

# REIMAGINING UK ADMISSIONS ANNEX C

Analysis of student dropout  
rates by acceptance route





## ANNEX OVERVIEW

This annex describes UCAS' analysis of student dropout rates by acceptance route, as reported in **Reimagining UK admissions**.

### OVERVIEW OF ACCEPTANCE ROUTES

**Acceptance route** is defined as the route through which a placed applicant was accepted.

**Adjustment:** Any student that has been placed at a university or college, and subsequently found an alternative course through the Adjustment process through meeting and exceeding the terms of their offer.

**Firm choice:** Any student that has selected an institution as their 'firm' choice, and subsequently been accepted at this institution.

**Insurance:** Any student that has selected an institution as their 'insurance' choice, and subsequently been placed there.

**Main Scheme Clearing:** A student that applied prior to the 30 June deadline, and was unsuccessful in securing their firm or insurance offer or has released themselves into Clearing to find an alternative place.

**Direct to Clearing:** A student that has applied after the 30 June deadline, and subsequently been placed.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation/technical>

### DROPOUT RATE DEFINITION

UCAS, through linking applicant data to HESA student data, analysed dropout rates by the student’s acceptance route.

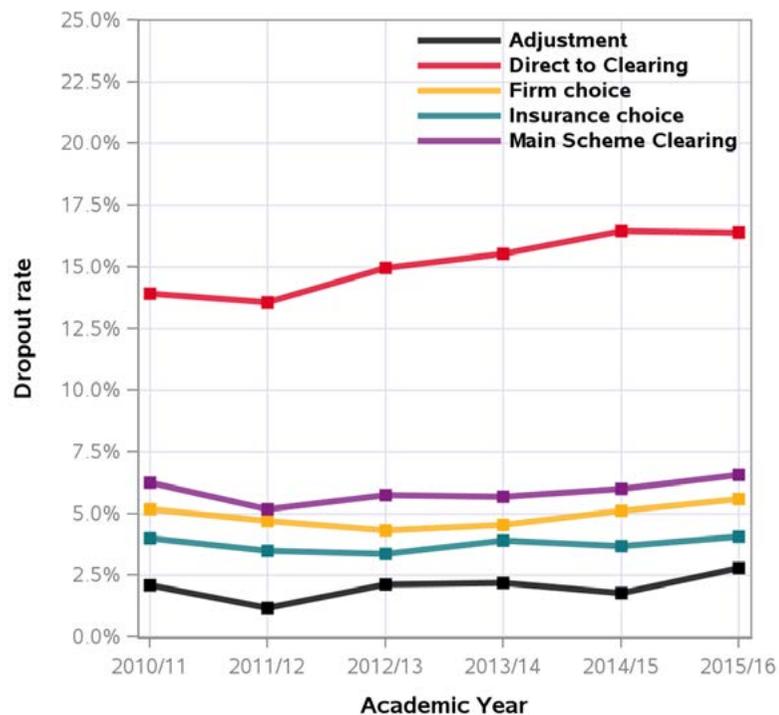
A student is included in the analysis if they can be identified in both UCAS and HESA datasets, such that an acceptance route can be assigned and there is a record of the student enrolling at a Higher Education Provider. UK domiciled students are included only.

Students with the following criteria are then identified as dropping out:

1. The academic year of entry matches the student’s final academic year on record, so there is no record of the student in Higher Education beyond their original year of entry.
2. The student has no Higher Education qualifications identified. This is to avoid inadvertently including students completing a single year programme.

Please note that a student is not identified as a dropout in this analysis if they have changed courses either at the Higher Education Provider that they originally enrolled at, or at a different Higher Education Provider.

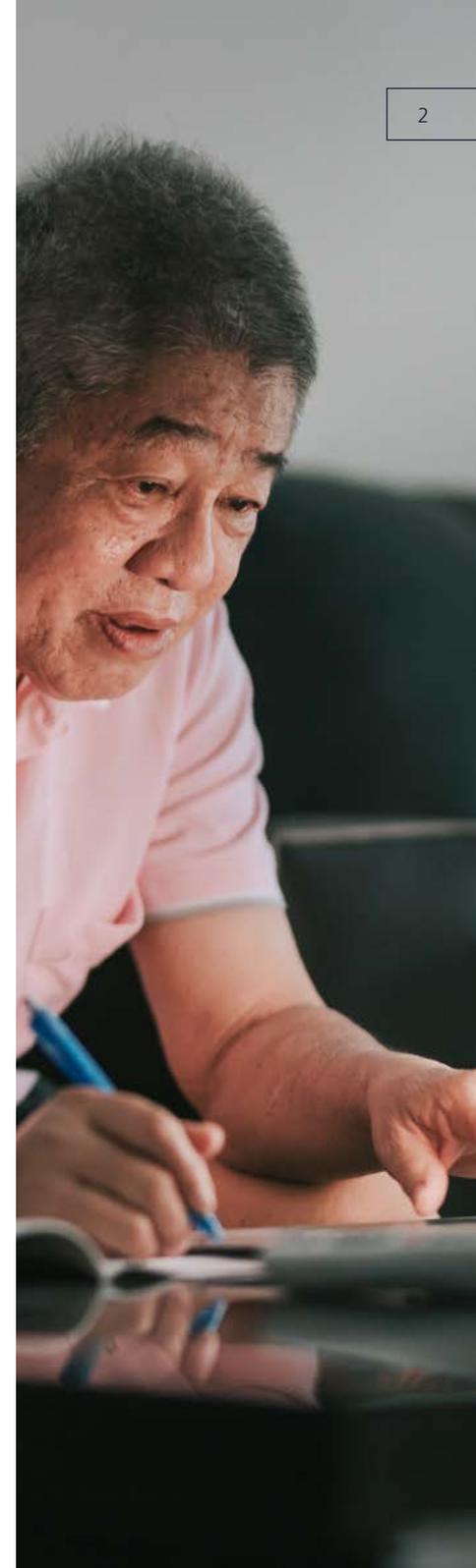
This definition may differ slightly to the HESA definition of non-continuation rates.<sup>1</sup>



**FIGURE 1: DROPOUT RATES BY ACCEPTANCE ROUTE – 2010 TO 2015 ENTRY**

The analysis shows that students placed through the Direct to Clearing route have consistently higher drop out rates in the first year of study compared to the other routes.

