

Office for  
Students



# Student transfers

Latest experimental statistics on  
students changing course from  
2012-13 to 2018-19

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**Enquiries to** [official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk)

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# Summary

1. This report is an update to our December 2020 publication 'Student transfers'<sup>1</sup> and uses the same methodology. In this update, we have added data for entrants in the 2018-19 academic year to the analysis.
2. As well as fulfilling the legal duty of the Office for Students (OfS) to monitor student transfers, this report shows whether different groups have different patterns of transfer behaviour. It remains important to understand student transfer activity across the sector, particularly in the context of the government's proposals for the Lifelong Loan Entitlement scheme.
3. Data limitations mean we cannot analyse results for all higher education students and cannot identify all types of credit transfer. We are currently only able to identify credit transfer which enables students to go straight into the second year of the new course. Due to these limitations, this analysis focuses on full-time students on first degree courses, excluding those at colleges. We hope to improve the methodology as more data becomes available in future.
4. The main conclusions from this analysis remain the same as the ones drawn out in the previous publication. More students transferred without credit, both within the same provider and to a different provider, than took credit with them which enabled them to bypass the first year. Compared to 2017-18, there was a small increase in the proportion of 2018-19 entrants who had to restart their course rather than continuing (4.4 per cent rather than 4.1 per cent).
5. The analysis also highlights how patterns differ between student groups. Traditionally underrepresented groups remain more likely to restart a course at their original provider than their better represented counterparts. This is true for students from underrepresented or deprived areas, black students, and students with a disability or care experience. This is also true for students whose Level 3 qualifications were BTECs. There is also a larger proportion of these groups who transfer to a different provider without credit.
6. Further, more male students, mature students (over 21 years old) and local students restarted their course at the same provider than female students, young students or non-local students. However, mature students and local students are less likely to transfer externally without credit. More detailed information is contained in the data tables accompanying this publication.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/).

# Introduction

7. In December 2020, the Office for Students (OfS) presented a method for classifying student transfers, both within the same provider and to a different provider. We introduced the numbers of and proportions of entrants who transferred between the academic years of 2012-13 and 2017-18. We also examined the number of students who did or did not carry credit with them as they transferred, and further presented the results split by personal characteristics to identify if some groups were indeed less likely to transfer, or to transfer successfully with credit.
8. In this publication we have added updated HESA data relating to entrants in 2018-19.
9. We have kept this update brief but all the data relating to different student groups is available in the supplementary tables.

## Rationale

10. Section 38 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) sets out a legal duty for the OfS to monitor the availability of schemes or other arrangements provided by registered higher education providers for student transfers.
11. Although HERA's definition of student transfers requires the receiving higher education provider to recognise the level of achievement of the students' original course, we show both 'successful transfers' where the student has taken credit and other course changes. This improves our understanding of patterns of student behaviour in this area, and whether students with different characteristics are more or less likely to transfer or take credit with them.
12. Student transfers are also important to consider in terms of what they mean for the interpretation of successful student outcomes from higher education. This report highlights that there are groups of transferring students starting their new courses from the beginning rather than, as the term 'transfer' implies, continuing their studies at a new provider. Understanding student transfer patterns is also increasingly relevant with the announcement of the new Lifelong Loan Entitlement in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill in May 2021<sup>2</sup> which may increase the number of students changing course as part of their qualification. Nevertheless, when making inferences it is important to remember that the data alone is not enough to distinguish the underlying reason behind the number of student transfers, or the proportion who transferred with credit – as it depends both on providers' policies and students' preferences and experiences.

This report provides an analysis of student transfers and is an experimental<sup>3</sup> official statistic which falls under the official statistics' Code of Practice. We are actively seeking feedback for this analysis. Please email comments to [official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk).

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>.

<sup>3</sup> Experimental statistics: A subset of newly developed or innovative official statistics undergoing evaluation. Experimental statistics are published to involve users and stakeholders in the assessment of their suitability and quality at an early stage.

## Population and methodology

13. To be **included** in the population for this analysis, students must be:

- Enrolled on a 'first degree' or a 'first degree with postgraduate component' course<sup>4</sup>
- Studying full time
- Studying at a registered<sup>5</sup> higher education provider in England
- Entrants on the first year of programme, studying a course expected to last longer than 15 months<sup>6</sup>
- Entrants between the academic years 2012-13 and 2018-19.

14. Students **not included** in the population for this analysis are:

- Students at providers which report data on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), typically further education colleges. This is because the ILR does not record year of programme which is crucial for identifying student transfers in the current methodology. Students in our population who transfer to such a provider will be counted as changing provider, but with 'credit unknown'.
- Students on courses whose course structure does not have years of programme.
- Students on overseas courses which articulate into a UK degree (such as dual-degrees).

