

Office for  
Students



# **Annex E: Differences in student outcomes – further characteristics**

**Sexual orientation**

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

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Differences in continuation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Differences in degree outcomes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Quality framework and student populations</b>	<b>7</b>

# Summary

Any questions or feedback related to this publication can be sent to William Rimington at [official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto: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. The Office for Students (OfS) annually publishes experimental data on the numbers and proportions of students entering higher education by sexual orientation as part of our equality and diversity statistics.<sup>1</sup> However, this is the first time we have published outcomes by this characteristic.
2. In 2018-19, 85.3 per cent of full-time, UK-domiciled, undergraduate entrants reported as being heterosexual while 6.2 per cent are lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students. A further 1.5 per cent reported that they are neither heterosexual or LGB and 7.0 per cent chose not to report their sexual orientation. The proportion of students who report as being heterosexual has been reducing while the proportion reporting as LGB has been increasing.<sup>2</sup>
3. For 2017-18 entrants, the continuation rate of LGB students was 1.1 percentage points lower than heterosexual students while the continuation rate of students who are not heterosexual or LGB was 5.6 percentage points lower than heterosexual students.
4. For qualifiers in 2018-19, the attainment rate of LGB students was 2.4 percentage points higher than heterosexual students. The attainment rate of students who are not heterosexual or LGB was 6.9 percentage points lower than heterosexual students.
5. The statistics included in this report are raw continuation and attainment 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.
6. The rates and differences in rates are rounded to one 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. The value of the differences can thus be 0.1 percentage point higher or lower than the difference between the rounded rates included in this report.
7. A lack of data prevents publication of differences in progression into highly skilled employment or further study at a higher level by sexual orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/).

<sup>2</sup> These values can be found on our equality and diversity webpages which can be accessed using the link above (footnote 1).

