.8	5	0	1,685	3.4	43,530	88.8	49,025
Quintile 4	4,380	7.3	10	0	2,185	3.6	53,505	89.1	60,085
Quintile 5	4,450	5.4	5	0	2,530	3.0	76,020	91.6	83,010
Unknown quintile	3,415	6.8	15	0	770	1.5	45,750	91.6	49,950

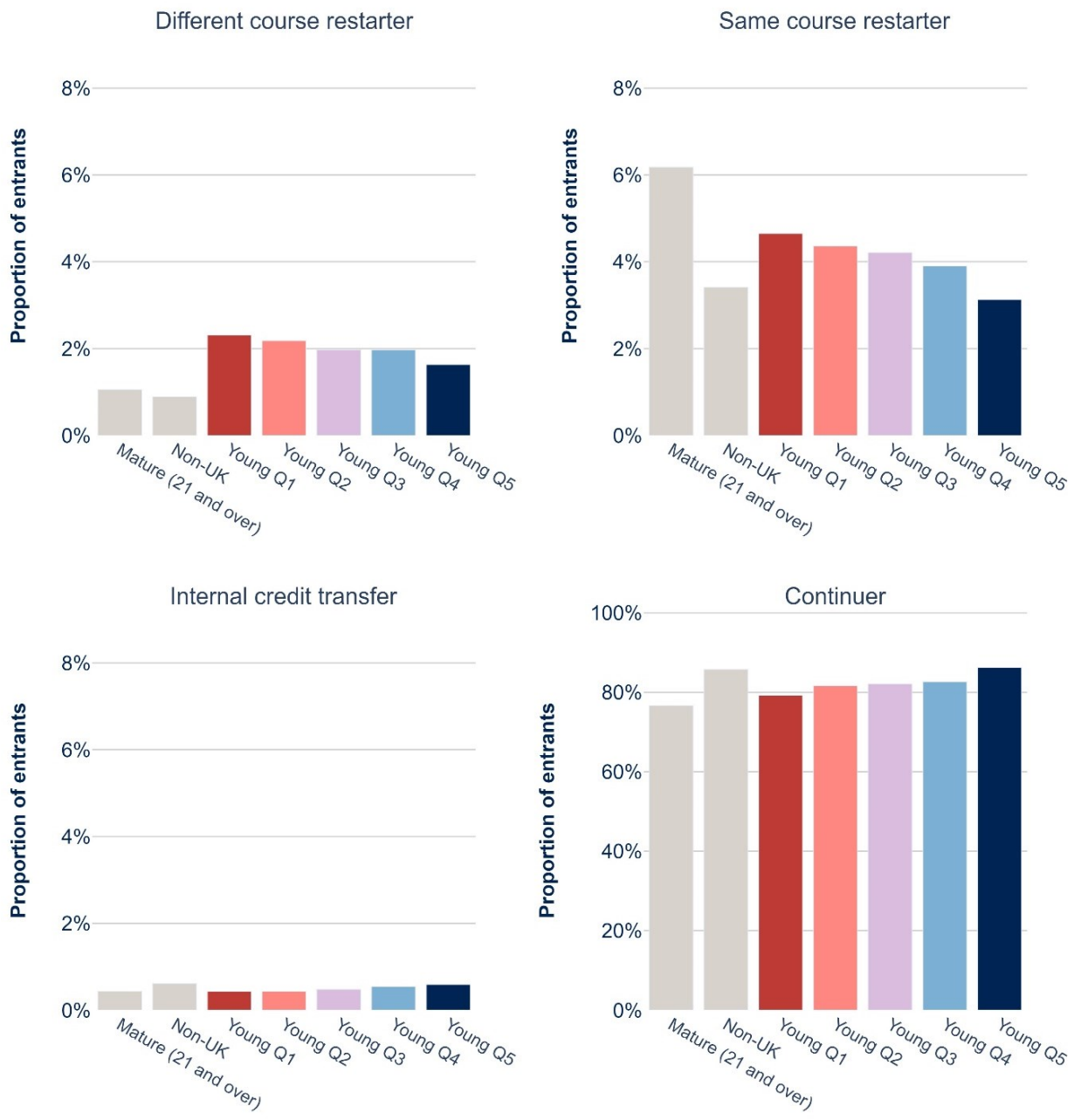
69. We go on to see whether there are differences in the proportion of students changing course and differences in whether they successfully transfer credit. This will show whether underrepresented student groups are more likely to start a course from the beginning rather than successfully transfer credit.

70. Students with unknown POLAR4 quintiles consist of students whose postcodes are not known and non-UK students. We compare the proportions of non-UK students to the proportions of students in each POLAR4 quintile. We also compare these proportions to the proportion of mature students to investigate the differences in ability to transfer with credit between young and mature students.

Outcomes for students studying at the same provider

71. Figure 4 shows students who are studying at the same provider and their outcomes as a proportion of total entrants in 2017-18. As can be seen, 4.7 per cent of students in quintile 1 restart the same course and 3.1 per cent of students in quintile 5 do so.

Figure 4: Outcomes for entrants from 2012-13 to 2017-18 studying at the same provider one year after entry, mature students and young students split by POLAR4 quintiles



72. A higher proportion of mature students started their course again than young students. 6.2 per cent of entrants are mature students who started their course again, compared to 4.7 per cent for young students belonging to the group least represented in higher education.

73. Non-UK students are more likely to continue or transfer with credit, and less likely to transfer without carrying credit compared to both young and mature UK students of all POLAR4 quintiles.

74. The same trend is present for students who restart on a different course. 2.3 per cent of students in quintile 1 change course without carrying credit, while 1.6 per cent of students in quintile 5 did so. Mature students are even less likely to change course without taking credit. This is in contrast to the proportion of students who are able to carry credit, which has been

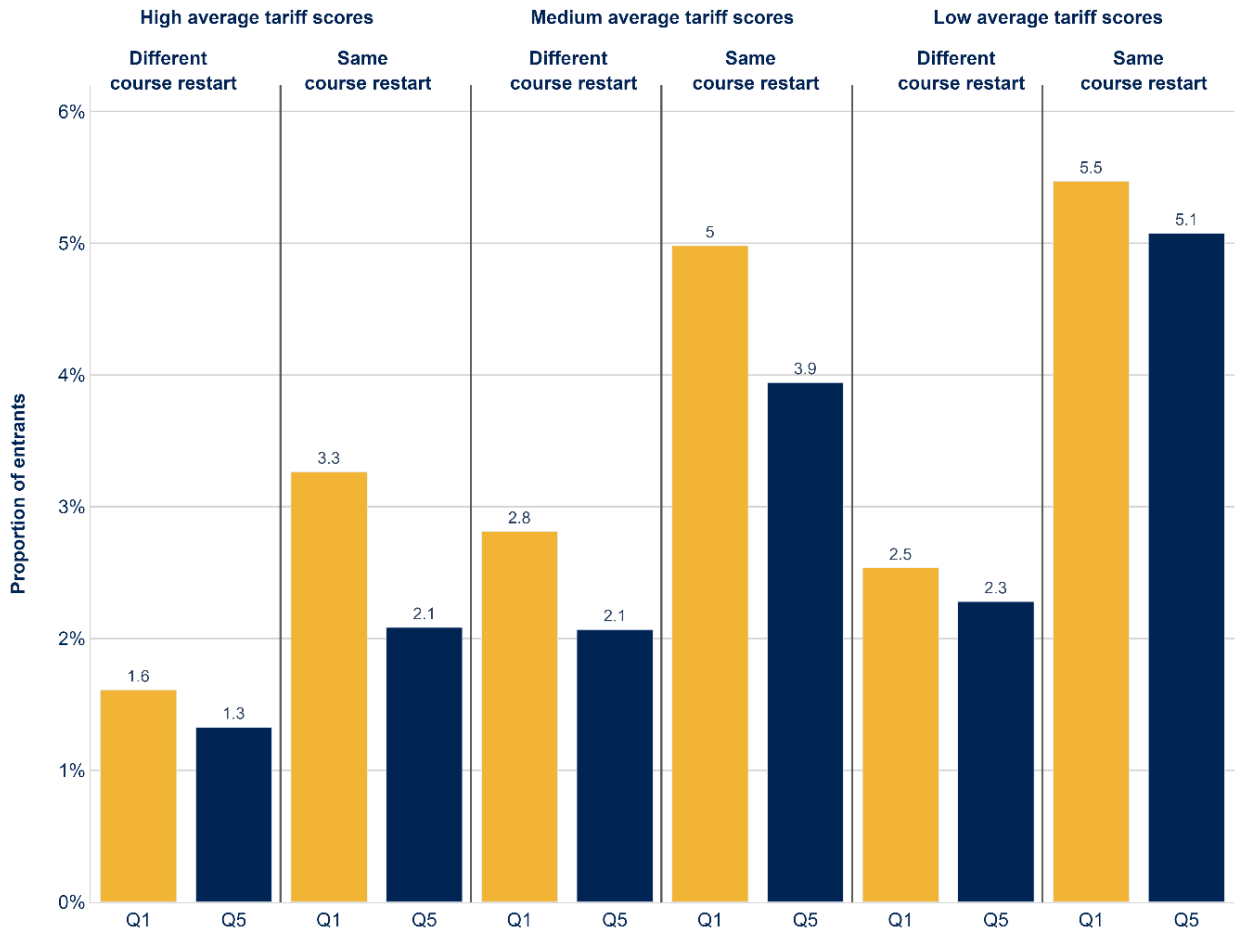
decreasing over time for students of all quintiles, but is consistently highest for quintile 5 students (0.6 per cent in 2017-18) and lowest for quintile 1 students (0.4 per cent). This suggests a discrepancy between the least represented and most represented student groups in achieving recognition for their previous study when moving to a new course.

Relationship between POLAR4 quintiles and provider tariff groups

75. Different providers have differences in the proportion of students belonging to each POLAR4 quintile, as well as different proportions of students who restart their course. In order to ensure that these differences between quintile 1 and quintile 5 students are not solely the result of provider choice, we examine the relationship between POLAR4 quintiles and provider tariff groups.

