

Annual Research Report - Extended Version
Presentation of findings from the first and second
years of the **back on course** project

December 2011



Acknowledgments

Analysis and reporting conducted by UCAS on behalf of, and under the direction of, **back on course**

Foreword, conclusions and additional drafting by Barbara Stephens and Alexis Peters, **back on course**, The Open University.

Contents

Foreword by back on course	2
1. Executive summary	3
1.1 Understanding the sample sizes used in this research	7
2. How to read this report	9
3. Introduction	10
3.1 The back on course project	10
3.2 The back on course research	12
4. What factors have been identified as reasons for not completing higher education?	13
5. Which HEIs partnered with back on course are included in this research?	15
6. Who are the early-leavers included in this research report?	18
6.1 Demographics	19
6.2 Pre-HE experiences	21
6.3 HE choices	23
7. Who re-applies to HE?	24
7.1 Demographics	24
7.2 Pre-HE experiences	25
7.3 HE choices	26
8. Who participates in back on course	28
8.1 Demographics	29
8.2 Pre-HE	30
8.3 HE choices	32
9. What did early-leavers say about why they left HE?	34
9.1 Demographics	35
9.2 Pre-HE experiences	37
9.3 HE choices	38
10. Bringing IAG and profile data together to understand more about early-leavers	39
10.1 Original HE choices	39
10.2 What factors determine level of engagement with the back on course IAG service?	44
10.3 Current activity and intended destinations	45
11. What about 'no shows'?	47
11.1 Demographics	47
11.2 Pre-HE experiences	49
11.3 HE choices	51
12. Conclusions by back on course	52
Lists of figures and tables	53
Annex 1 Methodology	55
Annex 2 Glossary of terms	60
Annex 3 Results of the back on course Client Satisfaction Survey	71
Annex 4 Bibliography	73

Foreword by **back on course**

This report presents the data and findings from the first and second years of the three-year **back on course** project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and delivered by a partnership between the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and The Open University (OU).

The project was established in response to widespread concern in the last 10 years about the number of students dropping out of higher education before they gained their qualification, and the cost of that non-completion, both financially and in terms of lost opportunity – money and lost opportunity to the student, the university and the wider economy. Although a great deal of research has since been conducted on improving retention within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), we have been unable to find significant research carried out with students after they leave the institution, and there has been no systematic attempt to offer these students information, advice and guidance (IAG) on their future direction.

back on course was established to address these deficits. In academic year 2009–10, the project was piloted in the north-west of England and the interim findings of the pilot were published in December 2010. Although the number of HEIs (6) and the number of former students covered by the research was small, it was sufficient to demonstrate that there was an unsatisfied demand for the IAG service, and that research conducted about these former students carried out through identifying this group had the potential to provide new insights into why students leave early, and what might be done to support them. During the pilot, a methodology was developed to identify and contact former students and to record key information for the research.

During academic year 2010–11, the project was rolled out across England. By the end of September 2011, 91 English HEIs had agreed to engage with the project, and the contact details of over 22,000 early-leavers have been passed to the project. This report analyses the characteristics of 19,750 early-leavers from the first 42 HEIs to upload contact details, and compares them with the characteristics of the total cohort of students who attended those HEIs.

The project has moved away from using the phrase 'drop-out', or even 'non-completer', and instead has adopted the phrase 'early-leaver' to describe this group of former students. This is because both of the earlier descriptors imply failure, and the conversations that the team has had with former students suggest that leaving early can be a reluctant response to difficult and complex situations; for many students, leaving was personally devastating. The case studies in this report are typical and illustrate the problems with which students wrestled and how much they welcomed contact with the **back on course** guidance service.

This report contains case studies of our clients, the names and images of some of these have been changed at the wishes of the clients.

1. Executive summary

This report describes the **back on course** activity. This main data set used in this report draws on 14,730 records from 42 participating **back on course** institutions that have been individually matched into UCAS applicant data. The substantial size of this data set together with the enhancement of linking to the UCAS data provides a sound basis for understanding the **back on course** activity. Analysis of this data set against the wider UCAS data shows that the participating institutions are broadly representative of the HE sector as a whole, suggesting that the findings have an applicability beyond the institutions currently participating. The report gives detailed analysis of the data from the activity, but some of the key findings are as follows:

Characteristics of early-leavers

The main criterion for records being supplied to **back on course** is that a student has left the HE course before qualifying; we call these records 'early-leavers'. The composition of these early-leavers has been compared against that of students who accepted places at partner HEIs in a typical entry period. This shows how the records supplied to **back on course** differ from the accepted applicants that they would typically be drawn from.¹ The main factor behind these differences is likely to be variations in the early-leaving rate across groups of accepted applicants.

Here we summarise some of the characteristics of this early-leaver group compared with the accepted applicant population at the same HEIs.

- 52% of early-leavers referred to **back on course** were female, lower than the proportion of all students who accepted places at **back on course** HEIs, of whom 55% were female (Figure 4).
- The age profile of early-leavers generally reflects the total applicant population of all **back on course** partner HEIs. However, there was an increased likelihood of early-leavers being aged 21–24, whilst the proportion under 21 was 3% lower than the overall participating institution figures (see Figure 5).
- Asian and black students were comparatively less represented than white students amongst **back on course** early-leavers (Figure 6).
- Many early leavers are from advantaged backgrounds (for example, 47% come from the most advantaged 40% of the population). This is a reflection of the high participation rates of these groups that gives them a large share of accepted applicants (around 50% for **back on course** institutions). Around 53% of early-leavers come from the most disadvantaged 60% of the population – this is a slight over-representation compared to their share of 49% of accepted applicants to **back on course** partner institutions.
- Disabled applicants to **back on course** partner institutions were no more or less likely to be in the early-leaver group than those with no declared disability.
- The previous educational establishment of early-leavers was disproportionately more likely to be an FE college or the 'other' category and less likely to be a state school, and even less likely to be a grammar or independent school.
- Early-leavers were more likely to have originally applied to HE with qualifications other than A levels: 45% of the group had none/unknown Tariff points – ten percentage points higher than the **back on course** partner institutional profile. Those with fewer than 80 or unknown Tariff points were also over-represented in the early-leaver group.
- Early-leavers were most likely to have originally been accepted to HEIs close to their home address, with 62% travelling less than 50 miles and 47% remaining within 25 miles of home (Figure 11).

¹ It should be noted that joining the project has been a phased process from August 2010 and therefore no direct comparisons should be made between these numbers only comparison of the compositions.

Re-applications to HE

Fifteen per cent of early-leavers were found to have already re-applied for HE study when they were matched against the UCAS data. Of those that had re-applied, 80% had made successful applications; thus 12% of all **back on course** early-leavers had been accepted again into higher education. This fact was signalled in the pilot research, and therefore it was considered useful to look at the characteristics of this group in more detail this year.

- Those in the youngest age bracket (20 and under) accounted for three-quarters of all early-leavers and were far more likely to re-apply (86% of all re-applicants were in this group). Older early-leavers (40 and over) were comparatively less likely to re-apply than younger early-leavers.
- The analysis showed that the overall pattern of non-completion and re-application was not strongly associated with ethnicity, disability or POLAR2 groups.
- While fewer than half (45%) of the early-leavers had originally entered HE with A levels only, of those that had re-applied, 58% had A levels only. Accepted re-applicant data shows that those with A levels only were more likely to have been accepted than re-applicants with qualifications other than A levels.
- Early-leavers with 240 or more Tariff points were notably more likely to have re-applied and more likely to have been accepted in their subsequent applications than those with fewer Tariff points.
- As previously noted, nearly half (48%) of the early-leavers originally applied to HEIs located within 25 miles of home, but those applying to local HEIs were less likely to re-apply (36%) after leaving their HE course early.
- Early-leavers who were originally accepted through Clearing were more likely to re-apply than those who entered directly to HEIs (outside of the UCAS main scheme).

Who participates in back on course?

At the time of this research 965 early-leavers had progressed to the final stages of IAG. Around half of this number were matched to UCAS data, allowing the progression rates from earlier in the programme to this IAG stage to be examined for a number of groups:

- Approximately three-quarters of early-leavers are aged 20 and under – in line with national data. Those aged 40 and over constituted just 2.5% of the total early-leaver records matched to UCAS records, but this age group were far more likely to have engaged fully with the IAG service (5% of all those engaged were 40+). By contrast, those 20 and under were the least likely to have taken up **back on course** guidance.
- Early-leavers from low participation areas were more likely to have been transferred to, and to have fully engaged with, the IAG service than those from higher participation areas.
- Early-leavers originally from grammar school or independent school backgrounds were less likely than all other backgrounds to fully engage with the IAG service.
- Early-leavers with qualifications other than A levels were the most likely to engage with the IAG service, whilst those who originally applied to HE with no recognised qualifications were less likely to have engaged.
- Early-leavers with between 120 and 239 Tariff points were most likely to have been successfully contacted and become engaged with the IAG service (240 Tariff points is equivalent to three C grades at A level). The higher the Tariff points total, the less likely early-leavers were to engage fully with the IAG service.
- At the time of their **back on course** guidance intervention, the majority of early-leavers (56%) were employed – with 27% in full-time employment (Figure 43). A further 30% were unemployed, although many of these were not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or other benefits. Only 5% were studying at FE or HE level.

What did early-leavers say about why they left HE?

Because many students leave their HEIs without telling the institution of their intention (many of them leave between terms and semesters and do not return), there is limited information about why that decision has been made. The IAG team asked the 965 early-leavers why they had decided to leave without completing their course. Of these, 487 could be matched to UCAS data, allowing us to report the types of reason they provided against their background. The high resolution this affords has the consequence that some of the analysis groups can be quite small, so that they provide indications as to likely reasons rather than definitive findings. For the larger groups we see:

- Younger early-leavers were more likely than those in other age groups to cite course-related reasons for their withdrawal.
- Nearly half of those from POLAR2 groups 4 and 5 (those areas with the highest proportions of HE-qualified adults) cite dissatisfaction with their course or institution experience, compared with approximately one-third of those in the lowest participation neighbourhoods.
- The early-leavers originally applying with A levels (whether or not they were in conjunction with other qualifications) were more likely to cite concerns over the course.
- Those applying with no qualifications were more likely than those with qualifications to cite caring commitments.
- Those with higher Tariff points were more likely to cite course-related reasons.

Original HE choices

Given the data in the two categories above, it was thought to be useful to see how former students made their original HE choices, and to see whether there was a correlation with propensity to leave early.

- Early-leavers whose original HE choices were primarily determined either by matching entry requirements (61%) or the institution's prestige (58%) were more likely to have cited dissatisfaction with their HE experience as the main reason for leaving HE.
- Almost 40% of early-leavers said that they received their information, advice and guidance in making their original HE choices directly from HEIs.
- Early-leavers with no clear source of independent IAG to help make their original HE choices were significantly more likely to have left owing to dissatisfaction with their HE experience.

Other factors affecting the decision to leave

- Of the early-leavers engaging with the IAG service, those with children or other dependants were more likely than the whole cohort to cite caring commitments. Those with dependants were far less likely to refer to course-related reasons for non-completion.
- Nearly half (49%) of those living alone left for 'other personal/financial' reasons, compared with 34% across the cohort.
- A significant minority (43%) of early-leavers who engaged with the **back on course** IAG service had jobs whilst they were undertaking their original HE course.

No shows

A supplementary group offered the **back on course** activity are those who accepted a place but then cancelled their application through UCAS before starting the course. Since they are not 'early-leavers' this group is analysed separately from the main 'early-leaver' group that was linked back to UCAS data with a focus on how people in this group differ from accepted applicants.

- They were more likely to be from the 21–24 or 25–29 age groups than the cohort as a whole.
- They were less likely to be from a white ethnic background than the cohort as a whole.
- They were much more likely to be from a POLAR2 low participation neighbourhood than from a higher participation group.
- They were more likely to be applying to an HEI within 25 miles of their home address.
- They were more likely to be from a further education or 'other' educational background than from state or independent school or sixth form college.
- They are much more likely to have fewer than 240 Tariff points than the cohort as a whole.

Current activity and intended destinations

At the time of their back on course guidance, the majority of early-leavers (57%) were employed – with 27% in full-time employment (Figure 43).

- A further 30% were unemployed, although many of these were not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or other benefits.
- 5% were studying at FE or HE level.

All early-leavers involved in the **back on course** IAG service were asked their intended destination, both at the beginning and at the end of their guidance intervention (Figure 44).

- At the start of the IAG process 83% planned to return to HE study, with the most popular other intended destinations (apprenticeships and employment) accounting for 7% and 6% respectively.
- The proportion planning to return to HE had increased to 86% at the end of their period of IAG with **back on course**.

1.1 Understanding the sample sizes used in this research

In order to explore the characteristics of early-leavers the **back on course** data in this report has been matched to UCAS data. As not all data was able to be matched, the numbers in this report are not indicative of the success of the service itself. When early-leavers are first introduced to **back on course** they are given an opportunity to opt-out of further contact. This, and the time it then takes to make reasonable contact attempts, builds in a lag between first knowing about an early-leaver, offering them the service and the completion of their journey with **back on course**.

At the time of conducting this research **back on course** has received 19,570 lines of data, of which 14,730 could be matched to UCAS data. Chapters 6 and 7 of this report draw on these. Chapter 8 explores who engages with **back on course**, and at the time this element of the research was conducted 12,197 early-leavers had been passed to the advisory service, of whom 4,297 had been successfully contacted by the project, 3,861 were unable to be contacted and 4,039 contacts were in progress. Of those 4,297 successfully contacted only 2,526 could be matched to the UCAS dataset and therefore **back on course** used this subset as the basis for the research.

Chapters 9 and 10 use information gathered by **back on course** Advisers in the course of delivering IAG and brings this together with the UCAS dataset. **back on course** offers a two-stage IAG service: initial contact is made by a team assistant, who explains the service and offers basic information and advice. If the early-leaver's query is resolved at this stage, or they do not wish to participate further, information about their reasons for leaving their HEI are not collected. The second stage is one or more in-depth advice and guidance appointments with a **back on course** Adviser. At the time this research was conducted, 843 early-leavers had scheduled or had an advisory appointment, with a further 122 wishing to proceed but an appointment not booked at this time. Of these, UCAS could match the following numbers: no appointment made at this time, 72; first appointment scheduled, 130; at least one appointment completed, 285. It is these clients whose data forms the basis for the research in Chapters 9 and 10.

The final group researched in this report are the 'no shows'. This supplementary group is defined through UCAS data and based upon accepted applicants who cancel their application before starting their courses. It will not include all people who do not turn up at institutions after accepting their place, but does provide a starting point for understanding this group. In 2010, there were 968 'no shows' at English institutions and these individuals were offered the opportunity to take part in the **back on course** activity. Since they are not 'early leavers' they are not reported on in the main analysis from linked UCAS data in the report but in a special section that explores how the composition of this group differs from accepted applicants.

Records submitted to **back on course** at time research conducted

Total received 19,570		
Matched 14,730	Not matched 4,840	
Not yet sent to IAG service 7,285	Sent to IAG service 7,445	Sent to IAG service 4,752
		Not yet sent to IAG service 88

Total sent to IAG service
12,197

Matched 7,445										Not matched 4,752			
No contact with client 4,919										No contact with client 4,919			
IAG contact attempts complete 2,383										Awaiting further contact attempts 1,503			
Awaiting further contact attempts 2,536										IAG contact attempts complete 1,478			
Level 1 engagement 2,039										Level 1 engagement 1,293			
Level 2 engagement 72										Level 2 engagement 50			
Level 3 engagement 130										Level 3 engagement 141			
Level 4 engagement 285										Level 4 engagement 287			
Level 4 engagement 285										Level 3 engagement 141			
Level 3 engagement 130										Level 2 engagement 50			
Level 2 engagement 72										Level 1 engagement 1,293			
Level 1 engagement 2,039										Level 1 engagement 1,293			
572										1,293			
271										1,293			
122										1,293			
3,332										1,293			
4,297										1,293			
4,039										1,293			
3,861										1,293			
7,900										1,293			
12,197										1,293			

2. How to read this report

- **Chapter 3** provides an introduction to the aims and workings of the **back on course** project.
- **Chapter 4** is a brief literature review that refers to studies of HE student retention and non-completion identified as being of relevance to the **back on course** project.
- **Chapter 5** provides an overview of the range of HEIs partnering with **back on course**. It considers the size of the **back on course** project and the extent to which the partner HEIs differ from, and reflect, all UCAS member HEIs in England as a whole.
- **Chapter 6** considers how representative the early-leavers referred to **back on course** from its partner HEIs are of the English UCAS HEIs as a whole. It provides an analysis of the early-leaver records against a range of variables matched to UCAS' own data.
- **Chapter 7** outlines the differences between the early-leavers who have re-applied to HE and those who have not re-applied.
- **Chapter 8** considers factors that may affect the extent to which early-leavers engage with the **back on course** Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service.
- **Chapter 9** reviews reasons early-leavers gave to explain why they left HE.
- **Chapter 10** provides additional information on early-leavers obtained by the **back on course** IAG service.
- **Chapter 11** provides additional information on 'no shows' (accepted applications to HE who either did not start their HE course at all or who started a course and left within the first two weeks).
- The methodology used for **back on course** and the research can be found at Annex 1.
- Annex 2 provides a glossary of terms used throughout this report.
- Results of the first round of the client satisfaction survey are available at Annex 3.

Mark, 24, originally studying at a non-affiliated University

I started a degree in TV and Film Production in 2009 as an older student. I left in the first term due to a combination of problems at home and problems with my health which were making me very unhappy. When I left I felt disappointed in myself even though the problems were out of my control.

Having spoken to the **back on course** team I realised I was still entitled to enough funding to study another degree. They also helped me with applying again. I got straight back in contact with my tutors, applied in time and got a place without having to go through Clearing. I felt a lot more confident and motivated after the first call from **back on course**. The help I received from them enabled me to write a good personal statement. They suggested I make it very personal and explain that I had left for very personal reasons. I had not been sure about being so open but it paid off as I have been accepted onto a different course at the same university. Without this support I think I would have finished my seasonal job and gone straight back on the dole, which I would have found depressing.

Without the initial email from **back on course** asking if I would like to use the service I really don't think I would be starting university again. After my Media and Film Studies degree I would like to do a PGCE. I would like to achieve as much as I can through education to the highest level that I can. A year ago I had no goals and no motivation but I now feel very positive about my future. I now feel very motivated and have personal goals which I have set myself.



3. Introduction

3.1 The back on course project

back on course is an impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service for UK domiciled, full-time undergraduate HE students who have withdrawn from or who have been withdrawn from full-time higher education in England before completing their studies (early-leavers). The service is designed to offer support to people who are interested in returning to education or exploring other positive options.

The **back on course** project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and is being run in partnership between The Open University and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Following a pilot in academic year 2009–10 in the north-west of England it now works with a subset of former students from HEIs across England, and aims to increase the number of students completing their higher education studies or moving on to other positive options.

back on course is not intended as a substitute for the retention activities of HEIs, but to provide further support once the student has left the institution. This is particularly important as many students do not contact their institution before making the decision to leave; in many cases students simply do not return after a vacation.

The following HEIs (see Table 1) have engaged in the **back on course** programme by submitting data via UCAS between the launch of **back on course** and the end of June 2011, when analysis for this report began. The project is still ongoing, with new HEIs uploading data in every month since the analysis in this report began. Funding from HEFCE comes to an end on 31 July 2012; a further research report is planned to be published in autumn 2012, and the project is currently seeking alternative sources of funding to enable the service to continue after July 2012.

HEI	Joined back on course
University of Bath	28/06/11
Bath Spa University	16/06/11
University College Birmingham	18/03/11
Bournemouth University	07/02/11
The University of Bradford	14/03/11
University of the West of England, Bristol	27/06/11
Brunel University	04/05/11
Buckinghamshire New University	14/04/11
Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London	20/06/11
City University	23/03/11
Coventry University	14/04/11
University of Cumbria	14/01/11
De Montfort University	23/03/11
University of Derby	17/05/11
Durham University	14/06/11
University of East Anglia	16/06/11
Edge Hill University	18/03/10
The University of Essex	12/04/11
University of Hertfordshire	14/04/11
Kingston University	14/06/11
Lancaster University	15/02/10
University of Lincoln	19/05/11
The University of Liverpool	15/03/10
Liverpool Hope University	09/03/10
London Metropolitan University	21/02/11
London School of Economics and Political Science (University of London)	07/04/11
The Manchester Metropolitan University	11/05/10
Newman University College, Birmingham	24/03/11
Oxford Brookes University	22/11/10
Ravensbourne	23/05/11
Rose Bruford College	14/06/11

HEI	Joined back on course
Royal Veterinary College (University of London)	01/04/11
The University of Salford	06/08/10
The School of Pharmacy (University of London)	28/06/11
Southampton Solent University	15/06/11
St George's, University of London (formerly St George's Hospital Medical School)	14/06/11
St Mary's University College, Twickenham	14/06/11
University of Surrey	04/05/11
University of Sussex	09/06/11
The University of Warwick	22/12/10
University of Wolverhampton	22/02/11
University of Winchester	17/06/11

Table 1: HEIs that transferred data to **back on course** by June 2011, a total of 42 HEIs.

In total, the data submitted by **back on course** to UCAS for analysis includes early-leavers from 70 institutions. As well as those listed above and the 'no shows', three institutions chose to refer their early-leavers directly to the scheme owing to internal data protection issues; some early-leavers also found their own way to the scheme through word of mouth or the internet.

Initial contact is made with the HEIs by one of the Senior Partnership Managers employed by the project. They negotiate participation in the project with the HEI, and arrange for an operational contact to be identified who is responsible for uploading personal data about early-leavers to the UCAS secure server. Once non-completion data is passed to UCAS it is cleaned and formatted. The data within this report has been through one of two separate processing models depending on when it was sent to UCAS. Under the old process the data would then be matched to discover the early-leaver's re-application status. If, through UCAS data, it was seen that an individual had re-applied since departing HE, we removed their details from the dataset, and they were not offered the IAG service.

The procedure was amended in May 2011, when it was realised that even though an early-leaver may be in the process of re-applying, they may still benefit from IAG, and it was decided that this procedure should be changed so that all individuals going forward were given the opportunity to receive advice and guidance.

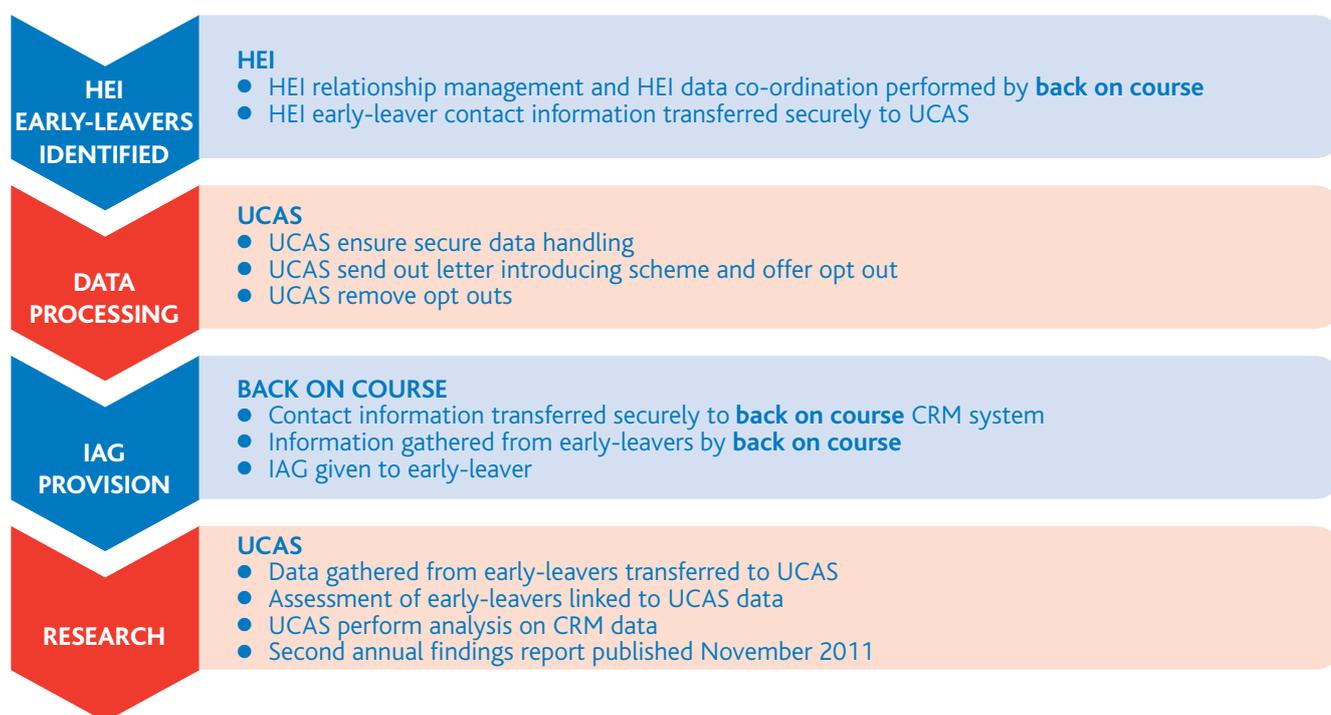


Figure 1: **back on course** data flow

UCAS writes to every early-leaver, introducing the service and offering them the opportunity to opt out. If they do not opt out, their contact details are passed to the **back on course** IAG service, housed within The Open University in Manchester, which attempts to contact the early-leaver via email, mobile and land line, followed up if necessary by a letter to the original address stating that they have been unable to contact the early-leaver. Those who are successfully contacted are offered basic guidance, information and advice, with the opportunity to progress to a more in-depth guidance service, which is delivered by qualified advisers by telephone or email. At each stage, further data is collected and recorded for research purposes, but early-leavers are also offered the opportunity for their data to be excluded from the research. Figure 1 provides a brief overview of this process.

Notable successes of the project thus far include:

- Impartial IAG had been offered to over 12,000 early-leavers by mid-September 2011.
- Very positive feedback has been received from participants in the service.
- 91 HEIs in England have now agreed to participate in the project.
- By mid-September, details of over 26,000 early-leavers had been received.

3.2 The back on course research

This report was created using data from year one (pilot year) and year two of the **back on course** project (up to 28 June 2011).

This research report's overarching aim remained the same as the pilot year's research: to improve retention strategies within the sector through reasoned analysis of **back on course** data and evaluation of the project's IAG service. In so doing, it aims to help HEIs gain a better understanding of the reasons why students leave, and ultimately improve the student experience in English higher education. While the service supports only full-time undergraduates in English HEIs, we believe that many of the issues raised apply equally to students elsewhere in the UK, and to part-time students.

In order to inform the HE sector, **back on course** data was analysed by demographic variables to discover who leaves HE early. We also investigated the reasons that early-leavers gave to the **back on course** team on why they departed HE, as well as exploring the influences on their decisions pre-and post-HE.

Second, the evaluation of the **back on course** intervention was fulfilled by measuring the degree of engagement in the **back on course** service by early-leavers, as well as noting their behaviour pre-and post-**back on course** intervention.

A shortcoming of the **back on course** pilot year research report was the small number of early-leavers with whom the project had engaged at the point of analysis. Due to the timing of the pilot year research report, and the fact that the methodology had taken time to establish, the opportunity to contact large numbers of individuals had not been available. This has been overcome in the second year by the expansion from the pilot to England-wide roll-out, enabling more HEIs to pass data to the project and timely contact to be made with more early-leavers once they are made aware of the service.

Issues in collating data in the first year related to the use of free text were overcome by revisions to the customer relationship management (CRM) system to collect closed fields and training the team on research methodology in data collection. Following a review of first year analysis the research parameters were slightly amended to include more questions and allow a more detailed and vivid description of those who engage in the service.

Ultimately, this report provides the structure of reporting that will continue in the third year report to provide consistency and the ability to track the progress of the project.

4. What factors have been identified as reasons for not completing higher education?

The **back on course** project has been informed, in part, by earlier studies of student retention and non-completion. This chapter makes reference to appropriate literature that helped define the variables used in the research and contextualise the approach taken by **back on course**.

Many studies into student retention exist, the majority of which are institutional research focusing on single HEIs, departments or courses. Some research has been undertaken on a national basis using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, whilst various international research reports have also been conducted. Limited literature exists that draws on empirical research with early-leavers, and that which does exist tends to draw from relatively small samples.

The most significant study into the retention of students in higher education in the UK is widely recognised to have been conducted by the National Audit Office (NAO) in 2007². This study builds upon a previous NAO report from 2002³ incorporating an analysis of Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) data about student retention and completion rates, and includes case studies of higher education (HEIs).

The NAO 2007 report concluded that a number of indicators were associated with students' withdrawal from higher education:

- level of qualifications
- subject choice
- areas of lower participation (identified by POLAR2⁴ data)
- age
- disability.

A number of additional reports corroborate these findings, but also add other indicators that could be seen to impact upon the likelihood of students withdrawing from HE. In particular:

- gender (Aston and Bekhradnia 2005, Barefoot 2004, Charlton et al. 2006, Curtis 2007)
- ethnicity (Aston and Bekhradnia 2005)
- direct entrants, in particular mature direct entrants (Aston and Bekhradnia 2005)
- type of qualifications (Bailey and Bekhradnia 2008, Curtis 2007, Fitzgibbon and Prior 2006, McCausland et al. 2005, May and Bousted 2004)
- level of Tariff points (Curtis 2007)
- students applying through Clearing (Davies and Elias 2003, Charlton et al. 2006).

James, 19, originally studying at University Alliance University

I left university in March. I felt ok in general but I wanted to get out and do some work. I had been in education for a long time and had decided I wanted to do some on-the-job learning. I felt a sense of relief when I left university. I had stayed for about a month after making my decision to make sure it was what I wanted. When the **back on course** adviser contacted me I found it very reassuring as I was not made to feel that I had made the wrong choice - when you leave you have doubts and think you may regret it but I found that I was doing exactly what I should have been doing, which was continuing to look for work in any way that I could. I was, however, advised to create a portfolio in preparation for interviews.

I found that helpful and I have now done that. I hope to find work in the design field and become a Graphic Designer eventually. I would recommend the service to my friends because it is reassuring to speak to someone.



² National Audit Office (2007) Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education

³ National Audit Office (2002) Improving student achievement in English higher education

⁴ POLAR2 group 1 neighbourhoods have the lowest HE participation rates. POLAR2 group 5 are the areas with the highest HE participation rates. More information on POLAR2 should be obtained from the HEFCE website: www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/polar/polar2/

Accordingly, **back on course** data has been examined against all of these variables.

