

## Mini-Briefing: Non-continuation at Scottish Universities

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) publishes annual statistics on the [non-continuation](#) (“drop-out”) rate among undergraduate students at higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK. It published its latest round of figures on 8 March 2018. These included three sets of figures:

- Numbers and proportions of full time and part time undergraduate / first degree students who did not continue from first year of study to second year
- Numbers and proportions of full time undergraduate / first degree students who, having dropped out after one year, returned the following year.
- Projected outcomes – whether those entering study will complete their studies.

The HESA data is presented this year for the first time as a set of interactive tables. This has the advantage of allowing you to run different tables, depending on your interest. While this does offer some opportunity to look in a little detail at specific circumstances - e.g. differences between young and mature students and between students at different Scottish HEIs - there are significant limitations to the data.

One such limitation is that the data is for all UK undergraduate / first degree students and it is not possible to analyse the figures for Scottish domiciled students only. So while we know that Scottish domiciled students represented 85% of the first degree entrants to Scottish institutions in academic year 2015-16, the drop out figures don't allow us to check Scottish students are more or less likely to drop out.

Another important limitation that relates to not knowing the home domiciled of UK students at HEIs in different parts of the UK is that we don't know about the drop-out rate of Scottish domiciled students who go to study at an HEI in another part of the UK.

### Non-continuance into second year – full time degree students

Table 1 below shows the number and proportion of full time degree students who started a degree programme in academic year 2015-16 who did not continue their studies in academic year 2016-17. The methodology adopted by HESA to identify who is included as a continuing student and who is not can be found [here](#).

**Table 1: Non-continuance among all full-time degree entrants (AY 2015-16)**

HE provider	Number entrants	Number not continuing	% not continuing
The University of Aberdeen	1,680	85	5.2
University of Abertay Dundee	1,035	145	14.1
The University of Dundee	2,260	120	5.3
Edinburgh Napier University	2,680	300	11.3
The University of Edinburgh	4,005	155	3.9
Glasgow Caledonian University	3,060	205	6.8
Glasgow School of Art	335	10	3.6
The University of Glasgow	3,555	190	5.3
Heriot-Watt University	1,595	130	8.2
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	715	75	10.4
The Robert Gordon University	1,995	140	7.1
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	205	5	1.9
The University of St Andrews	1,035	35	3.2
SRUC	280	25	9.6
The University of Stirling	1,850	125	6.8
The University of Strathclyde	3,190	245	7.7
University of the Highlands and Islands	575	65	11
The University of the West of Scotland	3,900	490	12.5
<b>Total Scotland</b>	<b>33,945</b>	<b>2,555</b>	<b>7.5</b>

Source: [HESA non-continuance statistics \(8 March 2018\)](#)

As Table 1 shows, of the UK students that entered a full time degree programme at a Scottish HEI in academic year 2015-16, 7.5% (over two and a half thousand students) did not continue their studies the following year.

What is perhaps more interesting is the variance in drop-out rates between UK students at different Scottish HEIs. For example, the University of St Andrews (3.2%) and University of Edinburgh (3.9%) have by far the lowest drop-out rates. In contrast, the University of Abertay Dundee (14.1%), the University of West of Scotland (12.5%), Edinburgh Napier University (11.3%) and Queen Margaret University (10.4%) reported higher than average drop-out rates.

