

Student characteristics data: Technical document

**Students at English higher education
providers between 2010-11 and 2023-24**

Reference OfS 2025.65

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Publication date 9 October 2025

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Overview

1. The student characteristics data release provides information about sector-level trends in student outcomes and populations for a wide range of student characteristics for those studying at English higher education providers.
2. This technical document describes the methodology and data coverage used to construct the data in the student characteristics data release. It sits alongside reports which summarise some of the key findings observed in the data, as well as interactive data dashboards, datafiles and webpages. These can all be found on our student characteristics webpage.¹

Dashboards included in this release

3. The student characteristics data release comprises three interactive dashboards containing student characteristics data for those studying at OfS-registered English higher education providers:
 - a. The **student outcomes data dashboard**, which presents rates and gaps in student outcomes – continuation, completion, achieving a first or upper-second class degree (attainment) and progression into managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes (progression) – between groups of students across a range of characteristics.
 - b. The **student populations data dashboard**, which presents counts and proportions of students in higher education across a range of characteristics.
 - c. The **entry qualifications and subject data dashboard**, which presents rates for student outcomes by entry qualifications and broad subject.
4. A user guide for each dashboard is included on the relevant webpage for each dashboard.

How the student characteristics data release relates to other OfS publications

5. This release complements other OfS data publications that include student outcomes and population data, many of which support our regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3.² This release includes a broader set of student characteristics, as well as some characteristics at a more disaggregated level.
6. The student population covered by this data release also represents an extension to the coverage of the OfS access and participation data dashboard, which reports sector-level data for the population of UK-domiciled undergraduate students (as the population most relevant to regulations made under the Higher Education and Research Act in relation to access and participation).³ The range of student characteristics considered here includes a number which

¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/.

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

are not currently included in the access and participation data dashboard. For example, sexual orientation, household residual income and care experience.

How does the student characteristics data release differ from other publications?

There are a number of OfS data publications that include student outcomes and population data. The student characteristics data release includes the broadest set of student characteristics. The other data publications include:

Student outcomes dashboard⁴

The student outcomes data dashboard shows measures of continuation, completion and progression outcomes for individual providers and the sector overall, and is used to inform our regulation of condition B3. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data outcomes dashboard but only includes a subset of the characteristics included here and does not show a time series by characteristic. It includes information about the statistical uncertainty associated with each indicator value.

Sector distributions of student outcomes and experience measures data dashboard⁵

The sector distributions data dashboard shows how measures of continuation, completion and progression outcomes are distributed across individual providers. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data outcomes dashboard, but includes a subset of the characteristics included here.

Access and participation dashboard⁶

This includes outcomes data for the sector and each registered provider. It includes access data, as well as continuation, attainment and progression data. It includes a subset of the characteristics published here and a shorter time series. The sector numbers in the access and participation dashboard are restricted to students registered at OfS-registered providers and so will match the 'registered' view of numbers published here.

Size and shape of provision dashboard⁷

This dashboard includes a breakdown of student numbers for the sector and at particular providers by student and course characteristics. It reports on the same, broad population as the student characteristics data populations dashboard but only includes a subset of the characteristics included here.

⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/sector-distribution-of-student-outcomes-and-experience-measures-data-dashboard/.

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

⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

7. Data from the student characteristics data release was used to inform the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), in particular to identify at a national level which student groups were most likely to be affected by risks to equality of opportunity across the higher education lifecycle.⁸ We expect providers to use the EORR to identify whether any of their prospective or current students are likely to be affected by the risks and which groups may be most at risk. Where a provider is unable to interrogate their own student population due to missing data, uncollected data or small student group sizes, they can use the sector-level student characteristics publications to inform the risks to equality of opportunity for a wide range of student groups.

⁸ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register-eorr/methodology/>.

Methodology and data coverage

This section summarises the methodology used to produce the statistics in this release and describes the framework used to determine population coverage.

Data quality

8. Some higher education providers are required to submit student data to the designated data body (Jisc). For the 2022-23 Student Record, Jisc introduced a new data model and a new data platform known as 'Data Futures',⁹ leading to delays in data collection. Consequently, additional risks for the quality of data were tolerated in some areas of the 2022-23 data. The same mitigations applied to student outcome and experience measures have been implemented for the student characteristics data dashboards. For further details, please refer to the dedicated page on the OfS website.¹⁰
9. As part of changing our technology base, we have refined the implementation of some algorithms, particularly for associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) and Graduate Outcomes (GO) quintiles. This might mean changes in some of our student data, as we have improved the processing of the data.

