

Student intentions and graduate outcomes

Investigating the actual destinations of respondents to the Intentions After Graduation Survey 2015

This report analyses how the intentions of undergraduate first degree students during their final year compare with their actual destinations six months after graduation, by mapping the 2015 Intentions After Graduation Survey against the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey 2016. The report compares the actual destinations of students by their intentions and by their characteristics.

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Student intentions and graduate outcomes

Investigating the actual destinations of respondents to the Intentions After Graduation Survey 2015

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
Of interest to those responsible for	Postgraduate education, Student opportunity, Planning, Graduate outcomes
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Executive summary

Background and purpose

1. This report analyses how the intentions of undergraduate first degree students during their final year compare with their actual destinations six months after graduation, by mapping the 2015 Intentions After Graduation Survey (IAGS) against the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey 2016. The report compares the actual destinations of students by their intentions and by their characteristics.
2. This follows on from 'Intentions After Graduation Survey 2016: Breakdown of responses by questions and characteristics of students' (HEFCE 2016/37), updating the analysis with the most recent survey results.

Key points

Overall patterns

3. A large proportion of those who go on to postgraduate study did not have firm plans to do so just months earlier. Just over a third (36 per cent) of postgraduate entrants in 2015-16 had indicated an intention to study at postgraduate level in spring 2015.
4. Conversely, of those surveyed in spring 2015 who planned to go straight on to postgraduate (PG) study, 67 per cent actually did so. Around 18 per cent ended up going into work and a further 4.7 per cent are in other or unknown activities, including unemployed and travelling.
5. Of those 'Unlikely ever' to study at PG level, around 9.8 per cent ended up studying or working and studying.

Variation between student groups

6. The analysis shows that intentions differ from actual destinations for all student groups, but that these differences are greater for some groups.
7. The match between intentions and destinations is broadly similar for students of different ethnicities, but some differences exist. Typically, the actual destinations of black and minority ethnic students are more likely to match their intentions. However, there are notable differences

between ethnic groups within this category. Students of black ethnicity were the lowest proportion to intend to go on to PG study (6.8 per cent) in 2015, and of these students only just over half matched their intention (56 per cent) – the lowest proportion of all ethnic groups to fulfil such an intention.

8. Chinese students are the most likely to match their intentions. Of the Chinese students who immediately intended to go on to PG study in IAGS 2015, 88 per cent were studying in the six months following graduation.

9. While there is little difference in the intentions of students from different young participation backgrounds, there are in their actual destinations. The proportion of students who intended to go on to PG study and actually did so was around 9 percentage points lower for those from the least disadvantaged backgrounds compared with those from the most. A higher proportion of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds ended up working and studying.

10. Neither the age, sex nor the disability status of a student makes a difference to whether students' final year intentions match their actual destinations after graduation.

11. Only a small proportion of students on sandwich courses have any intention to go on to PG study, with 70 per cent falling into the 'Unlikely ever' group based on their survey responses. In 2015, of those students who were 'Unlikely ever' to go on to PG study 85 per cent were employed within six months after graduating.

12. Having an actual destination that does not match their study intention seems to be correlated with a student's eventual degree class. Graduates achieving lower classifications are more likely to revise their plans and go into work instead. The largest such difference is seen among those in the 'Immediately intend' and 'Likely in the future' intention groups. This difference does not explain the observed differences between students with different characteristics.

13. There are no observable differences in the factors affecting PG study between those whose intentions matched their eventual outcome and those whose did not.

Action required

14. This document is for information only.

Introduction

15. This report compares the study and employment outcomes of first degree students with their stated intentions prior to completing their studies. This is done by linking the results of the Intentions After Graduation Survey (IAGS) carried out in spring 2015 with the 2016 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The IAGS is offered to all online first degree respondents of the National Student Survey and captures the future study and employment intentions of final year undergraduates. The DLHE survey collects information on what all leavers from higher education (HE) programmes are doing six months after qualifying from their HE courses.

16. The report explores the differences between intentions and actual destinations of students according to ethnicity, age, sex, ethnicity, and social background. We also consider the effect of a sandwich course or year studying abroad on the intentions of students. It is shown that differences between intentions and actual destination exist for all students, but that these differences are greater for some groups, in particular some ethnic minorities. The report concludes by exploring how far these differences might be attributable to degree outcomes and other factors such as financial concerns.

