

Office for
Students



Annex C: Differences in student outcomes: further characteristics

Free school meal eligibility

Enquiries to official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date 4 June 2020

This annex should be read alongside the report ‘Differences in student outcomes: further characteristics’ (OfS 2020.30)

Contents

Summary	1
Differences in continuation	3
Differences in degree outcomes	5
Differences in employment outcomes	7
Quality framework and student populations	9

Summary

Any questions or feedback related to this publication can be sent to William Rimington at official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk. This includes further detail of the results of applying our data quality framework, including specific disclosure rates and inconsistency scores.

1. Students who received free meals when at school are less likely to enter higher education than students who did not. Only 26.3 per cent of state-funded and special school pupils, who received free school meals at age 15, entered higher education by age 19 by 2017-18, compared to 44.9 per cent of students who did not receive free school meals.¹
2. For 2017-18 entrants, the continuation rate of students who were eligible to receive free meals whilst at school was 5.4 percentage points lower than those who were not.
3. For qualifiers in 2018-19, the rate of achieving a first or upper-second class degree was 13.0 percentage points lower for students who were eligible for free school meals compared to those who were not.
4. For qualifiers in 2016-17, the rate of progression into highly skilled employment or further study at a higher level was 4.8 percentage points lower for students who were eligible to receive free meals whilst at school when compared to those who were not. This progression data is only available for one year of qualifiers for a reduced student population and more data is required to determine how free school meal eligibility is related to progression rates.
5. The statistics in this annex apply to students who were under 21 when they began their qualification.
6. The statistics included in this report are raw continuation, attainment and progression rates and we have not used weighting or statistical modelling in their calculation to account for other student characteristics that can impact the rates of students with these characteristics.
7. The rates and differences in rates rounded to 1 decimal place. Some of these characteristics apply to small populations and we have not performed significance or sensitivity analysis on the raw rates included here. Small differences in rates may not represent statistically significant differences in outcomes for students with those characteristics. Also note the differences in rates were calculated using unrounded rates. As such, the value of the differences can be 0.1 percentage point higher or lower than the difference between the rounded rates included in this report.

¹ See DfE's report 'Widening participation in higher education: 2019' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education-2019>.

8. These statistics on free school meal eligibility apply to England-domiciled students rather than UK-domiciled. This is because free school meal eligibility data comes from the Department for Education's (DfE's) National Pupil Database (NPD) which only applies to schools in England.²

² The DfE does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD data by third parties.

Differences in continuation

9. Students who were eligible to receive free meals when they were at school have lower continuation rates than students who were not (see Figure C1). For entrants in 2017-18, the continuation rate of students who were eligible to receive free meals whilst at school was 5.4 percentage points lower than those who were not.
10. These statistics apply to England-domiciled full-time undergraduate or apprenticeship students who attended a state-funded mainstream school in England. This data on free school meal eligibility comes from the NPD and was linked onto data reported by the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA's) Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and the Higher Education Statistics Authority's (HESA's) student record and student alternative record. The population and measure of continuation in higher education is based on our access and participation data algorithms.³
11. Continuation rates are a measure of the proportion of entrants who either qualified, transferred to another higher education provider or continued their studies. All other students are deemed non-continuers. For full-time students this measure is based on student activity one year and 14 days after their commencement date.
12. The continuation rate of students who were eligible to receive free meals when at school has been slowly dropping. Continuation has reduced by 0.5 percentage points in the past four years, falling from 87.9 per cent for 2014-15 entrants to 87.4 per cent for 2017-18 entrants.
13. The continuation rate of students who were not eligible to receive free meals when at school has remained stable during this time and was 92.9 per cent in 2014-15 and in 2017-18.
14. The gap between the continuation rates of students who were and were not eligible for free school meals is increasing, growing by 0.4 percentage points in the last four years.

³ See our document 'Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Regulatory indicators, methodology and rebuild descriptions' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/.

Figure C1: The differences in continuation rate by free school meal eligibility for full-time, England-domiciled, undergraduate students



The data used to create this chart can be found in the data file associated with this publication.⁴ Details of the student population can be found later in this annex.