The **back on course** project incorporates information, advice and guidance (IAG), which helps to ascertain reasons for withdrawal from higher education. The analysis of this IAG work builds on earlier research identifying reasons for withdrawal from higher education, categorised into the following themes:

- personal reasons (NAO 2007, Curtis 2007)
- lack of integration (NAO 2007)
- dissatisfaction with course/institution (NAO 2007, Yorke and Longden 2008)
- lack of preparedness (Barefoot 2004, McCausland et al. 2005, NAO 2007, van Stolk et al. 2007, Yorke and Longden 2008)
- wrong choice of course (Curtis 2007, NAO 2007, van Stolk et al. 2007, Yorke and Longden 2008)
- financial reasons (Curtis 2007, NAO 2007, van Stolk et al. 2007, Yorke and Longden 2008)
- to take up a more attractive opportunity (NAO 2007)
- age at commencement of studies (van Stolk et al. 2007)

The NAO report recognised that many of these reasons may be interrelated but was limited by the HESA data on which it was based, which allowed for only one reason per person to be recorded. In addition, the number of early-leavers involved in detailed research had been very small (in-depth interviews with 26 students in the 2002 study; 17 students in the 2007 study). The **back on course** project provided for more than one reason for withdrawal to be recorded in order to provide greater understanding of motivating factors, and the number and diversity of both the HEIs and the students involved in the current research is significantly larger than any previous study. Finally, none of the previous studies looked at the characteristics and behaviour of early-leavers who re-applied spontaneously to HE, an area where this study breaks completely new ground.

5. Which HEIs partnered with **back on course** are included in this research?

This section seeks to show how the early-leavers contacted by **back on course** (and matched to UCAS data) are similar to or different from the sector as a whole. Entrants in the period 2006–2010 have been used as a comparison because these are the dates from which the early-leavers using the service entered HE. However, it should be noted that **back on course** has not been operating for this whole period and therefore no inferences should be drawn about the success of the service itself from direct comparison of numbers within this section. This research incorporates information about UK-domiciled applicants accepted to UCAS member HEIs in England from 2006 to 2010 inclusive. There was an annual average of 329,339 full-time applicants accepted to UCAS member HEIs during this period.

Back on course records are drawn from 42 HEIs that transferred data to the project. In terms of student numbers, however, the HEIs involved in **back on course** accounted for almost one-third of all UK-domiciled applicants accepted to English HEIs over the five-year period. It should be noted that HEIs currently participating in the **back on course** project are self-selecting, so there is scope for systematic differences between accepted applicants at partner HEIs and the national picture.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of accepted applicants by university mission group⁵, nationally and within the **back on course** project. Whilst the **back on course** sample is reasonably representative of the national picture (for all UK-domiciled students who accepted places at UCAS member HEIs), students at University Alliance and 1994 Group HEIs are over-represented, whilst the Russell Group is under-represented⁶. Association of Colleges members account for 4% of all UK-domiciled students who accepted places at HE provision in England but are not included within the **back on course** project as they are not covered by the HEFCE definition of HEIs.

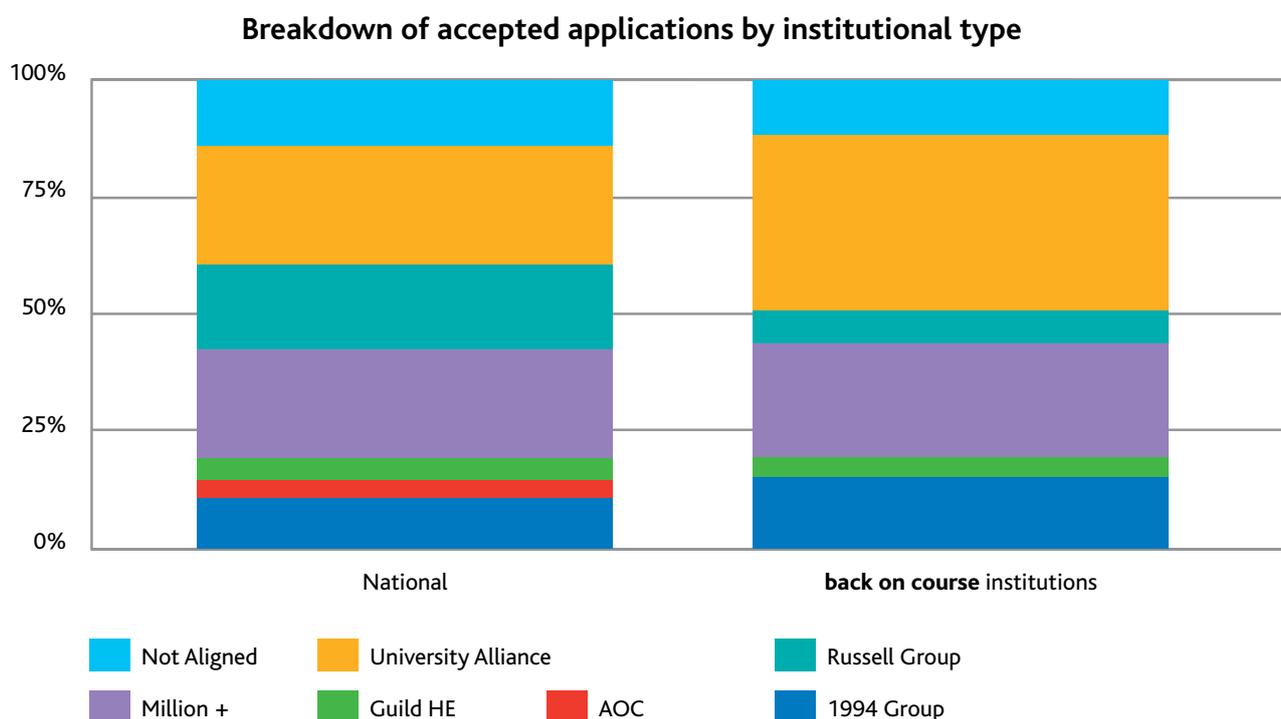


Figure 2: Accepted applicants by institution type (2006–2010), **back on course** partners and national

An analysis of applicants against a wide range of variables revealed that students at the **back on course** partner HEIs were not systematically different from all accepted applicants⁷ during the period of study. The similarities between the **back on course** HEIs and national data are clear from the indexed Table 2.

⁵ Some universities have formed groups through which they share ideas and resources regarding issues and procedures in the higher education sector. These groups work to improve the higher education system and share best practice methods.

⁶ Accepted applicant data by mission group is as follows: University Alliance (25.5% of accepted applicants nationally, 37.6% of all accepted applicants to **back on course** institutions); 1994 Group (11.5% national, 15.5% of **back on course**); Russell Group (17.9% national, 6.8% **back on course**); Million+ (22.8% national, 24.5% **back on course**); Guild HE (4.4% national, 4.2% **back on course**); and Association of Colleges (4.0% national, 0% **back on course**). In addition, 14.1% (national) and 11.4% (**back on course** accepted applicants) were at HEIs that are not aligned to any mission groups

⁷ Applicants who were placed at an HEI

	Student acceptances to UCAS member HEIs		Student acceptances to partner HEIs	
DEMOGRAPHICS	%	Index	%	Index

SEX

Female	55.4	100	55.0	99
Male	44.6	100	45.0	101

AGE GROUP

20 and under	78.0	100	78.0	100
21 to 24	10.5	100	10.7	102
25 to 39	8.9	100	8.9	100
40 and over	2.6	100	2.4	92

DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS

No disability	94.2	100	94.2	100
Any disability	5.8	100	5.8	100

ETHNICITY

White	73.8	100	70.9	96
Asian	10.7	100	12.9	120
Black	6.6	100	7.8	120
Mixed	3.4	100	3.5	104
Other ethnic background	1.1	100	1.3	110
Unknown or prefer not to say	4.4	100	3.7	83

POLAR2 GROUP

1	12.3	100	12.1	98
2	16.2	100	16.7	103
3	19.1	100	19.8	104
4	22.7	100	22.7	100
5	28.2	100	27.1	96
Unknown	1.5	100	1.5	100

	Student acceptances to UCAS member HEIs		Student acceptances to back on course partner HEIs	
PRE-HE EXPERIENCES	%	Index	%	Index

DISTANCE TRAVELLED

>0 and ≤24 miles	42.1	100	44.8	106
≥25 and ≤49 miles	16.0	100	16.1	101
≥50 and ≤74 miles	11.2	100	10.5	94
≥75 and ≤99 miles	8.6	100	9.6	112
≥100 and ≤124 miles	6.2	100	5.8	94

PRE-HE EXPERIENCES	Student acceptances to UCAS member HEIs		Student acceptances to back on course partner HEIs	
	%	Index	%	Index
DISTANCE TRAVELLED				
≥ 125 and ≤ 149 miles	3.8	100	3.0	79
≥ 150 and ≤ 174 miles	3.6	100	2.7	75
≥ 175 miles	5.5	100	4.9	89
Unknown	3.0	100	2.6	87
PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT				
Further education	20.7	100	21.7	105
Grammar school	5.8	100	5.0	86
Independent school	8.9	100	7.0	79
Sixth form college	17.4	100	18.9	109
State (excluding grammar)	29.6	100	30.3	102
Other	17.6	100	17.2	98
TARIFF BAND				
None/not known ⁸	34.3	100	34.7	101
1 to 79	4.5	100	4.9	109
80 to 119	1.7	100	2.0	118
120 to 179	4.4	100	5.1	116
180 to 239	7.9	100	9.3	118
240 to 299	11.0	100	12.4	113
300 to 359	11.6	100	11.7	101
360 to 419	10.0	100	8.7	87
420 to 479	6.8	100	5.4	79
480 to 539	4.1	100	3.1	76
540 plus	3.7	100	2.7	73

Table 2: Accepted applicants by variable, back on course HEIs and national data

As noted above, the students who accepted places at partner HEIs are generally representative of the national picture. However, there are some significant differences between proportions of students who accepted places at partner HEIs and proportions of student numbers nationally, across a few variables. In particular, a greater proportion of students who accepted places at partner HEIs were Asian or black. Partner HEIs were also disproportionately more likely to have accepted applicants from sixth form colleges, those travelling less than 25 miles to their institution and applicants accepted through Clearing. Conversely, partner HEIs had significantly fewer accepted applicants from independent schools or grammar schools. Students who accepted places at partner HEIs were less likely to have achieved 360 or more Tariff points, or to have travelled more than 100 miles to their chosen institution. Fewer accepted applicants applied directly to partner HEIs as opposed to applying through UCAS.

⁸ Tariff points are not known where clear, transferable qualifications data is not available for analysis.

6. Who are the early-leavers included in this research report?

This chapter considers how representative early-leavers from the **back on course** partners are of the HEIs' student populations as a whole. It provides a description of the matched early-leaver records against a range of variables where the early-leaver data differs from the institutional data. Early-leaver data from the 42 **back on course** partner HEIs for the five-year period was matched to UCAS accepted applicant data. Of 19,570 unique records by **back on course** HEIs, 75% could be matched to UCAS data (14,730). All individuals who opted out of the research are omitted from the data.

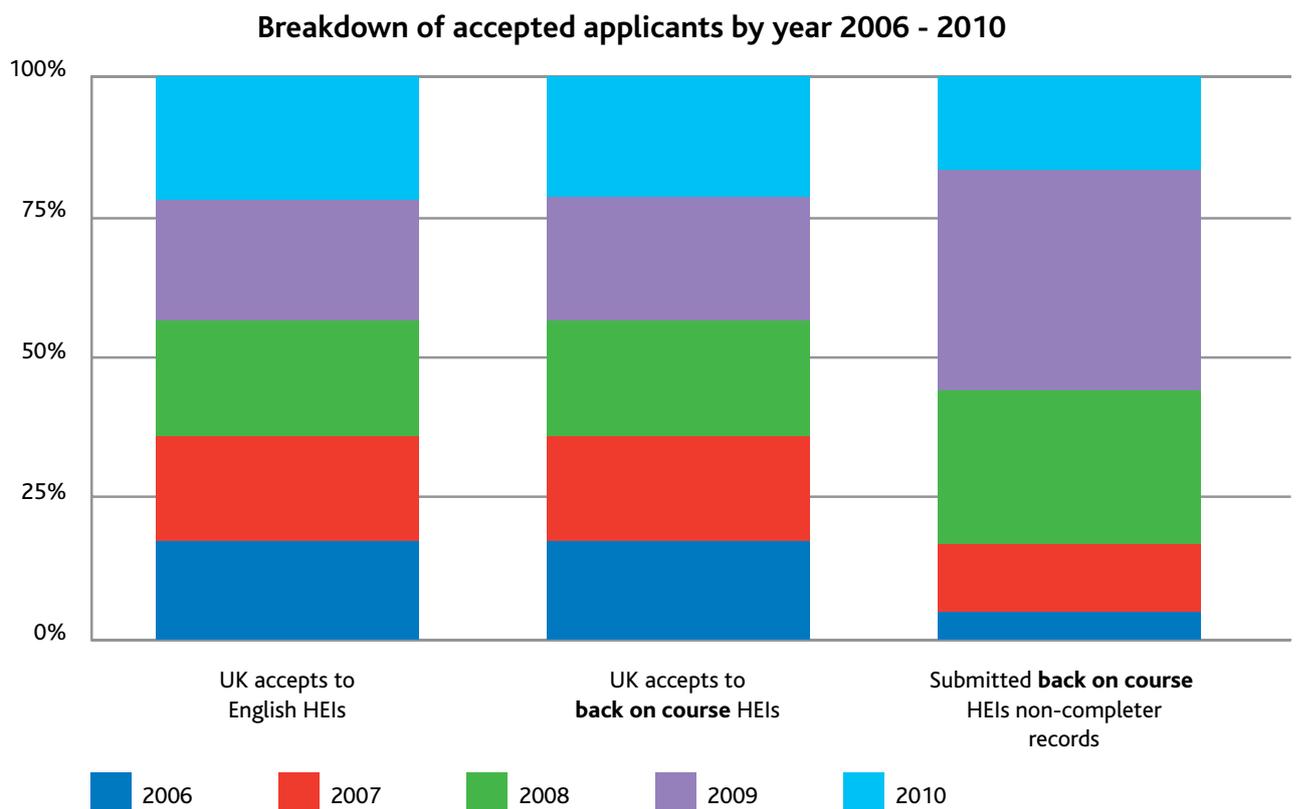


Figure 3: Breakdown of UCAS entry cohorts, 2006–10

The **back on course** data in this report refers to students who accepted places at English HEIs from 2006 to 2010 and who left without completing their studies. UK acceptances to both English UCAS members and **back on course** partner HEIs are fairly equally spread across the five UCAS entry cohorts we consider (Figure 3). In contrast, the **back on course** activities draw disproportionately on the later cohorts, so that 2008 and 2009 account for 66% of records; this is due to the timeframe within which the project has been operating and the timing when partners have joined. Only 5% of the early-leavers had originally applied in 2006.

Rebecca, 21, originally studying at 1994 Group university

I was quite happy and felt OK when I was at university. After the first year the course became less enjoyable and I was diagnosed as bipolar in my 3rd year. Initially I did not want to leave due to family pressure and the fact that I knew I was at a good university. I tried leaving a couple of times but my tutor persuaded me to stay as I was active in lectures and had always passed all my modules and exams. I stayed on even though I feel now I should have left earlier. Some days I could not get up in the morning. The condition can take over your whole life but only one of my closest friends understood. When I first got in touch with **back on course** they listened. I didn't know there was help out there for people like me. They helped me with writing my personal statement again.

I have spoken to **back on course** advisers three times now. I feel happy that there was something that could be done about my situation, and that this need not be the end of my studies and I can get help with re-applying. I wrote my Personal Statement again and I felt confident when doing this. It felt like a fresh start for me. I have applied to a different university closer to home and a new course through UCAS. Unfortunately, I recently had a relapse so I am going to take a gap year and will start my Business Management course in 2012 as I now need to make sure my health is ok.

I would probably have given up without the support from **back on course** and not re-applied for university. I have been applying for part-time jobs and hope to save some money for when I go back to university. I have a passion for business so I am hoping to get a good job related to my degree.

back on course gave me the belief that I could do it again. I feel like I've got a bright future and I don't feel like anything can hold me back. I have taken advice from doctors so hopefully I will go to university again and not have to take time off or have another relapse.

I would definitely recommend **back on course** to others as it has obviously had a positive impact on me and how I view my future. I would particularly recommend the service to any students who have chosen the wrong course or become ill during their studies.



6.1 Demographics

Most of the graphs that follow are self-explanatory and we provide only the headline statement.

Early-leaver profile by sex compared with institutional intake

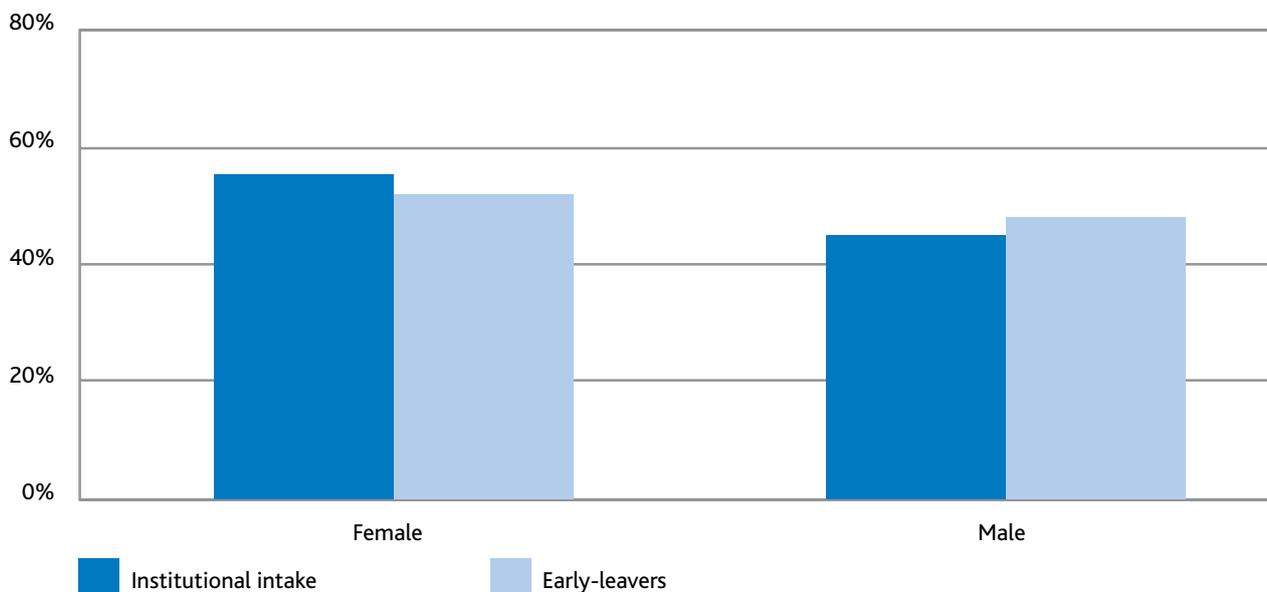


Figure 4: Early-leavers by sex

Female students appear proportionately less likely to be early-leavers than male students (Figure 4).

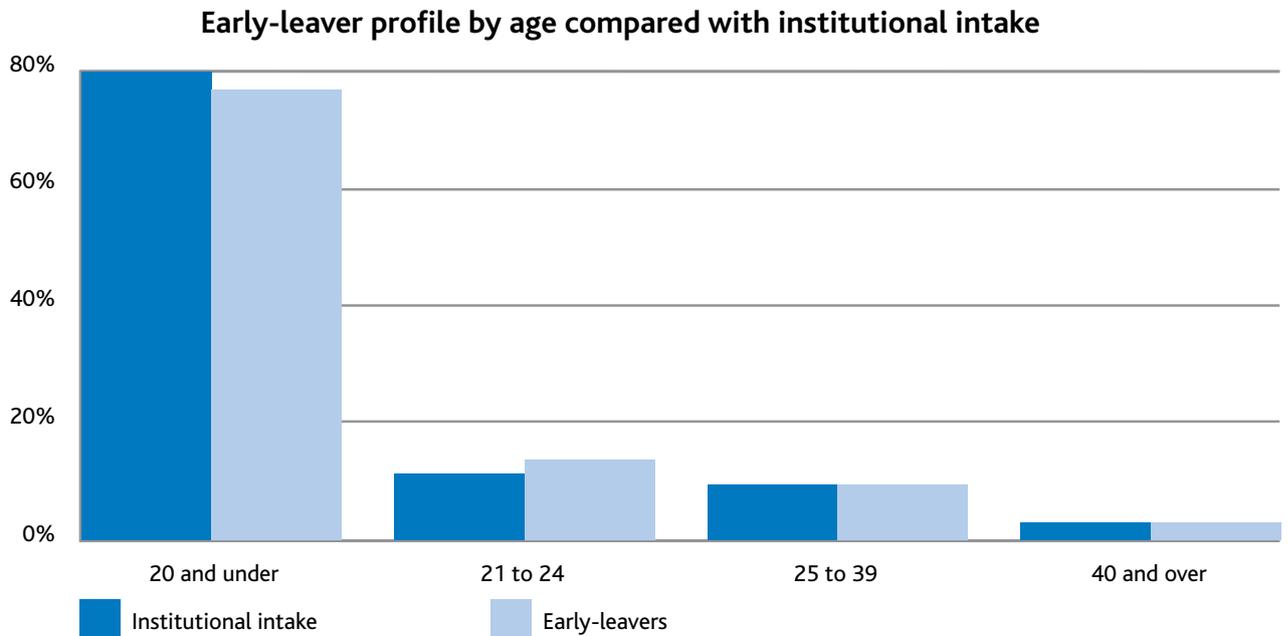


Figure 5: Early-leavers by age

Students aged 21–24 were proportionately more likely to be early-leavers than any other age group (Figure 5).

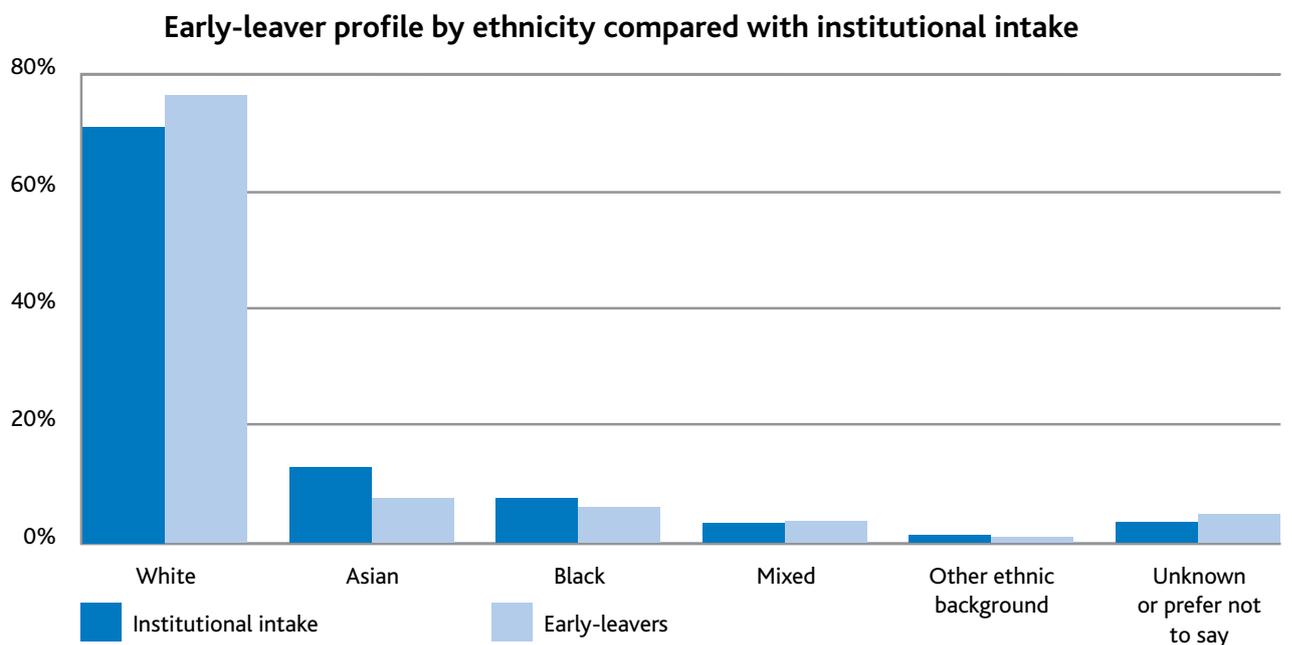


Figure 6: Early-leavers by ethnicity

The proportion of white students in the early-leaver cohort was 5% higher than **back on course** partner HEIs' overall student profile (71%). Asian and black students were comparatively less represented (5% and 2% lower than institutional data respectively) amongst **back on course** early-leavers (Figure 6). Over three-quarters (76%) of the early-leavers were white, whilst 8% were Asian, 6% black and 5% from mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.

Early-leaver profile by POLAR2 participant compared with institutional intake

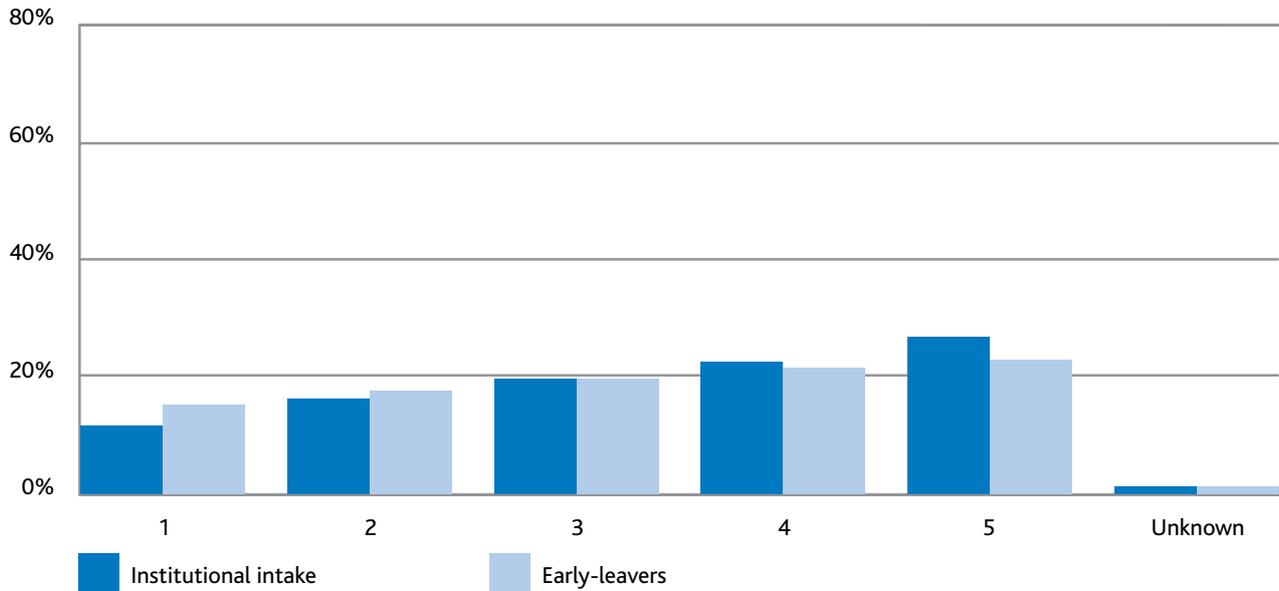


Figure 7: Early-leavers by POLAR2 group

Although POLAR2 group 5 (high participation neighbourhoods) make up the highest proportion of entrants to HE they appear under-represented in the early-leavers (Figure 7). Other findings were that white students are more likely to leave early than any other group other than the 'prefer not to say' group. Disabled applicants to **back on course** partner HEIs were no more or less likely to have been on their early-leavers lists.

6.2 Pre-HE experiences

Early-leaver profile by application centre compared with institutional intake

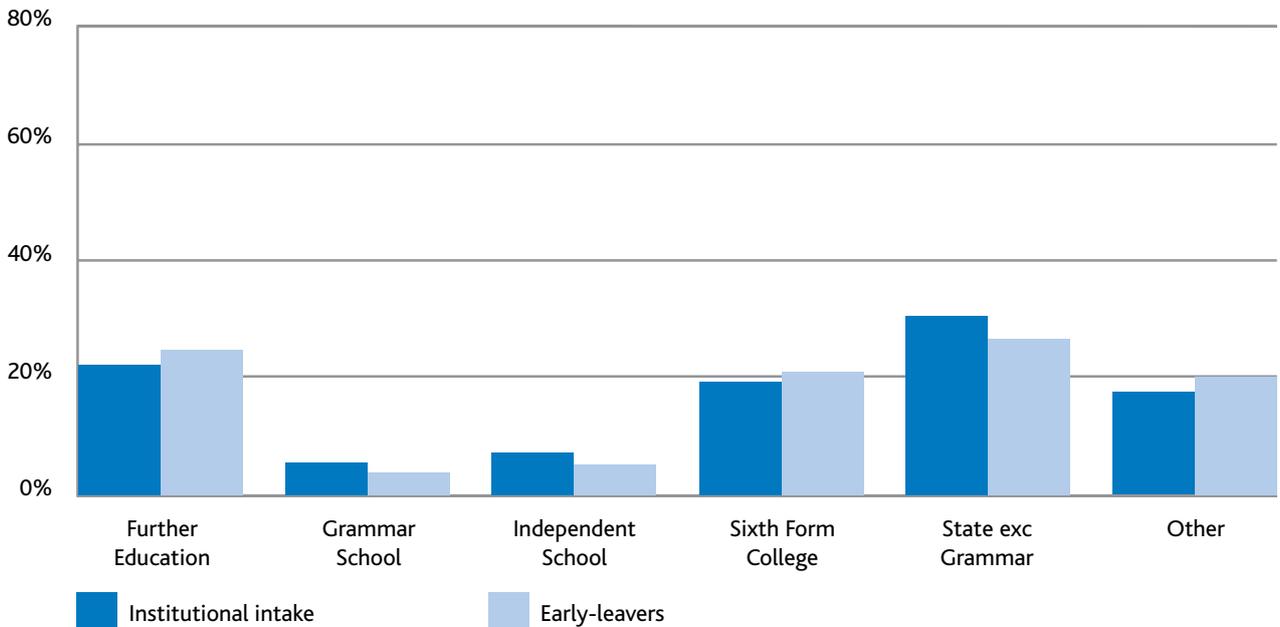


Figure 8: Early-leavers by centre type

Figure 8 indicates that students who came from grammar and independent schools are least likely to be early-leavers, whilst those who came from sixth form FE colleges or 'other'⁹ backgrounds are more likely to leave early.

⁹ 'Other' includes those who have applied not associated with a centre (will include some re-applicants) in addition to those applying via centres that do not fit into standard groupings, e.g. HEIs, prisons, language schools, etc.