Treatment of missing or excluded data

10. In calculating outcomes and populations for particular student characteristics, we have treated missing and excluded data in a way that aligns broadly with approaches adopted in OfS student outcomes regulation.
11. There are a number of reasons why information about the personal characteristics of a student may be unavailable, for example:
 - a. The student may have refused to provide information.
 - b. The student could not be linked to a matching record where characteristics are derived via linking between data sources.
 - c. The student may be excluded from the population coverage.
12. The range of population coverage for all student characteristics in this publication is detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.
13. Treatment of missing or excluded data differs between calculations of student characteristics outcomes and student characteristics populations statistics:
 - a. In the **student characteristics outcomes** data, the outcome measures for students with missing or excluded data are not reported. If students with a particular attribute were more

⁹ See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/data-futures>

¹⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-and-experience-measures/data-quality/.

likely to refuse information, or were more likely to be excluded from the population coverage, then this could have had an impact on the reported rates.

- b. In the **student characteristics populations** data, we show the counts of students who are either missing or excluded from the data. Where data is missing due to the student refusing to provide information, we have grouped students into a single 'No response' category. Where data is excluded from the population coverage or could not be linked to a matching record, we have grouped students into a 'Not applicable' category. Both categories are excluded from the calculation of proportions, except for age (broad and detailed), where a small number of students with unknown age are included in the denominator.

Subject-level data

- 14. When statistics are split by subject, students studying more than one subject are partially counted for each subject. For instance, a student studying half English and half history would have been counted as 0.5 in each subject.¹¹

Rounding and suppression

- 15. To align with approaches used in other OfS regulation data dashboards, the data in this publication is subject to rounding and suppression. Our approach is detailed in this section.
- 16. In the **student outcomes** data (including the entry qualifications and subject data dashboard), our approach to rounding and suppression is broadly aligned with that adopted by the provider-level student outcomes data dashboard¹² (used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3) and access and participation data dashboard.¹³ The following rounding is applied:
 - a. Headcounts such as numerators and denominators are rounded to the nearest 10.
 - b. Percentages such as rates and gaps are rounded to the nearest 0.1.
- 17. Suppression is also applied for data quality and protection reasons. The reason for data suppression is indicated by suppression codes, applied in the following hierarchical order:
 - a. [none] – there are two or fewer students in the population. Rows with this suppression code are removed from the dataset entirely, so they cannot be distinguished from rows containing genuinely no students.
 - b. [low] – there are fewer than 23 students in the population. All statistics are suppressed when this code applies.

¹¹ See 'What are the differences between a count of students, full-person equivalent (FPE) and full-time equivalent (FTE)?' at www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions.

¹² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/.

¹³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

- c. [DP] – the data has been suppressed for data protection reasons. All statistics are suppressed when this code applies.
 - d. [RR] – the response rate was too low (i.e. lower than 30 per cent for the progression measure). Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.
 - e. [DPL] – the numerator was two or fewer. Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.
 - f. [DPH] – the numerator was within two of the denominator. Rates and gaps are suppressed when this code applies but denominators and response rates are shown.
18. In the **student populations** data, our approach is similar to above but in order to reflect the approach adopted in the 'Size and shape of provision' data dashboard, the [low] suppression code is not used.¹⁴ Since the statistics in this dashboard do not rely on survey data in the same way as the student outcomes statistics do, the [RR] suppression code is also not used. Proportions are rounded to the nearest 0.1.

Population coverage

19. Table 1 and Table 2 provide a summary of population coverage of each student characteristic.
20. The data included in this release was derived from the following sources:
- a. The Department for Education's individualised learner record (ILR).¹⁵
 - b. The Student Return, collected by the designated data body (DDB).¹⁶
 - c. The Student Alternative (SA) record, collected by the designated data body (DDB).¹⁷
 - d. The Student Loans Company (SLC) data.¹⁸
 - e. The National Pupil Database (NPD) provided by the Department for Education.¹⁹
 - f. Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI) and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles are produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)²⁰ and are merged with the ILR and DDB records.