There could be a range of reasons for this. Direct to Clearing students tend to have characteristics associated with higher non-continuation rates - with over 50% aged 21 or over, typically have lower attainment; and apply to subject areas with higher non-continuation rates.



### FURTHER ANALYSIS – CALCULATING AN EXPECTED DROPOUT RATE

To test this further, to identify whether the acceptance route may impact on the rates, or whether the trends observed were a consequence of the cohorts following this route, UCAS combined the following attributes to calculate an 'expected' dropout rate for each acceptance route:

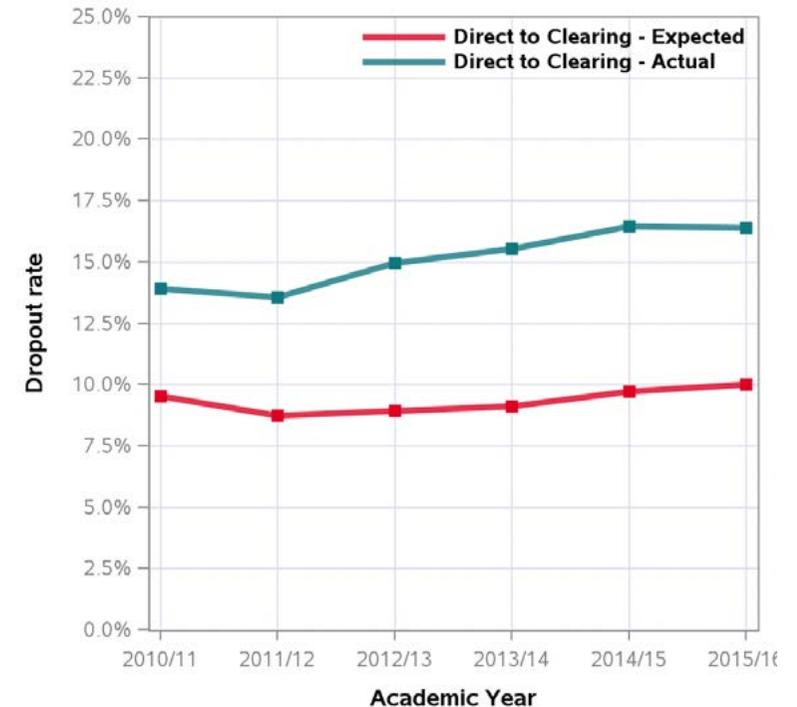
- > **Age group** – as aligned with the cut off points for school & college cohorts within the different administrations of the UK.
- > **POLAR4 quintile** (18-year-olds only) – a measure of student background, classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in Higher Education.
- > **Gender** – Male or Female, as declared on the UCAS application
- > **Provider tariff band** – a grouping of providers based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18-year-old accepted applicants (summarised through UCAS Tariff points) in historic cycles
- > **Subject group (JACS3)** – split into 3 broadly equal bands based on high, medium, and low dropout rates.
- > **Intention to live at home** – as declared by the student on application.

This is achieved by calculating the dropout rate for students within each subgroup. These dropout rates are applied to applicants within each acceptance route. The average of the rates is then calculated – this is the 'expected' dropout rate for each route. Therefore, the expected dropout rate represents the dropout rate that would be expected for students following each route assuming only the factors listed above influence the dropout rate, independent of the route itself.

Each of these factors have been included based on noticeable differences across the dropout rates between the values. For example, dropout rates for mature students (at around 10%) are higher than for 18-year-olds (4%).

Dropout rates also vary with levels of student attainment. However, due to incomplete data for Direct to Clearing, student attainment is not included as a factor. Some of the variation in attainment will be accounted for by the inclusion of provider tariff band, however this will not account for all of the variation in attainment between acceptance routes; this should be considered when comparing expected and actual dropout rates.

Once calculated, comparison was made against the actual dropout rates for students applying Direct to Clearing. The actual dropout rate is consistently 1.5-1.7 times higher than the expected rate, which suggests that the route may be having an influence.



**FIGURE 2: ACTUAL AND EXPECTED DROPOUT RATES FOR DIRECT TO CLEARING STUDENTS – 2010 TO 2015 ENTRY**

The way in which the expected dropout is defined means that dropout rates for each acceptance route will always contribute, in part, to the expected dropout rate for that group. When this contribution is large, the expected dropout rate will mainly reflect the patterns for that group. In this analysis we have focused on Direct to Clearing, which form a relatively low proportion of all acceptances for the cycles reported, from 1.7% to 3.2%. Therefore, this effect is assumed to be small.

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UCAS, a company limited by guarantee, is registered in England and Wales.  
Registered number: 2839815.

Registered charity number:  
1024741 (England and Wales) and SC038598 (Scotland)

Publication reference: MD-6984

Published by: UCAS, Rosehill, New Barn Lane, Cheltenham, GL52 3LZ.