

Office for
Students



Student characteristics data: technical document

Students at English higher education
providers between 2010-11 and 2021-22

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Overview

1. The student characteristics data release provides information about sector-level trends in student outcomes and populations for a wide range of student characteristics for those studying at English higher education providers.
2. This technical document describes the methodology and data coverage used to construct the data in the student characteristics data release. It sits alongside reports which summarise some of the key findings observed in the data, as well as interactive data dashboards, datafiles and webpages. These can all be found on our student characteristics webpage.¹

Dashboards included in this release

3. The student characteristics data release comprises three interactive dashboards containing student characteristics data for those studying at OfS-registered English higher education providers:
 - a. The **student outcomes data dashboard**, which presents rates and gaps in student outcomes – continuation, completion, achieving a first or upper-second class degree (attainment) and progression into managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes (progression) – between groups of students across a range of characteristics.
 - b. The **student populations data dashboard**, which presents counts and proportions of students in higher education across a range of characteristics.
 - c. The **entry qualifications and subject data dashboard**, which presents rates for student outcomes by entry qualifications and broad subject.
4. A user guide for each dashboard is included on the relevant webpage for each dashboard.

How the student characteristics data release relates to other OfS publications

5. This release complements other OfS data publications that include student outcomes and population data, many of which support our regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3.² This release includes a broader set of student characteristics, as well as some characteristics at a more disaggregated level.
6. The student population covered by this data release also represents an extension to the coverage of the OfS access and participation data dashboard, which reports sector-level data for the population of UK-domiciled undergraduate students (as the population most relevant to regulations made under the Higher Education and Research Act in relation to access and participation).³ The range of student characteristics considered here includes a number which

¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/.

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

are not currently included in the access and participation data dashboard. For example, sexual orientation, household residual income and care experience.

How does the student characteristics data release differ from other publications?

There are a number of OfS data publications that include student outcomes and population data. The student characteristics data release includes the broadest set of student characteristics. The other data publications include:

Exploring student outcomes data dashboard⁴

This dashboard shows the extent to which differences in continuation, completion and progression between student groups can be accounted for by other underlying factors, for a smaller set of student characteristics.

Student outcomes dashboard⁵

The student outcomes data dashboard shows measures of continuation, completion and progression outcomes for individual providers and the sector overall, and is used to inform our regulation of condition B3. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data outcomes dashboard but only includes a subset of the characteristics included here and does not show a time series by characteristic. It includes information about the statistical uncertainty associated with each indicator value.

Sector distributions of student outcomes and experience measures data dashboard⁶

The sector distributions data dashboard shows how measures of continuation, completion and progression outcomes are distributed across individual providers. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data outcomes dashboard, but includes a subset of the characteristics included here.

Access and participation dashboard⁷

This includes outcomes data for the sector and each registered provider. It includes access data, as well as continuation, attainment and progression data. It includes a subset of the characteristics published here and a shorter time series. The sector numbers in the access and participation dashboard are restricted to students registered at OfS-registered providers and so will match the 'registered' view of numbers published here.

⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-and-experiences-data-dashboards/exploring-student-outcomes-dashboard/.

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/sector-distribution-of-student-outcomes-and-experience-measures-data-dashboard/.

⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

Size and shape of provision dashboard⁸

This dashboard includes a breakdown of student numbers for the sector and at particular providers by student and course characteristics. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data populations dashboard but only includes a subset of the characteristics included here.

7. Data from the student characteristics data release was used to inform the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), in particular to identify at a national level which student groups were most likely to be affected by risks to equality of opportunity across the higher education lifecycle.⁹ We expect providers to use the EORR to identify whether any of their prospective or current students are likely to be affected by the risks and which groups may be most at risk. Where a provider is unable to interrogate their own student population due to missing data, uncollected data or small student group sizes, they can use the sector-level student characteristics publications to inform the risks to equality of opportunity for a wide range of student groups.

⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/methodology/.

Methodology and data coverage

This section summarises the methodology used to produce the statistics in this release and describes the framework used to determine population coverage.