¹⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/.

¹⁵ See www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr.

¹⁶ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21051.

¹⁷ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21054.

¹⁸ See www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company.

¹⁹ The DfE does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD data by third parties.

²⁰ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

Summary of population and year coverage

Table 1: Summary of population coverage of each student characteristic in the student characteristics data²¹

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	England	UG	Under 21 on entry and found in the NPD KS4 data
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) continuation quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Entrants only. Separate measures for full-time and part-time.
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) completion quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Entrants only. Separate measures for full-time and part-time.
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) progression quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Qualifiers only. Separate measures for full-time and part-time.
Age* (broad and detailed)	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Adult HE quintile	DDB and ILR	UK	All	Age not unknown and aged 21 or over on entry
Broad subject of study	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Care experience	DDB	UK	UG	-
Disability* (broad and type)	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Entry qualifications	DDB, ILR and NPD	UK	UG	-

²¹ The statistics in this publication cover both protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 alongside a broader range of other characteristics. For further information on the protected characteristics, see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/how-we-are-run/equality-and-diversity/what-does-the-law-say/>.

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Estrangement	SLC	England, Wales, Northern Ireland,	UG	Full-time, under 25 in year
Ethnicity* (5 groups, and 15 groups)	DDB and ILR	UK	All	-
Free school meals eligibility	NPD	All (UK data suppressed for data protection reasons)	UG	Under 21 on entry and found in the NPD KS4 data in 2009-10 or later
Geography of employment quintiles	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	All	In scope of progression indicators population
Household Residual Income (HRI) (shown separately for financially dependent and financially independent students)	SLC	England, Wales, Northern Ireland	UG	Full-time
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)	MHCLG, DDB and ILR	England	All	-
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	MHCLG, DDB and ILR	England	All	-
Individual disadvantage	DDB, ILR and NPD	England	UG	Only full-time
Parental higher education	DDB	All (UK from 2020-21)	All (UG from 2020-21)	-
Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4)	OfS, DDB and ILR	UK	UG	Under 21 on entry
Religion or belief*	DDB	All	All	-
Service child status	NPD	UK	UG	Under 21 on entry and found in the NPD KS4 data in 2008-09 or later

Characteristic	Data source(s)	Domicile	Level of study	Other
Sex*	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Sexual orientation*	DDB	All	All	-
Socioeconomic background	DDB	UK	UG	Full-time
Study location	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Subcontracted students	DDB and ILR	All	All	-
Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) MSOA	OfS, DDB and ILR	England	UG	Under 21 on entry

Note: UG = Undergraduate students only. Other acronyms are defined in the paragraph above.

*This relates to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Table 2: Summary of years of available data for each student characteristic and lifecycle stage in the student characteristics data

Characteristic	Population data available from	Continuation data available from	Completion data available from	Attainment data available from	Progression data available from
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintile	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	NA	NA	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) continuation quintile	2015-16 full-time, 2014-15 part-time	2015-16 (Full-time) 2014-15 (Part-time)	NA	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) completion quintile	2012-13 full-time, 2010-11 part-time	NA	2012-13 (Full-time) 2010-11 (Part-time)	NA	NA
Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) progression quintile	2017-18 qualifiers	NA	NA	NA	2017-18
Age* (broad and detailed)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Adult HE quintile	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Broad subject of study	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Care experience	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Disability* (broad and type)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Entry qualifications	NA	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Estrangement	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Ethnicity* (5 groups, and 15 groups)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18

Characteristic	Population data available from	Continuation data available from	Completion data available from	Attainment data available from	Progression data available from
Free school meals eligibility	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Geography of employment quintile	2017-18 qualifiers	NA	NA	NA	2017-18
Household Residual Income (HRI) (shown separately for financially dependent and financially independent students)	2011-12 entrants, 2013-14 qualifiers, 2013-14 all students	2011-12	2011-12	2013-14	2017-18
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Individual disadvantage	2014-15 entrants, 2016-17 qualifiers, 2016-17 all students	2014-15	2014-15	2016-17	2017-18
Parental higher education	2012-13	2012-13	2012-13	2012-13	2017-18
Participation of local areas (POLAR4)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Religion or belief*	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18	2017-18
Service child	2013-14 entrants, 2015-16 qualifiers, 2015-16 all students	2013-14	2013-14	2015-16	2017-18
Sex*	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Sexual orientation*	2015-16	2015-16	2015-16	2015-16	2017-18