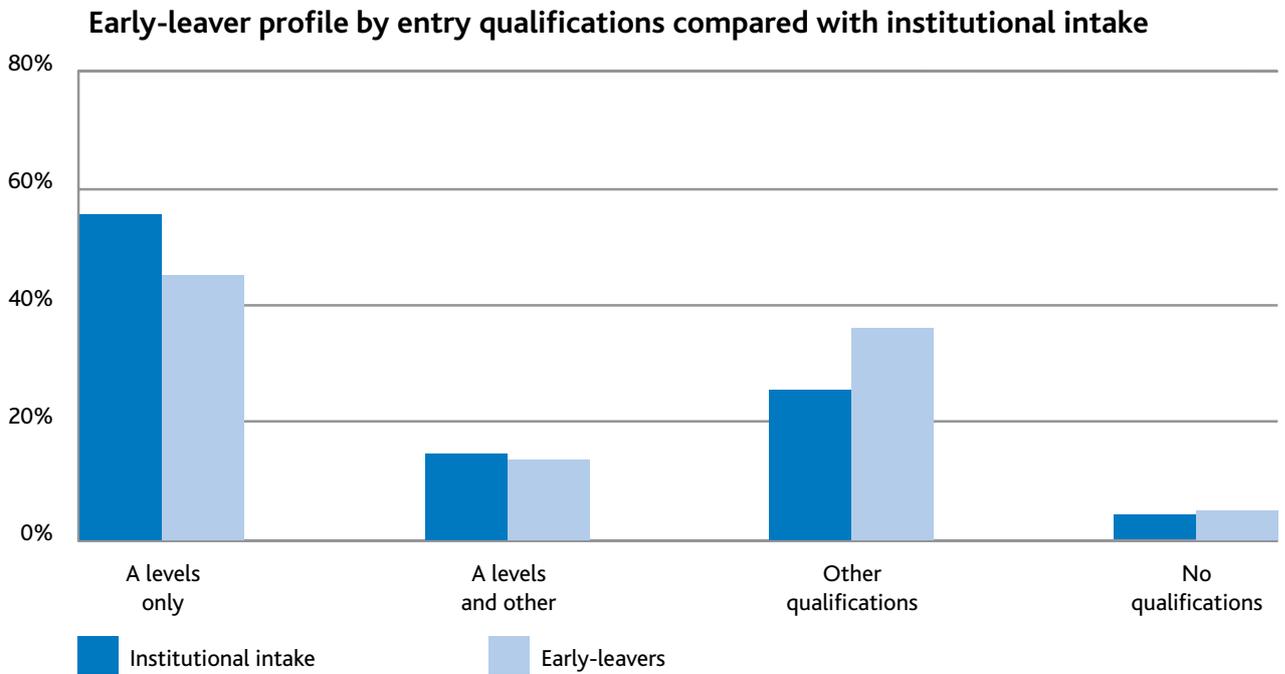


Figure 9: back on course early-leavers by entry qualifications

Qualifications other than A levels appear to be associated with disproportionately high early-leaver rates (Figure 9).

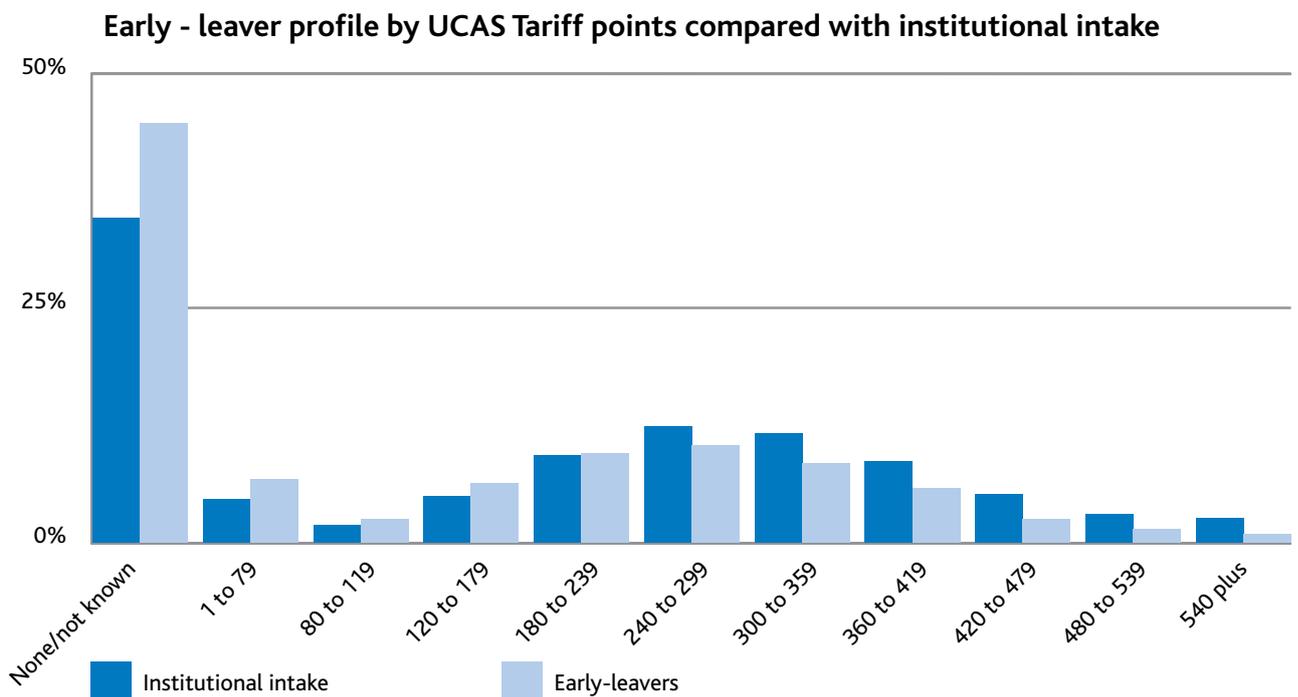


Figure 10: Early-leavers by Tariff points

Students attending HE having gained less than 240 Tariff points are more likely to be early-leavers than those with more than 240 points (Figure 10). (240 Tariff points is equivalent to three A levels at Grade C.) Qualifications not reported within the Tariff are those that were not part of ABL arrangements, those where the date upon which the qualification was sat fell outside of the ABL arrangements, and those for which Tariff data could not be analysed e.g. BTEC.

6.3 HE choices

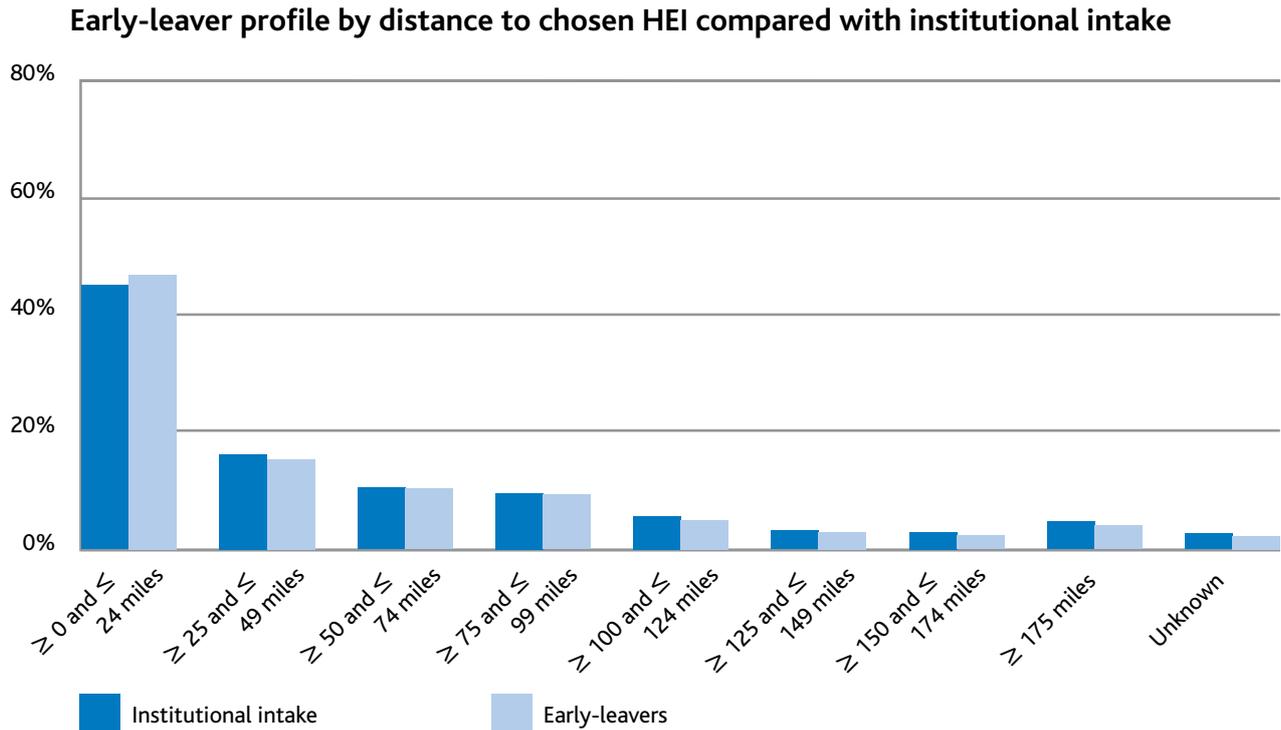


Figure 11: Early-leavers by distance from institution

Early-leavers were most likely to have originally been accepted to HEIs close to their home address (Figure 11).

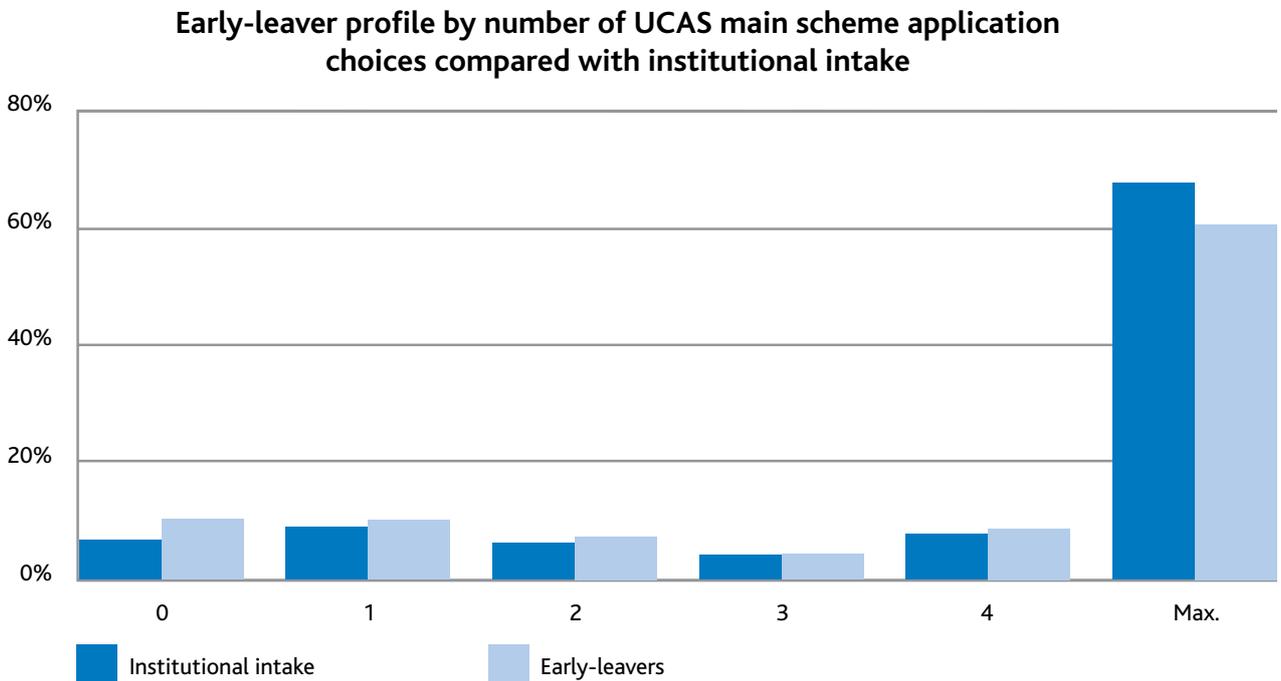


Figure 12: Early-leavers by number of UCAS main scheme choices

Figure 12 indicates that those who apply through Clearing or Adjustment (0 main scheme choices) or had applied directly to the HEI rather than through UCAS and are more likely to be early-leavers.

There were no discernable differences between the profile of early-leavers and the **back on course** partner HEIs' student profile in terms of the acceptance route or deferred status.

7. Who re-applies to HE?

The HESA performance indicators on resumption of study (see Table T4a, www.hesa.ac.uk) show that around 14 per cent of those full-time first degree students who discontinue their studies enter another HE institution after a year out of HE. This group is often overlooked; for instance it was not considered in either of the NAO reports (NAO 2002, NAO 2007). Our data shows that 15% of early-leavers with records matched to UCAS data were found to have already re-applied for HE study, close to the national figures reported in the Performance Indicators. Of those that had re-applied, 80% had made successful applications – this constituted 12% of all **back on course** early-leavers (see Table 3).

This was signalled in the pilot research, and therefore it was considered useful to look at the characteristics of this group in more detail this year.

	Early-leavers	Not a re-applicant	Application made	Application made: no outcome	Application made: accepted
Total	14,730	12,454	2,276	455	1,821
Percentage of all early-leavers	100%	84.5%	15.5%	3.1%	12.4%
Percentage of all re-applicants			100%	20.0%	80.0%

Table 3: Overview of re-applicants to HE

The following section considers differences between those early-leavers who have re-applied to HE and those who have not, against the set of variables outlined in Chapter 5.

7.1 Demographics

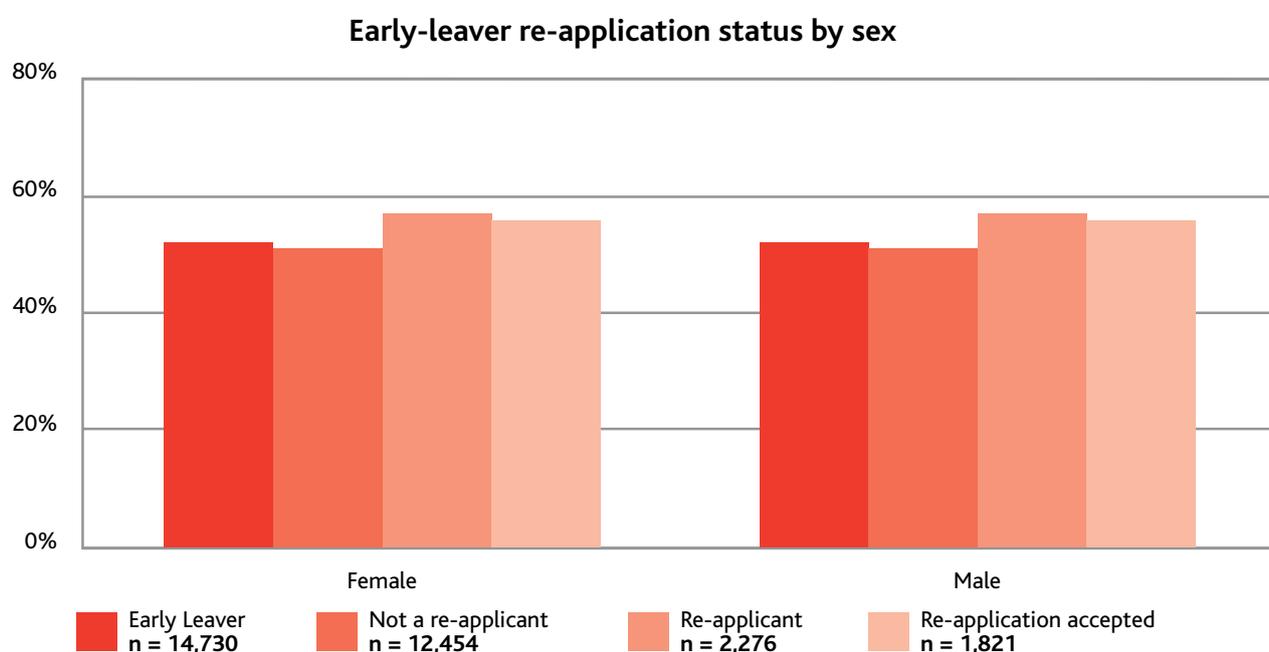


Figure 13: Re-application status by sex

A greater proportion of females re-applied to HE (57%) than in early-leaver records as a whole (52%). Female re-applicants were also more likely to have been accepted (Figure 13).

Early-leaver re-application status by age

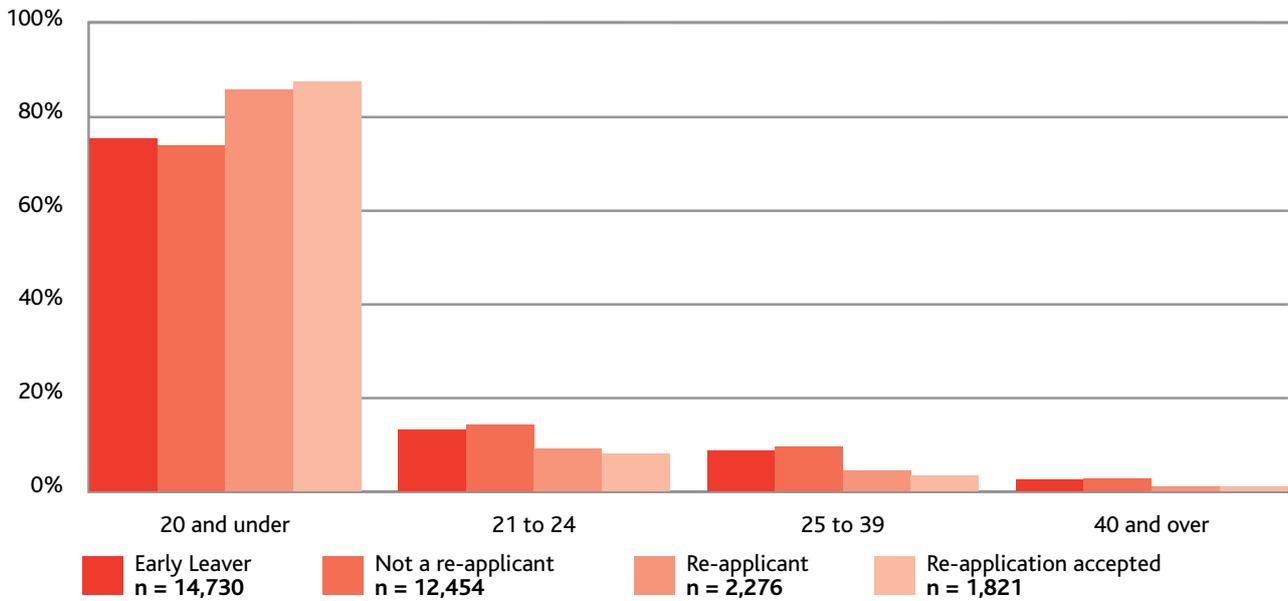


Figure 14: Re-application status by age

As illustrated in Figure 14, those in the youngest age bracket (20 and under) accounted for three-quarters of all early-leavers but were far more likely to re-apply (86% of all re-applicants were in this group). Older early-leavers (40 and over) were comparatively less likely to re-apply than younger early-leavers. This age group constituted 2.5% of all early-leavers, yet only 0.9% of all re-applicants. Younger re-applicants were also the most likely to have been accepted than other age groups, with 88% of all acceptances made to those under the age of 21.

The data indicates that the overall pattern of non-completion and re-application was not affected by ethnicity, disability or POLAR2 groups.

7.2 Pre-HE experiences

Early-leaver re-application status by qualification on entry

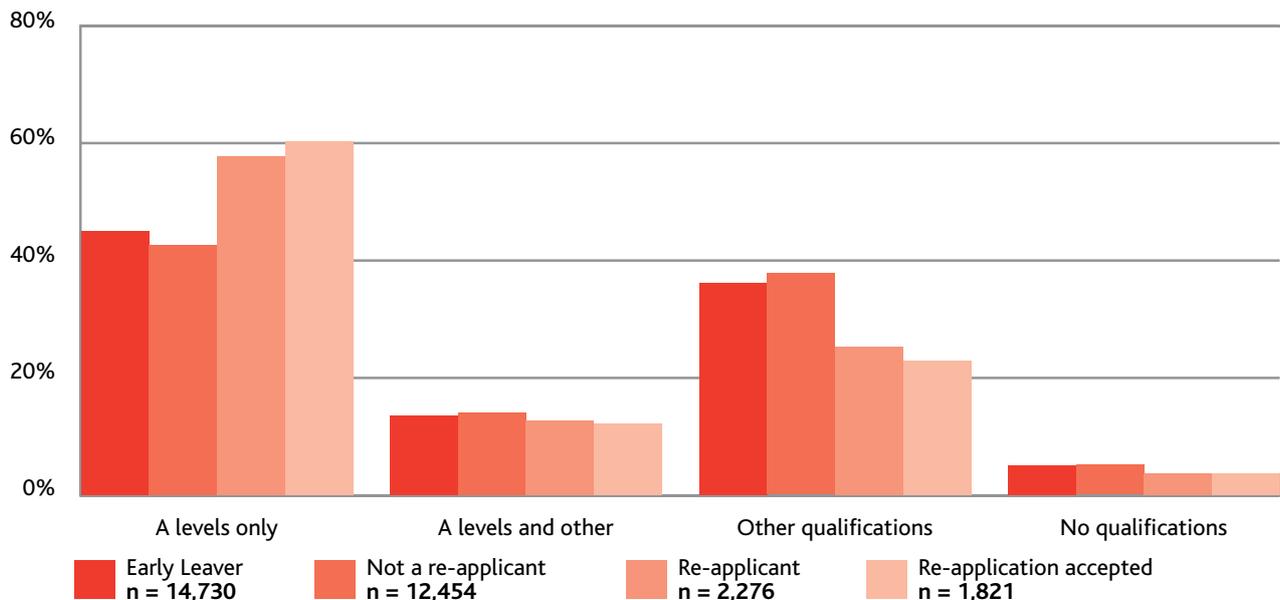


Figure 15: Re-application status by qualification

Figure 15 reveals that students without A levels are more likely to be early-leavers and less likely to re-apply than those with A levels.

Early-leaver re-application status by Tariff points

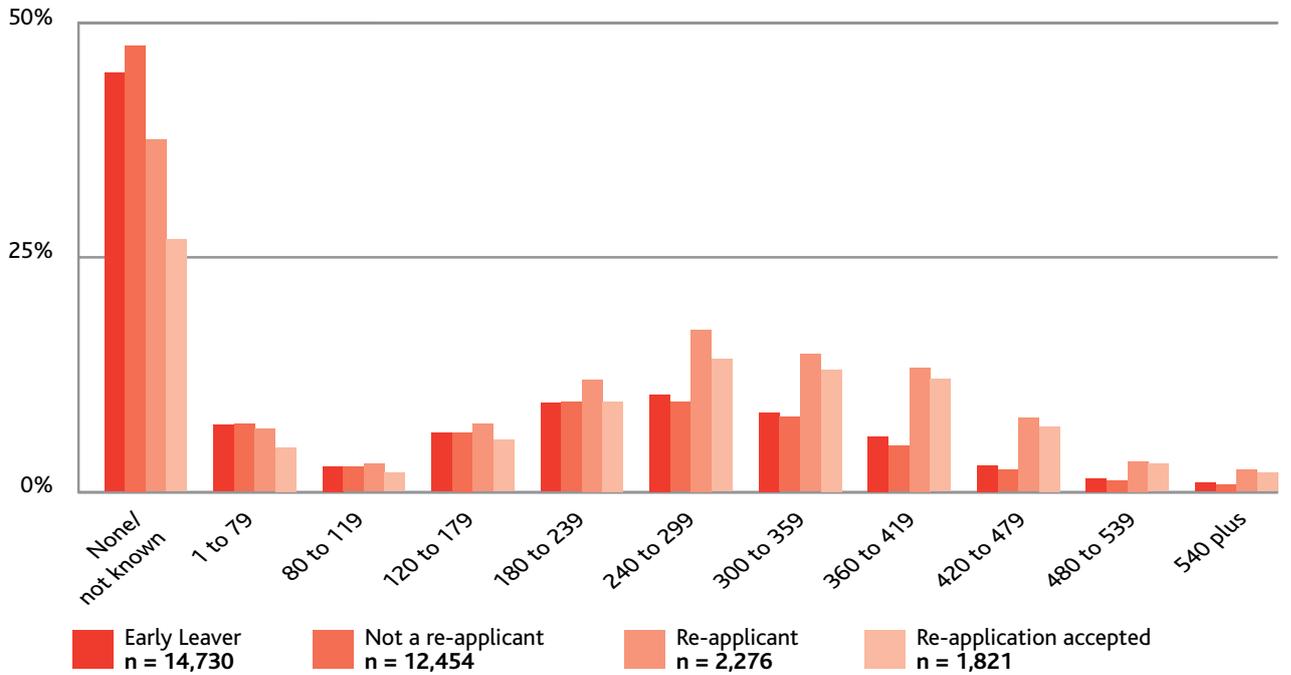


Figure 16: Re-application status by Tariff points

Figure 16 shows that early-leavers with 240 or more Tariff points were notably more likely to have re-applied and more likely than those with lower Tariff points to have been accepted in their subsequent applications. The likelihood of re-applying was not affected by previous educational establishment.

7.3 HE choices

Early-leaver re-application status by distance to chosen HEI

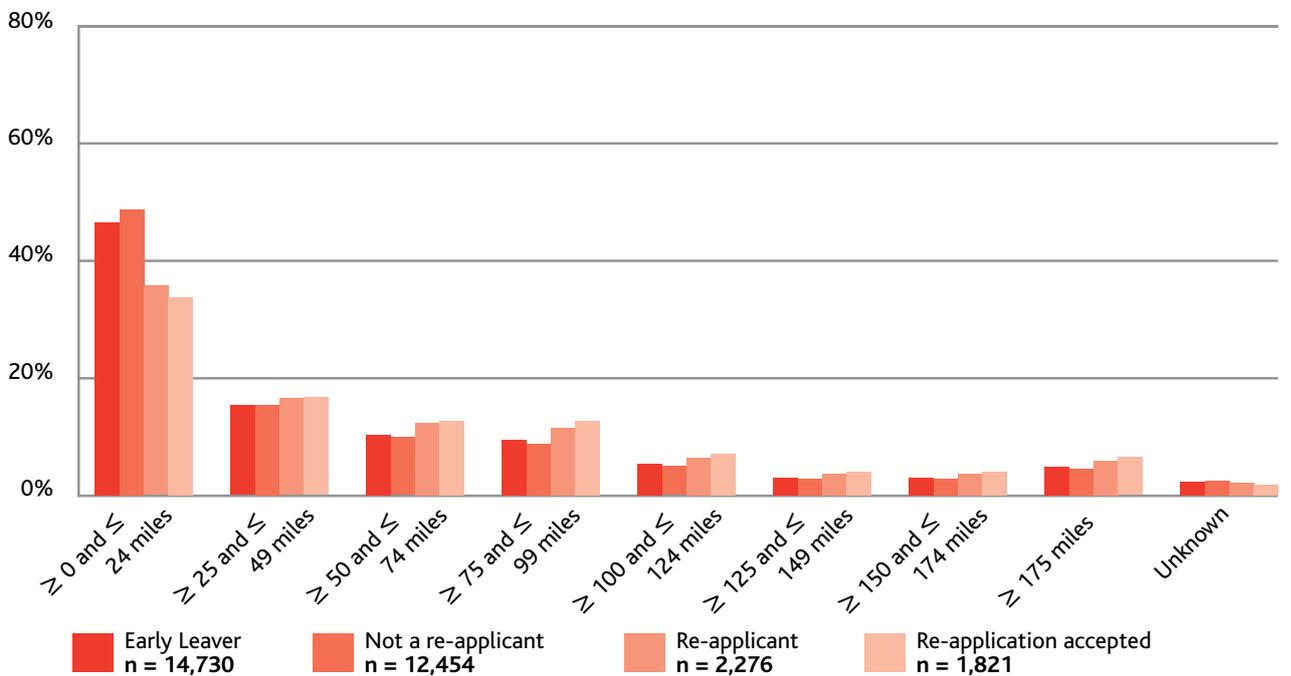


Figure 17: Re-application status by distance to chosen institution

As previously noted, nearly half (47%) of the early-leavers originally applied to HEIs located within 25 miles of home, but those applying to local HEIs were less likely to re-apply (37%) after leaving their HE course. Accepted re-applicants were comparatively more likely to be those who had originally applied to HEIs located between 25 and 125 miles from home (Figure 17). It is also apparent that local applicants constituted little more than a third (34%) of those who had been accepted in their subsequent application.

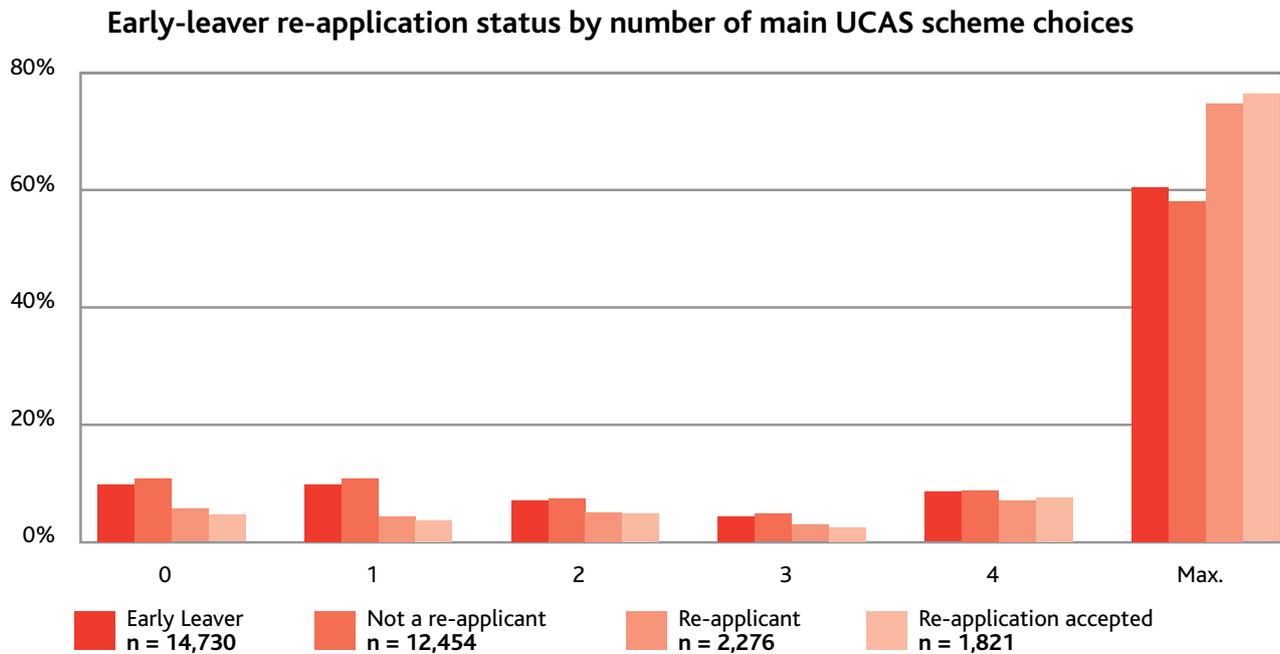


Figure 18: Re-application status by number of original choices

Approximately 60% of early-leavers made the maximum number of choices in their original applications through UCAS. Re-applicants were more likely to have used all their choices – accounting for three-quarters (75%) of re-applicants (Figure 18).

