

# Population and methodology changes associated with calculating continuation rates at English higher education providers

## Introduction

1. This document details the changes to the methods used to calculate continuation rates at higher education providers (HEPs) in England compared with the method previously used by the Office for Students (OfS), and before that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)<sup>1</sup>. In addition to a different calculation method, the population of students included in calculations has changed to reflect OfS's remit concerning all HEPs in England and not just higher education institutions. These changes are discussed in this document and summarised in Table 1. **As a result of these changes, the values of this release should not be directly compared to those of previous releases when making inferences about continuation trends.**
2. This is the first year that the focus of these rates has been continuation as opposed to non-continuation. This focus has changed to allow alignment with our Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).

## Student population

3. The student population used to produce the previous release of these statistics consisted of first degree, full-time, UK-domiciled students at HEFCE-funded higher education institutions. While this release also concerns full-time, UK-domiciled students, it has been expanded to consider all levels of undergraduate qualifications and all English higher education providers. This reflects the change in remit of the OfS compared with HEFCE and has allowed alignment with Key Performance Measure 3 (KPM3), which concerns continuation rates<sup>2</sup>.
4. This release concerns entrants in the academic years 2010-11 to 2016-17 whereas the previous release covered the period 2008-09 to 2015-16.

## Measuring continuation

5. Prior to this release, continuation rates were calculated using the method of the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA's) performance indicators<sup>3</sup>. To allow extension to all higher education providers (HEPs), the methodology has been updated. Continuation rates are now based on the student activity one year and 14 days after their start date. To align with this, the entrant year cohort is based on those students starting courses between 18 July and the following 17 July.
6. Undergraduate students who qualify on or before the census date, are still studying at the same provider on the census date or are studying at higher education level at another provider

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405122045/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/transfers/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/asures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-non-continuation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation/technical>

on the census date are described as having continued. All other students are described as non-continuers.

7. In this release, we also split transfers from the continuers so that the transfer rate can be considered separately. Therefore, there are two continuation rates: continuation and continuation (excluding transfers). Further details of the methodology, including those excluded from the calculations can be found in the document: Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures<sup>4</sup>.

## **Student characteristics and characteristics of higher education provision**

8. Like the previous release, the interactive charts allow continuation rates to be viewed by a selection of student characteristics and characteristics of higher education provision. This capability has been expanded to include several additional characteristics (listed below). As with the previous release, characteristics include age at entry (broad and detailed), educational disadvantage (POLAR4), ethnicity, entry qualifications, sex and subject of study. Term time accommodation is not included in this release as insufficient data is available for the expanded student population included in this release. Due to changes in the way in which Disabled Students Allowances (DSA) are administered (impacting academic years 2015-16 onwards), the disability characteristic no longer includes whether the student is in receipt of DSA.
9. The new characteristics included are:
  - a. Disability (detailed)
  - b. Provider group
  - c. Index of multiple deprivation 2015 (IMD, for England domiciled students only)<sup>5</sup>
  - d. UK domicile location

See the methodology document for definitions of these characteristics (see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/definitions/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/definitions/)).

## **Benchmarking factors**

The benchmarking factors used in these webpages now align with the factors included for benchmarking continuation for full-time students in TEF year 4<sup>6</sup>. Previously, only age at entry (broad), entry qualifications and subject of study were used in benchmarking but now educational disadvantage (POLAR4), ethnicity and level of study are also included. Full details of the benchmarking factor categories can be found in the methodology document associated with this release (see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/definitions/>).

---

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/guide-to-the-access-and-participation-data-resources/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/da96d15a-97e6-4732-a2f5-cb2473633932/ofs2018\\_45.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/da96d15a-97e6-4732-a2f5-cb2473633932/ofs2018_45.pdf)

**Table 1. Summary of changes made to population and methodology when calculating continuation rates at English HEPs**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Previous releases</b>	<b>This release</b>
<b>Rate of primary interest</b>	Non-continuation	Continuation
<b>Student population</b>		
Domicile	UK	UK
Mode of study	Full-time	Full-time
Level of study	First degrees	All undergraduate qualifications
Providers	HEFCE-funded higher education institutions	All English HEPs
Academic years	2008-09 to 2015-16	2010-11 to 2016-17
<b>Continuation calculation method</b>	HESA performance indicators method	Aligns with methodology used in the access and participation data
<b>Student characteristics</b>	Age at entry (detailed) Age at entry (broad) Disability (broad)	Age at entry (detailed) Age at entry (broad) Disability (broad) Disability (detailed)
	Educational disadvantage (POLAR4) Entry qualifications Ethnicity	Educational disadvantage (POLAR4) Entry qualifications Ethnicity Index of multiple deprivation (IMD) Level of study Provider group
	Sex Subject of study	Sex Subject of study UK domicile location
	Term time accommodation	
<b>Benchmarking factors</b>	Age at entry (broad)	Age at entry (broad) Educational disadvantage (POLAR4)
	Entry qualifications	Entry qualifications Ethnicity Level of study
	Subject of study	Subject of study

## Contact us

If you have any questions or feedback on this document or the associated webpages, please contact William Rimington at [william.rimington@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:william.rimington@officeforstudents.org.uk) or the Foresight and Insight team at [qapt@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:qapt@officeforstudents.org.uk)