Characteristic	Population data available from	Continuation data available from	Completion data available from	Attainment data available from	Progression data available from
Socioeconomic background	2015-16 entrants, 2017-18 qualifiers, 2017-18 all students	2015-16	2015-16	2017-18	2017-18
Study location	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Subcontracted students	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18
Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA)	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2010-11	2017-18

*This relates to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Populations and definitions

21. This section describes the various populations and definitions used in these statistics.

Throughout this section, definitions of variables with the prefix 'IP' can be found in the most recent OfS 'Technical algorithms for student outcome and experience measures' document.²² You can find out more about the rates used in the OfS 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.²³

Populations

Student characteristics outcomes dashboard

22. The student characteristics outcomes dashboard presents outcomes data separately for two different student populations, reflecting approaches used in OfS student outcomes and access and participation regulation:

- a. The **taught or registered** population: students who are either taught or registered (or both) by an OfS-registered provider. This aligns with populations used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3.²⁴
- b. The **registered** population: students who are registered by an OfS-registered provider. This aligns with populations used to support the regulation of access and participation.²⁵

23. For each lifecycle stage there are further restrictions to the population. These are detailed in the 'Rebuilding student outcome and experience measures from individualised files' section of the 2025 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures.²⁶ All definitions align with those agreed on following the 'Consultation on constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation'.²⁷

Student characteristics populations dashboard

24. To align with contextual data used to support the regulation of student outcomes through registration condition B3 (presented in the 'Size and shape of provision dashboard'), students are included if they are either **registered or taught** at an OfS registered provider, and in the

²² See 'Technical algorithms' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

²³ See 'Description of student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

²⁴ See footnote 28.

²⁵ See footnote 28.

²⁶ See '2025 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures', found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/documentation/.

²⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/.

relevant contextual population.²⁸ These populations are detailed in the 'Rebuild instructions: data about the size and shape of higher education provision' section of the 2025 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures.²⁹

25. Also, in alignment with contextual data used in regulation, the student populations data is additionally split into populations of **entrants**, **qualifiers** and **all students**. The definitions of these populations are detailed in the 'Rebuild instructions: data about the size and shape of higher education provision' section of the 2025 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures.³⁰

Student characteristics entry qualification and subject dashboard

26. Students are included if they are **registered** by an OfS-registered provider, with additional restrictions specific to each lifecycle stage. This population aligns the registered population in the student characteristics outcomes dashboard and with populations used to support the regulation of access and participation.

Lifecycle stage

27. This publication reports on differences in outcomes in higher education for certain groups of students. This section details how these outcomes are defined. All definitions are in alignment with definitions used in OfS student outcomes and access and participation regulation.³¹

Continuation rate

28. Continuation outcomes are measured by identifying a cohort of entrants to higher education qualifications at the provider and following them through the early stages of their course to track how many continue in active study, or qualify, in subsequent years.
29. The continuation rate is the proportion of students that were observed to be continuing in the study of a higher education qualification (or have gained a qualification) one year and 15 days after they started their course (two years and 15 days for part-time students).

Completion rate

30. Completion outcomes are measured by identifying a cohort of entrants to higher education qualifications at the provider and following them through their course to track how many of them complete their studies or are still active in their studies.
31. The completion rate is the proportion of students that were observed to have gained a higher education qualification (or were continuing in the study of a qualification) four years and 15 days after they started their course (six years and 15 days for part-time students).

²⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/.

²⁹ See '2024 rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcome-and-experience-measures/documentation/.

³⁰ See footnote 34.

³¹ See 'Description of student outcome and experience measures' found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/.

Attainment rate

32. Attainment rates express the number of qualifiers from Level 6+ undergraduate degrees who were awarded 'first' or 'upper second' (2:1) degree classifications as a percentage of all those qualifiers from Level 6+ undergraduate degrees who were awarded classified degrees.