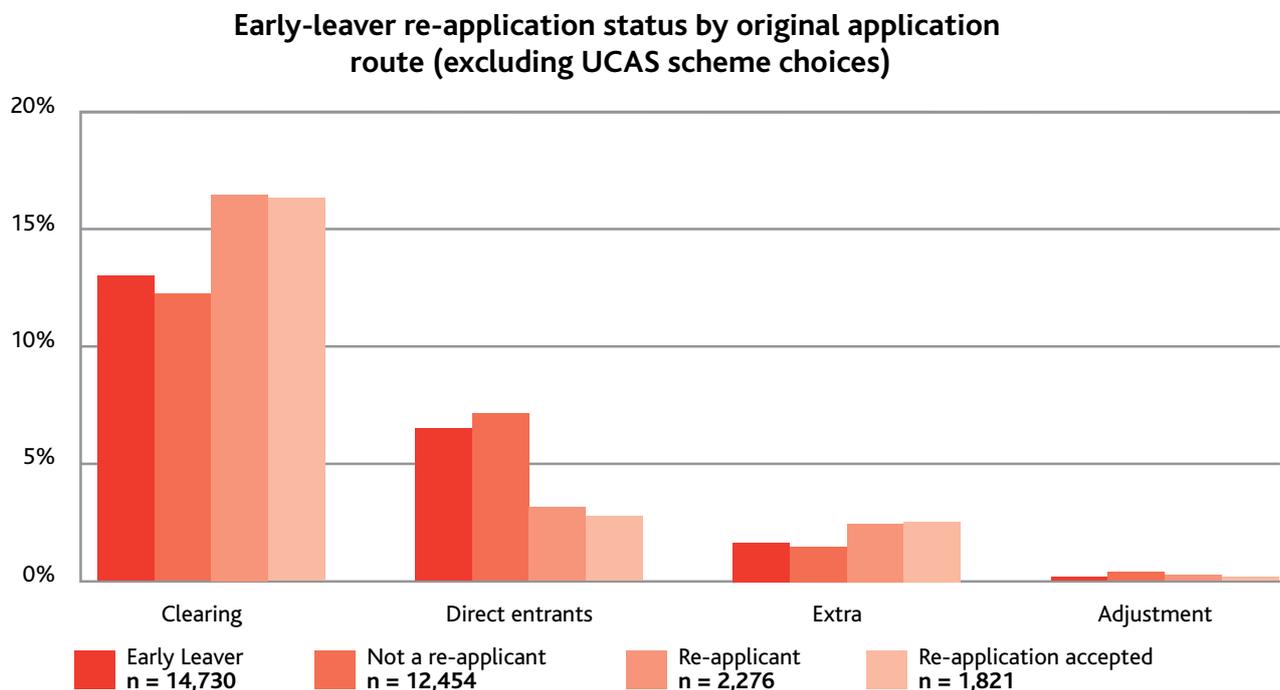


Figure 19: Re-application status by original application route – excluding UCAS main scheme

Those who were originally accepted through Clearing and Extra were over-represented in the group who re-applied compared with the early-leaver group. Figure 19 also shows that compared with the early-leaver cohort, those originally accepted as a direct entrant were under-represented in the group who re-applied. Re-application status was not affected by whether or not the original application to HE was deferred.

8. Who participates in **back on course**?

As described in Annex 1, a total of 14,730 of the **back on course** records could be matched to UCAS data, and therefore some comparative data was only available for the smaller number of early-leaver records.

At the time of conducting this research **back on course** had received 19,570 lines of data, of which 14,730 could be matched to UCAS data. This chapter explores who engages with **back on course**, and at the time the research was conducted 4,297 early-leavers had been successfully contacted by the project, 3,861 were unable to be contacted and 4,039 contacts were in progress. Of those 4,297 successfully contacted only 2,526 could be matched to the UCAS dataset and therefore **back on course** uses this subset as the basis for its research¹⁰.

These early-leavers were split into four groups of engagement:

- Level 4 – at least one guidance appointment has taken place (285 early-leavers)
- Level 3 – first guidance appointment has been scheduled (130 early-leavers)
- Level 2 – no guidance appointment had been made at this time (72 early-leavers)
- Level 1 – query resolved at first stage or did not wish to participate (2,039).

2,039 of these engaged at level 1 and either had their query resolved or did not wish to participate in the service. The remaining 487 early-leavers provided further information about their situation: the early-leavers who have engaged at levels 2, 3 and 4 have been defined as having fully engaged with the IAG and are reported on throughout this chapter as 'engaged'.

The graphs throughout this chapter should be read as follows:

- All graphs refer to indexed levels of engagement, using the proportion of all early-leavers for whom records have been successfully matched as the base (index = 100).
- Transferred to guidance service = all level 1, 2, 3 and 4 early-leavers plus those who do not wish to participate plus those where contact attempts are still in progress.
- Successfully contacted = all level 1, 2, 3 and 4 early-leavers plus those who do not wish to participate.
- Fully engaged = all level 2, 3 and 4 early-leavers.

It should be noted that all of the graphs in Section 8 are formulated using $n = 487$, i.e. the number of fully engaged early-leavers whose data was matched to UCAS and who had engaged with the IAG service data.

This chapter provides an analysis of the **back on course** records that have been matched to early-leaver data received by UCAS from the partner HEIs. An analysis of the aggregated data for all those who have engaged with the IAG service (as against those whose data has been received but with whom no contact has been made) can be found in Chapter 10.

¹⁰ Please note: as not all data was able to be matched, the numbers in this report are not indicative of the success of the service itself but are purely for research purposes.

8.1 Demographics

Early-leaver engagement profile by age indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS records

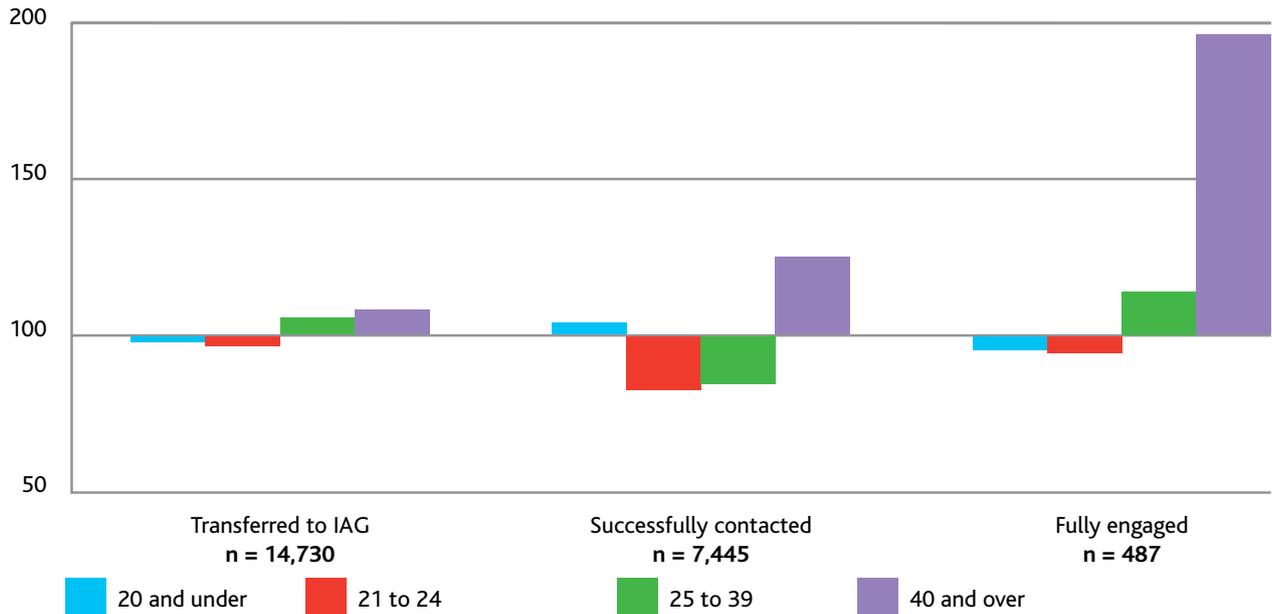


Figure 20: Indexed levels of engagement by age

As highlighted in Chapter 7, approximately three-quarters of early-leavers are aged 20 and under – in line with national data. Those aged 40 and over constituted just 2.5% of the total early-leaver records matched to UCAS records, but this age group was far more likely to have engaged at levels 3 or 4 (49% of all those engaged were 40 plus). This is highlighted in Figure 20.

Early-leaver engagement profile by ethnicity indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

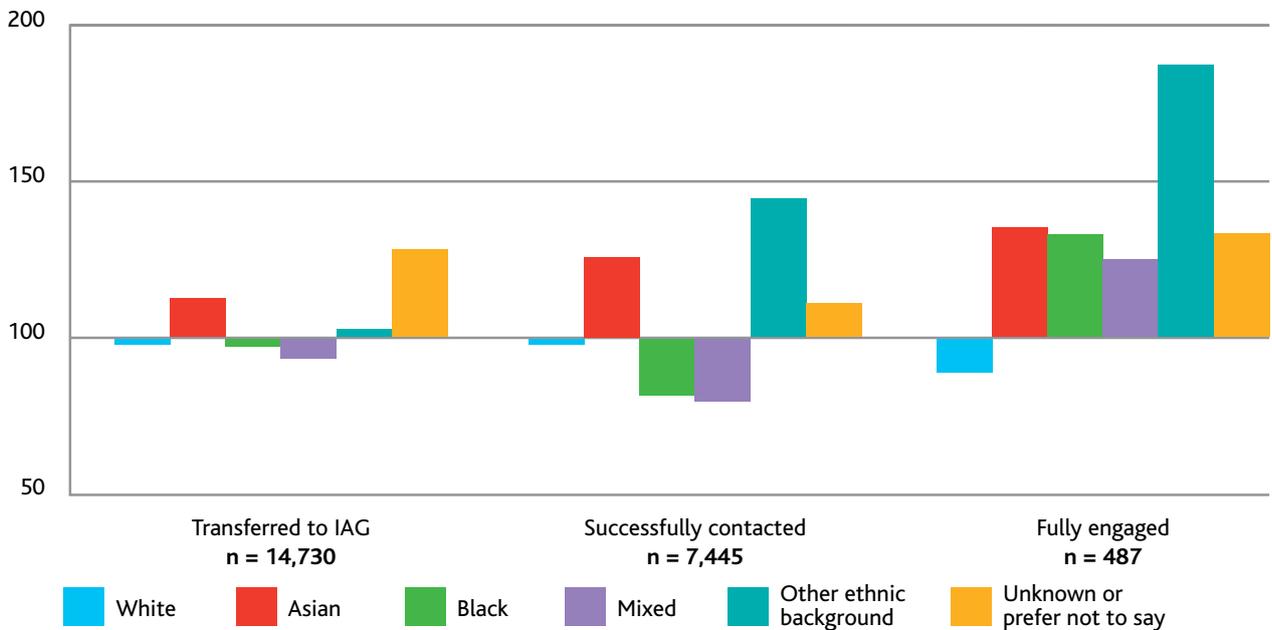


Figure 21: Indexed levels of engagement by ethnicity

White early-leavers were slightly less likely to have been transferred to the IAG service than those from other ethnic groups. In comparing against indexed data (Figure 21), it is clear that white early-leavers were the least likely ethnic group to have engaged with the IAG service. By contrast, early-leavers from all other ethnic groups were disproportionately more likely to engage with the IAG service.

Early-leaver engagement by POLAR2 participation rates indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS records

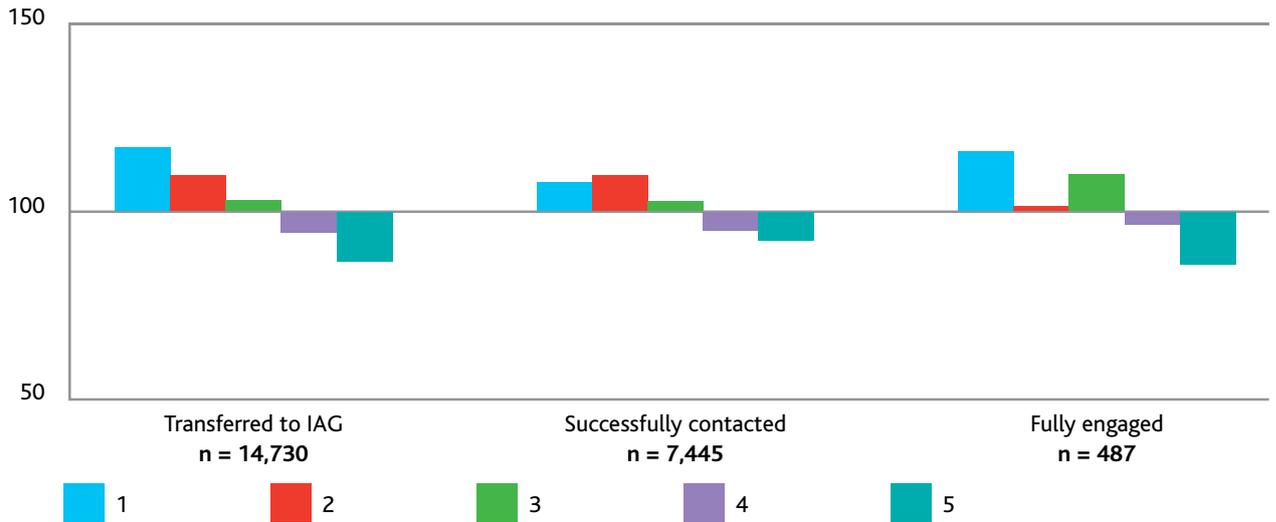


Figure 22: Indexed levels of engagement by POLAR2 group

Figure 22 shows a stark contrast between the levels of engagement by early-leavers from different POLAR2 groups. Those from POLAR2 group 1 (lowest participation rates) were most likely to have been transferred to, and engaged with, the IAG service and those from higher participation areas (POLAR2 5) the least likely.

The research for this chapter also showed that levels of engagement were not affected by sex or disability status.

8.2 Pre-HE

Early-leaver engagement by previous educational establishment participation rates indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

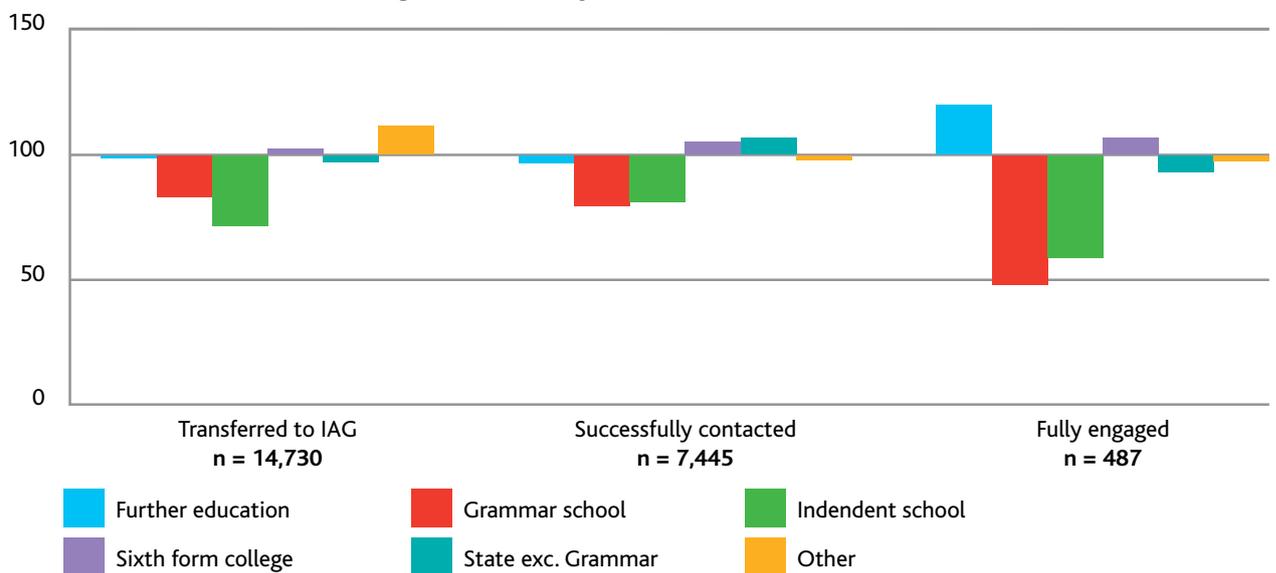


Figure 23: Indexed levels of engagement by previous educational establishment

Figure 23 shows that the early-leavers who were most likely to have actively engaged with the IAG service had previously been at FE colleges, with those from sixth form colleges also disproportionately engaged with the service. Students applying from grammar schools and independent schools were far less likely to have been successfully contacted by, or engaged with, the IAG service.

Whilst early-leavers from non-grammar state schools were successfully contacted more than any other group, they appeared less inclined to engage with the service at level 4.

Early-leaver engagement by previous qualifications indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

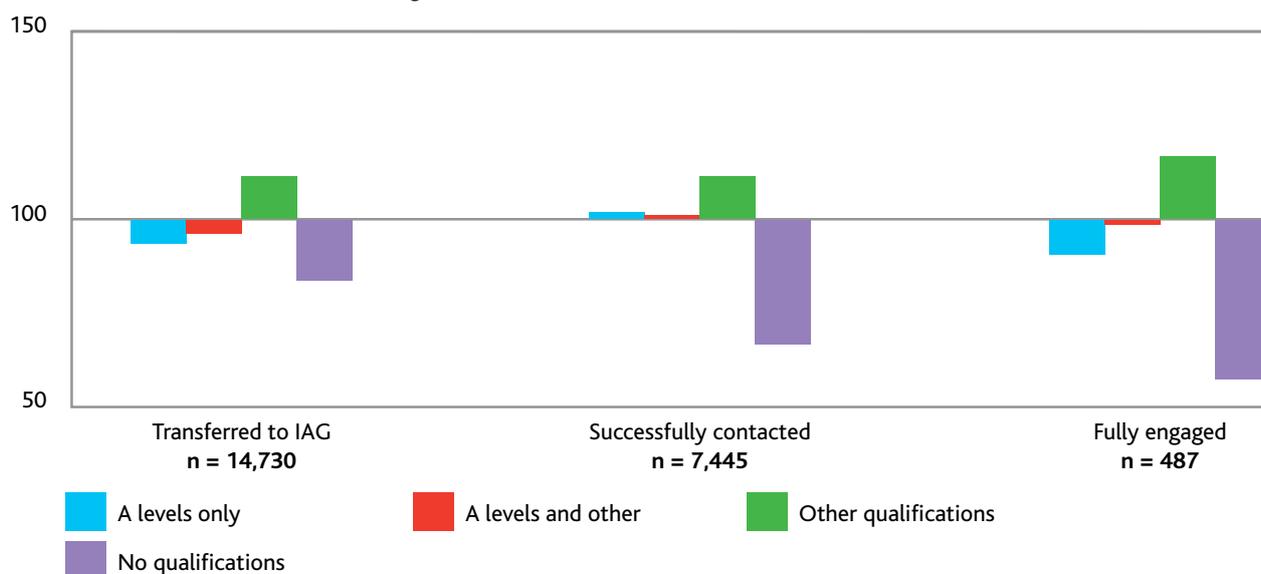


Figure 24: Indexed levels of engagement by qualification type

Early-leavers with qualifications other than A levels were the most likely to engage with the IAG service, whilst those who originally applied to HE with no recognised qualifications were far less likely to have engaged (Figure 24)¹¹.

Elisabeth, 19, originally studying at Russell Group University



I found out about **back on course** because my partner was given a leaflet at her university. I felt miserable and pressurised most of the time I was at university. I did not take part in extracurricular activities and felt isolated and lonely. There were personal reasons why I decided to leave but I also felt as if I needed a break from studying for a while and I now think that perhaps I should have taken a gap year. It took me a long time to make the final decision but I finally left during the Easter holidays. Overall I felt a sense of relief as I felt burnt out from studying.

When I spoke to **back on course** I felt reassured and more knowledgeable about student finance. I was also unsure what to say about why I had withdrawn and I was offered help with how to phrase this in my personal statement. I felt motivated and more able to move forward. It prompted me to put together a list of HEIs offering my course and to look at websites for specific universities as I knew I wanted to study the same course again.

I now want to work until I start university again and have recently started as a trainee chef in a pub. My employer knows I intend to start university again and I have already attended two open days. I intend to study German and Russian again in 2012. I would like to speak to a back on course adviser again when writing my statement.

I recommended my partner use the service and she did so. I think **back on course** should be as widely publicised as it can be.

¹¹ No level 3 or above qualifications are stated on the UCAS application form.

Early-leaver engagement by Tariff points indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

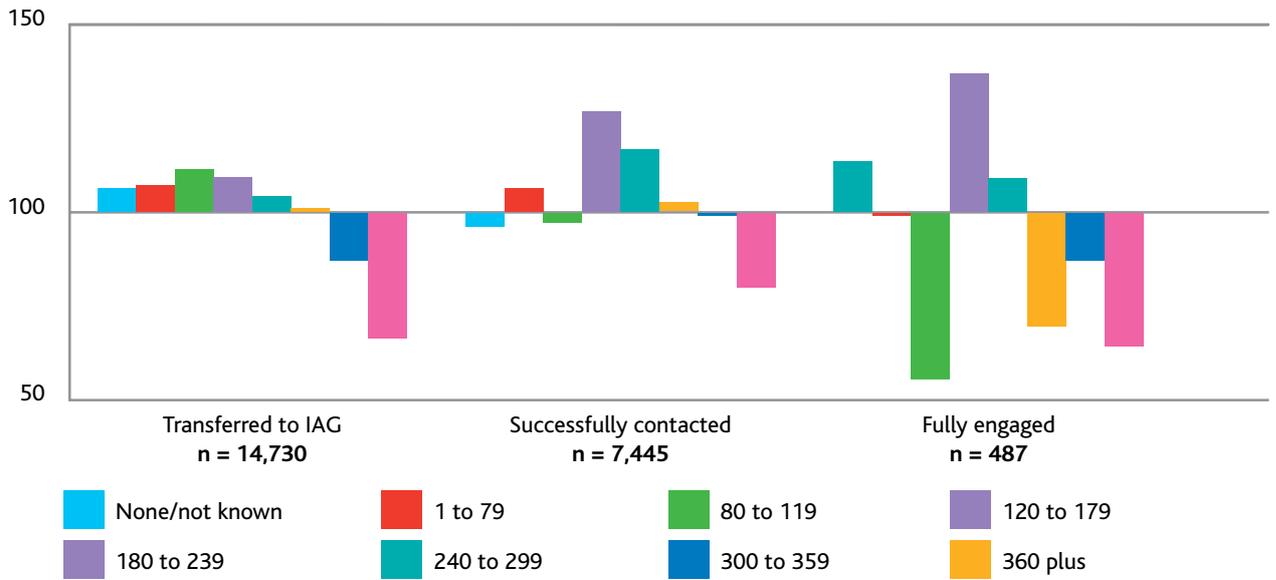


Figure 25: Levels of engagement by Tariff points

Figure 25 indicates that those students with Tariff points above 240 and below 120 are least likely to engage. However, it should also be noted that this data relates to the low number of students who were fully engaged in the IAG service and should be treated with some caution.

8.3 HE choices

Early-leaver engagement by distance to chosen HE indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

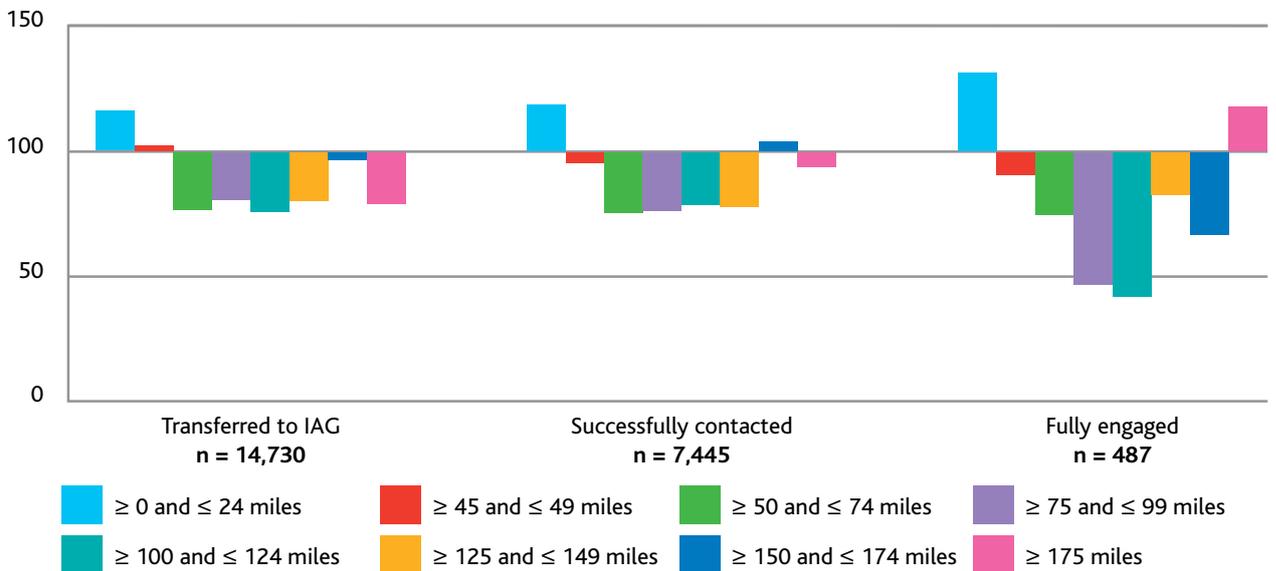


Figure 26: Indexed levels of engagement by distance from institution

Early-leavers travelling the furthest distance from home (175 miles or more) were the second most likely to have engaged with the IAG service (Figure 26). Those students who applied to a local institution (less than 25 miles from home) made up some 55% of those contacted by **back on course** and were most likely to engage.

Early-leaver engagement profile by deferral status indexed against all early-leavers matched to UCAS data

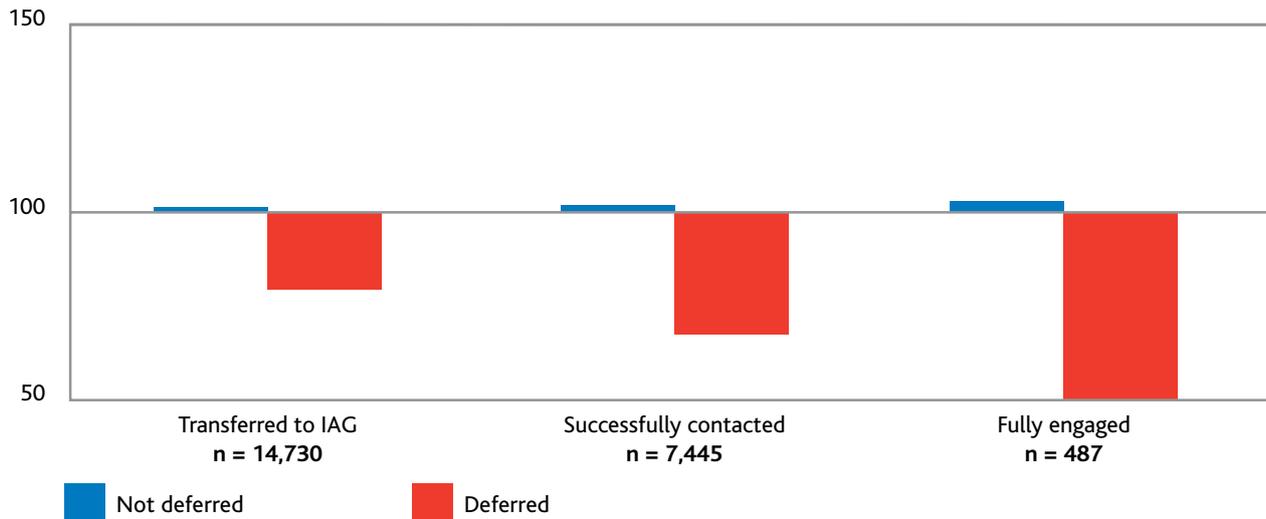


Figure 27: Indexed levels of engagement by deferral status

Although just 4% (204 individuals) of the early-leavers matched to UCAS data had deferred the start of their HE course, those that had deferred were less likely to have engaged with **back on course** (see Figure 27).

Levels of engagement were not affected by the acceptance route or number of choices in the original application to HE.

Addy, 21, originally studying at Million+University

At first I enjoyed the Law course I was studying and found it interesting but I started to feel worried about finding work since there are not many jobs at the moment. I also had to move out of halls because of financial problems, and the commute from my home was expensive and taking too long. Once I had left I felt a bit confused and did not know what to do next. I have since spoken to the **back on course** team several times. This was helpful, especially the information about taking a course that offers a placement year and the possibility of doing a one year Science Foundation course at a local college.

After the first conversation I was able to do some research and developed a better understanding of courses and jobs. I felt a bit more relaxed as I knew there was someone who knew more than me and could help me. I also found out I would not have to apply for a loan if I was to choose NHS funded courses as I would receive a bursary for these. I now have a place on a Science Foundation course for one year at a local college. I want to get into Radiography, which I had never thought of until I was encouraged to research this area by **back on course**.

I would recommend **back on course** to others because of the experience I have had. I feel like I am going somewhere and I am certain about a lot more than I was before. If I had not used the service I think I would have remained confused.



9. What did early-leavers say about why they left HE?

As highlighted in Chapter 8, 2,156 of the early-leavers could be matched against UCAS data. Of this group, 487 had provided to **back on course** their reasons for not completing their original HE course. Within the initial contact with a team assistant, each early-leaver was asked to provide their reasons for not completing their original HE course. UCAS has coded reasons given for leaving early into the categories shown in Table 4.

Overall heading	Main reasons	Sub categories
Dissatisfaction with previous HE experience (53%)	Course-related reasons (35%)	Change mode of study Change to different content Course too difficult
	Institution-related reasons (17%)	Dissatisfaction with HEI Withdrawn by HEI Location of university
Previous HE experience did not suit personal circumstances (45%)	Caring for self or others (13%)	Dependants Illness/disability Pregnancy
	Other personal/financial circumstances (32%)	Lack of money Working whilst studying Homesick Personal reasons To work To travel
Not asked (2.5%)	Respondent from pilot year (2.5%)	

Table 4: **back on course** survey respondents' reasons for leaving HE

The percentages in brackets show the proportion of responses in each category. Responses to the survey have been analysed against the variables outlined in Chapter 5, with key trends summarised within this chapter.

It should be noted that all of the graphs in Chapter 9 are formulated using n = 487, the number of fully engaged early-leavers whose data was matched to UCAS and who had engaged with the IAG service data.

Jo, 40, originally studying at Million+University

I felt disappointed when I left university – as a mature student I didn't make a connection with the other students, and felt that I was always the one answering the questions. A combination of several factors (including debt problems) caused me to withdraw – the tutors were fantastic but the university couldn't help me with my problems. The fact that my course was discontinued and I was unable to defer my place didn't help. I was a bit bereft when I left university and had put higher education out of my mind.

