

English Studies Provision in UK Higher Education

June 2023

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Foreword by the Advisory Group

English Studies today takes many forms, but common to all is the centrality of texts, whether literary, linguistic, or creative. Students of English learn to be interlocutors of texts, examining their place in history and culture, their structures and languages, the themes and concepts they explore. English Studies disciplines take the ‘text’, in its broadest form, as their core material. This includes prose, poetry and drama, but also extends to film and media, practice-based creative writing, and spoken language, the latter being central to English Language studies.

Histories of the discipline have been both complex and contested. Unlike Theology or Classics, English is comparatively young as a university subject. English Language and Literature did not emerge as a widely taught, autonomous, degree in the UK until late in the nineteenth century, although it had been taught and studied in non-university settings such as Mechanics’ Institutes and dissenting academies before that time and ‘rhetoric and belles-lettres’ had been a component of the Scottish university system from the mid-eighteenth century on. It first appeared as a component of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in the University of London, being taught (not yet as a fully-fledged degree subject) in University College London from 1828; from the 1830s it formed part of the London University Matriculation examinations. It could be studied for an Honours degree from 1859; King’s College London made English a component of its BA degree in 1860 and by the 1880s it was offered in all the new ‘civic’ universities (Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool and Queen’s College Belfast, for example). Separate courses in English were established at Oxford in 1894 and Cambridge in 1917.

However, it is not possible to understand the development of English Studies without considering the context of British colonial rule. While English could be studied as an Honours degree in England from 1859, the study of English Language and Literature was established in India well before that as the basis of a programme of moral and ethical instruction designed to create an Anglicized native elite. Indeed, by the 1830s, the curriculum of the secular, government-funded schools and colleges in India would be somewhat familiar to those studying English Literature today. Texts studied included Richardson, Goldsmith, Gray, Addison, Pope, Shakespeare, Milton, and Johnson among others.

The development of English Language and Literature as an autonomous subject in UK higher education in the nineteenth century emerged from two further contexts. One of these was the growing importance of scholarly enquiry into the origins, structure and development of the English language in Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and early Middle English and the literatures – Beowulf, The Edda, Chaucer – of these societies. This serious research had begun in the eighteenth century, and it continued through the nineteenth, culminating in the philological work of scholars such as William Skeat, who wrote, for instance, on English etymology (1887) and Chaucer (1900). English Literature, Language and Linguistics developed out of this philological practice of the early twentieth century, with Language and Linguistics developing a scientific methodology for the study of language. The second context was the prolific growth of the periodical press in England and its buoyant reviewing of literature, particularly contemporary literature. From the early Edinburgh Review to the mid-century Cornhill Magazine, where Matthew Arnold published Culture and Anarchy (1867-8), quarterlies, monthlies and weeklies flourished, and from this lively background emerged the idea of the professional critic, and thence the professionalised study of the canon of English Literature. Many nineteenth-century critics were also deeply influenced by the example of their German contemporaries, especially in terms of textual scholarship – indeed, their critical perspectives on Shakespeare were particularly influential.

What, then, did an English degree look like in its early manifestations? The syllabus of the typical English degree up to the late 1940s was mainly chronological and its method mainly historical and philological: it would begin with Old and Middle English language and literature and the history of the language, and progress through historical periods (Renaissance and Shakespeare, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) to the 'modern' period. During the 40s and 50s, however, that historical approach was challenged by the emphasis on the 'close reading' of 'the words on the page' espoused by 'New Critics' such as William Empson, F. R. Leavis and I.A. Richards. That method – one of close, sustained, attention to the language of texts – has remained an enduring characteristic of English Literature degrees, persisting even in the face of upheavals in the discipline in the 1970s, 80s and 90s wherein a wide variety of theoretical approaches such as structuralism, Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism challenged what had come to be seen as the overly conservative premises of New Criticism, especially with regard to its traditional conceptions of the canon, and its often apolitical framing of authors and their works (Empson was a notable exception to this rule).

Those challenges, perhaps especially those of feminist critics and more latterly postcolonial ones, transformed both the content of English Literature and Language degrees (syllabi, canon and 'text' are now a good deal more capacious than they once were) and the sense of what a student might focus on (it is hard to think of a degree now where consideration of the representation of women would not figure somewhere, for example). A parallel development, starting in the 1960s, was the rise of Creative Writing. Creative Writing had formed part of undergraduate and Master of Fine Arts degrees in some US institutions for some time. Undergraduate degrees at two new universities, Lancaster and UEA, experimented with Creative Writing courses from the late 60s, and Malcolm Bradbury established one of the earliest Creative Writing degrees (though only for the novel) in 1970. In recent years, Creative Writing has become a significant part of the offerings of most universities, although sometimes it sits with Film and Media rather than with English; it is very popular with students, and many universities now count noted authors as well as critics and language specialists among their teaching staff.

As a discipline, English Studies in all its various forms (Language, Literature, Creative Writing and combinations both of those strands of the discipline and with other subjects in Dual and Combined Honours provision,) was buoyant until the first decade of this century. But in recent years numbers have experienced a precipitous decline both at A level and at university.¹ Less than ten years ago English A levels were the most popular of A level subjects; last year they dropped out of the top ten. Government-led changes in the GCSE curriculum, the increasing emphasis on graduate wages and valorisation of STEM subjects over the humanities, along with the cessation of the AS level as a qualification from which one could progress to A Level have been among the reasons cited for this decline. The English Association and University English are currently collaborating with stakeholders across the English community to better understand this story.

What, however, can the student who goes on to study English at university expect to encounter today and what kinds of expertise will they emerge with? English Studies' self-conscious examination of what it is, what it does, and what kind of graduates it wants to produce is a feature of the discipline. The results of these interrogations are a range of core syllabi and options which evidence the immense imaginative energy that has been deployed in the evolution of English Studies' subject matter and approaches. For example, postcolonial criticism and eco-criticism are enabling students to get involved in addressing some of most urgent and pressing problems of the present and the future. Whether students study Literature, Language or Creative Writing, they will encounter a breadth of complex texts, both in English

¹ NATE, 'The Decline in Student Choice of A Level English: A NATE position paper', *Teaching English* 24, pp.4-8.

and in translation, and engage with an extraordinary variety of discourse and communication in written, spoken or digital form. Independent critical analysis of and creative interaction with the texts and languages of past and present cultures is central to their training. Alongside graduates across SHAPE disciplines, English Studies graduates will also have developed 8 of the top 10 skills declared as essential for 2025 by the World Economic Forum.² They enter the public sphere with vital subject expertise and a wealth of professional skills, meeting present and future challenges with a critical understanding of language, communications and cultural discourses.

This foreword's rapid journey through the complex development of English Studies is intended to frame the British Academy's report on the health of our disciplines. The development of English Studies has been iterative and self-reflexive, responding and contributing to understanding the most pressing problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Advisory Group welcomes the evidence presented in this report as a tool for the community in the continued reflection and collaboration on the present and future of English Studies.

² World Economic Forum (2020), *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them* [March 2023].

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Key findings

1 Between 2012 and 2019, the number of first degree undergraduates across English Studies fell by 20%.

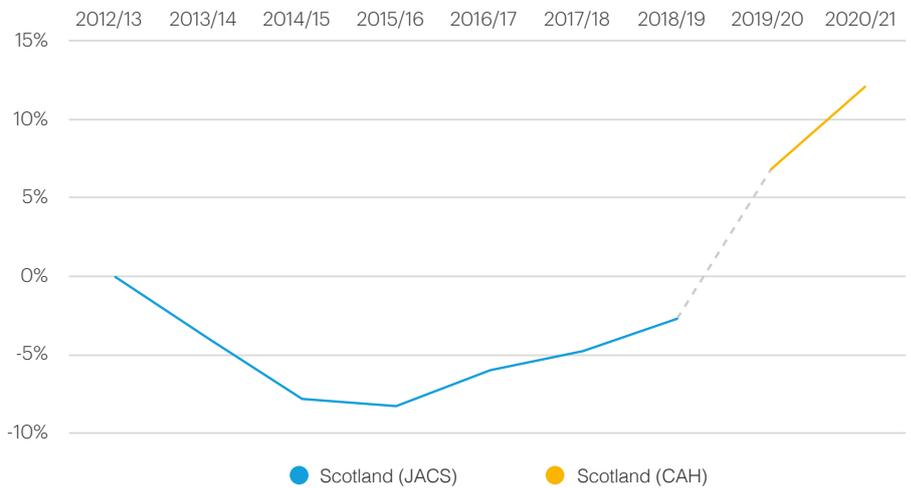
2 This decrease was not even across UK devolved administrations. While first degree students domiciled in England, Northern Ireland and Wales fell between 2012 and 2021, those domiciled in Scotland rose by 12%.

3 Creative Writing is the most popular postgraduate subject in English Studies. In 2020/21, 49% of English Studies postgraduate taught students were enrolled on Creative Writing courses.

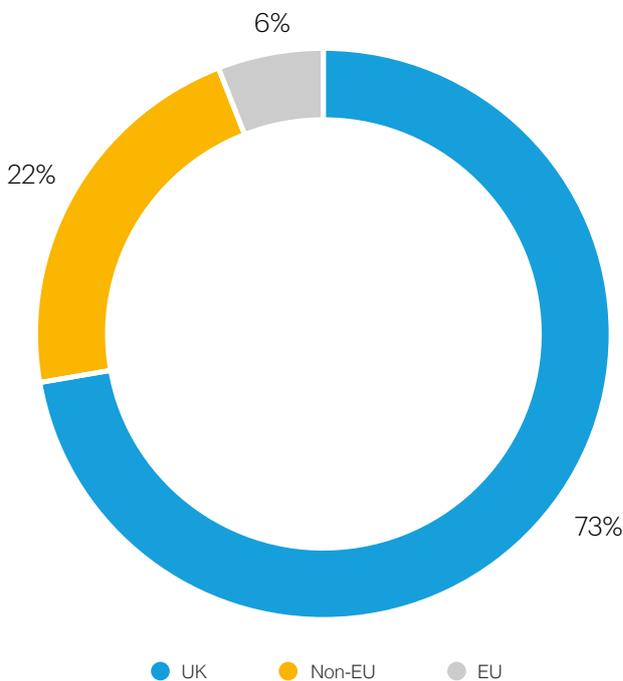
4 English literature courses are currently the most popular undergraduate English Studies subject. In 2020/21, 38% of first degree undergraduates across English Studies were enrolled on to literature degrees.

5 Since 2012, there has been an increase of 29% in English Studies postgraduate taught students, and an increase of 8% in postgraduate research students.

English Studies first degree undergraduates from Scotland, 2012-2021



Percentage of postgraduate research students by domicile, 2020/21



6 English Studies has healthy proportions of international students at postgraduate levels, demonstrating the international calibre of UK higher education in this disciplinary area. In 2020/21, international students made up 20% of postgraduate taught students and 28% of postgraduate research students.

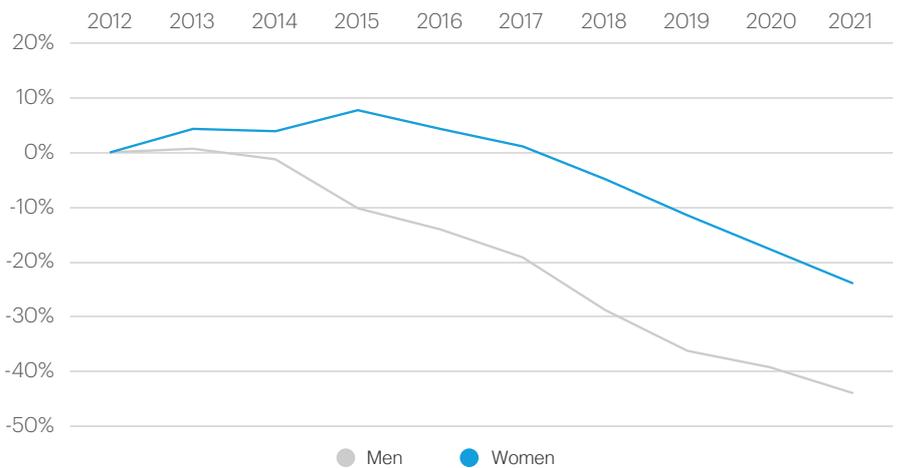
7 English Studies graduates develop vital skills for employers in a changing UK economy. These include advanced critical thinking and communication skills, creative approaches to problems and comfort with ambiguity.

8 In 2020/21, academic staff in English Studies made up 22% of academic staff across humanities cost centres. However, there has been a decline of 6% in the number of academic staff in English Studies between 2018 to 2021.

9 English Studies graduates are employed in professional roles 15 months after leaving their studies. In 2019/20, 57% of first degree leavers in employment were in 'Professional' or 'Associate Professional' roles. This proportion grew at postgraduate levels, with 70% of master's graduates and 84% of doctoral leavers in employment working in 'Professional' or 'Associated Professional' roles.

10 Men are under-represented in English Studies degrees and their enrolment is falling more quickly compared to women. Between 2010 and 2021, there was a decrease of 44% in acceptances onto English Studies undergraduate degrees by men, compared to a fall of 24% among women.

