

Non-continuation rates at English higher education institutions: Trends for entrants 2008-09 to 2015-16

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Introduction

1. This document provides information on the methodology, populations and interactive charts used to report on non-continuation and transfer rates at HEFCE-funded higher education institutions (HEIs) between 2008-09 and 2015-16. The reader is invited to explore the data interactively through our webpages¹.
2. The document and the data it describes update our previous publication 'Non-continuation rates at English HEIs: Trends for entrants 2005-06 to 2010-11' (HEFCE 2013/07)². Guidance is available, in paragraphs 10 to 16, on how to use the interactive charts available on our web pages.
3. The interactive tables and charts are split into two tabs:
 - time series and two-way splits of the data
 - benchmarked data.
4. The characteristics considered in the interactive charts are:
 - age
 - disability
 - ethnicity
 - qualifications on entry
 - sex
 - subject
 - term time accommodation
 - educational disadvantage.

See Annex A for definitions of these characteristics.

Background and methodology

5. Non-continuation rates were first published by HEFCE in 1999³ and have been published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on behalf of the funding agencies as part of the UK performance indicators for higher education⁴ publication, on an annual basis since 2004. They are part of a wider set of performance measures intended to provide consistent and comparable data at institutional level for different measures of performance.
6. This analysis focuses on a specific indicator: non-continuation following year of entry (table series T3). It uses the same methodology as outlined in the UK performance indicators publication. A summary of this methodology is given in paragraphs 8 and 9 and a full description is available on the HESA website under 'Non-continuation rates – technical details'⁵.

¹ Interactive charts are available at www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/

² Available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201307/

³ Further information is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/data/ukpi/

⁴ Published on the HESA website under table series T3a and T3d at www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2072/141/

⁵ For full details of the methodology, see www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation/technical

7. We analysed cohorts of full-time UK-domiciled first degree entrants to English HEIs who entered higher education between 2008-09 and 2015-16⁶. Entrants were tracked⁷ from the year they entered an institution to the following year, and their study outcome was classified as one of three states: continuing at the same institution; no longer in higher education; or transferring to another institution.

Benchmarked data

8. The performance indicators methodology used by HESA compares the non-continuation rates by institution with their expected non-continuation rates given the profile of entrants. This benchmark (or expected) rate is based on three factors: age, subject studied and qualifications on entry. These benchmark values have been calculated to allow meaningful comparisons between institutions, and aim to take into account other factors that are known to influence non-continuation rates. This means that when comparing another factor, the effects of age, subject and entry qualifications are taken into account.

9. This analysis does not compare HEIs. It presents a sector-wide summary of the data broken down by student and course characteristics. However, this can also be viewed for data that has been benchmarked according to age, subject studied and qualifications on entry, so that time series trends can be identified above and beyond those that might be related to changes in the composition of the student population.

How to use the interactive charts

10. The charts allow users to compare particular sub-categories of a characteristic (for example, young and mature students).

11. To select a category, go to the drop-down menu at the top of the graph and select the category of interest.

12. Additional drop-down boxes are available beneath the first charts so that users can select an additional characteristic to produce a two-way split for different years.

13. To highlight a particular sub-category:

- a. Click on the line on the chart or select the sub-category from the key.
- b. To select multiple sub-categories to display in the graphs, select the first sub-category of interest in the key and hold down Ctrl while selecting further sub-categories. Alternatively, select the lines on the chart while holding down Ctrl.
- c. To return to the original display of data, click in any part of the plot area.
- d. Refresh the page to resolve any problems.

14. To return to the original setup refresh the webpage.

15. Benchmark data is available on the second tab.

16. To download the data behind the graphs, click on the Excel spreadsheets beneath the charts under the 'Get the data' heading.

⁶ Entrants who left before 1 December in the year of entry were excluded.

⁷ Note that a difference in linking methodology has led to a small discrepancy between HESA total figures and the analysis presented here.