⁴ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

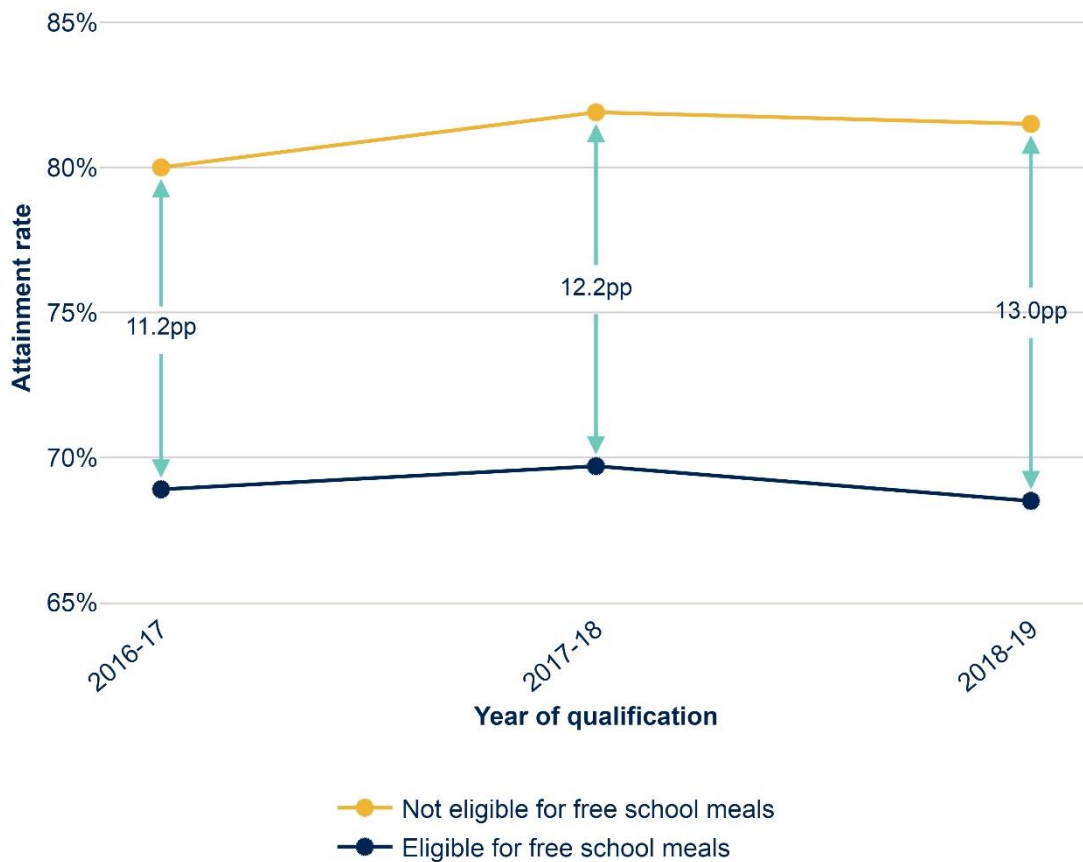
Differences in degree outcomes

15. Students who were eligible to receive free meals when at school have a lower rate of achieving a first or upper-second class degree compared to students who were not (see Figure C2). For qualifiers in 2018-19, the attainment rate was 13.0 percentage points lower for students who were eligible for free school meals compared to those who were not.
16. These statistics apply to England-domiciled, full-time students who attended a state-funded mainstream school in England prior to higher education and qualified with a first degree or undergraduate with postgraduate components qualification. This data on free school meal eligibility comes from the NPD and was linked onto data reported by the ILR and HESA student record and student alternative record. The population and measure of attainment is based on our access and participation data algorithms.⁵
17. Attainment rates are a measure of the proportion of students awarded Level 6+ undergraduate degree qualifications (first degree or undergraduate with postgraduate components) who received a first or upper second (2:1).
18. The attainment rate of qualifiers who were eligible to receive free meals when at school increased between 2016-17 (68.9 per cent) and 2017-18 (69.7 per cent) by 0.8 percentage points. However, the attainment rate dropped by 1.2 percentage points between 2017-18 and 2018-19 (68.5 per cent). As the free school meal data is used for 2014-15 entrants onwards, the data for qualifiers for 2016-17 does not include students who completed their qualification in four years. Given that undergraduate with postgraduate component qualifications typically take four years to complete and have a much higher attainment rate than first degrees⁶, the increase in attainment rate between 2016-17 and 2017-18 will in part result from these additional students being included in the population. As such the rates for 2017-18 and 2018-19 qualifiers are more representative of the student population.
19. The attainment rate of qualifiers who were not eligible to receive free meals when at school also increased between 2016-17 (80.0 per cent) and 2017-18 (81.9 per cent) but by a greater extent (1.9 percentage points). The attainment rate for these students also dropped between 2017-18 and 2018-19 (81.5 per cent) but only by 0.4 percentage points.
20. The gap in attainment rate has increased year on year, from 11.2 percentage points for 2016-17 qualifiers to 13.0 percentage points for 2018-19 qualifiers. Some of the increase in difference between 2016-17 and 2017-18 may be the result of the different student populations (as mentioned above).

