

Office for
Students



Analysis of degree classifications over time

Changes in graduate attainment from
2010-11 to 2022-23

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Summary

1. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23 the percentage of UK-domiciled, full-time first degree graduates attaining a first class or upper second class degree fell. In 2022-23, 77.6 per cent received a first or upper second class degree compared with 80.7 per cent in 2021-22. This decrease of 3.1 percentage points is the second successive year that rates have fallen, having increased considerably between 2010-11 and 2020-21.
2. This latest fall in the proportion of graduates attaining first or upper second class degrees means that the rate is now slightly below what it was in 2018-19, when it stood at 79.0 per cent. Overall however, between 2010-11 and 2022-23, there has been a 10.1 percentage point increase in the proportion of first and upper second class degrees awarded.
3. This report analyses these graduate attainment rates and uses statistical modelling to assess to what extent the increases and decreases in these rates could be statistically accounted for by changes in the prior attainment of, and distribution of subjects studied by, the graduate populations.
4. Across the 143 providers included in this analysis, the proportion of students awarded a first class degree has also fallen for two successive years, from 33.3 percent in 2021-22 to 29.6 per cent in 2022-23. The rate is now almost the same as it was in 2018-19, before the coronavirus pandemic, but still an increase from 2010-11 when it stood at 15.8 per cent. Under one half of the 29.6 per cent of awarded firsts in 2022-23 (13.4 percentage points) was not statistically explained when compared with attainment in 2010-11, the reference year. Of the 77.6 per cent awarded first and upper second class degrees in 2022-23, 11.0 percentage points were not statistically explained by the characteristics included in our modelling.
5. The report also examines unexplained attainment at the provider level. We compared each provider's attainment in a given year to the attainment of the sector in 2010-11 (the mean across the 143 providers included in this analysis). We also compared each provider's attainment in a given year to their own awarding in 2010-11.
6. Throughout this report we refer to the proportion of first or first and upper second class degrees awarded as 'graduate attainment'. In other Office for Students (OfS) publications we refer to this measure as 'degree outcomes'. We consider that these terms are equivalent and use them interchangeably.

Introduction

7. In July 2023, the Office for Students (OfS) published 'Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2021-22' (OfS 2023.35).¹ This used statistical modelling to investigate changes in the proportions of graduates attaining first or upper second class degrees over the academic years from 2010-11 to 2021-22. This new report builds on our analysis from last year by expanding the time series to include academic years from 2010-11 to 2022-23.
8. We report not only on how graduate attainment has changed over this period, but also on the extent to which this can be statistically accounted for by changes in certain characteristics of the graduate population.² This analysis has been undertaken at both the sector level and the provider level. The sector-level analysis and a summary of the provider-level analysis are in the main body of this report, with detailed results of the provider-level analysis available separately in Annex A.³
9. The graduate population considered in this report comprises UK-domiciled undergraduates (first degree and degrees including a postgraduate component) who:
 - were studying full-time when they started their course
 - were registered at higher education providers in England
 - graduated in the academic years from 2010-11 to 2022-23
 - attained a classified honours degree.
10. We also only include those who qualified from English providers that awarded classified honours degrees to at least ten students in each of the academic years considered. We therefore use data from 143 providers. These providers awarded 256,100 graduates a classified degree in 2022-23. In the rest of the report we refer to these providers as 'the sector', for the purposes of this analysis only.
11. Annex A, Table 3 shows (for providers included in this analysis):
 - the total number of graduates
 - the number graduating in each subject area
 - the number entering higher education with each type of entry qualification
 - the number entering higher education by their age group.

¹ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time-changes-in-graduate-attainment-from-2010-11-to-2021-22/.

² These are student and course characteristics associated with graduate attainment, which are derived and available from administrative data for the whole sector.

³ Available to download alongside this document at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time-changes-in-graduate-attainment-from-2010-11-to-2022-23/.

Annex B presents definitions of our graduate populations.

Using statistical modelling to estimate unexplained attainment

12. We have used statistical modelling of individual-level graduate data to estimate the extent to which changes in degree classification attainment between 2010-11 to 2022-23 can be accounted for by the following graduate characteristics (explanatory variables):
- provider at which the graduate was registered
 - year of graduation
 - subject of study
 - qualifications on entry into higher education
 - age on entry to higher education.⁴
13. As in last year's analysis, we employed a simplified model and do not include disability, ethnicity, sex and TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) as explanatory variables.⁵
14. In the May 2022 report, we added 'year' interaction terms to better capture year-on-year sector changes in attainment for age, qualifications on entry and subject of study. This followed the changes in attainment of particular groups of students during the coronavirus pandemic. As last year, we have retained these interaction terms in this year's analysis.
15. In 2010-11 the proportion of students awarded a first class degree was 15.8 per cent. Using the explanatory variables in paragraph 12, we estimated that the proportion in 2022-23 would be 16.2 per cent, a 0.4 percentage point increase. However, we observed 29.6 per cent of students attaining a first class degree in 2022-23, an increase of 13.8 percentage points (see Table 3).
16. In 2010-11 the proportion of students awarded a first or upper second class degree was 67.5 per cent. Using these explanatory variables we also estimated that the proportion in 2022-23 would be 66.6 per cent, a decrease of 0.9 percentage points. However, we observed 77.6 per cent of students attaining a first or upper second class degree in 2022-23, an increase of 10.1 percentage points (see Table 2).
17. Therefore the observed sector-level increases in rates of firsts and firsts and upper seconds combined over this period are considered statistically unexplained by the factors listed in paragraph 12 alone.
18. The term 'unexplained' in this context means that changes in the characteristics of the graduating cohort included in our modelling cannot explain statistically the changes in

⁴ In support of our regulation work related to the principle that 'qualifications granted to students are credible and hold their value', we use 2010-11 as the base year in our modelling, as this approach allows us to observe both historical and recent changes in unexplained attainment. Starting in 2010-11, rates of firsts started to increase by around two percentage points a year, but prior to 2010-11 yearly increases tended to be much smaller.

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/

attainment over the period. We are not seeking to understand what other factors might be driving the observed changes. We acknowledge that elements such as improvements in teaching quality could account for them. Our modelling cannot account for increases in degree awarding as a result of changes made in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Neither can it account for entry requirements such as performance in an audition or the submission of a portfolio, as entry qualifications are limited to standard A-levels, BTECs and direct equivalents. Similarly, it cannot account for changes in entry qualifications as a result of the teacher-assessed grading necessitated during the pandemic. For this reason, we also classify these changes as 'unexplained'.

Context and background

19. This report follows on from the previous OfS publication 'Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2021-22' (OfS 2023.35), published in July 2023.⁶
20. As well as adding the latest year of student data, for 2022-23, this latest report incorporates one other change. This is a small adjustment made to the base population on which the proportions for degree classifications are calculated, as the category 'Pass - degree awarded without honours following an honours course' is no longer collected in Data Futures.⁷ As students qualifying with these awards in 2022-23 can no longer be identified, they are therefore excluded from this base population (the denominator for our calculations). As the premise of the analysis is to measure degree classifications over time, we have also removed such students from the denominator in all years prior to 2022-23, in order that the time series is consistent. For this reason, proportions quoted in previous reports may differ slightly to those quoted here.
21. We have carried out some analysis to understand what affect this definitional change has made. We found that the proportions awarded first class degrees rose across the whole time series by around 0.3 percentage points in each year compared with those in last year's analysis. The increase in the proportions of first and upper second class degrees combined was around 0.8 percentage points in each year.

⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time-changes-in-graduate-attainment-from-2010-11-to-2021-22/.

