Student characteristics data:
Student populations – key findings

Students at English higher education providers between 2010-11 and 2022-23

Contents

Introduction

1. This document summarises some of the sector-level trends in our student characteristics populations data.

2. It sits alongside our Student characteristics population interactive data dashboard. This shows three different student populations (entrants, qualifiers, all students) that can be filtered by various domiciles, undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study, different study characteristics and student characteristics.[1]

3. Our student characteristics webpages also include associated datafiles and a technical document providing full definitions of each of the student characteristics together with the methodology we have used to construct the statistics.

> **If you have any queries, please contact official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk.**

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[1] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/population-data-dashboard/.

What is in the data dashboard?

Student characteristics

4. The Student characteristics population data dashboard includes multiple student characteristics. The characteristics marked with an asterisk (*) relate to one of the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.[2]

Age (broad and detailed)*

Adult HE quintile

Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) quintiles – access, continuation, completion and progression

Care experience

Disability (broad and type)*

Estrangement

Ethnicity (5 groups, and 15 groups)*

Free school meals eligibility

Gender identity

Geography of employment quintiles

Household Residual Income (HRI)

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

Individual disadvantage

Parental higher education

Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4)

Religion or belief*

Service child

Sex*

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[2] For further information on the protected characteristics, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/what-does-the-law-say/.

Sexual orientation*

Socioeconomic background

Subcontractual arrangement

Subject of study (broad)

Study location

Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) MSOA

5. This report looks at differences in the student population by age, sex, ethnicity and disability as these characteristics are both protected characteristics and used in our core regulatory work. This report also looks at individual disadvantage, which is a new addition to the student characteristics data dashboard this year.

6. You can find all the data on our interactive Student characteristics population data dashboard with splits by population, domicile, level of study and mode of study or subject of study.[3]

7. The findings in this report focus on full-time first degree entrants to higher education, in the latest years of data.

Changes from last year

8. We have made a few updates to the student populations data since the previous publication of the dashboards in 2023:

- Removal of the two-way ethnicity split. This is to be consistent with splits used by the Office for Students (OfS) to meet the requirements under the Equality Act, including through annual publications of equality and diversity statistics.

- Addition of two new student characteristics:

  o Measure of individual disadvantage

  o Student subcontractual (franchised) arrangement

9. The technical document provides further information about these new student characteristics.

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic

10. The sector-level trends reported in the dashboards and key findings include data up to the 2022-23 academic year. Changes in these statistics may be influenced by the impact of the

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[3] The student populations data dashboard is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/population-data-dashboard/.

coronavirus pandemic, particularly given that the UK entered three national lockdowns throughout the period March 2020 to July 2021.[4] For example:

- Any changes to the structure of learning and assessment during this time could have affected students' decisions. It may have had an impact on whether and how they might choose to register on higher education courses, and on whether students continued with their studies.

- Many OfS-registered providers introduced a 'no detriment' policy in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. This typically ensured no student would be awarded a final grade lower than the most recent provider assessment of their attainment.[5] This may have affected attainment rates in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years.

- The pandemic could have also affected rates across all of the life cycle stages in these years. For example, because of economic effects, changes to the assessment system and changes in learning methods prior to going to university or college during the pandemic.

11. However, users should not automatically interpret changes seen in the data since 2019-20 as having been caused by the pandemic. Other causal factors, such as provider actions or the individual motivations or experiences of a student, may also have contributed to these changes.