Treatment of missing or excluded data

8. In calculating outcomes and populations for particular student characteristics, we have treated missing and excluded data in a way that aligns broadly with approaches adopted in OfS student outcomes regulation.
9. There are a number of reasons why information about the personal characteristics of a student may be unavailable, for example:
 - a. The student may have refused to provide information.
 - b. The student could not be linked to a matching record where characteristics are derived via linking between data sources.
 - c. The student may be excluded from the population coverage.
10. The range of population coverage for all student characteristics in this publication is detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.
11. Treatment of missing or excluded data differs between calculations of student outcomes and student populations statistics:
 - a. In the **student outcomes** data, the outcome measures for students with missing or excluded data are not reported. If students with a particular attribute were more likely to refuse information, or were more likely to be excluded from the population coverage, then this could have had an impact on the reported rates.
 - b. In the **student populations** data, we show the counts of students who are either missing or excluded from the data. Where data is missing due to the student refusing to provide information, we have grouped students into a single 'No response' category. Where data is excluded from the population coverage or could not be linked to a matching record, we have grouped students into a 'Not applicable' category. Both categories are excluded from the calculation of proportions, except for age (broad and detailed), where a small number of students with unknown age are included in the denominator.

Subject-level data

12. When statistics are split by subject, students studying more than one subject are partially counted for each subject. For instance, a student studying half English and half history would have been counted as 0.5 in each subject.¹⁰

Rounding and suppression

13. To align with approaches used in other OfS regulation data dashboards, the data in this publication is subject to rounding and suppression. Our approach is detailed in this section.
14. In the **student outcomes** data (including the entry qualifications and subject data dashboard), our approach to rounding and suppression is broadly aligned with that adopted by the provider-level student outcomes data dashboard¹¹ (used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3) and access and participation data dashboard.¹² The following rounding is applied:
- a. Headcounts such as numerators and denominators are rounded to the nearest 10.
 - b. Percentages such as rates and gaps are rounded to the nearest 0.1.
15. Suppression is also applied for data quality and protection reasons. The reason for data suppression is indicated by suppression codes, applied in the following hierarchical order:
- a. [none] – there are two or fewer students in the population. Rows with this suppression code are removed from the dataset entirely, so they cannot be distinguished from rows containing genuinely no students.
 - b. [low] – there are fewer than 23 students in the population. All statistics are suppressed when this code applies.
 - c. [DP] – the data has been suppressed for data protection reasons. All statistics are suppressed when this code applies.
 - d. [RR] – the response rate was too low (i.e. lower than 30 per cent for the progression measure). Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.
 - e. [DPL] – the numerator was two or fewer. Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.
 - f. [DPH] – the numerator was within two of the denominator. Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.

¹⁰ See 'What are the differences between a count of students, full-person equivalent (FPE) and full-time equivalent (FTE)?' at www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions.

¹¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

¹² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

16. In the **student populations** data, our approach is similar to above but in order to reflect the approach adopted in the 'Size and shape of provision' data dashboard, the [low] suppression code is not used.¹³ Since the statistics in this dashboard do not rely on survey data in the same way as the student outcomes statistics do, the [RR] suppression code is also not used. Proportions are rounded to the nearest 0.1.

Data quality framework and population coverage

17. Many of the student characteristics in this release have previously been assessed against the OfS's data quality framework.¹⁴ The framework provides a standardised method of investigating the quantity and quality of student characteristic data to aid in making decisions whether to publish data and whether to use it in further analyses.

18. We have not re-applied the framework to any of the characteristics in this publication. To ensure we do not compromise data quality and publish data that has not been subject to sufficient quality control, we continue to restrict the population coverage as judged appropriate in the June 2021 'Equality, diversity and student characteristics data' publication.¹⁵

19. As November 2022 was the first time the service child data was published, details of the results of applying the data quality framework for this student characteristic can be found in Annex B of the accompanying report.¹⁶ In line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, we continue to report this data as experimental in this publication.¹⁷

20. In this year's publication we have added three new student characteristics to align with regulation dashboards and provide additional data that is relevant to our understanding of equality of opportunity. The new student characteristics we have introduced are:

- a. Geography of employment quintile, an area-based measure reflecting proportions of graduates in highly skilled or managerial employment.¹⁸ The quintiles are calculated by the OfS and are based on graduate outcomes data. They are used in OfS student outcomes regulation.¹⁹

¹³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/.

¹⁴ See the June 2021 OfS 'Equality, diversity and student characteristics data' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/equality-diversity-and-student-characteristics-data-2010-11-to-2019-20/.

¹⁵ See the June 2021 OfS 'Equality, diversity and student characteristics data' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/equality-diversity-and-student-characteristics-data-2010-11-to-2019-20/.

¹⁶ See the November 2022 student outcomes publication at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-characteristics-data-student-outcomes/>.

¹⁷ See www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/. Further information can be found in our compliance statement: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/official-statistics/compliance-statement/.

¹⁸ For more information about geography of employment quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/a-geography-of-employment/.