Change in English Studies acceptances by men and women, 2012-2021

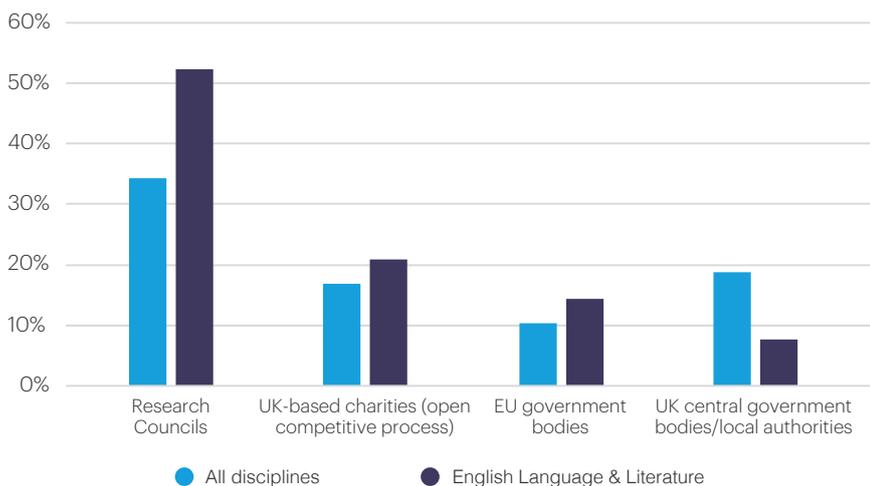


11 In 2020/21, a greater proportion of staff who are female and/or from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds were on fixed-term or atypical contracts than all staff in English Studies.

12 English Studies is more reliant on Research Council funding compared to other humanities disciplines. Currently, 46% of all research income for English Studies came from Research Council funding, a large proportion of which was funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

13 English Studies research is vital outside of higher education. The REF 2021 impact case studies highlight the diverse positive impact of English Studies research across the economy, health, technology, culture and the arts, society and inclusion, and the environment.

Research grants & contracts income for English Studies and across all disciplines, 2020/21



14 English Studies research across the UK is world-leading. The Research Excellence Framework 2021 exercise found that 48% of English Studies research was 4* or world-leading, with 4* research happening in every submitting institution. This reflects a high performing discipline across indicators of research excellence.

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Introduction

Context

As the UK's National Academy for the humanities and social sciences, it is the British Academy's role to support, strengthen and champion these disciplines. This report has been produced as part of the Academy's wider Observatory function, which seeks to monitor the health and sustainability of SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines. It follows previous Academy studies on its constituent disciplines. This includes the pilot report on the provision of *Theology and Religious Studies* (2019) in UK higher education and a report on *Business and Management Studies* (2021). The Academy is committed to providing its community of constituent disciplines with the evidence required to understand and reflect on their health and sustainability. Doing so not only highlights the value of the discipline to society but equips its academic community with a clearer understanding of how it might respond in order to support the development of teaching and research in a changing landscape.

Why English Studies?

As this report will go on to evidence, English Studies encompasses vital disciplines within the humanities, making up 22% of all first degree undergraduate students across the humanities. This makes English Studies comparable to History and Media Studies. The Research Excellence Framework 2021 exercise also found that 48% of English Studies research was world-leading, making English Studies among the strongest performing disciplines in terms of research. However, English Studies disciplines have also seen declines in student numbers over the last decade (a trend that this report will interrogate further), repeated instances of departmental restructures and closures, and has faced criticisms in the media inflected by recent 'culture wars'. With these competing contexts in mind, this report seeks to provide evidenced insight into the health of English Studies over the last decade. It is designed to serve as a resource for the English Studies community to better understand the complex trends experienced across UK higher education and as an evidence base for future activity related to the health of the discipline, shedding light on the policies and practices that are required to sustain its vibrancy.

Since 2021, we have been engaging with the English Studies academic community, conducting scoping interviews and gathering evidence to better understand what is happening across higher education, including teaching and research. We worked closely with this report's Advisory Group to develop a robust methodology through which to analyse the health of the discipline, including the use of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and our approach to qualitative interviews across the UK. As this report focuses on student, staff and research data from across the last decade, it is in nature looking back at what has happened. These contexts, we believe, can operate as a foundation for the community when looking forward to the future of the discipline.

What can you expect from this report?

The analysis conducted as part of this report has been structured against four core pillars of a discipline within the higher education community: student numbers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, their graduate outcomes, academic staff, and research income and activity. As you read through this report, you will see detailed analysis against specific themes that are vital to the health of the discipline, including diversity and protected characteristics and research excellence. This report also includes an extended section on the key characteristics of English Studies, which gives a high level overview of the constituent disciplines within English Studies alongside changes at GCSE and National 5 levels, and A level, Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers levels. This report concludes with a chapter reflecting on the risks and opportunities for English Studies as evidenced by the findings of this report. This is intended as a jumping board for the community in further work relating to the health of the disciplines. Finally, the methodology section of this report is front and centre, highlighting both the range of data analysed and areas of complexity, particularly in terms of the data codes used as part of its analysis.

How to use this report

This report can be read in multiple ways depending on the reader's key interests. It can be read by individual chapter, for example if changes in student numbers are of most relevance. However, to understand the health of English Studies at higher education level, engagement with this report needs to be holistic. For this reason, we have included a conclusion which focuses on the challenges and opportunities for English Studies based on the findings of this report. As noted, detailed layouts of the data codes utilised in this report can be found in the methodology section – this can be referred to as you read the report. You will also find additional detail on data sources where appropriate throughout as well as a glossary at the end of the report.

1. Data sources and methodology

This report utilises a mixed methods approach, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data to present a deeper and more contextualised understanding of the health of English Studies provision in UK higher education. In Phase 0, we undertook scoping calls with 25 members of the English Studies community and conducted a scoping report. In Phase 1, we formed an Advisory Group, which sought to represent the disciplines of English Studies, the geography of the UK and a range of institution types. We also agreed our initial report outline, the scope of the project and data methodologies. Phase 2 consisted of the quantitative and qualitative research, including the interviews that have informed this report. We conducted the writing of the report in Phase 3, which overlapped with Phase 2, incorporating feedback from the Advisory Group at key stages. Phase 4 included final drafting and sign-off.

This chapter outlines the data sources and overall methodology in further detail. As well as the contextual information below, and footnotes throughout, a full glossary of terms is found at the end of the report. We have developed the following methodology with advice from the Advisory Group, whose membership is detailed in the opening pages of this report.

Quantitative data

For the purpose of conducting longitudinal analysis across staff and student trends, we have interpreted English Studies to be aligned to the cost centres and codes outlined in Table 1 below. However, this is caveated by an acknowledgement that English Studies often operates beyond and across disciplinary boundaries, particularly at the intersections of English Language and Linguistics, English Literature and Creative Writing, Drama, Film, as well as more broadly across Comparative, Cultural and Area Studies, to name a few. As such, throughout this report, we will use dataset terminology when analysing data from HESA, UCAS, LEO and REF 2021, with the recognition that this does not always directly reflect the courses and departments in which English Studies is taught and researched. We tested findings extensively with our Advisory Group, and it became clear that some coding can lose the nuances in departmental construction and course design. Creative Writing, for example, can be taught by English Studies departments, as well as in Media Studies, Communications or Arts departments. Despite potential limitations presented by data categorisations, we are confident that the findings presented in the report allow us to accurately interrogate factors to build a picture of the health of English Studies at the time of writing.

As of the academic year 2019/20, HESA has introduced a new subject coding system — the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) — to replace the Joint Accounting Coding System (JACS). The Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) groupings were also introduced, with the aim of providing standard groups across both HECoS and JACS. However, HESA have since determined that the new CAH groupings are incompatible with previous datasets. It is therefore important to note that, while HESA 2019/20 to 2020/21 statistics are referenced in the report, our use of JACS and CAH coding means there is a break in continuity with earlier time series. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of codes utilised in this report for both the analysis of English Studies and broader aggregate humanities disciplines.

Within this report, where there are variations in how English Studies data is collected or interpreted, we have noted these to provide an accurate and transparent representation of the statistical findings.

Table 1. HESA dataset coding

Coding		Area of analysis
Cost centre	<p>English Studies: (138) English Language & Literature</p> <p>Humanities aggregate: (126) Archaeology (137) Modern languages (138) English Language & Literature (139) History (140) Classics (141) Philosophy (142) Theology & religious studies (145) Media studies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HESA academic staff data • HESA Research funding data
JACS	<p>English Studies: Q3 – English Studies W8 – Imaginative writing</p> <p>Humanities aggregate: Group P: Mass Communications and Documentation Group Q: Linguistics, Classics and related Group R: European Languages, Literature and related Group T: Non-European Languages, Literature and related Group V: History & Philosophical studies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HESA Student data, 2012/13 to 2018/19 • UCAS acceptance data 2012 to 2021 • HESA Graduate Outcomes data 2017 to 2018
CAH	<p>English Studies: 19-01-01 English Studies (non-specific) 19-01-02 English Language 19-01-03 Literature in English 19-01-04 Studies of Specific Authors 19-01-05 Creative Writing 19-01-06 Others in English Studies</p> <p>Humanities aggregate: 19 Language and area studies 20 Historical, philosophical and religious studies 23 Combined and general studies 24 Media, journalism and communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HESA Student data 2019/20 to 2020/21 • HESA Graduate Outcomes data 2018/19 to 2019/20

HESA datasets³

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is part of JISC and collects, assures and disseminates data about higher education in the UK. We have applied the HESA rounding and

³ HESA Staff Record 2012/13-2020/21, HESA Student Record 2012/13-2020/21, HESA Graduate Outcomes 2017/18-2020/21. These datasets were accessed under license via HeidiPlus and tailored datasets through JISC. *HESA Staff Record, Student Records, Graduate Outcomes Survey and Financial Records accessed under license via HeidiPlus. Copyright Jisc. Neither the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited nor HESA Services Limited can accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from data or other information obtained from HeidiPlus.*

suppression methodology to datasets used in this report to anonymise statistics for staff and students.⁴ This means that numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5 and any number less than 2.5 is rounded to 0. Any percentages based on a population of less than 22.5 are not published. Due to the application of the rounding methodology, the sub-totals and percentages of a category may not correspond precisely to the sum of the total.

We have used the following datasets from HESA:

- HESA Student, Staff and Finance Data

HESA Student, Staff and Finance data are used in chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively. The HESA finance data in this report provide a breakdown of research grants and contracts by source of income and HESA cost centre. The HESA staff record provides a breakdown of academic staff in higher education institutions by the cost centres to which their academic contracts are assigned. Cost centres are used by HESA to allow for meaningful and granular comparisons between different records. It should be noted that HESA cost centre coding does not exactly align with university departmental structures; it is at the discretion of the submitting HEI as to what cost centre staff are submitted to. As such, chapters 4 and 5, which use cost centre coding, will refer to the 'cost centre', rather than to departments.

The student data in the report is based on the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS 3) and Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH), which allows for longitudinal analysis between 2012/13-2018/19 and from 2019/20 respectively. This is outlined in more detail above. Neither JACS 3 nor CAH coding directly map onto English Studies distinctions. The CAH disciplinary distinctions in Table 1 above have significant overlap. This is particularly applicable across 'Literature in English', 'English Language' and 'English Studies (non-specific)'. For example, some HEIs may submit students studying English Literature to 'English Studies (non-specific)', rather than to 'Literature in English'. Data and analysis using CAH subject classifications may not accurately reflect either disciplinary distinctions or departmental structures. It should also be noted here that it is not possible to analyse subjects studied by joint honours through the HESA data.

Additionally, CAH19-01-06 'Others in English Studies' can include English as a Second Language at undergraduate level, which is not traditionally considered the remit of English Studies departments. As such, we have largely filtered by first degree undergraduate degrees, in order to remove students studying English as a Second Language. This does mean that mature students or students studying for a second undergraduate degree will not be captured in much of our analysis. We have also noted where student or staff data refers to Full Person Equivalent (FPE) or Full Time Equivalent (FTE) respectively.⁵

- HESA Graduate Outcomes Data

Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey data is analysed in chapter 6. The GO survey commenced in 2017/18, replacing the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The survey includes graduates who achieved their higher education qualifications from higher education providers in the UK, and from Further Education colleges (FECs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This report draws on the GO survey to analyse data on first degree and postgraduate outcomes from 2020/21. As the DLHE survey has a different methodology and constitutes a different measurement that is not directly comparable with GO datasets, we have not utilised this earlier dataset for the purpose of comparison in this report.

⁴ HESA, *Rounding and suppression to anonymise statistics* [Feb 2023].

⁵ See: HESA (2021/22), 'Count of students vs full-person equivalent (FPE) vs full-time equivalent (FTE)', *Definitions: Students* [20 Feb 2023]; HESA (2021/22), 'Staff full-time equivalent', *Definitions: Staff* [20 Feb 2023].

Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data

This report draws on LEO data in our analysis of graduate outcomes for English Studies in chapter 6. LEO data uses administrative data, including tax, benefits and student loans data, to provide information on employment and earnings of higher education graduates at different points after graduation, including 1 year, 3 years, 5 years and 10 years. While this data source can be a valuable tool for measuring graduate outcomes, there are some caveats to the methodology which impact accuracy. The data does not, for example, account for whether a graduate is in full- or part-time work, or has taken time out for childcare. LEO data may also exclude graduates who are self-employed in the relevant tax year, or working overseas.

Research Excellence Framework

We have also utilised the most recent Research Excellence Framework exercise (REF 2021) as part of our analysis of academic research in English Studies in chapter 5. The REF exercise is the UK's approach to assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. We have aligned our analysis of REF 2021 with Panel D, Unit of Assessment 27 English Language and Literature, the subpanel descriptor gives a broad definition of English Studies and its relation to related disciplines. It is important to note that the REF 2021 Units of Assessment broadly align with, but are not required to map directly to, HESA data categorisations.

This report also engages with the impact case studies submitted to REF 2021, which measure the wider effects of research beyond academia. Impact case studies offer qualitative data of how research conducted at an institution within a specific timeframe has resulted in a positive change or benefit against specific impact types: cultural, economic, environmental, health, legal, political, societal and technological.

