

Student Progression in Higher Education: Outcomes of a HEA Survey on Institutional Data and Interventions

Report for the Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education

Dr Deirdre Stritch on behalf of the
Higher Education Authority, 2025

Foreword

I am pleased to present ‘Student Progression in Higher Education: Outcomes of a HEA Survey on Institutional Data and Interventions,’ a report prepared for the HEA Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education.

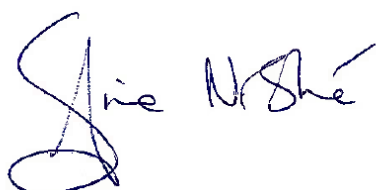
The Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education was established by the HEA in January 2025. The establishment of the Forum followed the 2024 HEA conference, Exploring Student Progression in Higher Education, which called for evidence-based, collaborative sectoral strategies. The Forum comprises representatives (Associates) from seventeen Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and representatives from the HEA. Its purpose is to establish an evidence base on student progression in higher education to inform policy and practice development, and next steps.

To inform the early work of the Policy Forum, the HEA conducted a national survey, in February/March 2025, on institutional practices for tracking and addressing student non-progression. I would like to extend my thanks to the seventeen Higher Education Institutions that responded to the survey issued in early March 2025.

This report presents the key themes, findings, and trends arising from the analysis of the information provided by the institutions in that survey. It provides insights into institutional data practices, risk identification mechanisms, follow-up activity with non-progressed students, and related policies and procedures.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the members of the Policy Forum for their guidance and assistance on the survey and for their engagement and commitment to this research. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr Deirdre Stritch (Independent Higher Education Consultant) for her work on the analysis of the data and findings and preparation of this report, and the HEA, in particular, Linda Darbey, for overseeing and managing the process.

This report represents an important first step taken by the Policy Forum to develop an evidence base on student progression in higher education and its findings will thus be of interest to the sector. I encourage higher education institutions and the HEA to draw on the findings of this report, to further inform the activities of the Policy Forum, and to develop and strengthen existing institutional practices.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Aine Ní Shé'. The signature is stylized, with a large initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Áine Ní Shé, Chair of the Policy Forum

Executive Summary

In response to ongoing concerns around student non-progression rates, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) established a *Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education* in January 2025. This initiative followed the 2024 HEA conference, *Exploring Student Progression in Higher Education*, which called for evidence-based, collaborative sectoral strategies. The focus of the Policy Forum is to develop a national evidence base on student progression in higher education. It is envisaged that the evidence base will inform the development of good practice, policy development, and next steps.

To inform its early work, the HEA conducted a national survey, disseminated to Policy Forum member Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)¹ in February 2025. The survey gathered data on institutional practices for tracking and addressing student non-progression. Seventeen HEIs participated, providing insights into institutional data practices, risk identification mechanisms, follow-up activity with non-progressed students, and related policies and procedures. The HEA then engaged an independent consultant to review and analyse survey responses.

The survey revealed considerable variation in how HEIs collect, examine, and utilise progression data. Data collection is strongest in Year 1 of programmes at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) but declines in subsequent years and in NFQ Levels 6 and 7 programmes, where non-progression is most prevalent. Tracking progression by cohort is sometimes limited to a small number of characteristics, such as students by programme or discipline area; HEAR and DARE students, or students by gender, with insufficient attention provided to vulnerable groups such as those entering via alternative access routes or on the basis of lower CAO points, commuting students, first-generation students, carers, or those from the Traveller/Roma communities and/or ethnic minorities. Although most HEIs collect some data on reasons for non-progression, few systematically follow up with withdrawn students or track long-term outcomes.

Risk factors like low CAO points and poor course choice are well understood but inconsistently monitored. Interventions such as analysis of engagement with virtual learning platforms, structured staff engagement, and monitoring of assessment outcomes are used in some HEIs, but the overall approach is fragmented both within and across HEIs and is sometimes reliant on local or informal practices. Similarly, while some HEIs have implemented innovative strategies and policies (for example, targeted initiatives for first-year students, digital learning frameworks), few have embedded institution-wide progression strategies.

A key finding is the limited integration of progression data into policy development or targeted interventions. While HEIs express an awareness of data gaps and system constraints (including ethical and technical limitations), significant opportunities remain to increase and enhance the use of early warning systems, predictive analytics, and monitoring of student engagement in order to support student progression.

The findings outlined in this report underline the need for a more coherent, strategic, and standardised approach to student non-progression at both institutional and national levels.

¹ A full list of member HEIs is included in Appendix A.

Key recommendations include the development of a national strategy with agreed definitions and metrics for student non-progression; improved data tracking for all years, including programmes at NFQ Levels 6 and 7; enhanced use of learning analytics; and sector-wide frameworks for follow-up with withdrawn students.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Data Collection and Trends in Student Non-Progression in Ireland

Increasing student progression rates in higher education is a national policy objective in support of wider ambitions to increase higher education attainment levels.² As noted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in its [Analysis of Non-Progression among Higher Education New Entrants in Ireland, 2016/17 to 2021/22](#), “... increasing Higher Educational attainment is a function not only of enrolments, but also the extent to which students go on to complete a qualification” (2024a, p. 6). Data collected and published by the HEA enables the identification of student cohorts who are at greater risk of non-progression and thereby supports HEIs in establishing meaningful and targeted interventions. The HEA routinely publishes analyses of student progression and completion rates using census data taken by higher education institutions (HEIs) each year on 1st March.³ This progression analysis tracks new entrants on full-time, undergraduate programmes leading to major awards at Levels 6–8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).⁴ The HEA’s most recent [Progression and Completion Report \(2025\)](#) confirms that the overall progression rate for new entrants in 2022/23 was 87%; 1% lower than the pre-Covid average rate (in 2016/17 to 2018/19). A further 2% of students transferred to another HEI, resulting in an overall retention rate of 89%. While non-progression rates rose during the Covid-19 period, they have returned to 2016/17 levels on NFQ Level 8 programmes (9%). Non-progression rates remain slightly higher than pre-Covid levels at 23% on NGQ Level 6 programmes and 25% on Level 7 programmes.⁵

HEA data indicates that non-progression rates vary by socio-economic background and by entry route to higher education. Disadvantaged new entrants have a higher non-progression rate (18%) compared to their affluent peers (10%), as do students in receipt of financial aid (14%). According to HEA data, students who enter higher education following school leaving exams have the lowest rate of non-progression (10%), while those who enter via access/foundation routes have the highest non-progression rate (19%). Other cohorts with a higher non-progression rate include mature students (15%) and students entering on the basis of a further education and training (FET) award (14%). Males have higher non-progression rates than females across all entry routes. The HEA analysis also highlights a clear link between the number of points obtained in the Leaving Certificate and student progression.

² See, for example, the Gov. of Ireland (2022) [National Access Plan 2022–2028](#), in which progression and completion among selected priority groups (for example, students and mature students from disadvantaged areas) is identified as a key performance indicator. The HEA’s Performance Framework includes metrics on student progression as a key performance indicator. It encourages institutions to implement strategies that improve student retention and completion rates. Improving progression rates is also a key objective of the IUA’s (2018) [Charter For A Sustainable Irish University System](#).

³ For more information and for the HEA’s most recent progression and completion report (2025), please see: [HEA – Progression and Completion Report 2025 | Statistics | Higher Education Authority](#).

⁴ A student is considered to have progressed if they remain in the same institution the following year and to have transferred if they are enrolled in a different HEI. Progressed students include those who repeat a year or who change to a different programme, level or mode of study in the same HEI in the following year.

⁵ Non-progression rates during the Covid-19 period are discussed in more detail in HEA (2024) *Analysis of Non-Progression Among Higher Education New Entrants in Ireland, 2016/17 to 2021/22*. Available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/02/Analysis-of-Non-Progression-2016-17-to-2021-22-Detailed-Report-1.pdf> and HEA (2024) *Exploring Student Progression in Higher Education. Conference Report and Next Steps*. Available at: [HEA Student Prog Conf Report Sept24.pdf](#).

Students with the highest points (550–599, 600–625) have much lower non-progression rates at 3% and 2% respectively. By contrast, students with points in the lower ranges (150–199 and 200–249) have non-progression rates of 54% and 45% respectively. In 2022/23, the average number of points for progressing students was 479.3, compared to 381.3 for non-progressing students.

These findings build on earlier, detailed reports on non-progression published by the HEA⁶ and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.⁷ The National Forum identified five key contributors to non-progression (2015):

- **Course-Related Issues:** The most significant factor, encompassing wrong course choice, transferring (including not CAO preference), misalignment between student expectations and course content and course difficulty.
- **Personal Reasons:** Challenges such as loss of motivation, or difficulty adjusting to the higher education environment.
- **Financial Constraints:** Financial pressures, including commuting costs and living expenses, impacting students' ability to continue their studies.
- **Medical/Health Concerns:** Physical and mental (and emotional) health problems that interfere with academic commitments.
- **Family Responsibilities:** Obligations such as caregiving or family emergencies that necessitate leaving the institution.

A notable finding of the National Forum report is the lack of systematic and standardised approaches among HEIs for collecting and analysing qualitative data on student non-progression and withdrawal. This gap hinders the development of effective policies and support mechanisms tailored to student needs. The findings outlined in this report indicate that, ten years on, this gap and vulnerability remains.

Policy Forum

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) presented findings and emerging trends from its analysis of non-progression among new entrants to higher education in Ireland during the academic years 2016/17 to 2021/22⁸ at a conference entitled *Exploring Student Progression in Higher Education*, held on 29 February 2024. This event served as a platform for the sector to engage in discussion, share experiences, and exchange knowledge, with the aim of connecting data to policy development and identifying future directions. Following the conference, the HEA compiled a report summarising the key themes from workshop discussions and participant feedback.⁹ One of the main recommendations outlined in that report called for the establishment of a policy forum to support evidence-based decision-making,

⁶ HEA (2024) *Analysis of Non-Progression Among Higher Education New Entrants in Ireland, 2016/17 to 2021/22*. Available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/02/Analysis-of-Non-Progression-2016-17-to-2021-22-Detailed-Report-1.pdf>

⁷ National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2015) *Why Students Leave: Findings from Qualitative Research into Student Non-Completion in Higher Education in Ireland: Focused Research Report No. 4*. Available at: [NF-2015-Why-Students-Leave-Findings-from-Qualitative-Research-into-Student-Non-Completion-in-Higher-Education-in-Ireland.pdf](https://www.nfhe.ie/assets/uploads/2015/04/Why-Students-Leave-Findings-from-Qualitative-Research-into-Student-Non-Completion-in-Higher-Education-in-Ireland.pdf)

⁸ HEA (2024) *Analysis of Non-Progression Among Higher Education New Entrants in Ireland, 2016/17 to 2021/22*. Available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/02/Analysis-of-Non-Progression-2016-17-to-2021-22-Detailed-Report-1.pdf>

⁹ HEA (2024) *Exploring Student Progression in Higher Education. Conference Report and Next Steps*. Available at: [HEA Student Prog Conf Report Sept24.pdf](https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/02/Exploring-Student-Progression-in-Higher-Education-Conference-Report-and-Next-Steps.pdf)

promote best practices, and guide the development of policy and institutional practices. Subsequently, a Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education was established by the HEA in January 2025. Each higher education institution (HEI)¹⁰ nominated a representative (Associate) to participate in the Policy Forum to advise on, and support the development of, an evidence base on student progression with the view to informing good practice and policy development.

1.2 HEA Survey

The initial activities of the Policy Forum have been informed by preliminary high-level analyses of student progression targets presented in Performance Agreements established between the HEA and HEIs in accordance with the System Performance Framework (2023–2028)¹¹. In 2025, the Policy Forum intends to focus on institution-level initiatives applicable to full-time, in-person programmes (major awards) at Levels 6–8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). To that end, the Policy Forum considered and provided feedback on a survey designed to capture data and information on institutional practices that promote student progression and address non-progression. The survey was circulated to Associates for completion in February 2025. This report sets out findings and recommendations arising from survey responses.

¹⁰ These institutions are designated institutions of higher education under the Higher Education Authority Act 2022 (section 53) and include an institution that the HEA works with under Statute, and which is in receipt of core public funding.

¹¹ The System Performance Framework 2023–2028 sets out parameters under which designated institutions of higher education identify their contribution to the achievement of institutional and national strategy, as appropriate to their mission, scale, location, and strategic plan. For further information, please see: [System Performance Framework | Funding, Governance and Performance | Higher Education Authority](#)

2. Methodology

To gain insights into student progression and retention practices across HEIs, the HEA developed a structured survey which was disseminated to HEIs via SurveyMonkey. The survey aimed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the availability, examination, and use of student progression and retention information and related institutional initiatives. Seventeen HEIs completed the survey (see Table 1 below). The responses reflect a range of institutional contexts and approaches to student progression and retention.

Name of HEI	Institution Type
Atlantic Technological University (ATU)	Technological University
Dublin City University (DCU)	Traditional University
Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)	Institute of Technology
Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dún Laoghaire (IADT)	Institute of Technology
Mary Immaculate College (MIC)	Specialist College
Maynooth University (MU)	Traditional University
Munster Technological University (MTU)	Technological University
National College of Art and Design (NCAD)	Specialist College
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)	Traditional University
South East Technological University (SETU)	Technological University
Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)	Technological University
Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)	Technological University
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	Traditional University
University College Dublin (UCD)	Traditional University
University of Galway	Traditional University
University of Limerick (UL)	Traditional University
University College Cork (UCC)	Traditional University

Table 1: List of HEIs that submitted a response to the survey

Survey Design

The survey comprised 26 questions, of which 16 were mandatory. These questions were organised into four thematic sections:

1. **Institutional Data** – explored the student cohorts for which data are available, the timeframes over which such data are examined, and how non-progression data are used within institutions.
2. **Students at Risk of Non-Progression** – investigated institution-wide mechanisms for identifying students at risk of non-progression and the nature of institutional engagement with these students.
3. **Non-Progressed Students** – examined follow-up practices with students who do not progress, data collection on student-reported reasons for non-progression, student outcomes, and institutional reporting mechanisms.

4. **HEI Policies and Procedures** – focused on policies and procedures to support student progression.

A full copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix D, while guidance on survey completion, as well as definitions, is included in Appendix E. For the purposes of the survey, the HEA definition of ‘progression’ applied, i.e. “A student is deemed to have progressed if they are present in the same institution in the following academic year.”¹²

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey captured a combination of quantitative data (from closed and structured question types) and qualitative data (from open-ended questions). Quantitative responses were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify common trends and practices. Qualitative data were thematically analysed to identify patterns, insights, and illustrative examples of institutional approaches and challenges.

The HEA contracted an independent consultant to review and analyse HEI survey responses. This analysis took place in April 2025 and identified key findings and trends and themes emerging from the data in respect of the overall higher education sector and each sub-sector (traditional universities, institutions in the technological higher education sector, and specialist colleges) as appropriate and relevant. Findings have been set out under each of the four headings in the survey: institutional data; students at risk of non-progression; follow-up with non-progressed students; and institutional policies, procedures and regulations. Based on this analysis, a number of recommendations have been identified and are outlined in the report’s conclusion.

2.1 Limitations

By their nature, surveys are limited in terms of the depth of information that can be obtained. Additionally, the level of detail provided by HEIs in their responses to open-ended questions varied considerably, making it difficult in some cases to compare information provided or to draw firm conclusions. The complexity of the issues explored in this survey may warrant further investigation through interviews or focus groups to better understand the factors at play within individual institutional contexts and across the sector as a whole.

In some instances (section 3), institutions may have responded to questions from different perspectives i.e. from an institutional perspective where data are considered at a central/senior level or from a School/departmental perspective where data are considered locally. The findings presented in the analysis that follows should be interpreted accordingly. Institutions may also have interpreted the term ‘non-progression’ in different ways when responding to the questions presented under section 5, with some institutions interpreting non-progression as referring to students who have already withdrawn.

¹² This has been the traditional definition of non-progression used by the HEA and which informed this survey — however, the HEA definition of non-progression has recently changed to refer to students that have *neither* progressed *nor* transferred to another HEI.

Section 3 — Institutional Data and Interventions

3.1 Introduction

In this section of the survey (comprising questions 1–11 — see Appendix D), HEIs were asked to provide an overview of the data that are collected on an annual basis related to student progression and retention; when these are collected; when and how they are examined at an institutional level to inform the development of policy and initiatives, and what additional data (if any) are needed to address non-progression rates. There was a 100% response rate to questions in this section of the survey.

3.2 Key Findings

Question 1

Question 1 asked respondents to confirm their institution name.

Questions 2 and 3

HEIs were asked to confirm whether they offer full-time, in-person programmes leading to major awards at Levels 6, 7, and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (i.e. at undergraduate level), and to identify the student cohorts (by programme year at each NFQ level) for which progression and retention data are collected and examined at an institutional level annually. All 17 HEIs confirmed that they offer full-time, in-person programmes leading to major awards at Level 8 on the NFQ, while 14 (82%) offer such programmes at Level 7, and 10 (59%) offer programmes at Level 6 (see Figure 1 below) on the NFQ.