⁷ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/22056/deriveddatadictionary?element=Engagement_Z_QCLASS_CYC.

Results

Sector-level analysis

Sector overview

22. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the numbers and proportions of graduates attaining different classified degrees in the academic years 2010-11, 2018-19, and 2020-21 to 2022-23.

Table 1: Degree classifications for academic years 2010-11, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23

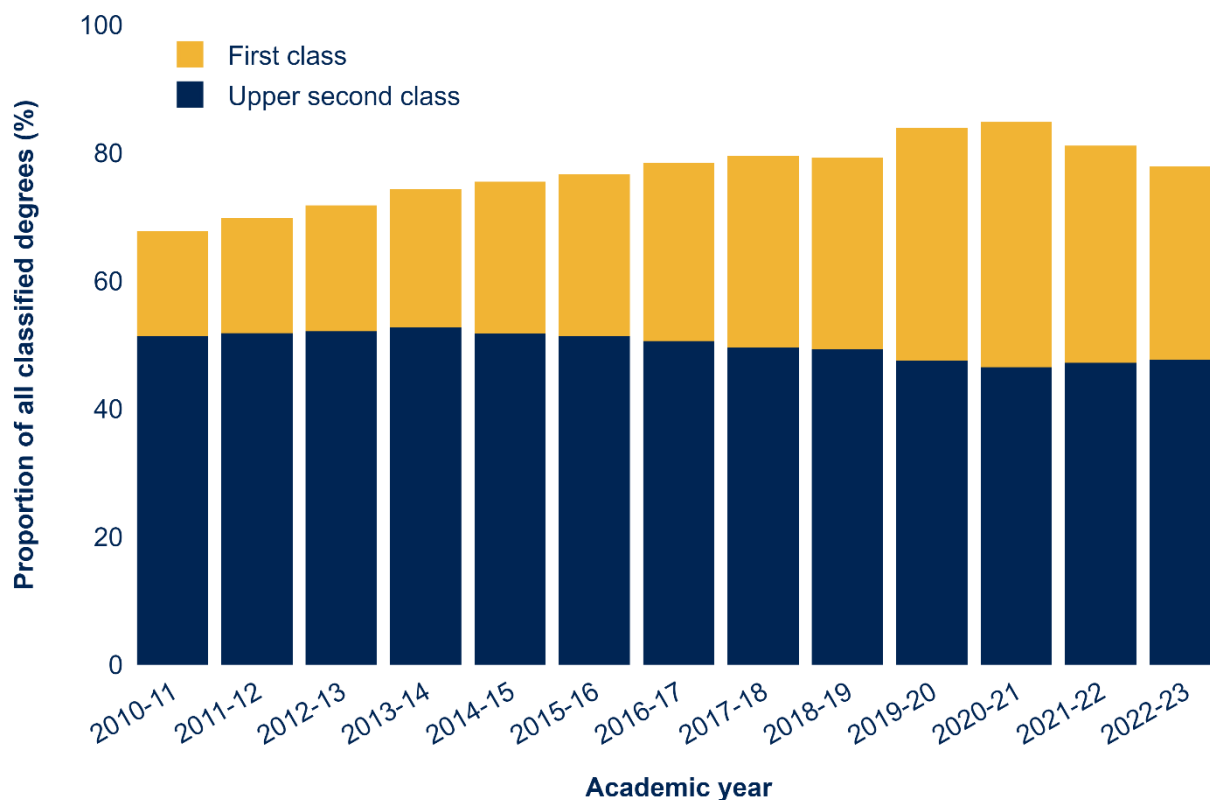
Degree classification	2010-11	2018-19	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number					
First	34,845	77,230	100,815	85,285	75,825
Upper second	114,125	130,115	124,970	121,680	122,875
First and upper second combined	148,965	207,345	225,790	206,965	198,700
Lower second	62,175	47,835	36,450	42,975	49,445
Third	9,650	7,225	4,935	6,480	7,955
Total	220,790	262,400	267,175	256,425	256,100
Proportion					
First	15.8%	29.4%	37.7%	33.3%	29.6%
Upper second	51.7%	49.6%	46.8%	47.5%	48.0%
First and upper second combined	67.5%	79.0%	84.5%	80.7%	77.6%
Lower second	28.2%	18.2%	13.6%	16.8%	19.3%
Third	4.4%	2.8%	1.8%	2.5%	3.1%

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest five and proportions are rounded to one decimal place. Due to rounding, totals might not equal the sum of individual numbers.

23. Figure 1 shows the changes in the proportions of all classified honours degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23, for providers included in this analysis. The proportion of graduates attaining a first or upper second class degree over the period has increased by 10.1 percentage points, from 67.5 per cent in 2010-11 to 77.6 per cent in 2022-23. However, since its peak in 2020-21 during the coronavirus pandemic, this proportion has fallen for two successive years. It is now lower than it was in 2018-19, before the coronavirus pandemic started, when it was 79.0 per cent. In contrast, the proportion of upper seconds alone was at its lowest level in 2020-21, when it stood at 46.8 per cent, but it has since increased to 48.0 per cent in 2022-23.

24. The proportion of students attaining a first class degree increased every year between 2010-11 and 2020-21, from 15.8 per cent in 2010-11 to its peak of 37.7 per cent in 2020-21. However, there have now been two successive falls of 4.4 percentage points between 2020-21 and 2021-22 and a further 3.7 percentage points between 2021-22 and 2022-23 (it stood at 29.6 per cent in 2022-23). This is now broadly the same level as it was in 2018-19, before the coronavirus pandemic, when it was 29.4 per cent.

Figure 1: Change in proportion of degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23