¹⁹ Geography of employment quintiles are used in a number of ways to inform student outcomes and experience regulation. More information about how the data underpinning this regulation is constructed and

- b. Adult higher education (HE) quintile, an area-based measure reflecting the proportion of adults that held a higher education qualification at the point of the 2011 census. The quintiles are calculated by the OfS and use the same area boundaries as for the POLAR4 measure.²⁰
- c. Local or distance learner, which gives information about a student's location of study relative to their provider location. It indicates whether a student was a distance learner, or if their study location was on campus. If their study location was on campus, this field indicates whether they were local to their provider prior to entry. This characteristic is relevant to OfS student outcomes regulation.²¹

21. Given these characteristics are reported here for the first time, in line with the Code of Practice for statistics, we report the above characteristics as experimental statistics.²²
22. As these characteristics are based on area lookups for established quintile data or have been published elsewhere as part of other OfS publications, we have not applied the data quality framework to these characteristics. The coverage of populations for each student characteristic is described below in Table 1.
23. We have also expanded the range of data over which we report Associations Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) quintiles. In the student populations data we have included ABCS quintiles for the continuation, completion and progression lifecycle stages. This is to align with data used in OfS student outcomes regulation.
24. Table 1 and Table 2 below provide a summary of population coverage of each student characteristic.
25. As shown in Table 1, the data included in this release was derived from the following sources:
- a. The Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA's) individualised learner record (ILR).²³
 - b. The Student Return, collected by the Designated Data Body (DDB).²⁴
 - c. The Student Alternative (SA) record, collected by the Designated Data Body (DDB).²⁵

presented can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

²⁰ For more information about adult higher education quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/.

²¹ For more information about how location of study is used as part of OfS student outcomes regulation, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

²² See www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/. Further information can be found in our compliance statement: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/official-statistics/compliance-statement/.

²³ See www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr.

²⁴ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21051.

²⁵ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21054.

- d. The Student Loans Company (SLC) data.²⁶
- e. The National Pupil Database (NPD) provided by the Department for Education.²⁷
- f. Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI) and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles are produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)²⁸ and are merged with the ILR and DDB records.

²⁶ See www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company.

²⁷ The DfE does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD data by third parties.

²⁸ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

Summary of population and year coverage

Table 1: Summary of population coverage of each student characteristic in the student characteristics data²⁹

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Age* (broad and detailed)	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Adult HE Quintile	DDB and ILR	UK	All	Age not unknown and aged 21 or over on entry
Care experience	DDB Student Return	UK	UG	-
Disability* (broad and type)	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Estrangement	SLC	English, Welsh, Northern Irish	UG	Full-time, under 25 in year
Ethnicity* (2 groups, 5 groups, and 15 groups)	DDB and ILR	UK	All	-
Free school meals eligibility	NPD	All (UK data suppressed for data protection reasons)	UG	Under 21 on entry and found in the NPD KS4 data in 2009-10 or later
Gender identity	DDB Student Return & Student Alternative	All	All	-
Geography of employment quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	All	In scope of progression indicators population
Household Residual Income (HRI)	SLC	English, Welsh, Northern Irish	UG	Full-time

²⁹ The statistics in this publication cover both protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 alongside a broader range of other characteristics. For further information on the protected characteristics, see [What does the law say? - Office for Students](#).

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)	MHCLG, DDB and ILR	English	All	-
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	MHCLG, DDB and ILR	English	All	-
Parental higher education	DDB Student Return	All (UK from 2020-21)	All (UG from 2020-21)	-
Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4)	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Under 21 on entry
Religion or belief*	DDB Student Return & Student Alternative	All	All	-
Service child	NPD	UK	UG	Under 21 on entry
Sex*	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Sexual orientation*	DDB	All	All	-
Socioeconomic background	DDB	UK	UG	Full-time
Study location	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) MSOA	OfS, DDB and ILR	English	UG	Under 21 on entry
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Under 21 on entry
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) continuation quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Entrants only

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) completion quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Entrants only
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) progression quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Qualifiers only
Entry qualifications	DDB, ILR & NPD	UK	UG	-
Broad subject of study	DDB & ILR	UK	UG	-

Note: UG = Undergraduate students only. Other acronyms are defined in the paragraph above.