### **Resuming study after a year away**

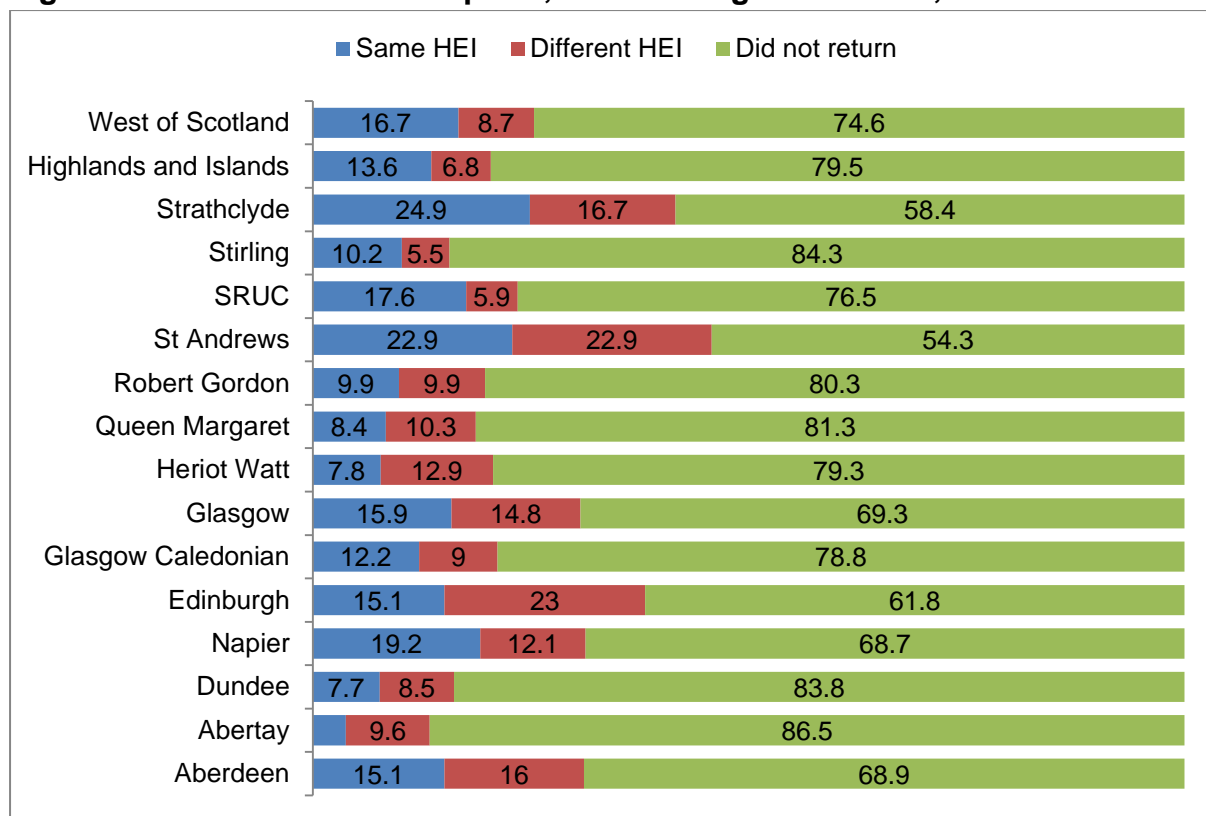
The second set of figures HESA has produced as part of this statistical release on non-continuance report on the number and proportion of students who started a full time undergraduate programme in 2014-15, who dropped out in 2015-16 and either returned or did not return in academic year 2016-17. This is interesting as it offers a slightly longer term look at the potential outcomes from study than the usual snapshot after a year offered by the drop-out data that HESA published as its long-standing 'performance indicator'.

Again the data are for UK students, but offer figures for each individual Scottish HEI. So we can look at how each HEI is doing in terms of getting students to return to study.

While the interactive tools allow you to dig in to look at the number and proportion of young and mature students who did or did not resume a degree programme after a year out, the figures are only available only for full time degree entrants who started their studies in 2014-15. So there are currently no figures about the potential return to study of part time degree students.

Figure 1 looks at the total population of UK students that had dropped out of their studies in academic year 2015-16 to see whether they have returned to study academic year 2016-17.

**Figure 1: Return rate after drop-out, full time degree entrants, AY 2016-17**



Source: [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(Table T4\)](#)

Some points worth noting from Figure 1:

- Of all Scottish HEIs, St Andrews (22.9%) and Edinburgh (23%) had the largest proportion of UK students who returned to **study at a new HEI**.
- Of all Scottish HEIs, Strathclyde (24.9%), St Andrews (22.9%) and Napier (19.2%) had the largest proportion of UK students who returned to **study at the same HEI**.

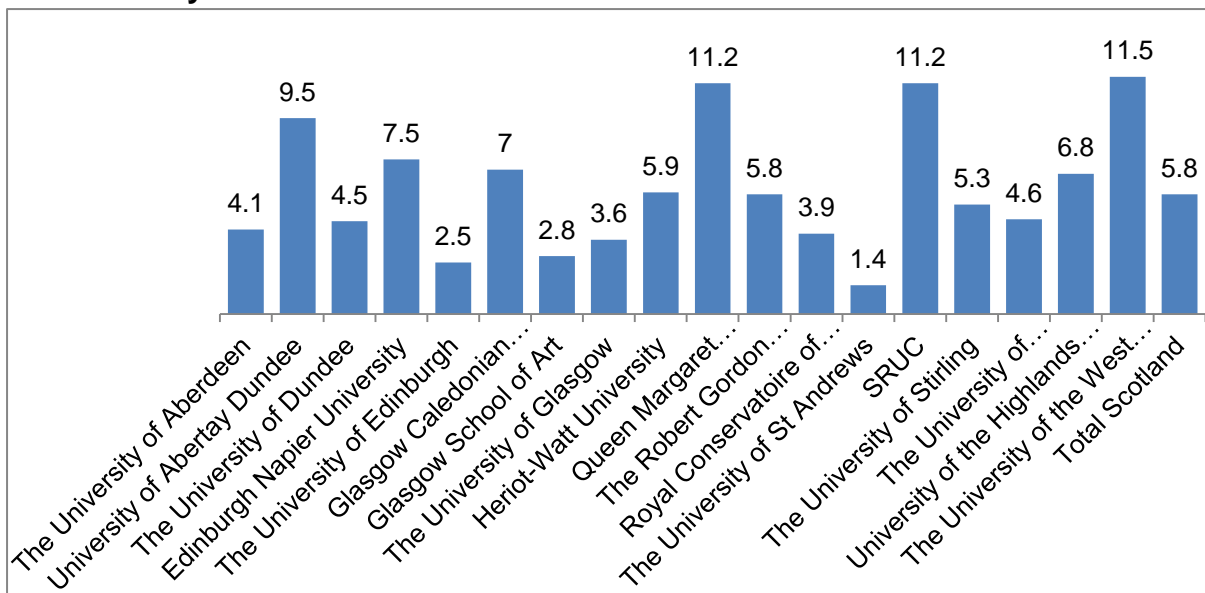
- While the average proportion students not returning to study after dropping out was between 75% and 85%, **the rate of non-return** was far lower at Strathclyde (58.4%), St Andrews (54.3%) and Edinburgh (61.8%).