In chapter 5, Academic Research, comparisons are made between REF 2014 and REF 2021. However, following the implementation of an independent review of REF 2014 by Lord Stern, there are some key differences between REF 2014 and REF 2021 methodologies. Most significantly, all staff employed on a contract of 0.2 FTE or greater, i.e. more than 7.5 hours per week, were expected to submit to REF 2021. REF 2021 terms these members of staff 'Category A research staff'. Additionally, the minimum number of outputs required from each researcher was reduced for REF 2021. An academic output represents the results of research, for example conference papers, workshops, journal articles or monographs. For REF 2021, the minimum expectation for each staff member was reduced from 4 to 2.5 per FTE staff member.⁶ This meant that, as part of REF 2021, on average more staff were included for each institution (or discipline), but each staff member submitted fewer pieces of research on average. This places limitations on our ability to make direct comparisons between the results of REF 2021 and any previous research assessment. That is not to say there is no continuity in the process, nor that it is pointless to make any comparison. However, we should be cognisant of the fact that we are not comparing like for like and so must be cautious about drawing any conclusions based on these caveats.⁷ We have highlighted areas where such caution is relevant within the chapter.

⁶ Category A staff was defined in REF 2021 as 'academic staff with a contract of employment of 0.2 full-time equivalent or greater, on the payroll of the submitting institution on the census date, whose primary employment function is to undertake either "research only" or "teaching and research"'. Please see REF 2021 (2018), *REF 2021: Decisions on staff and outputs*.

⁷ REF (2022), 'Guide to the REF results: Key differences to REF 2014' [29 Nov 22].

UCAS data

Chapters 2 and 3 use UCAS data on acceptance rates onto undergraduate programmes in English Studies. UCAS data provides annual figures for the number of applicants who received and accepted a place on a course at the end of the UCAS cycle (acceptances), including applications and acceptances made through the Summer Clearing process. This covers the majority of acceptances to full-time undergraduate programmes from people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and around two thirds of applications to full-time undergraduate programmes in Scotland.

Qualitative data

The findings of this report were partly generated by semi-structured interviews with Heads of Departments across eight UK universities, which took place between August and October 2022. In addition to interviews with Heads of Departments, we conducted three sets of in-depth interviews with three institutions, including interviews with Heads of Departments, Deans or Directors of schools, and UCU representatives. The student voice, however, is missing from this report. As is evidenced through our data, students of English Studies are a large, diverse cohort of undergraduates and postgraduates in the UK, and their experiences of learning and researching are critical in assessing the future of the discipline. Such research would be an important piece of the puzzle to add.

The selection process for interviews was initially informed by a scoping review of English Studies provision in the UK, in which HESA data was used to establish a set of criteria, and then by discussion with our Advisory Group. The interviews covered a range of institution types, department sizes and regions. Interviewees worked in across different regions in England (North East, Midlands, South East, South Central, and London), Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as in different institution types, with varying department sizes, numbers of student enrolments and REF 2021 performances.

As English is multi-disciplinary, we spoke to Heads of Department with oversight of courses across English Literature, Creative Writing, English Language and Linguistics, as well as across a range of personal research backgrounds. Sometimes this took the form of a multi-person interviews, with questions ranging across key themes, including institutional culture; practices around equality, diversity, and inclusion; fast-moving developments, such as COVID-19 and the UK's departure from the European Union; longer term trends over the last decade; academic provision; postgraduate research and early career researcher experiences; and overall research culture.

2. English Studies: key characteristics

This chapter considers the scope and characteristics of English Studies disciplines, including key skills and subject knowledge developed during English Studies degrees across English Literature, English Language and Creative Writing. Alongside an initial analysis of the provision of English Studies in UK higher education, this chapter highlights pipeline challenges between levels 2 and 3 across UK education, which may be impacting student numbers at higher education level.

Relationships and distinctions between English Literature, Language, and Creative Writing

At its core, English Studies refers to the study of language, literary and cultural works, and the production of critical and creative work, in the medium of English and related languages.⁸ English Studies students learn ‘to interpret and interrogate past and present cultures, to anticipate future cultural transformations, and to enhance their ability to understand themselves, other people and our shared world’.⁹ In a 2022 piece that resonated with many in the English community, Joe Moran characterises the study of English as teaching students to ‘handle stories with care, not just to accept without question their declared intentions and surface features’.¹⁰ Those working in English Studies in higher education recognise their disciplines as global, deeply interdisciplinary, and engaged with the world.

Through this report, we will largely consider English Studies disciplines through their capture in HESA and Graduate Outcomes data, including English Literature, Language and Creative Writing. However, this is with the caveat and understanding that English Studies can also take place beyond these disciplinary boundaries, and can be included under the further banners of Linguistics, Composition, Philology, Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, among others.¹¹ English Studies disciplines are built on a variety of disciplinary, creative and critical approaches to form and language, which can sometimes be held in tension, as well as collaboration, with one another.

The 2023 subject benchmark for English notes that during their degree, English Studies students learn to:

- Read closely, analytically and critically, developing an understanding of literary form and historical and linguistic contexts;
- Understand verbal creativity, including aesthetic features of literary and cultural texts;
- Analyse texts and discourses, with an ability to respond to the affective and rhetorical power of language;
- Reflect critically upon acts of reading and writing;
- Develop independent, imaginative and persuasive interpretations of literary, critical, linguistic or creative material;

⁸ QAA (2023), *Subject Benchmark Statement English: Version for Consultation*, p.3. [15 Feb 23].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Moran, J., (2022), ‘Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today’, *English: Journal of the English Association*, 71:273, p.9.

¹¹ Gildea, N., Goodwyn, H., Kitching M., and Tyson, H. eds. (2015), *English Studies: The State of the Discipline, Past, Present, and Future*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.6.

- Articulate a critical understanding of complex texts and ideas, and of their historical relations;
- Communicate clearly, accurately and effectively in both speech and writing.¹²

English Language students and researchers investigate and analyse spoken, written and multimodal communication and culture. English Language courses explore the ‘origins and historical development of English, its regional and national expressions, its contemporary global circulation and potential future forms’.¹³ This study includes the exploration of descriptive, critical and theoretical approaches to language through key sub-disciplinary areas, such as pragmatics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and phonetics. Students undertake qualitative and quantitative analysis on a wide range of texts, from everyday spoken communication and media to highly stylised written and spoken discourse.¹⁴ Therefore, while English Language still tends to come under the general umbrella of English Studies, Linguistics has evolved as a separate disciplines and is largely taught and researched in separate departmental structures. However, English Language often sits alongside and intertwines with the study of Linguistics, with theoretical and applied Linguistics included in English Language teaching and output submissions to REF21.¹⁵

The study of English Literature develops close, analytical reading skills and the ability to interpret and critically analyse a range of texts, including poetry, prose, and plays as well as essays, autobiographies, and journalism, and visual and aural media. In higher education, English Literature students have the opportunity to engage with texts from all periods of literary history, from early medieval to the contemporary. This includes a wide range of Anglophone literature as well as texts in translation. Students of English Literature engage with the stylistic, formal and rhetorical properties of texts, often drawing from theoretical or linguistic perspectives, to learn how these contribute to meaning. Students will also engage with the interconnections between texts; the relationship between literature and social, historical and cultural contexts; and theoretical approaches to and debates about literature. They may also examine processes of composition and production, histories of reception, and different forms of dissemination, such as manuscript, performance and print.¹⁶

The QAA Creative Writing subject benchmark notes that ‘Creative Writing is founded on an understanding of the imagination as a vital mode of perception and enquiry, and on an awareness of the power of language and literature to transform individual lives and cultures’.¹⁷ Creative Writing courses centre a ‘process of reflection on the development of individual and peer writing practices informed by diverse and critical reading of writing produced in a wide range of social, historical and cultural contexts’.¹⁸ The study of Creative Writing enables students to develop their own creative practices, through engagement with the analytical tools and approaches common to the study of language and literature. Creative Writing students produce original works across a wide range of genres, formats, media and styles, and may include poetry, prose, drama, visual media and creative non-fiction. Alongside academic qualifications such as MA and doctoral degrees, Creative Writing academics are also often practising writers.

Across all subject areas spanning the broad discipline of English Studies, students and researchers participate in critical and creative responses to contemporary global challenges in innovative and interdisciplinary ways. Students of English Studies can expect to be equipped with skills in understanding literary and linguistics contexts alongside an appreciation of, and comfort with, nuance and complexity.

¹² QAA, *English Subject Benchmark Statement*, pp.3-4.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ REF 2021. (May 2022), ‘Overview Report by Main Panel D and Sub-Panels 25 to 34’, p.89.

¹⁶ QAA, *English Subject Benchmark Statement*, p.10.

¹⁷ QAA (2019), *Creative Writing: Subject Benchmark Statement*, p.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Research excellence and rigour in English Studies

This report analyses the results of Research Excellence Framework 2021 (REF 2021) in more detail in chapter 6, but it is worth noting here that the REF 2021 sub-panel report highlights the breadth of English research across these disciplines, from the study of Anglophone Literature in English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and in global contexts, including North America; the history of the book, of reading, and of rhetoric; the sociology of texts; and multilingual research. Research excellence in English Literature, Language and Creative Writing is described by the REF 2021 sub-panel report as ‘intensely interdisciplinary in nature’, with submissions evidencing collaborations, and shared methodologies and insights from across a broad spectrum of disciplines, from the Natural Sciences to Business and Management Studies.¹⁹ Panellists also noted the variety and creativity of approaches to research, from period-based clusters to challenge-led and topic-based research groups. This report will highlight impact case studies which are reflective of the breadth of impact generated by English Studies research. English Studies research has created significant, positive impact for communities across a range of assessment areas, including health and wellbeing, the environment and technology.²⁰

Provision

The breadth and depth of English Studies disciplines are mirrored in the variation in how universities house English Studies, as well as the diversity of courses, approaches to teaching and learning, and the wide range and often inter- and multidisciplinary nature of research activity. This variation is also reflected in the language and terms associated with these disciplines, in both general discourse but particularly within formal datasets and monitoring exercises.

English Studies in higher education is largely taught through undergraduate degrees, taught and research master’s degrees and doctoral degrees. Information on staff is captured by HESA through cost centres (as explained in the methodology section of this report). According to data submitted to cost centre ‘138 English Language & Literature’, staff numbers are on average comparable to other large humanities disciplines, such as Media Studies and History. However, it should be noted that HESA codes and departmental structures do not align exactly. Indeed, there is a large variation in the different institutional relationships between English Literature, Language and Creative Writing. In some institutions they operate separately, while others include all three disciplines in their student offer. Table 2 below shows higher education institutions with the largest numbers of first degree undergraduate students across English Studies disciplines as categorised by HESA.

¹⁹ REF2021. (May 2022), ‘Overview Report by Main Panel D and Sub-Panels 25 to 34’, p.89.

²⁰ For example, see REF2021. (2022), ‘Accessing Literature: widening cultural participation and improving mental health awareness through theatre and poetry’, *Impact case study database*, [accessed 11 July 22]; and REF2021. (2022), ‘AI narratives: shaping public debate, policy and cultural responses to the future of Artificial Intelligence’, *Impact case study database*, [accessed 11 July 22].

Table 2. Higher education institutions with the largest number of first degree undergraduate enrolments by English Studies code, 2020/21 (FPE)

Disciplines	Higher Education Institution by size
English Studies (non-specific) (CAH 19-01-01)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The University of Exeter 2. The University of Birmingham 3. The University of Oxford 4. The University of Bristol 5. The University of Cambridge
English Language (CAH 19-01-02)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Open University 2. The University of Portsmouth 3. Oxford Brookes University 4. Cardiff University 5. The University of Birmingham
Literature in English (CAH 19-01-03)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Open University 2. The University of Edinburgh 3. The University of Glasgow 4. The University of Leeds 5. University of Durham
Creative Writing (CAH 19-01-05)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Open University 2. The University of Winchester 3. Bath Spa University 4. University of the West of England, Bristol 5. Liverpool John Moores University

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Though the HEIs with the largest first degree student enrolments for Creative Writing and English Language demonstrate institutional diversity, the majority of departments with large numbers of students in English Studies are high tariff institutions. As we will see through this report, the growth of such institutions' cohorts of undergraduates has generally been higher than that of low tariff institutions, causing some concern about the diversity of provision, particularly where some departments are shrinking. With an increasing stratification of English Studies in higher education over the second half of the 2010s, less institutional diversity may limit access for students, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.²¹

This uneven distribution of student numbers has resulted in significant challenges; the market trend has been associated with English departmental re-structures and/or closures, including associated redundancies. It is not within the scope of this report to identify each department that has faced closure or restructuring, particularly due to the complex and difficult decision-making behind such actions. However, it is cause for concern among much of the community. Recent statements issued by University English, The English Association, and the Institute for English Studies, highlight the importance of diversity in provision, as well as the discipline's commitment to contemporary challenges, outreach, social justice, climate change, and economic and cultural impact.²²

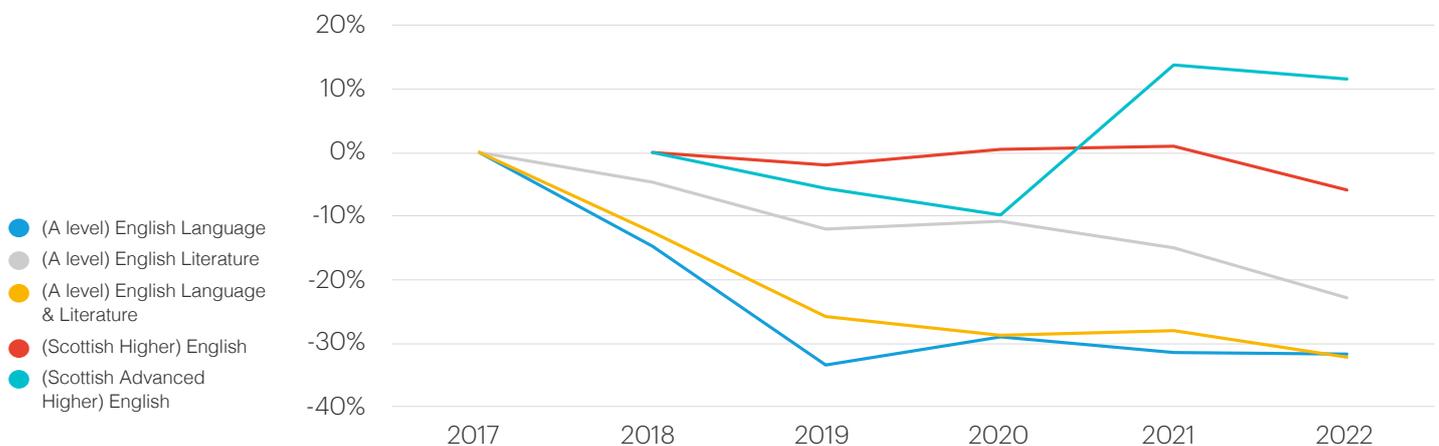
²¹ See, for example, the impact of variations in languages provision: The British Academy and the University Council of Modern Languages (2022), *Languages Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends*, p.4.