However, I found it very useful to speak to the **back on course** advisers as they were friendly, professional and impartial. They knew more and were able to explain much more than I could possibly find out by myself. As a result I have applied and been accepted on a part-time Business HNC course back at the same university. I am also upgrading my IT skills through distance e-learning. Ultimately I would like to work in a dynamic business environment or possibly even run my own small business eventually. I definitely now feel much more focused and motivated, thanks **back on course!**



9.1 Demographics

Reasons provided for leaving by age

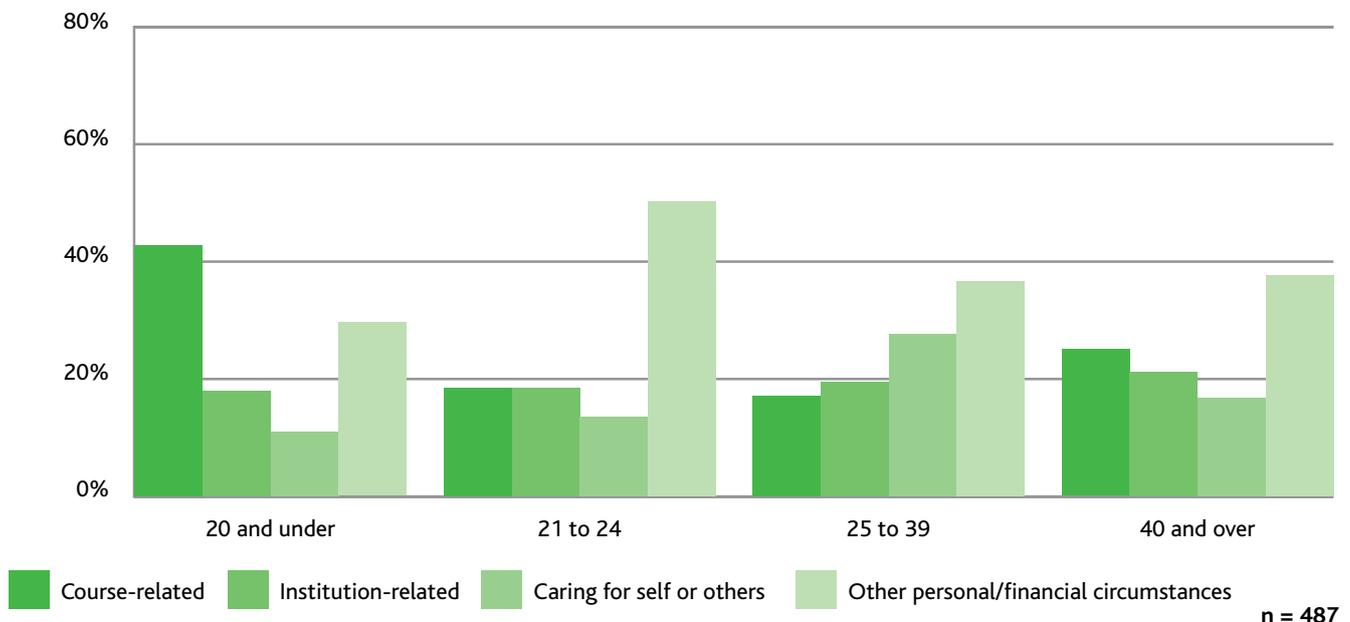


Figure 28: Reasons for leaving by age

Younger early-leavers were more likely than those in other age groups to cite course-related reasons for their withdrawal. Over 40% of those under 21 stated dissatisfaction with their course as the main reason for leaving the course, compared with 25% of the second highest proportion (40 and over). The under 21s were least likely to state caring responsibilities or other personal/financial circumstances as the primary reason for leaving (Figure 28).

Reasons provided for leaving HE by POLAR2 participation

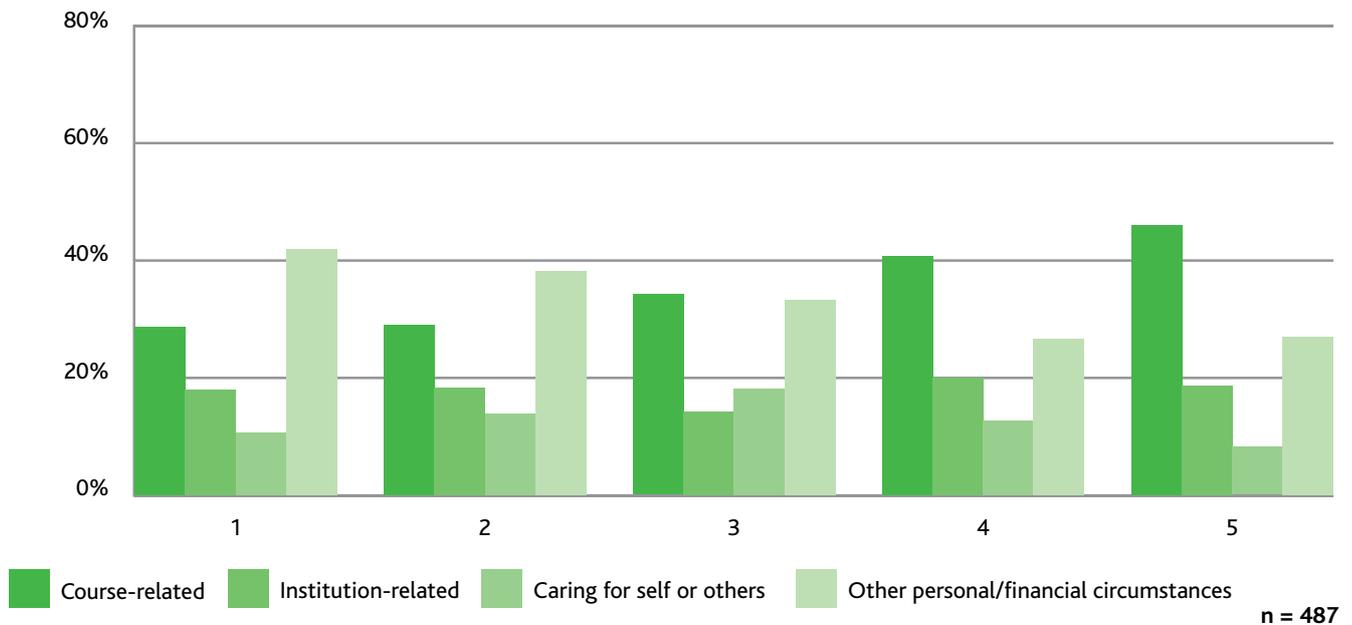


Figure 29: Reasons for leaving by POLAR2 group

The most striking finding regarding **back on course** non-completion analysed against POLAR2 participation rates was the correlation between identified POLAR2 group and those leaving for course- or institution-related reasons (illustrated in Figure 29). Nearly half of those from POLAR2 groups 4 and 5 (those areas with the highest proportions of HE-qualified adults) left due to dissatisfaction with their previous HE experience, compared with approximately one-third of those in the lowest participation neighbourhoods. Those from POLAR2 groups 1–3 were more likely than those from POLAR2 groups 4–5 to have left as a result of their HE experiences not suiting their personal circumstances. There were no discernable differences between the reasons given for leaving and the sex, ethnicity or disability status of the early-leavers.

Johnty, originally studying at Russell Group University

I was quite happy whilst studying my degree in Aeronautical Engineering but I found myself forgetting things. Sometimes I would forget to hand coursework in. Despite having very good grades at A level and a high IQ I failed the retake of my second year, and there were no courses for me to transfer to, and I had to leave. I felt a bit depressed and unsure where to turn to although I knew I wanted to return to higher education. On the advice of my Personal Tutor I went to see my GP and was diagnosed with ADHD.

When **back on course** contacted me they advised me where I could apply for courses and what the entrance requirements were. They made me feel as though I could move forward from my experience and the follow up email with different links was really helpful. I did not have to search for information as the links did this for me. I now hope to apply for Material Science courses but have also applied for BA's Future Pilot Programme as well. **back on course** gave me exact and specific advice which streamlined the process as they had more knowledge than my parents or I about UCAS deadline dates.

I feel so much better and more optimistic and I feel positive that I now have a future in HE. I feel as though I have a clear path. I would definitely recommend **back on course** to others. It's the easiest and best service to help you get back into university and back on track.



9.2 Pre-HE experiences

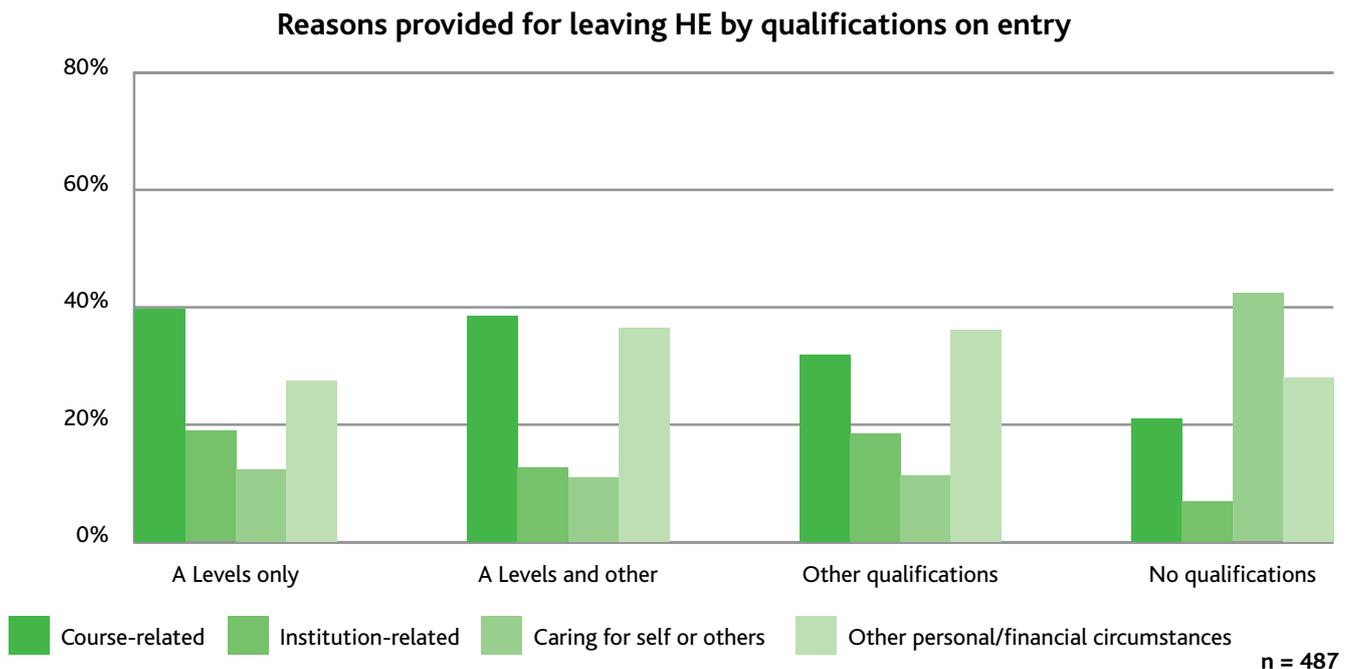


Figure 30: Reasons for leaving by entry qualifications

The early-leavers originally applying with A levels (whether or not they were in conjunction with other qualifications) were more likely to withdraw due to concerns over the course (Figure 30). Those applying with no qualifications were nearly four times (12% vs 43%) as likely as those with qualifications to leave in order to fulfil caring commitments.

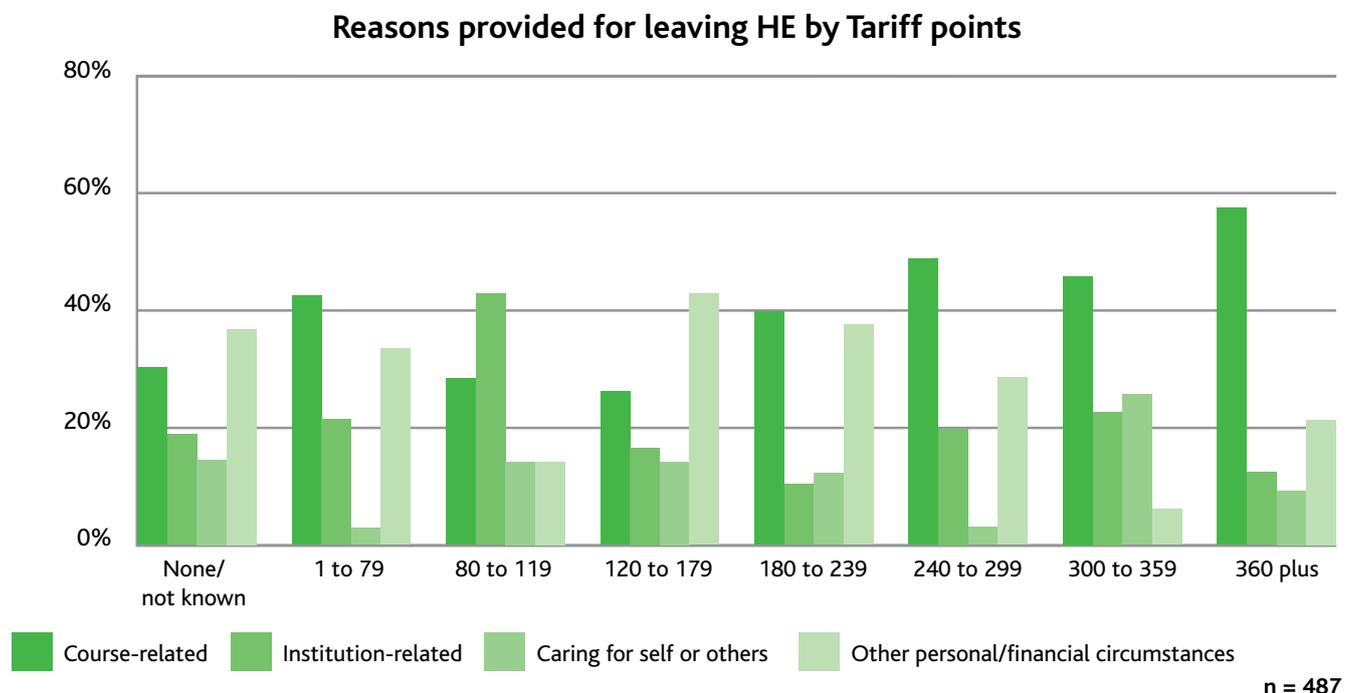
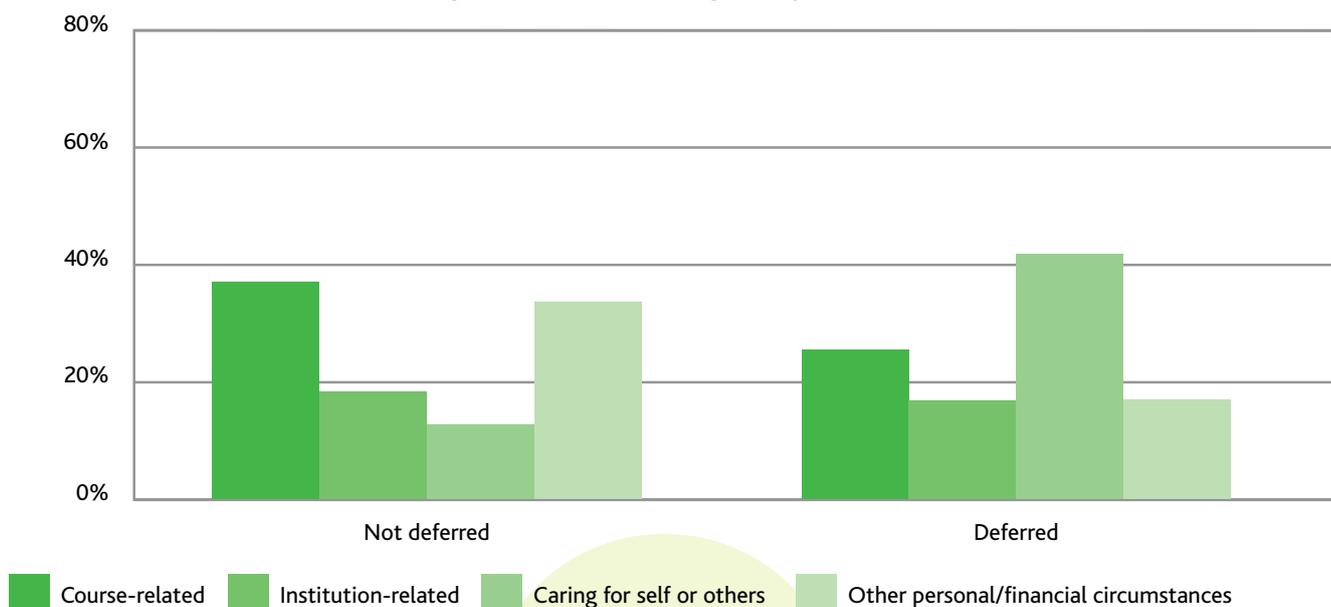


Figure 31: Reasons for leaving by Tariff points

There was a relationship between Tariff point achievement and non-completion for course-related reasons. Of those with no or unknown Tariff points, 30% cited course-related reasons for withdrawal, but this increases to 58% of all those with 360 or more Tariff points. There were no significant trends when considering other reasons for withdrawal against Tariff points (Figure 31).

9.3 HE choices

Reasons provided for leaving HE by deferral status



n = 487

Figure 32: Reasons for leaving by deferral status

Early-leavers who deferred their application to HE by twelve months were far more likely to have left as a result of caring responsibilities (42%) than those who did not defer (12%) (Figure 32).

Reasons for leaving did not appear to be affected by the route of acceptance, distance from home to the institution or the number of choices made in the original HE application.

10. Bringing IAG and profile data together to understand more about early-leavers

Data analysed in this chapter has been drawn from the 843 early-leavers who had scheduled or had an advisory appointment and the further 122 providing further information to proceed but not booking at this time (965 in total). Data in this chapter excludes early-leavers who were either not asked the question or did not answer or opted out of the research. Each figure shows the total number of respondents included within the dataset.

Samantha, 22, originally studying at a University Alliance University

I started studying on a Foundation degree course in 2007. I was advised by my university that chemistry based courses would open up more opportunities even though it was not the course I wanted to take initially. I agreed to trial it and was told I would be able to change if I did not like it. After two weeks I asked to switch but there were no places available. I failed some modules and exams. During this time I began to dislike being around people but felt ok when working in smaller sessions. Eventually I became ill and left in my third year and don't want to return to HE.

After speaking to **back on course** I felt relieved and felt a huge weight lifted from my shoulders. The website links they sent me relating to jobs such as lab technician were very helpful. The adviser was also very helpful in pointing out other job opportunities such as those in local government and within the HE sector. I was also reminded about appointments and this was appreciated as I can be forgetful. I was relieved that everything went at a pace I could understand. It did not feel like the adviser was working from a standard script. I was put at ease and found the service very personal. The email summary I was sent even included things that occurred to the adviser after she had spoken to me. As a result I looked at websites and applied for a few things as well as doing further research.

At the moment I feel uncertain as I have recently been diagnosed with anxiety and severe depression. Getting my life back on track by concentrating on my health is my main priority but once this is sorted I would like to find suitable employment or vocational training. back on course has influenced my plans by narrowing my focus to specific jobs and areas of work.

I would recommend this service to my friends because of its more personal approach. You don't feel as if you are getting information thrown at you. You are left feeling as if you know what you're doing and if you do have more questions it's easy to get in touch.



10.1 Original HE choices

Early-leavers' influencing factor on original HEI decision

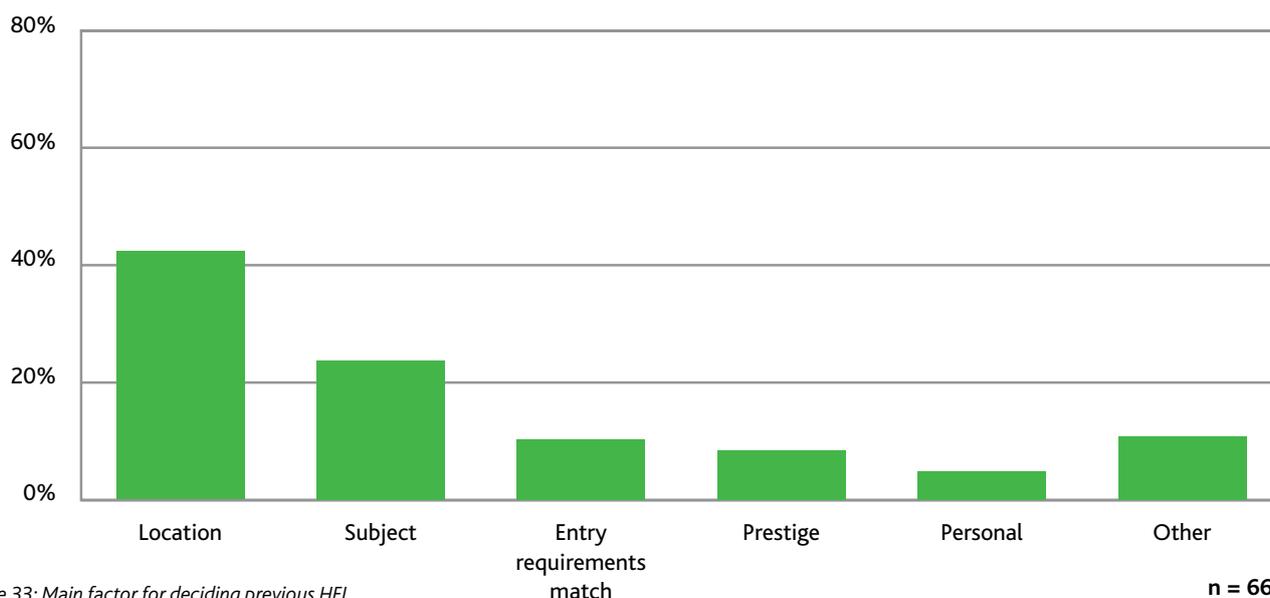


Figure 33: Main factor for deciding previous HEI

As shown in Figure 33, the institution's location was the main deciding factor for 42% of early-leavers' original HE choices. The second highest factor was subject choice (24%), whilst matching entry requirements and the institution's prestige accounted for 10% and 9% respectively.

Early-leaver influence on original HEI decision by reason for leaving



Figure 34: Main factor for deciding previous HEI, compared with main reason for non-completion

Respondents were also given the opportunity to state a second reason for non-completion. Analysis of secondary reasons produced similar trends to those presented here.

Early-leavers whose original HE choices were primarily determined either by matching entry requirements (61%) or the institution’s prestige (58%) were more likely to have cited dissatisfaction with their HE experience as the main reason for leaving. Early-leavers whose original decision was influenced by the prestige of the institution were most likely to have left for course-related reasons (Figure 34).

Early-leaver IAG influence on original HEI decision

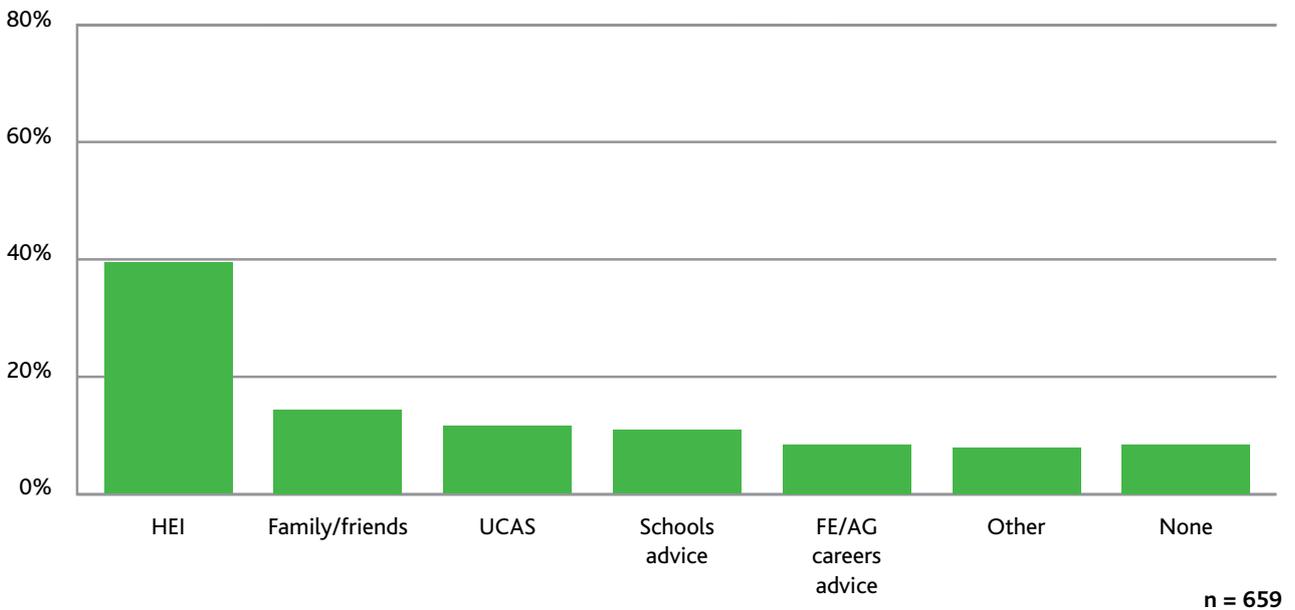


Figure 35: Main source of IAG when choosing HEI

Almost 40% of early-leavers said that they received their information, advice and guidance in making their original HE choices directly from one or more HEI. This was mainly through HEI websites (17%) or visits (16%), whilst prospectuses were the main source of application information and advice for 5% of **back on course** early-leavers (Figure 35).

Early-leaver influence on original HEI decision by reason for leaving

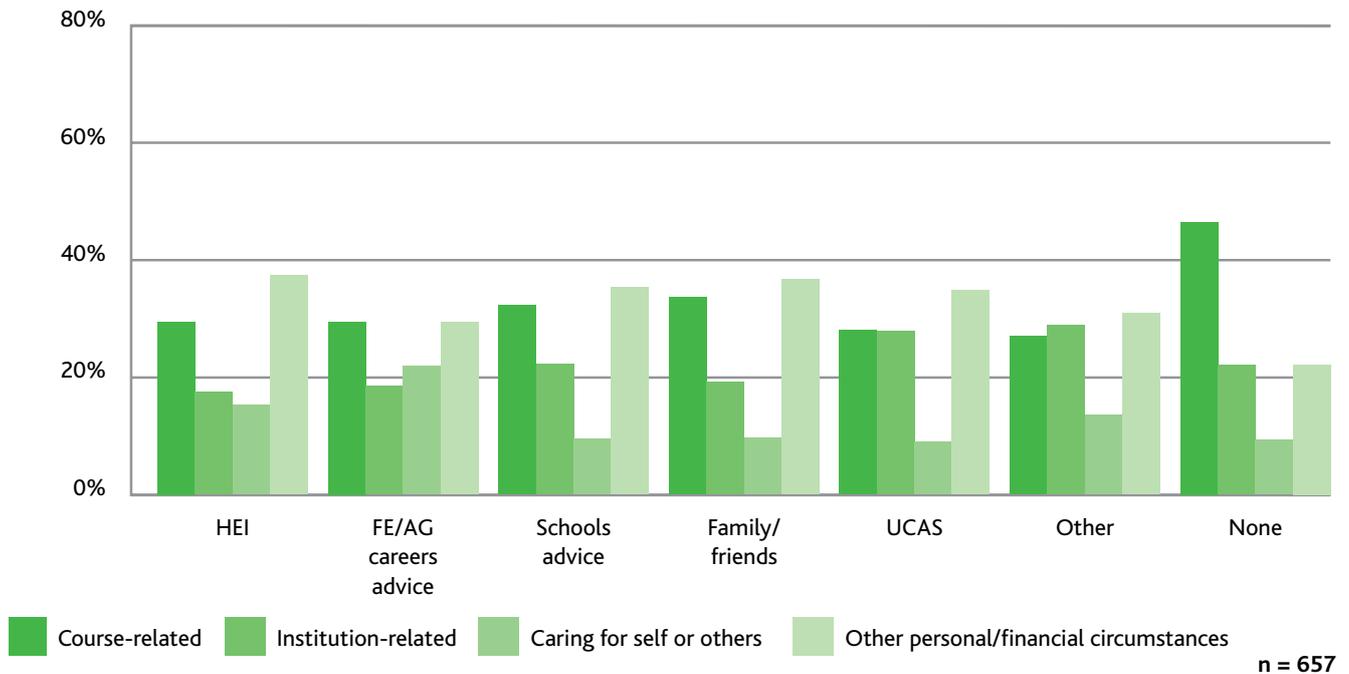


Figure 36: Main source of IAG when choosing HEI compared with main reason for non-completion

Figure 36 shows that early-leavers with no clear source of IAG to help make their original HE choices were significantly more likely to have left due to dissatisfaction with their HE experience. Almost half of those who did not refer to a main source of IAG in making their original choices left due to course-related reasons, with a further 22% leaving for reasons related to the institution.

Early-leaver reason for leaving by presence of dependants

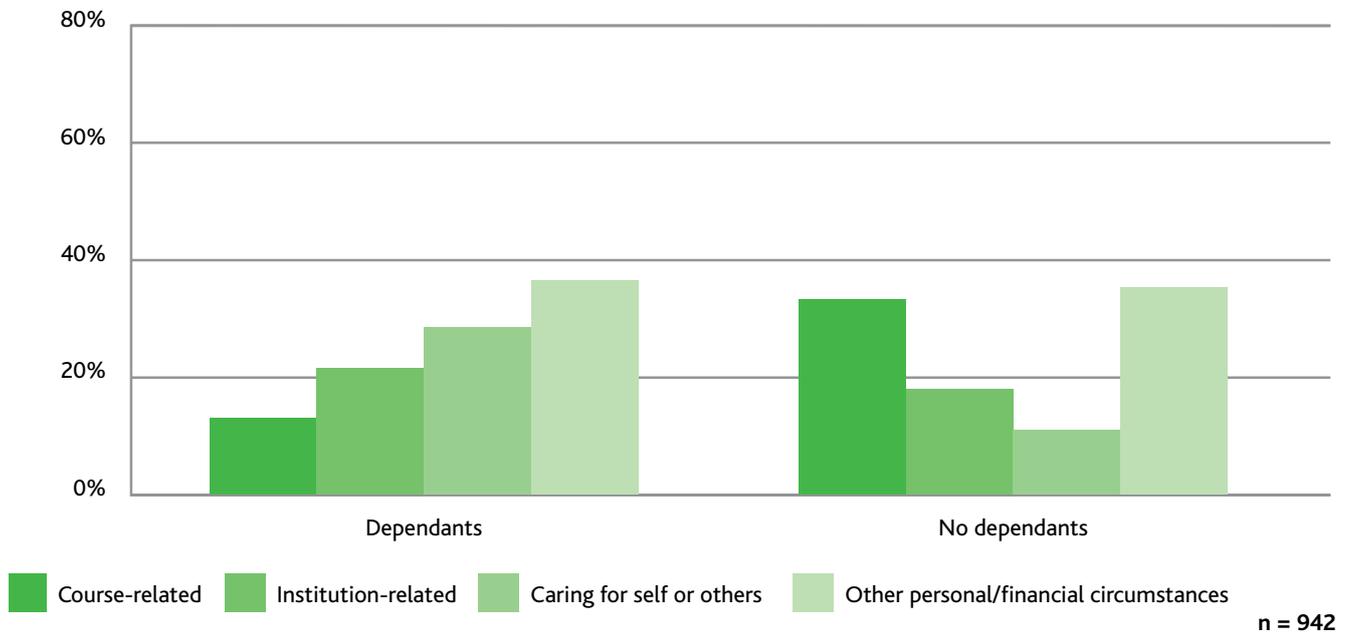


Figure 37: Dependants and the main reason for non-completion

Of the early-leavers engaging with the IAG service, 153 (16%) had children or other dependants (Figure 37). They were twice as likely (29%) as the whole cohort (14%) to have left HE in order to fulfil caring commitments – either for themselves or for others. Although this is not surprising, those with dependants were far less likely to refer to course-related reasons for non-completion (13% compared with 31% of all).