17. The results presented in this report can be explored interactively using the IAGS tool on the HEFCE website¹.

Background

18. Since 2013, final year undergraduates on first degree courses answering the National Student Survey online have also been also invited to complete the IAGS. The IAGS aims to provide information on the planned destinations of final year student cohorts, and the underlying reasons for making these choices. The IAGS consists of 13 questions, but questionnaire structure means that respondents are asked a maximum of 11 questions and a minimum of four. More information on the IAGS survey and the 2016 findings can be found in 'Intentions After Graduation Survey 2016: Breakdown of responses by questions and characteristics of students' (HEFCE 2016/37)².

19. Survey respondents can be linked to the Higher Education Statistics Agency's student record and DLHE to see their actual destinations. This enables us to understand how the intention to study converts to actual study, whether any differences between intentions and outcomes are related to student characteristics, and whether there are any barriers to entry in postgraduate study for certain groups of students. Further technical guidance on the methodology used in analysing IAGS can be found in the technical documentation on the HEFCE website³.

20. The report complements other work that HEFCE has published on entry into postgraduate study, most notably, 'Transitions into postgraduate study: Trends for one, three and five-year transition periods for 2002-03 to 2013-14 qualifiers' (HEFCE 2016/14)⁴.

21. While there have been multiple changes to the landscape of postgraduate (PG) study in the UK in the last year, these will not have had an effect on the 2015 cohort. The 2015 IAGS

¹ Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/iags2016/.

² Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201637/.

³ Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/iags2016/.

⁴ Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201614/.

preceded the announcement of PG loans and the decision to leave the European Union by more than a year.

The IAGS-DLHE population

22. There were 99,620 respondents to the 2015 IAGS. Of these, around 78 per cent also answered the DLHE, which gives a sample size of 75,300 for this analysis. This is a broadly representative sample of the total population of final year first degree undergraduates in 2015-16. In terms of proportion of respondents of different ages, disability status, ethnicities and social background (as measured by the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) measure) the IAGS-DLHE data is close to the overall population, although female students are over-represented in our sample (see Annex A).

23. We allocate the students to three groups according to how likely they say they are to do a PG course in the future (see Table 1). The groups are 'Intend immediately', 'Likely in the future' and 'Unlikely ever'. The sample of students who responded to both IAGS and DLHE is slightly more likely to include those who intended to go on to PG study, but overall we believe the sample is representative of the IAGS population.

Table 1: Comparison of total IAGS population with those who also responded to DLHE

Intention grouping	Original intention grouping proportions (%)	Intention grouping proportions of subset of population (%)
Immediately intend: Students who intend to go into PG level study within six months of graduation	8.4	8.9
Likely in the future: Students certain or likely to undertake PG level study in the future	35.6	34.3
Unlikely ever: Students unlikely to, or certain not to, undertake PG level study in the future	56.0	56.7

Results

24. This section of the report considers the results from IAGS 2015. It shows the intentions of students who responded to IAGS 2015 compared with their reported activities six months after graduation, using the results from the 2015-16 DLHE survey. The data in this section can also be visualised in the 'Actual destinations' section of the interactive tool on the HEFCE website.

All students

25. Overall, around 17 per cent of the population went straight on to studying in the six months after their degree, and a further 6.2 per cent of the population went on to work while studying (see Table 2). Around 68 per cent of the population went straight into work.

Table 2: Outcomes of students based on their intention grouping in the total population

	Study only (%)	Work and study (%)	Work only (%)	Other (including unemployed, travelling etc.) (%)	Unknown (%)
Immediately intend	66.5	11.0	17.9	3.3	1.4
Likely in the future	21.5	8.3	61.3	6.7	2.2
Unlikely ever	5.6	4.2	79.0	8.8	2.4
Total population	16.5	6.2	67.5	7.6	2.3

26. Of the 17 per cent of students who went on to PG study immediately, only about 36 per cent had indicated in IAGS that they would do so (see Annex B). In part this is due to only about two-thirds of the 8.9 per cent who stated they intended to go on to PG immediately actually doing so. This means that a large proportion of those who go on to PG did not have firm plans to do so just months earlier. About a fifth of those who thought they would be likely to do PG study in the future actually entered immediately, while more than 5 per cent of those who thought it unlikely they would ever do PG study quickly changed their minds and carried on to PG.

27. A sizeable minority of those who intended to go on to immediately did not do so. Around 18 per cent of those students ended up going into work, and a further 4.7 per cent are in other or unknown activities, including unemployed and travelling.