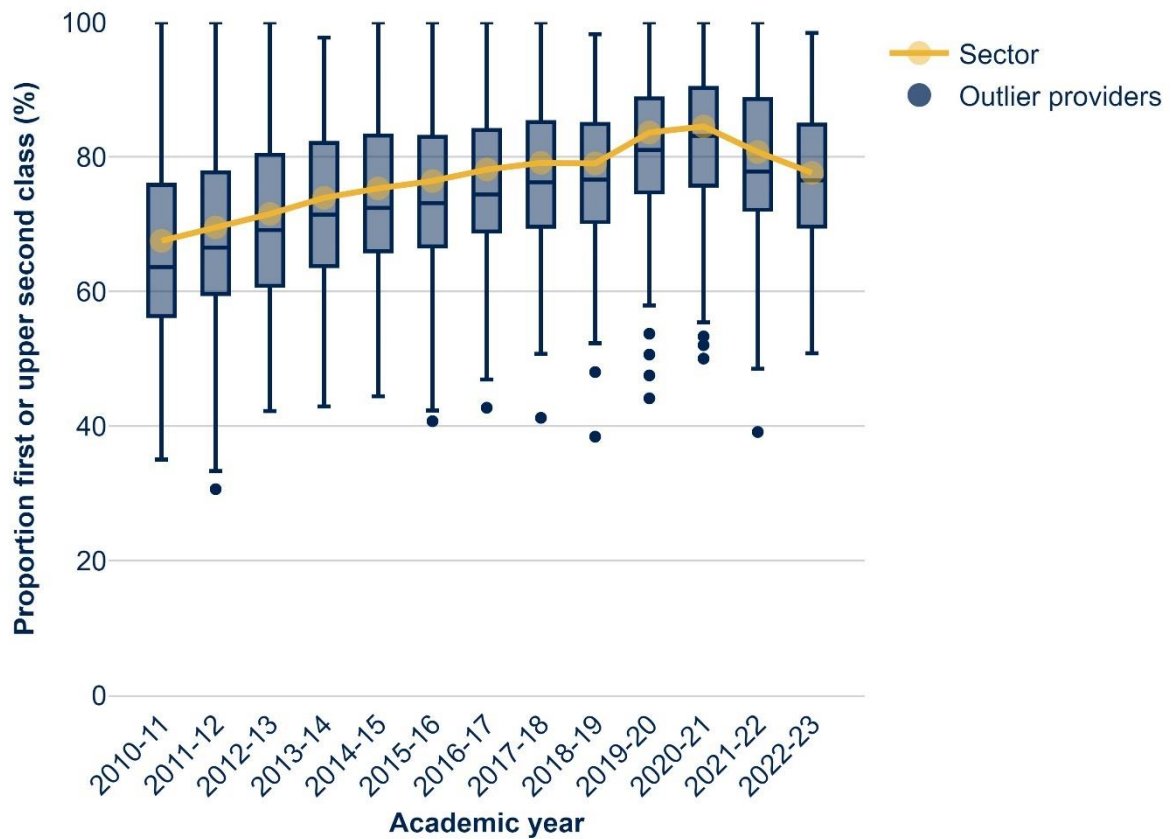


Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.

25. Figures 2 to 5 present ‘box-and-whisker’ summary plots of degree attainment at individual providers and across the sector. In each of these figures the solid horizontal line spanning the interior of the shaded box indicates the median attainment across all the providers, while the lower and upper bounds of the shaded box indicate the first (Q1) and third (Q3) quartiles of attainment across providers, respectively. The vertical lines extending out from the shaded box are known as the ‘whiskers’. Data points that sit outside of this range are considered to be ‘outliers’.

26. Figure 2 shows a summary of the proportion of classified degrees awarded as first or upper second class for academic years 2010-11 to 2022-23 across the 143 providers included in this analysis. This shows large variation in attainment of first and upper second class degrees across providers. Following a levelling out in attainment levels and provider variation in 2018-19, there was a large increase in sector attainment in 2019-20, a smaller increase again in 2020-21 and then decreases in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. Some outliers can be seen, all exhibiting attainment levels below the lower whisker cap of the respective year, although none in the most recent year.

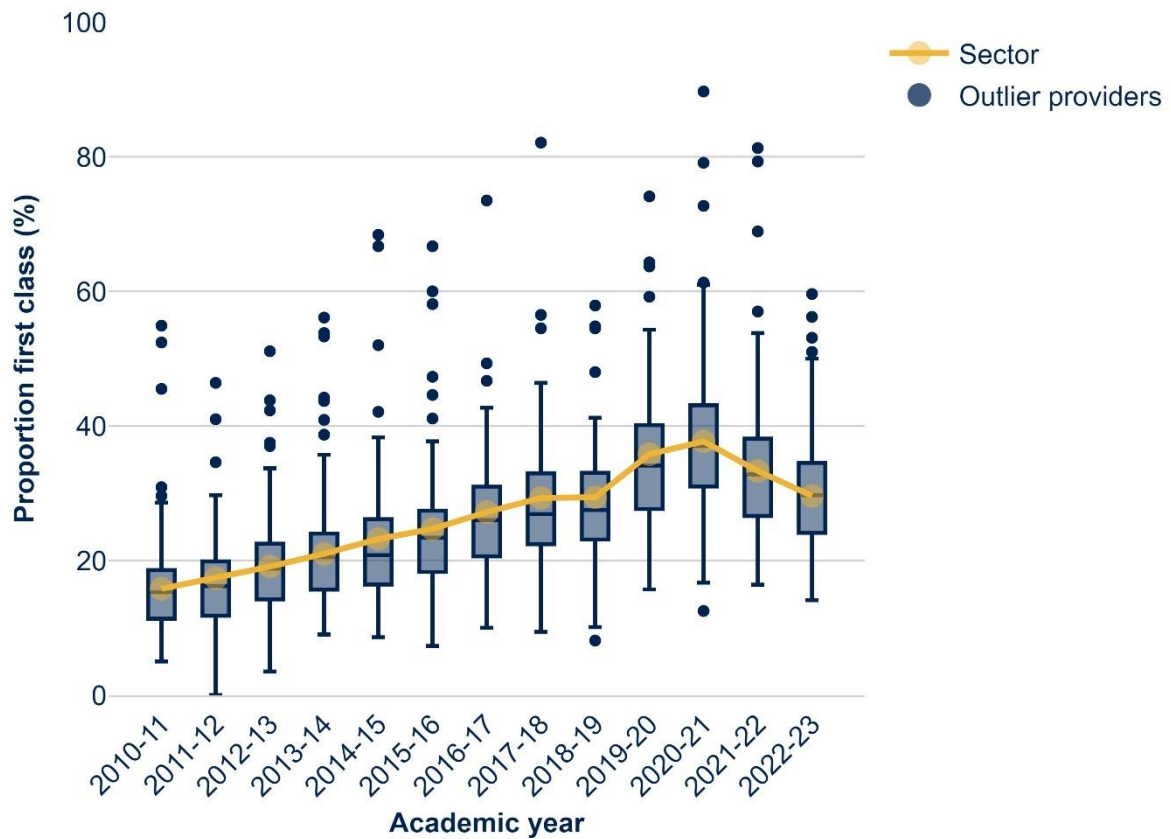
Figure 2: Provider-level summary distributions for proportions of first or upper second class degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.

27. Figure 3 shows the equivalent summary, for first class degrees only, over the same period. Similar to the trend of the proportion for combined first or upper second class degrees, following a levelling off of the sector attainment in 2018-19, there was a large increase in 2019-20 and a smaller increase again in 2020-21. This was followed by decreases in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. Some outliers can be seen, almost all exhibiting attainment levels above the upper whisker cap of the respective year. However, the outliers in the most recent year are less extreme than previous years.