²² Richards, J., Lees, C., Marshall, G. (2022), 'Joint Statement from University English, the English Association and the Institute for English on threatened job losses at Birkbeck', *University English*.

Changes to level 2 and level 3 English Studies qualifications

Though this report does not have the scope to address pre-18 education issues fully, it is worth noting that English Studies students entering higher education are shaped by compulsory study at GCSE and National 5. However, there have been concerns that changes to the GCSE curricula in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, in particular, is impacting uptake at A level. As seen in Figure 1, between 2017 to 2022, students studying English Language at A level across England, Wales and Northern Ireland fell by 32%, from 21,178 to 14,478. Those studying English Literature fell by 23%, from 46,411 to 35,791. Additionally, those studying the joint A level English Language & Literature fell by 32%, from 11,058 to 7,507. Indeed, in 2022, English Literature fell out of the top 10 most popular subjects in England for A level study for the first time.²³

Figure 1. Percentage change in the study of English Studies at A level, Scottish Higher and Scottish Advanced Higher, 2017-2022



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications: A level results and Scottish Qualifications Authority – Attainment Statistics 2022

Scottish Highers have seen more level shifts in entries for English. Between 2018 and 2021, entrants to Scottish Higher in English rose by 1%; however between 2018 and 2022, entrants fell by 6%. The picture is slightly different for Scottish Advanced Highers – which are a higher level of study compared with A level, but often treated as equivalent by universities in England. While between 2018 and 2020, entrants to Scottish Advanced Higher qualifications in English fell by 10%, while between 2018 and 2022, entrants have risen by 11%.

There have been strong links made within the sector between the falling numbers at A level and changes to the GCSE curricula in 2015.²⁴ Many of our interviewees identified the 2015 GCSE reforms in England, Northern Ireland and Wales as a key root cause of declining numbers of students studying English Language and Literature at A level, which is subsequently impacting enrolments to English Studies courses in higher education. These reforms included removing English Literature as a required GCSE in England, though it can be studied in conjunction with English Language. In particular, reforms to the GCSE curricula in England, Wales and

²³ Aguilar Garcia, C. et al. (Aug 2022), 'This year's A-level results in England explained in five charts', *The Guardian*, [19 August 2022].

²⁴ See, for example, Goodwyn, A., (2019) 'The State of English: NATE's Annual Survey', *Teaching English* (24) p.31.

Northern Ireland included the removal of coursework in favour of closed book examinations (i.e. examinations without having any of the texts available in the exam room). It should be noted that Scottish National 5 qualifications retain controlled or non-examination assessments across English Literature and English Language.

Changes to the English Language GCSE in England include the requirement to study nineteenth-century non-fiction (such as newspaper articles and reviews), as well as the removal of a discrete language component and the assessment of speaking and listening contributing to the final grade.²⁵ The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) curricula for English Language in Northern Ireland retains Speaking and Listening as controlled assessment, while the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) have non-examination assessments in oracy.^{26,27} In Scotland, the National 5 English curriculum also contains assessed performance-spoken language.²⁸ For English Literature GCSE in England, students are now required to study a complete nineteenth-century English novel, and American texts have been removed from the curriculum, with assessment objectives including an ‘appreciation of the depth and power of the English literary heritage’.²⁹ There is concern in the community that difficulty of teaching nineteenth-century texts at GCSE level has led to an overemphasis on two relatively short texts – *A Christmas Carol* and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. One interviewee was disheartened by the fact that students, whatever their background, could have access to a rich global literature in English, but that opportunity has been restricted by changes to curricula. However, this differs slightly across devolved administrations. The CCEA and WJEC curricula in Northern Ireland and Wales retain the option of contemporary prose, poetry and drama, as well as texts in English from across the globe.^{30,31} The National 5 curriculum in Scotland does not have restrictions on the selection of texts for study, apart from a range of prescribed Scottish texts.³²

While improvements in the UK’s PISA literacy rates tell a positive story for the new curricula, there is concern in the community about a loss of key skills at the core of English Studies.³³ These include critical and independent thinking skills, creativity and imagination, and initiative and curiosity, as well as effective written and verbal communication. Employers consistently identify these skills as crucial for the future of work.^{34,35} There are concerns about key gaps in the skills pipeline as changes to the GCSE and A level curricula in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, which overemphasises memorising quotations and information over critical engagement.³⁶ This is seen by many in the sector to hamper skills development and curb enthusiasm for the discipline.³⁷ There are also wide concerns in the sector about the loss of Creative Writing at A level, which was discontinued in 2018.³⁸ One interviewee noted that students at GCSE level and A level are unhappy at how English has been distorted by this curricula, particularly in the lack of space to be creative. Additionally, the interviewee noted

²⁵ Department for Education (2013), ‘English Language: GCSE Subject Content and Assessment Objectives’, p.4. [Nov 2022].

²⁶ CCEA (2022), *CCEA GCSE Specification in English Language*, p.6.

²⁷ WJEC (2019), *WJEC GCSE in English Language*, p.2.

²⁸ SQA (2018), *National 5 English Course Specification*, pp.19-21. [Feb 2023].

²⁹ Department for Education (2013), ‘English Literature: GCSE Subject Content and Assessment Objectives’, p.3 [Nov 2022].

³⁰ CCEA (2018), *GCSE English Literature (2017) Specification*, pp.7-11. [Feb 2023].

³¹ WJEC (2019), *WJEC GCSE in English Literature*, p.2. [Feb 2023].

³² SQA, *National 5 English Course Specification*, p.4.

³³ NATE. ‘The Decline in Student Choice of A Level English: A NATE Position Paper’. *Teaching English*, no. 24 (2020): p.8.

³⁴ British Academy (2020), *Qualified for the Future: quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills*, p.6.

³⁵ World Economic Forum (2020), *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them* [March 2023].

³⁶ Bleiman, B. (2018), ‘The Changing Picture of School English’, *English Shared Futures*, eds. Eaglestone R., and Marshall, G. Boydell & Brewer, pp.8-9.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ NAWA (2015), *Creative Writing A-level* [March 2023].

a mismatch between the discontinuation of Creative Writing at A level and the increasing popularity of Creative Writing in higher education, the latter of which this report will explore further in the next chapter.

Furthermore, the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) has produced multiple research papers, including their annual survey, articulating the effect of GCSE reforms in England, noting that ‘Government imposed reforms over the last decade have tended to emphasise a superficial focus on student performance in literacy, rather than a deeper and more satisfying engagement with literature and language’.³⁹ Interviewees in higher education and subject associations also raised the negative impacts of these curricula changes on both literature and language students, alongside a move away from Creative Writing at A level. In the NATE annual survey many teachers cited the curriculum and focus on examination at GCSE level in England as a key reason for declining engagement with the discipline.⁴⁰ Indeed, it was flagged by one interviewee that a focus on examination at GCSE can mean that the same material is repeatedly taught throughout secondary education, beginning when students are not ready for it. Alongside the effects of GCSE reform on the uptake of English Literature and Language at A level, NATE has also identified governmental pressure on students and schools to increase the numbers of students choosing STEM at A level as well as the loss of the AS level courses as impacting A level English.⁴¹

This initial picture of UK provision of English Studies in higher education, alongside the changing contexts of provision and curricula at levels 2 and 3 across the UK, will be important framings as this report turns to consider challenges and opportunities suggested by changes to the study of English Studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

³⁹ NATE, ‘The Decline in Student Choice of A Level English’, p.8.

⁴⁰ Goodwyn, ‘The State of English’, p.31.

⁴¹ NATE, ‘The Decline in Student Choice of A Level English’, p.5.

3. Student trends

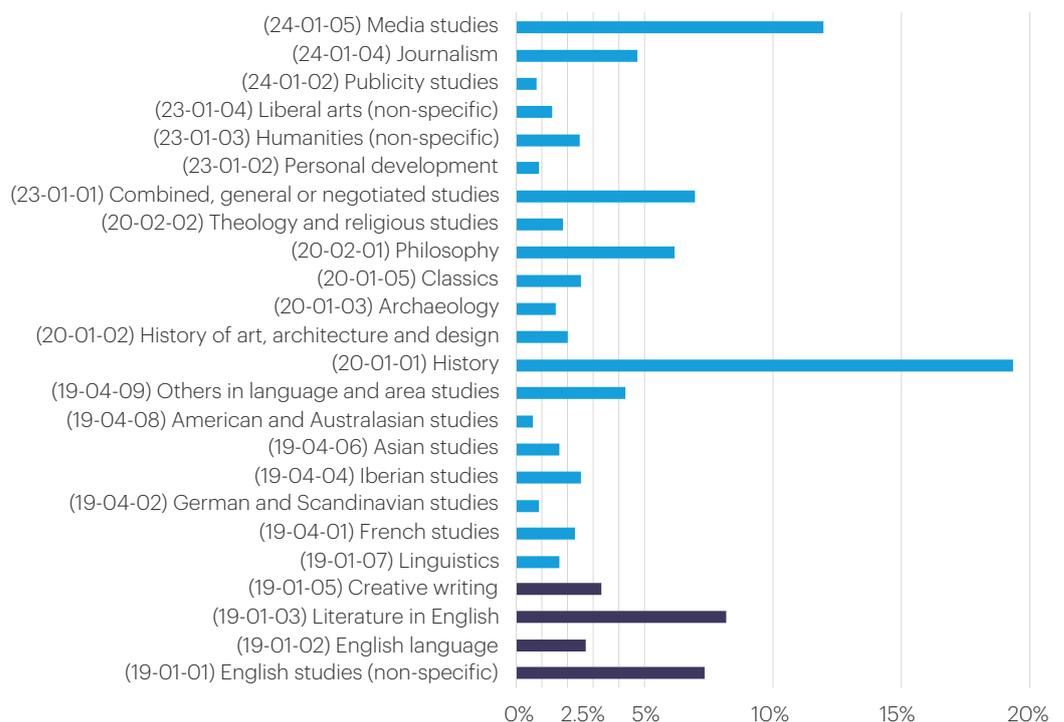
This chapter analyses changes in student cohorts in English Studies through sections on undergraduate and postgraduate study. It complicates the picture of decline in undergraduate recruitment through analysis of both English Studies as an aggregate and through individual codes. This chapter also includes a section on diversity and protected characteristics, which analyses student cohorts through the lenses of domicile, ethnicity, age, sex and reported disability.

Please note, this section uses both JACS and CAH codes for longitudinal analysis of English Studies. Where appropriate, differences in codes are highlighted in figures. This chapter also uses the JACS code W8 Imaginative Writing to analyse long term trends in Creative Writing. In order to distinguish between JACS and CAH codes for Creative Writing courses, it uses the term Imaginative Writing when discussing changes to student numbers submitted to the JACS code.

Changes in English Studies undergraduate study

In 2020/21, there were 42,445 undergraduate students studying English Studies. This included 39,970 first degree undergraduate students enrolled in English Studies at 121 higher education institutions (HEIs). As seen in Figure 2 below, in 2020/21, students across all four English Studies codes made up 22% of all first degree undergraduate students across humanities subject codes. This is comparable to History and higher than the third largest subject code, Media Studies. Figure 2 below also shows that students assigned to the codes English Studies (non-specific) and Literature in English made up 7% and 8% of all humanities first degree undergraduate students respectively. This was a higher proportion compared to Creative Writing and English Language, which both made up 3% of humanities first degree undergraduate students.

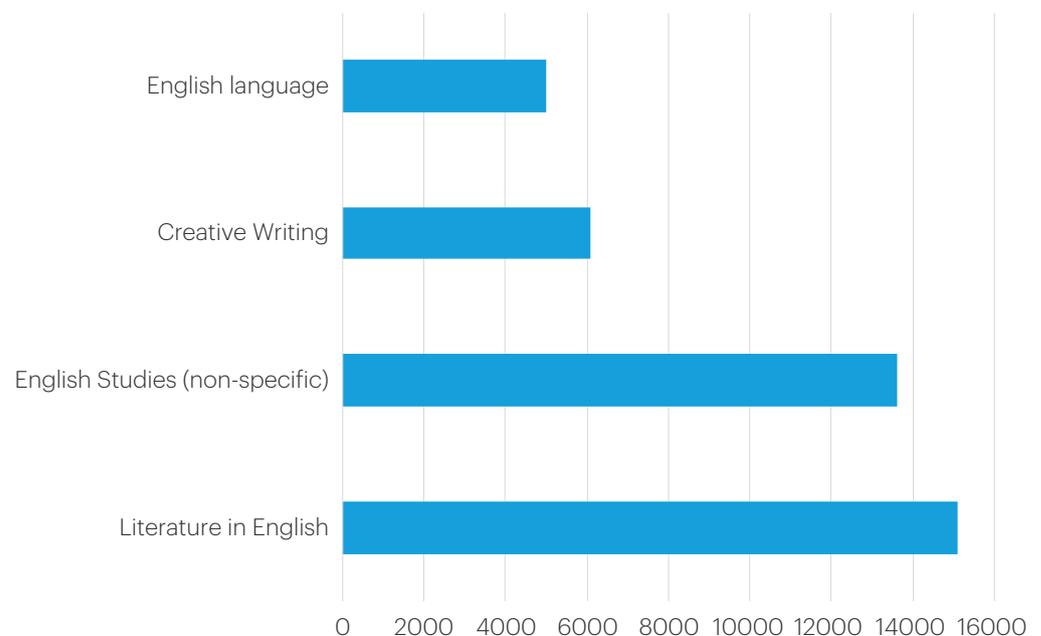
Figure 2. Proportion of first degree undergraduate students in humanities disciplines by subject code, 2020/21 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Student recruitment is not evenly spread across the constituent HESA codes for English Studies. As shown in Figure 3 below, in 2020/21, Literature in English was the most common code for first degree undergraduate students within English Studies, making up 38% (15,085) of English Studies first degree undergraduate students. Students on courses submitted to ‘English Studies (non-specific)’ represented 34% (13,605) of total English Studies undergraduates, while Creative Writing represented 15% (6,090) and English Language 13% (5,010). Though not shown in the Figure below due to their smaller population, there were also 175 first degree enrolments in ‘Others in English’. Though definitive conclusions about the proportions of students studying each English Studies disciplines cannot be drawn from this data — as there are English Language and English Literature students captured under English Studies (non-specific) — this does give some an indication of the weighting of subject areas at undergraduate level.