15. The methodology in identifying transfers for this update remains unchanged.<sup>7</sup> There are two parts to identifying whether a student has successfully transferred: whether they have changed course and whether they have taken credit with them.

a. Students are counted as changing course if:

- they have started studying a different<sup>8</sup> course with the same provider (internal transfer)
- or they have changed provider (external transfer)

b. Students are counted as taking credit if they have progressed to the next year of their study. Typically this means an entrant in year one will be in year two in the next year, whether on the same course or a different course.

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<sup>4</sup> Typically these are three-year bachelors' degree courses or four-year integrated masters' courses.

<sup>5</sup> That is, on the OfS Register as of 7 November 2021.

<sup>6</sup> This is because the available data does not typically allow us to identify transfers in courses which are expected to only last a year. The definition is extended to 15 months from 12 months to allow for courses which finish after slightly more than a year.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Methodology' section in our 2020 report at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/).

<sup>8</sup> That is, the course title and subject area are different and does not appear to be a typical pathway for others on that course. For more detail see the 'Identification of course change' section in our 2020 report at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/).

16. As the latest data included in this analysis is for 2018-19 entrants, who were making their decisions about continuing their course or transferring in the first year of their study (i.e. by the start of the 2019-20 academic year), the COVID-19 pandemic will not have impacted the results in this report.

## Limitations

17. As we point out above, the methodology uses the year of programme the student is in to track if they carried credit after transferring to another course at the same or at a different provider. However, this approach does not enable us to identify how far a student progressed in their course – i.e. whether they left before reaching the end, or failed their first year exams. It also means we are not able to identify cases where students have some credit but not enough for them to progress straight to the second year of their new course. As they are still required to substantially repeat a year of study, they will be treated as non-credit transfer despite carrying partial credit.
18. The implication is that within the current specifications of HESA and ILR student data it is currently difficult to identify transfers which involve a student carrying credit with them and it is not possible to do this consistently for all student groups. This means that the current data collections are currently unable to comprehensively differentiate the transfers that might be considered to represent positive student outcomes, from those that are less obviously in a student's best interests (given the potential for them to incur additional costs in starting a new course from the beginning).
19. As part of the move to the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS),<sup>9</sup> providers may have decided that their courses should be categorised slightly differently – so it is possible the same course will have different Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)<sup>10</sup> codes for last year's data and this year's. However, this change does not seem to have had a significant effect on the figures.
20. The methodology is not without its limitations, and is in scope to be improved in the next update when we have access to new HESA data on credit points held on entry.<sup>11</sup> However, we hope that as this analysis evolves it will form an important evidence base for monitoring patterns of student transfers and focus attention on where improvements could be made to benefit students.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah-about>.

<sup>11</sup> See the Next steps section below.

## Results

21. This section explores transfers patterns for students studying at the same provider and at a different provider in turn. It presents data for student transfers for entrants between 2012-13 and 2018-19 academic years.

### Studying at the same provider

22. Each year over 90 per cent of entrants in the analysed population are studying at the same provider one year after entry.