28. Unsurprisingly, the largest proportion of students in work only six months after the completion of their degree came from those 'Unlikely ever' to do PG study (79 per cent). This group also contains the largest group of students who are out of work and study (11 per cent) – though not necessarily unemployed, as this group includes those 'Travelling' and 'Looking after family or their home'. Of those 'Unlikely ever' to study at PG level, only around 9.8 per cent ended up studying (whether or not they were also working).

Student groups

29. Having considered the relationship between intentions and actual destinations for all students, we now analyse it for student groups according to ethnicity, age, sex and social background. The breakdown of intentions and actual destinations for each of these groups can be found in Annex C. The effect of course type is also explored.

Ethnicity

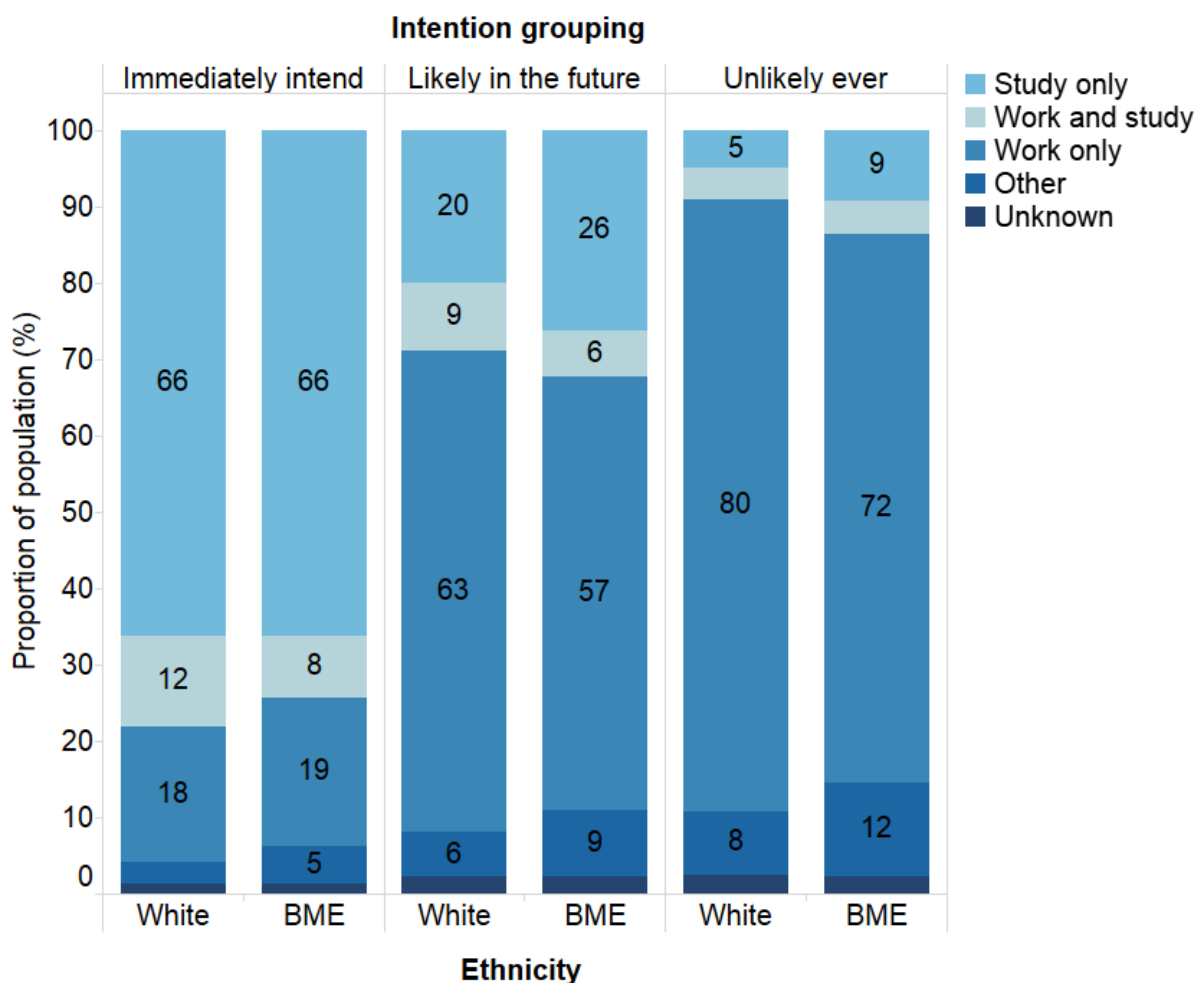
30. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of intentions and actual destinations for white and black and minority ethnic (BME) leavers of higher education. It shows that the match between intentions and destinations is broadly similar for both sets of students, but that some differences exist, and that typically the actual destinations of BME students are more likely to match their intentions. However, this is not the case for all BME groups.