Annex A: Definitions

1. Characteristics used in these analyses are consistent with the definitions used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Below is a list of the definitions used.
2. Age is defined on the HESA website at www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2379/#age. 'Young' is less than 21 years old and 'mature' is greater than or equal to 21 years old.
3. Subject is defined on the HESA website at www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2379/#subject.
4. Entry qualification is defined at www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2379/#entryquals. Further information on this can be found in 'Non-continuation rates at English HEIs: Trends for entrants 2005-06 to 2010-11' (HEFCE 2013/07) at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201307/.
5. Ethnicity is defined at www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2379/#ethnic.
6. Disability is a self-reported characteristic; we have grouped entrants who consider themselves disabled and those claiming disabled student allowance. For more information see the HESA website www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2379/#dsa.
7. The young participation rate uses the participation of local areas (POLAR) classification of rates of participation. The POLAR4 classification has been used in this report. See www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/ for more information.

Annex B: Frequently asked questions

Question 1: How can I segment the data?

The interactive tables and charts have drop-down boxes at the top. Users can select items in the boxes to break down the data in different ways to look at a population. The tables and charts update automatically when you make your selection.

Other features include the ability to:

- hover over lines, bars or points of a graph, or rows or columns of a table to see more information
- compare or highlight specific sub-categories of the data
- export underlying data tables for your own analysis
- share the interactive charts with others.

If you have problems with the interactive charts, return to the original setup by refreshing the webpage.

Question 2: Why is there no graph showing?

Graphs are not available for every combination in the drop-down menu.

If the primary characteristic you've selected is the same as the secondary characteristic, the drop-down menus will not work properly. Make sure the primary and secondary characteristics are different.

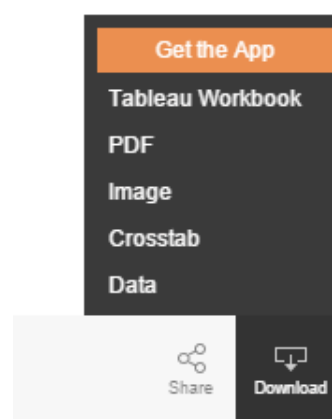
Question 3: Why is there missing data?

Where the number of students in a particular group is lower than 22.5, the data has been suppressed, so it will not show in the graphs or tables.

Question 4: Can I copy or save the charts to use in my own presentations or documents?

They may be copied or reproduced, provided that HEFCE is acknowledged and the material is not used, wholly or in part, for commercial gain. Use for commercial gain requires our prior written permission.

Copies of an **individual graph** can be exported as PDF files using the 'Download' facility beneath the chart:

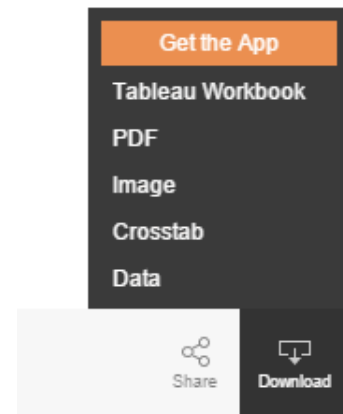


Question 5: Can I access the data underlying the graphs and charts?

As in Q4 above, the data behind a given graph can be downloaded using the 'Download' facility beneath the chart:

The entire dataset is available in Excel spreadsheets beneath the 'Get the data' heading.

Note: for data protection reasons, population sizes have been rounded to the nearest five, including in all downloadable data and workbooks. Proportions and young participation rates have been calculated prior to rounding. This means that our graphs cannot be re-created precisely from the population information provided.



Question 6: Can I change the way the graphs and tables are shown, such as to view them side by side, or to increase the size?

We are not able to offer different views for the graphs and tables. This is because the dimensions of the interactive charts are constrained by both the underlying software and the webpage layout. If you experience difficulties and would like assistance accessing the data, or if you have feedback, contact us at gapt@hefce.ac.uk.