23. There are four possible outcomes for these students:

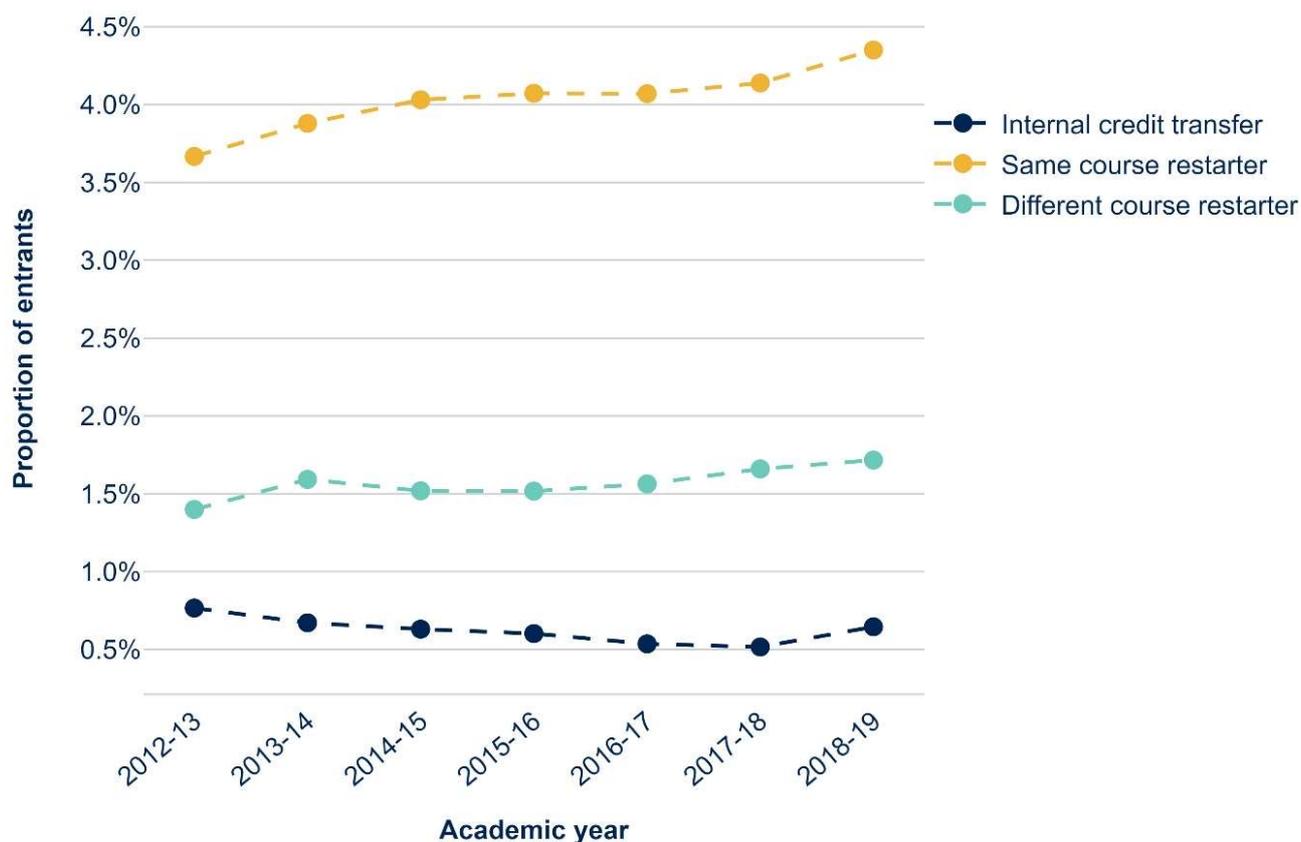
- a. Continuer – students on the same course who progressed into the next year
- b. Same course restarter – students on the same course who had to start in year one again
- c. Internal credit transfer – students on a different course who we can see took credit because they did not enter year one of the course
- d. Different course restarter – students on a different course who did not carry credit and so entered into year one.

24. In other words, ‘internal credit transfers’ represent successful transfers and ‘different course restarters’ represent unsuccessful transfers.

25. Figure 1 and Table 1 both show the credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2018-19 studying at the same provider one year after entry. The number of 2018-19 entrants who restarted a different course (1.7 per cent) is more than triple that of students who successfully transferred internally (0.6 per cent). This is very similar to the numbers reported previously for 2017-18 entrants.

26. The proportion who restarted the same course has increased to 4.4 per cent for 2018-19 entrants, compared with 4.1 per cent for 2017-18 entrants. Although it is a small change, this rate has been consistently increasing and the latest figure is also the largest yearly increase in the time series.

**Figure 1: Proportion of first degree students studying at the same provider from 2012-13 to 2018-19**



**Table 1: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2018-19 studying at the same provider one year after entry**

Year	Same provider: Continuing	Same provider: Internal credit transfer	Same provider: Same course restarter	Same provider: Different course restarter	Same provider: Unidentified	Not studying at the same provider	Total number of entrants
2012-13	83.7%	0.8%	3.7%	1.4%	0.1%	10.3%	310,865
2013-14	83.5%	0.7%	3.9%	1.6%	0.1%	10.2%	339,220
2014-15	83.1%	0.6%	4.0%	1.5%	0.1%	10.6%	356,545
2015-16	82.8%	0.6%	4.1%	1.5%	0.2%	10.9%	368,805
2016-17	83.0%	0.5%	4.1%	1.6%	0.2%	10.6%	370,750
2017-18	82.6%	0.5%	4.1%	1.7%	0.1%	11.1%	367,375
2018-19	82.4%	0.6%	4.4%	1.7%	0.1%	10.8%	368,220