31. Of those who intend to go on immediately to PG, BME students are slightly more likely to be in work only and slightly less likely to be in work and study. Of those without immediate intentions to go on to PG study, a greater proportion of BME students do so anyway.

32. Further differences exist between groups of BME students (see Annex C). Among students from minority ethnicities, Chinese students who intend to immediately go on to PG study are the most likely to fulfil their intentions (88 per cent). Conversely, only 56 per cent of black students who intend to go on to PG study actually do so, compared with 66 per cent for white students.

33. Of the students unlikely ever to study at PG level, black students tended to change their mind the most, with 9.1 per cent studying six months following graduation in comparison with 4.2 per cent of white students in the same grouping.

Figure 1: Outcomes for students from different ethnic backgrounds by intention group



Age group

34. The age of students appears to make little difference to the likelihood of intentions matching actual destinations. For all intentions, young students (those aged under 23 on entry to their first degree) are slightly more likely than mature students to be in study only six months after leaving HE. The differences are small, ranging between one and five percentage points. Mature students are also less likely to be in work and study, but more likely to be in work only, if they had intended to study immediately at some point in the future.

Disability status

35. There are no observable differences in whether a student's pre-graduation intentions match their actual destinations between students with and without a recorded disability. In all intention groups those with a recorded disability are marginally more likely to go on to PG study. The largest differences are observed among those who intend to go on to study immediately or at some point in the future but who do not do so after six months.

Gender

36. Their gender also makes little difference to whether student's pre-graduation intentions match their actual destinations. The proportion of female and male students studying within six months of graduation are within two percentage points across all intention groups, although men tend to match their intentions slightly more than women.

37. Of those who immediately intended to go into further study, a similar proportion of female (18 per cent) and male (17 per cent) students ended up working rather than matching their intention. Again, a similar proportion of men and women who were unlikely ever to go on to PG study changed their minds and were actually studying within six months of graduation (5.7 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively).