⁵ See our document 'Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Regulatory indicators, methodology and rebuild descriptions' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/.

⁶ See our access and participation data dashboard at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

Figure C2: The differences in rates of achieving a first or upper-second class degree by free school meal eligibility for full-time, England-domiciled, first degree and undergraduate with postgraduate components students



The data used to create this chart can be found in the data file associated with this publication.⁷ Details of the student population can be found later in this annex.

⁷ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

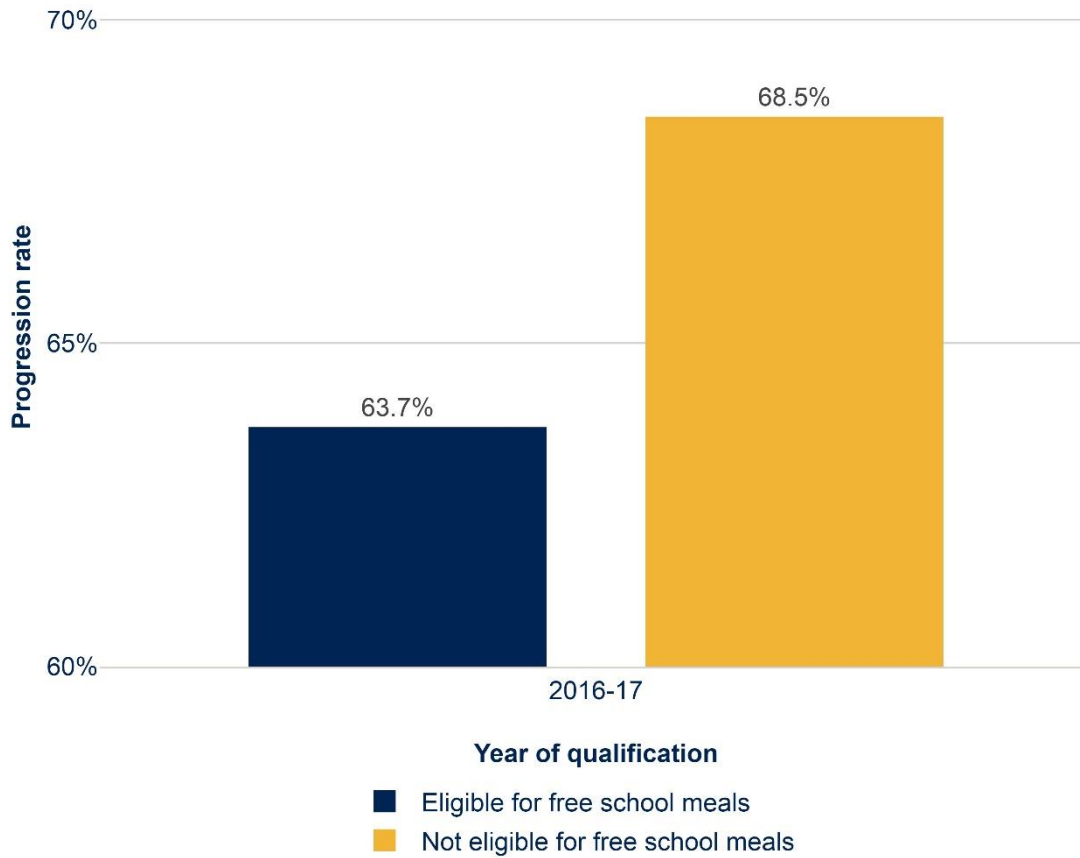
Differences in employment outcomes

21. Progression into highly skilled employment or further study at a higher level appears to be lower for students who were eligible to receive free school meals compared to those who were not (see Figure C3).
22. These statistics apply to England-domiciled, full-time students who attended a state-funded mainstream school in England prior to higher education and qualified with an undergraduate qualification or apprenticeship. This data on free school meal eligibility comes from the NPD and was linked onto data reported by the ILR and HESA student record and student alternative record. The population and measure of progression is based on our access and participation data algorithms.⁸
23. Progression rates are based on the proportion of higher education leavers who say they are in highly skilled employment or studying at a higher level (or both) approximately six months after leaving. These outcomes are based on student responses to Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The mapping of DHLE responses for progression rates is detailed elsewhere.⁹ As the DHLE survey has been discontinued, and free school meal data is available for 2014-15 entrants onwards, this employment progression data is available only for those students who qualified in 2016-17. Additionally, as detailed in paragraph 18, the data for 2016-17 only includes students who completed their undergraduate studies in three years or less so may be less robust than subsequent years had the survey been continued.
24. These caveats aside, qualifiers in 2016-17 who were eligible to receive free meals when at school had a progression rate (63.7 per cent) that is 4.8 percentage points lower than those students who were not (68.5 per cent). However, further data and investigation is required to determine the extent to which this is representative of progression of students that were eligible to receive free school meals.