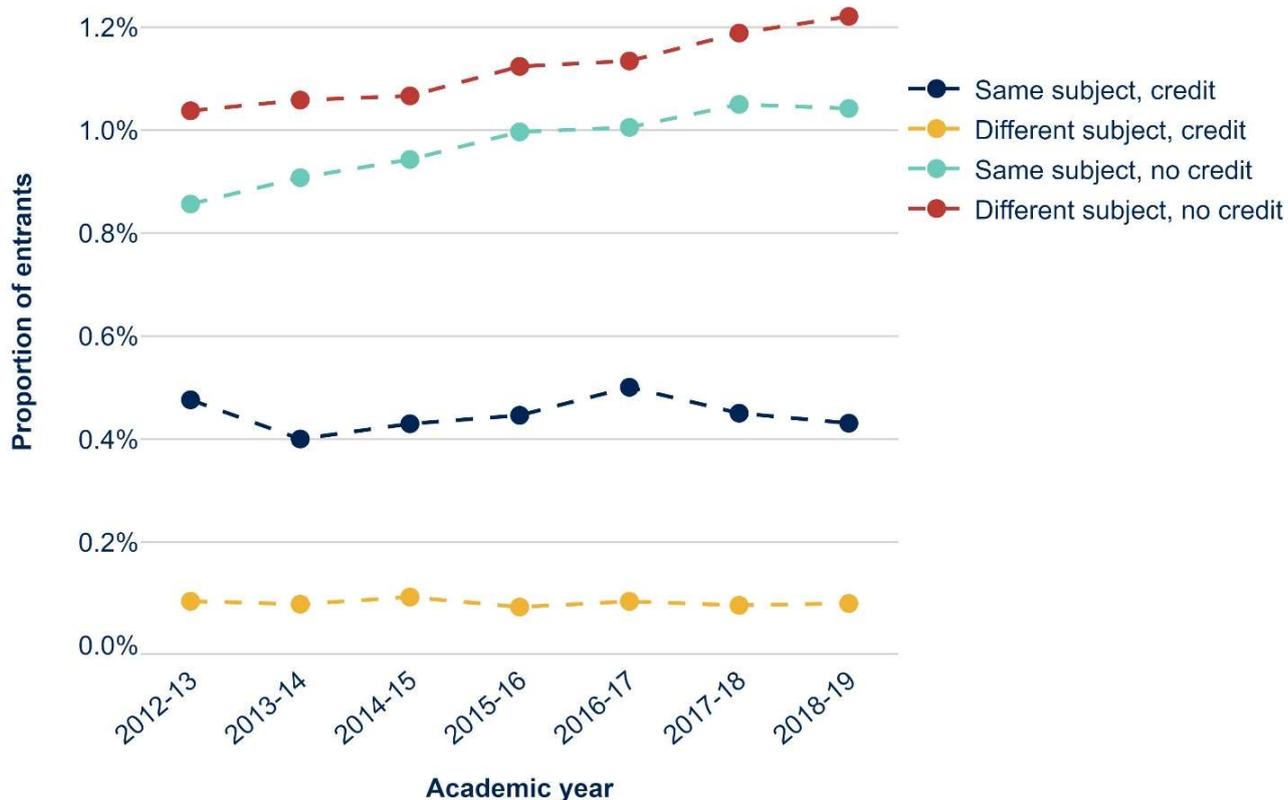
**Note:** Some of the rates and totals shown in the tables in this report are slightly different to the ones shown in the previous Student transfers publication. We have used an updated data source with some data amendments which also leads to slight improvements in the data linking between years.

Additionally, all percentages in this table are rounded to one decimal point and such may show less variation than that the data shown in Figure 1.

## Studying at a different provider

27. Each year less than 3 per cent of entrants in the population are studying at a different provider one year after entry.
28. There are four possible types of external transfer for these students:
- a. Same subject area, with credit – students in the same subject area who we can see took credit because they did not enter year one of the course
  - b. Different subject area, with credit – students in a different subject area who we can see took credit because they did not enter year one of the course
  - c. Same subject area, no credit – students in the same subject area who did not carry credit
  - d. Different subject area, no credit – students in a different subject area who did not carry credit.
29. Figure 2 and Table 2 show the credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2018-19 studying at a different provider one year after entry. There is just over twice the number of students who were studying in the same subject area who did not carry credit (1.0 per cent) than students studying in the same subject area who carried credit (0.4 per cent). The gap is larger for students studying a different subject – only 0.1 per cent carried credit and 1.2 per cent did not.

