



Department  
for Education

**Widening Participation in Higher Education, England,  
2017/18 age cohort**

# Technical Note

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# 1. Progression to Higher Education by Pupil Characteristics

The release covers progression to HE by free school meal status, gender, ethnicity, first language, Special Educational Need (SEN) status and POLAR disadvantage. Also, for the first time, statistics are included for Looked After Children.

For the most recent data, the denominator used for these measures covers pupils aged 15 in 2013/14 in English state-funded schools and special schools (including non-maintained special schools). This denominator is broken down by the pupil characteristics identified above.

The numerator is calculated by identifying pupils who progressed to UK Higher Education (HE) in either 2016/17 at age 18, or in 2017/18 at age 19.

The measures are calculated using matched data. This matches the National Pupil Database to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Individualised Learner Record and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record and Alternative Provider Student Record. This allows pupils to be tracked from English schools at age 15 to higher education (HE) by age 19. The measures cover HE courses at both UK Higher Education Institutions and Alternative Providers and English Further Education Colleges. It must be noted, due to the matching procedures deployed, all figures in this publication should be treated as estimates, and may include a small amount of double counting where pupils attend more than one school. Further details of the matching procedure can be found in Section 6.

The following table helps to demonstrate how the cohort is tracked through to HE entry.

Academic Year	Age at start of academic year	Stage of Education
2013/14	15	GCSEs or equivalent (Key Stage 4)
2014/15	16	AS Levels or equivalent (Key Stage 5)
2015/16	17	A Levels or equivalent (Key Stage 5)
2016/17	18	Entry to HE
2017/18	19	Entry to HE (following a gap year)

Free school meals may be claimed if parents receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) that does not exceed £16,190
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

### Caveats

1. There may be pupils who are eligible for FSM but do not claim for a number of reasons. Such pupils will not be classified as in receipt of FSM for the purposes of this measure.
2. Pupils may have claimed FSM in earlier school years, but not when age 15. Such pupils will not be recorded as in receipt of FSM in this measure.
3. These measures only track entry to HE by age 19. A number of pupils may enter HE at a later age and are not included in these measures.
4. Prior attainment is not accounted for in these measures. Many pupils will not continue their education; therefore will not hold the qualifications to progress to HE.
5. Due to the matching procedures deployed, all figures in these measures should be treated as estimates.

## 2. Progression to Higher Education/High Tariff Higher Education by school type

**The estimated percentages of A level and equivalent students, by school and college type, who progressed to higher education and high tariff higher education providers by age 19**

### Changes to Key Stage 5 cohort

Due to qualification reforms and methodological changes in the way the Key Stage 5 cohort is counted, it is not possible to directly compare figures for HE progression rates for 2017/18 with earlier years.

For students turning 19 in 2017/18 (KS5 in 2015/16), only students who entered approved level 3 qualifications (designated as academic, applied general or tech levels) are included in the statistics. In addition, the HE progression rate estimates for 2017/18 will include students entering qualifications equivalent to one AS level or higher. In earlier years students were only included where they entered with qualifications equivalent to one A level or higher.

Changes in the framework around A-level equivalent qualifications have also led to some courses no longer being approved, effectively removing some students from our latest estimates or affecting them due to schools and colleges changing their practices in response to government reforms. These changes are described in more detail here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2015-to-2016-revised>

We cannot quantify the impact of these changes on the latest 2017/18 progression estimates, though anticipate that they would have an impact on progression rates compared to previous years.

It should also be noted that because the state sector includes a greater range of qualifications that students are studying for (e.g. for those aged 17 in 2015/16, 94.0% of independent sector students studied A-levels compared to 75.8% in the state sector) these changes will have a much greater impact on HE progression rates for state school/college students.

**Figures for 2017/18 are therefore NOT directly comparable with earlier years**

For the most recent data, the denominator is defined as pupils aged 17 in 2015/16 who were entered for A levels or equivalent level 3 qualifications at English schools and colleges. This denominator is broken down by the school/college type: state, selective state or independent.