76. Figure 5 shows the comparison of the proportion of students in quintile 1 and quintile 5 who restarted their course in 2017-18 for different provider tariff groups. The figure reinforces the findings that quintile 1 students are more likely to restart their first year compared to quintile 5 students, regardless of whether it is the same course and regardless of the tariff group of their provider.

Figure 5: Proportions of young quintile 1 and quintile 5 students who restart their first year in 2017-18, split by the tariff group of their providers



Outcomes for students studying at a different provider

77. Although there are differences in the proportion of students in quintile 1 and quintile 5 who carry credit for students studying at the same provider, these differences are not as pronounced for students studying at a different provider. For students studying at a different provider, more students who change to a different subject area do not carry credit compared to those who carry credit, but there are no discernible differences between quintile 1 and quintile 5 students.

Ethnicity

Black students are the ethnic group most likely to start again when studying the same course at the same provider or the same subject area at a different provider. 9.1 per cent of black students restart the same course, and 2.0 per cent repeat their year when moving to a different provider.

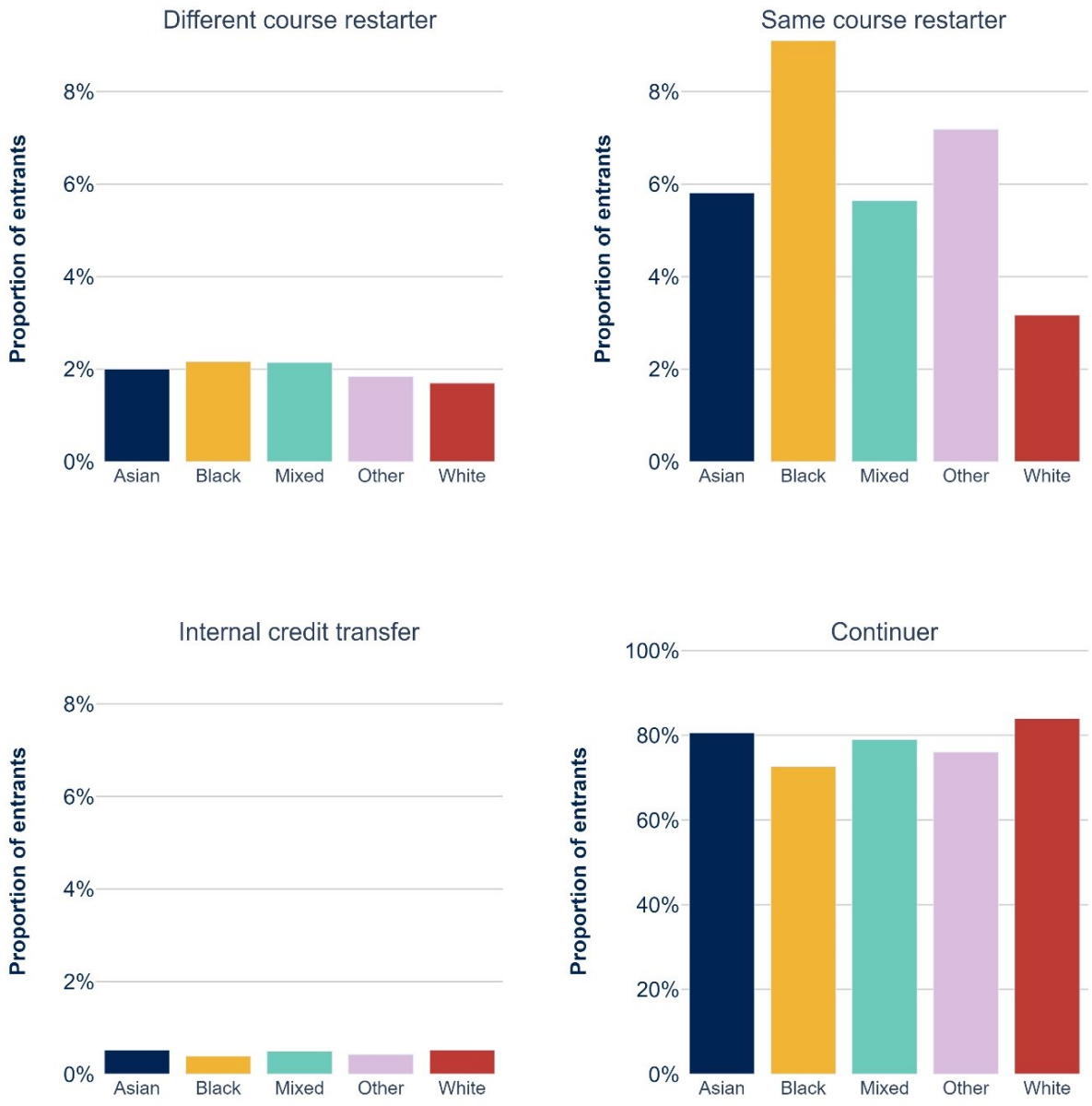
78. Outcomes also differ between students of different ethnicities. Table 11 shows that the white students group has the lowest proportion of students studying at a different provider (2.7 per cent). We can further examine these outcomes to see whether students were changing courses or subject areas and whether they carried credit with them. For this analysis we have excluded students whose ethnicity is unknown and have limited to only UK students.

Table 11: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 UK entrants, split by ethnicity

	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
Ethnicity	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Asian	2,990	7.1	5	0	1,645	3.9	37,550	89	42,190
Black	2,960	10.9	5	0	1,280	4.7	22,850	84.3	27,090
Mixed	1,415	9.2	5	0	535	3.5	13,475	87.3	15,430
Other	560	9.3	0	0	305	5.1	5,125	85.6	5,990
White	16,930	7.8	120	0.1	5,830	2.7	193,250	89.4	216,130

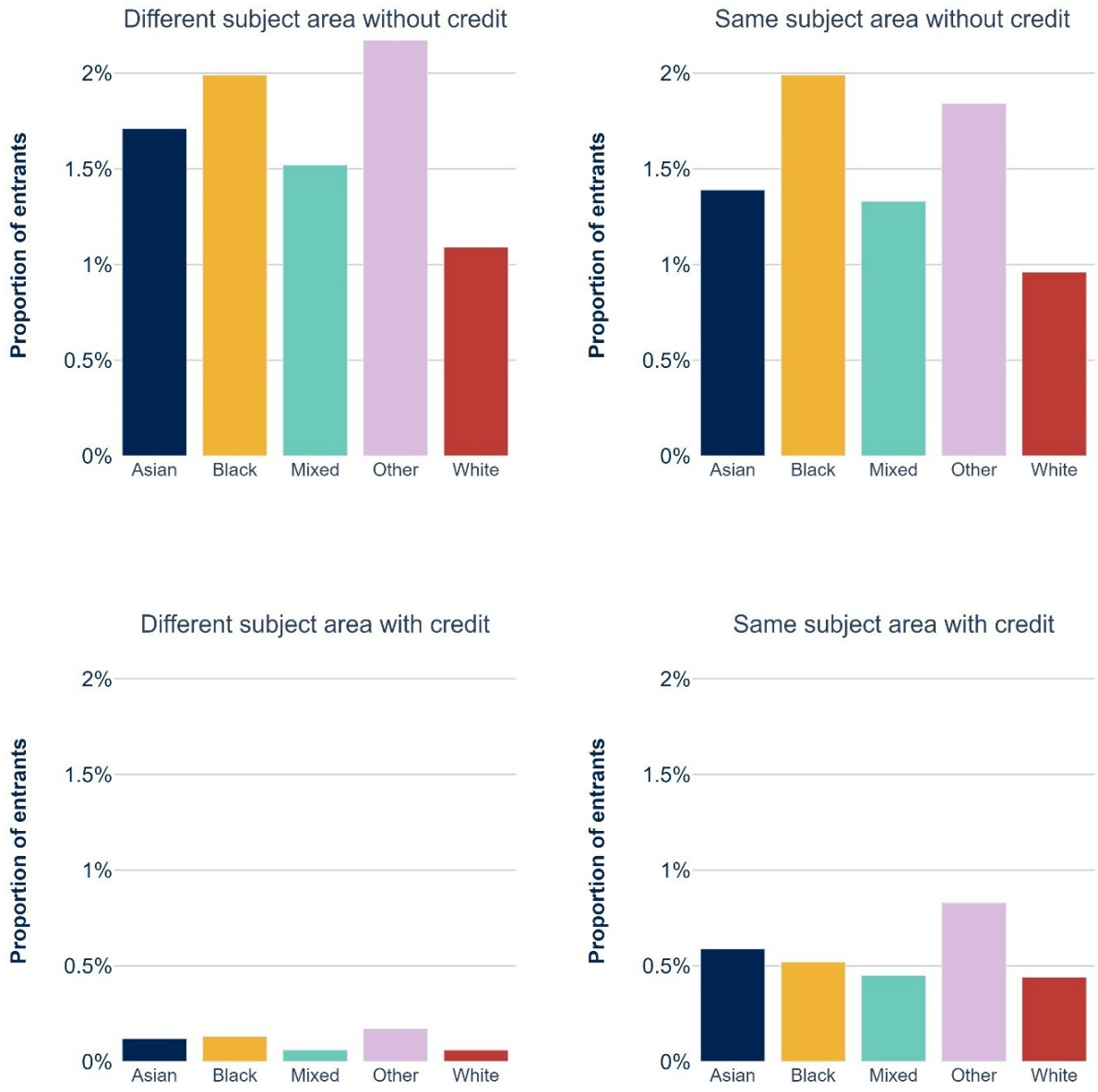
Figure 6 shows that for students studying at the same provider, the proportion of students who are internal credit transfers are not very different between students of different ethnicities, with black students the least likely to do so at 0.4 per cent compared to white and Asian students at 0.5 per cent. However, the proportion of students who did not carry credit do differ between students of different ethnicities. White students are less likely to restart their course than students from any of the other ethnic groups. 1.7 per cent of white students restarted a different course and 3.2 per cent restarted the same course, compared to 1.8–2.2 per cent students from any of the other ethnic groups who restarted a different course and 5.6–9.1 per cent who restarted the same course. Black students are also the most likely to restart the same course (9.1 per cent).

