

# Inclusion of foundation year students within the non-continuation indicators

PITG 13/06

## Issue

1. Inclusion of integrated foundation year students in continuation statistics.

## Recommendations

2. Students on integrated foundations years should continue to be included in all indicators according to their eventual qualification aim.
3. A context statistic is not added excluding students on integrated foundation years.
4. Integrated foundation years should not be added as a benchmark factor.

## Background

5. Students undertaking an integrated foundation year are included in the widening participation and continuation statistics according to the qualification that the foundation year is integrated into. While this treatment is largely beneficial in raising the institution's widening participation indicators the converse is true for continuation as students undertaking an integrated foundation year have on average lower continuation rates.
6. Students undertaking standalone foundation years are not included in any of the performance indicators as they are not registered for a higher education qualification.

## Discussion

7. Analysis of the 2009-10 performance indicators shows that full-time first degree students on an integrated foundation year have a continuation rate of 72.0% whereas students who are not on an integrated foundation year have a continuation rate of 89.6%.
8. An institution has argued that these students should not be included in the continuation indicator at all as they are very different to the students that are recruited directly into year one and there is a greater expectation that some will not progress. While it is possible to make this argument the counter argument would be that these are students who have joined the institution with the intention of gaining a degree and to exclude them would be misleading. This argument is strengthened by their inclusion in widening participation indicators, it would be inconsistent to remove them from the continuation and projected outcome indicators without removing them from the widening participation indicators. Indeed such a move may be resisted by some institutions for whom foundation year students will form part of their widening participation activity.

**Recommendation 1:** Students on integrated foundations years should continue to be included in all indicators according to their eventual qualification aim.

9. Even accepting the arguments above there remains an argument that the continuation patterns of students undertaking a foundation year are very different to those entering directly on to year one of a course. Table 1 shows that while some of the difference between the rates can be explained by the qualifications on entry held by students undertaking an integrated foundation year even for the groups with the most students the differences between those entering directly onto year one and those taking an integrated foundation year remain significant.

**Table 1 – First degree continuation rates by qualifications on entry and foundation year**

Qualification on entry benchmark group	Non-foundation year	Foundation year	Number on a foundation year
01 - AAAA	98	80	5
02 - AAA	97	74	25
03 - AAB	95	80	45
04 - AAC	94	73	15
05 - ABB	95	84	75
06 - ABC/BBB	93	80	130
07 - ACC/BBC	93	83	145
08 - BCC/CCC	92	78	250
09 - >290	92	82	235
10 - >260	91	77	195
11 - >230	90	79	385
12 - >200	88	78	435
13 - >160	88	76	710
14 - >100	86	74	1,155
15 - >0	86	69	775
16 - COMB3	86	75	895
17 - EQUIV3	82	65	790
18 - GNVQ/NVQ	84	70	150
19 - BACC	94	78	70
20 - FOUND	89	76	80
21 - ACCESS	84	75	355
22 - BTEC/ONC	83	56	780
23 - HEPG	84	75	10
24 - HEFD	90	69	65

25 - HEOUG	85	71	1,025
26 - NONE	84	73	485
27 - OTHERS	82	70	990
28 - UNKNOWN	84	71	120

10. Given that the differences are not explained by the qualifications on entry there is an argument that the performance indicators need to account for integrated foundation years in some way. The natural way to account for the difference would be to add “integrated foundation year” as a factor in benchmarking. However, the institution that raised this issue has argued that while a benchmark approach would technically account for the different characteristics this would be of little help as many users simply ignore the benchmarks and report indicators without any further context. Some institutions may therefore prefer to have a context statistic produced that shows the continuation rate excluding students on an integrated foundation year, institutions could then encourage users of the data to use this statistic in preference to the benchmarked performance indicator. While this solution is initially appealing and resolves this issue for the institution that raised it it is not a long term solution as the same argument could be applied to any of the factors used in benchmarks, indeed the benchmark process is designed to address this specific issue. Given that there is no clear argument as to why integrated foundation years differs from any of the other benchmark factors it is not recommended that a special case is made.

**Recommendation 2:** A context statistic is not added excluding students on integrated foundation years.

11. Assuming recommendations 1 and 2 are accepted there remains an issue as to whether the benchmarks should include integrated foundation year as a factor. We can see from Table 1 that the number of students undertaking integrated foundation years is relatively low, around 10,400.

12. Table 2 shows the impact of including being on an integrated foundation year in the continuation benchmark for full-time first degree students. It can be seen that for the majority of institutions there is no significant impact on the benchmark.

**Table 2: Change in benchmark following inclusion of integrated foundation year**

Change in benchmark	Number of institutions
+1%	6
0%	135
-1%	14
-2%	1

13. Given the very limited impact on benchmarks, the small number of students involved and the increased volatility that adding another benchmark factor would create it is not recommended that the benchmarking groups are extended.

***Recommendation 3:*** Integrated foundation years should not be added as a benchmark factor.

### **Further information**

14. For further information contact Richard Puttock (Tel: 01179317472; e-mail: [r.puttock@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:r.puttock@hefce.ac.uk)).