The numerator is calculated by identifying the pupils who progress to UK HE in 2016/17 at age 18, or in 2017/18 at age 19, and of those, which pupils progress to high tariff Higher Education Providers (HEPs).

This measure is calculated using matched data. This matches the National Pupil Database to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Individualised Learner Record and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record and Alternative Provider Student Record. It must be noted, due to the

matching procedures deployed, all figures in this measure should be treated as estimates. Further details of the matching procedure can be found in Section 6.

The following school types make up the state school/college group in this measure:

- Academy – Sponsor Led
- Community
- Voluntary aided
- Voluntary controlled
- Foundation
- City Technology College
- Community special
- Foundation special
- Further Education
- Academy – Special
- Academy – Converter
- Free School – mainstream
- Special Free School
- Converter Special Academy
- Free School – UTC
- Free School – Studio School
- Free School – 16-19

Independent schools include the following school types:

- Non-maintained special
- Independent School approved to take pupils with Special Educational Needs
- Independent
- Independent special

#### **Caveats**

1. Prior attainment is not accounted for in this measure. Many pupils may not achieve the required Level 3 qualifications to progress to HE.
2. Due to the matching procedures deployed, all figures in this measure should be treated as estimates.

#### **High Tariff Providers**

Following a consultation with users and work with key stakeholders, this publication now includes a newly agreed method of identifying the selectivity of providers.

Providers have been grouped into low, medium and high tariff providers based on the normalised mean tariff score of their intake.

The cohort used for the calculation is UK domiciled full-time first year entrants to undergraduate courses at UK Higher Education Providers who are aged under 21. The providers relate to those providing returns to the HESA Student Record and Alternative Provider Record.

The calculation of mean tariff is based on the UCAS tariff points of the cohort, where each individual points score is normalised to reflect the equivalent of the top three A level score achieved by the entrant.

The UCAS points used in the calculation for the current year are shown below for A level grades:

A level Grade	UCAS points
A*	56
A	48
B	40
C	32
D	24
E	16

The maximum score achieved by entrants is therefore set to 168 UCAS points (3 A levels at A\* or equivalent). The calculation is carried out for each individual year, with the tariff points used relating to those that were in place at the time.

Only entrants with UCAS tariff points recorded are included in the calculation. The calculation is carried out for entrants in each individual year and so providers may change between groupings year on year.

Once the mean tariff score is calculated for each provider, they are ranked and then allocated to low, medium and high tariff groupings with each forming roughly a third of the cohort.

Although all providers are included in the calculation of low, medium and high tariff, we suppress the provider level data for the smallest providers, where the figures are likely to be volatile and less representative of the provider as a whole. Data for providers is suppressed where the number of students included in the calculation is below 23 or where there are fewer than 50% of the cohort with tariffable qualifications.

The new methodology will be used by HESA, UCAS and OfS and ensure consistency in analysis across the sector. For this initial publication using the new list we focus on high tariff providers but breakdowns by low, medium and high tariff groupings may be included in future publications.

We will continue to update the groupings as new data becomes available and plan to include details of the normalised mean tariff scores for institutions in future releases.

More details on tariff points are available on the UCAS website:

[UCAS undergraduate tariff points](#)

The measure is not intended to be used to rank providers based on their selectivity or to judge their quality. In particular, some providers, such as those specialising in single subjects such as music and drama, are less likely to rely on UCAS tariff points for entry than more general providers. Judging selectivity based on UCAS tariff points alone is therefore likely to give a false impression. In addition, some of the more diverse providers are likely to be selective for some subjects and not others and this would be hidden by a measure covering the whole provider.

It should also be noted that the measure is based on UK entrants aged under 21. The measure may therefore be less representative of providers where they have a large proportion of non-UK domiciled students and/or older students.

This publication relates to progression to HE by age 19 for students who attended English schools and colleges. Given the coverage differs from that used to identify the tariff scores, we would not expect to see a third of students who attended English schools and colleges in each tariff group. The proportion in each group is also likely to be less stable than a measure that includes the full UK cohort.

### 3. Graduate outcomes by social background

The publication previously included figures on graduate employment by social background. These figures used the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey which has been cancelled. Data will not be available from the replacement Graduate Outcomes Survey until 2020.