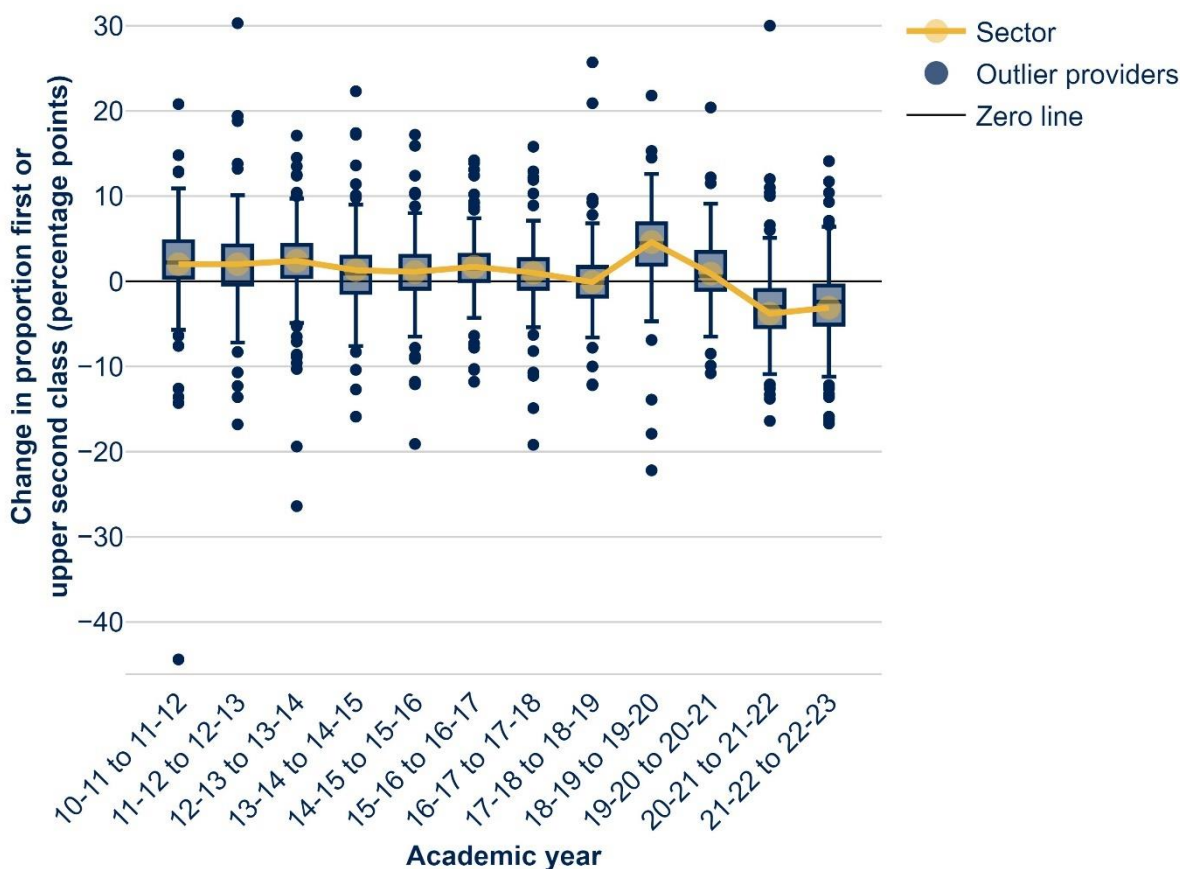
Figure 3: Provider-level summary distributions for proportions of first class degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.

28. Figure 4 shows the year-on-year changes in the attainment of first or upper second class degrees for the 143 providers, and the mean for the sector. In earlier years, the sector proportion consistently increased by over one percentage point each year, apart from between 2017-18 and 2018-19. However, after a peak sector-level increase of 4.6 percentage points between 2018-19 and 2019-20 and another smaller increase between 2019-20 and 2020-21, proportions have since fallen. The greatest fluctuations in year-on-year attainment changes tend to occur in providers with small numbers, where changes in the outcomes for a small number of students can greatly change the proportion attaining a particular degree outcome.

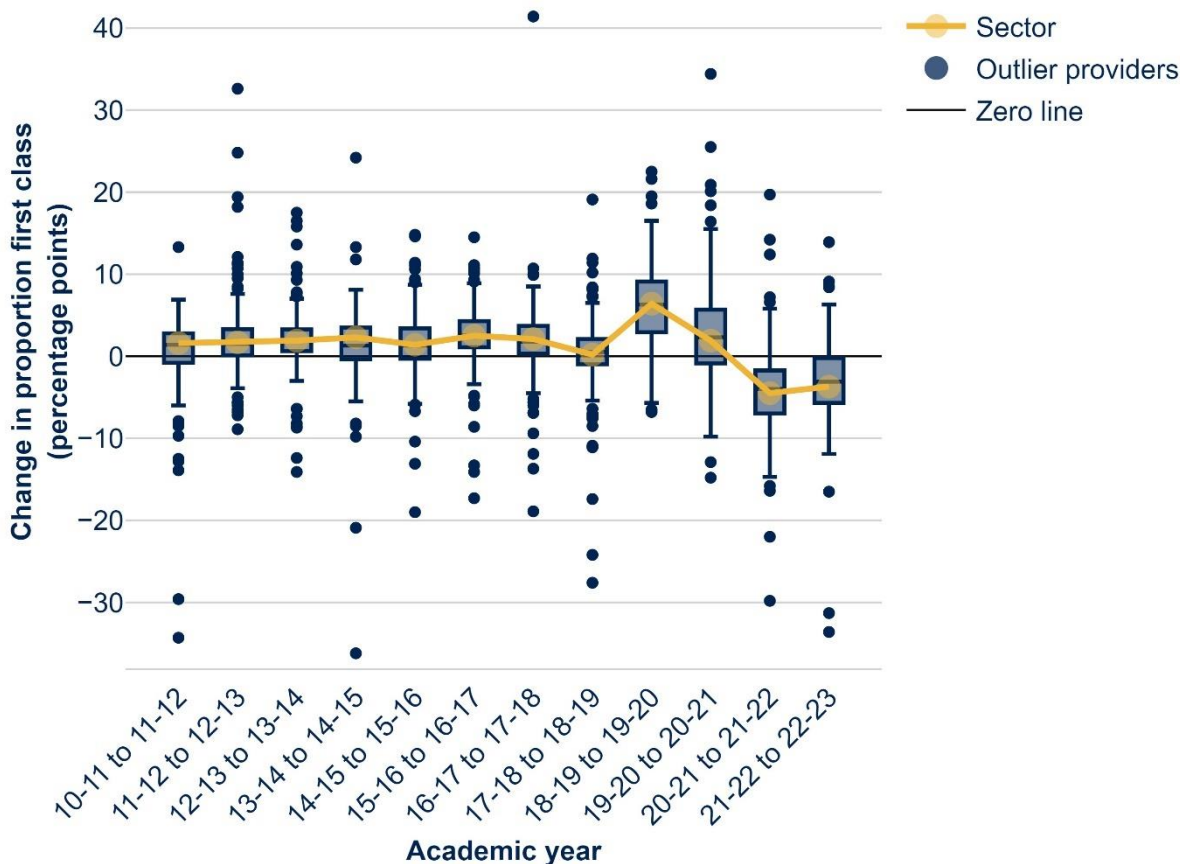
Figure 4: Provider-level summaries for year-by-year changes in proportions of first or upper second class degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.

29. Figure 5 shows the same data as Figure 4, but for first class degrees alone. The trends for both are similar. This classification has typically seen an increase of between one and a half and two and a half percentage points a year in earlier years, apart from between 2017-18 and 2018-19. Again, yearly changes peaked between 2018-19 and 2019-20, where there was a sector-level increase of 6.4 percentage points, followed by another increase of 1.9 percentage points between 2019-20 and 2020-21. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22 there was a decrease of 4.5 percentage points, followed by a further decrease between 2021-22 and 2022-23 of 3.7 percentage points.

Figure 5: Provider-level summaries for year-by-year changes in proportions of first class degrees awarded from 2010-11 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.