Figure 6: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by ethnicity



79. For students studying at a different provider, white students are the least likely to transfer, regardless of subject area and credit status. Figure 7 shows that black students are the most likely group to transfer in the same subject area without credit at 2.0 per cent.

Figure 7: Outcomes of students studying at a different provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by ethnicity



Entry qualifications

Students with BTECs as their main entry qualification are the group most likely to restart a course at the same provider (2.5 per cent on a different course and 7.2 per cent on the same course). They are also the least likely to transfer internally with credit (0.4 per cent).

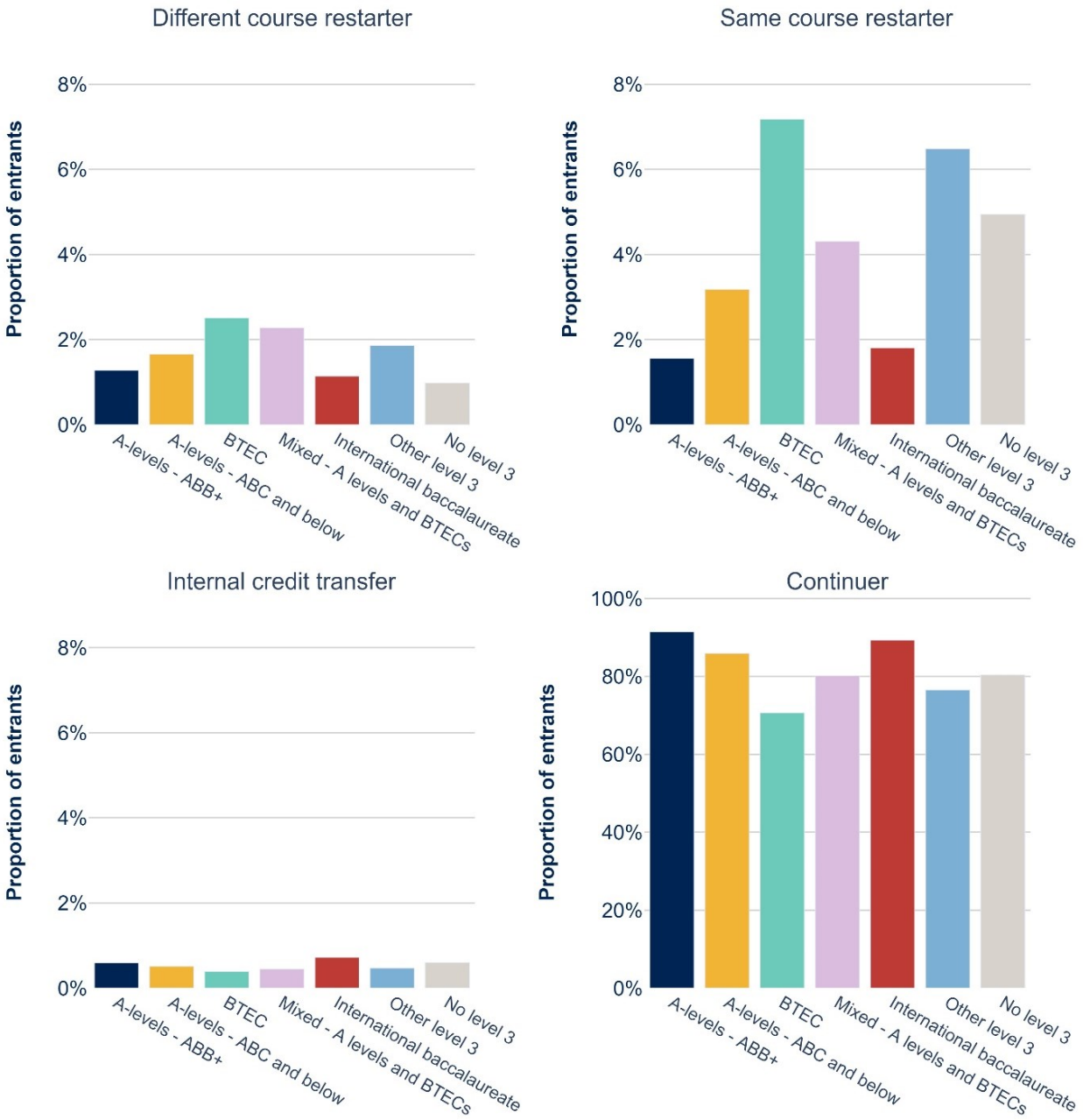
80. Students holding different Level 3 entry qualifications have different proportions in each outcome. Table 12 shows that students with BTEC qualifications have the highest proportion who are studying at a lower level or are inactive at 14.9 per cent, compared to students with other qualifications (ranging from 2.9–11.3 per cent).

Table 12: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 entrants, split by entry qualifications

Entry qualifications	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
A-levels – ABB+	2,235	2.9	5	0	1,755	2.2	74,385	94.9	78,380
A-levels – (ABC and below)	5,950	5.7	30	0	3,160	3.0	96,040	91.3	105,180
BTEC	7,810	14.9	40	0.1	2,220	4.2	42,265	80.8	52,330
Mixed – A-levels and BTECs	1,775	9.3	5	0	655	3.4	16,610	87.2	19,040
International Baccalaureate	530	5.0	0	0	210	2.0	9,750	93.0	10,485
Other Level 3	6,255	11.3	40	0.1	1,735	3.1	47,160	85.4	55,190
No Level 3	5,080	10.9	80	0.2	830	1.8	40,670	87.2	46,660

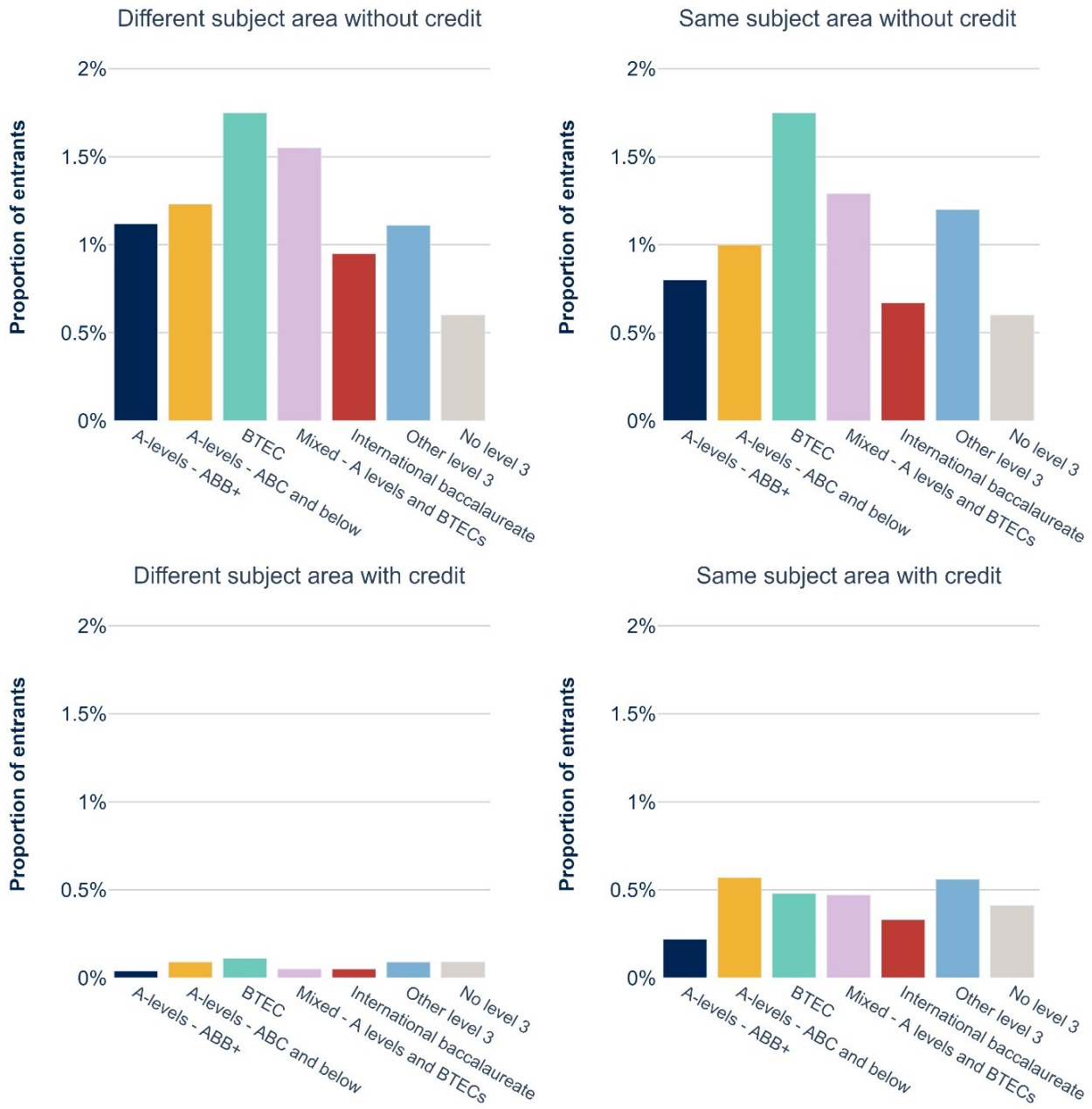
81. Figure 8 shows that for students studying at the same provider in 2017-18, BTEC students have the lowest proportion who are internal credit transfers (0.4 per cent) and the highest proportion who restart their course without carrying credit, with 2.5 per cent studying a different course and 7.2 per cent studying the same course. In comparison, students who enter with A-levels at ABB+ and International Baccalaureate students are the most likely to transfer with credit, with 0.6 per cent and 0.7 per cent doing so respectively. They are also the least likely to be restarters (1.1–1.8 per cent). Students with BTEC qualifications are four times more likely to restart the same course compared to students who entered with A-levels at ABB+ or International Baccalaureate students.