Progression rate

33. Progression measures are constructed from data reported through the Graduate Outcomes survey.

34. The progression rate is the proportion of qualifiers that identify managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes among the activities that they were undertaking when responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey 15 months after they left higher education.

Mode of study

35. Mode of study is defined by IPSTARTMODE for all students. Modes of study included are:

- full-time
- part-time
- apprenticeship.

Level of study

36. The level of study that can be examined varies by mode of study, as outlined below:

- a. Groupings available for full-time and part-time mode of study:
 - i. All undergraduate
 - ii. First degree
 - iii. Undergraduate with postgraduate components
 - iv. Other undergraduate
 - v. All postgraduate
 - vi. Postgraduate research
 - vii. Postgraduate taught masters
 - viii. PGCE
 - ix. Other postgraduate.
- b. Groupings available for apprenticeship mode of study:
 - i. All undergraduate

- ii. All postgraduate.

37. These levels of study are defined by IPLEVEL.

38. Note that only students aiming for a full qualification are included. This means that those studying only for credits are not in scope.

Domicile

39. As well as reporting for all domiciles combined, UK domiciled and non-UK domiciled students are reported separately. Data on apprenticeships for non-UK domiciled students has been removed from the publication due to small numbers, resulting in much of the data being suppressed.

Subject of study

40. The student population data presents populations of students split by subject. Level 1 (CAH1) codes are used for splits by 'Subject of study (detailed)', which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. Table 3 shows how these subject groupings relate to one another.

Table 3: Subject groups

Subject of study (broad)	Subject of study (detailed) – CAH1 groups
Business and management	Business and management (CAH17)
Design, creative and performing arts	Design, and creative and performing arts (CAH25)
Education and teaching	Education and teaching (CAH22)
Engineering, technology and computing	Engineering and technology (CAH10) Computing (CAH11)
Humanities and languages	Language and area studies (CAH19) Historical, philosophical and religious studies (CAH20) Combined and general studies (CAH23) Media, journalism and communications (CAH24)
Law and social sciences	Social sciences (CAH15) Law (CAH16)
Medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences	Medicine and dentistry (CAH01) Veterinary sciences (CAH05)
Natural and built environment	Agriculture, food and related studies (CAH06) Architecture, building and planning (CAH13) Geography, earth and environmental studies (CAH26)
Natural and mathematical sciences	Biological and sport sciences (CAH03) Physical sciences (CAH07) Mathematical sciences (CAH09)
Nursing, allied health and psychology	Subjects allied to medicine (CAH02) Psychology (CAH04)

41. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), was introduced in the 2019-20 academic year.³² This replaced the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) used in previous years. In this analysis, subject codes (both JACS and HECoS) are mapped to Version 1.3 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH).³³
42. Level 2 categorisation (CAH2) codes are used, which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. See IPSBJ_BROAD.
43. The change from JACS to HECoS causes some additional variation in the distribution of subjects between 2018-19 and 2019-20 on top of the usual year-on-year variation, which can also be due to changes in the providers reporting to HESA. Therefore, this should be taken into consideration when drawing comparisons between these two academic years.

Student characteristics

The following section describes the definitions used to construct the student characteristics in this publication. The IP fields referenced in this section are defined in the technical algorithms for student outcomes and experience measures.³⁴

Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) quintile

44. Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) is a set of measures that seeks a better understanding of how outcomes vary for groups of students with different sets of characteristics (for example, ethnicity, sex and background).³⁵ The student characteristics selected when constructing these measures should not have an impact on students' outcomes, but the evidence shows that they do.
45. This publication includes ABCS measures for continuation, completion and progression. They are reported in both the student outcomes and student populations. Coverage is restricted to UK-domiciled undergraduates.
46. For consistency with other dashboards used in OfS regulation, we have only reported ABCS quintiles for the cohort to which they are most relevant. For example, in the student populations dashboard, we report ABCS continuation and completion quintiles for entrants only, and ABCS progression quintiles for qualifiers only.
47. Additionally, in the student populations dashboard, we report ABCS access quintiles for all cohorts of students.

³² See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos.

³³ See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah.

³⁴ www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/

³⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/associations-between-characteristics-of-students/about-the-abcs-data/.

