

Student characteristics data: student populations – key findings

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

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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 that 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.

¹ See [Student characteristics data: Population data dashboard - Office for Students](#)

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

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 status

Sex*

Sexual orientation*

Socioeconomic background

² For further information on the protected characteristics, see [What does the law say? - Office for Students](#)

Sub-contractual 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 protected characteristics and are used in our core regulatory work.
6. You can find all the data on our interactive student populations data dashboard with splits by population, domicile, level of study and mode of study or subject of study.³

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

COVID-19 pandemic impact

7. The sector-level trends reported in the dashboards and key findings include data up to the 2023-24 academic year. Changes in these statistics may be influenced by the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly given that the UK entered three national lockdowns throughout the period March 2020 to July 2021.⁴ For example:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. The pandemic could have also affected rates across all of the life cycle stages in these years. For example economic effects, changes to the assessment system and changes in learning methods pre-university during the pandemic.
8. However, users should not automatically interpret changes seen in the data since 2019-20 to have 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.

³ The student populations data dashboard is available at [Student characteristics data: Population data dashboard - Office for Students](#)

⁴ For more information, see www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/timeline-coronavirus-lockdown-december-2021.pdf

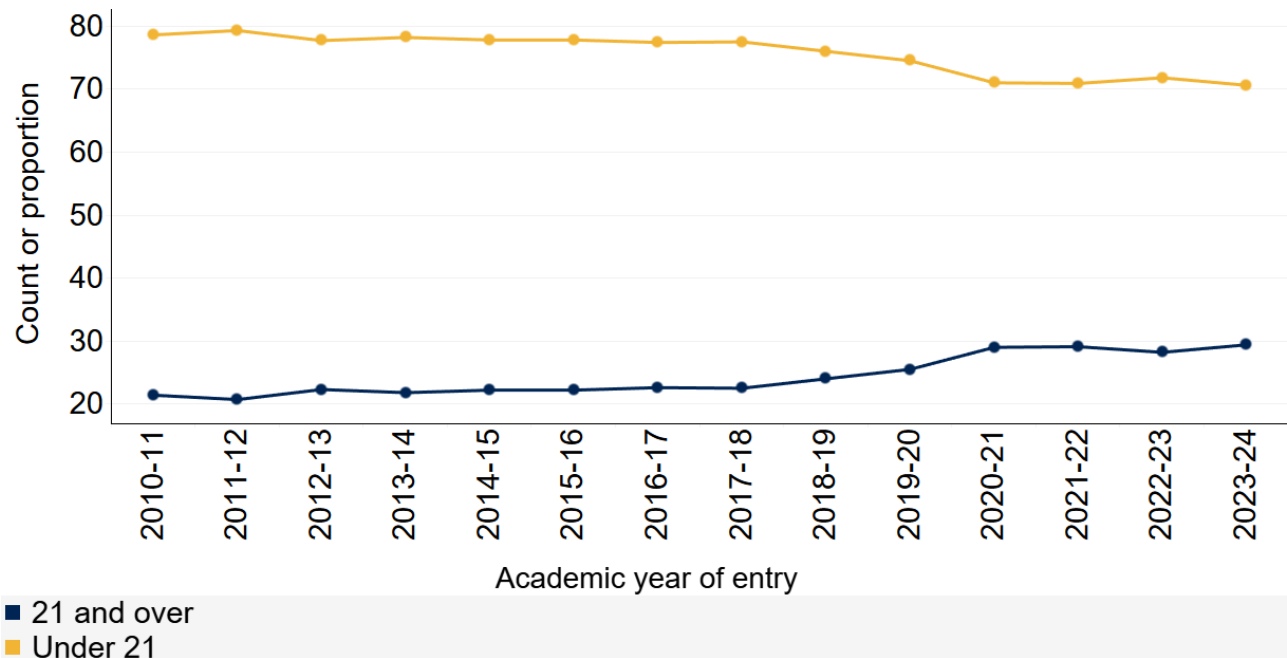
⁵ See [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2020/21 - Qualifications achieved | HESA](#)