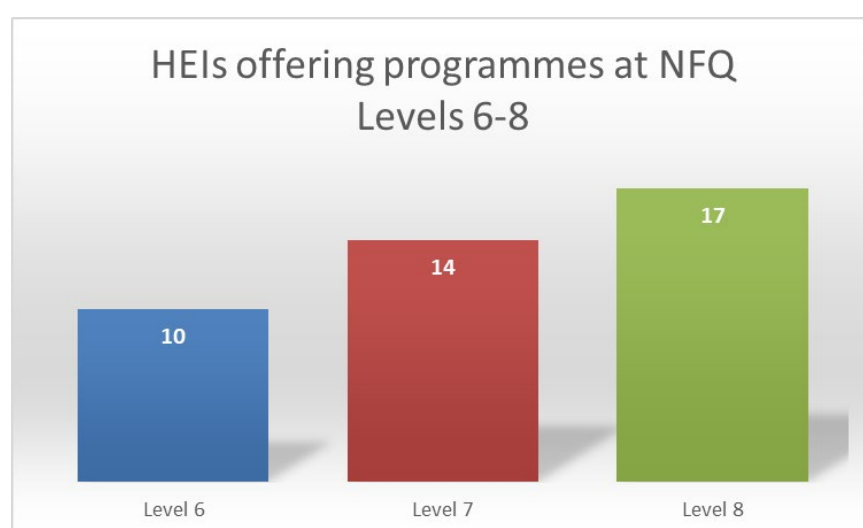


Figure 1: Numbers of HEIs offering programmes (full-time programmes delivered in person leading to major awards) at Levels 6, 7, and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

Traditional universities and specialist colleges were less likely to offer relevant programmes at NFQ Levels 6 and 7: the seven HEIs that do not offer relevant NFQ Level 6 programmes comprise four traditional universities, two specialist colleges, and one institute of technology, while two traditional universities, and one specialist college do not offer relevant programmes at NFQ Level 7. In recent years, the number of programmes delivered at NFQ Levels 6 and 7 has been on the decline across all HEIs.

Unsurprisingly, all HEIs collect progression and retention data annually on students in Year 1 of the NFQ Level 8 programmes outlined above.¹³ That number decreases to 15 (88%) in Years 2 and 3 of Level 8 programmes and to 14 (82%) for Year 4, the typical end point for most Level 8 programmes (see Figure 2 below). A smaller number of HEIs (eight (47%) and five (29%) respectively) collect progression and retention data for Years 5 and 6 of Level 8 programmes, potentially reflecting the smaller number of Level 8 programmes extending into a fifth and sixth year. That pattern is reflected across Level 6 and 7 programmes, with a greater number of HEIs collecting such data in Year 1 than in subsequent years. Only one institution in the technological higher education sector collects progression and retention data for Year 5 of Level 8 programmes; the other seven HEIs that collect these data are from the traditional university sector. The five HEIs that collect data for Year 6 of relevant Level 8 programmes are all from the traditional university sector.

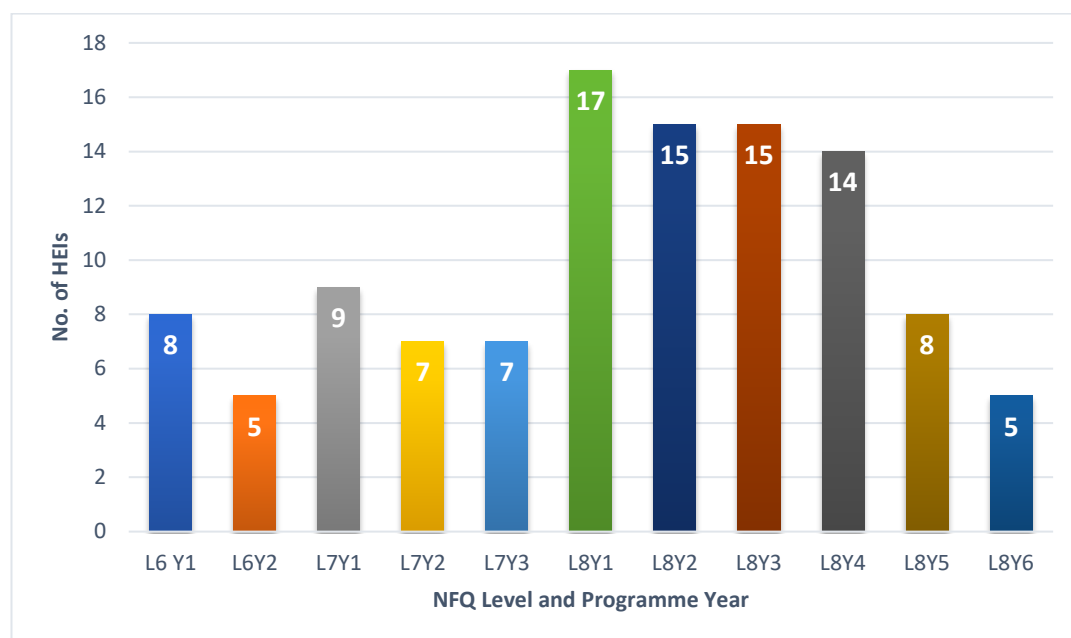


Figure 2: Number of HEIs that collect progression and retention data on specific cohorts (NFQ level and year) annually

Of the ten HEIs that offer relevant Level 6 programmes, eight (80%) collect progression and retention data for Year 1. Two traditional universities do not.¹⁴ A further three HEIs (two technological universities and a traditional university) do not collect such data for Year 2 of Level 6 programmes.

Among the 14 HEIs that offer relevant Level 7 programmes, a smaller proportion collect progression and retention data. Nine (64%) collect such data for Year 1, whilst five (36%) institutions do not. Seven HEIs (50%) collect such data in both Years 2 and 3. Two additional technological universities do not. It is not

¹³ The HEA has identified Year 1 as the point at which students are at highest risk of non-progression (2024a, p.6).

¹⁴ It may be conjectured that data are not collected on programmes with fewer enrolled students; however, the survey responses preclude firm conclusions to be drawn in that regard.

clear, given HEA reporting requirements on new entrants to such programmes, why some HEIs report that they are not collecting data on Year 1 of relevant Level 6 and 7 programmes. As noted in the introduction to this report, non-progression rates on Level 6 and Level 7 programmes (23% and 25% respectively) are consistently higher than on Level 8 programmes (9%).¹⁵

Questions 4 and 5

Question 4 asked HEIs to indicate the timeframes during the academic year during which non-progression data are available and examined at an institutional level. Respondents were offered a choice of five options within each academic year (Year 1–6):

- First 6–8 weeks of Semester 1
- End of Semester 1
- Commencement of Semester 2
- End of Semester 2
- Not examined/ not applicable

In academic years 1–4, the majority of HEIs (between 65% for Year 1 and 53% for Year 4) confirmed that data are available and examined at the end of Semester 2, with the end of Semester 1 being the next most common point for such activity (see Table 2 below). The commencement of Semester 2 is the most common point at which non-progression data are available and examined in Years 5 and 6.¹⁶ One HEI reported that it does not examine the data at institutional level.

	FIRST 6–8 WEEKS OF SEMESTER 1	END OF SEMESTER 1	COMMENCEMENT OF SEMESTER 2	END OF SEMESTER 2	NOT EXAMINED/ NOT APPLICABLE	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Year 1	29.41% 5	35.29% 6	29.41% 5	64.71% 11	5.88% 1	17
Year 2	31.25% 5	43.75% 7	31.25% 5	56.25% 9	12.50% 2	16
Year 3	31.25% 5	43.75% 7	31.25% 5	56.25% 9	12.50% 2	16
Year 4	33.33% 5	46.67% 7	33.33% 5	53.33% 8	13.33% 2	15
Year 5	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	50.00% 5	40.00% 4	20.00% 2	10
Year 6	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	9

Table 2: Timeframes during the academic year for which non-progression data are available and are examined at an institutional level

¹⁵ Please see HEA (2025) *Progression and Completion Report 2025*. Available at: [HEA – Non-Progression – Course Characteristics | Statistics | Higher Education Authority](#)

¹⁶ One HEI offered the following clarification: “The timing of non-progression is not tracked as a standard rule in [...], rather it is analysed in a manner similar to non-progression analysis performed by the HEA – a census of students in one academic year and whether a student is present or not in the next academic year. The methodology for analysis on non-progression in [...] is slightly different to that examined in the HEA non-progression analysis. [...] does not consider a student to have progressed if they are present in the institution in the following academic year, but on a different course or repeating an academic year. Attrition rates include exits only, but progression rates would not include repeat or Leave of Absence (LOA) students. In addition to this, the HEA has historically restricted non-progression analysis to New Entrant (NE) students from Year 1 to Year 2 of a programme. [...] sees attrition at all years of the programme and in our experience, it is not always true that attrition is at its highest in Year 1, so we look at all years of the programmes”.

In question 5, HEIs confirmed the year in which non-progression data are examined. As indicated in Figure 3 below, the majority of HEIs (nine/53%) examine data in the following academic year, while seven (41%) examine data in the same academic year. One HEI selected 'not applicable' in response to this question.

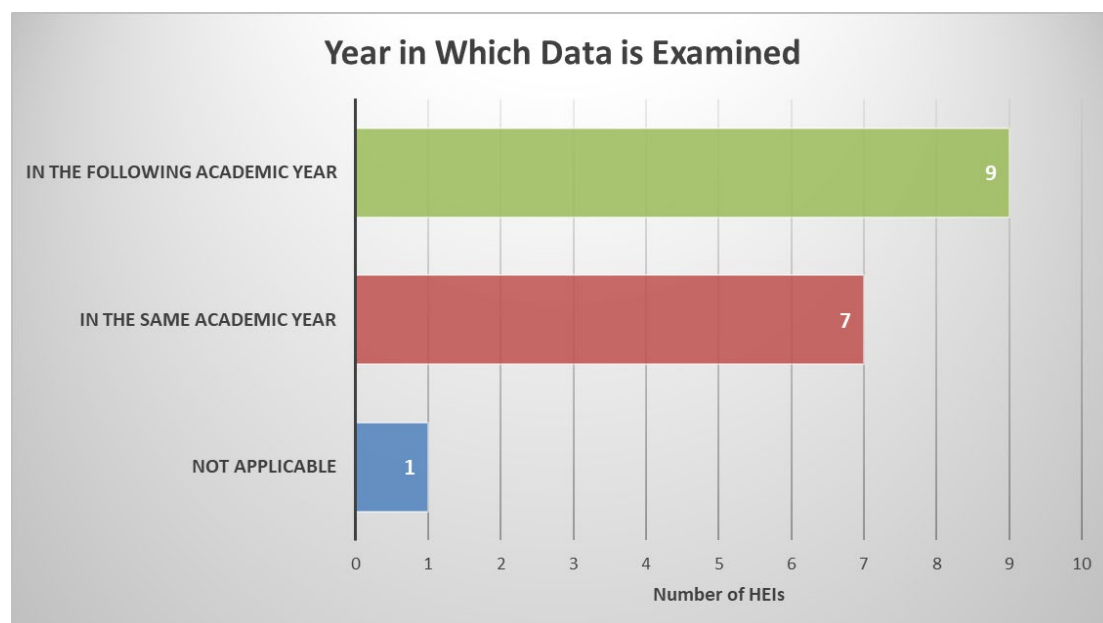


Figure 3: Year in which non-progression and retention data are examined institutionally

Traditional universities and, to a lesser degree, institutions in the technological higher education sector are more likely to examine non-progression and retention data in the following academic year, while specialist colleges examine such data in the same academic year (see Table 3 below).

	Institution in the Technological HE Sector	Traditional University Sector	Specialist Colleges
Following Academic Year	4	5	
Same Academic Year	3	2	2
Not Applicable		1	

Table 3: Year in which non-progression and retention data are examined, by HE sub-sector

Question 6

Question 6 asked HEIs whether progression and/or retention data are considered and examined in respect of a range of specified student cohorts (see Figure 4 below).

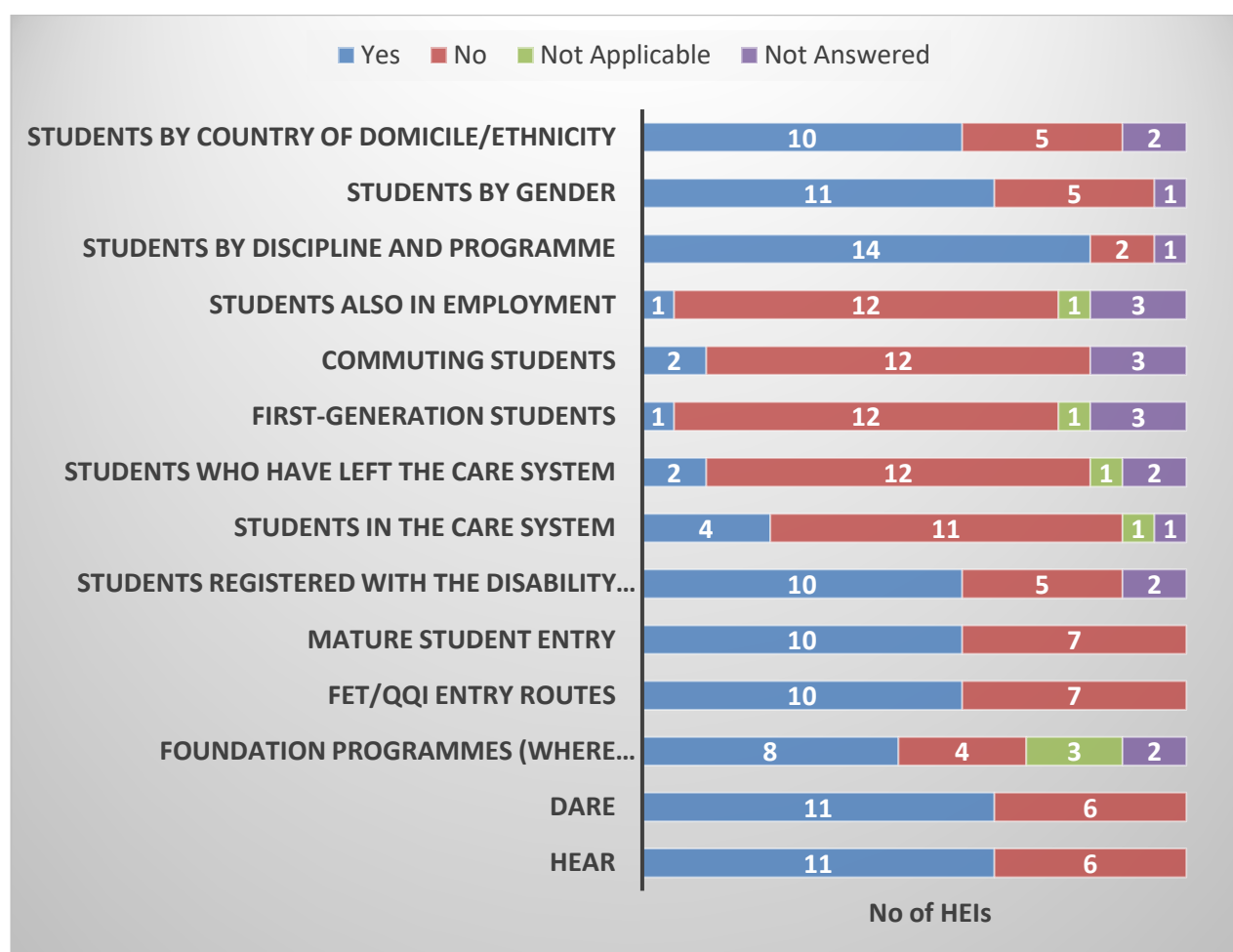


Figure 4: Cohorts for which progression and/or retention data are considered and examined

As outlined in Table 4 below, the cohort for which progression and retention data are most commonly considered and examined by HEIs is ‘students by discipline and programme’ (14 HEIs / 82%), followed by students who entered by HEAR and DARE entry routes, and students by gender (11 HEIs in each case / 65%). Conversely, only one HEI (a traditional university) considers and examines such data on first-generation students¹⁷ and students also in employment. Two HEIs consider and examine data on students who have left the care system (a technological university and a traditional university) and commuting students (a different technological university and the same traditional university). Contrary to requirements set out in the National Access Plan (2022–2028)¹⁸, one HEI does not examine progression and retention data for any of the cohorts specified, while another only examines data on students by discipline and programme. There were no trends of note in relation to the type of HEI that considers and examines data on particular cohorts.

¹⁷ It may speculate that some HEIs take a more cautious approach to the collection of such data on the basis of GDPR concerns and concerns related to inadvertently disclosing the educational background of students’ parents.

¹⁸ The [National Access Plan \(2022–2028\)](#) requires HEIs to collect data on: Progression of new entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds; progression of mature new entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds; completion rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and completion rates of students from DEIS schools (p. 71).

Cohort	No of HEIs that Consider and Examine Progression Data
Students by discipline and programme	14
HEAR	11
DARE	11
Students by gender	11
FET/QQI entry routes	10
Mature student entry	10
Students registered with the disability service post enrolment	10
Students by country of domicile/ethnicity	10
Foundation programmes (where applicable)	8
Students in the care system	4
Students who have left the care system	2
Commuting students	2
First-generation students	1
Students also in employment	1

Table 4: Cohorts for which progression and/or retention data are considered and examined

Three HEIs identified additional cohorts for whom progression and retention data are examined or offered clarifying information about current data analysis in respect of the cohorts specified under Question 6:

By CAO bands, by programme, by department, by School, by stage (Survey Response).