12. The impact of these changes will need to be considered when making comparisons across pandemic-affected years.
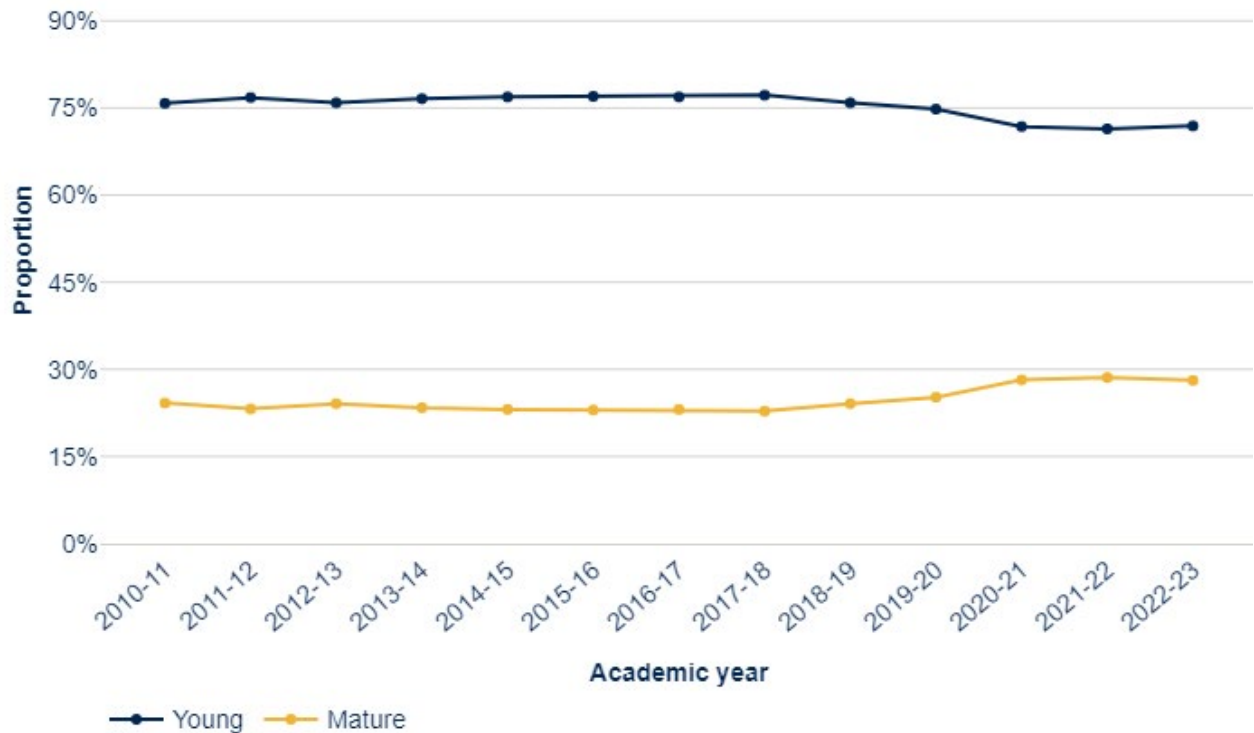
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[4] For more information, see www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/timeline-coronavirus-lockdown-december-2021.pdf.