9. The impact of these changes will need to be considered when making comparisons across pandemic-affected years.

Key findings

Age

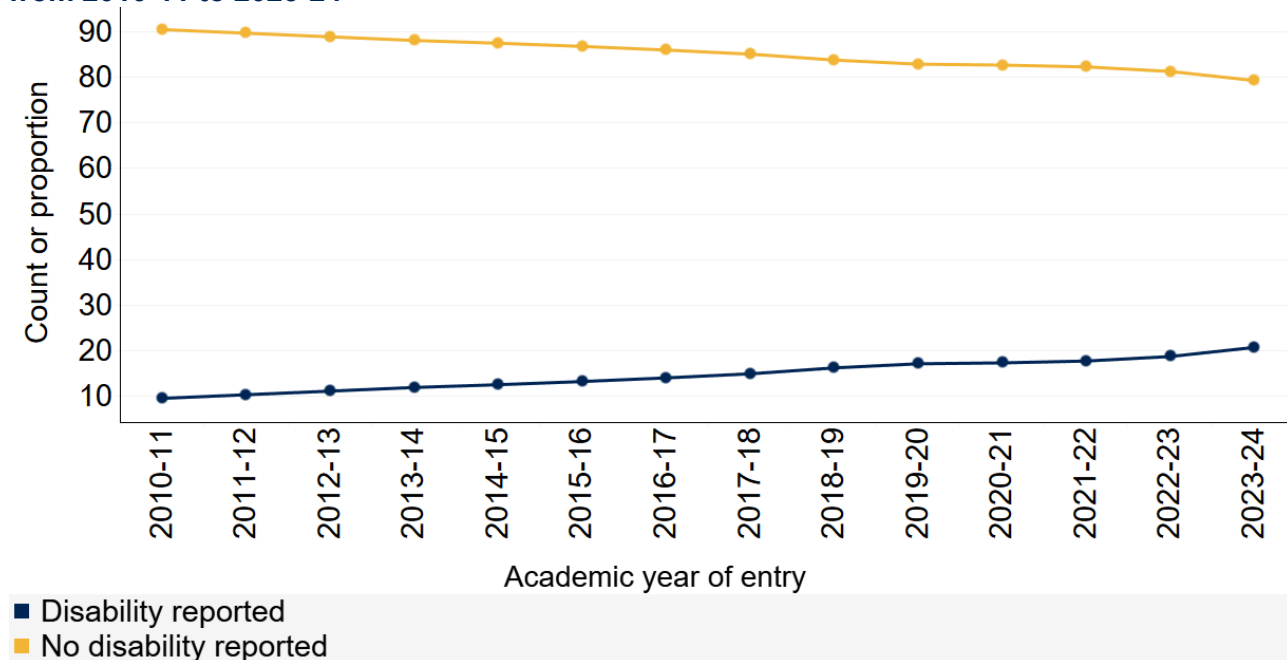
Figure 1: Proportion of UK-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants by age from 2010-11 to 2023-24



10. Full-time first-degree qualifications are most commonly studied by young students (under the age of 21). In 2023-24, 70.6 per cent of entrants to full-time first degrees were young, compared with 71.8 per cent in 2022-23. Although there was increase in the proportion of young students between 2021-22 and 2022-23, this decline between 2022-23 and 2023-24 is a return to the downward trend that has been present since 2017-18.

Disability

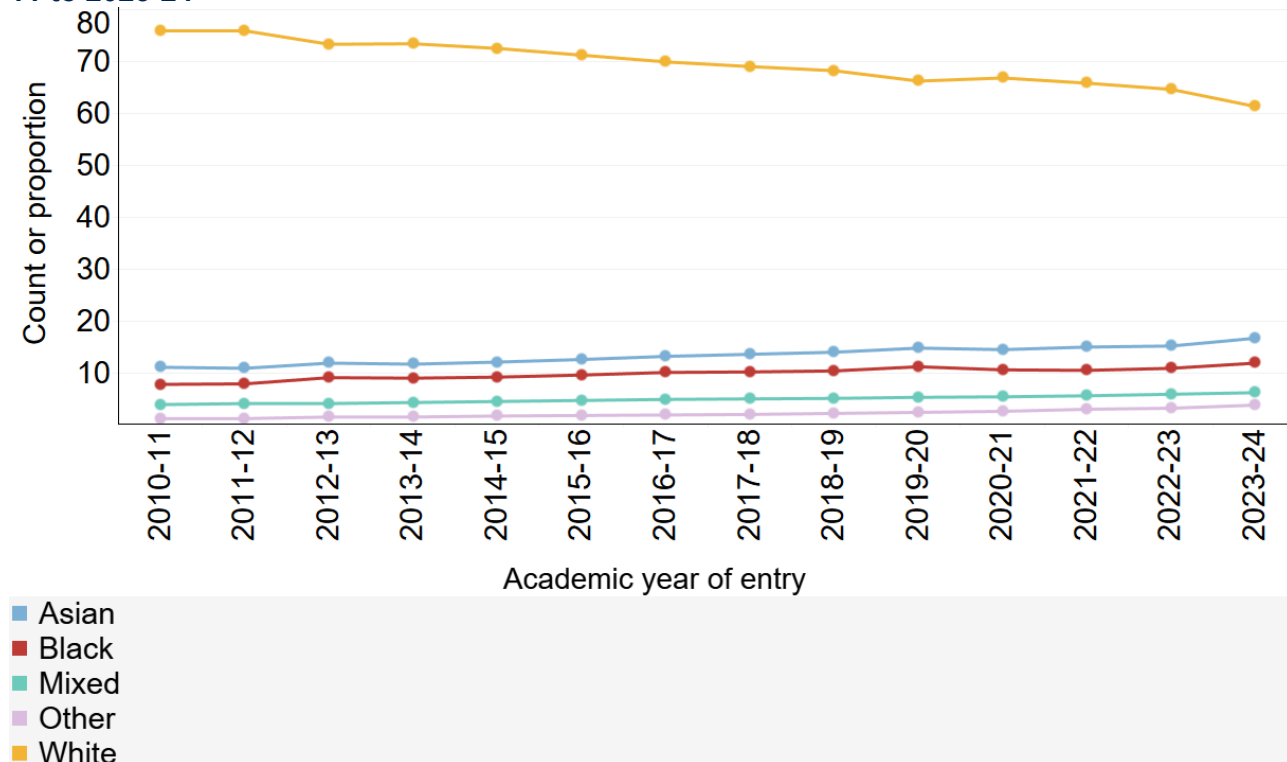
Figure 2: Proportion of UK-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants by disability reported from 2010-11 to 2023-24