Student Assistance Fund Recipients (Survey Response).

Foundation programmes: Analysis has been done on the different entry routes into the [...] year ... This is done on an ad hoc basis, not part of standard annual analysis. First-generation students: Not currently, but we have started collecting this data with a view to analysis in the future. Commuting students: Plans are in place to begin collecting this data from the next academic year. Students by gender: Yes, on an ad hoc basis, not part of standard annual analysis. Students by country of domicile/ethnicity: As standard, analysis is done on EU/NEU. Ad hoc analysis in the past has been done on the basis of domicile. Ethnicity has only been collected recently but it is envisaged that this will be included in the future (Survey Response).

Question 7

HEIs were then asked whether they can identify the time of year that sees the highest rate of non-progression/withdrawals. The majority (11/65%) responded that they can do so based on data, while four (23%) responded that they can do so anecdotally, and two (12%) stated that they cannot make such an identification (see Figure 5 below).

Ability to identify the time of year that sees the highest rate of non progression/withdrawals

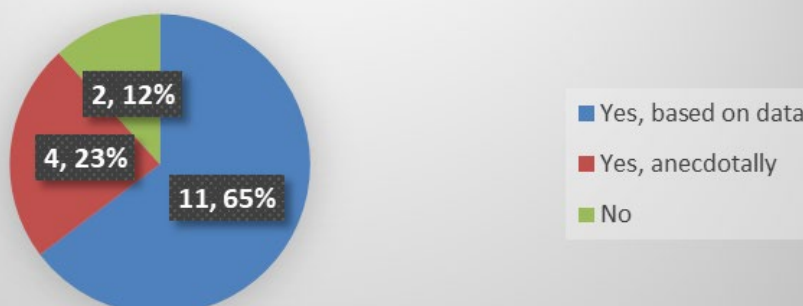


Figure 5: Ability of HEIs to identify the time of year that sees the highest rate of non-progression/withdrawals

Fourteen HEIs elaborated further, either by describing the data analysis process or by outlining the time of year that sees the highest rate of non-progression/withdrawals. One HEI noted that whilst the institution holds this information, the respondent did not have access to it.

Time of Year that Sees the Highest Rate of Non-Progression/Withdrawals

One HEI reported that students are most likely to withdraw or not progress following exams:

Non-progression due to failure to meet the academic standard following supplemental examinations [Survey Response].

Seven HEIs reported that students, particularly first-year students, are most likely to withdraw from a programme before the end of October, followed by the end of January. One HEI noted that this coincides with tuition payment deadlines. The prevalence of early withdrawal from programmes may not be reflected in HEA progression and completion data due to students having withdrawn prior to the census date in the base year (01 March). Four of these seven HEIs also note that students are also likely to withdraw around or post exams. The following responses are indicative:

Withdrawal analysis completed previously indicated that September and October had the highest withdrawal numbers, followed by January. This was based on formal withdrawal forms, so it would not capture all withdrawal students, many of whom do not complete the necessary paperwork [Survey Response].

Anecdotally, the main periods for non-progression / withdrawal or when enrolments are terminated include:

- i. *After first 7 weeks (mostly first year new entrants)*
- ii. *January, June, and August exits following exam boards*
- iii. *Same for all NFQ levels [Survey Response].*

The highest rates of non-progression and withdrawals for all NFQ Level 8 programmes take place around tuition payment deadlines, i.e. 31st October and 31st January and the times of assessment/examinations in each semester [Survey Response].

Two HEIs reported that non-progression/withdrawal is more likely towards the end of, or after, Semester 1. One of these two HEIs also noted that non-progression and withdrawal is higher after 1st year exams. One HEI noted that “Level 8, relatively evenly spread across the first and second trimesters”, while another noted that non-progression occurs at the “end of the academic year (June, August annually)”.

Data Analysis Process

Three HEIs reported on the times of year at which non-progression and/or withdrawal data are collected; they do so at different times of year and with varying frequency:

We look at retention across two periods; 01 March to 01 November and 01 November to 01 March. This would not give sufficiently granular insight into significant periods of poor retention [Survey Response].

Data is collected and can be examined at any time of year [Survey Response].

We analyse FT UG Bachelor Students withdrawals by month each year [Survey Response].

One technological university provided detail on the systems in place to manage data and the challenges and constraints currently in place, which may be reflective of the situation in other newly established institutions:

The data on non-progression and withdrawals is available through Banner. Currently, data is considered at the course board level for each programme and at examination boards (MEBs and PABs) in accordance with [...] Policy and Procedures. [...] is currently in the transition phase of becoming a technological university, following the merger of [...] higher education institutions. As a result, there are currently differing systems and approaches to tracking and responding to student progression across our campuses. Work is ongoing to develop a cohesive, university-wide approach and learn from best practice at both pre-merger institutions [Survey Response].

One HEI reported that students wishing to withdraw from a programme are advised of potential exit awards that may be achieved (where available) and how to ensure they have the required credits to achieve that award.

Question 8

Nine (53%) respondents reported that their HEI has data on the characteristics of students who are at greatest risk of non-progression (see Figure 6 below).

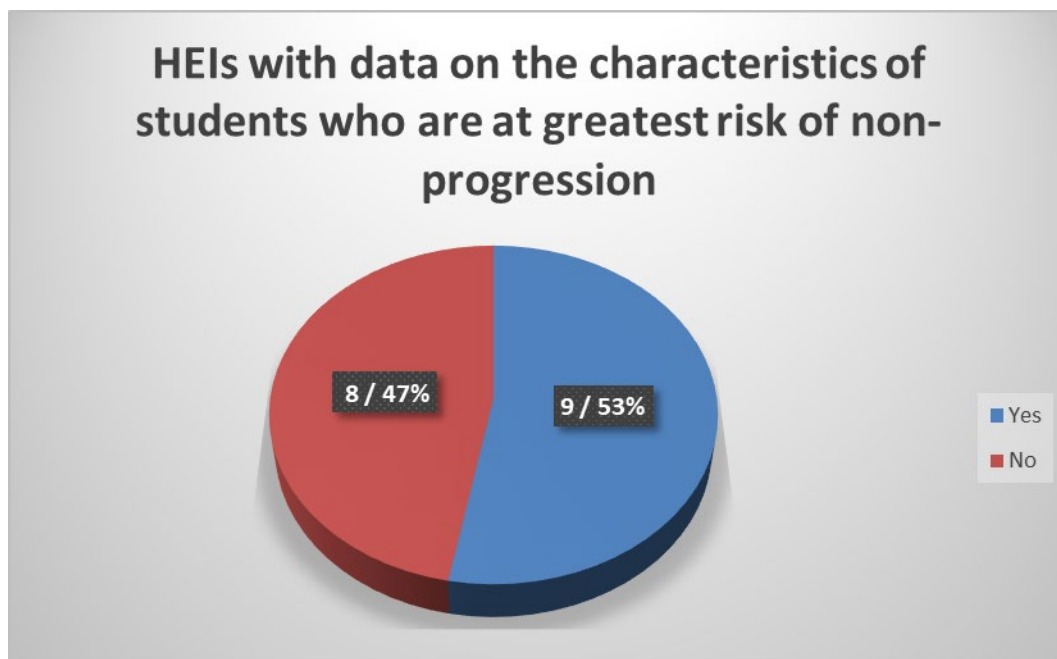


Figure 6: HEIs that have data on the characteristics of students who are at greatest risk of non-progression

Although no clear trends emerged regarding the types of HEI whose data provide insights into student cohorts or characteristics more vulnerable to non-progression, a notable correlation was observed between the number of specified cohorts for which data are collected and examined (see Question 6 above) and whether data are available on the characteristics of students who are at greatest risk of non-progression. HEIs that collect and analyse data for a greater number of specified cohorts are more likely to have information on the characteristics of students at the highest risk of non-progression. On average, HEIs that answered "yes" to question 8 collect and examine data on 8.3 different student cohorts, whereas those that answered "no" do so for only 3.5 cohorts.

In response to a prompt, twelve HEIs provided further information on the characteristics of students at greatest risk of non-progression or elaborated on the nature of the data held, while five HEIs did not answer this part of the question. One of these HEIs referred the reader to a relevant case study that was submitted to the Student Progression Case Studies reporting template. Another reported in detail on a PhD research project which studied student attrition in introductory computer science courses across ten Irish HEIs and developed *PreSS* (Predict Student Success), an AI tool designed to predict student performance and support targeted interventions to reduce attrition, and which did so with 71% accuracy at only four hours into the programme.

Characteristics of Students at Risk of Non-Progression

Most HEIs reported a variety of factors leading to a higher risk of student non-progression. Some overlap was reported in terms of wrong course choice and, most commonly, lower CAO points, reflecting the findings of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2015) and the HEA (2024a and 2025). As previously noted, HEA progression and completion data have

identified a strong correlation between lower CAO points for entry and non-progression.¹⁹ All factors and the number of times they were identified by respondents are outlined in Table 5 below.

Factor	Number of HEIs	Factor	Number of HEIs
Low CAO points	4	Low score in LC Honours English	1
Wrong course choice (not first or second preference)	3	Receiving financial aid	1
Financial difficulties	2	Domicile is further away from HEI (outside of county)	1
Health issues (mental and physical)	2	Difficulty settling into university life	1
Low score in LC Maths/Honours Maths	2	Lone parents	1
Mature students	2	Students who are bereaved	1
Traveller/Roma	2	Students with care experience	1
Male	2	HEAR	1
Registered with disability services/students with disabilities	2	Lower CAO preference	1
Registered with Access services	1	QQI/FET	1
Personal issues	1	EU	1
Enrolled on a Level 6/7 programme	1	Specific counties ²⁰	1
Services field of study	1	Entry route	1
Poorer attendance	1	Ethnic minority	1
Students from challenging backgrounds	1	Part-time working	1
Students who commute	1		

Table 5: Factors reported to lead to a higher risk of student non-progression/withdrawal

Conflicting comments were made with respect to whether EU students are more or less at risk of non-progression:

¹⁹ HEA (2025) *Progression and Completion Report 2025*. Available at: [HEA – Non-progression by Student Characteristics – 2 | Statistics | Higher Education Authority](#)

²⁰ This accords with the HEA findings that “The geographical area from which a student comes was influential in their likelihood of non-progression, with higher deprivation areas associated with worse non-progression outcomes, even after adjusting for all observed factors.” (2024a, p. 5).

No, however there is analysis that would indicate that EU students are more likely to progress on time (Survey Response).

Factors include lower points lower CAO preference certain cohorts e.g. Mature, QQI FET and EU (Survey Response).

Finally, one HEI reported that no characteristics were identified with a higher risk of non-progression despite a broad analysis of data.

Type of Data and Data Analysis

One HEI outlined perceived challenges in identifying the common characteristics of students who do not progress, including that it may be viewed as ‘profiling’; processing sensitive personal data; and creating the potential for bias:

A majority of student characteristics are sourced at the time of application, via CAO or direct application forms/materials. It would be possible to pull information on students who have not progressed and identify common characteristics across these students, where they are available. There is a risk in performing such an activity that it could be seen as profiling, or processing of sensitive personal data, or creating the potential for bias (Survey Response).

Another HEI reported that not all data retained is reported to staff (e.g., gender, school attended etc.), though a rationale was not provided for why such data are not shared. Finally, one HEI reported that a new staff member has been appointed with responsibility to develop the institution’s research/analytics and insight function:

In addition to self-reported data, [...] is interested in analysing wider socio-economic factors that may influence student progression. The HEA Deprivation Index provides a national overview of socio-economic disparities, and it may serve as a reference point in future analyses. However, student non-progression is recognised as a multidimensional issue influenced by both personal circumstances and structural factors. As [...] moves towards a unified data strategy, it is hoped to develop a more comprehensive and cohesive approach to identifying and supporting students at risk of non-progression across all campuses. To this end, a recent appointee to the Executive has the responsibility to develop the [...] institutional research/analytics and insight function (Survey Response).

Question 9

HEIs were then asked what additional data are needed to address non-progression rates in their institution and how they plan to capture these data. One HEI flagged a case study submitted as part of the wider Policy Forum collection of relevant case studies and one reported that no additional data are needed, while another indicated that it has not yet determined which data are needed.

Additional Data Needed

Seven HEIs identified additional data required to address non-progression rates in their institution. Whilst a variety of areas were referenced in responses (see Table 6 below), three HEIs noted a need for

more data on students who commute and on student engagement with virtual learning networks, such as Canvas, Moodle, Blackboard etc. Other measures of student engagement were also noted by more than one HEI, including class attendance and library use. In relation to commuting, it is worth noting that no common definitions are in place on what constitutes 'commuting', e.g. in relation to distance from the place of study/time spent in travel and when this becomes a barrier to successful engagement on the part of the student.

Data Requirement	Number of HEIs	Data Requirement	Number of HEIs
Commuting/commuting time/commuting distance	3	Student employment	1
Engagement with VLN	3	Social deprivation	1
Class attendance	2	Assignment submission	1
On campus library attendance/library use	2	Different student cohorts (as described by the HEA)	1
Students with caring responsibilities	2	Engagement with student services, including participation in clubs)	1
First generation students	1	Retention at different points in the year	1
Ethnicity	1	CAO points	1
Students with a disability	1	Exit surveys	1
Modules with high non-progression rates	1	Data on current retention initiatives	1

Table 6: Additional data needs identified by HEIs

One HEI referred to the need to enhance its capacity to capture and use data to inform retention activities, while another queried whether it should introduce a retention survey/local student experience survey to investigate which students are struggling and why.

... Distinguish between formal non-progression rates and signalling data that may be used to reduce non-progression rates. We need greater capacity to capture, collate, share and act on signalling data (e.g. student engagement indicators) in a coherent and meaningful way, using existing & new IT systems and platforms (e.g. VLE, SRS, case management system, library system, Student Engagement app). [...]’s Learning Analytics Policy is critical to informing and guiding what we do going forward in this regard (Survey Response).

Plans to Capture Data

Five HEIs outlined future plans to capture data on student non-progression. Three HEIs referred to current data collection and analysis activity (rather than specifying future needs and plans), noting both strong progression rates and particular challenges that exist, such as obtaining information from students who withdraw prior to registration. One HEI noted that such data are being collected to support EDI activity, rather than to address non-progression rates.

Two technological universities noted the challenges presented by the continued existence of different student record management systems and provided more detailed responses on plans to develop and harness new institution-wide student record systems to support student progression. A third technological university confirmed that it has the data needed as of this academic year, but that time is needed to ensure its effective use:

As mentioned previously, [...] is in a transition phase, and there is recognised need to develop a cohesive university-wide policy and procedure for student data gathering and its application to support student progression and success. This will support the maturation of the University's use of data to maximise student retention and success and, over time, support a shift in balance from the use of aggregate and retrospective data toward more individual and near real time data. Currently, data is gathered at various levels, but a more structured, systematic approach is required to ensure consistency and effectiveness across all campuses. A new initiative is being explored to leverage Learning Management System (LMS) data to proactively identify students at risk of non-progression, allowing for timely interventions (Survey Response).

Following the merger of the [...] Institutes of Technology in [...], the University continues to use [...] different student record management systems which makes the analysis of data difficult. From September 2025, the University will use a unified Banner system. Reports will need to be built that enable student progression and retention data to be analysed in a consistent way across the University. The creation of a databank with information on student characteristics that may affect retention and progression, such as student attendance, mental health issues and socio-economic status would be useful to facilitate analysis as this information is currently difficult to obtain and track. This databank would provide a better insight for creating initiatives to address issues. Nationally, there needs to be agreement on a simpler way of identifying students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, consideration should be given to agreeing national approaches to developing systems that will facilitate the early detection of students who will need an additional support, as the anecdotal data shows that these students often do not present themselves or avail of additional supports on offer. The University provides a lot of student supports but is reliant on students either self-identifying that they need help or year tutors recommending students avail of the available services (Survey Response).

Some responses were brief and made general reference to overarching activities intended to support data collection, including surveys, focus groups, resourcing to enable data collection and analysis, and the piloting of a student tracking system. One HEI noted that it is not planning to collect additional data due to GDPR concerns, but plans on working with existing data, as well as piloting a “student tracing system to capture non-progression rates of national access plan cohorts” (Survey Response). One HEI outlined an intention to monitor progression rates for a number of specified cohorts, including those who register with the disability service post enrolment, access route students, and those who commute:

We systematically monitor those students who are known to us through access routes, self-disclosure, actionable students post exam boards. Plans:

- *It is planned to add a marker to our SRS to monitor those students who registered with the disability service post enrolment (self-disclosure) to streamline issuing of LENs reports, tracking of special accommodations and to track progression status.*

- *Access data does not capture the intersectionality of the entrants from priority groups, resulting in an incomplete measure. This is difficult to resolve systematically but is recognised as an area which requires development.*
- *In recent years, there has been a focus on commuting students and the [...] has interrogated the SRS data to identify the % of students who are commuting, but this is dependent on up-to-date information being available through the SRS. Increasing the frequency of capture and retention of this data to track trends in students' accommodation/commuting status is being developed within the SRS (Survey Response).*

Question 10

HEIs were then asked how non-progression data are reported at institutional level and what role these data play in informing the development of institutional policies and initiatives. While all 17 HEIs answered this question, there was significant variation in the level of detail provided in responses, ranging from very high-level overview information to more detailed and comprehensive explanations. More succinct responses included:

Student data on progression/retention is made available to all staff through a dedicated SharePoint site. This can then be considered by Programme Board, Academic Council committees and other relevant fora (Survey Response).