Young participation

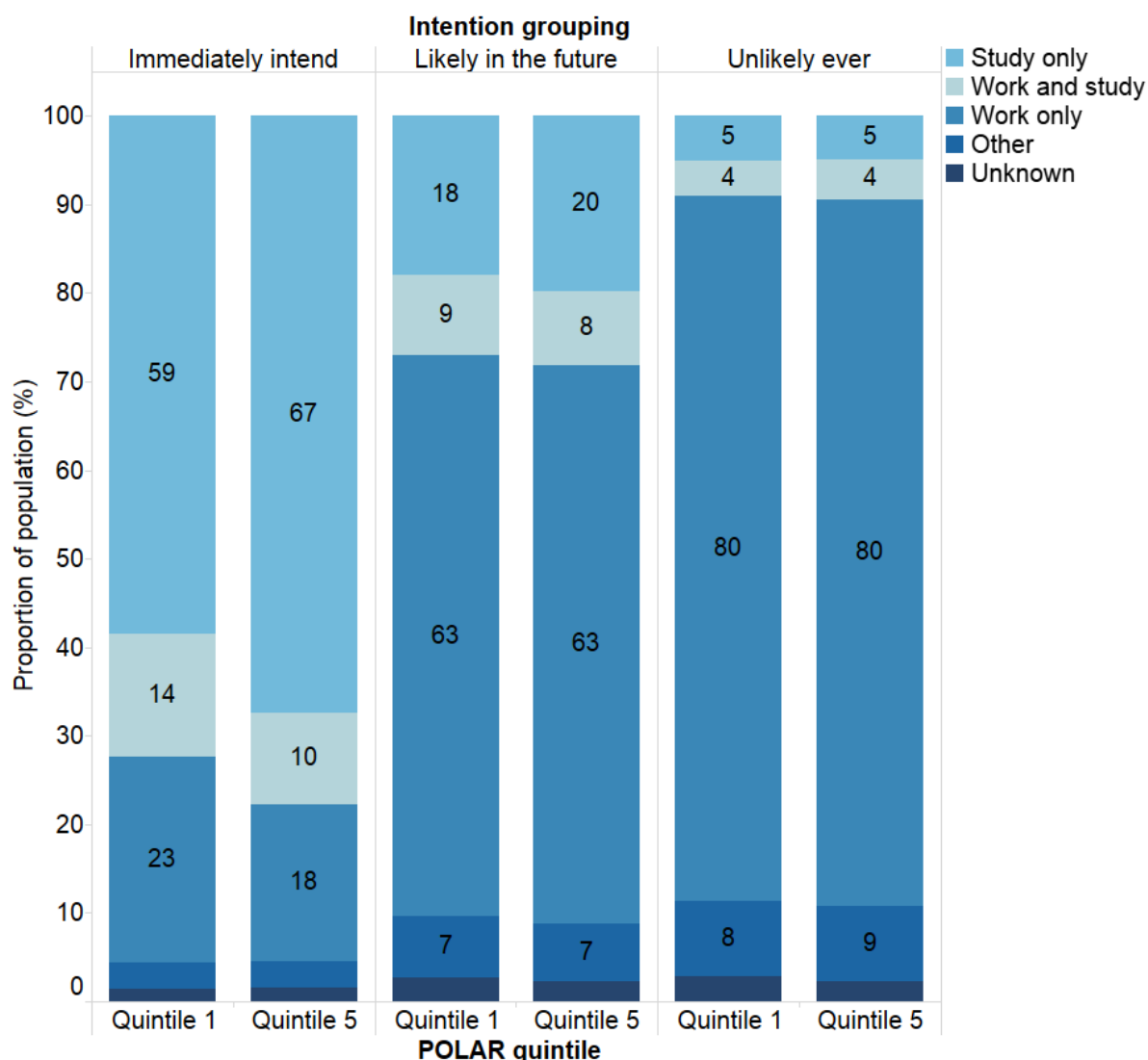
38. Relatively fewer students who come from low participation areas (POLAR Quintile one) and intend to go on to PG study immediately actually do so⁵. Figure 2 shows the outcomes of students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 5 backgrounds. The proportion of students who went on to study immediately is around nine percentage points higher for those from high participation (POLAR quintile 5) backgrounds.

39. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as we would expect students from low participation backgrounds to be from lower income households, some of this difference is offset by a higher proportion of these students working and studying: 14 per cent of quintile 1 students compared with 10 per cent of quintile 5 students.

40. The proportion of those quintile 1 students likely to go on to PG study in the future who actually did so immediately is also slightly smaller, although its difference is much less than observed for the 'Immediately intend' grouping. There are no observable differences among those who were unlikely ever to go on to PG study but who ended up studying within six months of graduation.

⁵ For more information on POLAR, see www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/.

Figure 2: Outcomes of students from POLAR quintiles by intention group



Course types

41. A much higher proportion of students on sandwich courses go on to work-only destinations than students on other courses. This is especially true for students on sandwich courses who were 'Unlikely ever' to go on to PG study, with around 85 per cent matching their intention of employment within six months of graduation. This may suggest that the experience of a year in industry helps these students gain employment more quickly after university. Only around 2.6 per cent of these students did not match their intention and were studying six months after graduation.

42. There is little difference between students who study abroad and those that study on a standard course, though a higher proportion of students who immediately intended to go on to study six months after graduation and studied abroad matched their intention.

Possible causes of differences between intentions and outcomes

43. Having established that differences exist between student intentions and actual destinations, and that these are greater for some student groups, in this section we explore some of the possible causes for these differences.

