Access and participation data resources

Supporting data user guide

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Introduction

1. This user guide is a basic introduction to using the Office for Students' (OfS's) access and participation data resources. It is intended for anyone new to the data, but it should help higher education providers in particular to navigate the data resources, understand their contents, and use the information to develop their access and participation plans. The data resources have been published as an analytical resource to support further interrogation of the information included in the access and participation data dashboard.[1]

2. The OfS has published the access and participation dashboard to help users build a good and consistent understanding of some of the key data that relates to a provider's performance in access and participation. The supporting access and participation data resources are intended to remove some of the barriers that we know can prevent effective use of data, and arise from the complexity of the access and participation data landscape.

3. We are aware that the information in these resources is not exhaustive in terms of the different types and sources of data, indicators and other measures being used in this area. However, the data allows comparisons to be made between different student groups and their peers, to identify some of the gaps in access and key student outcomes. Providers can use these resources to help them set appropriate targets and support their strategies for reducing gaps between student groups. We will also use these data resources to review submitted plans. This document aims to help users understand what the data resources contain, and how to identify which measures are most relevant to each provider.

4. For a detailed understanding of all the data resources, and the measures and outcomes reported in them, this document should be read alongside the following documents:

    - 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation', which describes the indicators, including their coverage and presentation.[2]

    - 'Rebuild instructions for student outcome and experience measures', which describes how the indicators can be rebuilt from individualised student data.[3]

    - 'Technical algorithms for institutional performance measures', which includes further technical detail of the categorisations applied to individualised student data.[4]

[1] See Access and participation data dashboard - Office for Students.

[2] Available at Documents describing our measures and definitions - Office for Students.

[3] Available at Documents describing our measures and definitions - Office for Students.

[4] Also available at Documents describing our measures and definitions - Office for Students.

Key terms

5. The following key terms should be borne in mind when reading this guidance:

- **Access and participation data resources:** A package of information including CSV and Excel files that contain the data underpinning the interactive data dashboard in a tabular format. It also contains the technical documentation defining the measures and outcomes reported (including this document and those detailed in paragraph 4).

- **Split indicator:** A subset of a split indicator type (for example, 'black' is a split indicator within the 'ethnicity' split indicator type).

- **Split indicator type:** A categorisation of students (for example, 'ethnicity'). This also applies to combined categories, such as 'Intersection of deprivation quintile (IMD 2025) and ethnicity').

- **Population type:** Specifies the provider's student population that the split indicators are being constructed for:

    - **Registered:** All students registered at the provider

    - **Subcontracted out:** Students who are registered at the provider but are taught at a different provider through a partnership arrangement. This is a subset of the 'registered' population.

- **Uncertainty distribution:** Communicates the statistical uncertainty associated with the reported rates and gaps and is represented in the data resources by a series of confidence intervals at different significance levels. Wider confidence intervals mean we need to consider the potential for the provider's true performance falling within a wider range of values around the point estimate that has been observed.[5]

- **Confidence interval:** A statistical term describing a reasonable range of values within which the true value might lie. Confidence intervals are constructed for a given significance level; the greater the significance level, the more confident we can be that a confidence interval contains the true value.

- **Gap:** The difference between two indicators, in percentage points (for example, the gap between a continuation rate of 98 per cent for non-disabled students and 95 per cent for disabled students would be 3 percentage points).

- **IMD:** Index of Multiple Deprivation, as calculated in England only. It is calculated from a set of measures which classifies areas in England by their level of deprivation. It is presented here as five quintiles, where quintile 1 contains the most deprived 20 per cent of the English population, and quintile 5 the least deprived 20 per cent. Two sets of IMD quintiles are presented as they were calculated in both 2019 and 2025.

[5] Further information on how to interpret an uncertainty distribution can be found in the 'Description and definition of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document available at Documents describing our measures and definitions - Office for Students.

- **TUNDRA (MSOA)**: Tracking underrepresentation by area (based on middle layer super output areas), an area-based measure, classifying areas according to the proportion of state-funded mainstream students in England who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years. Quintile 1 contains the areas with the lowest 20 per cent of participation rates for the young population; quintile 5 the highest participating 20 per cent.[6]

- **ABCS**: Association between characteristics, a measure modelling the rates of positive outcomes for UK-domiciled students based on combinations of characteristics. Quintile 1 contains the combinations of characteristics least likely to result in positive outcomes, quintile 5 contains the combinations of characteristics most likely to result in positive outcomes. ABCS quintiles are presented for the access, continuation, completion and progression lifecycle stages.[7]

- **Higher education sector:** The 'sector' includes all English OfS-registered higher education providers that submit data to the designated data body or to the Department for Education.

- **Student lifecycle:** The five stages of students' progression through higher education, as described in paragraph 6.

- **Numerator (of the indicator):** For the access indicators, this is the number of students with the attribute in question. For the other indicators, it is the number of students with the attribute in question who achieve the outcome being measured.