It is used as part of integrated planning cycle as one of the performance indicators (Survey Response).

Data Reported and Examined at Programme and/or Department/School Level

Four HEIs noted that non-progression data are reported and examined locally at school level and inform the quality assurance and enhancement of programmes, and in some instances are included in annual Programme Board reports. Local actions may also inform institutional initiatives. In one instance, the Admissions Office also analyses withdrawal data as part of efforts to support retention. More detailed responses include:

Progression and non-progression data (HEA and local) is provided to the Schools as one evidence based data source which is used to compile the annual Programme Board Report (part of the Institution's annual programme monitoring activities as provided in the Quality Assurance Framework). This is used to inform actions at a programme level within Departments. This would include initiative development at Department level. This in turn can potentially inform Institute initiatives. The Admissions Office conducts a detailed analysis of the underlying factors contributing to student withdrawals, providing insights to support institutional retention efforts (Survey Response).

An analysis of non-progression data led to the University developing a comprehensive 1st Year Framework for Success. Inputs were made to the development of this framework by both Professional Services staff, faculty representatives and the students union. The framework has been developed to guide staff on the implementation of comprehensive support to students transitioning to the University. As a framework, it provides for flexibility in approach, enabling

different disciplines to use approaches that are most suitable for their students and has led to a number of local initiatives being introduced, including extended induction programmes and enhanced orientation. Progression rates are reported annually at the Faculty Boards through the annual programme monitoring reports. In advance, each programme committee considers student retention and progression figures and identifies any actions that are required. These form a part of the programme quality enhancement action plan. In accordance with the University's Quality Framework, a consideration of progression data by Faculty Boards has triggered Programme Reviews to be undertaken to improve retention and progression rates. Non-progression and retention data is currently being used to inform the University's [financial planning] ...In addition, based on the consideration of retention and progression data, a number of initiatives have been introduced to address issues arising (Survey Response).

Data Reported and Examined Centrally

Four HEIs confirmed that non-progression data are reported centrally and inform policy development, as well as budgeting and business planning. In most instances, data are also circulated to colleges/faculties/schools to inform local decision making (for example in relation to programme review and enhancement) and initiatives. Two of the four HEIs referenced the use of non-progression data to update targets in HEA Performance Agreements. The following responses are illustrative:

Non-progression data are primarily reported at institutional level with respect to relevant KPIs and targets in the [...] HEA Performance Agreement. These are also reported to Governing Authority. Non-progression data are also considered for the purposes of the annual budget process (at institution level) and for annual programme review processes. Non-progression data and Performance Agreement reporting has led to the resourcing of different supports and services over the years. It also led to the establishment of the Student Retention Working Group (SRWG) in July 2024 – a time-bound cross-institutional group identifying and considering issues related to student retention and non-progression in [...], with a view to making actionable recommendations to senior management by the end of 2025 with respect to data monitoring and reporting, and relevant policy / strategy development (Survey Response).

The institutional data analytics system – [...] provides year-on-year progression and retention data which is disaggregated by faculty/programme/year/gender/access routes allowing for in-depth analysis of overall institutional non-progression rates. Institutional-level data is interrogated and reported at executive level through both the Access & Student Wellbeing Committee (sub-committees of Executive Team), academic [...] level through a sub-committee of Academic Council, Academic Council, faculty and programme-level via pre-exam boards, exam boards, annual programme reviews. This analysis drives the development of institutional policies and initiatives such as:

- *The development of wrap-around services (academic supports, counselling, occupational health, financial supports and bespoke measures) to support students at most risk of non-progression is driven by the Institution's data-informed practices.*
- *Development of the Careers Service which has strong collaborative working relationships with the services listed above and plays a pivotal role in engaging with current students at the earliest possible stage of their studies in respect of subject choice; this includes Orientation prior to the formal commencement of studies as well as participation in the*

Institution's extended orientation programme. Early intervention in respect of students' subject choices can broaden future employability opportunities as well as prevent students making uninformed and potentially incorrect decisions leading to non-progression/withdrawal.

- *Additional monitoring and support for ITE students who come through the DARE route. This number is increasing and with this the need for additional supports particularly in relation to Placement **(Survey Response)**.*

Data Reported to a Senior Governance Committee

Five HEIs provided a brief outline of the senior governance committee to which reports on non-progression are made. Two of these five noted that such data have resulted in policy and intervention initiations to support retention. Indicative examples include:

*First Year Retention and Progression is monitored by Academic Board / Academic Council and has been a university KPI. This has led to policy initiatives around orientation, first year experience, peer support mentors, skills centre etc. **(Survey Response)**.*

*Annually our 1st year to 2nd year non progression data is presented to the University Management Team and Governing Body as part of a broader suite of metrics, as well as updated in our HEA Performance Agreement reporting. It is broken down by College level. This data has informed pilot intervention initiatives at 2 Colleges (See Case Study 1) **(Survey Response)**.*

Institution in Transition

One technological university noted that it is in a transitional phase as it moves from multiple legacy approaches to a single, integrated institutional approach and envisages that this new approach will inform programme enhancement.

*Currently, non-progression data is used differently across [...] campuses and subject areas, in part reflecting legacy institutional approaches and subject areas where student cohort characteristics may have demanded a greater focus on retention. As [...] continues its transition phase, we recognise the need to mature the use of data to support student success and realise a more cohesive, best-practice-driven approach across all campuses. While there is a wealth of data available, the challenge lies in ensuring it is consistently accessible and usable to inform decision-making in an effective and timely manner. Moving forward, [...] aims to leverage non-progression data more systematically to support institutional policies and initiative development. From a Quality Assurance perspective, this data, it is envisaged, will play a key role in informing rationales for programme change as part of the Faculty Enhancement Review process. Additionally, non-progression data is vital at the national level to support reporting on performance compacts with the HEA, ensuring alignment with national policy objectives **(Survey Response)**.*

Question 11

HEIs were asked to outline how the available non-progression data are harnessed to enable evidence-informed approaches to addressing non-progression. Three HEIs referred to their previous responses to

Question 10, with one indicating that further information could be provided upon request. A fourth HEI referred to case studies submitted as part of the wider Policy Forum collection of relevant case studies.

Three HEIs reiterated that data are analysed centrally and then shared locally, and that they inform both institutional initiatives (e.g. the provision of additional supports for access route students) and local measures, as well as being incorporated into institutional and programme reviews. The following response is illustrative:

The data is reviewed to determine if there is a need to take action institutionally e.g. decision to stop live streaming lectures post-Covid and encourage return to campus, and additional measures to support students who have entered through access routes. The available data have been used within Schools to develop ways to support students at risk of non-progression e.g. additional check-ins for students who have not met the requisite GPA at specified points and a remediation programme for medical students required to sit supplemental assessments (Survey Response).

Four HEIs emphasised the use of data to inform targeted interventions at the programme level; for example:

Annually, each programme committee/discipline's programme board are required to consider the performance of students and identify any issues and develop a quality action plan to improve the programme. Issues that are identified that are outside of the remit of the programme team to resolve are escalated to the Faculty Board. A new initiative is being piloted in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment to review progress in first year's students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and to establish in more depth the connection between economic background and barriers to progression. Further details of this are contained in the case studies. The methodology and impact of this pilot will be analysed by the University with a view to sharing the approach across all faculties. Annually a survey is issued centrally to all students registered on programmes leading to Major Awards asking them to evaluate their programme of study. The reports from these surveys are analysed to identify the trends and issues affecting the students' experience of their programmes. An annual action plan is developed as a result of this survey. In addition, the results of the survey are disseminated at programme level and programme teams are expected to consider these results in conjunction with the students' progression results and devise actions at a programme level. Reports from the survey are also issued to Schools and Faculties so that they can consider issues affecting the student experience (Survey Response).

Two HEIs noted that the data are used to identify at-risk cohorts and to develop customised interventions to address non-progression amongst those groups. Some examples of such interventions were provided:

As outlined in previous responses the approaches adopted to date have primarily been focused on retrospective (i.e. HEA return data) and trends and patterns within this to identify in aggregate students whose characteristics suggest they may be more at risk. Looking forward, [...] is endeavouring to take a more data-driven approach to student interventions, incorporating LMS analytics and student support data to identify and assist at-risk students with the aspiration that the data in use will become nearer to real time and more individualised. A key priority is ensuring that interventions are timely, personalised, and equitable, particularly for students from underrepresented backgrounds. This aligns with the Institution's Strategic Plan and our

commitments under our HEA Performance Agreement to improve retention and progression rates
(Survey Response).

The availability of disaggregated non-progression data, specifically trend analysis, allows for the development of targeted bespoke initiatives to tackle non-progression in specific cohorts. A number of initiatives including extended orientation, Peer Mentoring, mainstreaming of the Student Parent Support Service; increased counselling support, implementation of Togetherall platform (online platform), investment in UD/UDL training for staff reflect a targeted data driven approach to non-progression/retention by the Institution
(Survey Response).

Less detailed responses made high-level commentary on the fact that non-progression data are analysed and inform continuous enhancement and/or targeted interventions.

Section 4 — Students at Risk of Non-Progression

4.1 Introduction

This section of the survey, comprising questions 12–15, explored what (if any) institution-wide mechanisms are in place for identifying students at risk of withdrawing or not progressing and the nature of institutional engagement with these students. Questions 12 and 14 were answered by all 17 participating HEIs, while questions 13 and 15 received nine responses.

4.2 Key Findings

Question 12

HEIs were asked to confirm whether there are institution-wide mechanisms in place to identify students at risk of non-progression, e.g. review of semester assessment grades or attendance records; and, if not, whether there are mechanisms in place at faculty/school/department level. Thirteen HEIs (76%) confirmed that institution-wide mechanisms are in place (see Figure 7 below). The four HEIs that reported not having institution-wide mechanisms included three technological universities and one traditional university.

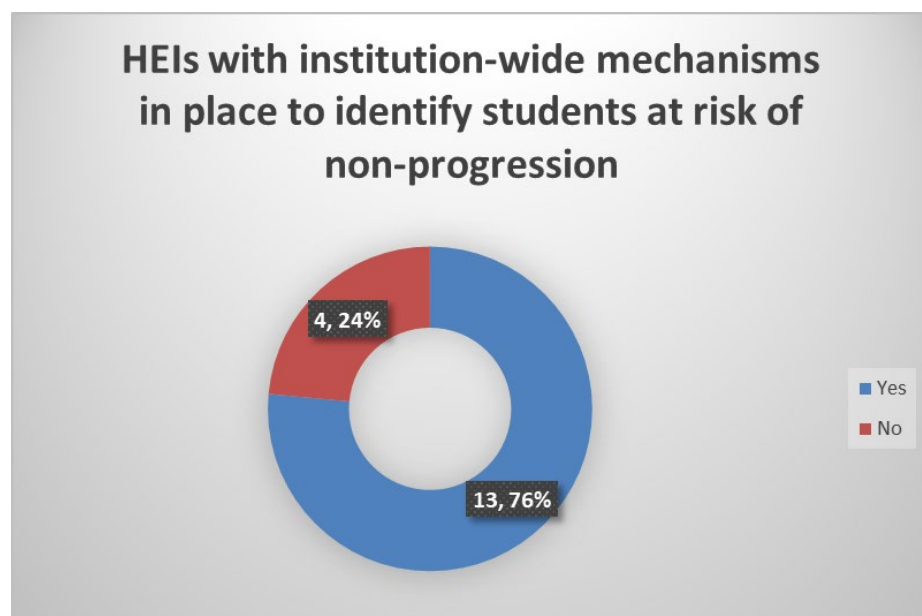


Figure 7: Number of HEIs with institution-wide mechanisms in place to identify students at risk of non-progression

HEIs were then asked to explain these institutional mechanisms for identifying students at risk of non-progression. Thirteen HEIs responded, though not all fully addressed the question: one HEI referred to a case study submitted to the Policy Forum, while another did not specify how it identifies at-risk students but stated that phone calls are made to students who do not progress between modules. A third HEI noted that it considers all students as being at risk of non-progression:

We consider that every student is at risk of non-progression. We are building capacity in terms of increasing targeted interventions based on the evidence. Interventions are conducted both centrally and at localised levels (Survey Response).

Monitoring Student Engagement

Three HEIs reported tracking student engagement, and in some instances, following up with students who are not fully engaging. In one instance, this effort is focused on the first six weeks, while in another there is a framework for managing and supporting students with poorer academic performance. In that case, students are referred to dedicated academic support services.

Using Brightspace data to track student engagement and reports are issued to student advisors on a weekly basis. In addition, our continuation policy provides a framework to ensure that there was a consistent approach to the management and to support students whose academic progress is deemed unsatisfactory (Survey Response).

Mechanisms to Identify Students at Risk 1. Analysis of Moodle VLE engagement. Academic staff follow up with students who are not fully engaging over the first 6 weeks of the semester. This is part of the Institute's "Talk Before You Walk" Initiative. 2. Department monitoring. Heads of Department, Programme Directors/First-Year Convenors lecturers monitor and follow-up with students on a regular basis. For example, students are encouraged to follow up with staff to discuss their options should they wish to defer or withdraw from their programme of study. Students are also supported by academic staff at consultation sessions at the end of each examination/assessment session. 3. Student Supports: Students are referred to the Student Learning and Development Centre (SLDC), Maths Learning Centre (MLC) and Library for academic supports and Student Services for all other supports (Survey Response).

First Year Experience Coordinator and International Student Support Officer work directly with students to promote retention and progression. The nature of some programmes, for example with small cohorts or extensive lab-based work or placements, means that non-attendance or lack of engagement is quickly identified and students are supported by the School or referred to university-level supports (Survey Response).

Reviewing Semester 1 Exam Results

Four HEIs noted that at-risk students are identified following Semester 1 exams and are followed up with by staff in the relevant faculty/school, while one HEI is moving to this model. Dedicated staff in the Access and Disability Office also follow up with students registered to that office. Attendance is not tracked in all instances, though poor attendance may trigger a conversation on programmes with attendance requirements in two of these four HEIs:

Students who are at risk of non-progression are identified at the Autumn Semester Exam Boards (soft progression) and are followed up with by the relevant faculty office to provide guidance and support to these students. This includes meeting with the students, offering supports (e.g. outline of remedial steps needed (repeat exams/review of subject choice)/language/math supports/counselling/other pastoral care and advice). In tandem with this the Access and

Disability Office that tracks students registered with the office over the lifetime of their studies and work with the faculties/support services to support these and other students who are in danger of not progressing (Survey Response).

Semester 1 marks are published. The identification of students at-risk for non-progression as a result of the publication of these marks is overseen at School and/or programme-level. Attendance monitoring does not exist at institutional level as the requirements of each programme are unique to the academic landscape of teaching and learning in that area. Where attendance requirements exist, these are communicated to students via handbooks as documented in the Programme Handbook Policy. Where an attendance issue arises, there is a College-level 'Non-Satisfactory Policy' whereby students who do not meet attendance requirements can be reported as non-satisfactory. This triggers a conversation between the student, their tutor and relevant academic/professional colleagues. This may result in the identification of mitigating circumstances which may then be accepted with no further action to be taken, and suggestions made to the student regarding relevant supports. The extreme outcome of this policy is that a student may be required to repeat the year (Survey Response).

Yes, the Student Support and Engagement Team reviews undergraduate students' overall grades on the release of results each semester (i.e. January and June). The team identifies students at risk of non-progression by virtue of their exam performance, and it proactively reaches out to those students to engage, to offer advice, to understand, if relevant, what may be going on for the student more broadly. The most critical student cohort with respect to this work is first year undergraduate students after Semester One exams. Student attendance is not tracked at institutional level (Survey Response).

All students are assessed by a system of continuous assessment rather than by terminal examination only. This provides Heads of Department with insight into non-attendance which can be followed up and alerted to Registry in the case of a withdrawal. [...] has moved to semesterised delivery for the academic year 2024/25. This will necessitate an additional exam board to be held in February, which will add an additional layer of oversight relating to first semester attendance and second semester continuation (Survey Response).