## Differences in continuation

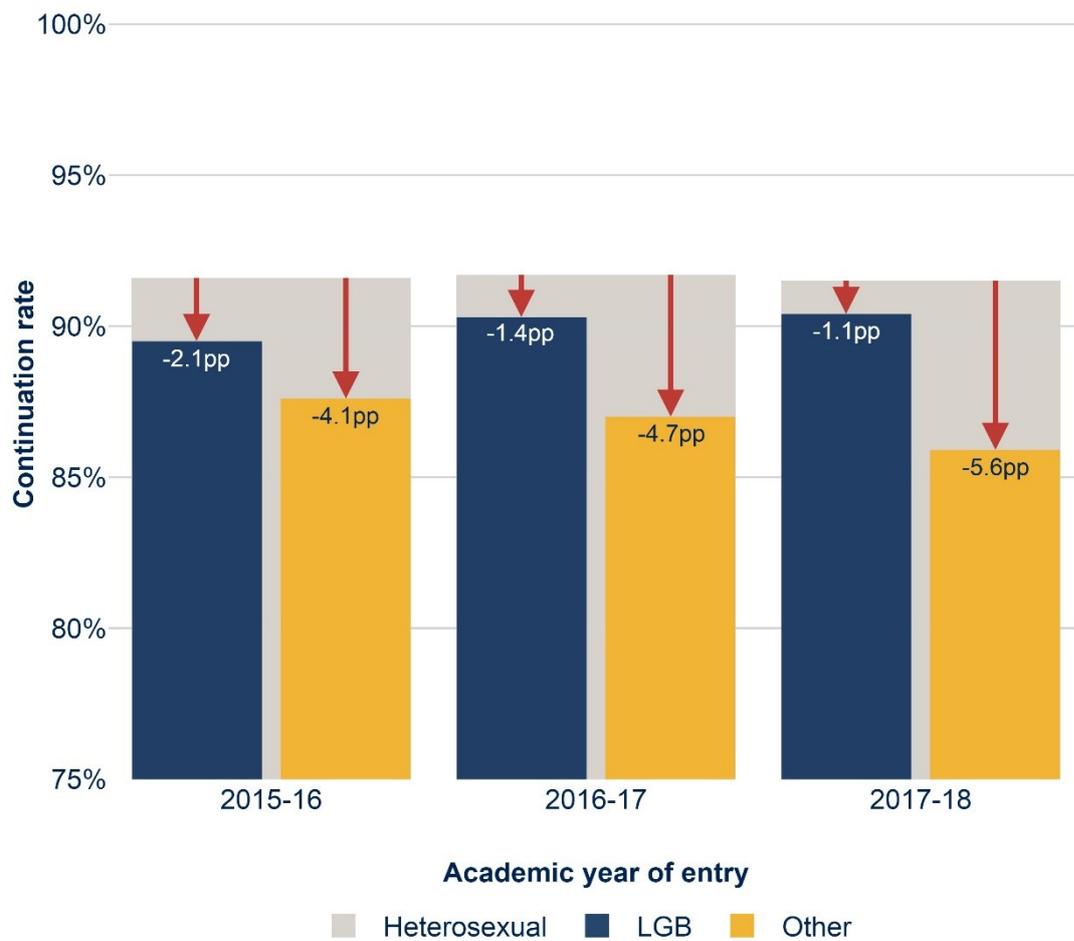
8. Continuation rates are lower for LGB students compared with heterosexual students. The same is true for students who are not heterosexual or LGB, but to an even greater extent (see Figure E1). For full-time, UK-domiciled, undergraduate entrants in 2017-18, the continuation rate of LGB students was 1.1 percentage points lower than of heterosexual students. In the same year of entrance the continuation rate of students who are not heterosexual or LGB was 5.6 percentage points lower than that of heterosexual students.
9. 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. The population and measure of continuation in higher education are based on our access and participation data algorithms.<sup>3</sup>
10. These statistics apply to UK-domiciled, full-time, undergraduate or apprenticeship students who attended higher education providers in England that report data to the HESA student record. In these continuation calculations around 50,000 students a year are excluded from the access and participation population because they did not have a HESA student record.<sup>4</sup>
11. The continuation rates of heterosexual students has remained steady for entrants between 2015-16 (91.6 per cent) and 2017-18 (91.5 per cent). During this time the continuation rates of LGB students has increased by 0.9 percentage points, from 89.5 per cent in 2015-16 to 90.4 per cent in 2017-18. Conversely, continuation rates of students who are not heterosexual or LGB have dropped during this period by 1.7 percentage points, from 87.6 per cent in 2015-16 to 85.9 per cent in 2017-18.
12. As a result, the gap in continuation rate between heterosexual and LGB students has been reducing and shrunk by 1.0 percentage points between 2015-16 and 2017-18, from 2.1 percentage points to 1.1 percentage points. On the other hand, the gap in continuation rate between heterosexual and students who are not heterosexual or LGB has grown in this time by 1.5 percentage points, from 4.1 percentage points in 2015-16 to 5.6 percentage points in 2017-18.

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<sup>3</sup> 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/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/institutional-performance-measures/technical-documentation/).

<sup>4</sup> See the data file associated with this release, available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/), for the numbers of students who have been excluded from the access and participation population based on the population restrictions outlined.

**Figure E1: The differences in continuation rate by sexual orientation for full-time, UK-domiciled, undergraduate students**



The data used to create this chart can be found in the data file associated with this publication.<sup>5</sup> Details of the student population can be found later in this annex.

<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/).