Catherine, 20, originally studying at Guild HE university

I have been living on my own since I was 17, and was not 100% sure I was committed to the Youth and Community Work degree course I was studying, mainly because I was soon struggling financially, paying rent and trying to cope. I felt relieved when I had left as I felt university had dug me into a deep hole.

The **back on course** adviser went through everything with me and he mentioned distance learning as travel costs had been one of the reasons I had left. He also suggested volunteering whilst doing a degree. He sent me a follow up email with all the links to relevant websites that would help me and he said I could ring again. He answered any questions I had or said he would get me an answer. It helped me a lot. I have since applied to The Open University for a similar course to the one I was studying. I have also applied to be a mentor for teenagers in school. The adviser also sent me this link and told me how to apply and I have an interview next week. If I am successful this will look better on my CV. I hope to give something back – I still want to work with troubled teenagers but via a different route.

back on course definitely gave me the push and opened my eyes to things that are available that I did not know about. It shows that there are second chances for people like me. I would definitely recommend the service to others as it allowed me to build a realistic action plan.



Early-leaver living arrangements whilst at previous HEI

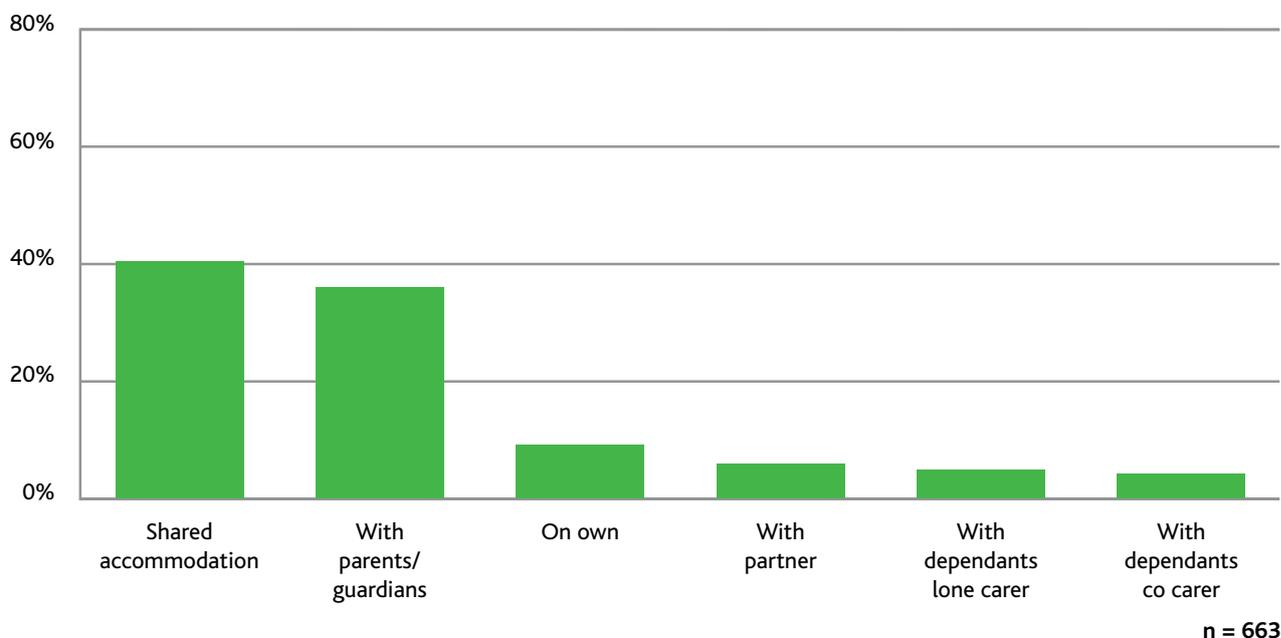


Figure 38: Living arrangements

Overwhelmingly, the early-leavers group was dominated by those who had either lived in shared accommodation (40%) or lived with parents/guardians (36%) during their previous HE course (Figure 38).

Early-leaver living arrangements whilst at previous HEI by reasons for leaving

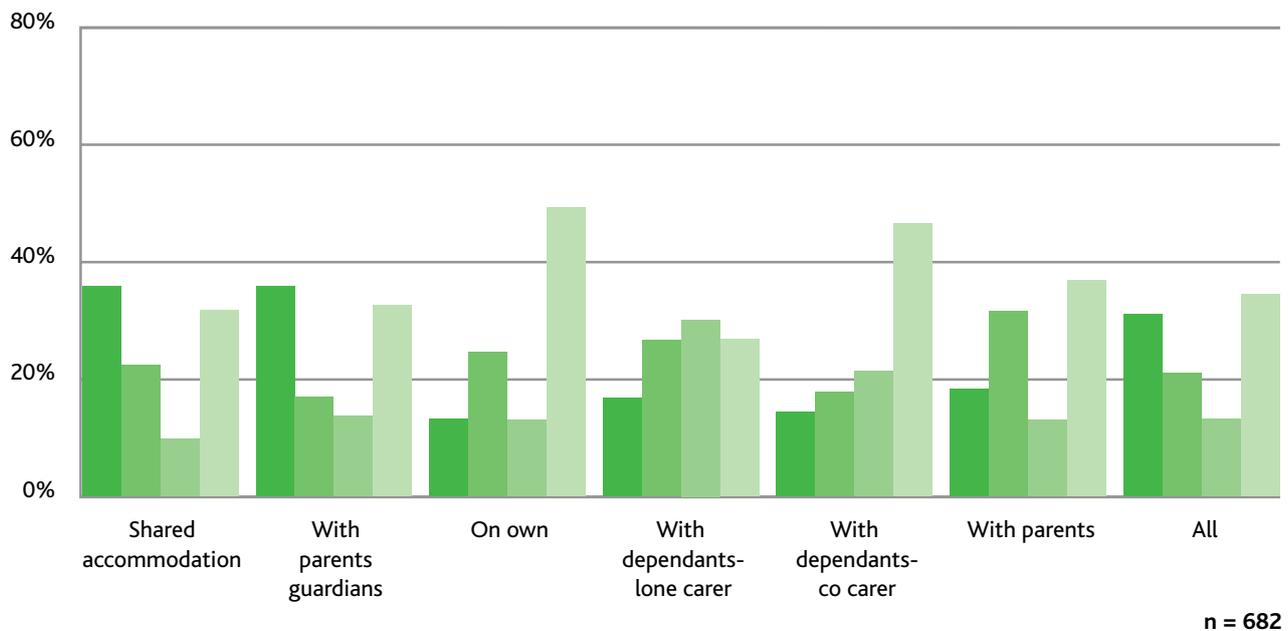


Figure 39: Living arrangements and reasons for non-completion

Figure 39 shows a correlation between living arrangements of early-leavers during their HE course and reasons for leaving early. Nearly half (49%) of those living alone left for 'other personal/financial' reasons, compared with 34% across the cohort. Those living in shared accommodation or with parents/guardians were most likely to have left for course-related reasons, whilst those living alone were much less likely to cite course-related reasons for leaving early. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with dependants were twice as likely to have left due to caring commitments.

Early-leaver employment status whilst at previous HEI by reasons for leaving

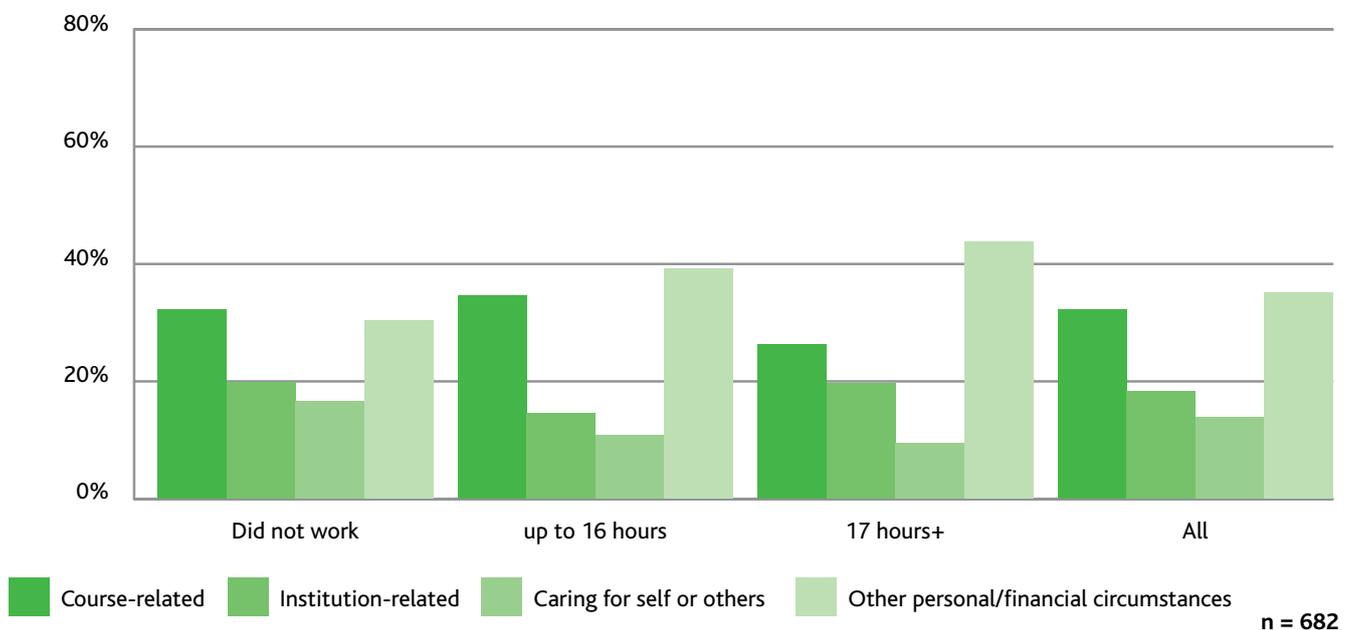


Figure 40: Employment status and main reason for non-completion

A significant minority (43%) of early-leavers who engaged with the **back on course** IAG service had jobs whilst they were undertaking their original HE course (see Figure 40). 28% were employed for between one and 16 hours per week, whilst a further 15% worked 17 hours per week or more. Time spent in employment whilst studying appeared to have affected the proportion of early-leavers stating 'other personal/financial' reasons for leaving. 'Other' reasons accounted for 31% of all those who did not work, compared with 39% of those working part-time and 44% of those employed for 17+ hours per week.

10.2 What factors determine level of engagement with the back on course IAG service?

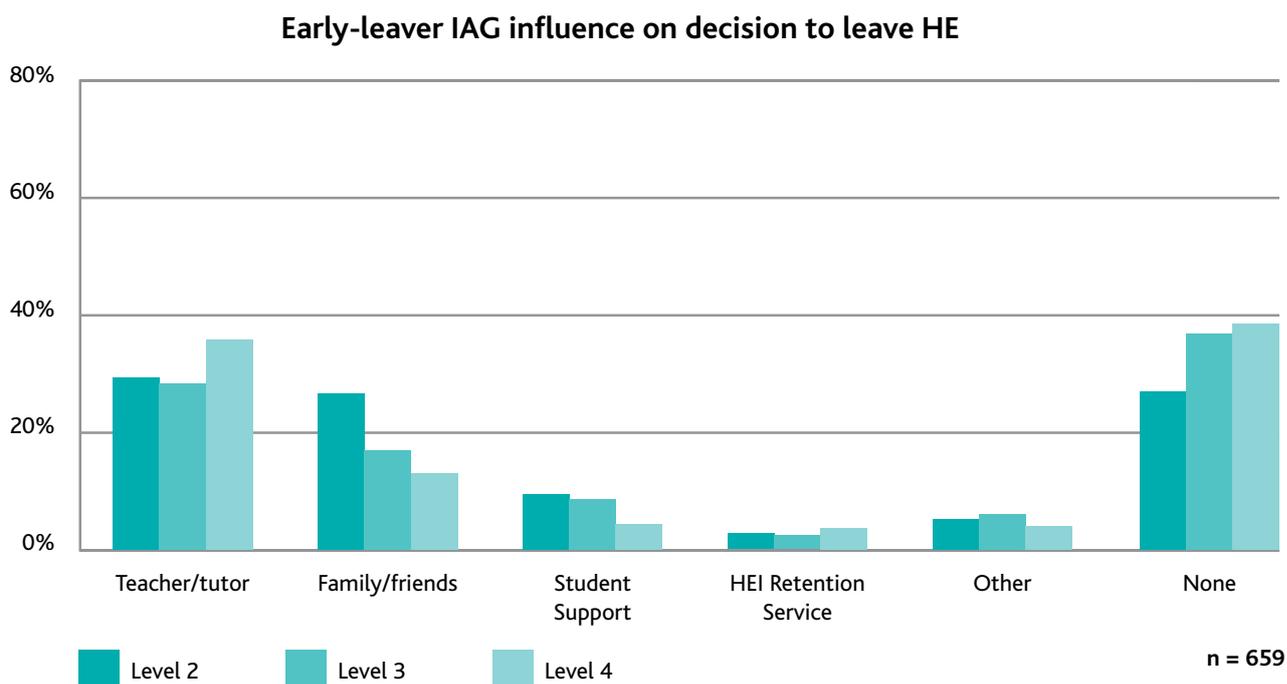


Figure 41: Main source of IAG on exit from previous HEI

Levels of engagement in the **back on course** IAG service appear to be partly determined by how, or indeed if, early-leavers received IAG on leaving their original HE choice (Figure 41). Early-leavers were more likely to have participated in at least one guidance session if they had either not received any IAG on leaving their previous course (38%) or had received IAG from a teacher/tutor (36%). Conversely, those who had sought advice from family or friends were far less likely to have been actively engaged with **back on course** guidance (13%) (Figure 41).

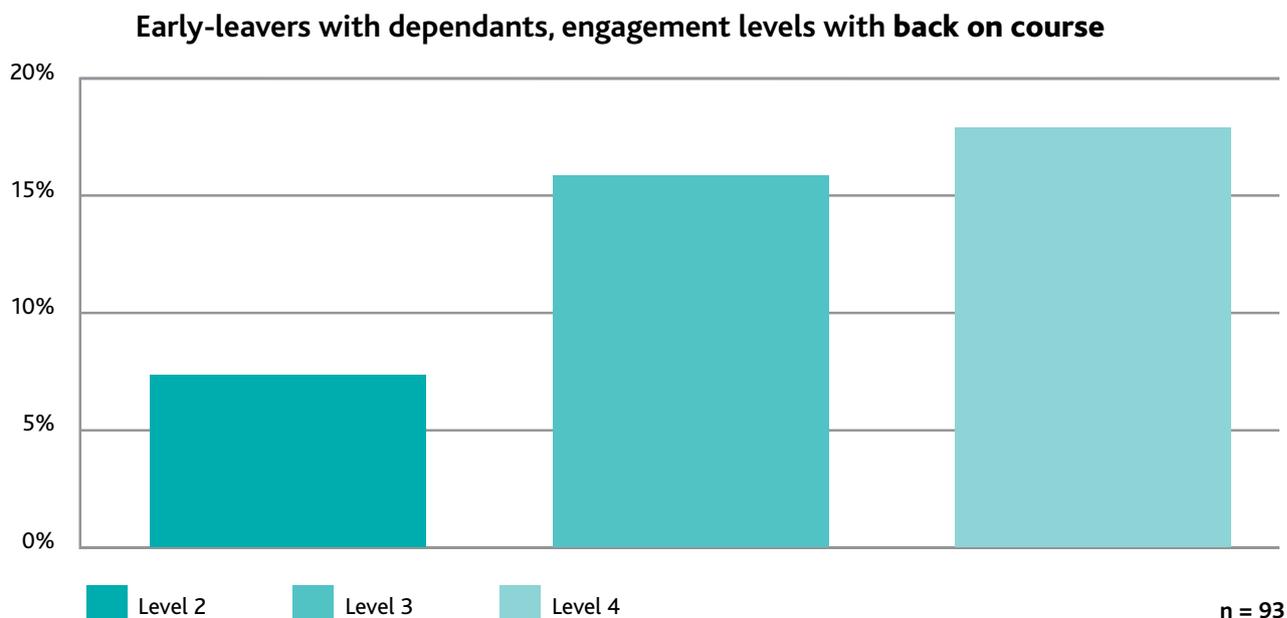


Figure 42: Level of engagement with **back on course** IAG service – early-leavers with dependants

Early-leavers with dependants were more likely to engage with the IAG service (Figure 42). Those with dependants constituted 18% of all those who had attended one or more **back on course** guidance sessions, compared with 7% of those with low-level engagement.

10.3 Current activity and intended destinations

Rachel, 23, originally studying at University Alliance University

I started at university but felt I had been mucked around, as the course I wanted to do was purely Art and it was changed to include Drama. Having left I didn't know what I could do next and drifted into the pub industry. **back on course** helped me find out that I was still entitled to three years funding despite leaving my course early. They also provided information about open days and advice about course choice. Having spoken to an adviser I felt like I could move forward and that a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt uplifted and after receiving a follow up email I started looking at courses elsewhere with the help of UCAS and other websites.

Having decided on Photography, **back on course** helped me again with quite a few options and more information. Without this support I think I would still be working in pubs and would not have gone back into higher education, as there was no-one else I could ask for advice. I am now studying at Stockport College on a BA honours in Photography (in association with John Moores University). Eventually I would like to start an internship with a photographer. I now feel more optimistic as I have got on a course I really want to do and my life is going somewhere.

I have since recommended **back on course** to several of my friends who had dropped out and did not know they were still entitled to funding.



Early-leaver current situation

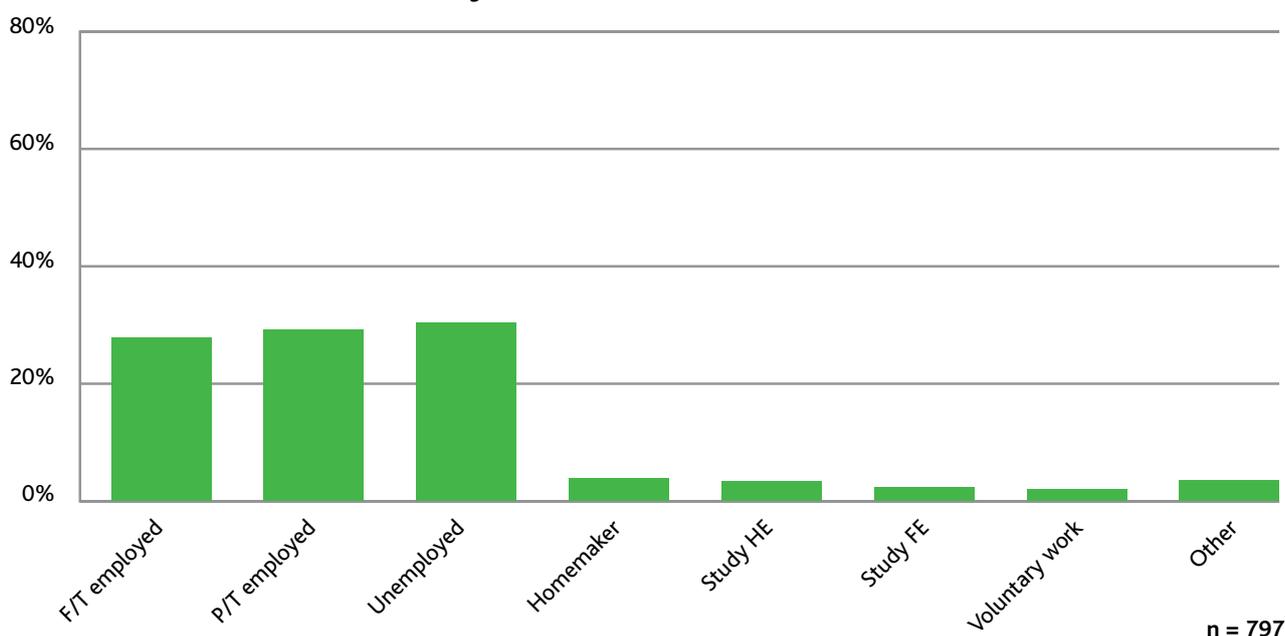


Figure 43: Early-leavers' current status

At the time of their **back on course** guidance intervention, the majority of early-leavers (56%) were employed – with 27% in full-time employment (Figure 43). A further 30% were unemployed although many of these were not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or other benefits. Only 5% were studying at FE or HE level.

Early-leaver IAG intended destination before and after engagement with **back on course**

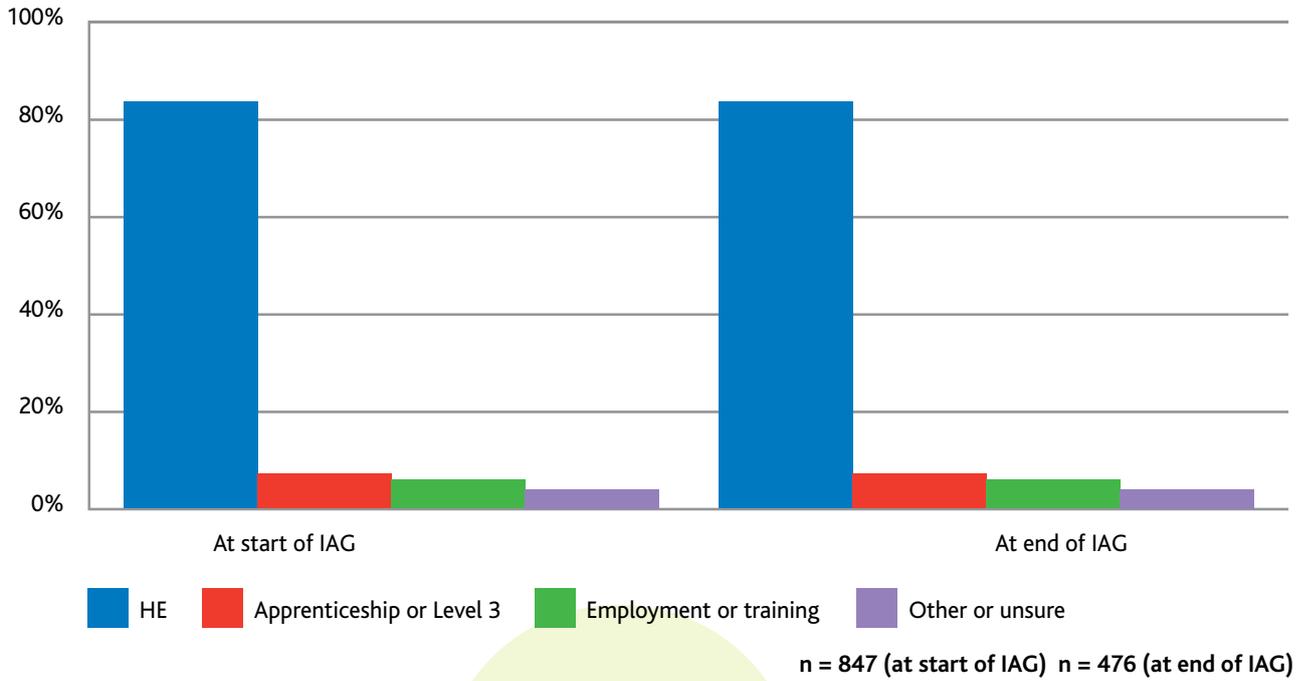


Figure 44: Early-leavers' intended destinations

All early-leavers involved in the **back on course** IAG service were asked their intended destination, both at the beginning and at the end of their guidance intervention (Figure 44). When starting their IAG, the vast majority (83%) planned to return to HE study, with the most popular other intended destinations (apprenticeships and employment) accounting for 7% and 6% respectively. Figure 44 shows that the proportion planning to return to HE had increased to 86% at the end of their period of IAG.

11. What about 'no shows'?

An additional cohort within the **back on course** activity is that of 'no shows'. This supplementary group is defined through UCAS data and based upon accepted applicants who cancel their application before starting their courses. It will not include all people who do not turn up at institutions after accepting their place but does provide a starting point for understanding this group. In 2010, there were 968 'no shows' at English HEIs out of a total of 357,581 accepted applicants (0.27%). These individuals were offered the opportunity to take part in the **back on course** activity but since they are not 'early leavers' they are not reported on in the main analysis from linked UCAS data in the report. In this section we explore how the composition of this group differs from accepted applicants.

11.1 Demographics

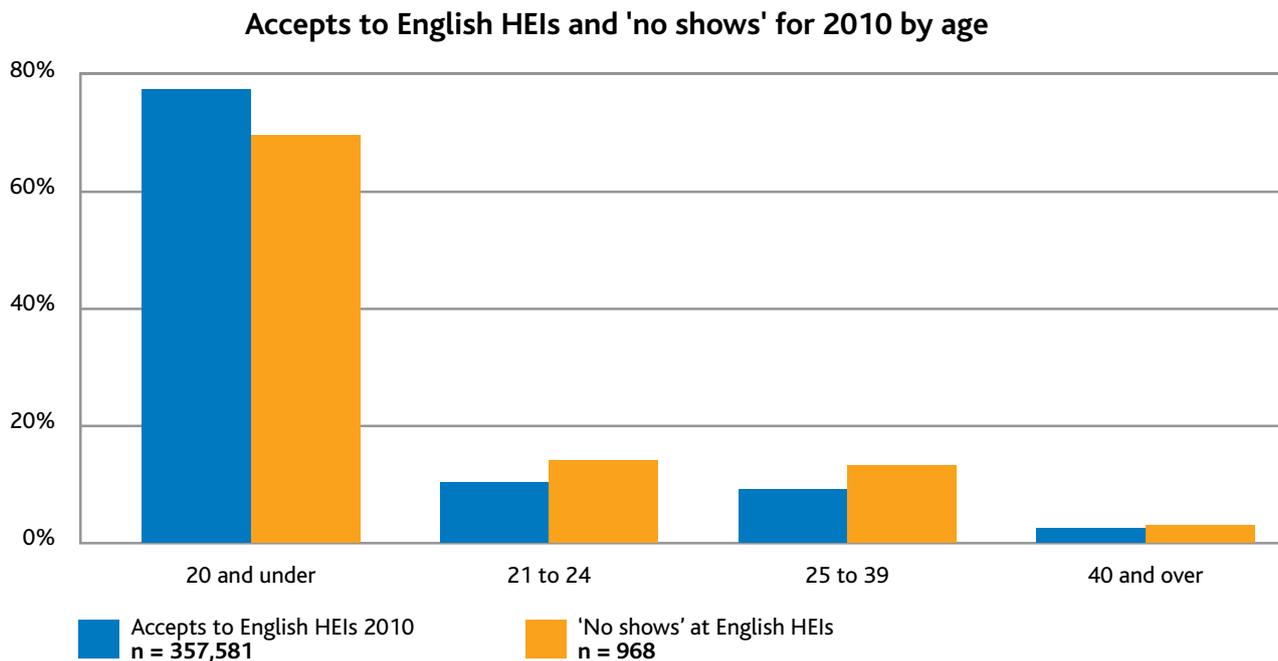


Figure 45: 'No shows' cohort by age group

'No shows' were more likely to be from the 21–24 or 25–39 age groups than the English average accepts and were less likely to have been drawn from the traditional intake age group of 20 and under. Indeed 78% of the English average accepts were made up of 20 and under applicants. Only 70% of the 'no shows' cohort were from the youngest age group (see Figure 45).

There was very little difference between the proportion of women and men who entered HE and the proportion of women and men who were classed as a 'no show'. Women were slightly more at risk of becoming a 'no show', as women made up 55% of all accepts to English HEIs but 58% of the 'no shows' category.

There was little difference between those who were accepted into English HEIs who had a disability and the proportion of those who had a disability within the 'no show' cohort.