Figure 2 looks at the proportion of all full time degree entrants who had started a degree in 2014-15, who had dropped out in 2015-16 and then did not return to study at a UK HEI in 2016-17.

The average figure across all Scottish HEIs was 5.8 per cent. However, there was significant variance between HEIs. For example:

- At St Andrews (1.4%) and Edinburgh (2.5%) the non-return rate was relatively low.
- At Queen Margaret (11.2%) and University of Highlands and Islands (11.5%) the non-return rate was relatively high.
- Compared with the Scotland average, Abertay (9.5%), Edinburgh Napier (7.5%) and Glasgow Caledonian (7%) also had relatively high rates of non-return.

**Figure 2: Proportion of 2014-15 entrants who had not returned to higher education by 2016-17**



Source: [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(Table T4\)](#)

## Projected Learning Outcomes

The final set of figures in this HESA statistics release focus on projected learning outcomes for the 2015-16 undergraduate student intake. What the figures in Table 2 offer are projections of outcomes – whether entrants will have gained a qualification, transferred to another HEI or been absent from study for two consecutive years. There is [technical note](#) on the HESA website that explains how these projections have been calculated, and what these terms mean.

**Table 2: Projected Learning Outcomes: 2015-16 UK entrants to a degree programme at a Scottish HEI**

	Number of entrants	Mature students (%)	Degree achieved (%)	No award achieved (%)	Other award achieve (%)	Transfer (%)
The University of Aberdeen	1,715	13.6	84.3	7.9	2.5	5.2
University of Abertay Dundee	1,030	41.7	68.3	20.7	4.4	6.6
The University of Dundee	2,140	19.7	83	9.2	3.8	4
Edinburgh Napier University	2,670	37	76.1	10.6	7.8	5.4
The University of Edinburgh	3,995	7.9	86.5	4.1	3.9	5.5
Glasgow Caledonian University	3,040	37.6	80.9	8.6	6.6	4
Glasgow School of Art	340	25.4	83.8	6	4.6	3.4
The University of Glasgow	3,545	15.1	83.6	8.2	3.2	4.9
Heriot-Watt University	1,595	16.4	77.5	8.8	6.6	7
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	730	25.9	74	15	4.9	6.1
The Robert Gordon University	1,950	23.8	81.7	8.1	6	4.1
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	205	16.9	87.5	3.1	2	7.3
The University of St Andrews	1,040	3.5	92.8	3.4	0.6	3.2
The University of Stirling	1,930	23.8	81.8	8.9	5.6	3.7
The University of Strathclyde	3,200	14.4	81.8	7.3	6.2	4.7
University of the Highlands and Islands	1,125	44.4	60.3	22.3	12.5	4.9
The University of the West of Scotland	3,825	49.7	77.4	16.2	3	3.5
<b>Total Scotland</b>	<b>34,075</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.7</b>

Source: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/ukpis/non-continuation/table-t5>

Table 2 shows a Scotland average estimate of 80.6% of full time degree entrants at Scottish HEIs achieving a degree. Within this, however, are significant institutional variances:

- A number of HEIs that are estimated to achieve higher than average levels of degree awards – including the four ancients (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews) and many of the HEIs that were established in the 1960s – including Stirling, Strathclyde and Dundee.
- Many (not all) the post-1992 HEIs are projected to achieve the lowest rate of degree awards – including Abertay (68.3%), Queen Margaret (74%), University of West of Scotland (77.4%) and the University of Highlands and Islands (60.3%).
- Glasgow Caledonian and Robert Gordon stand out among the post-1992 HEIs as projections suggest these HEIs will award degrees to 80.9% and 81.7% of full time degree entrants respectively (above the Scotland average).

Another projection presented in the above table is for no award achieved. The Scotland average is estimated at 9.7 per cent. Again there is variance between HEIs:

- The University of Highlands and Islands (22.3%), Abertay (20.7%), and the University of West of Scotland (16.2%) are projected to have by far the largest non-completion rate – no award being achieved. This corresponds clearly with these HEIs having the largest proportion of mature students in their number.
- In contrast, and in line with other statistics in this area, St Andrews (3.4%) and Edinburgh (4.1%) are estimated to have the lowest level of non-completion – no award being achieved. The very low proportion of mature students in the student numbers at these HEIs may play some part in that projected outcome.

Note - The information in this briefing does not include data on differences in drop-out rates between young students (those aged under 21 when starting a full time degree) and mature students (those aged 21 or over when they start a full time degree). However, the interactive tables on the [HESA website](#) show that drop-out rates are far higher among mature students than among young students. The differences are present both in the data on drop-out after year 1 and also in the data on those who return to study after a year away (or do not).

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