Figure 3. Breakdown of first degree undergraduate students across English Studies by subject code, 2020/21 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

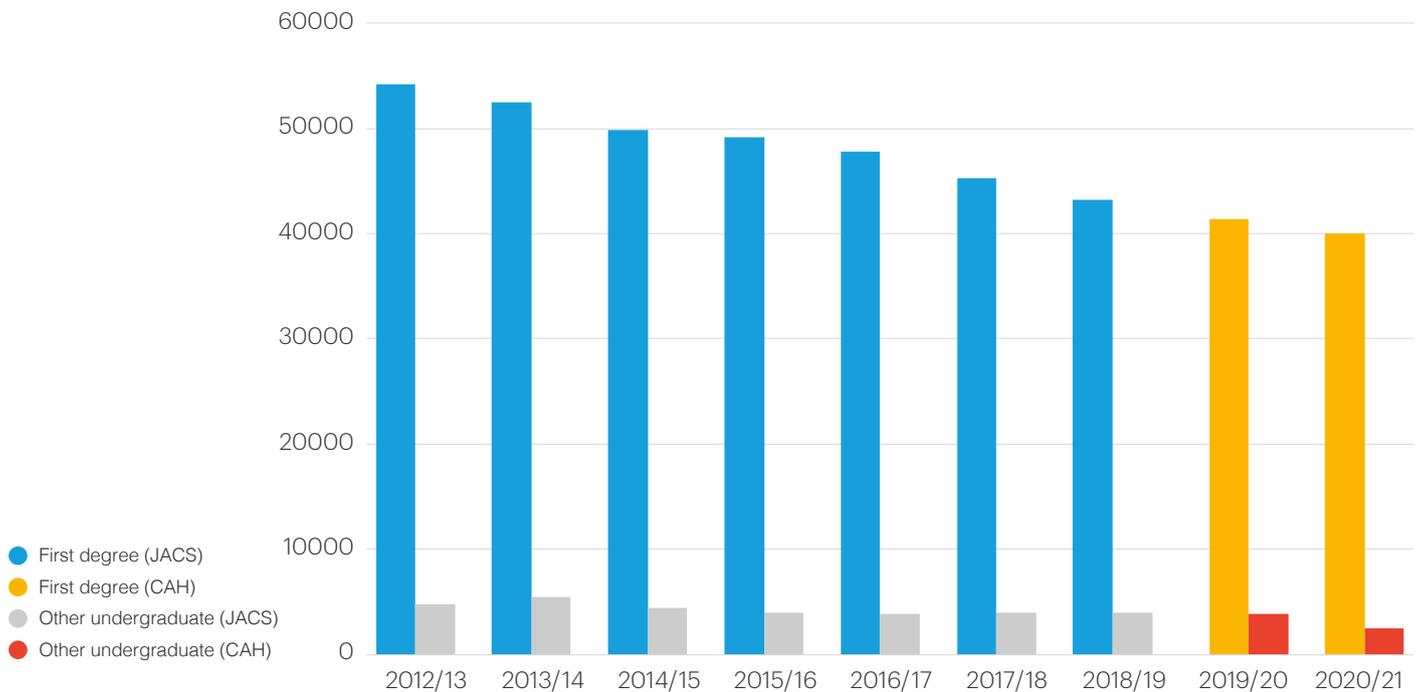
Longitudinal changes to English Studies at undergraduate level

Longitudinal analysis shows that between 2012 and 2019, first degree undergraduates submitted to the code English Studies decreased by 20%, as shown in Figure 4 below. From 2019 to 2021, there was a further decrease of 3% in first degree undergraduates in English Studies. There has been a decline in ‘Other undergraduate’ course students across English Studies, with a decrease of around 16% between 2012 (4,755) and 2019 (3,985), followed by a fall of 37% between 2019 to 2021, to 2,465, as shown in Figure 4. Other undergraduate courses include qualifications that are equivalent to and below first degree level, such as foundation courses at HE level.⁴² Additionally, foundation degree enrolments in English Studies have also experienced declining numbers, albeit it on a small scale: between 2012 and 2019, foundation degree enrolments in English Studies fell from 45 to 10.⁴³

⁴² HESA, ‘Definitions: Students 2007/08 to 2020/21’, [6 Feb 2023].

⁴³ Foundation degrees are qualifications in itself and equivalent to the first two years of a three-year degree, while a foundation year is designed to prepare students to go on to study a full degree.

Figure 4. First degree and 'other undergraduate' students in English Studies (aggregate) at Higher Education Institutions 2012-2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Between 2012 and 2021, changes to student enrolments have not been consistent across different HESA codes for English Studies. The changes in HESA coding make comparisons between pre- and post-2019/20 difficult. However, analysis of JACS 3 coding between 2012 and 2019 shows that Imaginative Writing saw an increase of 33%, from 4370 to 5820 in first degree undergraduate students. Over the same time period, English Studies saw an overall decrease of 25%, from 48,990 first degree undergraduate students to 36,545. CAH data, introduced in 2019, shows that between 2019 and 2021 enrolments to Creative Writing increased by 2%, while Literature in English saw a decrease of 3% in enrolments, English Language saw a decrease of 4%, and English Studies (non-specific) saw a decrease of 6%. However, as noted in the methodology section, these coding categories do not exactly align with English Studies disciplines and students studying English Literature and English Language may be submitted under English Studies (non-specific).

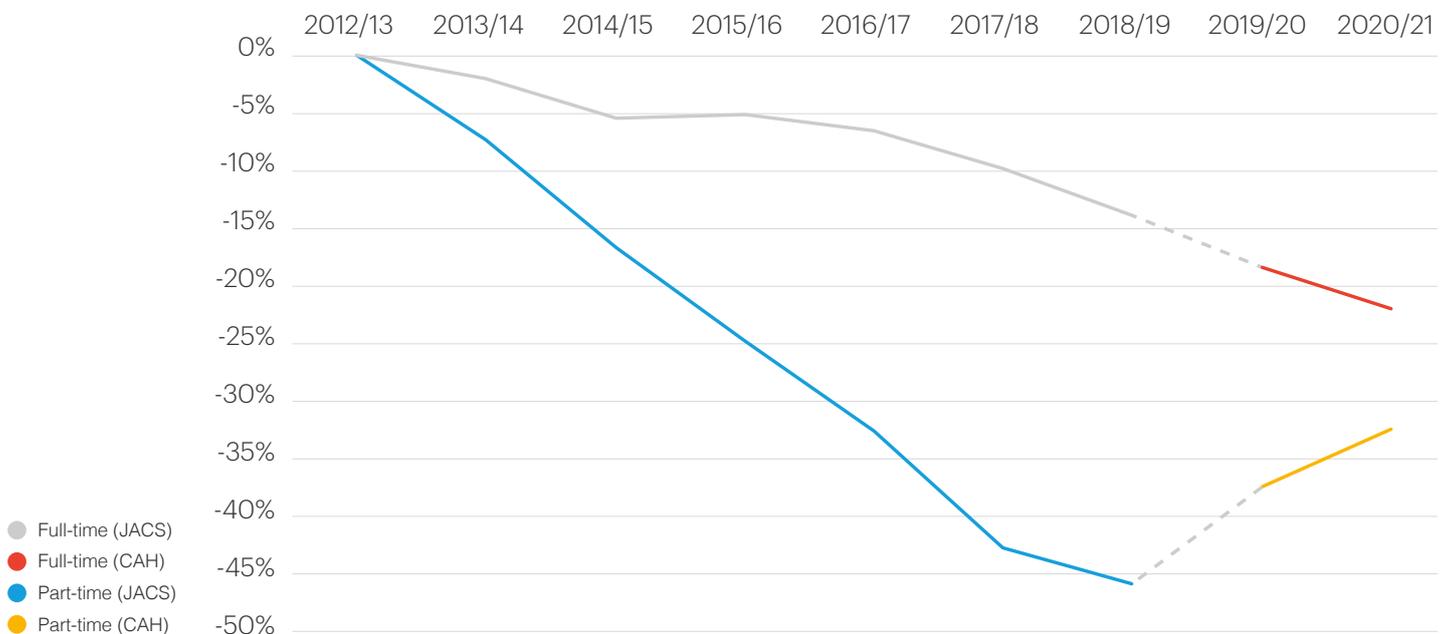
Furthermore, declines in first degree undergraduate student numbers in English Studies are not spread evenly across the higher education landscape. HESA data show that some institutions have seen increases in student enrolments over the same period. Throughout our interviews with Heads of Departments, the lift of the student number cap in England since 2015/16 was identified as a cause for changing strategies in HEIs, which had knock-on effects on parity in the sector.⁴⁴ Some universities across the UK, for instance, increased student numbers for English Studies, while other institutions have seen a substantial decline. This issue was largely referred to as the 'hoovering up' of students by interviewees. Interviewees from larger institutions noted that they 'are conscious of [their] expansion alongside other departmental closures'.

⁴⁴ The student number cap was lifted in England in 2015. This meant that Higher Education institutions could recruit any number of students. However, the picture is different in the devolved administrations. In Scotland, there are limits to local students due to its higher education funding structures, whereas in Northern Ireland local student numbers are controlled by the Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MASN). There is currently no cap on students from other UK nations or overseas in any of the four nations.

In particular, interviewees acknowledged that the current higher education landscape has created intensive competition for undergraduate students. Interviewees affected by both increasing and decreasing student recruitment also articulated concern about the student experience. For interviewees at institutions whose English Studies cohorts are increasing, the large increases in student numbers has resulted in the need to rapidly increase staff numbers and/or workloads for existing staff to 'safeguard the experiences of students'. While for those at institutions that have seen a decline in student numbers, interviewees noted that the threat of redundancies and cuts to courses makes it more difficult to keep a rich range of teaching and equitable opportunities to study English in place across the UK. Interviewees also highlighted that the pressure of workload changes associated with restructuring also affects staff moral and wellbeing.

This picture is further complicated by patterns in the number of first degree undergraduate students studying full-time and part-time. As seen in Figure 5 below, between 2012 and 2019, part-time first degree undergraduates across English Studies codes fell by 46%, while those studying full-time fell by 14%. This drop in part-time study has been seen across higher education, and is cause for concern, particularly as part-time study is vital to diversity in higher education.⁴⁵ Though not comprehensive due to changes to HESA codes, analysis from 2019-2021 suggests that while full-time first degree undergraduates across English Studies fell by 4 percentage points, part-time study rose by 5 percentage points. While part-time study has seen a greater decline at first degree undergraduate level in English, this analysis suggests that part-time study could be seeing a change.

Figure 5. Percentage change in full-time and part-time first degree undergraduate students in English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)



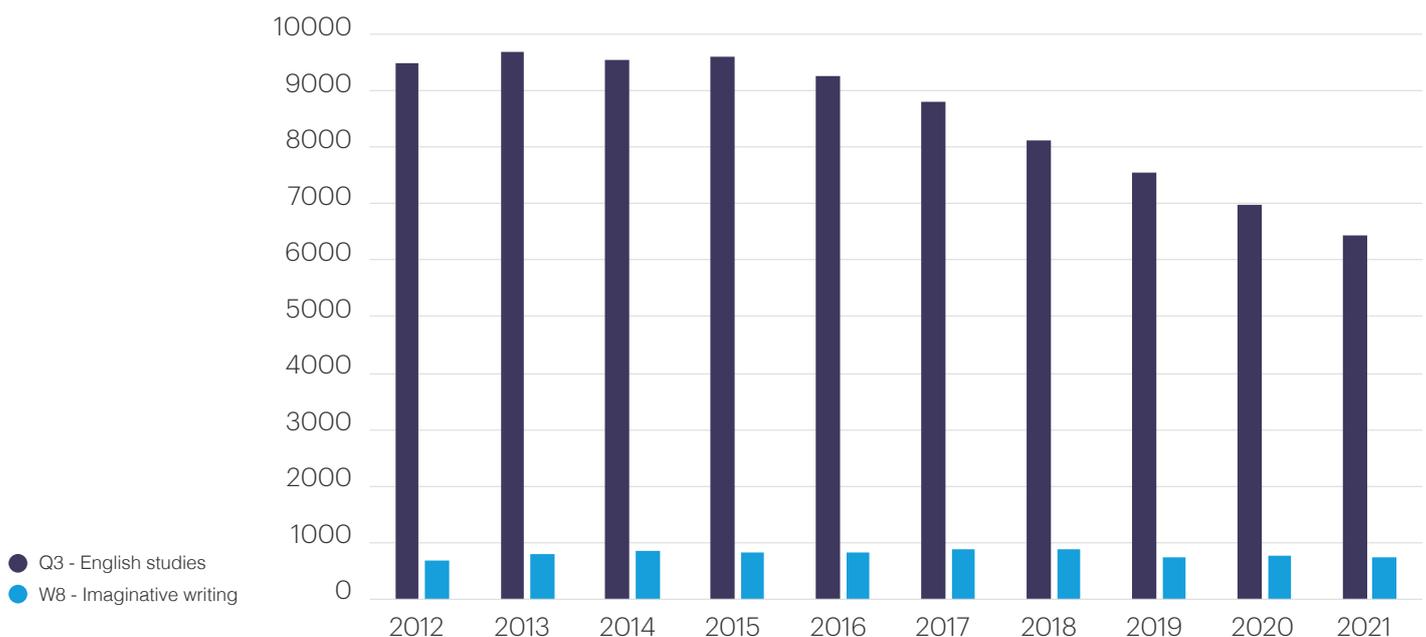
Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

⁴⁵ Kellett, M (2018), 'Why part-time study is so valuable', *WONKHE* [Feb 2023].