Role of Dedicated Student Service Offices

Whilst continuing to highlight the role of assessment in identifying at-risk students, two other HEIs highlighted the role played by dedicated offices, such as access, disability and mature student services. One HEI also noted the important role of class tutors in providing individual support to students:

At programme level a combination of the class tutor system and the use of early and regular assessments provides for a degree of monitoring of issues. Where issues are identified, year tutors provide support and sign posting to relevant services to students who are in need of additional support. The duties of the Year Tutor are set out in the University's Quality Framework and include: - Communicating with students in relation to the programme delivery, progression and pastoral issues including referral where appropriate to student services; - Working closely with student support services to help identify students in need of higher levels of support and to streamline and maximise the provision of support; - Advising students on academic and related aspects of their programme of study as outlined in the Student Handbook; - Facilitating delivery

*of a holistic support service to students taking into account the interlinking of academic issues, University experience and personal issues and briefing academic colleagues on the supports available to students from the various student support services; - Meeting students on group and individual basis to assess support needs. The Access Service conducts an analysis of exam results to identify students in need of additional support at the end of each semester. Further details are contained within the case study. The Disability Service conducts the analysis at the end of the year to identify students in need of an additional support **(Survey Response)**.*

*In recent years, we have transitioned from a centralised approach, previously led by Student Services, to a more decentralised, programme-level approach. This shift allows for greater autonomy and tailored support within individual programmes and modules. For specific NAP cohorts (Access, Disability, Mature), relevant offices continue to review end-of-semester grades and proactively reach out to students who have failed modules to arrange support meetings. While responsibility for targeted supports has been decentralised, data collection and dissemination at the aggregate level remain centralised under the remit of a central institutional analysis office (QIO). Anonymised, aggregate data is presented through a series of dashboards and reviewed by [] Education Committee, which includes representatives from all faculties, ensuring university-wide oversight of educational outcomes **(Survey Response)**.*

Pre-Exam Board Meetings

One HEI reported on the importance of pre-exam board meetings in identifying at-risk students and developing customised responses:

*The primary vehicle for identifying students at risk and developing individualised responses and action plans is the Pre-Exam Board structure. This involves programme-by-programme discussion of students at risk of non-progression involving academic staff, Heads of Department/School, Academic Registry and the Head of Academic Affairs to understand the nature of the issue and respond effectively in support of the student **(Survey Response)**.*

Question 13

Five HEIs (including the three technological universities that reported not having institution-wide mechanisms in place) confirmed that there are mechanisms in place at faculty/school/departmental level to identify students at risk of non-progression, while four HEIs (including the traditional university that reported not having institution-wide mechanisms in place) reported that such mechanisms are in place in some instances. Eight HEIs did not answer this question.

Question 14

Eleven HEIs (65%) reported that there is centralised engagement with students at risk of non-progression (see Figure 8 below). Six HEIs report that they do not have centralised engagement with students on this issue.

Number of HEIs with centralised engagement with students at risk of non progression

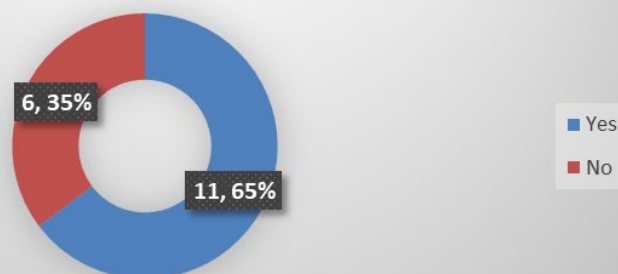


Figure 8: Number of HEIs with centralised engagement with students at risk of non-progression

HEIs were then asked to outline the nature of this engagement. Not all responses gave sufficient detail to understand which unit or role is responsible for this engagement (either in the present or planned).

Dedicated Student Support Staff and Offices

The role of dedicated student support staff and offices, such as Student Support Offices, Access and Disability Services, International Students Services, and Tutor Services were noted by five HEIs. One HEI, in particular, documented a wide range of targeted student engagement initiatives, including training and coaching for staff, designed to support student progression and retention:

There are Student Support Officers based in each of the 4 Colleges and a Post-Entry Support team in the Access Centre that carry out targeted interventions. All 3 case studies submitted give additional details (Survey Response).

The Access and Disability Service primarily focuses on promoting access for underrepresented groups in higher education... Furthermore, the University offers a range of targeted support programmes, including: Mature Student Orientation and Transition Programme; Financial support through the Student Assistance Fund; 1916 Student Bursaries; Traveller and Roma Access Support (incl. Star Pupil Traveller Access to Education Programme); Sanctuary Scholarship for asylum seekers and refugees. The Student Engagement Teams at [...] proactively promote a wide range of learning supports and student development opportunities. These include:

- *Student Orientation and Induction Programmes*
- *Academic subject supports,*
- *Academic Learning Centre Summer Programme of supports for repeating students.*
- *Academic Success Coaching*
- *Study and Learning Skills development*
- *Academic Writing seminars*
- *Time and Self-management coaching and mentoring,*

Information and support campaigns such as Just Ask... are widely offered at key times of the year. Teams of trained Student Engagement Associates offer high quality peer support whilst also working with Departments to host Get Connected ice breaking events that focus on mattering and belonging, in line with recommendations from student success literature ... Looking across the student lifecycle from New Student to Graduation, there are several programmes available to [...] staff that enable and support tailored interventions at key transition points during the student lifecycle that students find challenging and may cause a student to waver, e.g. Assessment and Feedback at HE, Managing academic learning and part-time work and /or commuting, Step up into second/third year, students face preparation and completion of placement, the possibility of repeating some modules, preparation for graduation, etc, Our Transitions at [...] programme, for instance, facilitates staff to avail of funding and coaching supports for targeted, tailored interventions that address areas of concern in relation to student progression at discipline/ central function level. This programme is administered and managed by the Student Engagement functions at [...]. Our EDGE Graduate Development Programme recognises, values and rewards engaged student behaviours and activities (Survey Response).

Where members of the Tutorial Service are aware of students at risk of non-progression they will engage with them to discuss what may be impacting them and guide students to making decisions appropriate for their circumstances (Survey Response).

There are a number of supports that have been put in place across the University to support student success. These include the Academic Writing Centre, the Maths Learning Centre, Computing Learning Centre, the Access Office, the Disability Support Service, Student Counselling Service, Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Service, Financial Aid, and the implementation of four Student Hubs across the three campuses. These were all introduced in the new Organisation Design to support students' retention and progression and address issues that have previously been identified as affecting students' performance. In addition, currently the university is involved in a process of unifying a diverse range of bespoke peer mentoring programmes that exist on various [...] locations as part of its retention strategy. The goal is a peer mentoring programme in which students with issues that might lead to them exiting their programme would be referred to relevant services by their peer mentor. The recording of that referral encounter is, at this point, outside the scope of the programme overall, though the more bespoke peer mentoring programmes may have that capacity. The University's Year Tutors play a fundamental role to support student progression at programme level. As detailed in question 12, they provide a key bridge between students and the relevant student service, identifying students who need further support and guiding students to access the services they need (Survey Response).

First Year Experience Coordinator and International Student Support Officer are available to meet students who are uncertain about their programme choice, not settling in or having other difficulties (Survey Response).

Yes, via student advisors (Survey Response).

Academic Affairs and Supports

Two HEIs reported that engagement with students is led by senior administrative functions: the Head of Academic Affairs, in one instance, and the Office for Students and Learning in the other:

Academic Registry and the Head of Academic Affairs are actively involved in the process of identifying progress issues and developing response plans. For particularly difficult circumstances, the involvement of the Head of Academic Affairs supports wider possibilities for intervention through Student Experience structures (Survey Response).

Through the Office for Students & Learning (Survey Response).

Question 15

Nine HEIs confirmed that there is engagement with students at the faculty/school/department level, including all those HEIs that reported not having centralised engagement with students at risk of non-progression. Eight HEIs did not answer this question.

4.3 Examples of Good Practice

Survey responses contain several examples of good practice in identifying and supporting students at risk of non-progression. These practices demonstrate proactive, structured, and evidence-based approaches. These include:

- Early engagement and monitoring initiatives: For example, the "Talk Before You Walk" Initiative, which includes monitoring Moodle engagement data, with follow-up from academic staff in the first 6 weeks, the period in which student non-progression is most prevalent.
- Use of VLN analytics: For example, tracking student engagement with Brightspace and issuing weekly reports to student advisors, ensuring consistent early identification of, and intervention with, at-risk students.
- Structured institutional mechanisms: For example, programme-by-programme discussion of at-risk students involving academic and support staff at pre-exam board meetings.
- Dedicated support services and targeted interventions: For example, through Access and Disability Offices and the creation of roles such as "First Year Experience Coordinator", which provided tailored support for vulnerable students during critical periods (the HEA has identified Year 1 as being particularly vulnerable to student non-progression).
- Development of staff knowledge and skills: For example, "Transitions at [HEI]", which provides funding and coaching to staff to develop tailored interventions at key transition points.
- Centralised data use for decision-making: For example, the use of dashboards to inform strategic planning at central and local level.

Section 5: Follow-Up with Non-Progressed Students

5.1 Introduction

The third part of the survey, comprising questions 16–25, explored the follow-up practices HEIs employ with students who do not progress, for example data collection on student-reported reasons for non-progression, student outcomes, and institutional reporting mechanisms. Not all HEIs answered all questions — the response rate for each question is included in the discussion of responses to that question.

5.2 Key Findings

Question 16

Just over half of HEIs (nine) reported that they follow up with students who have not progressed (see Figure 9 below). Traditional universities are significantly less likely to follow up with such students, with only two reporting that they do so. Conversely, only two institutions in the technological higher education sector do not follow up with non-progressed students.

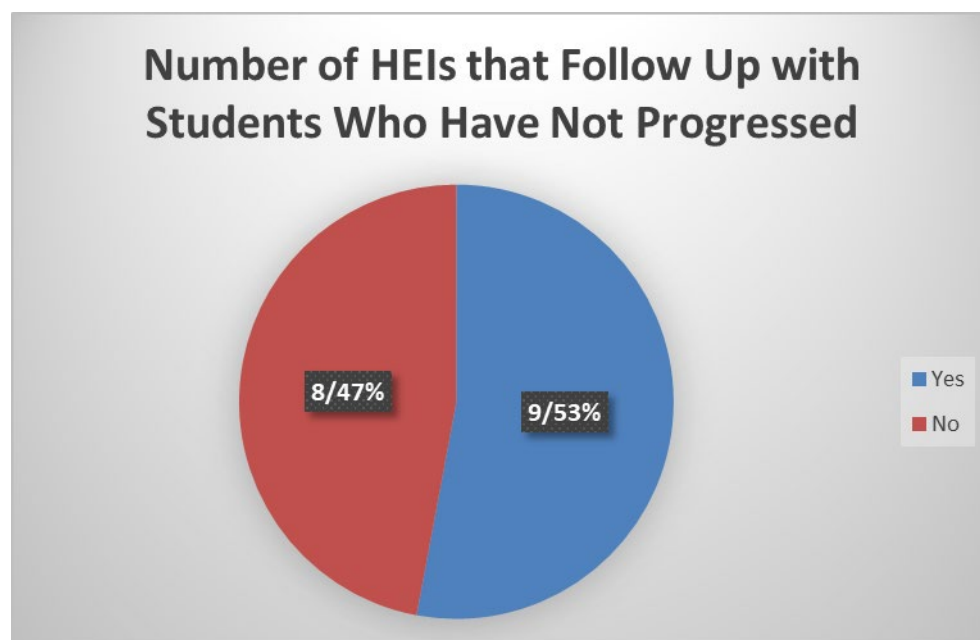


Figure 9: Proportion of HEIs that follow up with students who have not progressed

Those that follow up with non-progressed students indicated a variety of reasons and mechanisms for doing so. One HEI indicated that, contrary to its response to the preceding question, follow-up with students is not universal, but specific to particular cohorts:

Follow-up support is provided to students returning from a Leave of Absence and returning as a Repeat Student. However, there is not a systematic institution-wide follow up with students who have withdrawn (with the exception of ESF-funded 1916 Bursary students who withdraw) (Survey Response).

Follow-Up Post Exams

Four HEIs indicated that at-risk students are contacted post exams to advise of options to progress or repeat. Indicative examples include:

The Examinations Office communicates with all students after each examination/assessment session to advise of their options to facilitate progression (Survey Response).

Following the release of results in Spring, students who have not progressed are formally contacted by their respective faculty office to outline their options (repeat exams/repeat year/link-in). Those who must repeat a year/link-in are provided with the opportunity to discuss their options including advice on subject choice or internal transfer (if an option) (Survey Response).

Engagement with Academic Affairs/Relevant Academic Unit

A further two HEIs reported that programme staff, and/or Academic Registry, engage with non-progressed students or those at risk of non-progression to explore students' options:

All students are communicated with individually by Academic Registry and their programme team. In particularly difficult circumstances, students are invited to engage with Academic Affairs to support them in understanding and remediating their circumstances (Survey Response).

There's no formal process in place to follow up with students who have not progressed at University level. Individual programmes and Schools do try to follow up with students. Year tutors often take the lead on reaching out to students who are not engaging fully in their programme of study. A process has been put in place that requires students, in advance of completion of the official withdrawal form, to make contact with their School to discuss options. Plans are being put in place for the Student Hubs to follow up with students who complete the withdrawal forms. For students who are registered with the Access Service, they are contacted to see if the student has an exit plan in place and to provide information if they are considering returning to Higher Education, in [...] or other HEIs (Survey Response).

Exit Interviews/Surveys

Two HEIs reported that admissions offices engage directly with students either through exit interviews or questionnaires to understand the reasons for non-progression:

Yes, [...] follows up with students who have not progressed. Currently, follow-up processes need to be brought to a more consistent process and format post-merger. However, on [...] campuses, exit interviews are facilitated by Admissions and Academic Departments to understand students'

reasons for non-progression. Looking forward, [...] aims to develop a more unified approach across all campuses, ensuring that student withdrawals and non-progression trends are systematically reviewed. This will support institutional efforts to enhance student progression and inform policy decisions (Survey Response).

Students who have withdrawn or deferred from programmes are followed up with by the admissions office and complete a questionnaire. Not all students will respond or are contactable (Survey Response).

Question 17

Fifteen of seventeen HEIs (88%) reported that they collect data on student-reported reasons for non-progression and/or withdrawal (see Figure 10 below). Two technological universities reported that they do not.

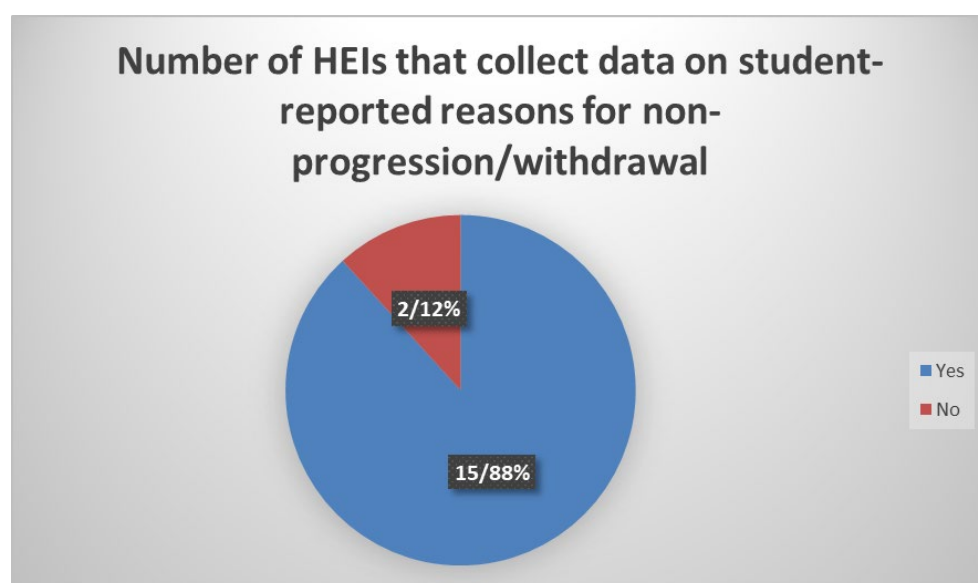


Figure 10: Proportion of HEIs that collect data on student-reported reasons for non-progression/withdrawal

Question 18

Those HEIs that do not collect such data were asked whether they have anecdotal data available from other institutional sources on student-reported reasons for non-progression/withdrawal. Both confirmed that they do not. Three other HEIs (all institutes in the technological higher education sector) reported that anecdotal data is available.

Question 19

HEIs that responded 'yes' to the previous question were then asked to rank in order of prevalence the following nine specified student-reported reasons for non-progression (including a non-specified 'other' option), with 1 = most prevalent and 9 = least prevalent:

- Course choice (e.g. wrong choice, difficulty, workload, other)
- Institution (e.g. institution did not suit)
- Family circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement, lack of support etc.)

- Personal circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement (outside of family))
- Financial reasons (cost of living)
- Availability of accommodation (not financial)
- To gain employment (career move, not financially motivated)
- To return home (not resident in Ireland)
- Other (please state)

HEIs were prompted to select 'N/A' if an option was not known to be applicable, rather than including it in the ranking.

Fourteen of the 15 HEIs that reported that they collect data on student-reported reasons for non-progression and/or withdrawal (Q. 17) answered this question, though not all ranked each option specified, as shown in Figure 11 below.