- **Denominator (of the indicator):** For the access indicators, this is the total number of entrants. For the other indicators, it is the total number of students in the population for the split indicator in question.

- **Indicator:** Calculated (in percentage terms) as the numerator divided by the denominator. For the access indicators, this shows the proportion of the entrant cohort with the split indicator in question. For the other indicators, it is the continuation, completion, attainment or progression rate as appropriate.

- **Year:** Each indicator is reported across a four-year time series from years 1 to 4. Year 4 corresponds to the most recent cohort of students relevant to the indicator in question. The academic years associated with the time series are provided in the data resources.

- **Aggregate**: Combines data across more granular breakdowns and reports the data as a single value. For example, in addition to the yearly time series, each indicator is also reported combining multiple years in the time series into one data point. This may allow data to be reported in aggregate where it cannot be reported as individual years due to small population sizes.

    - **Two-year aggregate**: reports the latest two years of the time series combined as one data point.

[6] For more details, see 'About TUNDRA' (About the TUNDRA area-based measures data - Office for Students).

[7] For more details, see 'About the ABCS data' About the ABCS data - Office for Students).

    - **Four-year aggregate**: reports the latest four years of the time series combined as one data point.

- **Suppression rules:** In some cases, the following suppression rules have been applied:
    - **[N/A]:** where the data item is not applicable to the population or cannot be calculated.
    - **[none]:** where there are no students (or two or fewer) in the relevant population.
    - **[low]:** where there are more than two but fewer than 23 students in the population.
    - **[DP]:** where data has been suppressed for data protection reasons. The code [DP] has been used where further data protection has taken place for sensitive data.
    - **[RR]:** relevant to the progression measure, where the provider participated in the graduate outcomes (GO) survey but has not met the required response rate of 30 per cent.
    - **[DPL]:** where the numerator is less than or equal to two (meaning the indicator will take on a value close to 0 per cent), the data is suppressed for data protection reasons.

Overview of data resources

6. The dashboard provides measures of performance at each stage of the student lifecycle, for individual providers registered with the Office for Students:

    a. **Access indicators**, detailing the makeup of students entering higher education.

    b. **Continuation indicators**, reporting the proportion of students that were observed to be continuing in the study of higher education (or that have gained a higher education qualification) one year and 15 days after they started their course (two years and 15 days for part-time students).

    c. **Completion indicators**, reporting the proportion of students that were observed to have gained a higher education qualification, or were continuing in the study of a higher education qualification, four years and 15 days after they started their course (six years and 15 days for part-time students).

    d. **Degree outcomes (attainment) indicators**, reporting the proportion of Level 6+ undergraduate qualifiers who were awarded first or upper second class degrees.

    e. **Progression indicators**, reporting the proportion of Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey respondents who identified managerial or professional employment, further study, or other positive outcomes among the activities they were undertaking 15 months after obtaining a higher education qualification.[8]

7. The data resources allow users to explore and understand patterns identified by these indicators for a range of split indicator types. They contain breakdowns of the various indicators described in paragraph 6, for a variety of split indicators. Information is available for each stage of the student lifecycle, for individual providers and the whole sector, for each mode and level of study, and across a four-year time series, and for two- and four-year aggregates of the time series. We report numbers and proportions of students, and have included confidence intervals for the indicator values, to help users judge the potential sensitivity of an indicator to random chance.

8. The data resources also compare students with different attributes within each split indicator type (for example, within the split indicator type of ethnicity, the continuation rate of black students compared with the continuation rate of white students). Resulting gaps between different groups are included, along with a range of confidence intervals calculated for each year of the time series.

9. The data resources include ‘overall’ rates for the continuation, completion, degree outcomes (attainment) and progression lifecycle stages. These detail their overall rate for each lifecycle stage across all student characteristics for each provider in the data. They also include ‘Overall’ denominators in the access lifecycle stage. This details the overall number of student entrants across all characteristics for each provider in the data.

[8] Other outcomes considered positive include being retired, travelling, and caring for someone.

Accessing the data resources

10. The data resources are available to download from our website in several formats.[9] The files and formats available are summarised in Table 1 below. These have been compressed in a zip file for download. We provide a data definitions file as part of the data resources. This contains descriptions of the variables along with the values that they can take and is included in each downloadable zip file.

Table 1: Summary of available data resource files

Filename	File format	Description
APData_[*UKPRN*].csv APData_SECTOR.csv	Comma delimited (CSV)	Individual files for each provider as well as one representing the aggregation to the OfS-registered English sector as a whole.
APData_ALL.csv	Comma delimited (CSV)	Data resources for all individual providers in the sector supplied in a single CSV file (for users of software packages capable of processing files containing large volumes of data).
APData_Registered_Access.xlsx APData_Registered_Continuation.xlsx APData_Registered_Completion.xlsx APData_Registered_Attainment.xlsx APData_Registered_Progression.xlsx APData_Subcontracted_Access.xlsx APData_Subcontracted_Continuation.xlsx APData_Subcontracted_Completion.xlsx APData_Subcontracted_Attainment.xlsx APData_Subcontracted_Progression.xlsx	Excel workbook	Data resource files for each lifecycle stage and population type containing data resources for all individual providers in the sector. Within each workbook there are separate sheets containing data for each characteristic (these files can be useful if you want to look at data from more than one provider).