## Differences in degree outcomes

13. LGB students have a higher rate of achieving a first or upper second class degree than heterosexual students. However, students who are not heterosexual or LGB have much lower rates of achieving a first or upper second class degree compared with heterosexual or LGB students (see Figure E2). For qualifiers in 2018-19, the attainment rate of LGB students was 2.4 percentage points higher than of heterosexual students. In the same year the attainment rate of students who are not heterosexual or LGB was 6.9 percentage points lower than of heterosexual students.
14. 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). The population and measure of attainment are based on our access and participation data algorithms.<sup>6</sup>
15. These statistics apply to UK-domiciled, full-time students who qualified with a first degree or undergraduate with postgraduate components qualification. These students attended higher education providers in England that report data to the HESA student record. In these attainment calculations around 13,000 students a year are excluded from the access and participation population because they did not have a HESA student record.<sup>7</sup> This value differs from the 50,000 value in paragraph 10 as these attainment statistics are calculated for a different population from the continuation statistics.<sup>8</sup>
16. For heterosexual students, the attainment rate increased 0.6 percentage points between 2017-18 (78.8 per cent) and 2018-19 (79.4 per cent). It is important to note that sexual orientation data is only used for 2015-16 entrants onwards. The data for 2017-18 does not therefore 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 degrees<sup>9</sup>, this increase in attainment rate between 2017-18 and 2018-19, despite a sector-level cessation in grade inflation<sup>10</sup>, will in part result from these additional students being included in the population. The rates for 2018-19 are more representative of attainment for this population of students.
17. The attainment rate of LGB students increased from 80.5 per cent in 2017-18 to 81.8 per cent in 2018-19, while the attainment rate of students who are not heterosexual or LGB increased from 71.0 per cent to 72.5 per cent. Again these increases will be at least in part the result of the additional students included in the population.

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 4.

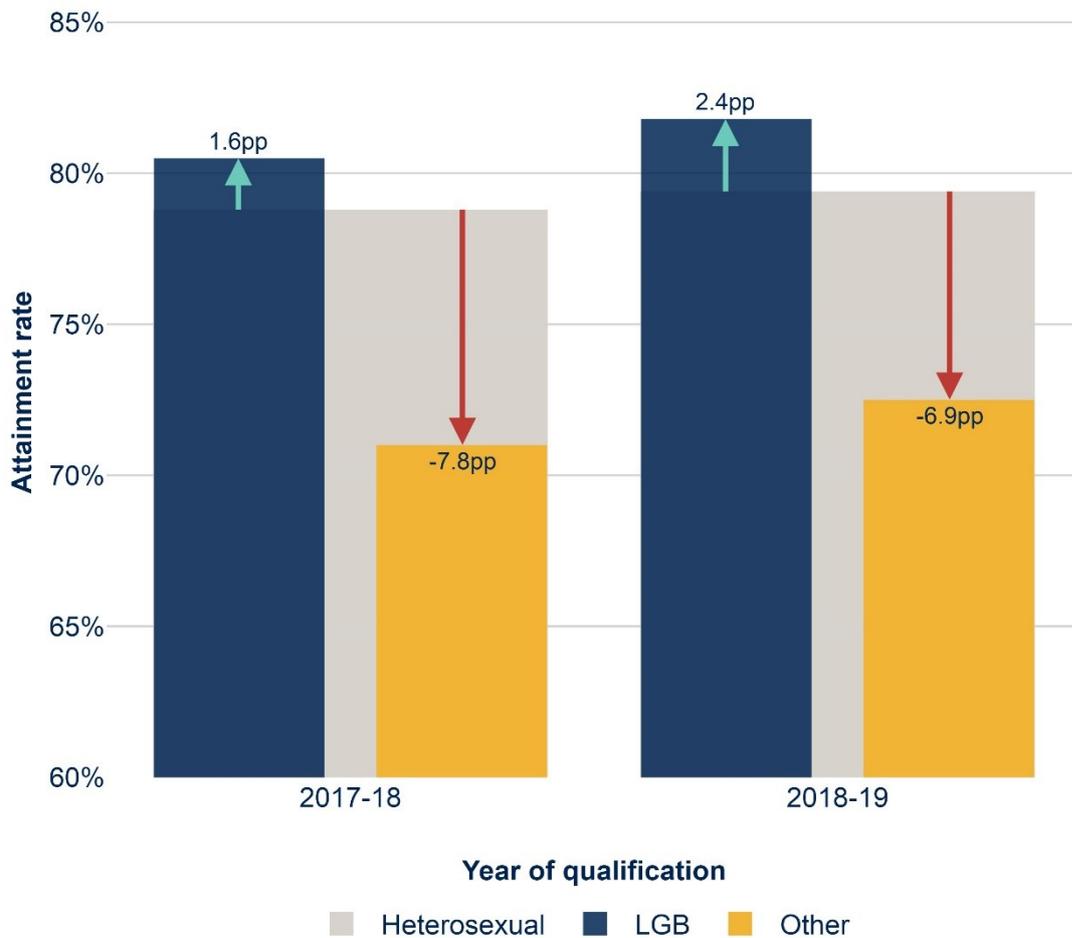
<sup>8</sup> For further detail of the different populations see footnote 3.