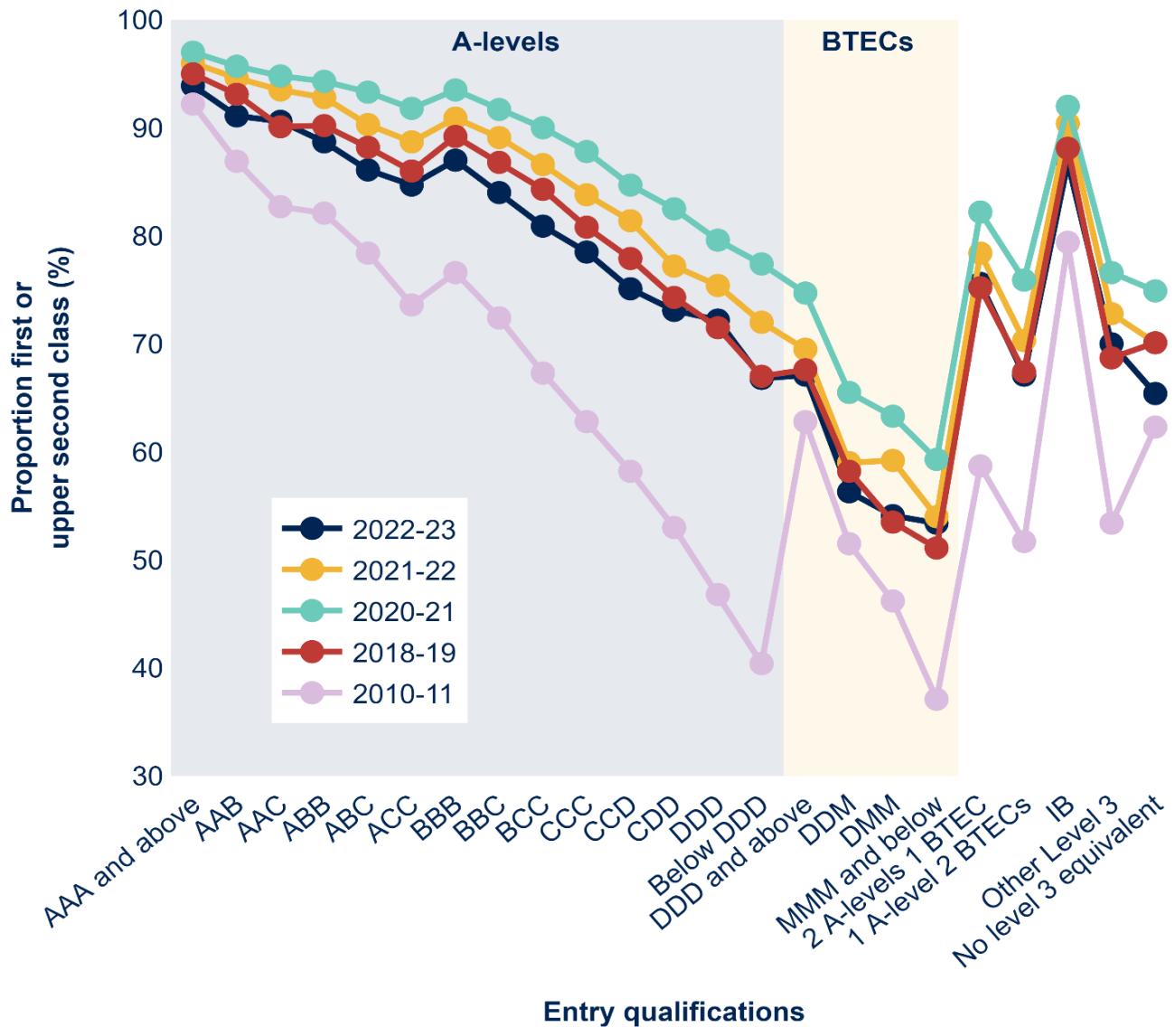
Changes by entry qualifications

30. Figure 6 presents the changes in the attainment of first and upper second class degrees combined, in relation to graduates' entry qualifications. Between 2010-11 and 2022-23 there has been a 10.1 percentage point increase in first or upper second class degree attainment rates (see Table 2), with the peak occurring in 2020-21. However, the size of the average increase has varied considerably between students entering higher education with different qualifications. In general, between 2018-19 and 2020-21 there were large increases across the different groups, and the size of the differences varied markedly. Since then, however, all entry qualification groups have seen decreases in attainment, to levels similar to or below those before the coronavirus pandemic in 2018-19. We note here that students graduating in 2022-23 are the first cohort to have been impacted by the teacher-assessed grading necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic.

31. When comparing students that graduated in 2010-11 to students that graduated in later years, Figure 6 shows that for A-level and BTEC qualifications (where there is a clear concept of grade hierarchy), those with the highest entry qualifications experienced the smallest changes in attainment rates. Students entering with the lowest A-level qualifications experienced the largest changes. However, we note that there is a ceiling effect for those with the highest A-level category.

32. The impacts of the sector-level 3.1 percentage point decrease in first and upper second class degrees awarded between 2021-22 and 2022-23 varied between the different entry qualification groups. Amongst the A-level categories, the decreases ranged from 2.1 percentage points for students with grades of AAA and above through to a 6.3 percentage point reduction for students entering with grades of CCD. Amongst the BTEC categories however, those entering with grades MMM (merit, merit, merit) and below only fell by 0.6 percentage points between the two most recent years.

Figure 6: First and upper second class degree attainment by entry qualifications for academic years 2010-11, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



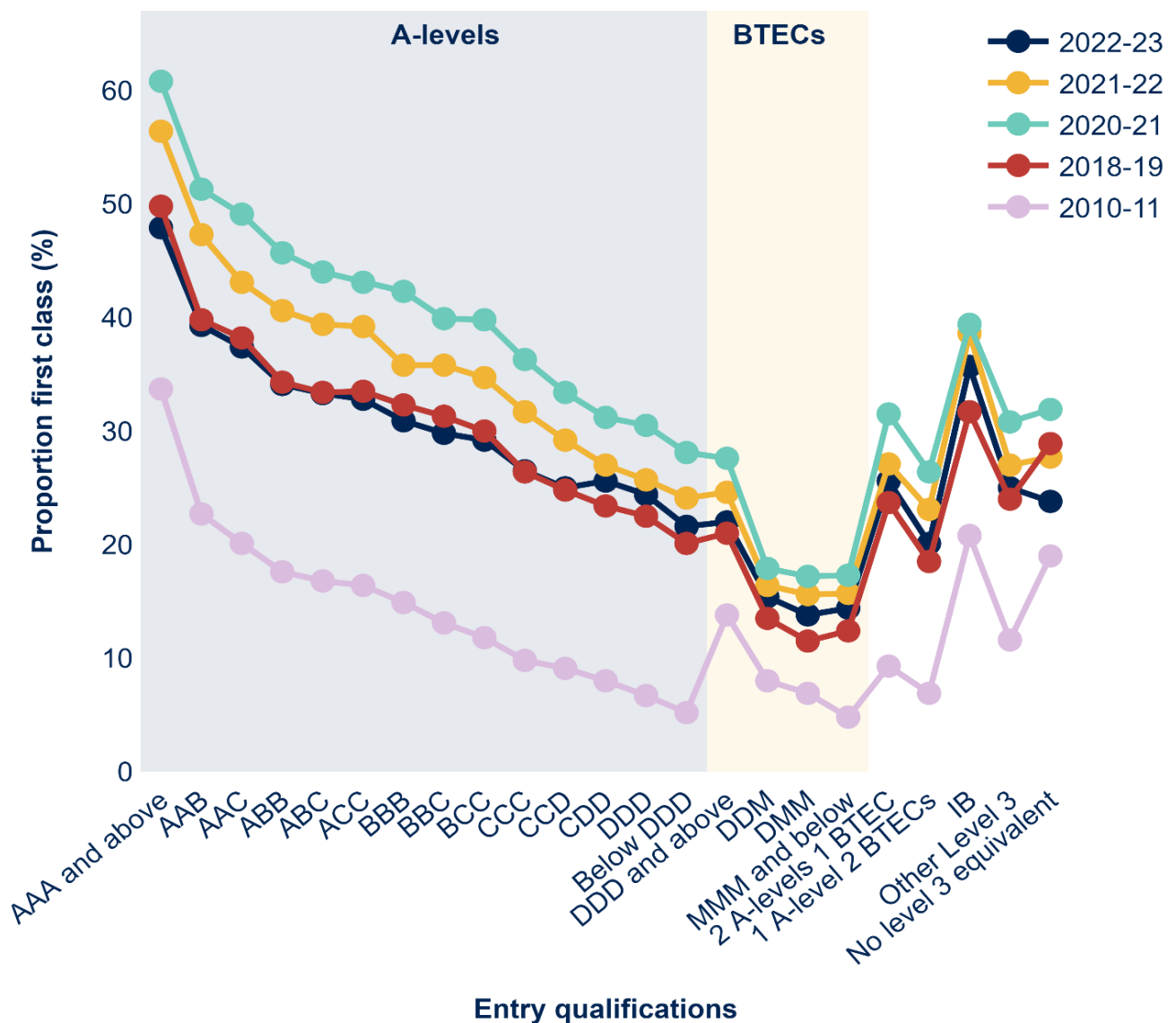
Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A. This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart. The y-axis does not start at zero.