In addition to the HESA data analysed above, UCAS provides annual figures for the number of main scheme applications as well as the number of applicants who received and accepted a place on a course at the end of the UCAS cycle (acceptances), including applications and acceptances made through the Summer Clearing process.⁴⁶ This covers the vast majority of applications to full-time undergraduate programmes from people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and around two thirds of young (under 21 years) applications to full-time undergraduate courses in Scotland. Data on applications and acceptations provides a longitudinal understanding of trends in application cycles for full-time undergraduate courses. Between 2012 and 2021, aggregated UCAS application figures for the codes English Studies and Imaginative Writing fell by 33%. This decline started gradually, with small decreases between 2012 and 2016, followed by a more marked decline of 26% between 2017 and 2021. As shown in Figure 6 below, overall acceptances to English Studies decreased by 24% between 2012 and 2021.⁴⁷ Between 2012 and 2015, there were sustained small percentage increases, as shown in Figure 6, with 12,455 acceptances in 2013, followed by a decrease of 26% between 2015 and 2021. However, this picture excludes the years preceding 2012; while the last decade has seen a decline from 2015 in acceptances across English Studies, this does not account for longer term trends.

Looking at the codes in more detail, acceptances to courses submitted to English Studies began to decline after 2015, falling 33% between 2015 and 2021. Acceptances onto Imaginative Writing courses experienced an overall rise of 10% from 670 acceptances to 735 acceptances between 2012 and 2021. However, this picture is complicated by a peak of 890 acceptances in 2017. Between 2017 and 2021, acceptances onto Imaginative Writing courses fell by 17%, from 890 to 735. This suggests a more complex picture of the expansion of Creative Writing in comparison to English Literature and English Language; though, as noted in the methodology, JACS coding does not map directly onto these disciplines.

Figure 6. UCAS acceptances to English Studies (JACS) and Imaginative Writing (JACS), 2012-2021



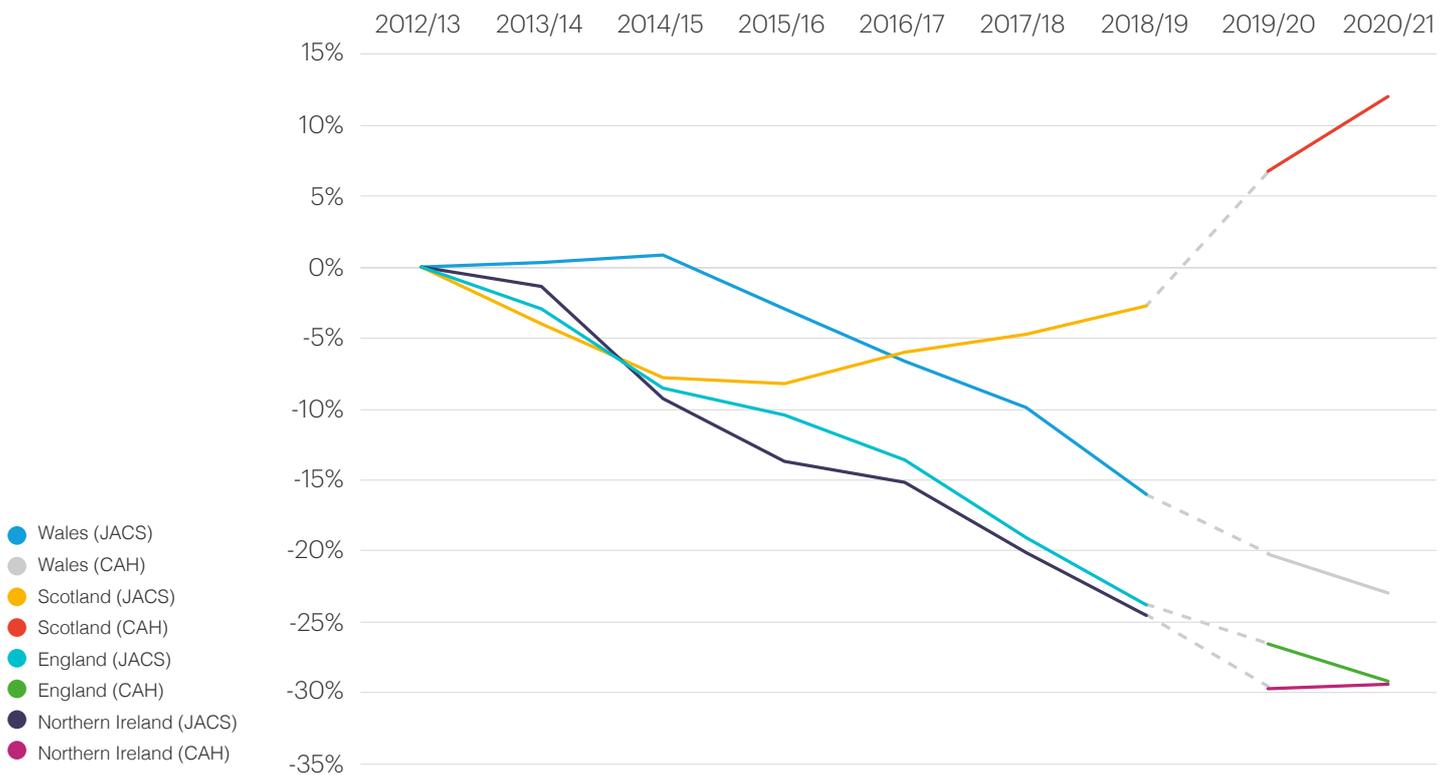
Source: UCAS End of Cycle 2021 data resources [September 2022]

⁴⁶ The UCAS main scheme refers to the main UCAS application system, where applicants choose and apply to five higher education institutions.

⁴⁷ UCAS have retained consistency in JACS categories over this period, allowing direct comparisons between UCAS acceptance figures from 2012 to 2021.

Changes to student numbers were not homogenous across UK nations. The domicile of students refers to where students lived prior to beginning their degree. As Figure 7 below shows, between 2012 and 2019, English Studies first degree undergraduate students domiciled in Northern Ireland fell by 25%, and those domiciled in England fell by 24%. Students domiciled in Wales fell by 16% and those from Scotland fell by just 3%. Analysis of the numbers since 2019 tentatively suggests that while students domiciled in Northern Ireland, England and Wales continued to fall between 2019 and 2021, students domiciled in Scotland rose: between 2012 and 2021 first degree undergraduate students domiciled in Scotland increased by 12%. The differences in the number of students entering English Studies degrees from different UK nations are notable, particularly as education is a devolved matter. Policy reform to pre-university qualifications, most notably changes to English Studies GCSEs, are likely to have contributed to this discrepancy (GCSEs are not taught in Scotland). However, the different higher education system that is in place in Scotland, which is subject to less change in student numbers, is also a defining factor here.

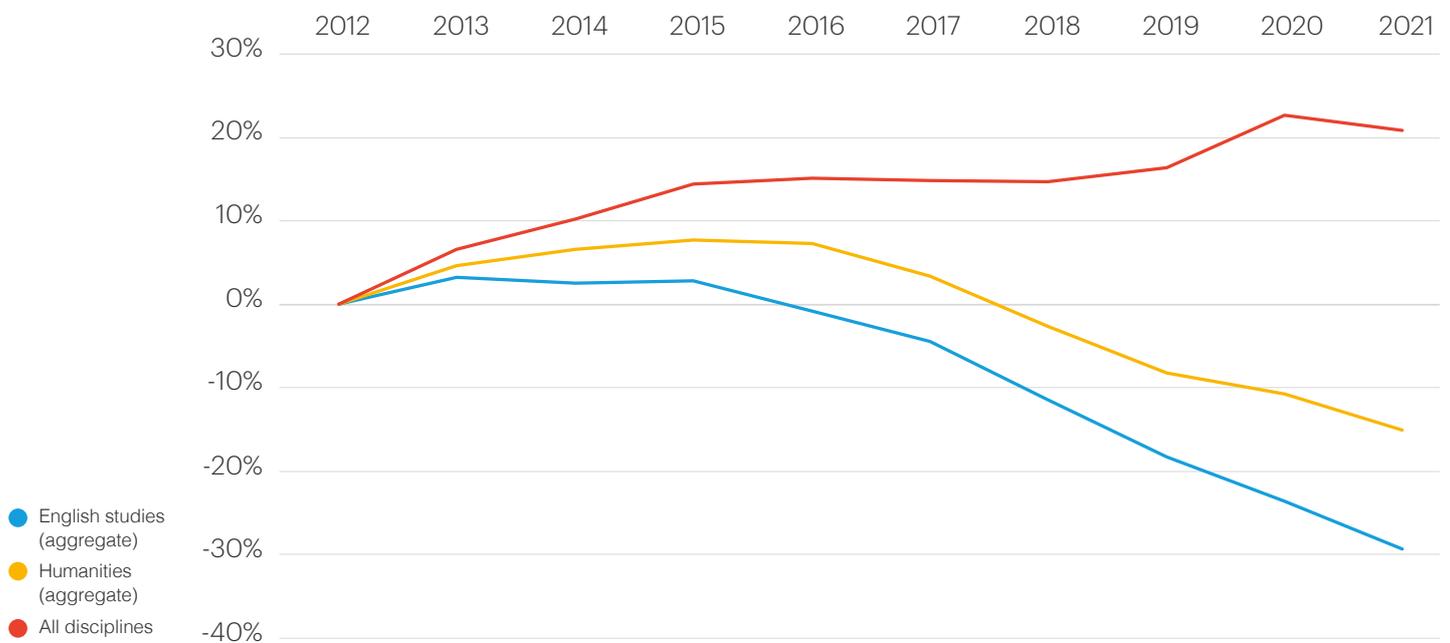
Figure 7. Percentage changes in first degree undergraduate students in English Studies (aggregate) by UK domicile, 2012-2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Compared with averages across the humanities, English Studies has seen a steeper decline of UCAS acceptances. English Studies saw a decline of 29% in UCAS acceptances, compared to 15% across the humanities, as seen in Figure 8 below. Between 2012 and 2021, European Languages, Literature and related subjects and Non-European Languages, Literature and related subjects have seen more substantial decreases of 39% and 32% respectively, compared to English Studies. Additionally, Group V: History & Philosophical studies also saw a less severe decline of 16% between 2012 and 2021. One interviewee said that they felt that the challenges facing English have been felt by Modern Languages studies for some time, and some narratives feel particularly familiar.⁴⁸ Though the overall population of 18 year olds has been decreasing over the last decade, analysis of all UCAS acceptances at university level has steadily increased by 21% since 2012, as also shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Percentage change in UCAS acceptances for undergraduate courses across humanities disciplines and English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021

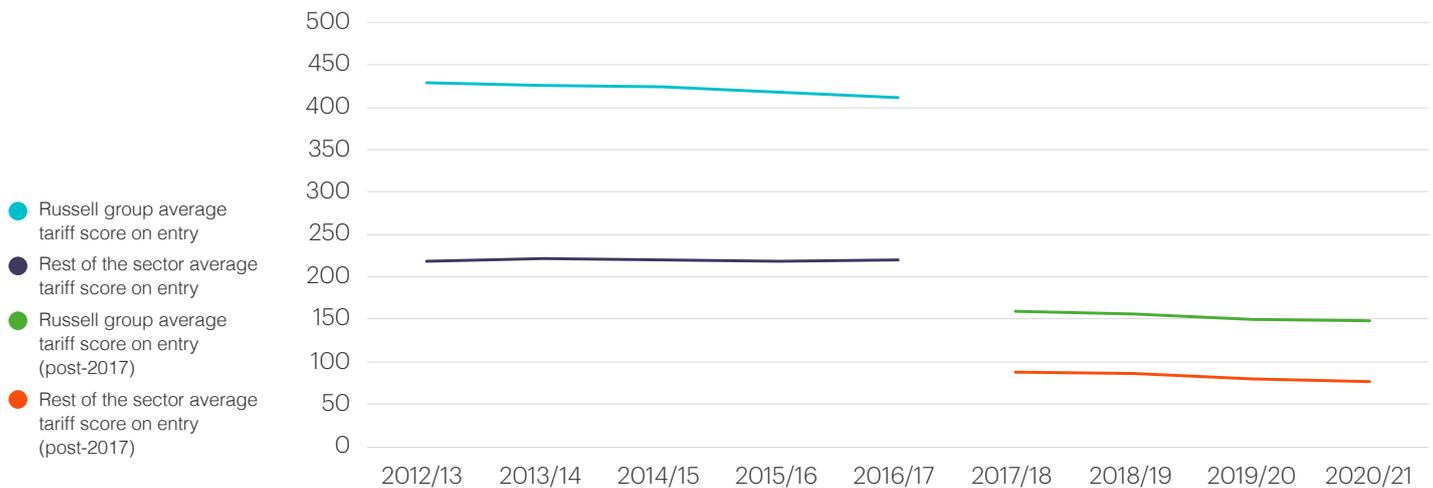


Source: UCAS End of Cycle 2021 data resources [March 2023]

Data analysis also suggests that the average tariff scores achieved by students prior to entry onto an English course has reduced slightly over time. As UCAS has changed its tariff methodology, the average first degree undergraduate tariff score on entry — i.e. A level or equivalent grades on entry — between 2012 to 2017 and 2018 to 2021 cannot be compared directly. As shown in Figure 9 below, between 2012 to 2017, the average tariff score achieved on entry to English Studies undergraduate degrees for Russell Group institutions decreased by 4%, while the average score across the rest of the sector increased by 1%. From 2017 to 2021, the average tariff score for English Studies undergraduate degrees decreased by 7% in Russell Group institutions, and by 14% across all other institutions.