<sup>9</sup> See our access and participation data dashboard at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/).

<sup>10</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/grade-inflation-for-first-class-degrees-stalls/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/grade-inflation-for-first-class-degrees-stalls/).

18. The size of these attainment gaps are not consistent between 2017-18 and 2018-19 but, as discussed above, these two years contain different student populations. The 2018-19 differences should be considered to be more reliable for first degree and undergraduate with postgraduate component students. Furthermore this data should not be interpreted as showing that the gap between heterosexual and LGB students is increasing or that the gap between heterosexual and other students is decreasing; more data is needed to determine whether this is the case.

**Figure E2: The differences in rates of achieving a first or upper second class degree by sexual orientation for full-time, UK-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.<sup>11</sup> Details of the student population can be found later in this annex. The data for 2017-18 consists of a reduced population and is less robust than the data for 2018-19; see paragraph 16 for more details.

<sup>11</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/).

# Quality framework and student populations

19. A summary of applying our data quality framework<sup>12</sup> to the data on sexual orientation can be found in Table E1. Based on the criteria of the framework this data is useable for entrants from 2015-16 onwards. Though this data is available from 2012-13, for the years prior to 2015-16 the disclosure rates were below 50 per cent.

**Table E1: Summary of applying data quality framework to sexual orientation data**

Framework criteria	Summary
<b>Data source</b>	HESA student record (SEXORT)
<b>Year data collection started</b>	2012-13
<b>Summary of data field</b>	Records the sexual orientation of the student, on the basis of their own self-assessment
<b>Student population data available for</b>	All students (optional)
<b>Part I – Data availability</b>	
<b>I.A – documentation</b>	Well-documented
<b>I.B – disclosure rate</b>	Over 67% since 2015-16 for UK-domiciled undergraduate students
<b>I.C – provider response</b>	Reported by over 85% of providers with UK-domiciled undergraduate students
<b>Part II – Data quality</b>	
<b>II.A – identified data issues</b>	Issues associated with optional reporting including providers not reporting any data or reporting data for a small proportion of their students
<b>II.B – reporting consistency</b>	Inconsistency score below 1 since 2013-14 both at characteristic and category level
<b>II.C – comparisons with public</b>	Age impacts the proportions of the different sexual orientations. Comparing 16 to 24-year-old, UK-domiciled, undergraduate entrants with the ONS 2018 Sexual orientation data for people of this age <sup>13</sup> shows the proportions are similar, with slightly higher proportions of LGB and Other in the student population.
<b>Outcome</b>	Data considered useable from 2015-16 entrants onwards.

<sup>12</sup> See Annex A associated with this report.

<sup>13</sup> See Office for National Statistics (ONS) Sexual Orientation, UK dataset (Table 3) at [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/datasets/sexualidentityuk](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/datasets/sexualidentityuk).