Accepts to English HEIs and 'no shows' for 2010 by ethnic background

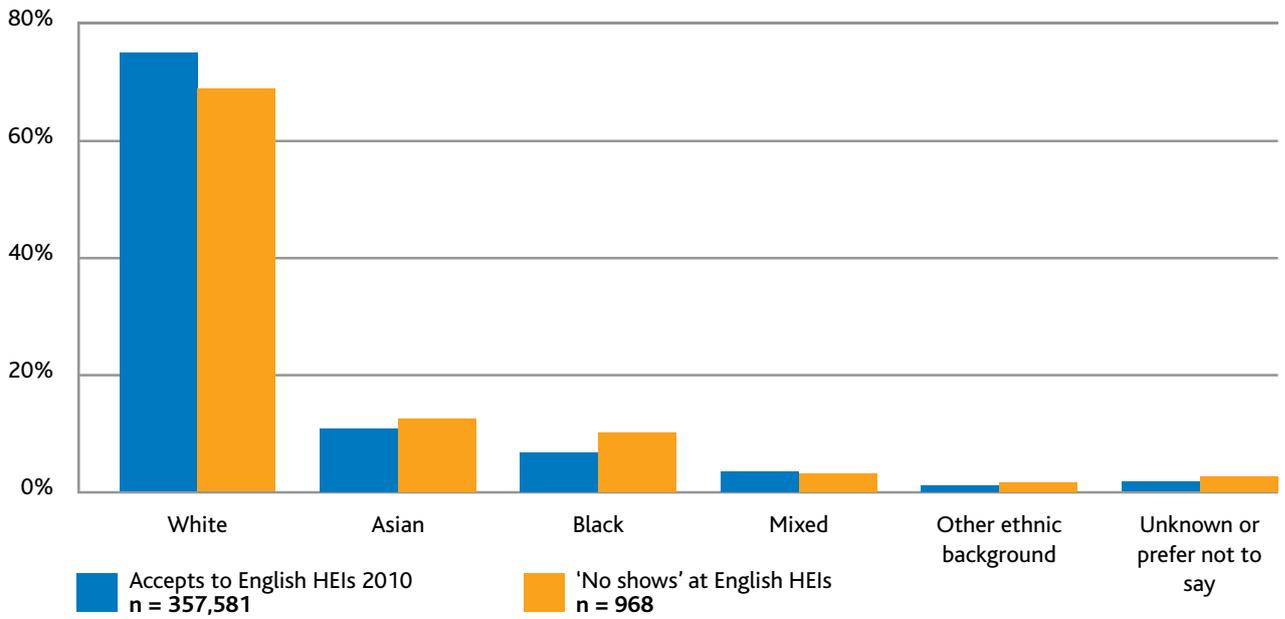
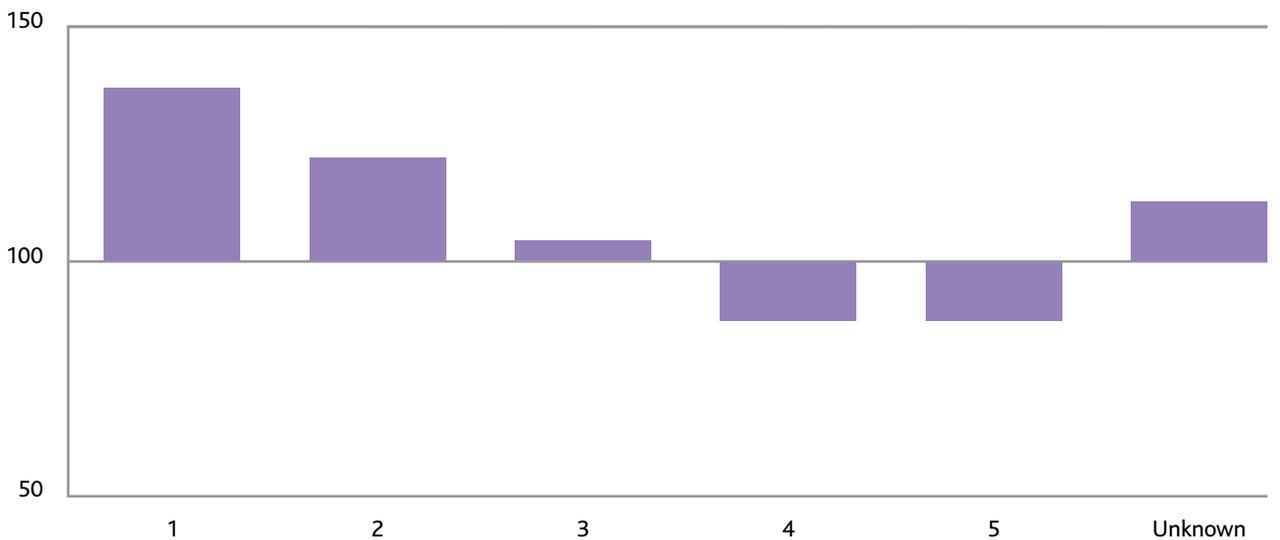


Figure 46: 'No shows' cohort measured against ethnicity

As Figure 46 shows, the proportion of those from a white ethnic background is smaller in the 'no shows' cohort than in the average for all English HEI accepts. The other ethnic groups were over-represented within the 'no shows' cohort compared with the English acceptance average. This over-representation was spread evenly across the other ethnic groups of Asian, black, and other.

'No shows' for 2010 by POLAR2 participation rates indexed against Accepts to English HEIs 2010



UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010 n=357,581 'No shows' at English HEIs 2010 n=968

Figure 47: 'No shows' cohort variance to English HEI accept average by POLAR2

As Figure 47 demonstrates, those from POLAR2 groups 1 and 2 (areas of varying degrees of low participation in HE) were over-represented within the 'no show' cohort and those from POLAR2 groups 4 and 5 (areas of high participation in HE) were under-represented. This is expressed as a variance from the proportion of the cohort and is most pronounced within group 1, where the group's size within the average English intake was 13% but makes up 18% of the 'no show' cohort; and Group 5, which was 28% of the English intake but only 21% of the 'no show' cohort.

11.2 Pre-HE experiences

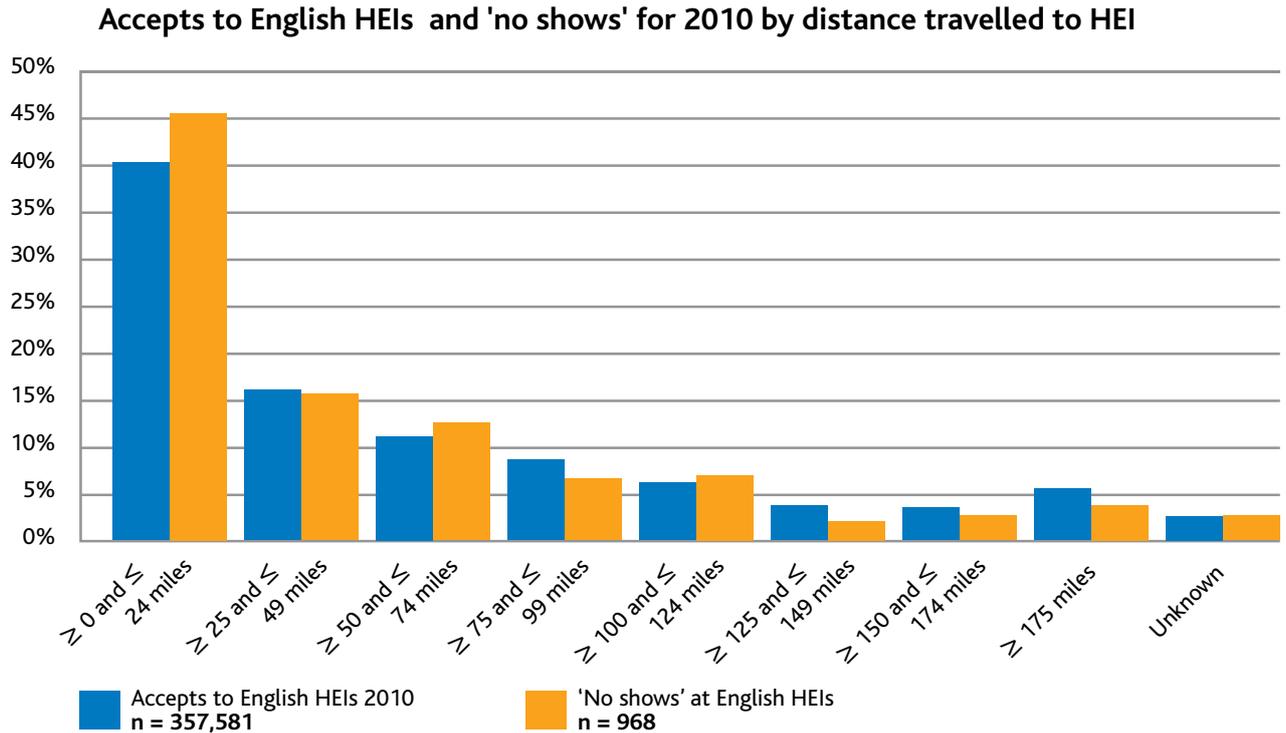
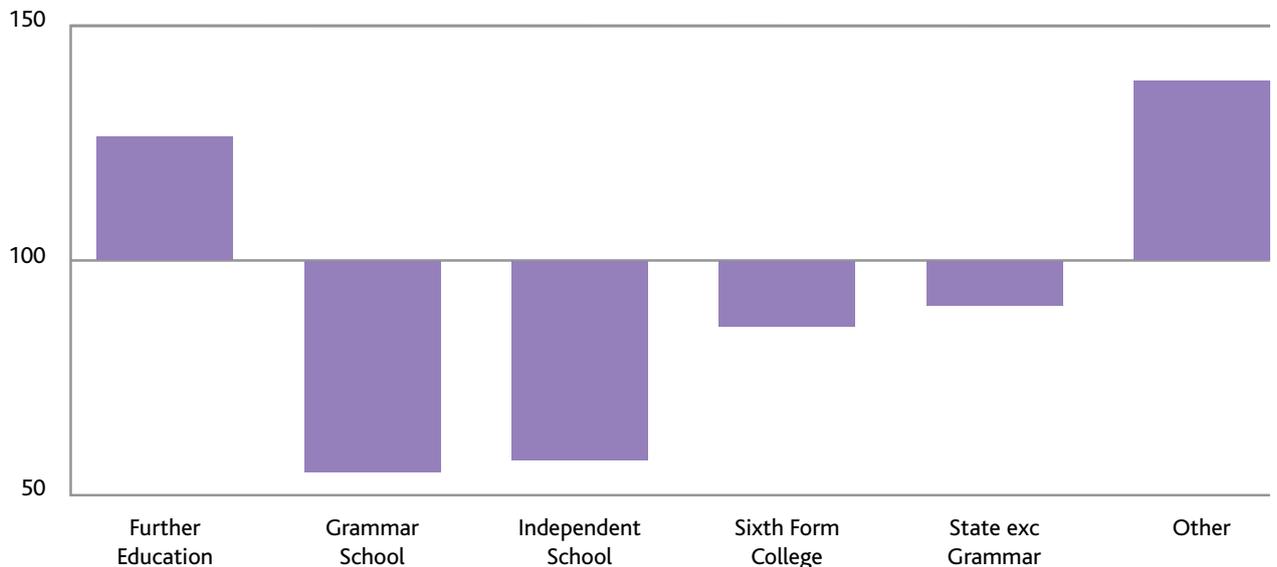


Figure 48: Distance travelled to HEI

As Figure 48 shows, when analysed by distance travelled to HEI, the 'no show' cohort had a similar spread to the English intake average. The biggest variation was those applying to an HEI near their home (24 miles and under), as they were over-represented within the 'no show' cohort (46%) compared with the average English HEI accepts (41%).

'No shows' for 2010 by previous educational establishment indexed against UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010

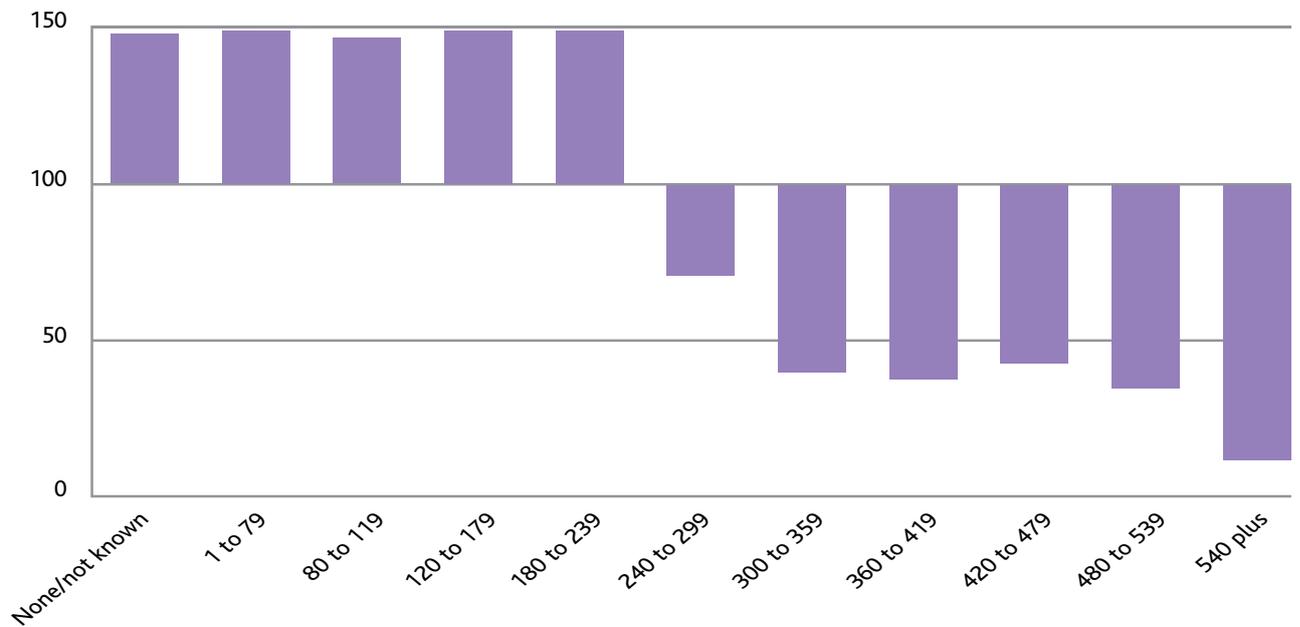


UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010 n=357,581 'No shows' at English HEIs 2010 n=968

Figure 49: Pre-HE establishment

Those from FE or 'other' categories within the 'no show' cohort were over-represented compared with all English HEI accepts, expressed in Figure 49 as a variance. Grammar schools and independent schools were under-represented within the 'no shows' group. Sixth form colleges and state schools (excluding grammar) had a similar proportion within both samples.

'No shows' for 2010 by Tariff points indexed against UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010

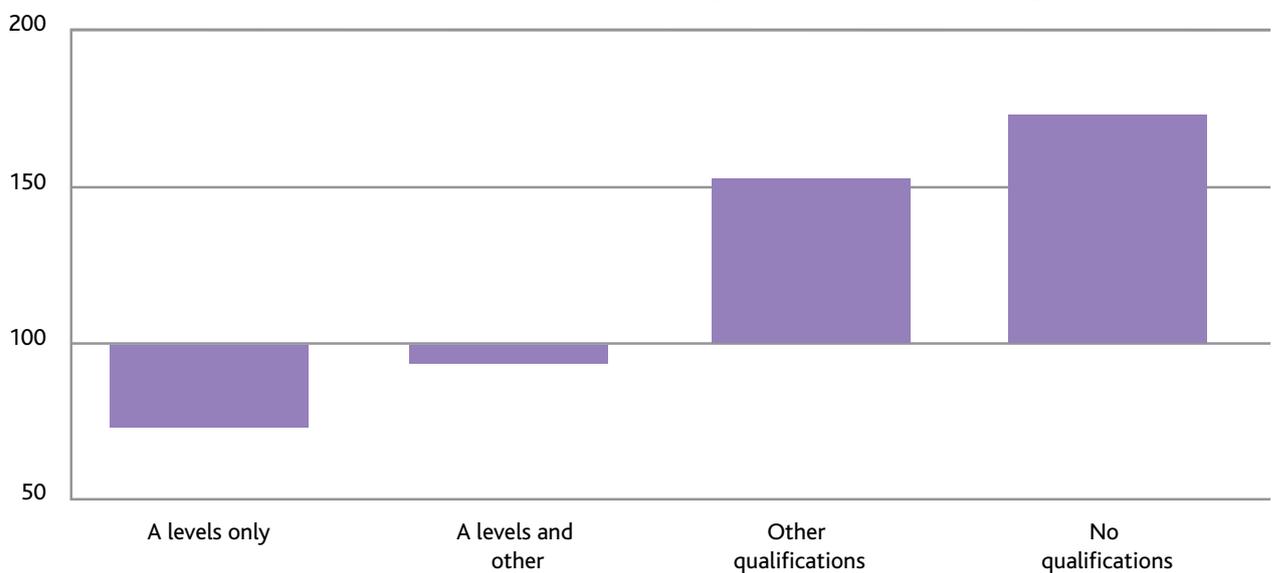


UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010 n=357,581 'No shows' at English HEIs 2010 n=968

Figure 50: Tariff band on application

The greatest variance between the two cohorts was on the none/not known category when samples were analysed by Tariff band. The none/not known category comprises those without qualifications as well as those without qualifications that attract Tariff points. Those without Tariff points/Tariff points unknown are over-represented within the 'no shows' cohort, whereas the 540-plus Tariff points category was significantly under-represented within the 'no shows' cohort. In general, the 'no shows' cohort had a higher proportion of individuals with 239 and under Tariff points compared with the English HEI accepts average (Figure 50). (240 Tariff points equates to two A levels at C grade.)

'No shows' for 2010 by entry qualifications indexed against UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010



UK Accepts to English HEIs 2010 n=357,581 'No shows' at English HEIs 2010 n=968

Figure 51: Pre-HE qualifications

When the cohorts were analysed by qualification group, those with A levels were under-represented within the 'no shows' cohort, as 53% had A level qualifications within the English accepts, but only 39% of the 'no shows' cohort did. Students with 'other qualifications' were also over-represented: the category represented 28% of the English HEI accepts but 42% of the 'no shows' cohort. The 'no qualifications' category shows significant variance in Figure 51 due to the small percentage it represents within the English HEI accepts (1%), and the larger percentage it represents within the 'no shows' cohort (2%).

11.3 HE choices

Number of main scheme choices

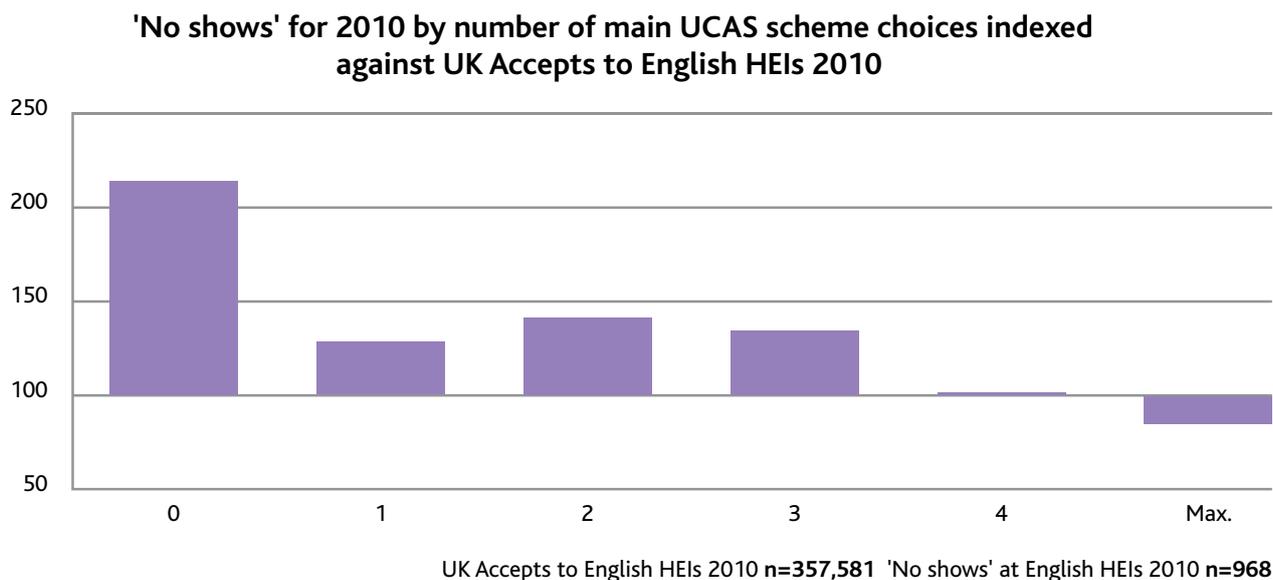


Figure 52: Number of choices to HE made on application

As Figure 52 shows, those within the 'no shows' cohort were more likely not to use the maximum number of choices available: 60% used the maximum number of choices within the 'no shows' cohort, while 70% of the English HEI accepts used the maximum number of choices.

12. Conclusions by **back on course**

Both the **back on course** IAG service and the associated research builds on work that led to the National Audit Office reports of 2002 and 2007. The NAO reports drew principally on the data recorded by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), and came to a number of conclusions based on an analysis of the data, and a relatively small number of interviews with early-leavers and focus groups.

This report contains a very large amount of data drawn from a diverse range of HEIs and students, which will be of interest for many reasons. However, in this chapter we are confining ourselves to highlighting some of the areas where this study either reinforces the original conclusions of the NAO work or comes to different conclusions. In doing so, we draw readers' attention to the information in Chapter 5 of this report, which points out where students accepted to the 42 HEIs who transferred data and that are included in this research differ from the students accepted to the sector as a whole. The HEIs participating in the **back on course** project are more likely to have accepted students from sixth form colleges, those travelling less than 25 miles to their institution and applicants accepted through Clearing. The **back on course** service has been available only to UK-domiciled, full-time undergraduate students based in English HEIs.

Given the detail within the report, we believe that there are some areas where this research breaks new ground:

- Whereas the NAO research suggested that early-leavers were disproportionately drawn from lower socio-economic groups, this work, based on neighbourhoods, suggests that the likelihood of leaving early is much more evenly spread across low and high participation neighbourhoods.
- Where earlier work has suggested that a low proportion of early-leavers re-applies spontaneously to HE, 15% of the matched sample in this research had done so, and 80% of them had been accepted. Those who spontaneously re-apply are more likely to be 18–21 years old, from high participation neighbourhoods, and to have A levels (and the higher the Tariff score, the more likely they are to re-apply).
- Those early-leavers who engaged most actively with the **back on course** service were also disproportionately drawn from older students, have originally applied to universities close to home (less than 25 miles), or a long way from home (more than 175 miles), and to be non-white.
- Early-leavers who were contacted by the service often told us that the reason they had given their HEI for leaving was not the real reason, because they did not think it would be palatable for the institution. Over 40% of those early-leavers under the age of 21 told us they left for course-related reasons; nearly half of those from high-participation neighbourhoods left because of dissatisfaction with either their course or institution. Fifty-eight per cent of early-leavers with high Tariff points left because of dissatisfaction with their course, as did more than half the early-leavers from highly selective HEIs (Russell Group and 1994 Group), although it should be emphasised that the number of students involved is small.
- The impression is often given that those who leave HE early are condemned to becoming NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training). Fifty-six per cent of those we were able to contact were in employment and 27% were in full-time employment. Thirty per cent were unemployed but many of these were not claiming any benefits.
- More than 80% of those contacted wanted to return to HE at some point; they still saw higher education as a desirable stage in their life and their development.

What does this suggest for future research or action?

Chapters 6 to 10 of the report provide a number of correlations and trends which would warrant further investigation through qualitative or further quantitative studies and we would encourage researchers to undertake this. Four areas that we would particularly like to highlight and that are supported by the anecdotal evidence from **back on course** team in their conversations with early-leavers and that suggest some areas for future research, and for action by HEIs, are:

- For most students who left early, this was not attributable to a single cause; a combination of factors persuaded them to leave. However, there is a subset that were withdrawn by their HEI, due to exam failure or non-attendance or fitness to practice. This was the case for many of the students who failed academically and were asked to leave; often there were underlying health or other reasons that contributed to their academic failure.

- Many of the students who went to a university within 25 miles of their home address were living at home; we have heard from some students that without the commitment of paying for accommodation, it was easier for them to decide not to continue. This may be exacerbated in the future when fees are higher; students could decide to leave rather than to take on a loan for a further year and we believe this should be monitored for change over the next three years.
- Many of these students, as well as older students with other responsibilities, failed to fully engage with their institution. Their disengagement was such that they did not inform their institution they were considering leaving, and so the institution was not given the opportunity to invoke their retention strategies. Many of the early-leavers who talked to the service made statements that suggested a lower level of engagement than would be the case for continuing students.
- The students who engaged with the service reported that, once they had left, there was no advice and guidance available to them about their future options until they found out about **back on course**. Many did not know they could resume their studies, and the characteristics of those who re-apply suggest this is an issue which is very much about helping under-represented groups back into HE.

It is hoped that this research project can be continued beyond July 2012, to capture the enormous changes across the HE sector. The impact of the Browne review and the Government's White Paper (Putting Students at the Heart of HE, June 2011) is likely to have major implications for student retention. Efforts should be made to build on this research and feed into HE policy guidance and student retention strategies for the future.

Lists of figures and tables

List of figures

Figure 1: back on course data flow	11
Figure 2: Accepted applicants by institution type (2006–2010)	15
Figure 3: Breakdown of UCAS entry cohorts, 2006–10	18
Figure 4: Early-leavers by sex	19
Figure 5: Early-leavers by age	20
Figure 6: Early-leavers by ethnicity	20
Figure 7: Early-leavers by POLAR2 group	21
Figure 8: Early-leavers by centre type	21
Figure 9: back on course early-leavers by entry qualifications	22
Figure 10: Early-leavers by Tariff points	22
Figure 11: Early-leavers by distance from institution	23
Figure 12: Early-leavers by number of UCAS main scheme choices	23
Figure 13: Re-application status by sex	24
Figure 14: Re-application status by age	25
Figure 15: Re-application status by qualification	25
Figure 16: Re-application status by Tariff points	26
Figure 17: Re-application status by distance to chosen institution	26
Figure 18: Re-application status by number of original choices	27
Figure 19: Re-application status by original application route – excluding UCAS main scheme	27
Figure 20: Indexed levels of engagement by age	29
Figure 21: Indexed levels of engagement by ethnicity	29
Figure 22: Indexed levels of engagement by POLAR2 group	30
Figure 23: Indexed levels of engagement by previous educational establishment	30

Figure 24: Indexed levels of engagement by qualification type	31
Figure 25: Levels of engagement by Tariff points	32
Figure 26: Indexed levels of engagement by distance from institution	32
Figure 27: Indexed levels of engagement by deferral status	33
Figure 28: Reasons for leaving by age	35
Figure 29: Reasons for leaving by POLAR2 group	36
Figure 30: Reasons for leaving by entry qualifications	37
Figure 31: Reasons for leaving by Tariff points	37
Figure 32: Reasons for leaving by deferral status	38
Figure 33: Main factor for deciding previous HEI	39
Figure 34: Main factor for deciding previous HEI, compared with main reason for non-completion	40
Figure 35: Main source of IAG when choosing HEI	40
Figure 36: Main source of IAG when choosing HEI compared with main reason for non-completion	41
Figure 37: Dependants and the main reason for non-completion	41
Figure 38: Living arrangements	42
Figure 39: Living arrangements and reasons for non-completion	43
Figure 40: Employment status and main reason for non-completion	43
Figure 41: Main source of IAG on exit from previous HEI	44
Figure 42: Level of engagement with back on course IAG service – early-leavers with dependants	44
Figure 43: Early-leavers' current status	45
Figure 44: Early-leavers' intended destinations	46
Figure 45: 'No shows' cohort by age group	47
Figure 46: 'No shows' cohort measured against ethnicity	48
Figure 47: 'No shows' cohort variance to English HEI accept average by POLAR2	48
Figure 48: Distance travelled to HEI	49
Figure 49: Pre-HE establishment	49
Figure 50: Tariff band on application	50
Figure 51: Pre-HE qualifications	50
Figure 52: Number of choices to HE made on application	51

List of tables

Table 1: HEIs that transferred data to back on course by June 2011, a total of 42 HEIs	10
Table 2: Accepted applicants by variable, back on course HEIs and national data	16
Table 3: Overview of re-applicants to HE	24
Table 4: back on course survey respondents' reasons for leaving HE	34
Table 5: back on course HEI early-leaver records by year	55
Table 6: Success rates for matching IAG Service Records	57
Table 7: back on course survey respondents' reasons for leaving HE	58
Table 8: Levels of engagement in back on course IAG service	59
Table 9: Information collected by back on course and recorded on the CRM system for those progressing to full IAG engagement	64

Annex 1 Methodology

The analysis of **back on course** data is contained within Chapters 6 to 11 of this research report. This chapter outlines the methodology undertaken in analysing data, with detailed summaries for each chapter.

It should be noted that the report focuses on findings from the research analysis that are notable or where they are particularly important from a policy perspective. Where analysis produced similar patterns, it has been assumed that the cohort is not significantly affected by the variable concerned.

Analysis methodology for Chapters 5 and 6

The aims of these chapters are to:

- describe **back on course** in relation to which HEIs are involved and the sizes of the datasets
- provide a profile of the early-leavers to the project through analysis of their UCAS application
- look at re-applicants' attributes and behaviours.

To match the **back on course** cohort (of all data collected from the beginning of the project until the end of June 2011) to UCAS data, only UK-domiciled accepts to English HEIs for years 2006–2010 were used. 2006–2010 was taken as the sample group because data has been collected in a consistent and easily accessible format by UCAS over that period¹². It is also the period in which those early-leavers whom **back on course** has been working with joined their original HEI.

Matching individual records to UCAS data was done in two rounds to maximise opportunity for a successful match:

- Surname, forename, home postcode, institution accepted to (HEIs from which **back on course** had received records)
- Surname, forename, date of birth, institution accepted to (HEIs from which **back on course** had received records)

Where more than one match was found within the UCAS data, the latest recorded acceptance to that HEI was taken as the match to early-leaver record.

A total of 19,570 unique records were submitted to a matching exercise before 1 July 2011. All individuals who had opted out were omitted. Of the remainder, 14,730 (75%) could be matched to UCAS data. The distribution of matched records across the cycles is shown in Table 5.

	back on course HEI early-leaver records	%
2006	774	5%
2007	1,759	12%
2008	3,999	27%
2009	5,751	39%
2010	2,447	17%
TOTAL	14,730	100%

Table 5: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records by year

All early-leaver data by the HEIs was classified as one of the following four categories:

- Not matched – cannot be matched to UCAS data.
- Early-leaver – has not applied through UCAS since their last recorded acceptance at the HEI from which **back on course** received their data.
- Re-applicant: not yet accepted – has applied (though not yet been accepted) through UCAS since their last recorded acceptance at the HEI from which **back on course** received their data.

¹² Please note that partner institutions were not asked to provide data relating to this entire period. Therefore no inferences should be drawn regarding levels of engagement within the project from these figures.

- Re-applicant: accepted – has applied (and has been accepted) through UCAS since their last recorded acceptance at the HEI from which **back on course** received their data. The exception is if their last recorded acceptance at the HEI from which **back on course** received their data is to a course with a start date in the future, in which case they are counted within the 'Re-applicant: accepted' category.

Within Chapter 8 this categorisation is used to look at the data separately. The total intake 2006–2010 and the total intake for **back on course** partner HEIs for 2006–2010 are analysed against the following variables in Chapter 5.

The following variables (taken from the UCAS application) were analysed for all matched records to the project:

Demographics

- Sex
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Disability

POLAR2

- Pre-HE experience
- Previous educational establishment
- Qualifications on entry to HE
- Tariff

HE choices

- Acceptance route
- Deferred entrance
- Distance travelled
- Number of UCAS main scheme choices made on application

(Full definitions of these can be found in the Glossary in Annex 2.)

For Chapter 6 of the report, twelve tables were produced for each variable.

In each of the cases below:

- 'a' tables (raw figures) show the volumes within each cohort
- 'b' tables (column percentages) show how the make-up of each volume differs across stages of the service or behaviours shown (e.g. re-applying, engagement with guidance)
- 'c' tables (row percentages) show how each volume is represented within another, significant volume.

T1 TABLES – compare back on course HEIs to all English HEIs intake 2006–2010

The purpose of these tables is to show if and how the intake of the **back on course** partner HEIs differs from the total intake of English HEIs.

- T1a – raw figures
- T1b – column percentages
- T1c – row percentages (with A: UK accepts to English HEIs cohort = 100%)

A: UK accepts to English HEIs cohort is chosen as the denominator for row percentages to show how much of the potential **back on course** partner student population is represented by its current HEI partners.

e.g. x% of UK accepts to English HEIs are made up of acceptances to **back on course** partner HEIs.