*This relates to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Table 2: Summary of years of available data for each student characteristic and lifecycle stage in the student characteristics data

Characteristic	Population data available from	Continuation data available from	Completion data available from	Attainment data available from	Progression data available from
Age* (broad and detailed)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Adult HE quintile	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Care experience	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Disability* (broad and type)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Estrangement	2014-15	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Ethnicity* (2 groups, 5 groups, and 15 groups)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Free school meals eligibility	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Gender identity	2018-19	2018-19	NA	2018-19	2018-19
Geography of employment quintile	2017-18 qualifiers	NA	NA	2017-18	2017-18
Household Residual Income (HRI)	2011-12	2011-12	2011-12	2013-14	2017-18
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Parental higher education	2012-13	2012-13	2012-13	2012-13	2017-18
Participation of local areas (POLAR4)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18

Religion or belief*	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18
Service child	2012-13 entrants, 2014-15 qualifiers, 2014-15 all students	2012-13	2012-13	2014-15	2017-18
Sex*	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Sexual orientation*	2015-16	2015-16	2015-16	2015-16	2017-18
Socioeconomic background	2015-16 entrants, 2017-18 qualifiers, 2017-18 all students	2015-16	2015-16	2017-18	2017-18
Study location	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintile	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	NA	NA	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) continuation quintile	2015-16 full-time, 2014-15 part-time	2015-16 (Full-time) 2014-15 (Part-time)	NA	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) completion quintile	2012-13 full-time, 2010-11 part-time	NA	2012-13 (Full-time) 2010-11 (Part-time)	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) progression quintile	2017-18 qualifiers	NA	NA	NA	2017-18
Entry qualifications	NA	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Broad subject of study	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18

*This relates to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Populations and definitions

26. This section describes the various populations and definitions used in these statistics.

Throughout this section, definitions of variables with the prefix 'IP' can be found in the most recent OfS 'Technical algorithms for student outcome and experience measures' document.³⁰ You can find out more about the rates used in the OfS 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.³¹

Populations

Student outcomes dashboard

27. The student outcomes dashboard presents outcomes data separately for two different student populations, reflecting approaches used in OfS student outcomes and access and participation regulation:

- a. The taught or registered population: students who are either taught or registered (or both) by an OfS-registered provider. This aligns with populations used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3.³²
- b. The registered population: students who are registered by an OfS-registered provider. This aligns with populations used to support the regulation of access and participation.³³

Note this is the only population reflected in the 'Entry qualifications and subject' data dashboard.

28. For each lifecycle stage there are further restrictions to the population. These are detailed in the 'Rebuilding student outcome and experience measures from individualised files' section of the rebuild instructions for spring 2023 data resources.³⁴ All definitions align with those agreed on following the 'Consultation on constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation'.³⁵

Student populations dashboard

29. To align with contextual data used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3 (presented in the 'Size and shape of provision dashboard'), students are included if they are either registered or taught at an OfS registered provider, and in the

³⁰ See 'Technical algorithms' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

³¹ See 'Description of student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ See '2023 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/documentation/.

³⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/.

relevant contextual population.³⁶ These populations are detailed in the 'Rebuild instructions: data about the size and shape of higher education provision' section of the rebuild instructions for spring 2023 data resources.³⁷

30. Also, in alignment with contextual data used in regulation, the student populations data is additionally split into populations of **entrants**, **qualifiers** and **all students**. The definitions of these populations are detailed in the 'Rebuild instructions: data about the size and shape of higher education provision' section of the rebuild instructions for spring 2023 data resources.³⁸
31. Note that the number of counted qualifiers in the populations data may have changed compared to previous publications. This is in part due to changes in the way level of study is determined for students in the qualifier population. Where previously a student was assigned a level of study based on the qualification awarded, the starting level of study is now used. Changes to the scope of the qualifying population will also have had an effect on the number of qualifiers. The definitions in this publication have been modified from previous publications in order to align with those agreed on following the 'Consultation on constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation'.³⁹

Lifecycle stage

32. This publication reports on differences in outcomes in higher education for certain groups of students. This section details how these outcomes are defined. All definitions are in alignment with definitions used in OfS student outcomes and access and participation regulation.⁴⁰

Continuation rate

33. Continuation outcomes are measured by identifying a cohort of entrants to higher education qualifications at the provider and following them through the early stages of their course to track how many continue in active study, or qualify, in subsequent years.
34. The continuation rate is the proportion of students that were observed to be continuing in the study of a higher education qualification (or have gained a qualification) one year and 15 days after they started their course (two years and 15 days for part-time students).

Completion rate

35. Completion outcomes are measured by identifying a cohort of entrants to higher education qualifications at the provider and following them through their course to track how many of them complete their studies or are still active in their studies.

³⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/.

³⁷ See '2023 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/documentation/.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/.

⁴⁰ See 'Description of student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

36. The completion rate is the proportion of students that were observed to have gained a higher education qualification (or were continuing in the study of a qualification) four years and 15 days after they started their course (six years and 15 days for part-time students).

Attainment rate

37. Attainment rates express the number of qualifiers from Level 6+ undergraduate degrees who were awarded 'first' or 'upper second' (2:1) degree classifications as a percentage of all those qualifiers from Level 6+ undergraduate degrees who were awarded classified degrees.

Progression rate

38. Progression measures are constructed from data reported through the Graduate Outcomes survey.

39. The progression rate is the proportion of qualifiers that identify managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes among the activities that they were undertaking when responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey 15 months after they left higher education.

Mode of study

40. Mode of study is defined by IPSTARTMODE for all students. Modes of study included are:

- full-time
- part-time
- apprenticeship.

Level of study

41. The level of study that can be examined varies by mode of study, as outlined below:

a. Groupings available for full-time and part-time mode of study:

- i. All undergraduate
- ii. First degree
- iii. Undergraduate with postgraduate components
- iv. Other undergraduate
- v. All postgraduate
- vi. Postgraduate research
- vii. Postgraduate taught masters
- viii. PGCE
- ix. Other postgraduate

b. Groupings available for apprenticeship mode of study:

- i. All undergraduate
- ii. All postgraduate

42. These levels of study are defined by IPLEVEL.

43. Note that only students aiming for a full qualification are included. This means that those studying only for credits are not in scope.

Domicile

44. As well as reporting for all domiciles combined, UK domiciled and non-UK domiciled students are reported separately. Data on apprenticeships for non-UK domiciled students has been removed from the publication due to small numbers, resulting in much of the data being suppressed.

Subject of study

45. The student population data presents populations of students split by subject. Level 1 (CAH1) codes are used for splits by 'Subject of study (detailed)', which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. Table 3 shows how these subject groupings relate to one another.

Table 3: Subject groups

Subject of study (broad)	Subject of study (detailed) – CAH1 groups
Business and management	Business and management (CAH17)
Design, creative and performing arts	Design, and creative and performing arts (CAH25)
Education and teaching	Education and teaching (CAH22)
Engineering, technology and computing	Engineering and technology (CAH10) Computing (CAH11)
Humanities and languages	Language and area studies (CAH19) Historical, philosophical and religious studies (CAH20) Combined and general studies (CAH23) Media, journalism and communications (CAH24)
Law and social sciences	Social sciences (CAH15) Law (CAH16)
Medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences	Medicine and dentistry (CAH01) Veterinary sciences (CAH05)
Natural and built environment	Agriculture, food and related studies (CAH06) Architecture, building and planning (CAH13) Geography, earth and environmental studies (CAH26)

Natural and mathematical sciences	Biological and sport sciences (CAH03) Physical sciences (CAH07) Mathematical sciences (CAH09)
Nursing, allied health and psychology	Subjects allied to medicine (CAH02) Psychology (CAH04)

46. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), was introduced in the 2019-20 academic year.⁴¹ This replaced the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) used in previous years. In this analysis, subject codes (both JACS and HECoS) are mapped to Version 1.3 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH).⁴²
47. Level 2 categorisation (CAH2) codes are used, which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. See IPSBJ_BROAD.
48. The change from JACS to HECoS causes some additional variation in the distribution of subjects between 2018-19 and 2019-20 on top of the usual year-on-year variation, which can also be due to changes in the providers reporting to HESA. Therefore, this should be taken into consideration when drawing comparisons between these two academic years.

Student characteristics

The following section describes the definitions used to construct the student characteristics in this publication.

As noted in the '[Data quality framework and population coverage](#)' section above, population and year coverage of each characteristic has previously been considered by applying the OfS data quality framework, resulting in the coverage described in Table 1 and Table 2.⁴³ The framework provides a standardised method of investigating the quantity and quality of student characteristic data to aid in making decisions whether to publish data and whether to use it in further analyses.

We consider the results of applying the OfS data quality framework as part of previous student characteristics publications to continue to apply here. Full details of the results of applying the framework on population and year coverage are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

⁴¹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos.

⁴² See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah.

⁴³ See the June 2021 OfS 'Equality, diversity and student characteristics data' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/equality-diversity-and-student-characteristics-data-2010-11-to-2019-20/.