Age (broad and detailed)³⁶

48. Age (both broad and detailed) refers to the age of the student on 31 August in the year they commence their studies (see IPSTARTAGEBAND). For the populations data only, a small number of students with unknown age are included in the denominator for the calculation of proportions.

Adult higher education (HE) quintile

49. Adult higher education quintiles are an area-based measure reflecting the proportion of adults who held a higher education qualification at the point of the 2011 census.³⁷ It is reported here for UK-domiciled students aged 21 or over on entry, and is considered most relevant to students studying at postgraduate levels of study. See IPADULTHEQ.

Broad subject of study

50. A new subject coding system, the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), was introduced in the 2019-20 academic year.³⁸ This replaced the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) used in previous years. In this analysis, subject codes (both JACS and HECoS) are mapped to Version 1.3 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH).³⁹

51. Level 2 categorisation (CAH2) codes are used, which are then further aggregated into 10 groups for 'Subject of study (broad)'. These groups are listed in Table 3. See IPSBJ_BROAD.

52. The change from JACS to HECoS causes some additional variation in the distribution of subjects between 2018-19 and 2019-20 on top of the usual year-on-year variation, which can also be due to changes in the providers reporting to HESA. Therefore, this should be taken into consideration when drawing comparisons between these two academic years.

Care experience

53. Data on care experience is collected for entrants on the DDB Student Record.⁴⁰ See IPCARELEAVER.

54. For English providers, care experience can be recorded as one of two categories. First, data is recorded as part of the UCAS application via student self-disclosure. Providers are then able to verify care status and, where they confirm the student was in care, this is recorded as a different category that takes precedence over the UCAS category. Providers can choose to what extent they verify care status and they may use different verification criteria. For the purposes of this analysis these two categories are combined into one called 'care experience'.

55. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to care experience data are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

³⁶ Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

³⁷ For more information about adult higher education quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/.

³⁸ See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah.

³⁹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah.

⁴⁰ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/careleaver.

Disability⁴¹

56. Disability (both broad and detailed) is self-reported by students at the point of starting their course. See IPDISABLETYPE.

Entry qualifications

57. This field categorises students, where the student has A-levels, Scottish Highers, Scottish Advanced Highers, International Baccalaureate or BTECs on entry, into groups according to the highest grades for these qualification types. See IPGRADECOMB.

58. This characteristic is relevant only to the 'Entry qualifications and subject' data dashboard.

Estrangement

59. Student estrangement is recorded by the SLC on a case-by-case basis. To be recorded as estranged, a student must be irreconcilably estranged from their living biological or adoptive parents for a considerable period of time (usually at least 12 months). This being the case, there will be students who are estranged but are not recorded as such, because they do not have an SLC record or have chosen not to declare their estrangement to the SLC. There may also be students who consider themselves to be estranged from their parents but do not fulfil the requirements of the SLC to be recorded as estranged.

60. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to student estrangement data are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Ethnicity⁴²

61. Ethnicity information is provided by the student on the basis of their own self-assessment. See IPETHNICDETAIL. For this release, we report ethnicity in two different groupings: five groups and fifteen groups.

62. Ethnicity information is restricted to UK domiciled students, reflecting coverage in the designated data body (DDB) Student Return.⁴³

Free school meals eligibility

63. A student's eligibility for free school meals (FSM) can be used as an individual measure of disadvantage. To generate information on students' FSM eligibility, we have linked DDB Student, DDB Student Alternative and ILR data with schools' NPD data using person-based linking.⁴⁴ We link to NPD school census data at key stage 4, from 2009-10 onwards. This has information on pupils attending maintained schools in England. From spring 2013-14, this includes local authority maintained Pupil Referral Units and alternative provision academies, including alternative provision free schools. Students are included in the FSM data if they were under 21 on commencement of their studies and were successfully linked to records from the NPD.

⁴¹ Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁴² Ethnicity is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁴³ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/ethnic.

⁴⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/supplying-data/approach-to-linking-data/.

64. The DfE does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD data by third parties.
65. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to free school meals data are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Geography of employment quintile

66. Geography of employment quintiles are an area-based measure based on the proportion of graduates in highly skilled jobs.⁴⁵ The coverage is restricted to graduates who responded to the Graduate Outcomes survey. See IPGOQUINTILE.