33. Figure 7 shows first class degree attainment by entry qualifications. Between 2010-11 and 2022-23 there was a 13.8 percentage point increase in the first class degree attainment rate (see Table 3). Again, we saw that between 2018-19 and 2020-21 there were large increases across the different groups. Since then, however, there have been decreases and in 2022-23 attainment rates for those entering with the higher A-level grades were very similar to those in

2018-19, before the coronavirus pandemic. At the lower end of A-level grades, and also other entry qualifications, attainment rates tended to remain slightly above 2018-19 values.

34. Figure 7 shows that for first class degrees alone, there were similar changes in attainment across different entry qualifications for the years presented. Between 2010-11 and 2022-23, students entering with A-level grades of DDD experienced the largest increase in first class degree attainment; 17.7 percentage points, from 6.7 per cent to 24.4 per cent. This compares to an increase of 14.2 percentage points for students with the highest A-level grades, when 47.9 per cent of students that entered with grades of AAA and above were awarded a first class degree in 2022-23. Students entering with BTEC grades of DMM (distinction, merit, merit) experienced the smallest increase from 6.9 per cent in 2010-11 to 13.8 per cent in 2022-23.

Figure 7: First class degree attainment by entry qualifications for academic years 2010-11, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A. This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart.

Results from statistical modelling

35. Tables 2 and 3 present sector-level changes in the attainment of first and upper second class degrees combined and of first class degrees alone, respectively, from 2010-11 through to

2022-23. The tables show the observed proportion of graduates attaining the respective degree classifications ('Observed') and the percentage point ('pp') change in the observed attainment relative to 2010-11 ('Change from 2010-11'). The tables include the amount of attainment statistically 'explained' by the characteristics included in our model when looking at awarding in 2010-11 (see paragraph 12). As we use 2010-11 as our reference year, all attainment in 2010-11 is considered 'explained'. The tables also include the amount of attainment that is 'unexplained' by the characteristics included in our model. This is the difference between the observed attainment and attainment explained by our modelling. Details of the statistical methodology used to determine unexplained attainment can be found in Annex B.

Table 2: Summary of observed and unexplained sector-level changes in first and upper second class degree attainment combined

Academic year	Observed attainment (%)	Change from 2010-11 (pp)	Explained attainment from model (%)	Unexplained change (pp)
2010-11 (reference year)	67.5	0.0	67.5	0.0
2011-12	69.5	2.0	67.5	2.0
2012-13	71.5	4.0	68.0	3.5
2013-14	73.9	6.4	68.4	5.6
2014-15	75.3	7.8	68.4	6.9
2015-16	76.4	8.9	67.9	8.5
2016-17	78.1	10.6	67.6	10.5
2017-18	79.1	11.6	67.3	11.8
2018-19	79.0	11.5	67.1	11.9
2019-20	83.6	16.1	66.8	16.8
2020-21	84.5	17.0	66.4	18.1
2021-22	80.7	13.2	65.5	15.2
2022-23	77.6	10.1	66.6	11.0

Table 3: Summary of observed and unexplained sector-level changes in first class degree attainment

Academic year	Observed attainment (%)	Change from 2010-11 (pp)	Explained attainment from model (%)	Unexplained change (pp)
2010-11 (reference year)	15.8	0.0	15.8	0.0
2011-12	17.4	1.6	16.0	1.5
2012-13	19.1	3.3	16.4	2.8
2013-14	21.0	5.2	16.7	4.3
2014-15	23.2	7.4	16.9	6.4
2015-16	24.7	8.9	16.4	8.3
2016-17	27.2	11.4	16.2	11.0
2017-18	29.3	13.5	16.0	13.3
2018-19	29.4	13.6	15.8	13.6
2019-20	35.8	20.0	15.8	20.1
2020-21	37.7	21.9	15.7	22.1
2021-22	33.3	17.5	15.4	17.9
2022-23	29.6	13.8	16.2	13.4

36. Table 2 shows that unexplained attainment for first and upper second class degrees has increased by 11.0 percentage points between 2010-11 and 2022-23. During this time, observed attainment increased by 10.1 percentage points. Our modelling suggests that, given the awarding behaviours in 2010-11 and the characteristics of students graduating in 2022-23, we might have expected the attainment rate for first and upper second class degrees to have been 66.6 per cent. However, it was 77.6 per cent. In all years after 2010-11 the explained attainment was smaller than the observed attainment, indicating that changes in student and course characteristics do not fully explain the increases observed.

37. Table 3 shows these trends for first class degrees. In 2022-23, 29.6 per cent of students were awarded a first class degree, a 13.8 percentage point increase compared with 2010-11. Our modelling suggests that this value would have been 16.2 per cent, had awarding behaviours been the same as 2010-11, based on the characteristics included in the model. As noted for firsts and upper second class degrees combined, in all years for first class degrees, observed attainment was greater than the attainment explained by our modelling.

38. Tables 2 and 3 show that both observed and unexplained attainment peaked in 2019-20 and 2020-21. These years were the ones most affected by the coronavirus pandemic and are considered to be atypical in terms of graduate attainment. Since then, both observed and unexplained attainment has fallen to levels broadly similar to those in 2018-19, before the coronavirus pandemic.

39. For first and upper second class degrees, unexplained attainment fell for the second successive year from 15.2 per cent in 2021-22 to 11.0 per cent in 2022-23, which is below its

2018-19 value. For first class degrees, unexplained attainment fell from a peak of 22.1 per cent in 2020-21 to 13.4 per cent in 2022-23, which is almost the same as its 2018-19 value.