[5] See www.hesa.ac.uk/news/25-01-2022/sb262-higher-education-student-statistics/qualifications.
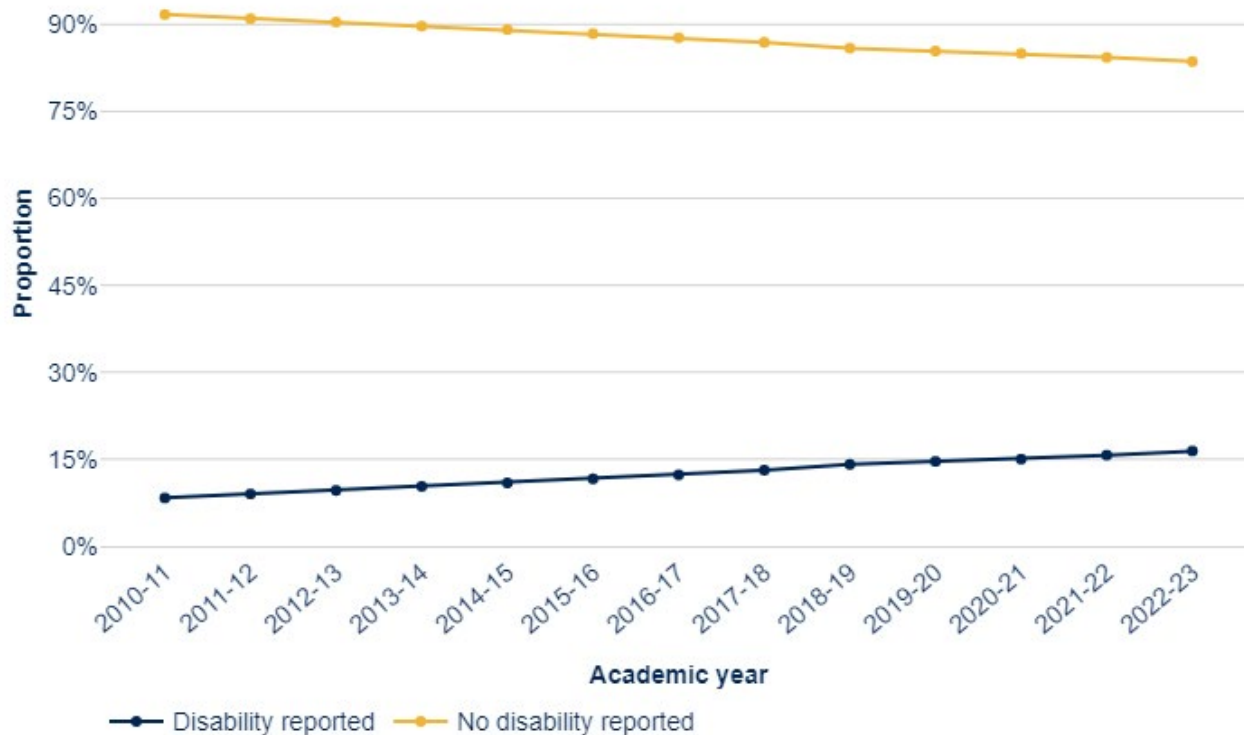
Key findings

Age

Figure 1: Proportion of full-time first degree entrants split by age from 2010-11 to 2022-23

13. Full-time first degree qualifications are most commonly studied by young students (under the age of 21). In 2022-23, 71.9 per cent of entrants to full-time first degrees were young, compared with 71.5 per cent in 2021-22. In the four previous years there had been a small year-on-year decline, with the proportion of young entrants reducing from 77.2 per cent in 2017-18 to 71.4 per cent in 2021-22. Therefore, the latest year of data is the first time the proportion of young entrants has increased since 2017-18.

Disability

Figure 2: Proportion of full-time first degree entrants split by disability reported from 2010-11 to 2022-23