Age (broad and detailed)⁴⁴

49. Age (both broad and detailed) refers to the age of the student on 31 August in the year they commence their studies (see IPSTARTAGEBAND). For the populations data only, a small number of students with unknown age are included in the denominator for the calculation of proportions.

Adult higher education (HE) quintile

50. Adult higher education quintiles are an area-based measure reflecting the proportion of adults who held a higher education qualification at the point of the 2011 census.⁴⁵ It is reported here for UK-domiciled students aged 21 or over on entry, and is considered most relevant to students studying at postgraduate levels of study. See IPADULTHEQ.

Care experience

51. Data on care experience is collected for entrants on the DDB Student Record.⁴⁶ See IPCARELEAVER.

52. For English providers, care experience can be recorded as one of two categories. First, data is recorded as part of the UCAS application via student self-disclosure. Providers are then able to verify care status and, where they confirm the student was in care, this is recorded as a different category that takes precedence over the UCAS category. Providers can choose to what extent they verify care status and they may use different verification criteria. For the purposes of this analysis these two categories are combined into one called 'care experienced'.

53. The use of care experience data has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Disability⁴⁷

54. Disability (both broad and detailed) is self-reported by students at the point of starting their course. See IPDISABLETYPE.

Estrangement

55. Student estrangement is recorded by the SLC on a case-by-case basis. To be recorded as estranged, a student must be irreconcilably estranged from their living biological or adoptive parents for a considerable period of time (usually at least 12 months). This being the case, there will be students who are estranged but are not recorded as such, because they do not have an SLC record or have chosen not to declare their estrangement to the SLC. There may also be students who consider themselves to be estranged from their parents but do not fulfil the requirements of the SLC to be recorded as estranged.

⁴⁴ Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁴⁵ For more information about adult higher education quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/.

⁴⁶ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/careleaver.

⁴⁷ Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

56. The use of student estrangement data has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Ethnicity⁴⁸

57. Ethnicity information is provided by the student on the basis of their own self-assessment. See IPETHNICDETAIL. For this release, we report ethnicity in three different groupings: two groups, five groups, and fifteen groups.

58. Ethnicity information is restricted to UK domiciled students, reflecting coverage in the Designated Data Body (DDB) Student Return.⁴⁹

Free school meals eligibility

59. A student's eligibility for free school meals (FSM) can be used as an individual measure of disadvantage. To generate information on students' FSM eligibility, we have linked DDB Student, DDB Student Alternative and ILR data with schools' NPD data using person-based linking.⁵⁰ We link to NPD school census data at key stage 4, from 2009-10 onwards. This has information on pupils attending maintained schools in England. From spring 2013-14, this includes local authority maintained Pupil Referral Units and alternative provision academies, including alternative provision free schools. Students are included in the FSM data if they were under 21 on commencement of their studies and were successfully linked to records from the NPD.

60. The DfE does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD data by third parties.

61. The use of free school meals data has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Gender identity

62. Gender identity information is collected on the DDB Student Record⁵¹ and DDB Student Alternative (SA) Record⁵² only. Students should, according to their own self-assessment, indicate if their gender identity is the same or different to their sex registered at birth. The field is collected for all students, having become compulsory in 2019-20.

63. The use of information about gender identity derived from these data sources have previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

⁴⁸ Ethnicity is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁴⁹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/ethnic.

⁵⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/supplying-data/approach-to-linking-data/.

⁵¹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/genderid.

⁵² See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20054/a/genderid.

Geography of employment quintile

64. Geography of employment quintiles are an area-based measure based on the proportion of graduates in highly skilled jobs.⁵³ The coverage is restricted to graduates who responded to the Graduate Outcomes survey. See IPGOQUINTILE.

Household Residual Income (HRI)

65. Household Residual Income (HRI) is a measure of household income, based on gross income after accounting for certain costs such as dependants and pensions (but before tax and national insurance). It is assessed by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and is used to determine a student's access to income-assessed student finance.

66. For students who are financially dependent on parent(s)/guardian(s), household residual income is based on parental income. For students who are financially independent, it is based on their own income, and their partner's if they have one. This publication includes HRI for both categories of students.