Provider-level analysis

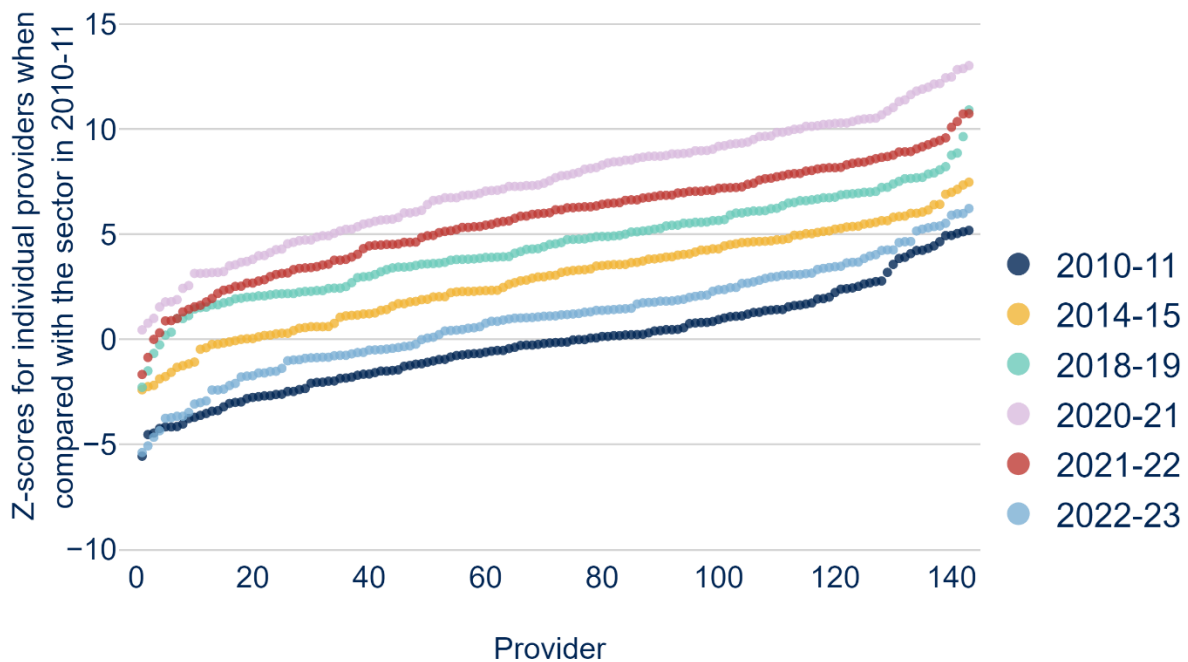
40. In addition to our sector-level analysis we have investigated changes in graduate attainment at individual providers, relative both to the mean graduate attainment in the sector in 2010-11 and at the same provider in 2010-11. Provider differences are presented as Z-scores to measure the significance of the change in unexplained attainment.
41. Z-scores measure the distance a provider's attainment is from a comparator mean (the sector or same provider attainment in 2010-11) and whether they are above (positive Z-score) or below (negative Z-score) that mean. The distance is measured in standard deviations so that differences are comparable across academic years and providers.⁸

Changes in attainment at providers relative to the sector in 2010-11

42. Figures 8 and 9 present the distribution of Z-scores denoting the changes in unexplained graduate attainment between the sector in 2010-11 and providers for years 2010-11, 2014-15, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23, for first and upper second class degrees combined and first class degrees alone respectively. This demonstrates that in 2010-11 providers were fairly evenly distributed around the 2010-11 sector average (where the Z-score is 0), with only a small number exhibiting attainment considerably higher or lower than the sector mean. The overall shape of the trend across providers has been fairly consistent over time. Differences between the sector average in 2010-11 and the provider averages increased in most years until 2020-21. In both 2021-22 and 2022-23, however, the differences between the sector average in 2010-11 and the provider averages decreased in size, particularly so in the most recent year. In 2022-23 they had fallen to levels close to the 2010-11 distribution.
43. Figure 9 shows a similar trend for first class degrees alone. However, the difference from the 2010-11 sector average is more pronounced for firsts, with larger Z-scores, especially for the more recent years. The distribution in 2022-23 is still above that seen in 2010-11.

⁸ Standard deviation is a measure of the amount of variation of the values of a variable about its mean. A low standard deviation indicates that the values tend to be close to the mean, while a high standard deviation indicates that the values are spread out over a wider range.

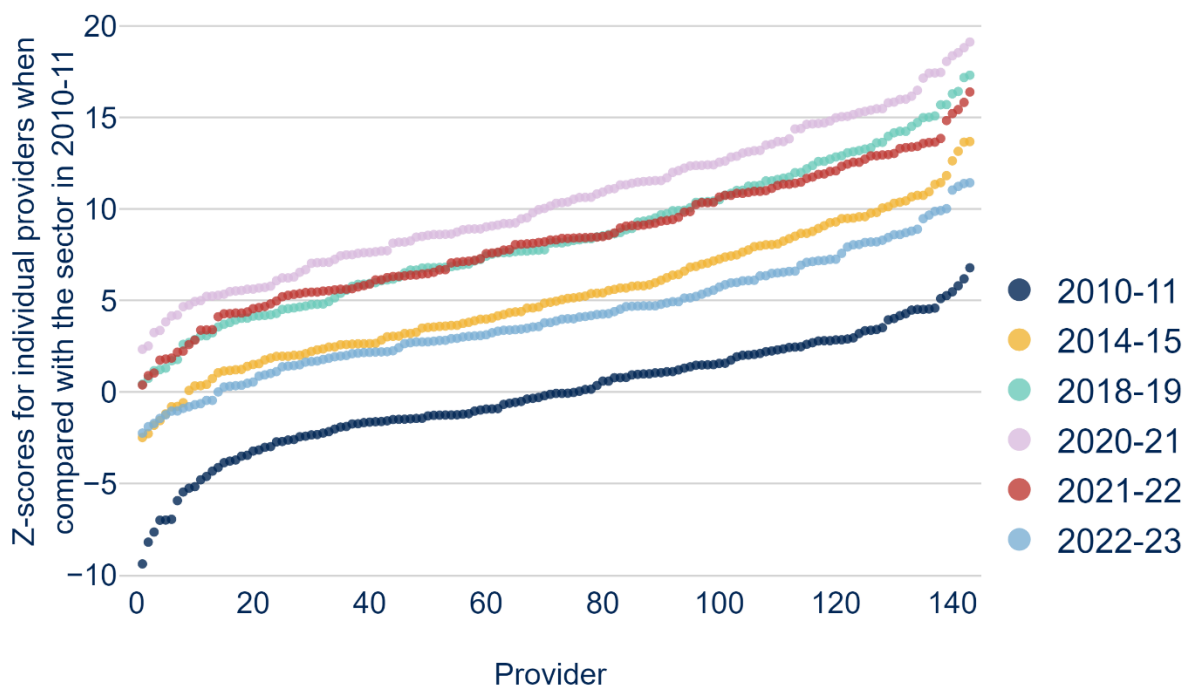
Figure 8: Distribution of Z-scores denoting the difference between first and upper second class attainment in the sector in 2010-11 and individual providers for academic years 2010-11, 2014-15, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.⁹ This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart. These years follow similar trends, with differences between the sector average in 2010-11 and the provider averages gradually increasing each year until 2020-21. The colours used to represent specific years may change between charts.

⁹ In Figures 8 to 11, providers are ordered independently each year based on the size of their Z-score, so the provider with the lowest Z-score each year is always first and the provider with the highest Z-score that year is always last. Thus the position of a specific provider, indicated by their x-axis value, will not necessarily be the same from year to year.

Figure 9: Distribution of Z-scores denoting the difference between first class attainment in the sector in 2010-11 and individual providers for academic years 2010-11, 2014-15, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A.¹⁰ This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart. These years follow similar trends, with differences between the sector average in 2010-11 and the provider averages gradually increasing each year until 2020-21. The colours used to represent specific years may change between charts.