14. In 2022-23, 16.4 per cent of full-time first degree entrants had a reported disability, compared with 15.7 per cent in 2021-22. The proportion of entrants with a reported disability has been steadily increasing since 2010-11 with the latest year's 0.7 percentage point increase continuing this trend and matching the percentage point increase from the previous year.
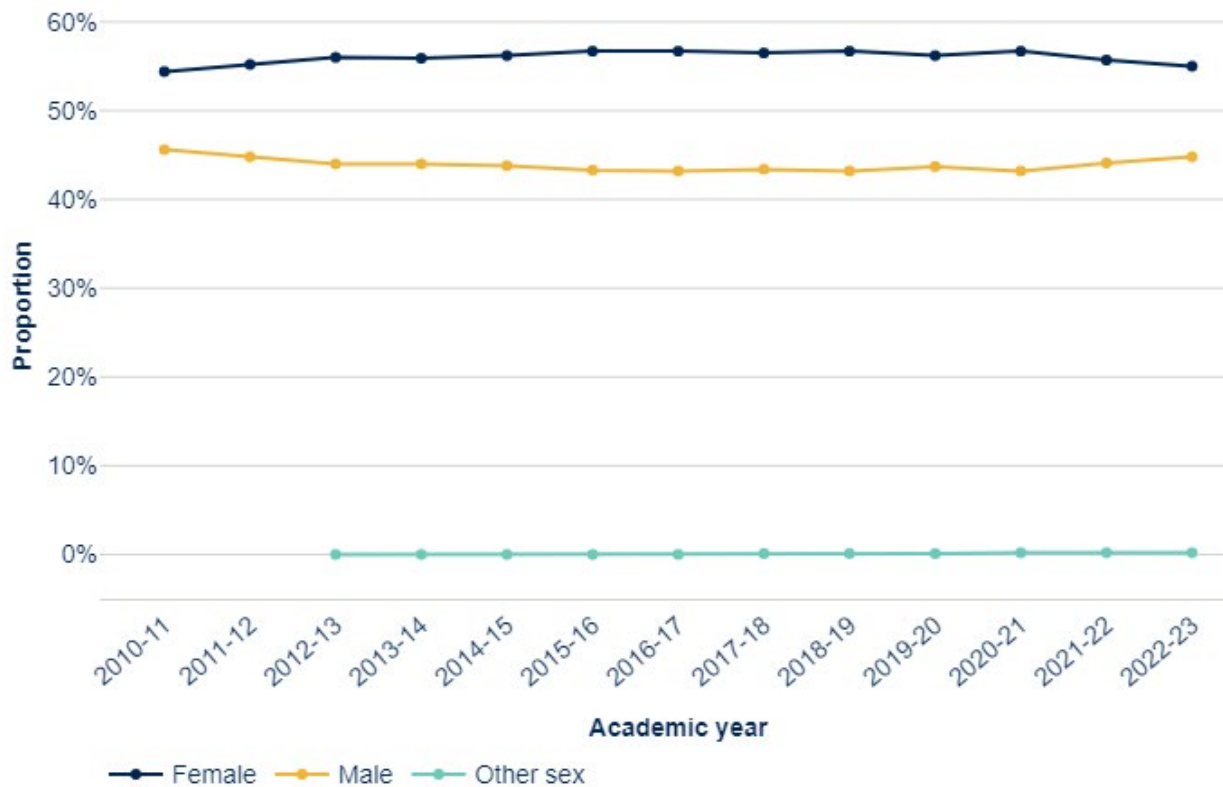
Ethnicity

Figure 3: Proportion of UK-domiciled full-time first degree entrants split by ethnicity from 2010-11 to 2022-23

15. In 2022-23 the proportion of UK-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from a white ethnic background was 64.8 per cent, a decline of 1.1 percentage points from 2021-22. This continues an overall downward trend across the time series which has seen the proportion of entrants from a white ethnic background reduce from a high of 76.0 per cent in 2010-11.