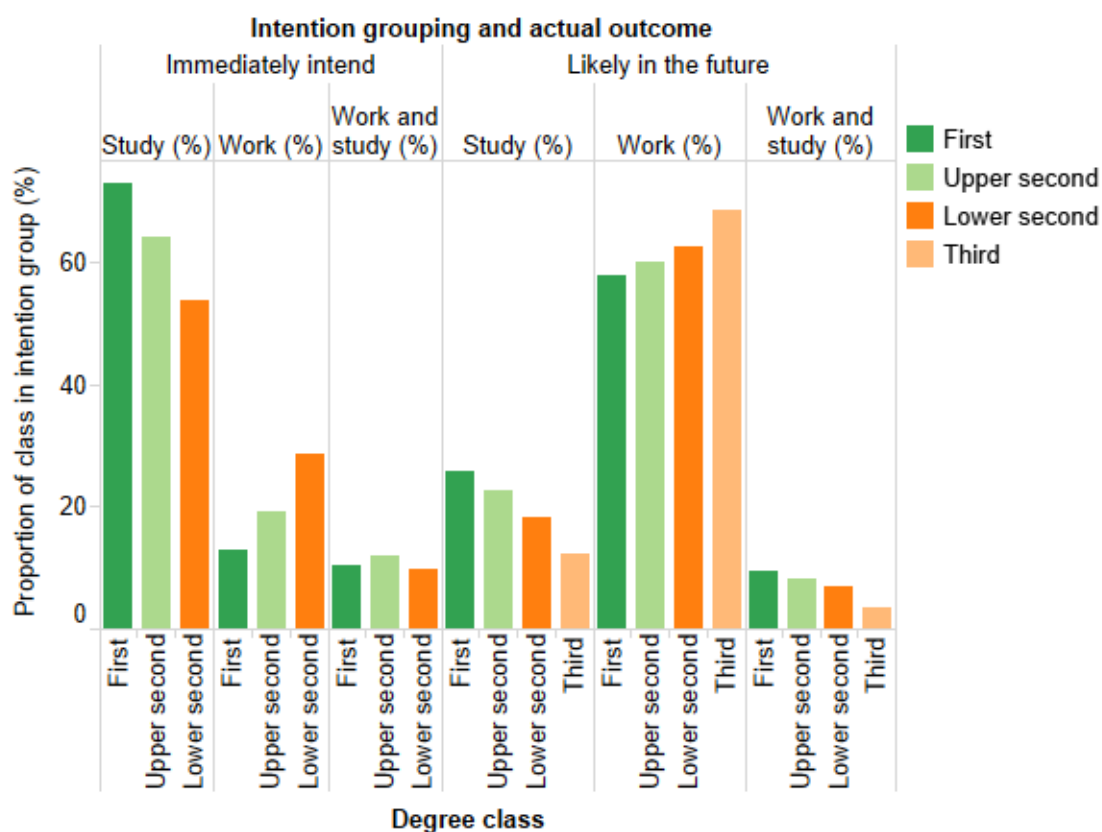
The impact of grades

44. Having an actual destination that does not match their intention seems to be correlated with a student's eventual degree class (see Annex D). Figure 3 shows students' actual destinations by their degree class. Of those who immediately intend to go on to study at PG level, 73 per cent of students who get first class honours degrees match their intention. However, this figure drops to 64 per cent for students who get an upper second class honours and is just 54 per cent for those who get a lower second class honours.

45. Graduates achieving lower classifications are more likely to revise their plans and go into work instead. Around 29 per cent of students who graduated with lower second class degrees but intended to go immediately on to PG study end up going straight into work only. This compares with 12 per cent of students who graduated with a first class honours degree.

46. Degree class also makes a difference for those students who intended to go on to PG at some point in the future. The proportion who ended up going into PG study within six months of graduation was around 7.3 percentage points higher among students who graduated with first class honours degrees than those who graduated with lower second class honours degrees.

Figure 3: Actual destinations by degree class



Note: There are not enough students with third class honours in the 'Immediately intend' group to include in this chart.

47. Degree classification does not have the same effect for those who had no intention of ever going on to PG study. There is only a 1.1 percentage point difference in the proportion of these students who go on to PG study between those who graduate with a first class honours degree and those who graduate with a lower second class honours degree.

48. However, the relationship between degree class and the likelihood of a student fulfilling their intention to study does not explain the differences previously observed between student groups. For all degree classifications, POLAR quintile 5 students are more likely to fulfil their intentions than quintile 1 students. For example, in the case of students who graduate with first class honours, 72 per cent of quintile 5 students match their intention compared with 66 per cent of quintile 1 students. Similarly, Black and Asian students are less likely to fulfil their intentions than white students for all degree classifications.

Other factors

49. The IAGS asks students which factors are likely to encourage or discourage them to study at PG level. Some of the encouraging factors include additional financial support, or particular PG qualifications being a prerequisite for the student's desired career path. Discouraging factors include the cost of living, course fees and a fear of debt. In HEFCE 2016/37 students' attitudes to these factors are discussed. The most encouraging factor was additional financial support, with around one in four stating this, while the overall cost of living was the biggest factor discouraging further PG study.