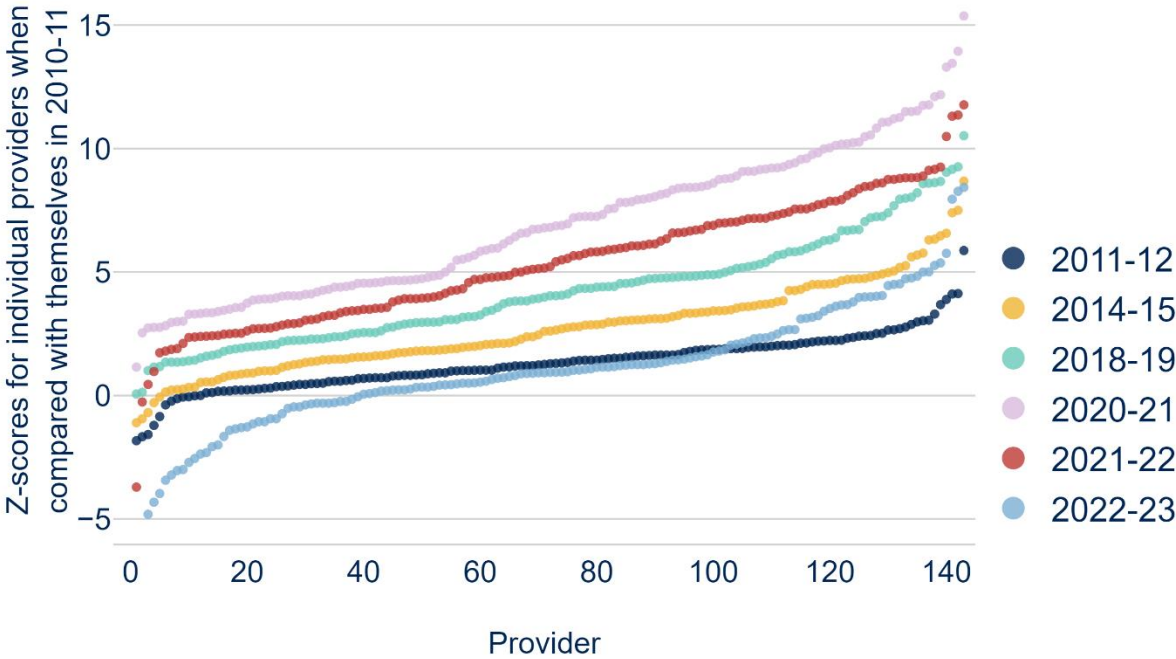
Changes in attainment at providers relative to the provider in 2010-11

44. Figures 10 and 11 present the distribution of Z-scores for providers when comparing specifically to their own graduate attainment in 2010-11 (rather than the sector average) with subsequent years, for first and upper second class degrees combined and first class degrees alone respectively. Trends similar to the 2010-11 sector comparison (Figures 8 and 9) have been observed, although there are far fewer negative Z-scores overall. Given the recent trend of attainment decreasing in providers and, when comparing providers in 2022-23 with themselves in 2010-11 (where the Z-score is 0), we can see a substantial reduction in Z-scores. In the case of first and upper seconds combined, there are a large number of providers with negative Z-scores when comparing 2010-11 with 2022-23, meaning that many providers in 2022-23 were awarding fewer firsts and upper seconds than they were in 2010-11. This trend

¹⁰ In Figures 8 to 11, providers are ordered independently each year based on the size of their Z-score, so the provider with the lowest Z-score each year is always first and the provider with the highest Z-score that year is always last. Thus the position of a specific provider, indicated by their x-axis value, will not necessarily be the same from year to year.

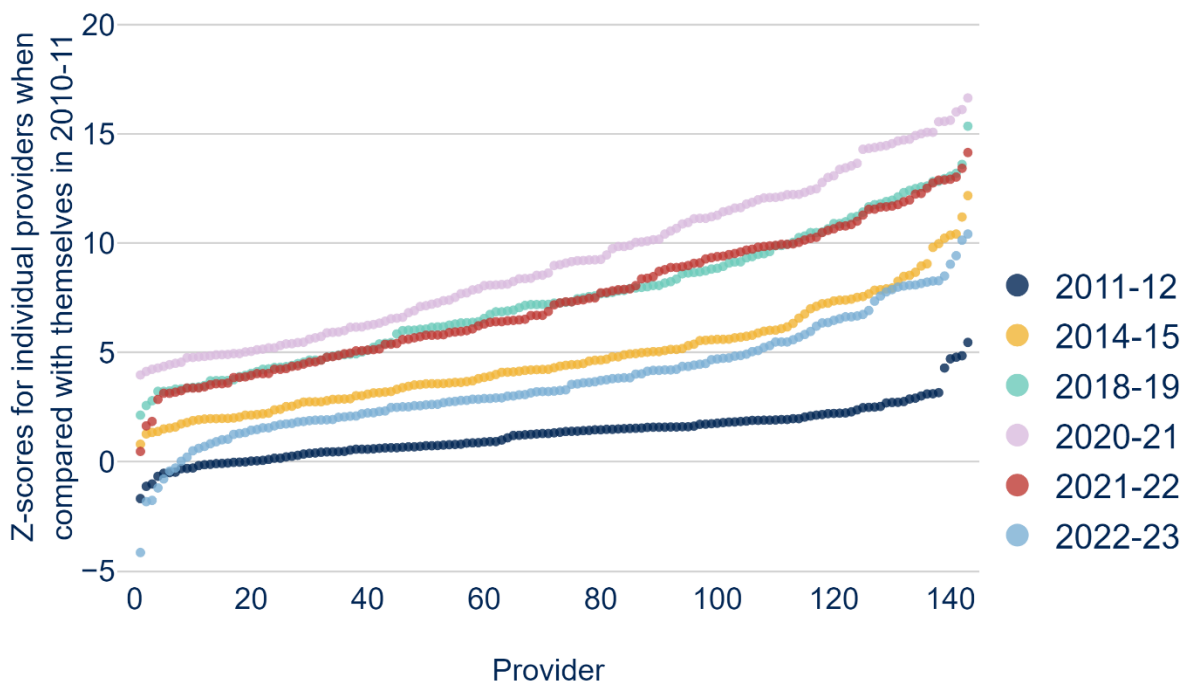
is not seen for firsts alone, which shows that the majority of providers still have positive Z-scores.

Figure 10: Distribution of Z-scores denoting the difference between first and upper second class attainment at providers in 2010-11 compared with 2011-12, 2014-15, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A. This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart. These years follow similar trends, with differences between the provider in 2010-11 and successive years gradually increasing until 2020-21. The colours used to represent specific years may change between charts.

Figure 11: Distribution of Z-scores denoting the difference between first class attainment at providers in 2010-11 compared with 2011-12, 2014-15, 2018-19 and 2020-21 to 2022-23



Note: The data used to create this chart can be found in Annex A. This includes data for the intermediate years not displayed in the chart. These years follow similar trends, with differences between the provider in 2010-11 and successive years gradually increasing until 2020-21. The colours used to represent specific years may change between charts.

Provider-level changes in unexplained attainment

45. As discussed in paragraph 38 and Tables 2 and 3, the academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 saw sector-level unexplained attainment peaking, before falling again in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. These recent decreases in unexplained attainment were not uniform across all providers however, and varied considerably, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 of Annex A.
46. For firsts and upper second class degrees combined, between 2021-22 and 2022-23, overall sector-level unexplained attainment dropped 4.2 percentage points, to 11.0 per cent. At individual providers the change between these years fluctuated widely, ranging from a 13.9 percentage point increase to a 17.4 percentage point decrease. For comparison, before the coronavirus pandemic, unexplained attainment increased between 2017-18 and 2018-19 by 0.1 percentage points, to 11.9 per cent. Again the changes varied considerably between providers, from an increase of 26.1 percentage points between these two years to a decrease of 10.7 percentage points.
47. For first class degrees at a provider level, changes in unexplained attainment between 2021-22 and 2022-23 ranged from a 13.6 percentage point increase to a 33.9 percentage point decrease, with a sector decrease of 4.5 percentage points. By comparison, before the coronavirus pandemic, between 2017-18 and 2018-19 the average change in unexplained awarding of first class degrees was a 0.3 percentage point increase, but at provider level changes ranged from a 18.4 percentage point increase to a 24.4 percentage point decrease.



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