16. In contrast, the proportions of entrants from all other ethnic groups have been steadily increasing across the time series with the highest proportion of entrants from Asian, mixed and other ethnic groups recorded in 2022-23 (15.3, 5.9 and 3.2 per cent respectively). The proportion of entrants from black ethnic groups across the time series peaked in 2019-20 at 11.2 per cent, with a slight decline in the following two years. However, the proportion of entrants from black ethnic groups increased again in 2022-23 going up 0.3 percentage points to 10.8 per cent.
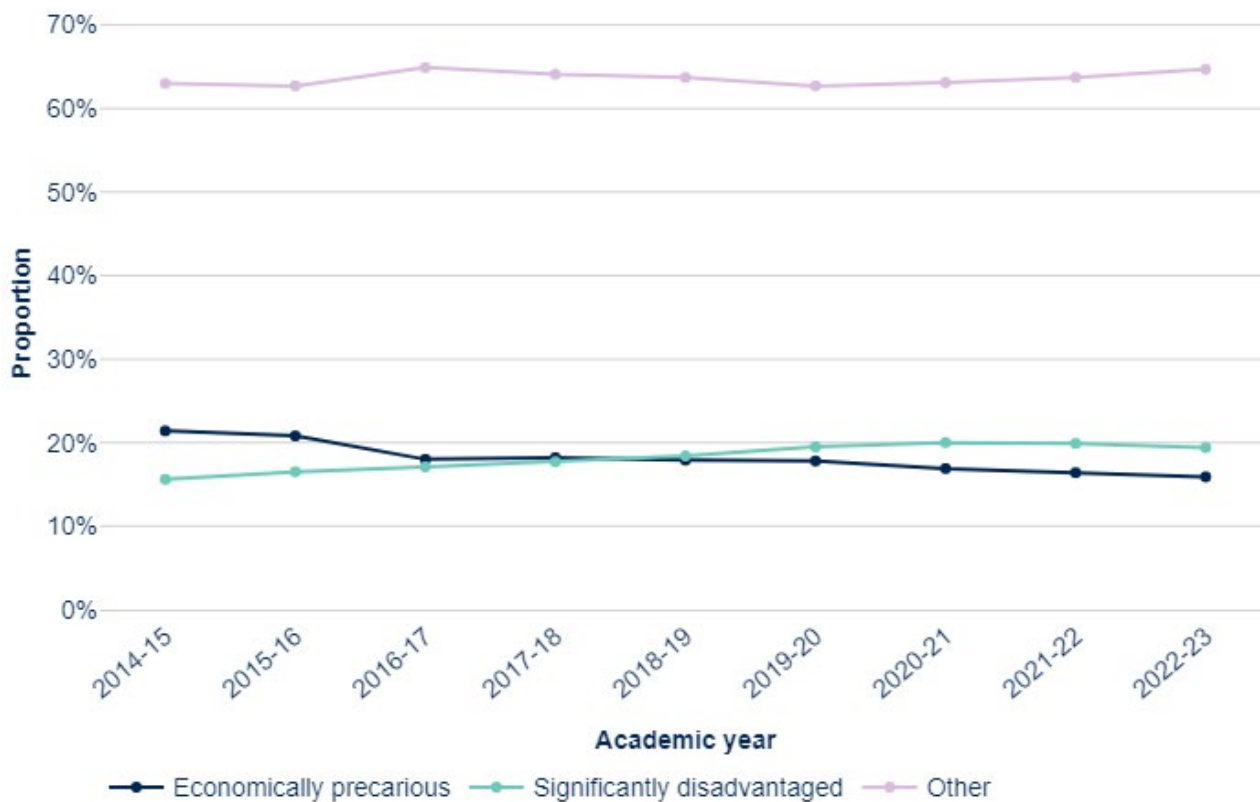
Sex

Figure 4: Proportion of full-time first degree entrants split by sex from 2010-11 to 2022-23

17. In 2022-23, 55.0 per cent of full-time first degree entrants were female, compared with 55.7 per cent in 2021-22. This 0.7 percentage point decline follows a 1.0 percentage point decline last year, prior to this the proportion of female entrants had been relatively stable for six years.

Individual disadvantage

Figure 5: Proportion of full-time first degree UK-domiciled entrants split by level of individual disadvantage from 2014-15 to 2022-23

18. Information about our measure of individual disadvantage is available on the OfS website.[6]

19. In 2022-23, 19.4 per cent of full-time first degree UK-domiciled entrants were significantly disadvantaged, compared with 15.9 per cent that were economically precarious. For both groups, this is a 0.5 percentage point decline from the previous year.

20. For economically precarious entrants this continues the trend of a year-on-year decline in each year since 2014-15 where there was the largest proportion of 21.4 per cent (the only exception was in 2017-18 where there was an increase of 0.2 percentage points).

21. In contrast, the proportion of significantly disadvantaged entrants had been growing year-on-year from a low of 15.6 per cent in 2014-15 to 20.0 per cent in 2020-21. Although there was a small decline (0.1 percentage points) in the proportion of this group last year.

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[6] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/how-we-are-run/key-performance-measures/kpm-5-access-to-higher-education/.

Notes

22. A rise in the proportion of students with a certain characteristic does not always mean the number of students has risen. If the number of students with a given characteristic has fallen, the proportion may still rise if the number of students with different characteristics has fallen by a greater amount.

23. Where students have not provided information, or the data is not applicable or otherwise unknown, these students are generally excluded from the calculation of proportions. A small number of students with unknown age are included in the denominator.