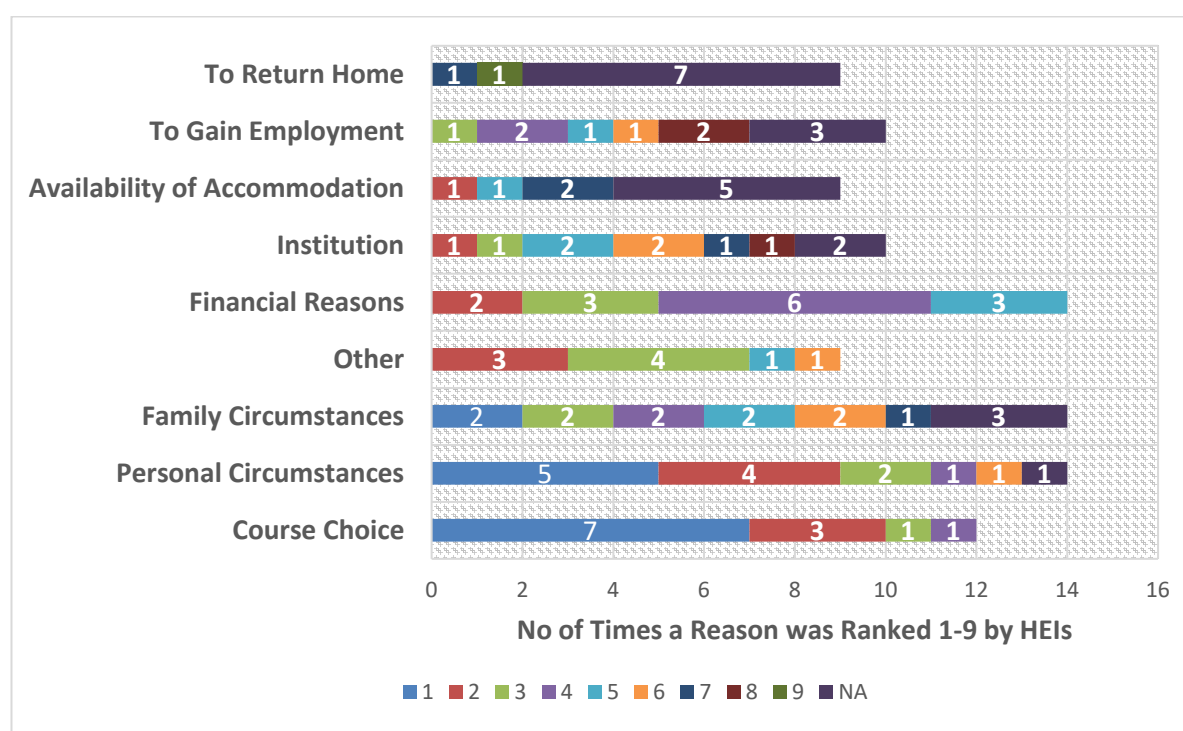


Figure 11: Breakdown of HEI ranking of student-reported reasons for non-progression. *Each colour reflects a ranking, e.g., dark blue = '1', i.e., that reason was ranked '1' by the number of HEIs indicated in the data label in the bar.

The weighted average ranking score for each of the reasons for student non-progression was calculated,²¹ and is set out in Figure 12 below.

²¹ The method for calculating the weighted average ranking score is available here: [Ranking Question | SurveyMonkey Help](#)

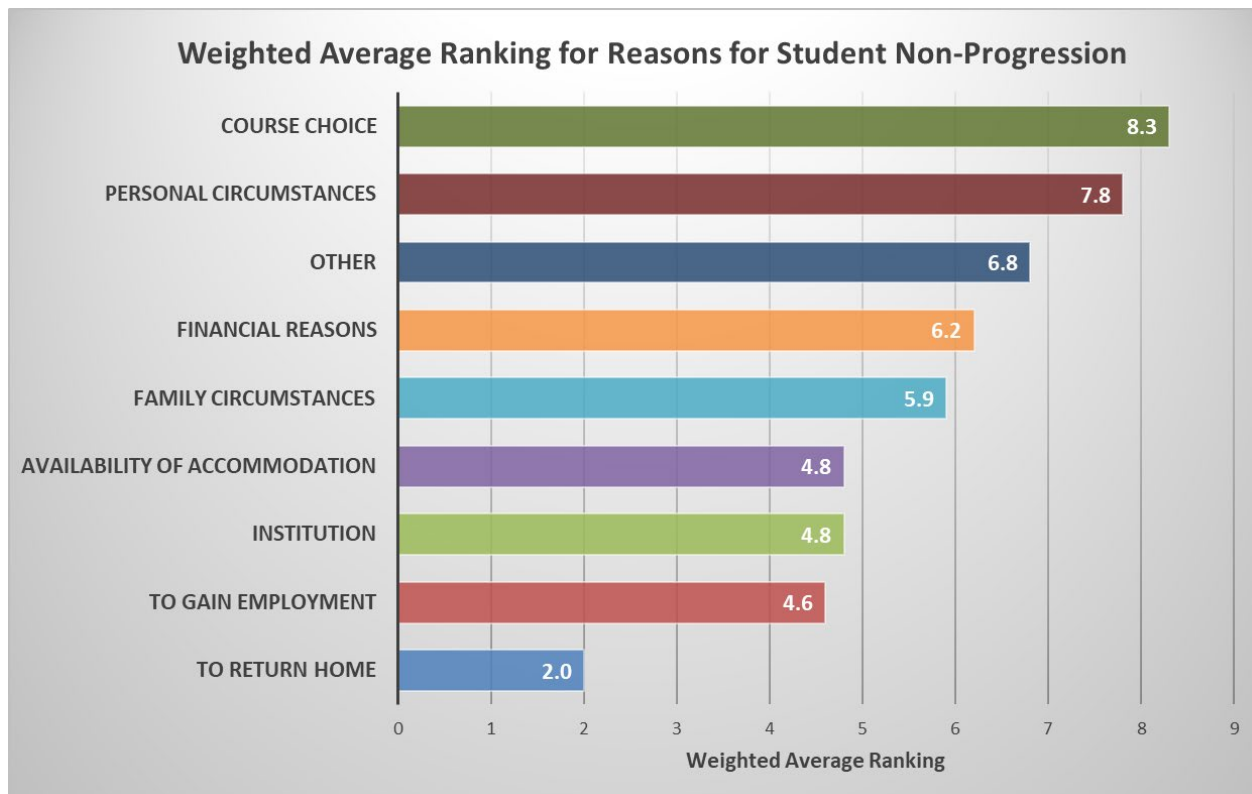


Figure 12: Weighted average ranking score for each reason for student non-progression

Table 7 below identifies the number of times a given reason for non-progression received a particular ranking by HEIs. ‘Course choice’ and ‘Personal Circumstances’ were ranked as the most prevalent reasons for student non-progression by HEIs, followed by ‘Other’, ‘Financial Reasons’ and ‘Family Circumstances’. Overall, this reflects the five key themes related to non-completion identified by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in 2015: Course (51%); Personal (18%); Financial (15%); Health and Medical (15%) and Family (11%),²² though the weight given to each factor differs between the two studies.

²² National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2015) *Why Students Leave: Findings from Qualitative Research into Student Non-Completion in Higher Education in Ireland: Focused Research Report No. 4*. Available at: [NF-2015-Why-Students-Leave-Findings-from-Qualitative-Research-into-Student-Non-Completion-in-Higher-Education-in-Ireland.pdf](#) (p. 36)

Reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N/A	TOTAL	SCORE
Course Choice	58.3% 7	25.0% 3	8.3% 1	8.3% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	12	8.33
Personal Circumstances	35.7% 5	28.6% 4	14.3% 2	7.1% 1	0.0% 0	7.1% 1	7.1% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	7.1% 1	14	7.77
Other	0.0% 0	33.3% 3	44.4% 4	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	9	6.78
Financial Reasons	0.0% 0	15.4% 2	15.4% 2	46.2% 6	23.1% 3	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11	6.23
Family Circumstances	14.3% 2	0.0% 0	14.3% 2	14.3% 2	14.3% 2	14.3% 2	7.1% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	21.4% 3	14	5.91
Institution	0.0% 0	10.0% 1	10.0% 1	0.0% 0	20.0% 2	20.0% 2	10.0% 1	10.0% 1	0.0% 0	20.0% 2	10	4.75
Availability of Accommodation	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	55.6% 5	9	4.75
To Gain Employment	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	10.0% 1	20.0% 2	10.0% 1	10.0% 1	0.0% 0	20.0% 2	0.0% 0	30.0% 3	10	4.57
To Return Home	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	77.8% 7	9	2

Table 7: Weighted average ranking of reasons for student non-progression

Conversely, ‘To return home’ and ‘Availability of accommodation’ were the reasons most commonly reported as “not applicable” to student non-progression in this survey (see Figure 13 below).

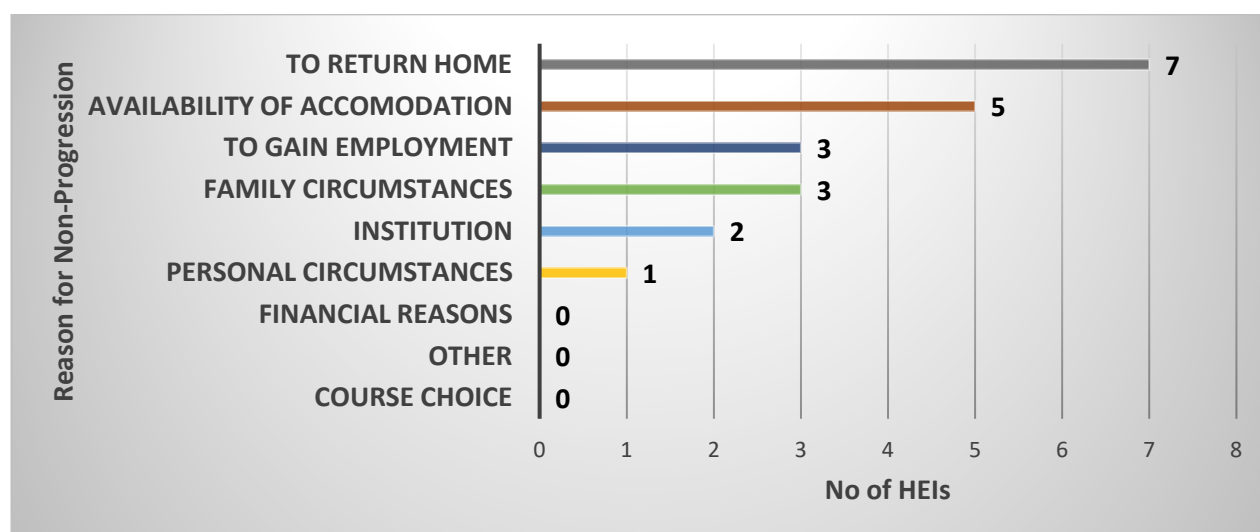


Figure 13: Reasons reported by HEIs as not applicable (N/A) to student non-progression

Question 20

The HEIs that selected ‘Other’ in response to Question 19 were asked to clarify those factors. Twelve HEIs responded to this question, with two indicating that data on reasons for student non-progression are not currently available:

Again, I do not currently have access to this data. Anecdotally family and personal circumstances are the main reported reasons for non-progression. I suspect the quality of data here is not robust, due to low response rates to requests (Survey Response).

Information not collected currently (Survey Response).

Two HEIs responded that the 'Other' category included students who did not provide a reason for withdrawing or not progressing and/or who did not respond to HEI efforts to engage. One HEI noted that the factors outlined in Question 19 do not mirror those in the withdrawal forms provided to students:

The other category includes students who have chosen not to give a reason, students who never attended and students who never responded to a notice of withdrawal. Please Note: Family Circumstances and Personal Circumstances fall under the one category on [...]’s student withdrawal forms so they’re both included as ‘3’ above (Survey Response).

Includes instances where no information was provided or where ‘other’ was indicated by the individual. Categories available here do not mirror options on the [...] our withdrawal form (Survey Response).

One HEI noted that students often have more than one reason for withdrawing from a programme:

Students pick from a drop down but also provide a narrative. Usually there are several reasons involved when you read the full text (Survey Response).

Finally, seven HEIs reported a variety of different reasons for student non-progression, including a culture gap; a change of career aspirations; lack of childcare; inability to 'settle in'; loneliness; commuting time; visa issues, emigrating, travel; medical reasons; dissatisfaction with student life; dissatisfaction with requirements/regulations; dissatisfaction with staff/student relations; and a need to take over the family business.

Questions 21, 22 and 23

Fourteen HEIs reported that they do not have data or information available on student outcomes (for example, on whether they are in employment or have transferred to another programme) upon follow-up with non-progressed students (see Figure 14 below). One HEI reported having these data and two HEIs did not respond to this question.

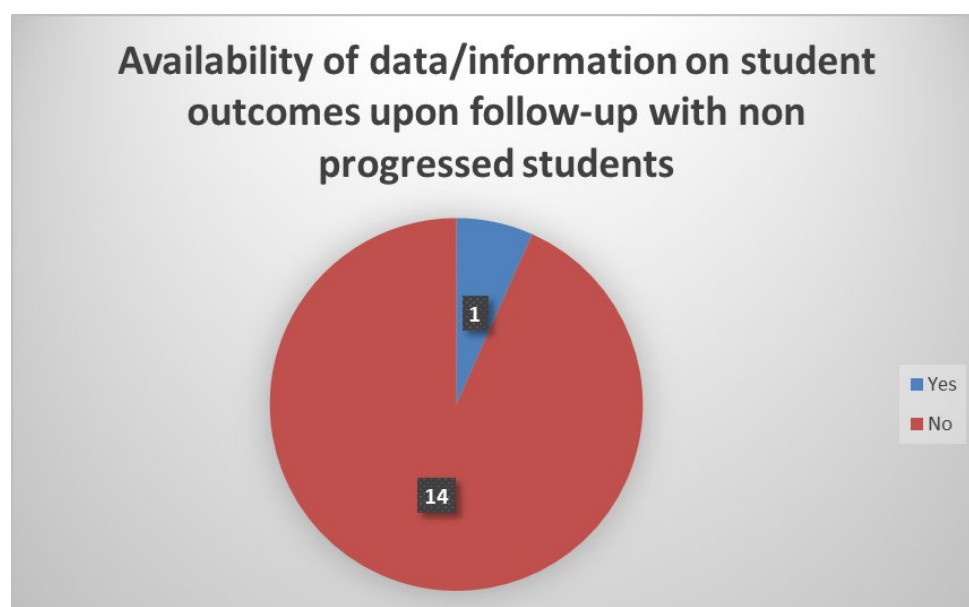


Figure 14: Number of HEIs with data/information available on student outcomes upon follow-up with non-progressed students

The HEI with data on student outcomes ranked the most prevalent outcomes for non-progressed students from a list of nine options (see Table 8 below).

Outcome	Ranking
Transferred to another institution	1
Returned to course with supports	2
Transferred to another course	3
Year off books	4
Employment	5
NEET (not in education, employment or training)	-
Travelled abroad/emigrated	-
Returned home (not resident in Ireland)	-
Other (please state)	-

Table 8: Most prevalent outcomes for non-progressed students as ranked by one HEI

Question 23 asked HEIs to outline any 'Other' option selected in response to question 21. This was not applicable to any respondents.

Question 24

Eleven HEIs responded to a question seeking a description of the mechanisms in place (if any) to report on follow-up with non-progressed students, while six HEIs did not respond to this question. Five of the eleven confirmed that there are no mechanisms in place, though this was recognised as a gap in one instance, while in another, it was reported that "Some HoDs/lecturers/admins staff will follow up with students to determine reasons, but this is generally in an informal basis. Online student advisors take a more systematic approach with online only students as this is a part of their job role." **(Survey Response).**

Two of the 11 HEIs responded 'N/A' to this question, and another HEI did not address the question, but referenced follow-up activity from its Access Office with non-progressed Access route students.

Three HEIs described data capturing and/or reporting through student records systems or other dashboards:

Where interventions have resulted in non-progressed students remaining within the institution (Leave of Absence/Repeat Year/Link-in/internal transfer to another programme), this data is captured by the following mechanisms:

- Student Status Committee – report on internal transfers/LOA/RLOA
- SRS reporting on Repeat Year/Link-ins **(Survey Response).**

As noted elsewhere, mechanisms for follow up are: Central communication to each individual (Academic Registry), Local communication with each individual student (Programme Team) Invitation to speak to / meet with the Head of Academic Affairs where appropriate, needed or

requested. A full record of each of these steps is held on the Student Record System (Survey Response).

We collect the data and present it in a PowerBI dashboard (Survey Response).

Question 25

Ten HEIs responded to Question 25, which asked HEIs to describe how they use data resulting from follow-up with non-progressed students to inform policy/initiative development, while seven HEIs did not respond to this question. Three of these ten noted that there are no mechanisms in place for this activity or responded 'N/A' to this question. Another HEI noted that data are used "Only in relation to online students – e.g. better induction, information provision, technical fixes, tailored supports" **(Survey Response)**, while a fifth reiterated plans reported earlier to make better use of data to drive targeted interventions in the future.

Three HEIs reported that data are used to inform student wellbeing and support activities, with one HEI providing examples of initiatives undertaken:

The data has informed initiatives such as:

- *Increase in wraparound supports: assistive technology, counselling, occupational health, additional academic supports/resources (i.e. one-to-one, small group additional language support classes for students who are neurodivergent)*
- *Student Mental Health and Wellbeing initiative, [...] has employed four additional, 5 counsellors. These counsellors facilitate group counselling sessions as follows:*
- *The Body Project (eating disorders)*
- *A Bereavement Group*
- *A Neuro-Divergent Student Support Group*
- *An Emotion Regulation Group*
- *Postgraduate Support Group.*

All of the above groups fulfil an important function of ensuring that students at risk of exiting have their wellbeing needs supported. Introduction of BA route change (1 subject) after Year 1 Semester 1 for students who have clearly made the wrong subject choice (Survey Response).

Used to inform curriculum design and topics for Student Skills Centre; Peer Support; Welcome Festival - Fáilte Fest (Survey Response).