[9] Available at Get the data - Office for Students.

Navigating the data resources: worked examples

11. The following worked examples have been provided to illustrate some techniques that you may wish to use when navigating a provider's data, as published in CSV format, and finding relevant measures. They are not intended as a guide to the measures that should be included in access and participation plans.

12. These examples are based on the sector file. The methods and concepts are equally applicable to individual provider files. For the purposes of this user guide, we assume that the data for a single provider at a time is being viewed in Microsoft Excel (version 2007 or later). In each case, begin by downloading the data resources for the sector and opening APData_SECTOR.csv in Microsoft Excel. Highlight the header row and choose **filter** from the **data** menu.

Worked example 1: finding completion indicators for IMD (2025) quintile 1 students

13. Filter **LIFECYCLE_STAGE** to 'Completion', **SPLIT_IND_TYPE** to 'EnglishIMDQuintile_2025' and **SPLIT_IND1** to 'IMDQ1'. The field **INDICATOR_VALUE** now shows the value of IMD (2025) quintile 1 completion rates across available modes, levels and years.

14. Use the fields **POPULATION_TYPE**, **MODE, LEVEL** and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to filter to a particular student population, mode and level of study, and year of the time series. For example, filtering **POPULATION_TYPE** to 'Registered', **MODE** to 'Full-time', **LEVEL** to 'All undergraduates' and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to 'YEAR3' or 'YEAR4' shows the continuation rates for full-time undergraduate students registered at OfS registered providers for the two most recent years of available data.

Worked example 2: comparing continuation indicators across TUNDRA quintiles

15. Filter **LIFECYCLE_STAGE** to 'Continuation', then **SPLIT_IND_TYPE** to 'TUNDRAQuintile'.

16. Filter **SPLIT_IND1** to 'TUNDRAQ5'. The field **INDICATOR_VALUE** now shows the value of TUNDRA quintile 5 continuation rates across available modes, levels and years.

17. Filter **SPLIT_IND2** to 'TUNDRAQ1'. The field **GAP** now shows percentage point differences between TUNDRA quintile 5 and quintile 1 continuation rates. To view gaps between different split indicators, change the filters on **SPLIT_IND1** and **SPLIT_IND2**.

18. Use the fields **POPULATION_TYPE**, **MODE, LEVEL** and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to filter to a particular student population, mode and level of study, and year of the time series. For example, filtering **POPULATION_TYPE** to 'Subcontracted out', **MODE** to 'Apprenticeship', **LEVEL** to 'All undergraduates' and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to 'AGGLAST2YRS' or 'AGGLAST4YRS' shows the gap between quintile 5 and quintile 1 for apprenticeship undergraduate students registered at OfS registered providers but taught elsewhere for the two- and four-year aggregates.

Worked example 3: considering levels of statistical confidence for progression gaps between young and mature students

19. Filter **LIFECYCLE_STAGE** to 'Progression', then **SPLIT_IND_TYPE** to 'AgeOnCommencement'.

20. Filter **SPLIT_IND1** to 'Young_Under21'. The field **INDICATOR_VALUE** now shows the value of the indicator for the progression rates of young (under 21) students across available modes, levels and years.

21. Filter **SPLIT_IND2** to 'Mature_Age21andOver'. The field **GAP** now shows percentage point differences in progression rates between mature and young students. The field **RATIO** shows this comparison as a ratio between the two proportions.

22. Use the fields **POPULATION_TYPE**, **MODE, LEVEL** and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to filter to a particular student population, mode and level of study, and year of the time series. For example, filter **POPULATION_TYPE** to 'Registered', **MODE** to 'Part-time, **LEVEL** to 'First degree' and **YEAR_TIMESERIES** to 'YEAR4' to show the gap between young and mature students at part-time first degree level in year 4.

23. The fields **UPPERCI[X]** and **LOWERCI[X]** give the upper and lower limit of statistical confidence for a range of confidence intervals. For example, **UPPERCI95** and **LOWERCI95** show the upper and lower limits of the 95 per cent confidence interval on the gap between young and mature students at part-time first degree level in year 4.[10] For more information about the upper and lower confidence interval fields given in the supporting data files, please refer to our data definitions file.[11]

24. The range of confidence intervals for the gap describe the distribution of statistical uncertainty associated with the observed gap.[10] The field **GAP_ABOVE_0** gives the proportion (as a percentage) of the statistical uncertainty distribution for the gap that is greater than zero.

[10] For more information about the calculation and presentation of statistical uncertainty in access and participation data, see 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation', published at Documents describing our measures and definitions - Office for Students.

[11] The data definitions file is published alongside the access and participation supporting data resources, published at Get the data - Office for Students.

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