

Summary of equality and diversity data

May 2019

Background

1. This data release contains equality and diversity data for students in higher education at English higher education providers. The data sources are the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record¹, the HESA alternative provider (AP) student record² and the Education and Skills Funding Agency Individualised Learner Record (ILR)³.
2. The data reports the proportions and numbers of students in higher education by age at entry, disability (broad and detailed), educational disadvantage (POLAR4), ethnicity and sex. Additionally the data is provided by various levels of higher education study and mode and subject of study. This data is updated annually and constitutes Official Statistics.
3. This information is published as part of a broader approach to equality and diversity, which includes Office for Students policies and action plans⁴.

Population and methodology

4. This release includes students in higher education in the academic years 2010-11 to 2017-18. The student numbers are available for all years of study, entrants (first year of study) and qualifiers.
5. Details of the methodology and populations used in this data analysis can be found in the methodology document associated with this release⁵.

Findings

6. These highlighted findings are for entrants from all domiciles, but data for all students and qualifiers, as well as only UK-domiciled students can found in the interactive charts and tables associated with this release⁶.

Undergraduate entrants

Age on entry

7. Full-time undergraduate qualifications are most commonly undertaken by students under the age of 21 (369,780 students in 2017-18, equivalent to 72.7 per cent of entrants) whereas part-time qualifications are most commonly started by students aged 31 to 40 (26,960 students in 2017-18, equivalent to 23.4 per cent of entrants).

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c17051>

² <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c17054>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ilr-specification-validation-rules-and-appendices-2017-to-2018>

⁴ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/>

⁵ Methodology document available at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/>

⁶ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/>

Disability

8. The proportions of undergraduate students reporting a disability continues to increase. In 2010-11, 7.9 per cent of undergraduate students reported a disability compared to 12.8 per cent in 2017-18.
9. Reporting of mental health conditions has seen a bigger increase than reporting of any other type of disability. The proportion of undergraduate entrants reporting a mental health condition has increased from 0.6 per cent of students in 2010-11 to 3.1 per cent in 2017-18.
10. There has been an increase in the reporting of mental health conditions for all subject groups. This is especially the case for students taking humanities and liberal arts (non-specific) subjects, psychology, and language and area studies. The proportion of psychology students reporting a mental health condition has increased from 1.4 per cent in 2010-11 to 7 per cent in 2017-18.

Education disadvantage (POLAR4)

11. In 2017-18, for all subject areas except education and training, as the POLAR4 quintiles increase, so do the proportions of students (i.e. quintile 5 has the highest proportion of students and quintile 1 the lowest). For education and training subjects, there is a higher proportion of students from quintile 2 (20.3 per cent in 2017-18), quintile 3 (22 per cent) and quintile 4 (22.1 per cent) than quintile 5 (19.5 per cent).
12. Of any subject group, medicine and dentistry has the greatest difference between POLAR4 quintiles 1 (6.3 per cent in 2017-18) and 5 (46.1 per cent).

Ethnicity

13. The proportion of white undergraduate entrants has been dropping year on year (79.9 per cent in 2010-11 to 71.9 per cent in 2017-18) with an equivalent increase in non-white students.
14. The proportions of the different ethnic groups has been changing for full-time study but have remained fairly constant for part-time study.
15. Ethnic diversity is subject dependent however many subject groups have seen marked increases in their proportions of non-white students.
16. There has been a large increase in the proportion of students starting undergraduate courses in medicine and dentistry who are Asian, increasing from 24.3 per cent in 2010-11 to 33.1 per cent in 2017-18.

Sex

17. For the most part, the proportions of female and male undergraduate students have remained steady with a one per cent drop in the proportion of female students (57.4 per cent in 2010-11 to 56.4 per cent in 2017-18) and an equivalent one per cent increase in male students.
18. There is a higher proportion of female students than male students regardless of the mode of study, but the difference is more pronounced for part-time study. In 2017-18, 55.5 per cent of full-time undergraduate entrants were female compared to 60.5 per cent of part-time undergraduate entrants.

19. STEM subjects (biological and sport sciences, physical sciences, mathematical sciences, engineering and technology, and computing) continue to be more commonly undertaken by male students. This is especially the case for engineering and technology (85.4 per cent of students in 2017-18 were male) and computing (85.3 per cent).
20. Outside of STEM subjects, female students are more common than male students in all subject groups other than architecture, building and planning, and business and management.

Postgraduate entrants

Age on entry

21. The proportion of full-time students aged 21 to 25 entering postgraduate study has been increasing (63.2 per cent in 2010-11 to 68.8 per cent in 2017-18), while the proportion of postgraduate entrants aged 26 to 40 has been decreasing.
22. Part-time postgraduate study is most commonly undertaken by students aged 31 to 40 (30.8 per cent in 2017-18).

Disability

23. Like undergraduate entrants, the proportions of postgraduate entrants reporting a disability has continued to increase, but to a smaller extent. In 2010-11, 5 per cent of postgraduate students reported a disability compared to 9.2 per cent in 2017-18.
24. Reported mental health conditions in postgraduate students have continued to increase, from 0.3 per cent in 2010-11 to 2 per cent in 2017-18.

Ethnicity

25. The proportion of white postgraduate entrants has been dropping. In 2010-11, 81.2 per cent postgraduate entrants were white compared to 75 per cent in 2017-18. There has been an equivalent increase in non-white students.
26. During the last seven years, black students had the biggest increase in postgraduate entrance, rising from 5.7 per cent of postgraduate entrants in 2010-11 to 8.3 per cent in 2017-18

Sex

27. The proportion of female students undertaking postgraduate qualifications has been increasing year on year, with a subsequent decrease in male students. In 2010-11, 56.6 per cent of postgraduate entrants were female compared to 60.2 per cent in 2017-18.
28. Like undergraduate qualifications, there are more female students than male students regardless of the mode of study, but this difference is more pronounced for part-time study.
29. Postgraduate entrants to biological and sport sciences are now more commonly female than male (51.2 per cent in 2017-18 were female). This is not the case for the other STEM subjects, which continue to be more commonly undertaken by male students.

Contact

30. If you have any questions or feedback on these pages, please contact William Rimmington at william.rimmington@officeforstudents.org.uk or the Foresight and Insight team at qapt@officeforstudents.org.uk