

The effect of postgraduate loans: methodology

Technical document

1. This document provides information on the methodology and populations used in the Office for Students' postgraduate loan webpages¹.
2. The webpages are split into seven tabs which consider the following characteristics:
 - age
 - gender
 - ethnicity
 - disability
 - educational disadvantage.
3. This analysis focuses on four main concepts:
 - numbers of entrants to eligible courses
 - one-year transition rates from undergraduate to postgraduate study
 - loan take-up
 - realising intentions.
4. All of these analyses consider students at higher education providers in England, but methodologies and populations vary slightly for each analysis.

Methodology

5. Eligible courses must not be NHS-funded, and must be one of the following:
 - a masters' degree, obtained typically by a combination of coursework and either thesis or dissertation, that does not meet the criteria for a research-based higher degree
 - a taught masters' degree designed specifically as training in research methods and intended as preparation for a research-based higher degree
 - a post-experience taught masters' degree
 - an MBA
 - a pre-registration masters' degree leading towards obtaining eligibility to register to practice with a health, social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body

¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/the-effect-of-postgraduate-loans/

- a masters' degree that meets the criteria for a research-based higher degree
- for part-time students only, study towards a taught qualification at Level M (where a qualification at Level H is a pre-requisite for course entry) leading towards registration with the Architects Registration Board (a 'Part 2' qualification).

Entrants to eligible courses

6. This analysis was conducted on all UK-domiciled entrants on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record to eligible courses at English providers between the academic years 2007-08 and 2016-17. Entrant, course and institutional characteristics were considered in the splits of this data.

One-year transition rates from undergraduate to postgraduate

7. For this section, data was taken from the HESA student record for the academic years 2010-11 to 2016-17.

8. The analysis considers the transition of first degree qualifiers into postgraduate study in English providers linked forward one year. Transition rates were calculated by dividing the number of qualifiers found in postgraduate study by the total number of full-time first degree qualifiers at English providers.

9. Further details on this methodology are available in 'Transitions to postgraduate study' (HEFCE 2016/14)².

Loan take-up

10. All entrants at English providers who were eligible for a masters' loan in 2016-17 on the HESA student record were linked to Student Loans Company data to establish whether a loan was taken out³.

11. The population of loan-eligible students was defined as those who were:

- studying on an eligible course
- aged under 60 on entry to postgraduate study
- UK or EU-domiciled
- studying with at least 50 per cent intensity (i.e. the course studied part-time must take no longer than twice the length of the equivalent full-time course)⁴.

12. Because of how study intensity is recorded in the HESA data, particularly for flexible courses, some students may meet the legal eligibility criteria but have a recorded intensity below 50 per cent. These students are excluded from the analysis, even though some of them received a loan, to give an accurate estimate of loan take-up for those clearly eligible. The figures used to

² Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201614/.

³ Students were matched between the two data sources using personal characteristics such as name and postcode, as well as a unique identifier called a student support number.

⁴ For more information on eligibility see www.gov.uk/masters-loan/eligibility.

estimate loan take-up are therefore based on a large subset of those students who were eligible for student support.

13. A student was identified as actually taking out a loan if they were recorded as receiving a masters' loan in the Student Loans Company data.
14. The Student Loans Company data available to the Office for Students at the time of publication was missing around 10 per cent of those who received a postgraduate loan in 2016-17. However, while this means the figures somewhat understate the loan take-up, the comparisons between different groups of students are still valid.

Realising intentions

15. Data from the HESA student record for 2014-15 to 2016-17 showing entrants to eligible postgraduate courses was linked to the 2013-14 to 2015-16 data from the Intentions After Graduation Survey⁵ (IAGS).
16. For the majority of the webpages, 'realisation' of intentions refers to the proportion, of those students reporting on the IAGS that they intended to enter postgraduate study six months after graduation, who actually realised these intentions during the next academic year in HESA.

Definitions

17. The characteristics used in these analyses are consistent with the definitions used by HESA, as follows:
 - a. Ethnicity is defined on the HESA website at www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c16051/a/ethnic
 - b. Disability is a self-reported characteristic. For more information see www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c16051/a/disable
 - c. The young participation rate uses the participation of local areas (POLAR4) classification of rates of participation. See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/ for more information.

⁵ For more information see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/intentions-after-graduation-survey/.