Academic Registry and Student Experience (all student well-being and learning supports) sit within Academic & Student Affairs, enabling close collaboration in response to, and analysis of, emerging patterns. A key mechanism for acting in relation to developing institution-wide responses to emerging patterns is the College Community Welfare Committee as it has representation from across the College, as well as the Quality Assurance Steering Committee through membership of the Head of Academic Affairs (Survey Response).

Two HEIs reported that data are used to inform targeted interventions — in one case, within the specific context of access students:

Within the Access Service, the trends found in the data are used to inform professional practice and influence policy, within the Access Support team / Student Support area. The model of support is reviewed each year and updated accordingly (Survey Response).

We use it to target specific interventions, either in student support or through department module practice (Survey Response).

5.3 Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice were highlighted in responses to questions in Section 3 of the survey. These practices demonstrate proactive approaches to supporting students who do not progress and the use of data for institutional improvement:

- Individualised academic engagement: For example, one HEI reported that Academic Registry and programme staff engage with at-risk students, offering personal support and outlining options, while another HEI has implemented a process requiring students to consult with their academic School before completing the official withdrawal form, helping to ensure students are aware of alternative options and receive guidance, possibly preventing unnecessary withdrawals.
- Exit interviews and surveys for withdrawing students: Some HEIs reported conducting exit interviews or questionnaires to understand why students leave. Such data directly informs institutional learning and enables the identification of systemic issues contributing to non-progression.
- Use of data dashboards and student record systems: For example, some HEIs capture and present follow-up data in dashboards and/or in the SRS, thereby facilitating the monitoring of trends; identifying at-risk groups, and informing institutional responses.
- Tailored support for access students: For example, within the Access Service in one HEI, data are reviewed annually to improve the support model. This is important in helping to ensure that a vulnerable cohort (with higher non-progression rates than average) receives appropriate support.

Section 6: Institutional Policies, Procedures and Regulations

6.1 Introduction

The final section of the survey comprised one question focused on identifying what policies and procedures are in place within HEIs to promote student progression, for example, policies and guidelines on flexible timetabling, recorded lectures etc. HEIs were asked to state the name of the policy/regulation and provide a URL if available, as well as state the aim of the policy/regulation (e.g. a flexible timetable policy may aim to provide greater flexibility to facilitate commuting students/students in employment etc.). All 17 HEIs responded to this question.

6.2 Key Findings

The majority of responses provided links to relevant HEI policies, while one HEI responded 'N/A' to this question, and one technological university reported that legacy policies from antecedent institutes of technology are in place, without naming those procedures or providing links for them. Another HEI referenced the broad groups of policies it has in place, without naming individual policies. Not all HEIs stated the aim of the policy, and it is not clear in all cases how the named policies support student progression. Where stated, aims were often student-centred but not clearly tied to mitigating non-progression. In other cases, policies are referenced which are focused more on increasing access or pertain to general academic regulations rather than deliberately supporting progression and retention. In two instances, HEIs referred to institutional decisions (to stop live streaming lectures to encourage attendance and engagement) and to a committee (Student Status Committee) in addition to named policies.

Overall, responses to this question may highlight a broad, but fragmented policy landscape; however, institutions may have interpreted this question in different ways with not all institutions highlighting the breadth of policies in place. There was a total of 37 unique policy types identified; however, most policies were only mentioned by a single HEI. Very few HEIs cited formal progression strategies or data-driven frameworks; two HEIs referenced policies targeting first-year transitions or supports, while another referenced 'Student Support Trees'. There was a notable absence of reference to concrete retention-focused policies and procedures, such as use of early warning systems, progression analytics, or institutional strategies to increase progression rates and/or reduce attrition rates. Only one HEI referenced a dedicated "Transitions and Student Success Strategy". Some innovative policies referenced included High Performance Athlete and Student Artist Policies and Digital Education and Learning Analytics Frameworks. The most commonly cited policies were Exceptional/ Extenuating Circumstances policies (5); Reasonable Accommodations Policies (5); Recording of Lectures/Learning Activities Policies (4); Transfer Policies (3) and Exam Appeals (3).

The wide variance in how this question was addressed by responding HEIs makes it difficult to identify common themes or make comparisons, and speaks to the lack of common definitions and, perhaps,

understandings of what constitutes support for student progression. All policies referenced, the frequency with which they were referenced, and their aim (where specified) are included in Table 9 below. Note, the number of HEIs indicated for each policy should be interpreted with caution, as it is likely that most HEIs have these policies in place and did not reference them in their responses to the question.

Policy	No. of HEIs	Aim
Exceptional/Extenuating Circumstances/Mitigation Policy See I-grade regulation below also.	5	To support students who encounter unexpected circumstances that impact on their ability to prepare for or to sit an examination/To support students in articulating particular challenges they are experiencing so that support can be made available within their programme and beyond their programme, where relevant/To help students who experience serious and unanticipated difficulties which adversely affect their ability to study, complete assessments or attend.
Reasonable Accommodations / Alternative Assessment Policy	5	Ensure students with disabilities, learning differences, or ongoing health conditions receive appropriate accommodations, such as alternative assessment methods, assistive technology, etc. / Enable the recommendation of some 'Non-standard Reasonable Accommodations – Teaching & Learning' such as flexible assessment deadlines and/or flexibility with course attendance requirements. These arrangements are generally agreed on a case-by-case basis as the numbers that require non-standard accommodations are small. Students must be registered with Disability Support in one instance.
Recording of Lectures/Recorded Learning Activities Policy	4	To support students and staff in the provision and appropriate use of technologies to record learning activities that take place on campus or online/To guide lecturers on the provision of recorded lectures to students.
Admission and Transfer Policy/Transfer Policy	3	To enable students to change programmes to one which may fit their interest better (pertains to both internal and external transfers in one instance)
Exam appeals, assessment reviews and module rechecks/Appeals	3	
Leave of Absence	2	One of a range of programme supports available where a student requires a specified period of time off for a variety of personal, medical, academic or pregnancy-related reasons. Aim not stated in other instance.
Flexible timetabling/Timetabling Policy	2	Support commuting students; student-parents. Aim not stated in another instance.
First Year Focus/1 st Year Framework for Success	2	To provide guidance on the range of activities that should be undertaken to support students transition to university. Aim not stated in other instance.

Policy	No. of HEIs	Aim
High Performance Athlete Academic Flexibility Policy	2	Allow any student who is an elite athlete to progress at a slower pace to accommodate their participation in elite sport /To provide all four [...] faculties with a standard, campus- wide approach to the awarding of HPA status on enrolled elite athlete students. The policy sets out the conditions under which students are eligible to apply for HPA status and the step-by-step application process. Once a student has been awarded HPA status, the student is eligible to be in receipt of reasonable accommodations from the University to assist them to meet the requirements of both their degree programme and their outside sporting commitments.
Maternity Leave	1	
Support for Students in Crisis	1	
Deferral of Exams Guidelines	1	
Equity of Access and Participation Policy	1	Widen participation, supporting underrepresented groups, and ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds have the necessary supports to progress in their studies.
RPL Policy	1	Facilitate student entry and progression by recognising prior formal, non-formal, and informal learning, enabling greater flexibility in pathways through higher education.
Policy on English Language Proficiency (International Learners)	1	Ensure international students meet minimum language requirements to succeed academically while providing necessary language supports for progression.
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy	1	Foster an inclusive and respectful environment for all students, staff, and affiliates, promoting equal opportunities, eliminating discrimination, and advancing diversity through strategic initiatives, legal compliance, and positive action.
Park and Ride	1	Deal with undercapacity in student parking areas due to commuting crisis, providing free of charge parking in order to not add to the burden for commuting students and for those struggling financially.
Policy on Supports for Student Parents, Student Carers and Students Experiencing Pregnancy	1	Enable students to partner with their [...] Tutor and/or Course Co-ordinator in order to establish a management plan taking into account the demands of the course, the expected demands of the carers' responsibilities, and the achievement of academic standards, which enables some flexibility on a case-by-case basis to ensure students with such responsibilities are supported to progress in their course.
Late Submission of Assessed Work (Extensions)	1	Support clear communication and expectations around late submission of assessments for all students, but particularly those who have reasonable accommodations.

Policy	No. of HEIs	Aim
Undergraduate Progression and Awards Regulations	1	Provide students in undergraduate programmes the automatic right to re-assessment in an academic year and to repeat an academic year once. There is also provision for compensation to apply to in certain circumstances. Individual programmes may receive derogations to certain aspects of these regulations, normally where professional accreditation applies. Students who are not able to progress within the boundaries of the progression and award regulations for their programme may put forward an Appeal to progress.
Feedback Policy	1	To assist students in understanding what performance standards are required and identify pathways for improvement.
Student Charter	1	Outline what students can expect of the HEI and what the university expects from students to maximise the educational, personal and developmental needs of all learners.
Consultation Days Guidelines	1	To facilitate meetings with lecturers to allow students to see how marks were allocated and seek feedback on improving academic performance.
Marks and Standards	1	Regulations pertaining to progression, compensation regulations and resits.
Transitions and Student Success Strategy	1	
Student Support Tree	1	Outline all pastoral supports available to students
HEI Education Model	1	Set out the guiding principles that will provide “A supported landscape of choices and experiences through which learners attending [...] can learn and grow, offering them the skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications they require”.
Digital Education and Digital Capability Framework	1	Set out how modules can be delivered providing flexibility in structure, mode, and place of delivery to suit learners and to support a digitally enhanced student learning experience. Can be used by staff to ensure the quality of module and programme delivery is in line with the QQI statutory guidelines for providers of blended and online delivery
Academic Regulations Continuation – Academic Progress Policy and Procedures	1	To ensure students are eligible to continue with their studies
Student Mental Health and Well-being Policy	1	To promote and support a whole university approach to mental health and wellbeing support and provide clear information relating to sources of help and supports available to students
Fitness to continue study policy and procedure	1	Framework to support students where a concern is raised regarding a student’s fitness to continue in study and the type of action that may be taken to support the student and manage the matter.

Policy	No. of HEIs	Aim
Policy on the Use of Data to Enhance Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Learning Analytics Policy)	1	To provide accurate and actionable insights into the learning process through the exploration, modelling and aggregation of relevant data and to provide an evidence base for optimising the conditions in which learning can flourish
I-grade regulation	1	'I-grade' stands for 'Incomplete grade'. An I-grade helps a student who faces issues affecting their ability to take end-of-semester exams. Being approved for an I-grade means that their exam or assessment will be rescheduled, usually during the repeat exam period in August, and no penalty (grade cap or repeat exam fee) is applied.
Student Artist Policy	1	To provide students who have become or who are developing as artists with a standard, university-wide approach to support enrolled students. The policy sets out the conditions under which students are eligible for this support and outlines the processes through which they can apply for reasonable accommodations to assist them to meet the requirements of both their degree programme and their artistic commitments

Table 9: Policies and procedures identified by HEIs as being in place to promote student progression

Discussion

This analysis of responses to a HEA survey on HEI data and interventions to address student non-progression and withdrawal found that data collection across HEIs is strongest in the early years of programmes, particularly in Year 1 of NFQ Level 8 programmes, but declines notably in subsequent years, especially within programmes at Levels 6 and 7 on the NFQ. The lack of complete data collection for Levels 6 and 7 is notable given that these programmes have higher non-progression rates (23% and 25% respectively, compared to 9% for Level 8). There also remains a clear need for more comprehensive and systematic tracking of diverse student cohorts, especially those considered vulnerable or non-traditional. Only one HEI reported that they track progression data for first-generation students or those in employment. There is very limited analysis of other groups, such as carers or students from ethnic minorities. This lack of disaggregated data limits the capacity for informed, targeted interventions. HEIs with more cohort-specific data were more likely to identify students at higher risk of non-progression, showing the value of granular analysis.

The timing and methodology for reviewing progression and retention data vary widely across institutions, indicating a lack of standardisation in practice. Notably, peak periods for student withdrawals occur early in the academic year, primarily before the end of October and then before the end of Semester 1, presenting valuable opportunities for timely and targeted interventions. However, just over half of HEIs (53%) examine non-progression data in the following academic year. This delay may reduce the ability of institutions to intervene proactively. Immediate or ongoing analysis could allow HEIs to identify and support at-risk students at an earlier stage, especially during known high-risk periods. HEIs indicated that they recognise these data gaps and limitations, with some beginning to adopt more nuanced tracking systems and cohort-specific analyses to improve student progression and outcomes.

Survey responses indicate that the risk factors for non-progression are well recognised but are inconsistently tracked. In common with previous findings by the HEA and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, low CAO points and wrong course choice are the most commonly cited risk factors. However, data on these characteristics are not widely or systematically collected. One HEI raised concerns around data sensitivity and profiling, indicating a need for ethical frameworks that support actionable insight without compromising student rights or institutional legal obligations. HEIs also signalled a need for more data on commuting, student engagement with virtual learning networks, and class and library attendance. However, definitions (for example, on what constitutes “commuting”) and metrics (for example, in relation to engagement) are absent. Additionally, technological challenges in collecting and sharing data, especially (though not exclusively) in technological universities, which are still developing integrated student record systems, hinder comprehensive analysis of data in all cases. Data-informed interventions exist, with some HEIs reporting the use of data to design targeted interventions (e.g. support for access route students); however, the brief nature of some survey responses limits our understanding of how widespread such interventions are in practice, or of institutional capacity across the sector to act on data insights.

Thirteen out of 17 HEIs (76%) have institution-wide mechanisms for identifying students at risk of non-progression. Tools and approaches reported for identifying at-risk students include:

- Tracking engagement through virtual learning environments (e.g., Moodle, Brightspace)
- Reviewing Semester 1 exam results

- Monitoring attendance (in some cases)
- Structured staff intervention (by Heads of Department, Programme Directors etc.)
- Use of pre-exam board meetings and student support services.

Data-informed identification appears to be established in some HEIs, particularly through digital learning analytics and review of assessment outcomes. A few HEIs stand out with highly structured, proactive frameworks (e.g., “Talk Before You Walk” and centralised dashboards). The lack of universal attendance monitoring also reflects an area for future consideration, given the National Forum’s findings in relation to student motivation and engagement as a factor in student non-progression (2015).

Eleven HEIs (65%) reported having centralised engagement with students at risk of non-progression, while nine HEIs confirmed that there is engagement with at-risk students at the faculty/school/department level. Responses indicate that student support offices (e.g., Access, Disability, Mature Student Services) and roles (e.g., Year Tutors, Student Support Officers) play a crucial role in identifying and supporting at-risk students. Just over half of HEIs (9 out of 17) follow up with non-progressed students. Even among those HEIs that do conduct follow-up, practices are inconsistent. Some institutions only target specific student cohorts (e.g., students returning from a Leave of Absence), while others engage more broadly, particularly post-examinations. This disparity reflects a systemic gap in institutional policy and suggests the need for sector-wide guidance.

Fifteen of the seventeen HEIs (88%) reported collecting data on reasons for non-progression, though response quality and consistency varied considerably. A minority do not collect or hold anecdotal data, especially in the institutions in the technological higher education sector. When asked to rank reasons for non-progression, most HEIs identified course choice and personal circumstances as the top two reasons for non-progression and withdrawal, with lesser relevance assigned to ‘returning home’ and availability of accommodation. The ‘Other’ category revealed a range of additional factors such as visa issues, dissatisfaction with staff or student life, childcare challenges, and culture shock, pointing to the complex, often multifactorial nature of student withdrawal. Survey responses strongly indicate that standardised data categories and improved data collection mechanisms are essential to accurately capture, understand and respond to student needs and student non-progression. The vast majority of HEIs (14 out of 17) do not track what happens to students after they withdraw (e.g., employment, transfer, etc.). Only one institution reported maintaining such data. Without outcomes data, it is difficult to evaluate the long-term impact of withdrawal for students or the effectiveness of institutional interventions.²³

Few HEIs provided examples of how data informs policies and interventions to address non-progression. Examples provided include expanded student wellbeing initiatives, curriculum adjustments, and tailored supports for Access students. Notably, one HEI developed a BA route change after Semester 1 in Year 1 to accommodate students who have made the wrong subject choice. In general, however, it appears that while data are collected, they are often under-utilised. In relation to institutional policies and procedures supporting student progression, survey responses demonstrate some positive institutional initiatives; however, the overall picture is fragmented and inconsistent. The wide variance in responses underscores a lack of shared definitions around what constitutes a “progression-supporting” policy and reveals inconsistencies in how institutions understand and document such policies. A total of 37 unique policy

²³ The HEA has a role in this regard: national new entrants data held by the HEA can help determine whether students have transferred to another HEI. The HEA can also work with the CSO to establish employment and educational outcomes for students.

types were identified, but most were mentioned by only one HEI. Only a handful of policies appeared with any frequency (e.g., Exceptional Circumstances and Reasonable Accommodations policies were each reported by 5 HEIs). It is worth noting, however, that all HEIs are likely have these policies in place, but did not highlight them in response to the survey question as they may not have considered them relevant. This implies that there is no clear national or sector-wide strategy guiding student progression and that student progression is not always formally supported through a dedicated policy at institutional level. Most initiatives appear to be localised and institution-specific. Few HEIs referenced formal progression strategies, data analytics, or early intervention systems. Only one institution cited a “Transitions and Student Success Strategy,” and only one referred to a Learning Analytics Policy. Despite increasing emphasis on evidence-based student support, many HEIs report not having integrated, data-driven frameworks to guide progression and retention efforts, further evidence of potential system-level and infrastructure constraints currently faced by some HEIs. Few mentions were made of recognised best practices in student retention, such as early warning systems; predictive analytics; structured academic advising frameworks; and cohort tracking or intervention programmes. A few HEIs showcased innovative policies addressing Digital Education Frameworks; Learning Analytics; Student Support Trees; and High-Performance Athlete and Student Artist Policies.