Figure 8: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by entry qualifications



82. A similar pattern persists for students studying at a different provider, where BTEC students are the most likely to transfer without carrying credit compared to students who enter with other qualifications. For the same subject area, 1.8 per cent of BTEC students transfer without credit compared to students with other qualifications (0.6–1.3 per cent). For different subject areas, 1.8 per cent of BTEC students transfer without credit compared with other qualifications (0.6–1.6 per cent). However, Figure 9 shows that a high proportion of BTEC students also transfer with credit, with 0.5 per cent in the same subject area and 0.1 per cent in a different subject area. Approximately 0.2 to 0.6 per cent of students with other qualifications are credit transfers in the same subject area, and roughly the same proportion as BTEC students are credit transfers in a different subject area.

Figure 9: Outcomes of students studying at a different provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by entry qualifications



Sex

Male students are more likely to transfer within a provider than female students. However, male students transferring to a different provider are more likely to carry credit in a different subject area, but less likely to do so in the same subject area.

83. In this section we observe the differences in outcomes between male and female students. Students with other or unknown sex are excluded because of low numbers. Female students have a slightly higher proportion who are studying at the same provider (89.8 per cent) compared with male students (87.9 per cent), and a lower proportion who are studying at a lower level or are inactive (7.2 percent) compared with male students (9.1 per cent) – see Table 13.

Table 13: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 entrants, split by sex

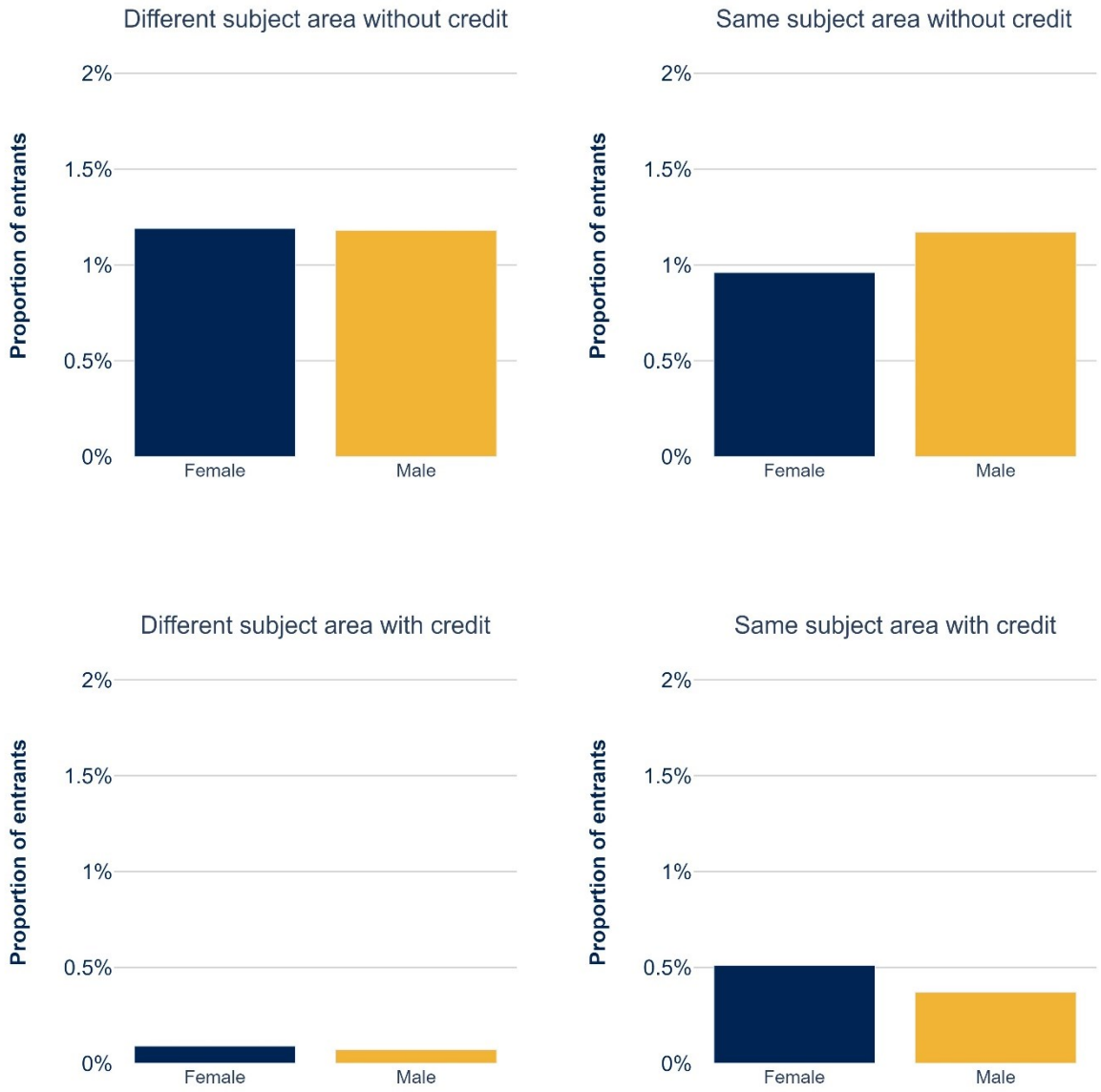
	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
Sex	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Female	14,985	7.2	120	0.1	5,960	2.9	186,010	89.8	207,070
Male	14,630	9.1	80	0.1	4,605	2.9	140,715	87.9	160,035

84. Figure 10 shows that while more female students continue on the same course than male students, male students are more likely to transfer within a provider, regardless of credit. The largest difference can be seen for those who restart their course: 5.3 per cent of male students compared with 3.3 per cent of female students.

Figure 10: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by sex

85. Comparing male and female students who transfer to a different provider reveals similar proportions of students who study in a different subject area regardless of credit, but that male students are less likely to carry credit for courses in the same subject area (see Figure 11). 0.4 per cent of male students are able to carry credit compared with female students at 0.5 per cent, and 1.2 per cent of male students do not carry credit compared with female students at 1.0 per cent.

Figure 11: Outcomes of students studying at a different provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by sex



Disability

Students with a reported disability studying at the same provider are more likely to change course than students with no reported disability. Similar proportions of students with and without a reported disability transfer to a different provider.

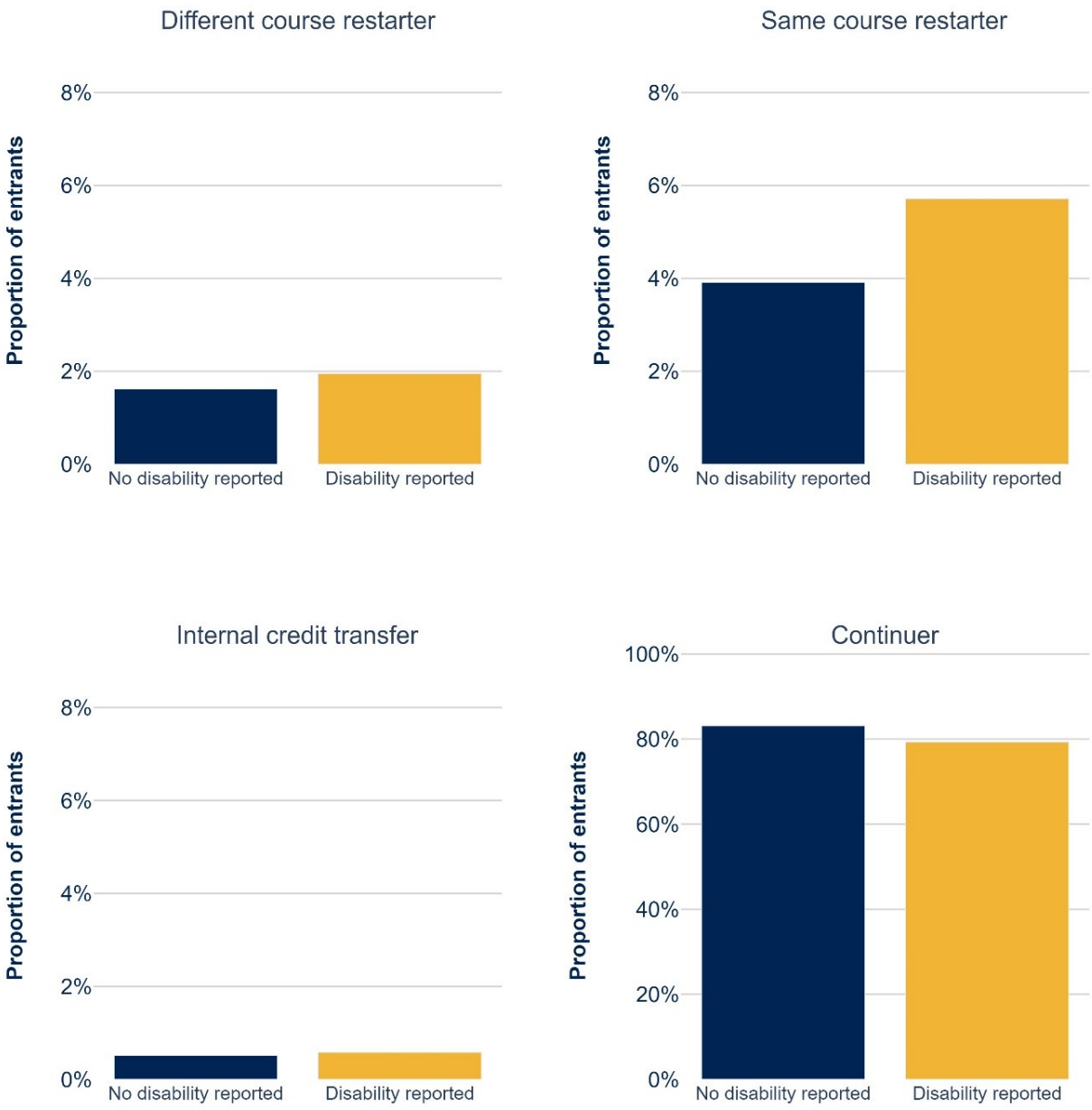
86. A higher proportion of students with a reported disability study at a lower level or are inactive (9.2 per cent) compared with students with no reported disability (7.9 per cent) – see Table 14.