20. This data on sexual orientation is collected by HESA on the student record. Collection details can be found on the HESA website.<sup>14</sup> Sexual orientation data is also collected for providers that report data to the student alternative record.<sup>15</sup> However the sexual orientation data collected as part of the student alternative record fails the framework for all available years, because of low disclosure rates and high inconsistency scores. This data is therefore not included here.
21. Reporting of sexual orientation to HESA is optional and HESA does not have a student population for which collection is required. For the purposes of this analysis, the student population is limited to UK-domiciled, undergraduate, full-time or apprenticeship students. Not only does this allow for consistency with our access and participation data<sup>16</sup> but also this student population has considerably higher disclosure rates – the data should therefore be more representative of this student population. Collection of sexual orientation data will be compulsory for 2020-21 entrants onwards.
22. When applying the framework, 'Information refused' was set to 'Unknown' as it does not provide information for this investigation into differences in outcomes.
23. To allow us to more effectively communicate sector-level trends, we have combined data for students recorded as bisexual, gay man and gay woman/lesbian into a single group called LGB.<sup>17</sup> Continuation and attainment rates of bisexual, gay man and gay woman/lesbian students can be found as separate groups in the data file associated with this release.<sup>18</sup> The combination of these sexual orientations into LGB is consistent with the method used by the ONS for presenting its sexual orientation data.<sup>19</sup>
24. Continuation and attainment 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'.<sup>20</sup> We have excluded sexual orientation data for students who are not found in the access and participation populations, for example postgraduate students and students not domiciled in the UK.
25. The quality framework is used to help determine an academic year of entrance for which this data is deemed to be acceptable quality. The outcome populations are therefore limited to those students who began their studies on or after the academic year chosen. Sexual

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c19051/a/sexort](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c19051/a/sexort).

<sup>15</sup> See [www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c19054/a/sexort](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c19054/a/sexort).

<sup>16</sup> See our access and participation data dashboard at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/)

<sup>17</sup> Trans students are not included in this group because student gender identity data is collected separately to this sexual orientation data.

<sup>18</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/).

<sup>19</sup> See Sexual orientation, UK: 2018 at [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2018](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2018).

<sup>20</sup> See [footnote 3](#).

orientation is not part of the student entry profile and providers can report a different sexual orientation for a student each year. However, the outcomes populations are still limited to students who began their studies in the years of entrance recommended by the framework, to ensure the data was collected in a year that the passed the framework (this accounts for sexual orientation being collected at the start of a course but not in subsequent years).

26. The first two years of qualifier data related to a characteristic 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 the sexual orientation data is considered useable from 2015-16 onwards, this results in qualifier statistics from 2017-18 onwards. As detailed in paragraph 16, the data for 2017-18 does not include students who completed their undergraduate studies in four years and, the data for 2018-19 can therefore be considered to be more representative of the undergraduate population.
27. There is insufficient data to calculate differences in progression rates by sexual orientation. This is because progression rates are based on responses to the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey which has been discontinued and the final year of data available relates to qualifiers in 2016-17. As detailed above, the sexual orientation data is used for 2015-16 entrants onwards so qualifier statistics can only be calculated for 2017-18 and later. We will investigate differences in progression by sexual orientation when the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey data is available.
28. For 2015-16 UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants, sexual orientation was known for two-thirds of students (67 per cent). While we have deemed this sufficient for us to use this data, it is still the case that sexual orientation is unknown for a third of students. The differences in outcomes presented here should therefore be caveated as we do not know how the unknown third would have impacted the results. Disclosure rates would be higher if we included ‘information refused’ in our calculations, as around 7 per cent of full-time, UK-domiciled, undergraduate entrants choose not to disclose their sexual orientation.<sup>21</sup> Disclosure rates will increase from next year when collection of this data becomes compulsory.
29. As reporting of this data is optional there have been concerns regarding its quality and the rigour with which it was collected. Our ambition is to use data where possible and our framework has determined it is useable from 2015-16 entrants onwards. Even in the years after 2015-16 there are instances of providers choosing to report sexual orientation for none of their students or a small proportion of their students. To avoid introducing bias the only limitations we made to the data were the student populations detailed above. We have reported the data as it is available and have not excluded data that could be perceived as abnormal. As with the problem of reduced disclosure rates, this issue should reduce in future years now that collection is compulsory.

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<sup>21</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/).



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