Household Residual Income (HRI)

67. Household Residual Income (HRI) is a measure of household income, based on gross income after accounting for certain costs such as dependants and pensions (but before tax and national insurance). It is assessed by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and is used to determine a student's access to income-assessed student finance.
68. For students who are financially dependent on parent(s)/guardian(s), household residual income is based on parental income. For students who are financially independent, it is based on their own income, and their partner's if they have one. This publication includes HRI for both categories of students.
69. Further details of the collection of HRI are published by the SLC.⁴⁶
70. There are a number of caveats that are important to consider when considering proportions and outcomes of students in particular household income groups. In particular:
- a. Household Residual Income (HRI) is only available for students who have applied for income-dependent financial support. It is not a compulsory part of the student loan application. In particular, if a student or their parents are aware that their HRI is above a level which would mean they were not entitled to an income-assessed loan, or if they have other evidence of low income which means submitting income is not necessary, then their financial information will not be recorded. This could mean the data presented in this report is not representative of the wider student population.
 - b. For some courses, such as nursing prior to 2017-18, a student may have an SLC record but receive finance that is not assigned using HRI. These students would not have been required to provide this information.
 - c. Income-dependent maintenance loans were only introduced for part-time students from 1 August 2018 onwards.⁴⁷ This means that, before this point, very few part-time students reported any HRI information. We are therefore waiting for a consistent time series to be established before reporting HRI data for part-time students. In addition, because part-time

⁴⁵ For more information about geography of employment quintiles, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/a-geography-of-employment/.

⁴⁶ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-finance-how-youre-assessed-and-paid/student-finance-how-youre-assessed-and-paid-2023-to-2024.

⁴⁷ See www.gov.uk/student-finance/parttime-students.

distance learners are only eligible for a maintenance loan if they are studying long distance because of a disability, it may be that the data will still not be a fair reflection of the profile of part-time students, even once a time series is well established.

- d. The HRI data in this release applies to students domiciled in England, Wales and Northern Ireland only. Students domiciled in Scotland are not included because they do not submit their financial information to the SLC as part of their student support applications.
- e. The HRI groupings presented in this publication are used because they broadly reflect the values used by the SLC for assigning income-assessed components of the maintenance loan. The boundaries have not changed in line with inflation.

71. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to household residual income information are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

72. This field shows the 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quintile of a student for students with a home postcode in England.⁴⁸ The index is based on all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families. It is produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Values are assigned as 1 to 5, with 1 being the quintile of highest deprivation. See IPIDACI.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

73. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 is a measure of deprivation for small areas within England. It is calculated at lower-layer super output area (LSOA) level and uses a number of different measures to determine levels of deprivation. It is produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).⁴⁹ Values are assigned 1 to 5, with 1 being the quintile of highest deprivation. See IPIMDNATION.

Individual disadvantage

74. Individual disadvantage is a measure of young (under 21), full-time undergraduate students by differing levels of individual disadvantage. It is based on KPM 5 data that combines information about a student's: school type, free school meals eligibility, dependency status and household residual income.⁵⁰ KPM 5 disaggregates individual students into one of three groups: significantly disadvantaged, economically precarious, or other.

Parental higher education

75. Parental higher education data is collected as part of the DDB Student Return.⁵¹ It indicates whether one or more of the student's parents has a higher education qualification. On the DDB Student Return this data is primarily collected as part of UCAS applications. Providers are also expected to collect this information for eligible students who did not use UCAS. Previous

⁴⁸ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

⁴⁹ See www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

⁵⁰ For more information about the methodology used to calculate our measure of individual disadvantage used in KPM 5, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/how-we-are-run/key-performance-measures/kpm-5-access-to-higher-education/.

⁵¹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/pared.

publications have restricted parental higher education data to students who could be matched to their UCAS application, but this does not appear to have a substantial impact on data quality, so this restriction is no longer applied. See IPPARED.

76. As a result of changes to data collection requirements, the reporting of parental higher education data for most postgraduate students and non-UK domiciled students dropped considerably in 2020-21. Because of this change, from 2020-21 onwards, parental higher education data is only provided in this release for UK-domiciled undergraduate students.
77. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to parental higher education information are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Participation of local areas (POLAR4)

78. The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of young people who participate in higher education.⁵² It looks at how likely young people are to participate in higher education across the UK and shows how this varies by area.
79. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation, while quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation. POLAR4 is calculated using data on students who begun their studies between 2009-10 and 2013-14. See IPPOLAR4.