Table 14: Numbers and proportions of students who are studying at the same provider, studying at a different provider, or have other outcomes in 2017-18, split by disability

Disability status	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Reported disability	4,395	9.2	25	0.1	1,495	3.1	41,775	87.6	47,685
No reported disability	25,240	7.9	175	0.1	9,070	2.8	285,105	89.2	319,590

87. For students who are studying at the same provider, students with a reported disability are more likely to change course than students with no reported disability, regardless of credit (see Figure 12). 0.6 per cent of students with a reported disability are internal credit transfers compared with 0.5 per cent of students with no reported disability. 2.0 per cent of students with reported disabilities restart their course in a different subject area, and 5.7 per cent restart in the same subject area. In comparison, 1.6 per cent of students with no reported disabilities restart a different course and 3.9 per cent restart the same course.

Figure 12: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by disability



88. For students studying at a different provider, the proportions are similar whether or not students have a disability (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Outcomes of students studying at a different provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by disability

Sexual orientation

LGB students are more likely to restart in a different course without credit, and students with other sexual orientation are more likely to restart the same course without credit than heterosexual students.

89. Data on sexual orientation is of usable quality from 2015-16 onwards, but it is worth noting that the data will still be missing for 29 per cent of entrants in 2017-18. We will only examine outcomes for students whose data is not missing.

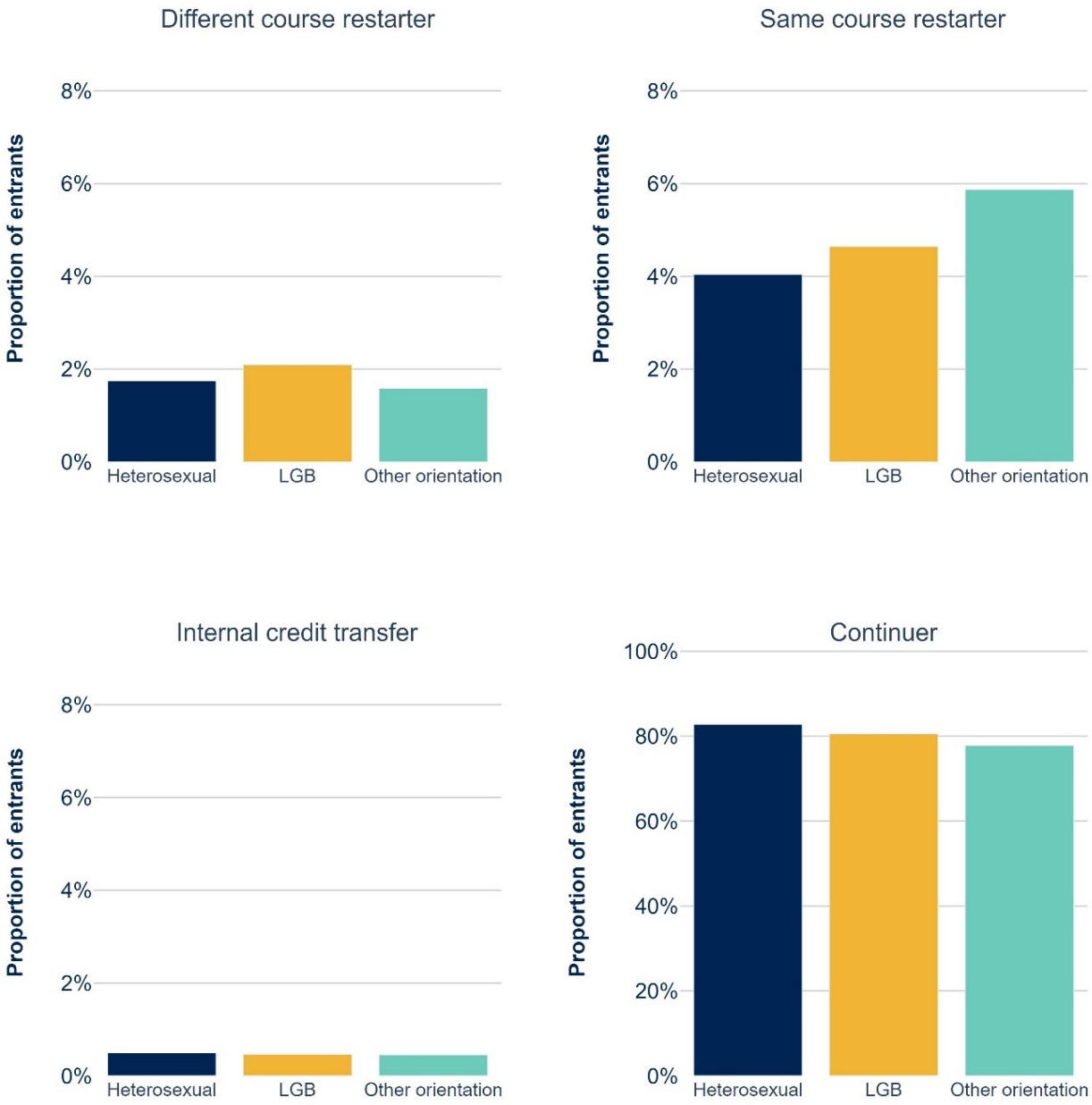
90. Table 15 shows that heterosexual students are the most likely to continue studying at the same provider (89.1 per cent), least likely to study at a different provider (2.9 per cent), and least likely to study at a lower level or become inactive (7.9 per cent). Comparatively, 9.2 per cent of LGB students are studying a lower level or are inactive one year after entry, and students with other sexual orientations at 11.2 per cent.

Table 15: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 entrants, split by sexual orientation

Sexual orientation	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Heterosexual	18,990	7.9	95	0	7,085	2.9	214,190	89.1	240,360
LGB	1,400	9.2	5	0	465	3	13,435	87.8	15,310
Other	500	11.2	0	0	135	3	3,795	85.7	4,430

91. Figure 14 shows that LGB students have a higher proportion who restart on a different course (2.1 per cent) than heterosexual students (1.7 per cent) and students of other orientation (1.6 per cent). Students of other orientation have the highest proportion who restart the same course (5.9 per cent) compared with heterosexual students (4.0 per cent) and LGB students (4.6 per cent).

Figure 14: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by sexual orientation



92. Figure 15 shows that students of all sexual orientation have very similar proportions who change providers, regardless of credit status and subject area.

Figure 15: Outcomes of students studying at a different as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by sexual orientation

Care experience

Students who have been in care are more likely to restart their original course or a different course at their provider than other students. For students studying at a different provider, a higher proportion of care experienced students have to start from the beginning, whether or not the subject area was different.

93. Data on care experience is available from the HESA student records from 2014-15 onwards and, as a data item that relies on students self-reporting this information, still has a lot of missing data. In 2017-18, 23 per cent of first degree entrants were missing this data. We will only examine the outcomes for students whose data is not missing. Additionally, it is worth noting that only a small proportion of entrants are care experienced (0.8 per cent), which may mean extra caution must be used when generalising the outcomes for this particular group.

94. Table 16 shows that there is a higher proportion of care experienced students who are studying at a lower level or are inactive (13.6 per cent) compared with students who are not care experienced (7.9 per cent).

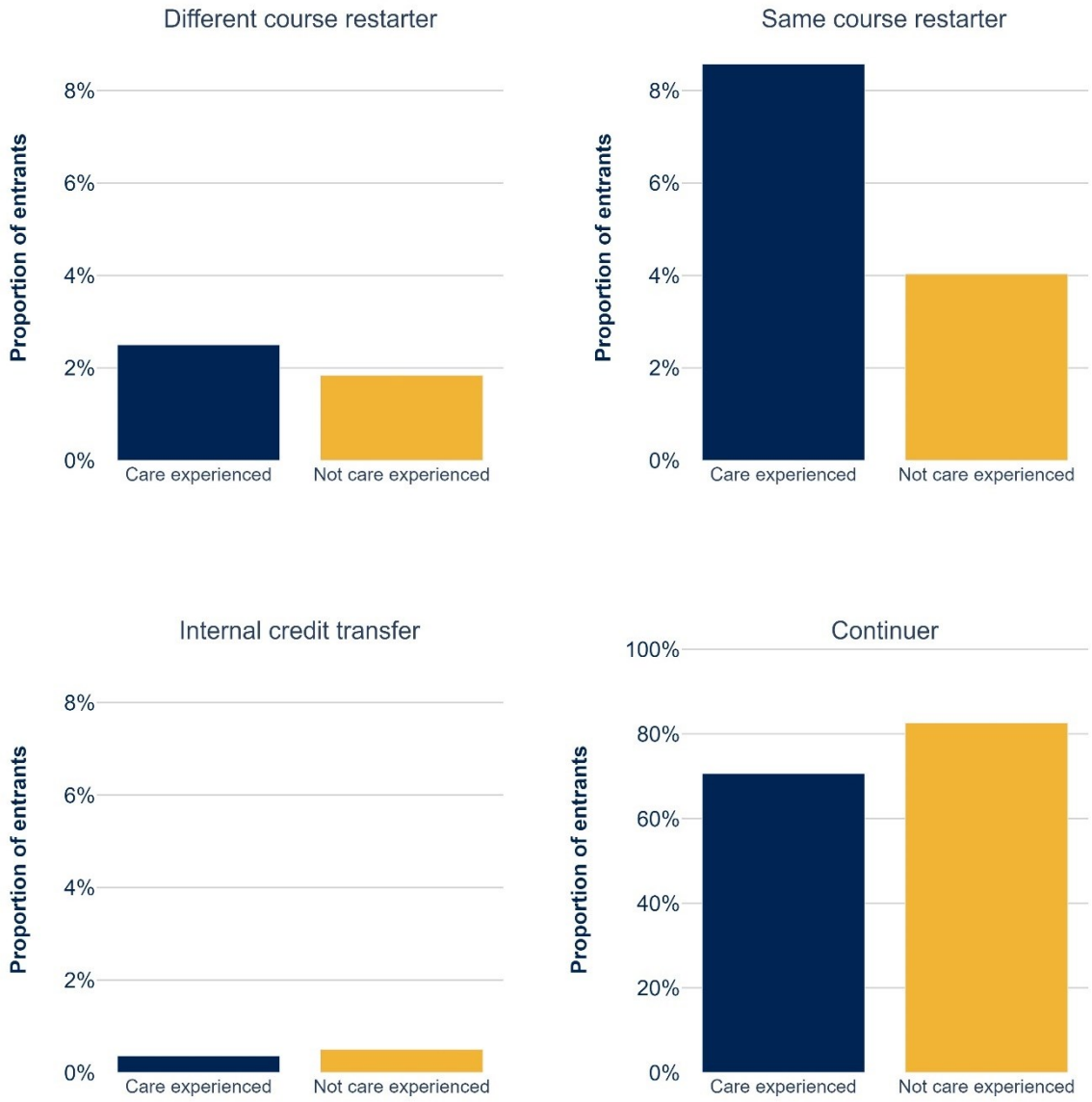
Table 16: Outcomes after one year for 2017-18 entrants, split by care experience status

Care experience status	Studying at a lower level or inactive		Qualified		Studying at different provider		Studying at same provider		Total first degree entrants
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Care experienced	380	13.6	0	0	115	4.2	2,300	82.2	2,800
Not care experienced	21,885	7.9	115	0	8,515	3.1	247,970	89.0	278,485

95. Figure 16 shows that students who are not care experienced are more likely to be able to carry credit in their courses than care experienced students. More students without experience of care continue on their original course (82.6 per cent) and transfer to a different course internally with credit (0.5 per cent) than students who are care experienced (70.7 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively).