Conclusion

Findings from this survey highlight that while all HEIs are engaged in collecting non-progression and withdrawal data, significant variation exists in:

- The depth of data collected;
- The cohorts examined;
- The timeliness of analysis; and
- The institutional integration of data into policy and intervention design.

Many HEIs are making significant efforts to identify and support at-risk students using both academic performance data and engagement metrics. The presence of dedicated support services adds considerable value. However, systemic issues (fragmented data systems, lack of shared definitions, GDPR concerns) limit some HEIs' ability to harness data effectively. While data often informs institutional planning, its use in targeted, real-time interventions remains inconsistent. In a number of instances, activity at the local level is conducted informally, with practice varying across schools and departments. Investment in robust learning and data analytics and related resources is likely to make a significant contribution to ensuring that national and institutional strategies and policies in this area are evidence informed and effective.

Data collection is strongest at NFQ Level 8 and in early programme years, but weakest where attrition is highest (Levels 6 and 7). The lack of comprehensive data reported by HEIs, especially for vulnerable student populations and NFQ Level 6 and 7 programmes represents both a system-level and institution-level vulnerability. There is strong potential to improve outcomes through earlier, more granular, and more consistently integrated data practices across institutions.

There is also significant opportunity for HEIs to develop and harmonise their strategies to counter student non-progression, contributing to a cohesive sector-wide approach to increasing student completion rates. The wide variability in practices reported across HEIs, especially between traditional and technological universities, suggests a need for national or sectoral frameworks to standardise data collection and follow-up practices. While many institutions collect data on non-progression, far fewer use it to drive change. Institutions should be encouraged to develop internal processes that turn data into measurable action. The limited follow-up with non-progressed students (for example, through exit interviews, surveys, etc.) represents a missed opportunity to better understand and address factors leading to withdrawal and to re-engage students or address issues before they leave a HEI. Overall, the survey findings point to a system with localised strengths, but which would benefit from more coherent, institution-wide or sector-wide progression strategies.

Finally, it appears from survey responses that the 23 recommendations made by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in 2015²⁴ remain pertinent today. Whilst all 23 recommendations are relevant, the most salient of those recommendations considering the findings

²⁴ National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2015) *Why Students Leave: Findings from Qualitative Research into Student Non-Completion in Higher Education in Ireland: Focused Research Report No. 4*. Available at: [NF-2015-Why-Students-Leave-Findings-from-Qualitative-Research-into-Student-Non-Completion-in-Higher-Education-in-Ireland.pdf](#)

from this survey (and which are addressed to HEIs rather than to Government and the higher education system as a whole) are reiterated here:

- Recommendation 1: Systematic and standardised qualitative data should be gathered as a matter of course by all higher education institutions from students who withdraw from their course.
- Recommendation 2: Development of a common exit form that includes open-ended questions seeking to elucidate why such a decision has been reached; what, if anything, might have helped them to stay; and whether the student plans to re-enter higher education in the immediate future.
- Recommendation 5: Review of the marketing strategy and its “fit” with course content and academic demands.
- Recommendation 6: Review of entry requirements in relation to students’ second-level subject choices and Leaving Certificate results in areas of particular relevance.
- Recommendation 7: Review of assessment feedback and academic support structures with particular focus on the first three months of a programme, thereby creating an “academic early warning system”.
- Recommendation 8: Reviews of internal transfer mechanisms and supports to ensure that such opportunities are maximised for students who might otherwise withdraw.
- Recommendation 9: Audit of the academic and administrative supports needed to identify and advise students who have become disenchanted with their chosen course.
- Recommendation 10: More focus on general learning skills at higher education in the early weeks of first year, as well as building curricula interventions that promote student engagement and student resilience in their higher education studies.
- Recommendation 11: Identifying students from intake statistics who might be particularly vulnerable to poor social integration either because they are the only one attending from a particular second-level school, or whose home is a considerable distance away.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this survey, the following recommendations are made to both the HEA and to HEIs:

1. The HEA is encouraged to consider the development of a national framework for good practice on student non-progression. Such a framework should include definitions of key terms and propose common metrics for the measurement of non-progression, as well as guidelines for HEIs on follow-up with students post withdrawal and related outcome tracking to support student success more consistently across the sector. Finally, the framework could consider how HEIs in the sector can be supported to effectively harness learning and data analytics and related resources to ensure evidence-informed approaches to mitigating student non-progression.
2. Informed by national approaches, HEIs should develop and embed institution-wide strategies and policies on non-progression that reflect local academic contexts and student profiles.
3. HEIs should explore ways, including use of new technologies, such as AI, to increase and enhance use of learning analytics and early intervention systems to identify students at risk of non-progression and devise appropriate and effective interventions. Efforts should include systematic use of non-progression data to inform policy development and the implementation of targeted interventions.
4. HEIs should ensure that data on non-progression for all Year 1 students on full-time programmes leading to major awards at Levels 6 and 7 on the NFQ are captured and examined within all HEIs. HEIs should take steps to ensure data are examined in the academic year in which they are collected to inform early intervention strategies and measures.
5. HEIs to consider capturing and examining student progression rates across all years of all relevant programmes and across a range of student cohorts.
6. HEIs to consider increasing efforts to systematically follow up with non-progressed students in an ethical manner.
7. HEIs are encouraged to continue to collaborate and share innovative and effective practices across the sector.

Appendix A: Participating Higher Education Institutions

Atlantic Technological University

Dublin City University

Dundalk Institute of Technology

Institute of Art, Design & Technology

Mary Immaculate College

Maynooth University

Munster Technological University

National College of Art and Design

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

South East Technological University

Technological University Dublin

Technological University of the Shannon

Trinity College Dublin

University College Cork

University College Dublin

University of Galway

University of Limerick

Appendix B: Policy Forum Members

Chair

Dr. Áine Ní Shé (MTU)

HEI Associates

Marese Bermingham (MTU)

Professor Brian Bowe (TU Dublin)

Patrick Brophy (IADT)

David Denieffe (SETU)

Dr. Rachel Keegan (DCU)

Rhona McCormack (UL)

Marie McPeak (Trinity College Dublin)

Finola McTernan (NCAD)

Susan Mulkeen (UCD)

Paul O'Donovan (UCC)

Dr. Owen Ross (TUS)

Dr. Deirdre Ryan (MIC)

Brendan Ryder (DkIT)

Dr. Perry Share (ATU)

Professor Judith Strawbridge (RCSI)

Professor Tim Thompson (Maynooth University)

Dr. Becky Whay (University of Galway)

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Appendix D: Survey



Student Progression in Higher Education: HEI Data and Interventions

Context

The HEA Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education is establishing a national evidence base on student progression. The HEA is inviting HEIs to contribute to this evidence base by completing two forms.

This form (reporting template) asks what data are currently captured and shared across your institution with respect to student progression and retention, and how the data are used to promote progression and/or to address non-progression.

Please refer to the accompanying guidelines for further information and definition of terms.

1. **Institution name:**
2. **Programme levels on offer (major awards, full-time programmes delivered in person): select all that apply.** NFQ Levels 6/7/8

Institutional Data (major awards, full-time programmes delivered in person)

3. Select the student cohorts for which data on non-progression and retention are captured by the institution annually. (Where certain year groups are not relevant to a given NFQ Level, they can be left blank.)
NFQ Level 6 – year 1, year 2, year 3, year 4, year 5, year 6
NFQ Level 7 – year 1, year 2, year 3, year 4, year 5, year 6
NFQ Level 8 – year 1, year 2, year 3, year 4, year 5, year 6
4. Indicate the timeframes during the academic year for which non-progression data are available and are examined by the institution (at institutional level).
Timeframes apply to each year cohort — Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4, Year 5, Year 6.
 - First 6–8 weeks of Semester 1
 - End of Semester 1
 - Commencement of Semester 2
 - End of Semester 2
 - Not examined/not applicable
5. When are the data mentioned in Q4 examined? (see guidelines)
 - In the same academic year
 - In the following academic year

- Not applicable
6. Are progression and/or retention data for the following student cohorts considered and examined by the institution? (Tick yes/no/not applicable)
- HEAR
 - DARE
 - Foundation programmes (where provided)
 - FET/QQI entry routes
 - Mature student entry
 - Students registered with the disability service post enrolment
 - Students in the care system
 - Students who have left the care system
 - First-generation students
 - Commuting students
 - Students also in employment
 - Students by discipline and programme
 - Students by gender
 - Students by country of domicile/ethnicity
 - Other (please specify) _____
7. Can you identify the time of year that sees the highest rate of non-progression/withdrawals?
- Yes, based on data
 - Yes, anecdotally
 - No
- If yes, please outline (with reference to NFQ Level and year group, if relevant).
8. Does your institution have data on the characteristics of students who are at greatest risk of non-progression? Yes/No
Please highlight the characteristics of these students, where appropriate.
9. What additional data are needed to address non-progression rates in your institution?
How do you plan to capture these data?
10. How are non-progression data reported at institutional level? What is the role of non-progression data in informing institutional policies/initiative development?
11. How are the available non-progression data harnessed to enable evidence-informed approaches to addressing non-progression?

Students at risk of non-progression

12. Are institution-wide mechanisms in place to identify students at risk of non-progression, e.g. review of semester assessment grades, or attendance records? Yes/No.
If yes, please explain.

13. If no, are mechanisms in place at Faculty/School/department level? Yes/in some instances/No.
14. Is there any centralised engagement with students at risk of non-progression? Yes/No.
If yes, please outline.
15. If no, is there engagement with those students at the Faculty/School/department level? Yes/No.

Non-progressed students — follow-up at institutional level (across all disciplines/programmes)

16. Does your institution follow up with students who have not progressed? Yes/No.
If yes, please outline.
17. Does your institution collect data on student-reported reasons for non-progression/withdrawal? Yes/No.
18. If no to Q17, are anecdotal data available from other institutional sources? Yes/No.

If you answered No to both Q17 and Q18, please proceed to the next page.

19. **Student-reported reasons for non-progression** (where relying on anecdotal data, please respond to the question as best you can): review the options provided below and rank in order of prevalence, where 1 is the most prevalent reason. If certain options are not known to be applicable, select N/A instead of including them in the ranking.

Reason	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
• Course choice (e.g. wrong choice, difficulty, workload, other)										
• Institution (e.g. institution did not suit)										
• Family circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement, lack of support etc.)										
• Personal circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement (outside of family))										
• Financial reasons (cost of living)										
• Availability of accommodation (not financial)										
• To gain employment (career move, not financially motivated)										
• To return home (not resident in Ireland)										
• Other (please state below)										

- Course choice (e.g. wrong choice, difficulty, workload, other)
- Institution (e.g. institution did not suit)
- Family circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement, lack of support etc.)
- Personal circumstances (e.g. health, bereavement (outside of family))
- Financial reasons (cost of living)
- Availability of accommodation (not financial)
- To gain employment (career move, not financially motivated)
- To return home (not resident in Ireland)
- Other (please state below)

20. If you answered "Other" in Q19, please clarify here.

21. Are data/information on **student outcomes** (e.g. in employment, transferred to another programme) available upon follow-up with **non-progressed students**? Yes/No.

22. If yes, please rank the following from 1–9, where 1 is the most prevalent outcome and 9 the least.

Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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- Returned to course with supports
- Transferred to another course
- Year off books
- Transferred to another institution
- Employment
- NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Travelled abroad/emigrated
- Returned home (not resident in Ireland)
- Other (please state)

23. If you answered "Other" in Q22, please clarify here.

24. Describe the mechanisms in place (if any) **to report on follow-up with non-progressed students.**

25. How do you use data gathered, resulting from **follow-up with non-progressed students**, to inform policy/initiative development?

HEI policies/procedures/regulations

26. What policies/regulations are in place to support progression in your institution e.g. policies and guidelines on flexible timetabling, recorded lectures etc? Please state the name of the policy/regulation and provide URL if available.
In your response, state the aim of the policy/regulation (e.g. flexible timetable policy may aim to provide greater flexibility to facilitate commuting students/students in employment etc.).

Appendix E: Guidelines on Survey Completion



Student Progression in Higher Education

Guidelines to support completion of forms to capture information on HEI practices

The HEA is inviting institutions to complete two forms: (i) HEI Data and Interventions and (ii) Case Studies to establish:

- what data are captured and shared across each higher education institution with respect to student progression and retention,
- how data are used,
- what initiatives are in place to promote progression across the student life cycle and/or to address non-progression rates.

These guidelines have been developed to support completion of the forms.

Scope: information to be provided only with respect to full-time in-person programmes offered at NFQ Levels 6–8.

Where the term ‘**institutional**’ is used, it relates to institution-wide initiatives rather than programme-specific initiatives that have been agreed and implemented locally.

Institutions are asked to provide information with respect to:

- Data** — data captured, considered, shared and reported across the institution rather than at programme/local level.
- Interventions/initiatives** — interventions/initiatives in place across the institution i.e. institution-wide rather than in place for a specific programme or discipline. Examples include initiatives targeting all new entrants regardless of programme or all second-year students or international students across all programmes etc.
- Initiatives/interventions** in place that have been **agreed at institutional level**. This includes initiatives that are not necessarily aimed at all students; however, they have been considered by a central authority e.g. an academic committee of Council. For example, the institution has decided to specifically address STEM non-progression rates.

- (iv) **Case studies** — it is recommended that no more than one case study is provided for new entrants. This is to capture the range of initiatives/measures that are in place across the student lifecycle.

Definition of Terms

Actions: These are activities undertaken to implement objectives. They represent an attempt to improve a way of working to produce a better outcome. Actions may change or be adapted over the short term in response to external factors or in response to learnings.

Aim/goal: an aim/goal relates to the purpose of an initiative and what it sets out to achieve. An aim/goal should be specific and achievable.

Impact describes the positive effect or change that occurs as a result of a well-executed action and is usually medium to long term.

Evaluation of Impact: Effective evaluation of the impact of an objective goes beyond monitoring (i.e. the ongoing process of systematically collecting data on an outcome to check if an action has been implemented correctly). Evaluating impact involves the systematic assessment of an objective and its design, implementation, and results. Evaluation is concerned with an objective's effectiveness (i.e. did it do what it was intended to do?) and efficiency (i.e. did it do this well?) to assess its impact and sustainability. Therefore, achieving and evidencing impact requires measurable targets, well-managed implementation, and a strategic approach to gathering and evaluating quantitative or qualitative data.

Non-progressed: The HEA definition of non-progressed will apply. A student is deemed to have progressed if they are present in the same institution in the following academic year.

Objective is a succinct statement of a specific aim/goal for performance that the initiative will achieve or attain over the lifetime of that initiative. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART).

Outcomes are the results of actions or activities. They reflect the changes that will contribute towards impact. The outcome of an action or activity is an indicator of whether it will be impactful over time. Outcomes may be evaluated in terms of measurable improvement (or sustained performance) in efficiency or effectiveness of activities or actions, e.g. percentage of students from a target group that progress to year 2.

Notes to assist with specific questions in the forms

HEI Data and Interventions form

- **Q3 and Q4** include options for “Year 5” and “Year 6”. These options are included because they may be applicable for certain disciplines such as medicine or dentistry. Most programmes within the scope of this reporting template (NFQ Level 6–8) will be of four years duration or less, so the Year 5 and 6 options can be left blank or marked “not applicable”. (Note: the undergraduate degree element of integrated Master’s programmes, where these are delivered, are within scope.)

- **Q4** asks for the timeframes for which non-progression data for each year cohort are available and are subsequently considered at institutional level (e.g. specific reports are generated and/or the data are considered at an academic committee of Council and/or by an office or section with responsibility for student progression/non-progression). Please do not select timeframes for data that are not examined at institutional level.
- **Q5** asks about when the data referred to in Q4 are examined. If they are examined at institutional level in the same academic year as they were collected, select "in the same academic year". If they are examined at a later date, i.e. the student cohort in question has since progressed, select "in the following academic year".

For example, if student progression data are collected at the end of Semester 1 of the current academic year and are examined at a meeting of Academic Council/section with responsibility for student progression at the start of Semester 2, select "in the same academic year". If non-progression data from the commencement of semester 2 are considered by the institution in October (start of a new academic year), select "in the following academic year".

- **Q6** asks whether progression data for specific cohorts are specifically examined at institutional level. "Yes" means that the data for that cohort are specifically isolated and considered as a unit. "No" means that the progression data for that cohort are not specifically isolated and considered as a unit (regardless of whether the data exists or not). "Not applicable" means that there is no such cohort in the institution, e.g. there are no foundation programmes.
- **Q22:** As with Q19, some options can be marked as not applicable rather than included in the ranking.
- **Q26** asks about policies and regulations, not initiatives and measures. Therefore, there should be no need to duplicate information that will be included in the Case Study form.

Case Studies form

- If you wish to include supplemental information on the case study you are describing, please send it as a Word doc or in PDF format to policy@hea.ie.

Once the templates have been returned by Institutions, the HEA will undertake an analysis of the data and prepare a report presenting key findings, trends, and themes arising from the data.