67. Further details of the collection of HRI are published by the SLC.⁵⁴

68. There are a number of caveats that are important to consider when considering proportions and outcomes of students in particular household income groups. In particular:

- a. Household Residual Income (HRI) is only available for students who have applied for income-dependent financial support. It is not a compulsory part of the student loan application. In particular, if a student or their parents are aware that their HRI is above a level which would mean they were not entitled to an income-assessed loan, or if they have other evidence of low income which means submitting income is not necessary, then their financial information will not be recorded. This could mean the data presented in this report is not representative of the wider student population.
- b. For some courses, such as nursing prior to 2017-18, a student may have an SLC record but receive finance that is not assigned using HRI. These students would not have been required to provide this information.
- c. Income-dependent maintenance loans were only introduced for part-time students from 1 August 2018 onwards.⁵⁵ This means that, before this point, very few part-time students reported any HRI information. We are therefore waiting for a consistent time series to be established before reporting HRI data for part-time students. In addition, because part-time distance learners are only eligible for a maintenance loan if they are studying long distance because of a disability, it may be that the data will still not be a fair reflection of the profile of part-time students, even once a time series is well established.
- d. The HRI data in this release applies to students domiciled in England, Wales and Northern Ireland only. Students domiciled in Scotland are not included because they do

⁵³ For more information about geography of employment quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/a-geography-of-employment/.

⁵⁴ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-finance-how-youre-assessed-and-paid/student-finance-how-youre-assessed-and-paid-2023-to-2024.

⁵⁵ See www.gov.uk/student-finance/parttime-students.

not submit their financial information to the SLC as part of their student support applications.

- e. The HRI groupings presented in this publication are used because they broadly reflect the values used by the SLC for assigning income-assessed components of the maintenance loan. The boundaries have not changed in line with inflation.

69. The use of information about household residual income has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

70. This field shows the 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quintile of a student for students with a home postcode in England.⁵⁶ The index is based on all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families. It is produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Values are assigned as 1 to 5, with 1 being the quintile of highest deprivation. See IPIDACI.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

71. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 is a measure of deprivation for small areas within England. It is calculated at lower-layer super output area (LSOA) level and uses a number of different measures to determine levels of deprivation. It is produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).⁵⁷ Values are assigned 1 to 5, with 1 being the quintile of highest deprivation. See IPIMDNATION.

Parental higher education

72. Parental higher education data is collected as part of the DDB Student Return.⁵⁸ It indicates whether one or more of the student's parents has a higher education qualification. On the DDB Student Return this data is primarily collected as part of UCAS applications. Providers are also expected to collect this information for eligible students who did not use UCAS. Previous publications have restricted parental higher education data to students who could be matched to their UCAS application, but this does not appear to have a substantial impact on data quality, so this restriction is no longer applied. See IPPARED.

73. As a result of changes to data collection requirements, the reporting of parental higher education data for most postgraduate students and non-UK domiciled students dropped considerably in 2020-21. Because of this change, from 2020-21 onwards, parental higher education data is only provided in this release for UK-domiciled undergraduate students.

74. The use of parental higher education information has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

⁵⁶ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

⁵⁷ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

⁵⁸ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/pared.

Participation of local areas (POLAR4)

75. The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of young people who participate in higher education.⁵⁹ It looks at how likely young people are to participate in higher education across the UK and shows how this varies by area.
76. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation, while quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation. POLAR4 is calculated using data on students who begun their studies between 2009-10 and 2013-14. See IPPOLAR4.

Religion or belief⁶⁰

77. Religion or belief is collected on the DDB Student Return⁶¹ and DDB Student Alternative (SA) Record⁶² only. It records the religion or belief of the student, on the basis of their own self-assessment. The field is collected for all students, having become compulsory in 2017-18.
78. The use of religion or belief data has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Service child

79. The children of military services personnel (service child) measure is based on the population of students matched to the Department for Education's National Pupil Database (NPD).⁶³ It indicates if a pupil had parent(s) who were serving in regular military units (including pupils with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full-time reserve service) of any forces and exercising parental care and responsibility, when the child was in key stage 4.
80. The use of service child data derived from this data source previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework, in our previous student outcomes report. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Sex⁶⁴

81. Sex is reported by the student as 'Male', 'Female', or 'Other sex'. See IPSEX.

⁵⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/.

⁶⁰ Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁶¹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/relblf.

⁶² See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20054/a/relblf.

⁶³ See find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/en/concepts/d8f6c965-f1ec-4e55-b226-41ffe06f8646.