96. 2.5 per cent of care experienced students restart a different course compared with only 1.8 per cent of students who are not care experienced. Additionally, care experienced students are also more likely to restart the same course, with 8.6 per cent (240 entrants) doing so. This is more than double the proportion of students who are not care experienced (4.0 per cent). That is, if care experienced students had the same proportion restarting their course as other students, there would only be 110 who restarted rather than 240. Care experienced students are also less likely to carry credit when studying at the same provider.

Figure 16: Outcomes of students studying at the same provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by care experience status



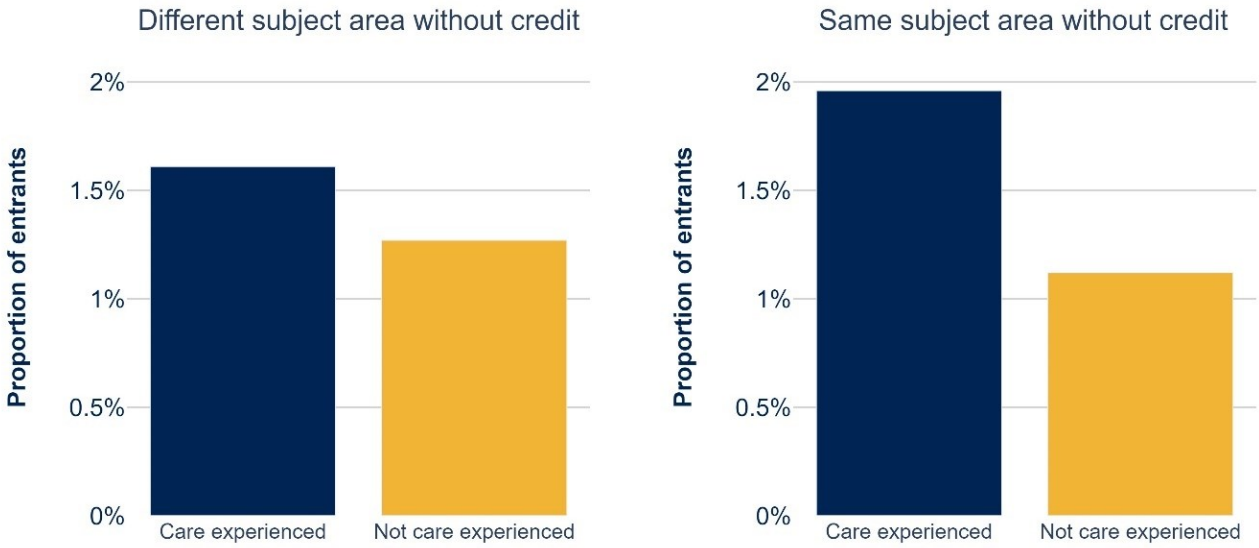
97. Because there are only 115 care experienced students studying at a different provider in 2017-18, it may not be accurate to compare the proportions of care experienced students with non-care experienced students because of the low numbers, especially after viewing splits by four different outcomes. As a result, we must examine the time series for care experience status in order to determine how stable these proportions are across the time series.

98. For students who are studying at a different provider and did not carry credit, the proportion transferring without credit is higher for care experienced students in each of the previous three years, suggesting that it is not due to just random fluctuation.

99. Figure 17 shows the proportion of students studying at a different provider who did not carry credit. Care experienced students studying the same subject area have proportions ranging from 1.7 to 2.0 per cent, compared with non-care experienced students at 1.0 to 1.1 per cent. For courses in a different subject area, proportions for care experienced students range from 1.6 to 1.9 per cent while proportions for non-care experienced students range from 1.2 to 1.3 per cent. We can conclude that a higher proportion of care experienced students do not carry

credit when changing course at a different provider compared to students who are not care experienced, regardless of the subject area.

Figure 17: Outcomes of students who did not carry credit studying at a different provider as a proportion of entrants in 2017-18, split by care experience status



100. For students who carry credit, the proportion of care experienced students fluctuates from year to year. As a result, we cannot conclude whether there are genuine differences in the experiences of care experienced and non-care experienced students in their ability to carry credit when transferring to a different provider.

Conclusion

101. This has shown that student characteristics associated with underrepresentation in higher education or increased likelihood to drop out are often also associated with an increased likelihood to restart study. While data limitations means there are forms of credit transfer not being identified, the analysis suggests that disadvantaged student groups are more likely than advantaged groups to find themselves gaining no formal credit from their first year.

102. There are several reasons why there may be barriers to carrying credit. Students who wish to change course may not qualify to carry credit as the course they want to change to may be in a different subject area and their original course does not include the foundations applicable to that particular subject area. They may also have left their original course before completing the first year, either dropping out or failing their exams, and so will not have credit to transfer when they change course. However, there may also be cases where providers' existing credit transfer procedures are not enabling all types of students to transfer the benefit of their study to a new course.

Annex A: Detailed methodology for identifying course change within a provider

1. This annex provides the details to the different criteria used for identifying a change in course within a provider. This methodology applies only to internal transfers, because an external transfer would immediately result in a change in course.

Course title

2. Students with the same course title for both years have not changed course. However, because data on course title is allowed to vary from year to year, we have modified the course titles to ensure that courses which have similar titles are considered the same course.

3. One of the modifications is to modify brackets so that courses that should be identified as the same would match when comparing between years. Table A1 demonstrates the modification process. First, all brackets within course titles are converted into the same type of brackets. The brackets are then removed, and the course titles for each year are compared with each other. If the course titles don't match, as demonstrated in Case B and Case C – process (3), the course titles are then reverted back to the version before bracket removal. If they do match, both course titles are converted into the version with brackets (Case B). Finally, everything in brackets is removed, inclusive of the brackets itself. This resolves both Case A and Case B, but does not resolve case C. As a result, further modifications are needed, as well as other criteria for identifying course changes.

Table A1: Methodology for modifying course titles

	Course titles					
	Case A		Case B		Case C	
Process	Year 0	Year 1	Year 0	Year 1	Year 0	Year 1
(1) Original course title	Maths (3yrs)	Maths 3yrs	Maths (3yrs)	Maths [FT]	Maths sandwich	Maths {industry}
(2) Convert to same bracket type	Maths (3yrs)	Maths 3yrs	Maths (3yrs)	Maths (FT)	Maths sandwich	Maths (industry)
(3) Remove brackets	Maths 3yrs	Maths 3yrs	Maths 3yrs	Maths FT	Maths sandwich	Maths industry
(4) Convert to version with brackets if match; revert back to version (2) if no match	Maths (3yrs)	Maths (3yrs)	Maths (3yrs)	Maths (FT)	Maths sandwich	Maths (industry)
(5) Remove everything within and inclusive of brackets	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths sandwich	Maths

4. Another modification is to remove certain words in the course title which do not indicate a change in course. For example, words such as ‘industry’ are removed so that courses with a year in industry component and the version of the same course which does not can be grouped together as a course. Additionally, symbols are also removed for the same reason, apart from ‘+’ and ‘&’ which are instead converted to ‘AND’ for consistency between the course titles. This process occurs after the modification to brackets so that course titles with some of these words to be removed in brackets would still match with course titles which have other words in brackets. Table A2 displays a list of these words and symbols which are removed as part of the modification.

Table A2: List of text removed from course titles

ABROAD

YEARABROAD YRABROAD YRAB STUDYABROAD WYRAB WYAB WITHABROAD WITHYRAB

WITHSTUDYIN WITHOVERSEASSTUDY WITHYREARABROAD WITHYRABROAD INCLUDINGYEARABROAD

WITHAYEARABROAD WITHSTUDYABROAD WITHSTUDYYEARABROAD WITHATERMABROAD

WITHANAPPROVEDYEARABROAD WITHASTUDYABROADYEAR WITHASTUDYYEARABROAD WITHSTUDYINCONTINENTALEUROPE

INDUSTRY SANDWICH PLACEMENT INDUSTRIAL EXPERIENCE

INDUSTRYEXPERIENCE INDUSTRIALEXPERIENCE SANDWICHEXPERIENCE PLACEMENTEXPERIENCE EMPEXP EMPXP EMPLOYEREXPERIENCE SANDWICHEXPERIENCE

SANDWICHROUTE WITHINDUSTRY WITHSANDWICH WITHPLACEMENT WITHINDUSTRIAL WITHEXPERIENCE WITHYRININD WITHEMPXP WITHEMPEXP RESEARCHPLACEMENT

WITHINDUSTRYEXPERIENCE WITHINDUSTRIALEXPERIENCE WITHPLACEMENTYEAR INCLUDINGWORKPLACEMENT INCLPROFESSIONALEXPERIENCE YEARSINCLUDINGPLACEMENT

UKPRIVATEINDUSTRYCOMMERCE XMONTHWORKPLACEMENT WITHTHINSANDWICHPLACEMENTS YEARSINCLUDINGPLACEMENT WITHPROFESSIONALPLACEMENT

WITHAYEARININDUSTRY WITHYEARLONGWORKPLACEMENT WITHANASSESSEDYEARININDUSTRY WITHANINDUSTRIALPLACEMENTYEAR WITHAPROFESSIONALPLACEMENTYEAR

WITHINTEGRATEDWORKPLACEMENT WITHPROFESSIONALANDRESEARCHPLACEMENT

& +

Subject area

5. Students studying the same subjects at CAH3 subject classification for both years have not changed course. While CAH2 had been considered, CAH3 was chosen as it seemed to identify most correctly what a change in course is when viewed alongside how much the course title seems to have changed.