50. Analysing responses to these questions according to whether students' actual destinations matched their intentions shows no observable differences between the responses of those whose intentions matched and those whose did not. Again, this does not explain the differences seen between students in POLAR quintiles 1 and 5 and those of different ethnicities in how likely they are to fulfil their intentions.

Conclusions

51. While the majority of students match their intention in their actual destination, a sizeable proportion of students do not. This largely depends on the characteristics of students, as well as their degree classification.

52. The characteristics which affect students matching their intentions the most tend to be their ethnicity and POLAR classification. The highest proportion of students whose actual destination matches their intention is found among students of Chinese ethnicity. This is true across all intention groups and is most apparent among those who immediately intend to go on to PG study. BME groups in general are more likely to go on to 'work only' than those of white ethnicity, and black students in particular match their intentions the least.

53. A higher proportion of students from high participation rate backgrounds match their intention of PG study within six months of graduation than those from low participation backgrounds. This is true across all intention groupings. Some of this difference is offset by students from low participation backgrounds going into work and study after graduation. This might be due to those from low participation backgrounds coming from lower income households and thus needing the extra funding from working while studying. This will be interesting to investigate in future IAGS analysis, following the introduction of PG loans in 2016.

54. The eventual classification of a student's degree also affects their ability to meet their intentions in their actual destination. The proportion of those who intended to go on to PG study and actually did so is around 19 percentage points higher among those who get first class honours than those who get lower second class honours. In addition, those achieving lower classifications are more likely to revise their plans and do something else altogether. This effect differs based on the POLAR quintile of the students.

Annex A: Student populations by characteristic

	Student characteristic	All first degree students in final year	Proportion of full population of eligible IAGS respondents (%)	IAGS and DLHE respondents	Proportion of full population of eligible IAGS respondents who also responded to the DLHE (%)
Gender	Female	220,320	57	54,015	73.7
	Male	166,175	43	21,285	29
Age group	Mature	148,835	38.5	24,600	33.6
	Young	237,700	61.5	50,700	69.2
Disability status	No known disability	339,755	87.9	66,520	88.3
	Disability	46,780	12.1	8,785	11.7
Ethnicity	White	272,825	70.6	58,860	78.2
	Black	23,295	6	3,520	4.7
	Asian	37,365	9.7	6,125	8.1
	Chinese	15,525	4	1,440	1.9
	Mixed race	12,965	3.4	2,230	3
	Other	6,395	1.7	805	1.1
	Unknown	18,165	4.7	2,320	3.1
POLAR	Quintile 1 (Low)	44,375	11.5	8,910	11.8
	Quintile 2	56,670	14.7	11,810	15.7
	Quintile 3	65,985	17.1	14,025	18.6
	Quintile 4	76,435	19.8	16,220	21.5
	Quintile 5 (High)	85,710	22.2	17,635	23.4

Note: 'IAGS' = 'Intentions After Graduation survey'; 'DLHE' = 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey'; 'POLAR' = 'Participation of Local Areas measure'.

Annex B: Proportion of total outcome by intention group

Group	Total	Study only	Work and Study	Work only	Other	Unknown
Immediately intend	8.9	36.0	15.9	2.4	3.8	5.4
Likely in the future	34.3	44.7	45.9	31.2	30.2	33.4
Unlikely ever	56.7	19.3	38.3	66.4	65.9	61.2
Total	75,305	12,425	4,680	50,795	5,700	1,705