⁶⁴ Sex is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

Sexual orientation⁶⁵

82. Sexual orientation information is collected on the Student Return to the Designated Data Body (DDB) Student Return⁶⁶ and DDB Student Alternative Record⁶⁷ only. It records the sexual orientation of the student, on the basis of their own self-assessment. The field is collected for all students, having become compulsory in 2019-20. See IPSEXORT.
83. The use of sexual orientation information derived from these data sources have previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Socioeconomic background

84. National Statistics socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC) data is collected on the DDB Student Return.⁶⁸ NS-SEC data is also available on the ILR; however, the quality of this data was assessed against the OfS data quality framework and deemed to be of insufficient quality.⁶⁹ See IPSEC.
85. Previous student characteristics publications used a slightly different definition of socioeconomic classification than used elsewhere in OfS regulation, reflecting the different ways this data is collected depending on the student's age on entry to higher education.⁷⁰ For students aged 21 and over at entry, it is based on their occupation prior to starting their course. For students under 21, it is based on the occupation of their parent, stepparent, or guardian who earns the most. Previously, this information was reported only for young students (under 21 on entry) only. However, in order to align with definitions used in OfS student outcomes regulation, the information is now reported for students of any age.
86. Collection of socioeconomic background data by the DDB is limited to UK-domiciled undergraduates who entered their higher education instance via a UCAS scheme. Since there are few young part-time students entering higher education through UCAS, socioeconomic background data is reported for full-time students only.
87. The use of socioeconomic background information using data derived from this source has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

⁶⁵ Sexual orientation is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁶⁶ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/sexort.

⁶⁷ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20054/a/sexort.

⁶⁸ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/sec.

⁶⁹ See Annex F of www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

⁷⁰ Previous student characteristics publications are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-characteristics-data-student-outcomes/.

Study location

88. Study location information is derived from DDB and ILR data. It is used to determine whether a student was a distance learner, or if they were not, whether they were local to their provider prior to entry. See IPDL and IPSTUDYLOCTYPE.

Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA)

89. TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) is an area-based measure that uses tracking of state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to calculate young participation.⁷¹

90. TUNDRA classifies local areas across England into five equal groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation.

91. TUNDRA is a different measure to POLAR4 because it focuses on the participation rate of state-funded mainstream school pupils and only applies to England. TUNDRA quintiles are assigned according to home postcodes, for which coverage exceeds 99 per cent of young English undergraduates.

92. Previous student characteristics publications reported multiple definitions of TUNDRA (Tracking Under-representation by Area) quintiles were presented, based on both Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and Middle-layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs), as well as a version of the quintiles that excluded students not from state-funded mainstream schools.⁷² In this release, we have included only the TUNDRA quintiles based on Middle-layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) that includes all young English undergraduates. This is in order to align with data used in OfS student outcomes regulation.

93. The use of TUNDRA quintile data has previously been assessed against the OfS data quality framework. Population and year coverage restrictions applied for this characteristic as a result of this assessment are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) quintile

94. Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) is a set of measures that seeks a better understanding of how outcomes vary for groups of students with different sets of characteristics (for example, ethnicity, sex and background).⁷³ The student characteristics selected when constructing these measures should not have an impact on students' outcomes, but the evidence shows that they do.

95. This publication includes ABCS measures for continuation, completion and progression. They are reported in both the student outcomes and student populations. Coverage is restricted to UK-domiciled undergraduates.

⁷¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/.

⁷² Previous student characteristics publications are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-characteristics-data-student-outcomes/.

⁷³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/associations-between-characteristics-of-students/about-the-abcs-data/.

96. For consistency with other dashboards used in OfS regulation, we have only reported ABCS quintiles for the cohort to which they are most relevant. For example, in the student populations dashboard, we report ABCS continuation and completion quintiles for entrants only, and ABCS progression quintiles for qualifiers only.
97. Additionally, in the student populations dashboard, we report ABCS access quintiles for all cohorts of students.

Entry qualifications

98. This field categorises students, where the student has A-levels, Scottish Highers, Scottish Advanced Highers, International Baccalaureate or BTECs on entry, into groups according to the highest grades for these qualification types. See IPGRADECOMB.
99. This characteristic is relevant only to the 'Entry qualifications and subject' data dashboard.

Broad subject of study

100. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), was introduced in the 2019-20 academic year.⁷⁴ This replaced the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) used in previous years. In this analysis, subject codes (both JACS and HECoS) are mapped to Version 1.3 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH).⁷⁵
101. Level 2 categorisation (CAH2) codes are used, which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. See IPSBJ_BROAD.
102. The change from JACS to HECoS causes some additional variation in the distribution of subjects between 2018-19 and 2019-20 on top of the usual year-on-year variation, which can also be due to changes in the providers reporting to HESA. Therefore, this should be taken into consideration when drawing comparisons between these two academic years.

⁷⁴ See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah.

⁷⁵ Ibid



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www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/