6. However, the CAH3 classification will show a difference in course for students on a 'non-specific' CAH3 subject who have progressed onto a more specific version of the subject. Table A3 displays an example of how a non-specific category may misclassify students on some courses. Cases A, B and C are all classified as different subjects under CAH3. A student considered Case B who is found as Case C in the following year has changed course because there is difference between 'English language' and 'Literature in English'. However, a student considered Case A who is found as either Case B or C in the following year should not be classified as changing course, as the student could simply be specialising in an aspect of their course. As a result, CAH2, a broader subject classification, should be applied instead.

Table A3: An example of how CAH3 classifications are nested in CAH2 classifications

Case	CAH3 subject classification	CAH2 subject classification
A	English studies [non-specific]	English studies
B	English language	English studies
C	Literature in English	English studies

7. There are also some course titles with certain words in them whose context would indicate that the structure is general only in the first year of the course, such as 'INTO', 'General Foundation', and 'Interdisciplinary'. While these course titles may suggest a general to specialised course, some students may actually have changed course, and so we still chose to compare subjects, but at the broader CAH2 level instead.

8. Students who are studying joint honours courses are not considered as having changed course as long as they are studying some of the same subjects (determined above) in the following year. There is no restriction on the proportion of the subjects that must be the same between each year. However, data on joint honours students can be recorded in two different ways: one which lists the multiple subjects a student is studying, and one which replaces the subject with 'combined, general or negotiated studies'. Students within the latter category for one of the years, but not both, would be classified as having changed subjects. This is because while there may not be enough information to compare what subjects the student may be studying, a change in the way data is recorded signifies underlying changes.

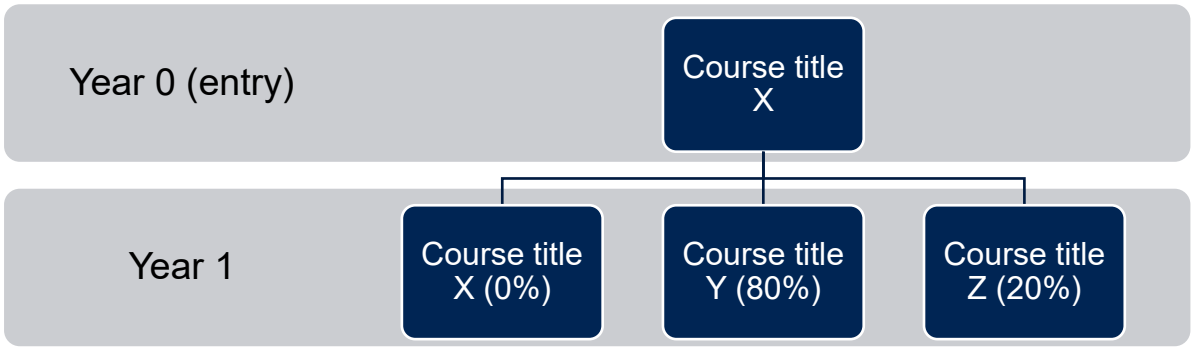
Natural progression

9. Students who are on a natural progression should not be identified as having changed course. A natural progression is when a student is on the same course, but many aspects of the course will have changed from year to year because of how the course itself is structured. For example, aspects such as course titles and subject areas may change as a student on a course engages in study abroad, work placement, or as they specialise in an aspect of their course.

10. Students studying an intercalated course which includes a year in a different course are not considered to have transferred since the intercalated year is a natural progression and part of the programme.

11. One of the ways in which we have identified a natural progression is through the proportion of students who progress onto a particular route. If the majority of students, or more than a third on a particular course title, change course titles the following year, it is more likely that this 'path' is a natural progression rather than a large group of students deciding to change course in exactly the same way. Figure A4 displays an example for course X. Because the majority of students (or at least a third) are on course title Y, students who are on this particular path (course title X in the first year and course title Y in the following year) are considered to be on a route which indicates natural progression. Students who are on course title Z in the following year are not naturally progressing and would therefore be considered to have changed course. Students on course title X in the following year are also not naturally progressing, but because their course title is the same as previously they are considered to be studying the same course.

Figure A4: Example of proportions of students progressing onto different course titles



12. The other method we have employed in identifying natural progression attempts to identify courses whose structure is more general in the first year and is more specialised in the following year. Following from the previous method described, where the proportions of students from one course title progressing onto another course title is used, this method combines the use of proportions and the number of pathways a particular course title leads to, in order to create a concentration index. The concentration index is a measure of how students of a particular course title are distributed, in terms of the pathways into other course titles in the following year.

13. Figure A5.1 displays a concentrated course with a high index value. This means there are either a fewer number of course titles that the original course title in the previous year leads to, or a higher proportion of students choose only a few of these course titles. On the other hand, a low value (Figure A5.2) would suggest that there are multiple pathways from the course title in the base year, and that students choose each pathway more evenly. As a result, course titles with a low index value is more likely to be a course which is more general in the first year, with multiple options for students to specialise in later on.

Figure A5.1: Example of a course with a high concentration index

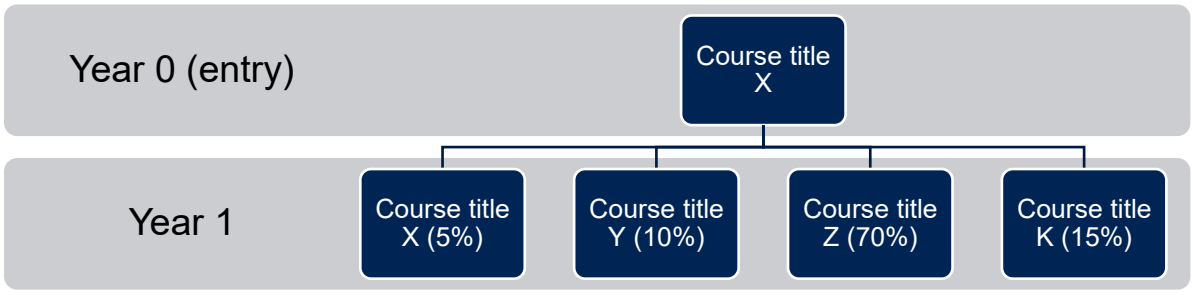
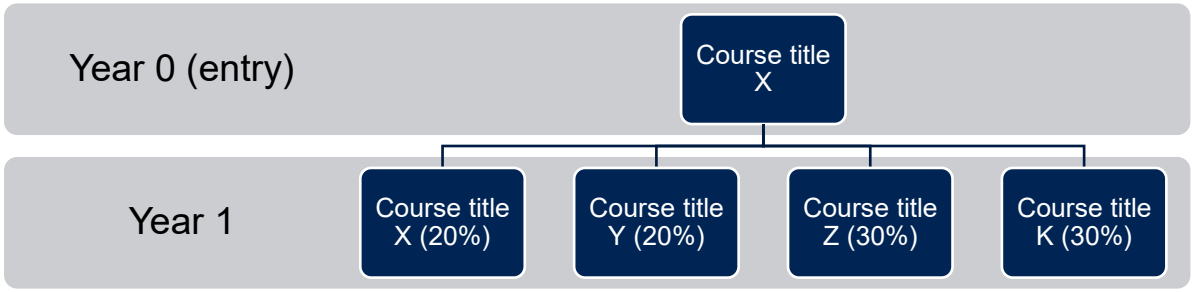
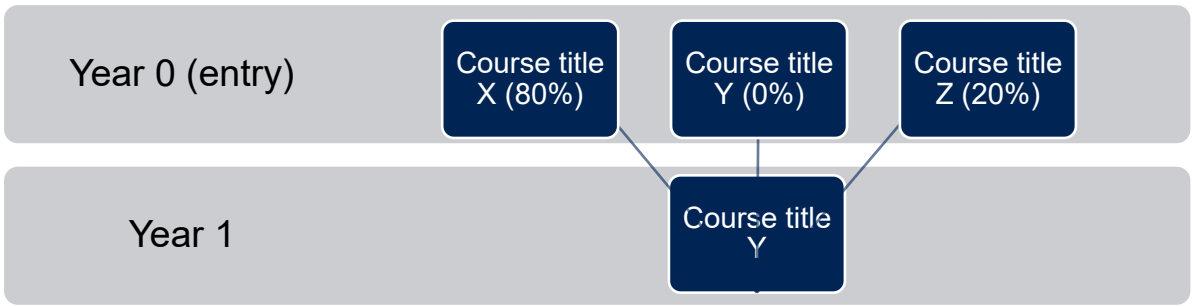


Figure A5.2: Example of a course with a low concentration index



14. Investigation has shown that the index on its own is not able to distinguish courses with a specialised route as an option from other courses. However, combining the index with reverse proportions allow us to better identify such courses. Reverse proportions are the proportions of students with a particular course title in the following year who had other course titles in the year of entry. Figure A6 displays how reverse proportions are calculated.

Figure A6: An example of reverse proportions



15. A high reverse proportion suggests that the route is only accessible through very few options, suggesting that a student looking to take a particular course must go through a particular route. On its own, reverse proportions do not allow much deduction, but combined with concentration indices, we are able to identify courses which are general in their first year and more specialised in the following years. The criteria used to determine natural progression is shown in Table A7.