Annex C: Additional DLHE data

Student characteristics		Intention grouping proportions of subset of population (%)	Work and study (%)	Work only (%)	Study only (%)	Other (%)	Unknown (%)
Gender	Male	9.0	11.2	18.2	66.0	3.4	1.2
		34.5	8.5	61.4	21.5	6.5	2.1
		56.6	4.5	78.9	5.6	8.7	2.4
		100.0	6.5	67.4	16.5	7.4	2.2
	Female	8.9	10.7	17.0	67.6	2.8	2.0
		33.9	7.8	61.1	21.6	7.1	2.5
		57.2	3.3	79.2	5.7	9.2	2.6
		100.0	5.5	67.5	16.6	7.9	2.5
Ethnicity	White	8.8	11.9	17.8	66.2	2.7	1.3
		31.6	8.8	63.0	20.0	6.0	2.2
		59.6	4.2	80.2	4.9	8.2	2.5
		100.0	6.3	69.3	15.0	7.0	2.3
	Black	7.5	11.0	22.7	55.7	8.7	1.9
		50.9	6.5	62.5	18.8	9.7	2.6
		41.6	4.5	71.9	9.1	13.0	1.6
		100.0	6.0	63.4	17.5	11.0	2.1
	Asian	8.0	9.2	23.7	59.1	6.3	1.6
		40.2	7.6	59.7	22.1	8.6	2.0
		51.8	4.3	73.6	8.7	11.3	2.2
		100.0	6.0	64.1	18.1	9.8	2.1
	Chinese	15.1	3.2	6.5	88.0	1.4	0.9
		42.7	5.0	37.0	51.5	4.7	1.8
		42.3	4.3	68.9	14.6	9.7	2.5
		100.0	4.4	45.9	41.4	6.3	1.9
	Mixed	8.2	12.0	18.6	65.6	1.6	2.2
		34.9	6.3	67.1	17.9	6.4	2.3

		56.9	4.4	76.6	5.9	10.6	2.5
		100.0	5.7	68.5	15.0	8.4	2.4
	Other	10.0	4.9	25.9	63.0	6.2	-
		54.1	5.5	57.8	20.2	14.2	2.3
		35.9	4.5	68.9	7.3	17.0	2.4
	Unknown	100.0	5.1	58.6	19.9	14.4	2.1
		14.3	6.3	11.1	77.1	3.9	1.5
		50.4	8.3	46.1	35.9	7.2	2.6
		35.3	4.5	72.5	10.1	10.5	2.3
		100.0	6.7	50.4	32.7	7.9	2.3
POLAR	Quintile 1	7.5	13.8	23.3	58.5	2.9	1.5
		37.7	9.1	63.4	17.9	7	2.7
		54.8	4	79.8	5	8.5	2.8
	Quintile 5	100	6.6	69.3	13.9	7.5	2.6
		8.1	10.3	17.7	67.4	3.1	1.5
		30.2	8.4	63.1	19.8	6.5	2.2
		61.7	4.5	79.7	5	8.6	2.2
		100	6.1	69.7	14.5	7.5	2.2
Age group	Mature	8.0	10.0	18.7	65.6	4.1	1.5
		34.9	8.0	63.3	19.5	6.8	2.4
		57.2	4.1	79.6	5.1	8.7	2.4
	Young	100.0	5.9	69.1	14.9	7.7	2.3
		10.7	12.4	16.7	67.5	2.2	1.2
		33.3	8.8	57.7	25.3	6.4	1.9
		56.0	4.4	77.8	6.5	8.9	2.4
		100.0	6.7	64.6	19.2	7.3	2.1

Note: 'DLHE' = 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey'; 'POLAR' = 'Participation of Local Areas measure'.

Annex D: Actual destinations by degree class

Intention grouping	Degree class	Total	Study (%)	Work and study (%)	Work (%)	Other (%)	Unknown (%)
Intend	First	2,735	73.1	10.4	13.0	2.3	1.2
	Upper second	3,240	64.2	12	19.3	3.3	1.2
	Lower second	615	53.8	9.9	28.6	5.7	2.0
	Other	155	56.1	9.6	22.3	6.4	5.7
Likely in the future	First	7,805	25.7	9.3	57.9	5.4	1.7
	Upper second	12,140	22.5	8.3	60	7.1	2.1
	Lower second	3,655	18.4	6.9	62.5	9.5	2.8
	Third	325	12.4	3.4	68.7	11.1	4.3
	Unclassified	605	1.5	3.8	90.7	0.7	3.3
	Other	1,585	12.3	10.7	68.3	5.2	3.4
Unlikely ever	First	11,475	6.2	5.3	79.5	7.1	1.9
	Upper second	21,575	5.6	3.9	79.2	8.9	2.3
	Lower second	6,445	5.3	2.9	76.5	12	3.2
	Third	615	2.9	2.0	75.9	15.4	3.7
	Unclassified	585	1.2	1.0	94.9	1.0	1.9
	Other	2,310	7.2	7.2	74.3	7.2	4.0

Annex E: Abbreviations and terminology

BME	Black and minority ethnic
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
IAGS	Intentions After Graduation Survey
Mature	Students aged 23 and over when responding to the IAGS
PG	Postgraduate
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas, a classification of geographical areas based on rates of participation in higher education by young people
Young	Students aged under 23 when responding to the IAGS