⁴⁸ These trends have also been identified by the Academy's languages programmes. Please see British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK (2020), *Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills*.

Figure 9. Average first degree undergraduate tariff score on entry for English Studies (aggregate), 2012/13-2020/21 (FPE)



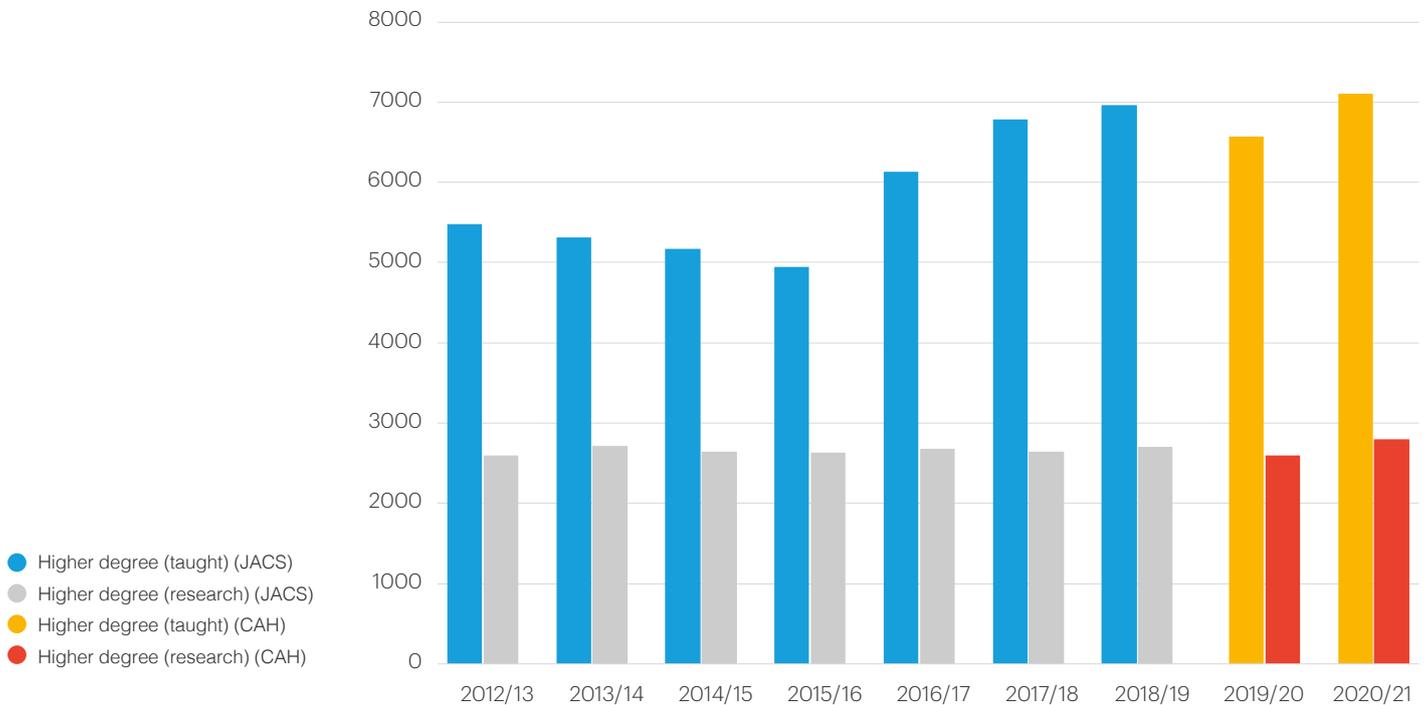
Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

The long-term changes outlined above may be reflective of institutions' responses to both decreasing student acceptances over this period, and increased competition between institutions due to the removal of student number caps in England. Interviewees in larger departments noted that their institutions had seen an increase in student numbers, with more students gaining places during clearing processes. While interviewees had no issues about this practice in principle, two consequences were noted. First, that this may impact smaller institutions who might previously have accepted students with lower tariff scores and recruited at clearing stages. Second, that staff and university systems need to be better equipped to support students with varying levels of prior knowledge – interviewees noted the importance of early support in higher education careers, without assumptions about prior knowledge, due to changing entry tariffs. The need for further support for staff and students was also felt to be exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic, including university staff understanding the contexts of teacher assessed grades. It was felt that this support was not always available to lecturers and students.

Changes in English Studies postgraduate study

Postgraduate study in 2020/21

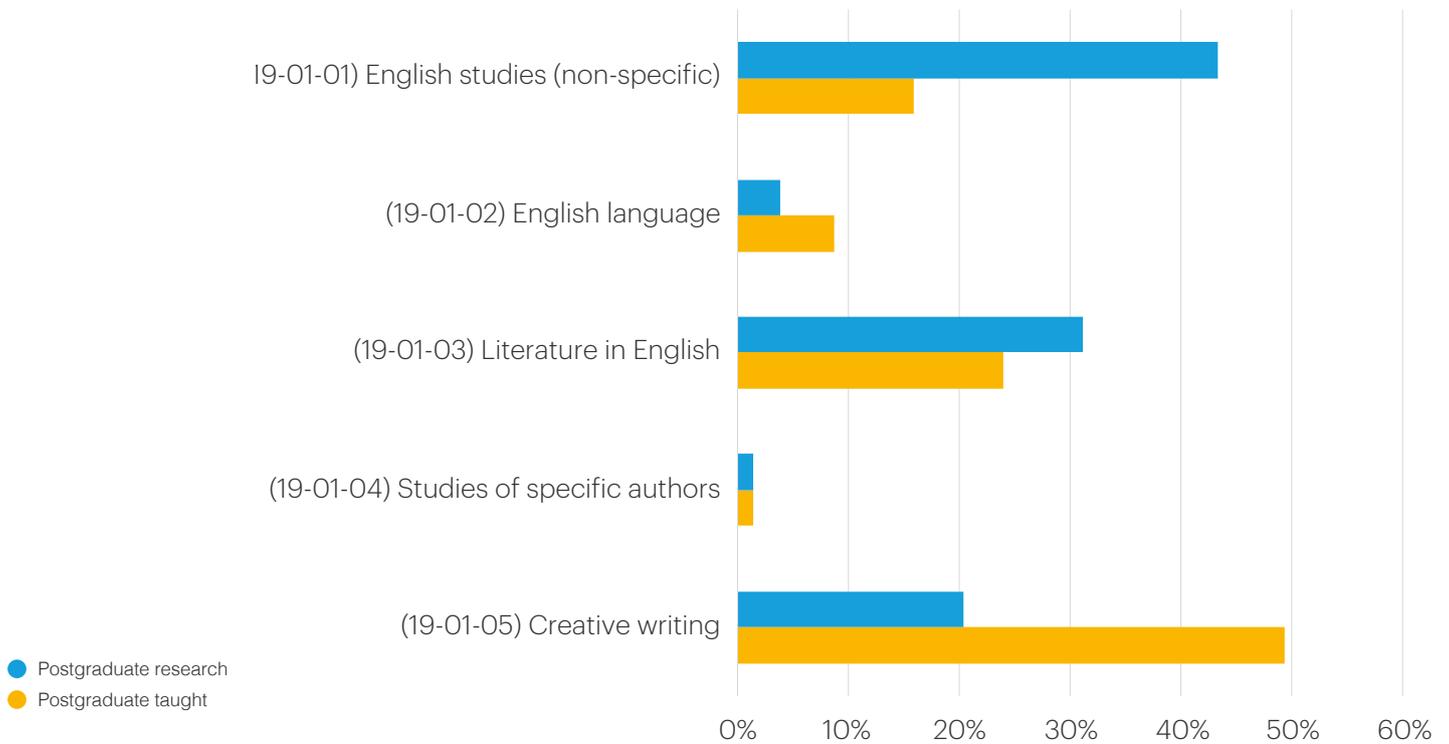
A total of 9,905 students were enrolled in postgraduate degrees in English Studies in 2020/21. Of that number, 7,105 (72%) were enrolled on postgraduate taught degrees, and 2,800 (28%) were enrolled on postgraduate research degrees. As shown in Figure 10 below, there have been fluctuations in the number of enrolments since 2012. Overall, since 2012, there has been an increase of 29% in English Studies postgraduate taught students, while there has also been an increase of 8% in English Studies postgraduate research students over the same time period. Though this longitudinal picture is limited by the changes to HESA coding, the rise in demand for English Studies at postgraduate level, especially from international students, is an important positive trend. Postgraduate fees can bolster departments and the wider university. This demand is also indicative of the role that English departments across the UK play in training researchers who go on to careers worldwide.

Figure 10. Number of postgraduate students in English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Figure 11, below, shows postgraduate enrolments across English Studies by subject area for 2020/21. In 2020/21, postgraduate taught students across English Studies were most commonly enrolled on Creative Writing courses (49%), followed by 'Literature in English' (24%), 'English Studies (non-specific)' (16%) and English Language (9%). At postgraduate research level, a larger proportion of students were classified under 'English Studies (non-specific)', which accounted for 43% of total English students. Research students studying 'Literature in English' made up the second largest proportion of enrolments (31%), followed by Creative Writing (20%) and English Language (4%). In 2020/21, King's College London and the University of Birmingham were the only institutions that submitted postgraduate taught courses to Studies of Specific Authors, with 110 students.⁴⁹ The proportions of students studying different disciplines within English therefore vary between postgraduate taught and research levels, particularly with respect to Creative Writing, as illustrated in Figure 11. However, as outlined in the methodology of this report and earlier in this chapter, there are issues with HESA categorisations for English Studies disciplines that make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from these breakdowns.

⁴⁹ Though it is not possible to tell directly from HESA data, King's College London and the University of Birmingham are notable for offering postgraduate taught degrees in Shakespeare Studies, and work in partnership with The Globe and Royal Shakespeare Company respectively.

Figure 11. Postgraduate students in English Studies by subject area, 2020/21 (FPE)

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

As shown in Figure 12 below, longitudinal analysis of postgraduate taught students in English Studies illustrates that there was an overall increase of 27% in enrolments to courses coded to English Studies between 2012 and 2019, followed by an increase of 8% between 2019 to 2021. When split by code, there was an increase of 14% in the JACS code English Studies and a 50% increase in Imaginative Writing. Though the JACS and CAH codes for Creative Writing are not completely compatible, it is clear that Creative Writing continued to play an important role in overall increases in students at postgraduate level for English Studies between 2019 and 2021. Figure 12 also shows a marked increase in enrolments across English Studies from 2016. This may have been influenced by the reintroduction of the student loan at master's level.^{50,51}

⁵⁰ Office for Students (2018), 'The Effect of Postgraduate Loads'. [10 Nov 22].

⁵¹ House, G. (2020), *Postgraduate Education in the UK*, Higher Education Policy Institute, p.2.

Figure 12. Percentage change in postgraduate taught students in English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)



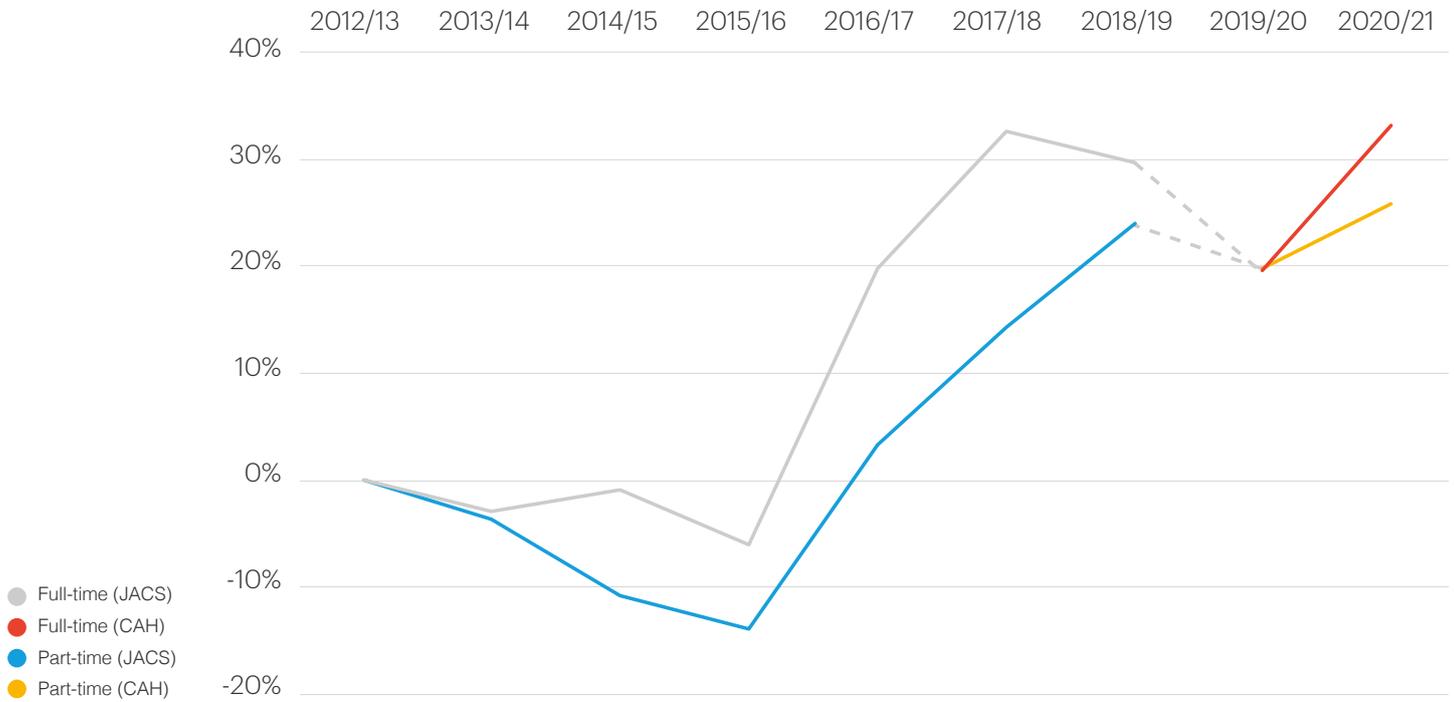
Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Longitudinal analysis also suggests that postgraduate taught students studying both full-time and part-time across English Studies are increasing. Between 2012 and 2019, part-time postgraduate taught students in English Studies increased by 24%, with an increase of 26% between 2012 and 2021. Those studying full-time increased at a similar but slightly steeper trajectory of 30%. As Figure 13 shows, there is a clear increase in both part-time and full-time postgraduate taught study in English Studies after 2015/16 – both modes of postgraduate study had been experiencing a decline until this point. This change in patterns of study may have been influenced by the reintroduction of the student loan at master’s level in 2016/17.^{52,53}

⁵² Office for Students (2018), 'The Effect of Postgraduate Loads'. [10 Nov 22].