Table A7: Criteria for determining natural progression

Reverse proportion	Number of students in the course title of the following year	Concentration index value	Considered natural progression?
=1	>=5	Any	Yes
>0.5	>=5	<=0.13	Yes
>0.7	>=10	0.16	Yes
Otherwise			No

Foundation year

16. Students who appear to have changed course but were in their foundation year of entry are not considered to have changed course. Courses with a foundation year will often appear as a different subject and different course title, and so we use other information such as course aim and year of study in combination with course titles and year of programme in order to identify foundation years. Students who were on a foundation year and are continuing to study in the following year are expected to not have changed course, because it is a natural progression.

Annex B: Numbers and proportions of students who transfer internally and externally by mode and level

1. This annex displays the differences in transfer rates, for both internal and external transfers, between the different modes and levels. Table B1 displays number of entrants included in our population, and the number considered to be transfers within a provider and between providers, for the year 2017-18.

Table B1: Number and proportion of entrants transferring (internal and external) one year after entry, split by mode and level

Mode	Level[17]	Number of students who transferred internally	Proportion of students who transferred internally	Number of students who transferred externally	Proportion of students who transferred externally	Total number of entrants
Full-time	First degree	1,780	0.53%	1,880	0.56%	335,675
Full-time	Other PG	5	0.15%	0	0%	3,345
Full-time	Other UG	15	0.14%	25	0.24%	10,370
Full-time	PG Taught masters	5	0.03%	10	0.07%	14,795
Full-time	PGCE	0	0	0	0	55
Full-time	PHD and Mphil	180	0.89%	105	0.52%	20,140
Full-time	UG courses with PG elements	120	0.41%	50	0.17%	29,300
Part-time	First degree	10	0.15%	10	0.15%	6,675
Part-time	Other PG	55	0.56%	10	0.1%	9,780
Part-time	Other UG	15	0.23%	15	0.23%	6,430
Part-time	PG Taught Masters	65	0.19%	80	0.23%	34,520
Part-time	PGCE	0	0	0	0	640
Part-time	PHD and Mphil	55	1.19%	15	0.33%	4,610
Part-time	UG courses with PG elements	0	0	0	0	1,790

[17] UG is undergraduate; PG is postgraduate. Structurally, courses of some levels, such as PGCE or 'UG courses with PG elements', will not have any students who are categorised as transfers. Other levels such as 'PG Taught masters' will have very low numbers as most students on courses of this level usually finish within a year.

Annex C: Limitations of each criterion identifying course change for internal transfers

1. Defining a change in course is particularly challenging because the term is not defined by HERA, and differs between providers. This annex lists the limitations of each criterion used in identifying course change for internal transfers, and examines the interactions between each criterion.

2. For the analysis, we had to make certain assumptions about the nature of courses in order to be able to distinguish whether a student has changed course. As discussed in the methodology section and in further detail in Annex A, these criteria were tested to ensure that the criteria developed were classifying courses as expected. However, because courses vary from provider to provider, and sometimes even between different departments and faculties within a provider, the criteria developed may hold stricter definitions of a change in course for some students and more lenient definitions for others.

3. We applied the subject classifications CAH3 and CAH2 for the analysis, which assumes that these levels of broadness in terms of subject groupings will be able to correctly classify a change in subject. For internal transfers, this assumes that providers will be consistent in the way subjects are recorded for students between years. For external transfers, the method assumes that same subjects are classified the same way between different providers. Although we have allowed for more leniency by using CAH2, a broader level of categorisation, for external transfers, it is still possible for providers to not record their courses as having the same subject as they may focus on different aspects of the subject.

4. Students on joint honours courses are less likely to be categorised as transfers because of the lenient definition applied. We assume that joint honours students who are studying at least some part of the same subjects did not change course. Because there are many combinations of how much time a student is devoting to each subject on their course, students who are studying a very low percentage of the same subject would still be considered on the same course. For example, a student may be studying Physics with English, where 95 per cent of their time is devoted to Physics and 5 per cent devoted to English. If the student is studying just English in the following year, they would be considered as on the same course, despite English only accounting for 5 per cent of their studies in their year of entry. This criterion was defined in this way because selecting a cut-off percentage of shared subject between years is difficult, as subjects may change between years and providers.

5. Students on course titles with very few students are excluded from the calculations of the ‘common route’ criterion. Calculating the proportion of students on a particular course title who continue to study at another course title is difficult for course titles with less than five students, and so they are omitted. Similarly, they are also omitted from the calculation of the criterion regarding general to specialised routes, because the criterion relies on calculating proportions. As a result, there is a higher chance for students on course titles with a low number of students to be classified as transfers, as a lower number of criteria are applied to them.

6. There are also limitations to the concentration index criteria used to determine courses which are general and become more specialised. There are several cut-off points which are judged against the index used to classify the course. These cut-off points were created by examining

the characteristics of the courses, and as a result would apply well for the years of data used when examining these characteristics. Any future years may have different characteristics, and so the criteria may not be as accurate in future years.

7. We have also evaluated the effectiveness of each criterion in its ability to distinguish additional students as not having changed course. Table C1 displays how many students are classified as not having changed course for each criterion that were not classified as such through any other criteria. In other words, the effectiveness of each criterion in capturing additional students as studying the same course where they would have been misclassified otherwise.

Table C1: Number of additional students in each year who are classified as studying the same course by each criterion

	Year					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Course title matched	229	199	201	202	142	175
Subject matched at CAH3 level	9,986	11,290	10,588	11,186	11,219	11,128
Subject matched at CAH2 level (but not CAH3)	385	390	443	406	385	384
Common route (proportions)	525	688	401	315	321	275
General to specialised course using concentration index	67	52	35	19	28	28
Foundation year	0	0	0	1	9	13

8. Although the number of additional students classified as non-transfers from the foundation year criterion is very small, this number is increasing in recent years. This suggests that the criterion is important, especially if we were to continue to calculate the percentage of students who transfer in future years, as it is capturing an increasing number of students each year.

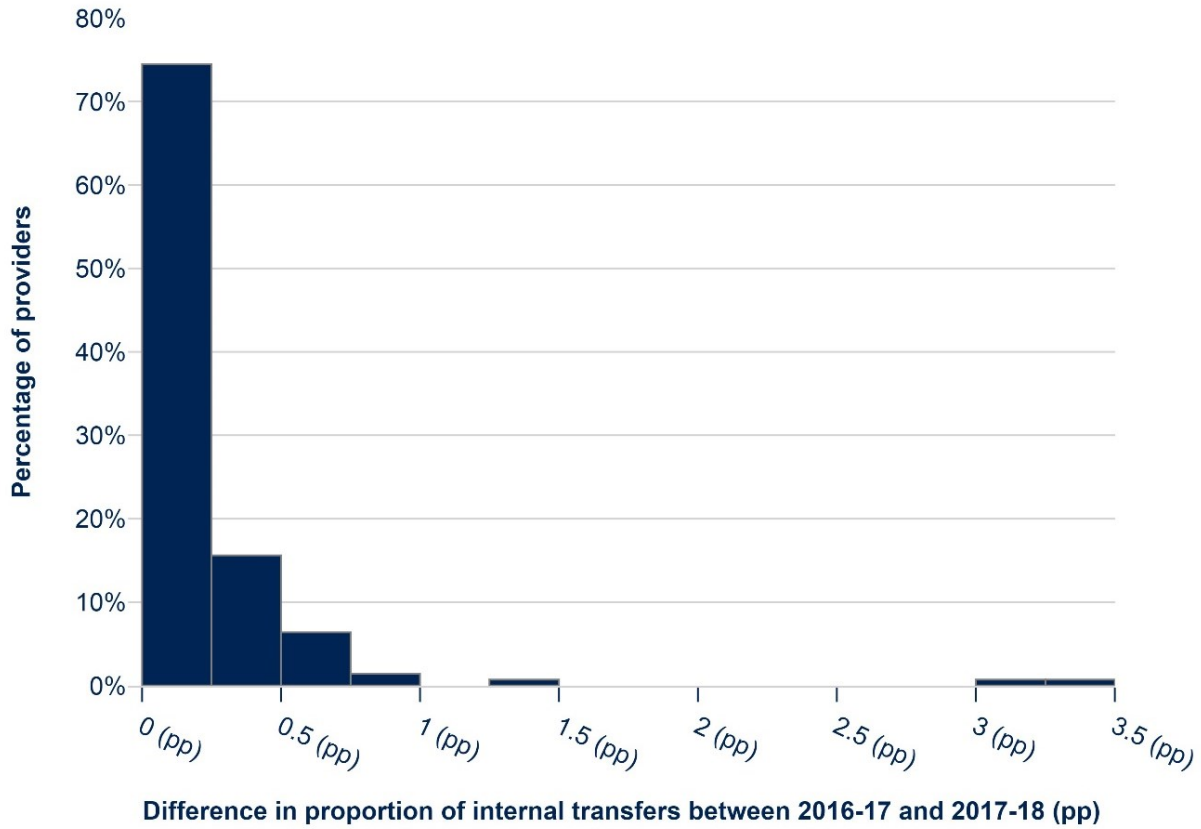
Annex D: Stability of proportions of internal transfers

1. This section tests whether the transfer measures as defined ensure that the proportions of internal transfers calculated fluctuate from year to year. Fluctuation from year to year may suggest that issues with the data are giving misleading results.

2. We examined whether the proportion of transfers varies between years for each provider. Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, only 3 per cent of providers (4 providers) changed by more than 1 percentage point. This proportion is approximately 10 per cent for providers (15 providers) who changed by more than 0.5 percentage points. We have concluded that only a small number of providers seem to change significantly.

3. Figure D1 shows the percentage of providers who experience change in proportion of internal transfers between 2016-17 and 2017-18. It excludes providers which experience a change of greater than 8 percentage points, as it is an outlier.

Figure D1: Percentage of providers who experience change in proportion of internal transfers between 2016-17 and 2017-18



4. Further investigation showed that those providers which experience large variations are providers with very small numbers of students, and so variation is expected. Figure D2 displays this relationship between the number of students and the absolute change of transfers in percentage points.

Figure D2: Average number of entrants and difference in proportions between 2016-17 and 2017-18