11. In 2023-24, 20.7 per cent of full-time first-degree entrants had a reported disability, compared with 18.7 per cent in 2022-23. The proportion of disabled entrants has been steadily increasing since 2010-11 with the latest year's 2.0 percentage point increase being the largest year to year increase in the time series.

Ethnicity

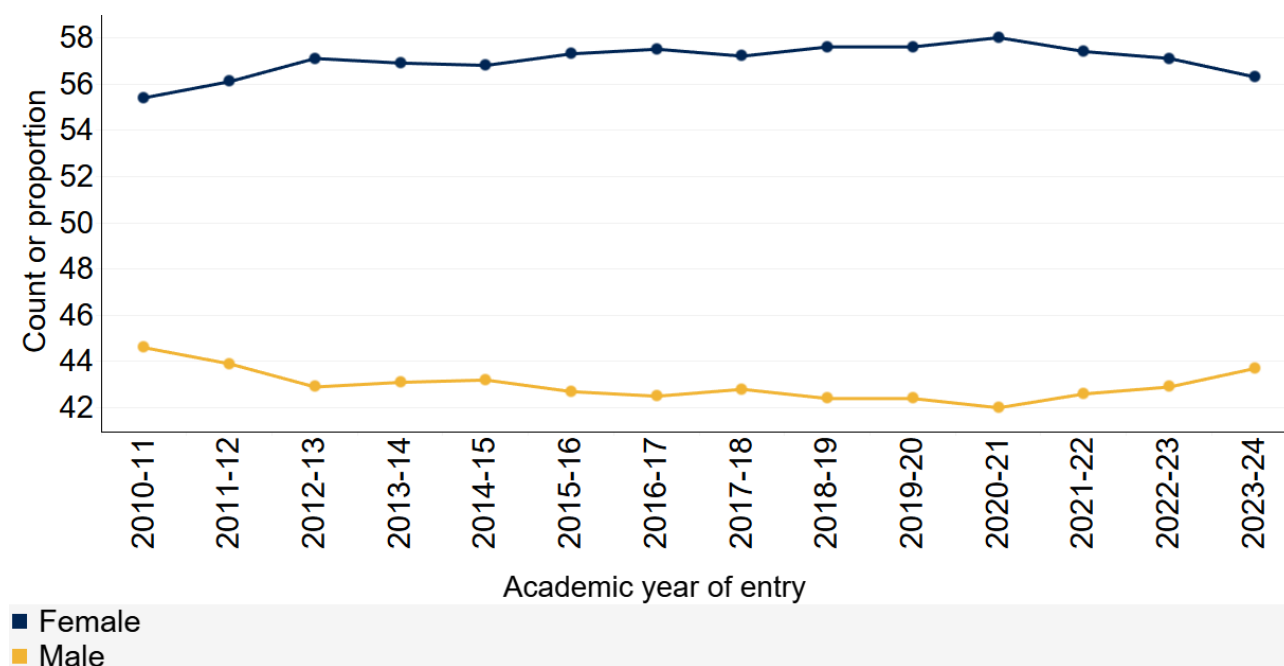
Figure 3: Proportion of UK domiciled full-time first-degree entrants by ethnicity from 2010-11 to 2023-24



12. In 2023-24 the proportion of UK domiciled full-time first-degree entrants from a white ethnic background was 61.4 per cent, a decline of 3.3 percentage points from 2022-23. 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. Note that this does not reflect a reduction in the number of white entrants, which has increased from 218,690 in 2010-11 to 232,920 in 2023-24.
13. In contrast, the proportion of entrants from all other ethnic groups have been steadily increasing across the time series with the highest proportion of Asian, mixed and other ethnic group entrants recorded in 2023-24 (16.7, 6.2 and 3.8 per cent respectively). While the proportion of black entrants had been in decline since it peaked at 11.2 per cent in 2019-20, the proportion saw an increase of 0.4 percentage points between 2021-22 and 2022-23. A further increase of 1.0 percentage point between 2022-23 and 2023-24 means that the proportion of black students in 2023-24 (11.9 per cent) is the highest it has been across the time series.

Sex

Figure 4: Proportion of UK-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants by sex from 2010-11 to 2023-24



14. In 2023-24, 56.3 per cent of full-time first-degree entrants were female, compared with 57.1 per cent in 2022-23. The proportion of female students reached its highest at 58.0 per cent in 2020-21 and has seen a gradual decline in each year since.

Notes

15. 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.

16. 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.



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