T2 TABLES – progression from receipt of back on course early-leaver record to guidance appointment stage

- T2a – raw figures
- T2b – column percentages
- T2c – row percentages (with C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records = 100% for categories D and E and E: Records transferred to IAG service = 100% for all E subcategories)

C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records are chosen as the denominator for categories D and E. This is so that contact rates are not artificially lowered by not accounting for the time lapse between the records extracted from the Open University Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (IAG guidance phase) for use in the report and the records extracted from the UCAS early-leaver data for use in the report.

e.g. x% of early-leaver records had not yet been transferred to the IAG service at the time of the extracts taken for research.

E: Records transferred to IAG service is chosen as the denominator for all E subcategories to show who has been contacted and their level of engagement as a proportion of all those who can potentially be contacted and engaged.

e.g. x% of records transferred to the IAG service have been successfully contacted and have shown the fullest level of engagement.

T3 TABLES – re-application status of back on course early-leavers

- T3a – raw figures
- T3b – column percentages
- T3c – row percentages (with C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records = 100%)

C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records is chosen as the denominator to show the make-up of the successfully matched early-leavers in terms of their re-application behaviour.

e.g. x% of early-leavers chose to re-apply but have not yet had an outcome.

Analysis methodology for Chapter 8

The aims of this chapter are to:

- track the likelihood of progression through the IAG service for groups within the early-leavers to the project
- measure the engagement level of those who are successfully contacted by the **back on course** service.

The data used in this research is collected by the **back on course** team directly from early-leavers and is stored in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The records from the IAG service are matched using the two rounds of match keys above via the early-leaver data¹³.

This is to ensure that we can track progression through all stages of the project:

- Acceptance
- Receipt of early-leaver records
- Engagement with IAG service

The success rates for matching the IAG service records were as shown in Table 6.

Level of engagement	UCAS linked (via early-leaver record)				Total
	Not matched		Matched		
	Number	%	Number	%	
Awaiting: Contact attempts in progress	1,503	37	2,536	63	4,039
None: Contact attempts complete – unsuccessful	1,478	38	2,383	62	3,861
Level 1: Query answered at 1st contact or does not wish to participate at this time ¹⁴	1,293	39	2,039	61	3,332
Level 2: No guidance appointment made at this time	50	41	72	59	122
Level 3: Scheduled first guidance appointment	141	52	130	48	271
Level 4: At least one guidance appointment	287	50	285	50	572
Total	4,752	39	7,445	61	12,197

Table 6: Success rates for matching IAG Service Records

Some of the early-leavers who did not initially wish to participate have subsequently contacted the service and asked for assistance. Similarly, early-leavers have found that their queries can be answered on first contact and do not need to progress to the full guidance process; some of these have provided data which has informed the research.

¹³ Some individuals come directly to the **back on course** service and therefore do not follow the same progression route as those referred by HEIs. These records are not part of this section of the analysis but are included in the other analysis for this report.

¹⁴ Due to recording mechanisms within the CRM system it is not currently possible to distinguish between those clients who have had their queries answered at 1st contact or who have completely declined the service.

Analysis methodology for Chapter 9

The main purpose of this chapter is to:

- analyse the guidance interviews conducted by **back on course** advisers to look at factors which may contribute to the reasons for leaving HE.

This was expressed in the following tables.

T4 TABLES – reason for leaving for those who have engaged with the IAG service

- T4a – raw figures
- T4b – column percentages
- T4c – row percentages (with E2b+E2c+E2d = 100% e.g. level 2, 3 and 4 engagement in IAG service)

E2b+E2c+E2d is chosen as the denominator to show the make-up of those engaged in IAG services in terms of their main reasons for leaving HE.

e.g. x% of those who have engaged with the IAG service stated that the main reason they left HE was due to caring for themselves or others.

These are explored in the context of the level of engagement and the main reason for not completing the previous HE course. These reasons are grouped based on the data collected through the IAG process. They are grouped in order to aggregate the figures and provide a clearer picture which could be investigated further if required. The reasons are grouped as shown in Table 7.

Overall heading		Main reasons		Sub-categories
1	Dissatisfaction with previous HE experience	1a	Course-related reasons	Change mode of study Change to different content Course too difficult
		1b	Institution-related reasons	Dissatisfaction with HEI Withdrawn by HEI Location of university
2	Previous HE experience did not suit personal circumstances	2a	Caring for self or others	Dependants Illness/disability Pregnancy
		2b	Other personal/ financial circumstances	Lack of finances Working whilst studying Homesick Personal reasons To work To travel

Table 7: **back on course** survey respondents' reasons for leaving HE

Analysis methodology for Chapter 10

The intention of this chapter is to:

- analyse the guidance interviews conducted by **back on course** advisers to look at factors which may contribute to:
- willingness and reasons for engaging with the programme
- changes in behaviours as a result of **back on course** intervention

All IAG service records were used in this section of the report, not just those successfully matched to the early-leaver records. The report is limited to those who have engaged at some level, as shown in Table 8.

Level 2	No guidance appointment made at this time	This group consists of clients with whom back on course has made contact, who have provided data for research but not requested an advisory appointment at this time.
Level 3	Scheduled first guidance appointment	This group consists of clients with whom back on course has made contact, who have provided data for research and have scheduled their first guidance appointment.
Level 4	At least one guidance appointment	This group consists of clients with whom back on course has made contact, who have provided data for research and have had at least one guidance appointment.

Table 8: Levels of engagement in **back on course** IAG service

The following variables, collected through the IAG process, were also analysed to provide a more detailed understanding of the early-leavers:

- Main reason for not completing previous HE course
- Secondary reason for not completing previous HE course
- Current intended destination
- Main factor for deciding previous HEI
- Main source of IAG used when choosing previous HEI
- Main source of IAG used when deciding to exit previous HEI
- Number of dependants
- Number of hours employed weekly during previous HE course
- Living arrangements during previous HE course
- Disability status on previous HE course
- Current activity

(Fuller descriptions of these variables can be found in the Glossary in Annex 2.)

The next strand of analysis for those engaged with the IAG service looks at any changes in behaviour for:

- Intended destination at entry compared against exit

And for those considering HE:

- Intended number of HE choices at entry compared against exit
- Intended HE subject area (reports only whether or not there is a change, not specific subjects).

This was to see if there was a change in behaviour evident from when an early-leaver first enters the service and at the point of their exit from the service.

Annex 2 Glossary of terms

Cohort descriptions A–E

A: UK Accepts to English HEIs

All UK-domiciled students who accepted places at UCAS member HEIs in England 2006–2010.

B: UK Accepts to **back on course** HEIs

All UK-domiciled students who accepted places at UCAS member HEIs who provided early-leaver data through **back on course** 2006–2010. Specific HEIs are:

University of Bath	Bath Spa University
University College Birmingham	Bournemouth University
The University of Bradford	University of the West of England, Bristol
Brunel University	Buckinghamshire New University
Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London	City University
Coventry University	University of Cumbria
De Montfort University	University of Derby
Durham University	University of East Anglia
Edge Hill University	The University of Essex
University of Hertfordshire	Kingston University
Lancaster University	University of Lincoln
The University of Liverpool	Liverpool Hope University
London Metropolitan University	London School of Economics and Political Science (University of London)
The Manchester Metropolitan University	Newman University College, Birmingham
Oxford Brookes University	Ravensbourne
Rose Bruford College	Royal Veterinary College (University of London)
The University of Salford	The School of Pharmacy (University of London)
Southampton Solent University	St George's, University of London (formerly St George's Hospital Medical School)
St Mary's University College, Twickenham	University of Surrey
University of Sussex	The University of Warwick
University of Wolverhampton	University of Winchester

C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records

Early-leaver data from **back on course** partners 2006–2010 submitted by the end of June 2011 which has been successfully matched to the UCAS accepted applicant data for the same period using one of the following match keys:

- Surname, forename, home postcode, institution accepted to (i.e. that provided the record)
- Surname, forename, date of birth, institution accepted to (i.e. that provided the record)

A total of 19,570 unique records were submitted to UCAS by the end of June 2011 and 14,730 (75%) of these could be matched to UCAS data. In total the data submitted by **back on course** to UCAS for analysis includes early-leavers from 70 institutions. As well as those listed above and the 'no shows' three institutions chose to refer their early-leavers directly to the scheme due to internal data protection issues; some early-leavers also found their own way to the scheme through word of mouth or the internet.

Where more than one match is found within the UCAS data, the latest recorded acceptance to that HEI is taken as the match to early-leaver record.

All individuals who opted out of the research are omitted.

D: Record awaiting transfer to IAG service

This group contains those early-leavers whose records were received by UCAS in June 2011 but had not yet been transferred to the **back on course** IAG service.

All individuals who opted out of the research are omitted from this group.

E: Transferred to IAG service

All early-leaver records transferred to the **back on course** IAG service by mid-June 2011 or who approached the IAG service directly by mid-June 2011.

All individuals who opted out of the research are omitted from this group.

This group includes only those records within the **back on course** IAG service data which can be matched to records within group C: **back on course** HEI early-leaver records.

E1: Not yet contacted

E1a: Awaiting: Contact attempts in progress

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has not yet attempted to contact or who are part way through **back on course's** usual contact attempts of two phone calls followed by a letter

E1b: None: Contact attempts complete

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has been unable to make contact with, after completing the usual contact attempts of two phone calls, a letter and an e-mail.

E2: Successfully contacted

E2a: Level 1: Query answered at 1st contact or does not wish to participate at this time

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has made contact with, who have not provided data for research or requested an advisory appointment.

E2b: Level 2: No guidance appointment made at this time

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has made contact with, who have provided data for research but not requested an advisory appointment at this time.

E2c: Level 3: Scheduled first guidance appointment

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has made contact with, who have provided data for research and have scheduled their first guidance appointment.

E2d: Level 4h: At least one guidance appointment

This group consists of clients who **back on course** has made contact with, who have provided data for research and have had at least one guidance appointment.

Re-application statuses

Not a re-applicant

Those within group C: **back on course** partner HEI early-leaver records who have not made an application through UCAS during 2006–2010 cycles since leaving early. See the glossary entry for group C for a definition of an early-leaver.

Application made: no outcome

Those within group C: **back on course** partner HEI early-leaver records who have made an application through UCAS during 2006–2010 cycles since leaving early. See the glossary entry for group C for a definition of an early-leaver.

Application made: accepted

Those within group C: **back on course** partner HEI early-leaver records who have been accepted through UCAS during 2006–2010 cycles since early-leaver. See the glossary entry for group C for a definition of an early-leaver.

Please note that due to the definition of an early-leaver being their last recorded acceptance to the HEI which provided their record, this group will not include those who have been re-accepted to the same institution.

Reasons for leaving HE (only for group E2bcd: successfully contacted and engaged)

Group E2bcd consists of all clients within groups E2b, E2c and E2d (see relevant glossary entries for further information on those groups). In practice this accounts for all those who have been successfully contacted by the IAG service and have provided data for research.

The reasons for leaving HE are taken from the IAG service data collected from the clients. The team is provided with the options listed in the table below to define the client's reason for leaving. These have been grouped for the purposes of the research into two overarching groups ('dissatisfaction with previous HE experience' and 'previous HE experience did not suit personal circumstances') and four subgroups ('course-related', 'institution-related', 'caring for self or others' and 'other personal/financial circumstances'). There is an additional category for those who were contacted by the IAG service during the pilot year and were therefore not asked this question.

Overarching reasons	Main reasons	Sub-categories
Dissatisfaction with previous HE	Course-related reasons	Change mode of study Change to different content Course too difficult
	Institution-related reasons	Dissatisfaction with HEI Withdrawn by HEI Location of university
	Caring for self or others	Dependants Illness/disability Pregnancy
Previous HE experience did not suit personal circumstances	Other personal/ financial circumstances	Lack of finances Working whilst studying Homesick Personal reasons To work To travel
Not asked	From pilot year	

Definitions of UCAS variables

Variable name	Further information
Course-related reasons	The route of acceptance. A direct entrant is defined as an applicant accepted through a Record of Prior Acceptance. For UK students, these tend to take place as the cycle draws to a close. The applicant approaches the HEI directly and the acceptance is then recorded with UCAS retrospectively by the HEI.
Age	Derived from the date of birth entered by the applicant – age as at 30 September in the autumn following the cycle in which the applicant applied.
Deferred entrance	Deferred entrance is defined as applicants who defer their higher education acceptance to the following year.
Disability	As entered by the applicant.
Distance travelled	Derived from the applicant's home postcode and the postcode of the main campus of the institution accepted to.
Ethnicity	As entered by the applicant.
Number of UCAS main scheme choices	Number of UCAS main scheme choices made in cycle applied, i.e. excluding choices made through Extra, Clearing, Adjustment or as a direct entrant.
POLAR2	Derived from the home postcode entered by the applicant. POLAR2 is a HEFCE measure of participation in HE. Two different measures have been applied based on whether the applicant is 19 or under, or over 19. More information on POLAR2 should be obtained from the HEFCE website: www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/polar/polar2/
Previous Educational Establishment	For UCAS-registered educational establishments only. Derived from the establishment entered as the last attended by the applicant and the establishment type assigned by the establishment itself when they register with UCAS. 'Other' includes those who have applied not associated with a centre (will include some re-applicants) in addition to those applying via centres that do not fit into standard groupings e.g. HEIs, prisons, language schools, etc.
Qualifications on entry to HE	Derived from the qualifications entered by the applicant. 'Other' is any level 3 or above qualification not categorised elsewhere.
Sex	As entered by the applicant.
Tariff	<p>Tariff is derived from the qualifications entered by the applicant.</p> <p>Results available through UCAS' Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) arrangements cover some, but not all, examination sittings depending upon the qualification and awarding body concerned – in many instances results are restricted to the most recent summer sittings (although GCE A levels cover qualification examinations taken in the last 18 months and SQA for a much longer period).</p> <p>Qualifications not reported within the Tariff are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those that were not part of ABL arrangements • Those where the date upon which the qualification examinations taken fell outside of the ABL arrangements. • Those for which Tariff data could not be analysed e.g. BTEC. <p>This qualifications data does not therefore give a complete picture of applicant qualifications on entry.</p>

Table 9: Information collected by back on course and recorded on the CRM system for those progressing to full IAG engagement

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
Name of Course Not Completed	The qualification the client has withdrawn from	Free Text – e.g. 'BA (Hons) English Literature' or 'FD Contemporary Theatre'	
Date Course Started	The month the client began study on the course they withdrew from. If a top-up year from a foundation degree: record the date they started study on the top-up year. Disregard the foundation degree. If they don't know, make an educated guess from what they've told us. UCAS won't be working on anything as detailed as a month by month breakdown, they'll be looking on a broader scale.	Using the 'Due date' column. We request the month and the year, and always set the day as the first of the month.	
Date Left Course	The month the client decided to withdraw. Details as above.	Using the 'Due date' column. We request the month and the year, and always set the day as the first of the month.	
Any Completed Award	Any qualification awarded from the study the client withdrew from. We privilege a named qualification over CATs points as CATs points has its own question. DO NOT include any previously completed HE. (If studying a top-up year, do not include the foundation degree)	None (default)	No named qualification or CATs points awarded for study completed.
		CATs Points	Credit Accumulation and Transfer scheme points.
		Cert HE	Certificate of Higher Education
		Dip HE	Diploma of Higher Education
		HNC	Higher National Certificate
		HND	Higher National Diploma
		FD	Foundation Degree
Other	Any named qualification not listed above.		
Estimated Credit Transfer	An estimation of how many CATs points a client will have (if any) from the study they completed. DOES NOT take into account actual probability of getting credit transfer/advanced standing, just considers actual standing, just completed.	None (default)	
		1–60	
		61–120	
		121–180	
		181–240	
Main Influence on Entry to Previous HEI	The main reason the client gives for their original decision to study at the university they have withdrawn from.	Location	
		Subject	
		Facilities	
		Prestige	
		Entry Requirements Match	
		Personal	
		Other	

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
Main IAG Source Used on Entry to HE	The source the client 'values' the most in the process of gathering information about and making decisions on HE. By value, we mean they privilege this source above the others available to them. The information gathered here is more important than the information gathered elsewhere, the advice is more authoritative for them. These are more general decisions than choosing a specific HEI, it's a source they'd use in choosing subject areas, types of qualifications, finding out about different kinds of HEIs.	HEI Website	
		HEI Prospectus	
		HEI Visit	Open Day
		UCAS Website	
		UCAS Guide	
		School Careers Advice	
		FE/AG Careers Advice	Guidance Services accessed through further education colleges, or separate adult guidance services.
		Teacher/Tutor	
		Friends/Family	
		Support org website	Websites about transitioning to university, or intended for those already there. Specialist websites such as those aimed at students with a disability. Aimhigher, NUS, Studentroom, SKILL, push. NOT Unistats/Hotcourses, which have their own category.
		Unistats/Hotcourses	
Other	Used an IAG source not listed above.		
None	Did not use any source to make decision		
Living Arrangements	The client's living arrangements during study (in the year which they withdrew from).	Shared Accommodation	Halls, private residences, including with family members if these family members don't fall under parent/guardian (e.g. siblings
		With Parents/Guardians	
		With Partner	
		With Dependants – Lone Carer	
		With Dependents – Co Carer	
		On Own	
Why Left (x2)	The reasons the client has for withdrawing from study.	Personal Reasons	
		Pregnancy	
		Dependants	
		Illness/Disability	
		Homesick	
		Location of University	
		Course Too Easy	
		Course Too Difficult	
		Dissatisfaction With HEI	
		Withdrawn By HEI	
		Lack of Finances	
		Delayed Allowances/Benefits	
		Working Whilst Studying	
		To Travel	
		To Work	
Change to Different Content			
Change Mode of Study			

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
Exit Initiated By	How the client withdrew. If they decided to stop studying or if the HEI decided they were no longer allowed to study.	Client – Active	The client told the HEI they wanted to withdraw, and initiated formal withdrawal processes.
		Client – Passive	The client decided they no longer wished to study and stopped participating. This may include not submitting course work or not turning up to an exam, but they did not engage with the HEI to discuss their withdrawal.
		HEI – Academic	The client failed assessed work and the HEI did not allow them to continue studying.
		HEI – Non Academic	The HEI did not allow the client to continue studying on non-academic grounds (e.g. Behavioural, failed a CRB)
Main IAG Source Used on Exit from HE	The source the client 'values' the most in the process of gathering information about withdrawing from HE. By value, we mean they privilege this source above the others available to them. The information gathered here is more important than the information gathered elsewhere, the advice is more authoritative for them.	HEI Website	
		HEI Prospectus	
		UCAS Website	
		HEI Careers Advice	
		School Careers Advice	
		FE/AG Careers Advice	Guidance Services accessed through further education colleges, or separate adult guidance services.
		Teacher/Tutor	A tutor/lecturer from the client's faculty.
		Friends/Family Support org website	Websites targeted at students. Specialist websites such as those aimed at students with a disability. Aimhigher, NUS, Studentroom, SKILL, push. NOT Unistats/Hotcourses, which have their own category
		Unistats/Hotcourses HEI retention service	Only applicable if the HEI has a retention service, such as Fresh Start, for the client to engage with.
		Student Support	Pastoral care offered by the university, such as counsellors, welfare representatives, or personal tutors. DO NOT include academic tutors, HEI IAG services, or retention services, which have their own categories. 'Student Support' can also be used to categorise any university contact whose role within the HEI the client isn't able to identify.
Other			
None			

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
What doing now	<p>The client's current circumstances. If there is a choice between more than one category, be led by the client. If the client is unemployed but answers 'I'm looking after my children', then choose homemaker. If there is a choice between more than one category but the client views them as equal, then be led by what the client spends most of their time doing.</p> <p>We want their circumstances at the time of the discussion, not what they have been doing since withdrawal. These may differ due to a recent change of circumstances (new job offer/redundancy etc.) but we still record their current circumstances.</p>	F/T Employed	Full Time employment, defined as over thirty hours a week.
		P/T Employed	Part Time employment, defined as less than thirty hours a week.
		Voluntary Work	Unpaid work.
		Homemaker	
		Unemployed	
		Unemployed Claiming JSA	Unemployed Claiming Job Seeker's Allowance
		Unemployed Claiming Disability	
		Unable to Work, No Benefits	
		F/T Study HE	
		P/T Study HE	
		Distance HE	
		F/T Study FE	
		P/T Study FE	
None of the Above			
Were you	Whether or not they were in employment during term time when they were studying, and if they were, how many hours a week on average.	Did Not Work	
		1–7	
		8–16	
Were you working while studying (Avg hours per week)	Were, how many hours a week on average.	17–25	
		26–34	
		35+	
Disability or Additional Requirements (x2)	Any disability the client may disclose.	None	
		Specific LD e.g. Dyslexia	
		Blind/Partially Sighted	
		Deaf/Hearing Impaired	
		Wheelchair/Mobility	
		Autistic/Asperger Syndrome	
		Mental Health	
		Unseen e.g. diabetes	
		Condition Not Listed Above	
		Does Not Wish to Disclose	
Was DSA Allowance) Allowance) applied for?	If the client did disclose a disability, whether or not they claimed a disabled student's allowance	N/A	
		Yes	
		No	

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification	
Do you have dependants/caring responsibilities	What, if any, caring responsibilities the time of withdrawal. Note: categories are only to be used if the client is responsible for caring for them. Adult children, partners and parents are not to be recorded unless they are dependent on the client.	None (default)		
		Parents		
		Children		
		Children – Single Parent		
		Parent		
		Partner		
		Other		
Tariff Score	From the level three qualifications the client obtained, calculate their UCAS Tariff score.	0 – 100		
		101 – 200		
		201 – 300		
		301 – 400		
		401 – 500		
		500+		
Recent Qualification Held	The most recent qualification passed by the client. All other qualifications are written in free text.	A levels		
		Access Course		
		Btec National Award		
		Btec National Cert		
		Btec National Dip		
		NVQ L2		
		NVQ L3		
		NVQ L4 or 5		
		Foundation Course		
		Apprenticeship		
		IB		International Baccalaureate
		GCSEs		
Baccs (UK, AQA) and Adv/Ext Dip				
None of the Above				
Would Consider Returning to Previous HEI	If the client is including their former HEI in the list of HEIs they might apply to.	Yes	The client is considering their former HEI	
		No	The client is not considering, or is uncertain about if they want to consider, their previous HEI.	
		N/A	The client is not considering returning to HE.	
Intended Mode of Study	The basis on which a client would like to return to study.	F/T		
		P/T		
		Distance F/T		
		Distance P/T		
		N/A		The client is not considering returning to study.
No. of Intended HEIs before IAG	To be asked before advisory discussion: How many HEIs is the client considering whilst making their decisions about returning to HE.	0	Includes 'no particular institution', 'I don't know', 'haven't thought about it yet' 'not sure, maybe somewhere close'	
		1		
		2		
		3		
		4		
		5		
		5+		
		N/A		The client is not considering returning to HE.

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
Main Influence Intended HEI	The main factor governing the client's decision making process about HEIs they would like to return to.	Location	
		Subject	
		Facilities	
		Prestige	
		Entry Requirements Match	
		Personal	
		Other	
	N/A	The client is not considering returning to an HEI	
No. of Intended HEIs after IAG	To be established during advisory discussion: How many HEIs is the client considering after IAG from adviser?	0	Includes 'no particular institution', 'I don't know', 'haven't thought about it yet' 'not sure, maybe somewhere close'
		1	
		2	
		3	
		4	
		5	
		5+	
	N/A	The client is not considering returning to HE.	
Number of Info and Advice Assistant Calls	The number of times the client has spoken to an assistant on an inbound or outbound call (the assistant doesn't necessarily have to provide any information or advice). This includes the FIF call, but not unsuccessful call attempts. Does not count a 'hot transfer' to an adviser, but does count if the assistant has to take a message and arrange for later contact.	0 (default)	
		1	
		2	
		3	
		4	
		5	
		5+	
Number of Info and Advice Adviser Calls	The number of times the client has spoken to an adviser on an inbound or outbound call and received information or advice. This is a less detailed, following up kind of discussion, rather than full guidance.	0 (default)	
		1	
		2	
		3	
		4	
		5	
		5+	
Number of Guidance Adviser Calls	The number of times has the client has spoken to an adviser on an inbound or outbound call and participated in a detailed guidance discussion. If the adviser gets part way through a guidance discussion before needing to postpone it, this is still counted. If the call begins with an immediate request from the client to rearrange, this is not counted.	0 (default)	
		1	
		2	
		3	
		4	
		5	
		5+	

Description	What does it record?	How is it recorded?	Clarification
Number of Missed Adviser Appointments	The number of times a client has missed an appointment with an adviser. Instances where the client pro-actively phones in to rearrange this appointment are not counted. Neither are cases where the client answers, part of a guidance discussion is undertaken, but then the call has to be rearranged as it is not possible to finish the discussion at that moment in time. However, cases where the client answers at the appointed time and then immediately requests to reschedule ARE counted.	0 (default)	
		1	
		2	
		3	
		4	
		5	
		5+	
Point of Client Engagement	This is the contact attempt which leads to a team member interacting with the client themselves for the first time	HEI/UCAS Letter	Client contacted back on course at the start of the process after having a letter introducing the service. This would be before back on course have made a call attempt.
		Call 1	First call attempt
		Call 2	Second call attempt
		NCL	The client responded to a No Contact Letter/Email
		Client Referral	Client found the service without having their details passed on by a HEI.
Appointment Made	If the client has an advisory appointment made for them. This is not altered if the client misses the appointment.	No (default)	
		Yes	
		Not wanted	
Initial Discussion Taken place and Action Summary Attached	For advisers to attach action summaries to.		

Annex 3 Results of the **back on course** Client Satisfaction Survey

back on course clients were approached to fill in this survey; 46 clients responded (12.5%).

Question 1 consisted of collecting client address data.

For questions 2–12 clients were asked to rate their experience on a sliding scale of 1–4 where 1 = not at all and 4 = very much so. No free text boxes were provided.

Question 2

To what extent did the initial **back on course** phone call make you interested in the service?

After receiving the initial telephone contact from a **back on course** team assistant 84% of clients rated their interest in the service as a 3 or 4 on the sliding scale, indicating that they were interested or very interested in finding out how the service could support them.

Question 3

To what extent were you made aware of what to expect from the service in the initial phone call?

After the initial contact from a **back on course** team assistant 75% of clients felt that they had a good or full understanding of the service they would be receiving from a **back on course** Adviser.

Question 4

To what extent did the service fulfill your initial expectations?

After an appointment with a **back on course** Adviser 73% of clients rated their experience as a 3 or 4 on the sliding scale, showing that their initial expectations had been met well or fully.

Question 5

To what extent were the advisory interviews arranged at suitable times for you?

Clients seemed happy with the flexibility of the **back on course** appointment system. 71% of clients felt that quoted appointment times suited them very well and 22% of clients indicated that the choice of times suited them well.

Question 6

To what extent were the timings flexible? Could you rearrange the appointment easily (if you needed to)?

Client feedback shows that **back on course** flexibility was appreciated. The majority of clients questioned, 91%, used the scale to indicate that they thought that appointment times were flexible or very flexible and that it was straightforward to rearrange appointments if required.

Question 7

Did the Adviser put you at ease?

Of the clients who answered this question 86% responded with a 3 or 4 on the scale showing that during the appointment with a **back on course** Adviser they felt at ease or very at ease.

Question 8

To what extent did you feel the service provided by the Adviser was relevant to your needs?

77% of **back on course** clients questioned felt that the service provided by the Adviser was personalised and relevant or very relevant to their needs.

Question 9

To what extent did the Adviser respond appropriately to you, in terms of responding to your questions, your worries or problems?

Responses showed that 74% of clients awarded a 3 or 4 on the sliding scale to this question. This suggests that clients felt that their worries, questions and problems were addressed well or very well by the **back on course** Adviser.

Question 10

To what extent did the Adviser inform you of other sources of information and advice where necessary?

After an appointment with a **back on course** Adviser, of the clients questioned 77% felt that the resources that they had been provided with had met their expectations to a full or very full extent enabling them to carry out further research or gain support from other relevant organisations.

Question 11

Did **back on course** help make you feel more positive about your previous higher education experience?

Of the **back on course** clients questioned 69% appreciated the opportunity to talk and felt more positive or much more positive about their experience of higher education after they had discussed it with an Adviser.

Question 12

Asked clients to rate five different aspects of the advisory call based on the previously used sliding scale of 1–4, where 1 = not at all and 4 = very much so.

To what extent did the advisory call help you to:

Identify appropriate opportunities

- 80% of clients who answered this question felt that the support they had received from a **back on course** Adviser had helped them identify opportunities well or very well.

Define your own goals and aims

- 77% of clients who had spoken with an Adviser felt that the intervention had helped them define their own goals and aims to a full or very full extent.

Understand what you needed to do to achieve these

- 79% of clients felt that the discussion with a **back on course** Adviser had helped them gain a deeper understanding of what they needed to do in order to move forward with their plans and work towards their goals to a full or very full extent.

Think more constructively about your immediate future

- 72% of clients who answered this question thought that speaking with an Adviser had helped them think much more or very much more constructively about what they were going to do next.

Feel more confident about your own capabilities

- Overall 66% of clients who responded felt that they had become much more or very much more confident in the own capabilities as a result of speaking with a **back on course** Adviser.

Annex 4 Bibliography

- Aston, L. and Bekhradnia, B. (2005), Non-completion at the University of North London and London Guildhall University: a case study, Higher Education Policy Institute
- Bacsich, P. and Bristow, S. F. (2010), Student Retention and the Value of Higher Education: Final Report, Open University (unpublished report)
- Bailey, N. and Bekhradnia, B. (2008), The academic experience and outcomes of students with vocational level 3 qualifications, Higher Education Policy Institute
- Barefoot, B. O. (2004), Higher education's revolving door: confronting the problem of student drop out in US colleges and universities. *Open Learning*, 19 (1), pp. 9–18
- Charlton et al. (2006), Attempting to predict withdrawal from higher education using demographic, psychological and educational measures. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 11 (1), pp. 31–47
- Curtis, A. (2007) Student doubters project report, Roehampton University
- Davies, R. and Elias, P. (2003) Dropping out: a study of early-leavers from Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills
- Fitzgibbon, K. and Prior, J. (2006), Students' early experiences and university interventions: a timeline to aid undergraduate student retention. *Widening participation and lifelong learning*, 8(3): pp17–27
- Harrison, N. (2006), The impact of negative experiences, dissatisfaction and attachment on first year undergraduate withdrawal, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol 30, No 4, pp377–391
- McCausland, et al. (2005) Explaining student retention: the case of the University of Aberdeen. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 7 (3), pp. 24–26
- May, S. and Bousted, M. (2004) Investigation of student retention through an analysis of the first-year experience of students at Kingston University
- National Audit Office (2002) Improving student achievement in English higher education
- National Audit Office (2007) Staying the Course: The Retention of Students in Higher Education
- van Stolk et al. (2007) Student Retention in Higher Education Courses: International Comparison, RAND Corporation
- Yorke, M. and Longden, B. (2008) The First Year Experience of Higher Education in the UK, Higher Education Academy





Contact the team

Student enquiries: 0845 366 0476
HEI enquiries: 01908 655885

www.backoncourse.ac.uk
info@backoncourse.ac.uk