Religion or belief⁵³

80. Religion or belief is collected on the DDB Student Return⁵⁴ and DDB Student Alternative (SA) Record⁵⁵ only. It records the religion or belief of the student, on the basis of their own self-assessment. The field is collected for all students, having become compulsory in 2017-18.
81. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to religion or belief data are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Service child status

82. The children of military services personnel (service child) measure is based on the population of students matched to the Department for Education's National Pupil Database (NPD).⁵⁶ It indicates if a pupil had parent(s) who were serving in regular military units (including pupils with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full-time reserve service) of any forces and exercising parental care and responsibility, when the child was in key stage 4.

⁵² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/.

⁵³ Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁵⁴ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/reblf.

⁵⁵ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20054/a/reblf.

⁵⁶ See find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/en/concepts/d8f6c965-f1ec-4e55-b226-41ffe06f8646.

83. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to service child data derived from this data source are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Sex⁵⁷

84. Sex is reported by the student as 'Male' and 'Female'. For data returned to the DDB, the category "other" is not a valid category in the collection for UK-domiciled students, therefore data recorded against this code is categorised as a non-response or is not reported. For non-UK students the numbers of students reporting sex as "other" is very small and so the numbers are suppressed for data protection reasons. See IPSEX.

Sexual orientation⁵⁸

85. Sexual orientation information is collected on the Student Return to the designated data body (DDB) Student Return⁵⁹ and DDB Student Alternative Record⁶⁰ only. It records the sexual orientation of the student, on the basis of their own self-assessment. The field is collected for all students, having become compulsory in 2019-20. See IPSEXORT.

86. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to sexual orientation information derived from these data sources are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Socioeconomic background

87. National Statistics socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC) data is collected on the DDB Student Return.⁶¹ NS-SEC data is also available on the ILR; however, the quality of this data was assessed against the OfS data quality framework and deemed to be of insufficient quality.⁶² See IPSEC.

88. Collection of socioeconomic background data by the DDB is limited to UK-domiciled undergraduates who entered their higher education instance via a UCAS scheme. Since there are few young part-time students entering higher education through UCAS, socioeconomic background data is reported for full-time students only.

89. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to socioeconomic background information using data derived from this source are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Study location

90. Study location information is derived from DDB and ILR data. It is used to determine whether a student was a distance learner, or if they were not, whether they were local to their provider prior to entry. See IPDL and IPSTUDYLOCTYPE.

⁵⁷ Sex is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁵⁸ Sexual orientation is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

⁵⁹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/sexort.

⁶⁰ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20054/a/sexort.

⁶¹ See www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/a/sec.

⁶² See Annex F of www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/differences-in-student-outcomes-further-characteristics/.

Subcontracted students

91. Subcontracted students information is derived from DDB and ILR data. It is used to determine whether a student is studying at a provider via a subcontractual arrangement based on whether the UKPRN of the registering provider is the same as the UKPRN of the teaching provider.

Tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA)

92. TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) is an area-based measure that uses tracking of state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to calculate young participation.⁶³
93. TUNDRA classifies local areas across England into five equal groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation.
94. TUNDRA is a different measure to POLAR4 because it focuses on the participation rate of state-funded mainstream school pupils and only applies to England. TUNDRA quintiles are assigned according to home postcodes, for which coverage exceeds 99 per cent of young English undergraduates.
95. Previous student characteristics publications reported multiple definitions of TUNDRA (Tracking Under-representation by Area) quintiles were presented, based on both Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and Middle-layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs), as well as a version of the quintiles that excluded students not from state-funded mainstream schools.⁶⁴ In this release, we have included only the TUNDRA quintiles based on Middle-layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) that includes all young English undergraduates. This is in order to align with data used in OfS student outcomes regulation.
96. Population and year coverage restrictions applied to TUNDRA quintile data are detailed in Table 1 and Table 2.

⁶³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/.

⁶⁴ Previous student characteristics publications are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-characteristics-data-student-outcomes/.



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