### 4. POLAR Disadvantage

Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) was developed by HEFCE and classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in HE. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people and are ranked from quintile 1 (Q1) (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (Q5) (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged). This has been updated over the years to POLAR2, POLAR3 and POLAR4. This publication presents information using POLAR4.

More information on POLAR can be found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>

### 5. Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) was introduced to assess, recognise and reward high quality teaching and student outcomes in higher education. Universities are awarded a rating of Gold, Silver or Bronze taking into account factors such as student satisfaction, employment outcomes and retention rates.

In the TEF, a higher education provider is rated:

- Gold for delivering consistently outstanding teaching, learning, and outcomes for its students. It is of the highest quality found in the UK
- Silver for delivering high quality teaching, learning, and outcomes for its students. It consistently exceeds rigorous national quality requirements for UK higher education
- Bronze for delivering teaching, learning, and outcomes for its students that meet rigorous national quality requirements for UK higher education

TEF is currently a voluntary scheme and so not all providers participate. The awards relate to the rating held by providers as at October 2019. A full list of providers and their TEF rating can be found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/#/>

### 6. Details of the matching process

The National Pupil Database (NPD) contains administrative data on all pupils in schools in England, collected by the Department for Education. Key Stage 5 (KS5) data and Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) records were matched to the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) Student Record and Alternative Provider Student Record, and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Individualised Learner Record (ILR).

The matching process allows for school pupils to be tracked through to Higher Education. The match achieved is called a "fuzzy match" where we rely on names, postcodes, dates of birth, etc and there is some potential for minor errors in the matching process. For this reason, the figures are deemed estimates due to the reliability of the matching procedure used and are subsequently rounded to allow for a small margin of error that arises as result of the matching procedure deployed.

## 7. Changes from previous release

### Alternative Providers

Alternative providers (APs) are higher education providers who do not receive recurrent funding from the Funding Councils or other public bodies and who are not further education (FE) colleges.

Data on APs is now included in the release. Data is available from 2014/15 onwards. Previous analysis showed that including students in APs increased progression rates by around 0.5% for pupils who attended state-funded schools and special schools and therefore had limited impact on the comparability of progression measures over time.

### Looked After Children

We are including figures on progression to higher education for children looked after by local authorities for the first time.

A child is looked after by a local authority under the Children Act 1989 if they fall into one of the following: is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours [Children Act 1989, Section 20 & 21], is subject to a care order [Children Act 1989, Part IV], or is subject to a placement order.

The Department also publishes figures on entry to HE in the [Children looked after in England including adoption](#) publication. The progression rates are lower than presented here as those statistics relate to care leavers known to local authorities. This publication uses a different cohort – children looked after continuously for 12 months or more at 31st March for pupils in state-funded and special schools who were 15 at the start of the academic year – and uses matched census data to identify HE participation by age 19 rather than for a single age.

### Changes to Key Stage 5 Cohort

The main changes to the KS5 Cohort are set out in section 2 above. In addition to this a minor change has been made to the deduplication of data and assigning students to their main school or college. This has changed the figures slightly in some years but by no more than 5 students.

### High Tariff Providers

The method of identifying high tariff providers has been changed after consultation. More information on the change is set out in section 2 above. In addition, the publication now shows progression to high tariff providers for all student characteristics.

### POLAR

The publication now uses the latest version of POLAR - POLAR4. More information on POLAR is in section 4 above.

### Removal of Tables

We have removed figures on graduate employment by social background due to the source survey being cancelled. Data will not be available from the replacement Graduate Outcomes Survey until 2020.

We have removed the old Table 5, which provided a summary of higher education progression statistics produced by UCAS, HESA and DfE. The table has been removed due to changes in the metrics produced over time and their lack of comparability. Links are provided to the source publications instead.

### Rounding

We are removing rounding and suppression of data where possible in order to maximise the utility of the statistics while minimising the risk of disclosure. More information about the Departmental policy on confidentiality can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/773124/External\\_confidentiality\\_policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773124/External_confidentiality_policy.pdf)





# Department for Education

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