⁸ See our document 'Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Regulatory indicators, methodology and rebuild descriptions' at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/.

⁹ See footnote 8.

Figure C3: The difference in students progressing into highly skilled employment or further study at a higher level by free school meal eligibility for full-time, England-domiciled, undergraduate students



The data used to create this chart can be found in the data file associated with this publication.¹⁰ Details of the student population can be found later in this annex.

¹⁰ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

Quality framework and student populations

25. A summary of applying our data quality framework¹¹ to the data on free school meal eligibility can be found in Table C1. It is important to note that this data on free school meal eligibility is already considered high quality and is widely used. As such the primary purpose of applying the framework was to allow a better understanding of this data.

Table C1: Summary of applying data quality framework to free school meal eligibility data

Framework criteria	Summary
Data source	National Pupil Database (EVERFSM_6_SPR)
Year data collection started	2009-10
Summary of data field	Whether a pupil has ever been recorded as eligible for free school meals in the last 6 years up to the pupil's current year
Student population data available for	England-domiciled students who attended school in England
Part I – Data availability	
I.A – documentation	Well-documented
I.B – disclosure rate	Available for >99% of appropriate student population
I.C – provider response	NA
Part II – Data quality	
II.A – identified data issues	Data not reported by providers but linked via NPD. Reporting of free school meal eligibility is low for pupils that attended independent schools so population is limited to state-funded mainstream schools.
II.B – reporting consistency	Data not reported by providers so does not reflect whether data is being reported inconsistently. However inconsistency scores are below 2.2 for all years, indicating that there is low variability in the proportions of students who were and were not eligible to receive free school meals attending providers.
II.C – comparisons to public	The proportion of the student population who were ever eligible to receive free school meals is lower than the proportion of the key stage 4 state school population who were ever eligible to receive free school meals. Given people who received free school meals are underrepresented in higher education ¹² we would anticipate this lower proportion.
Outcome	Data used for 2014-15 entrants onwards.

¹¹ See Annex A associated with this report, available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

¹² See DfE's report 'Widening participation in higher education: 2019' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education-2019>.

26. The data on free school meal eligibility is collected as part of the NPD. Full details can be found on the associated webpage.¹³
27. The free school meal field used is EVERFSM_6_SPR, which records whether the pupil was ever eligible for free school meals during the last six years, recorded at key stage 4. The key stage 4 free school meals census data is available from 2009-10 onwards. This definition of free school meals is used to be consistent with our access and participation data.¹⁴
28. The free school meals data was matched to data reported by the ILR and HESA student record and student alternative record. Since pupils are generally 15-years-old at the beginning of key stage 4, the academic year 2014-15 is the earliest year that a full cohort of young entrants (under 21 on entry) can be tracked back to the NPD. For this reason the student population is limited to students under 21 on entry throughout these free school meal statistics.
29. While the NPD contains data for various school types, reporting of free school meal eligibility is much higher for a state-funded mainstream schools, so the population is limited to only those students who attended these schools.
30. Continuation, attainment and progression populations were based on those included in our access and participation data dashboard. Details of these populations can be found in the document 'Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures: Regulatory indicators, methodology and rebuild descriptions'.¹⁵ Where restrictions exist in the availability of this data, beyond those associated with the access and participation populations, then these were also applied. For example the access and participation populations include UK-domiciled students; however the NPD only contains data for pupils attending schools in England. As such, the population is limited to England-domiciled students. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have different systems for allocating free school meals.
31. The first two years of qualifier data available by free school meal eligibility are not presented as these results relate to a small number of students who completed their studies in one or two years – it is not until the third year of data that more robust statistics can be produced. The qualifier population was not limited by the time it took to achieve the qualification. As this free school meal data is available for 2014-15 entrants onwards, this results in qualifier statistics from 2016-17 onwards. As detailed in paragraph 18, the data for 2016-17 does not include students who completed their undergraduate studies in four years and as such the data after 2016-17 can be considered to be more representative of the undergraduate population.

¹³ See NPD webpage 'Eligible for free school meals in the past 6 years' at <https://find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/en/concepts/d7f8e8e0-6fa7-4aa2-a963-265267c2bed4>.

¹⁴ See our access and participation data dashboard at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

¹⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/.



© The Office for Students copyright 2020

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

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