**Figure 2: Proportion of first degree students studying at a different provider from 2012-13 to 2018-19**



**Table 2: Credit transfer and course change status of entrants from 2012-13 to 2018-19 studying at a different provider one year after entry**

Year	Different provider: Same subject with credit	Different provider: Different subject with credit	Different provider: Same subject without credit	Different provider: Different subject without credit	Different provider: Unidentified	Not studying at a different provider	Total number of entrants
2012-13	0.5%	0.1%	0.9%	1.0%	0.2%	97.4%	310,865
2013-14	0.4%	0.1%	0.9%	1.1%	0.1%	97.5%	339,220
2014-15	0.4%	0.1%	0.9%	1.1%	0.1%	97.3%	356,545
2015-16	0.4%	0.1%	1.0%	1.1%	0.1%	97.3%	368,805
2016-17	0.5%	0.1%	1.0%	1.1%	0.1%	97.2%	370,750
2017-18	0.5%	0.1%	1.1%	1.2%	0.1%	97.2%	367,375
2018-19	0.4%	0.1%	1.0%	1.2%	0.1%	97.1%	368,220

**Note:** All percentages in this table are rounded to one decimal point and such may show less variation than that the data shown in Figure 2.

## Student characteristics

30. Previously, we had identified that groups of students with certain personal characteristics were more likely to transfer without credit or restart a course. These findings remain true for 2018-19 entrants and are summarised below. See the supplementary data tables for all the updated figures and the previous report for more exploration into some of these findings.
- a. Students from the areas of lowest higher education participation (POLAR4<sup>12</sup> quintile 1) are the most likely to both transfer without credit and to restart their course at their provider.
  - b. The same trend is present for when considering students from economically deprived areas (measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 14). Quintile 1 students (from the most deprived areas) are more likely to restart on a different course (2.3 per cent) or restart the same course (7.0 per cent) compared with 1.6 per cent and 2.7 per cent of quintile 5 students (from the least deprived areas) respectively. Quintile 1 students also change provider more than quintile 5 students, with or without credit.
  - c. Mature students (21 years and over) are more likely to start their course again than young students (6.7 per cent of mature students restart, compared with 3.9 per cent of young students). These figures demonstrate an increase of students restarting their course compared with 2017-18 entrants, but the jump is larger for mature students (0.5 percentage points as opposed to 0.1 percentage points for young students).
  - d. Similar proportions of mature and young students transfer externally with credit, but young students are more likely to transfer externally without credit (2.4 per cent) than mature students (1.5 per cent).
  - e. The number of mature students who are classified as inactive or at a lower level of study one year after entry is nearly twice as large as the number of young students (13 per cent of mature students, compared with 7 per cent of young students).
  - f. Male students are more likely than female students to restart their course at the same provider. Male students are also more likely to transfer within a provider than female students (2.6 per cent of male students transfer but only 2.1 per cent of female students do).
  - g. Moreover, a smaller proportion of male students (0.4 per cent) than female students (0.5 per cent) carry credit when transferring to a different provider in the same subject area.
  - h. Students with BTECs as their main entry qualification remain the group most likely to restart a course at the same provider (2.6 per cent on a different course and 7.4 per cent on the same course).
  - i. Black students are the ethnic group most likely to start again when studying the same course at the same provider or the same subject area at a different provider. 9.8 per cent of black students restart the same course, and 1.9 per cent repeat their year when moving to a different provider and studying the same subject. In comparison, only 3.3 per cent of

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/).

white students restarted their course at the same provider and 0.9 per cent at a different provider.

- j. Students with a reported disability studying at the same provider are more likely to change course than students with no reported disability. Similar proportions of students with and without a reported disability transfer to a different provider.
  - k. Students who have been in care are twice as likely to restart their original course or a different course at their provider as other students (8.4 per cent of care experienced students did compared to 4.2 per cent of other students). For those studying at a different provider, a higher proportion of care experienced students start from the beginning, whether or not the subject area was different.
  - l. Local students<sup>13</sup> remain more likely to restart the same course (5.5 per cent) than non-local students (4.1 per cent).
  - m. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students are more likely to restart in a different course without credit, and students with other sexual orientation are more likely to restart the same course without credit than heterosexual students.
  - n. Students at providers in the North East of England continue to have the highest proportion of internal credit transfers. This was 1.4 per cent for 2018-19 entrants, higher than rates across the rest of the country (0.5 to 0.9 per cent). Students at providers in the North East are the least likely to transfer to a different provider, regardless of credit.
31. For more detailed information on transfer rates for the different student groups, please refer to the data tables accompanying this publication.

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<sup>13</sup> Local students are defined as students who are studying in the same region as the region in which they are domiciled.

## Next steps

32. We plan to update this publication next year, with the following changes:

- a. Update to use data for 2019-20 entrants, and
- b. Explore using new HESA fields<sup>14</sup> which record more information about the number of credit points previously achieved which count towards onward study. The hope is that this will enable us to identify transfers which allowed students to use some of their previous credit, even if it was not enough to allow progression directly to the second year of the new course.

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<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/crdptstu>.



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