⁵³ House, G. (2020), *Postgraduate Education in the UK*, Higher Education Policy Institute, p.2.

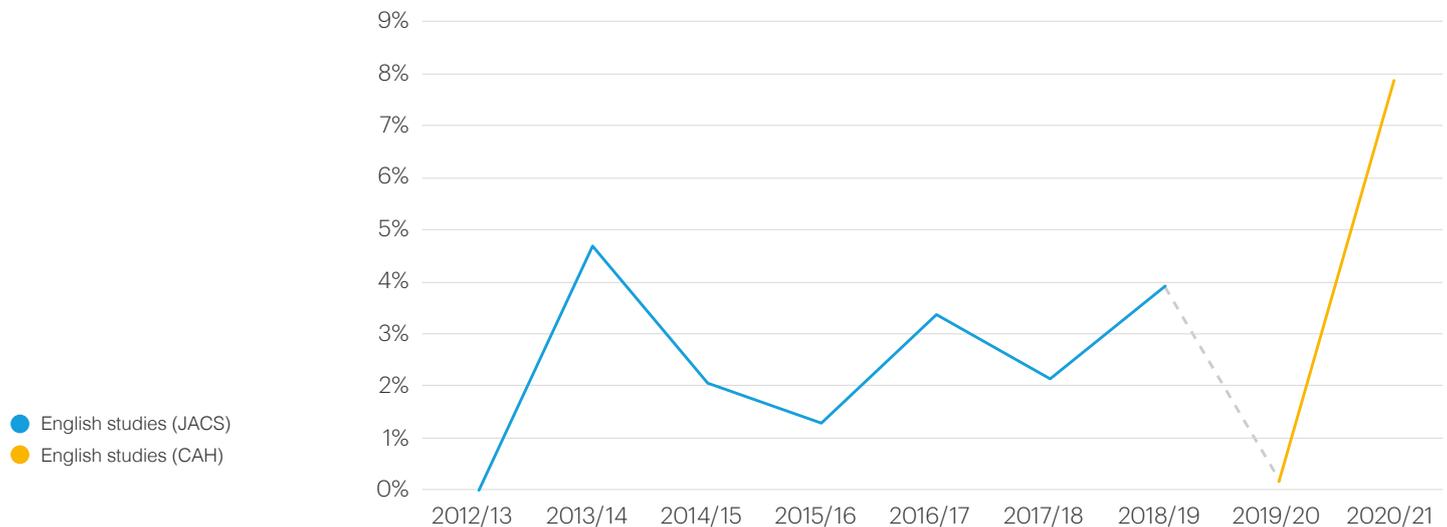
Figure 13. Percentage change in part-time and full-time postgraduate taught students across English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Figure 14 below indicates that there is some similarity in the changes in postgraduate taught and postgraduate research student numbers. This should be caveated by the fact the postgraduate research numbers are from a smaller population, and therefore more likely to be subject to larger variations. Across English Studies, postgraduate research students increased by 4% between 2012 and 2019, and by 8% between 2019 and 2021. There was a large increase of 92% in Imaginative Writing students between 2012 and 2019, while students onto English Studies fell by 3%. In the shorter term, between 2019 and 2021, students in Creative Writing increased by 18%, alongside an increase of 13% in the CAH code 'Literature in English' and a 29% increase in 'English Language'. Only 'English Studies (non-specific)' saw a small decrease of 2% between 2019 and 2021. As also indicated in Figure 11 above, the spread of enrolments is less skewed towards Creative Writing, with a higher percentage of English Studies postgraduate research students submitted the codes 'English Studies (non-specific)' and 'Literature in English' at postgraduate research level, when compared to postgraduate taught. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, there are not clear demarcations between 'English Studies (non-specific)' and English Literature and Language, so the above does not indicate explicit changes to postgraduate research student numbers in Literature and Language.

Figure 14. Percentage change in postgraduate research students in English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Despite the increases in student enrolments at postgraduate taught and research levels, interviewees raised concerns about the pipelines between postgraduate taught to postgraduate research levels, and then into academia. Interviewees highlighted potential gaps in ‘succession’ in certain periods of literature, particularly medieval and eighteenth-century literature. Interviewees noted that many postgraduate research degrees have not changed in response to the increased competitiveness and precarity associated with pursuing an academic career. Some felt that postgraduate research degrees can be narrowly conceived of as an ‘academic apprenticeship’, rather than focusing on broadening research skills as a launchpad into careers beyond academia. This was contrasted with the focus on employability and skills at undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels.

It was also noted during our interviews that access to employability opportunities may be uneven, with funded research students more likely to have access to training and development opportunities than those who were self-funded, for example through the Arts and Humanities Research Council doctoral training partnerships. Alongside these challenges, some interviewees highlighted successful institutional activities and programmes designed specifically for postgraduate research employability, noting where there is additional support for those seeking alternatives to academic careers.⁵⁴

Interviewees raised the issue that external burdens may be affecting enrolment and continuation on postgraduate research programmes. Particularly, it was noted that the cost of living crisis has impacted both self-funded postgraduate research students as well as the smaller proportion of postgraduate research students with research funding (due to the real terms drop in research stipends). Interviewees highlighted that the pressure to work alongside the doctoral degree can lead to burn out. Experience in teaching at university level is acknowledged as a pre-requisite for early career academics, and PhD students often teach during their doctoral degree. Interviewees flagged that these contracts are short-term and hourly paid though often not reflective of time spent preparing and marking. This means that research students who

⁵⁴ Please also see: The British Academy (2020), *Good Practice in Providing Careers Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students*.

need an income they can live on, for example those who are self-funding their PhD, may need to take on other work. This was of particular concern to interviewees given the current financial climate. Others raised issues of mental health following the Covid-19 pandemic, with two interviewees raising the gendered burden of childcare responsibilities during lockdown periods affecting postgraduate research students alongside academic staff (this report will further address gender parity in the diversity sections of chapters 3 and 4). These issues have been felt across the doctoral community, with organisations like the UKRI and Vitae working to improve the sense of belonging and research culture for postdoctoral researchers across all disciplines.⁵⁵

Diversity and protected characteristics of English Studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels

We discussed issues of diversity at length in our interviews with college Deans, Heads of Department and UCU representatives across the sector. Interviewees discussed the positive changes in diversity, with English Studies becoming more diverse across the board, particularly in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, which this section will examine in more detail. However, this varied significantly between institutions, and institution types. As we will see through this section, challenges in diversifying the student body do not affect institutions evenly and vary by both institution type and region.

Class and socioeconomic background markers for students are not available through HESA Heidi Plus data and are therefore not included in the analysis in this section. However, socio-economic background was a key, intersecting issue raised by interviewees, particularly in relation to the importance of appropriate support in teaching spaces. Interviewees highlighted the importance of nurturing students' confidence in their intellectual and critical analysis capabilities, noting that it is vital to 'spend time building them up'. Interviewees expressed that it is vital that curricula knowledge is not assumed — particularly around essay expectations, seminar participation and use of library sources — and that students are given adequate support and guidance. This theme will recur throughout this section, interlinking with current diversity challenges in English Studies. The categorisations used in this chapter relate to the HESA categorisations for certain characteristics and indicators of diversity, including domicile status, ethnicity, age, sex and disability.

Domicile of English Studies students⁵⁶

Domicile of first degree undergraduate students

In 2020/21, students domiciled in the UK made up 92% of the first degree undergraduates across English Studies, and international students made up 8% of first degree undergraduates. As shown in Table 3 below, the international student population of first degree English Studies undergraduates was evenly split between European Union, and non-European Union domiciled; students domiciled in the European Union made up 4% of first degree undergraduates in English Studies in 2020/21, and students domiciled in non-European countries made up 4%. Of all internationally domiciled first degree undergraduates, the largest group of international students were domiciled in China, making up 1% of first degree undergraduates.

⁵⁵ Please see Vitae and UUK (2020), *Catalyst Fund: Supporting mental health and wellbeing for postgraduate research students*.

⁵⁶ Domicile data is provided to HESA through postcodes (for the UK, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man domiciled students) or country codes.

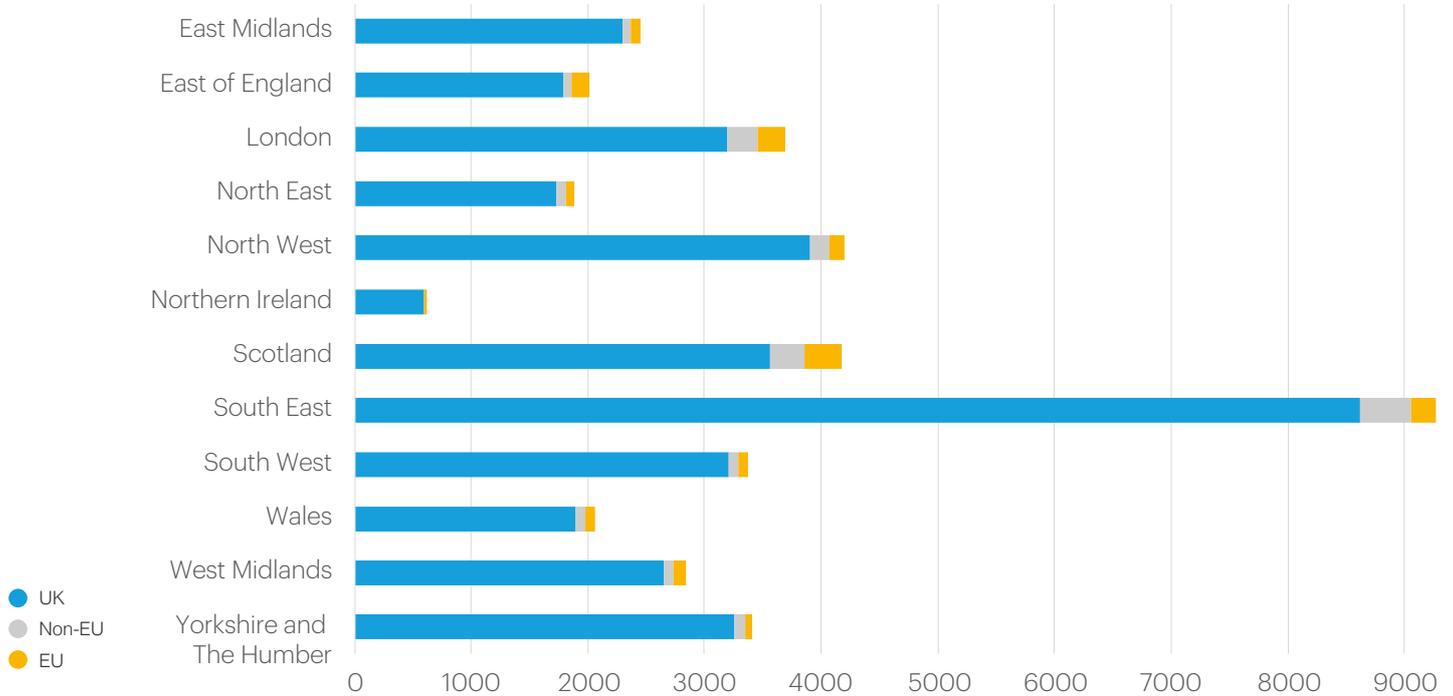
Table 3. First degree students in English Studies (aggregate) by domicile, 2020/21 (FPE)

Domicile	Percentage of first degree undergraduate students (FPE)
England	79%
Northern Ireland	2%
Scotland	7%
Wales	4%
Non-European Union	4%
European Union	4%

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Furthermore, the proportion of first degree undergraduate students varied by region. As shown in Figure 15 below, in 2020/21 there were more first degree undergraduate students at institutions in the South East of England than in any other region, accounting for 23% of all English Studies undergraduates. Further analysis shows that students from different domiciles were proportionately different evenly across UK regions and devolved administrations. As also shown in Figure 15 below, the South East had the largest proportion of UK-domiciled first degree undergraduate students (23%) and the largest proportion of non-European Union domiciled first degree students (26%) of any region. Non-European Union domiciled students made up 17% of first degree undergraduate students in Scotland and 15% of first degree undergraduates in London. Scotland also had the largest proportion of European Union domiciled first degree undergraduate students compared to other regions, with European Union domiciled students making up 20% of first degree undergraduates enrolled in Scotland. Until 2021/22, EU domiciled students did not pay tuition fees in Scotland; this data may reflect those students in the previous fee arrangement. European Union domiciled students made up 16% of first degree undergraduates in London and 14% of first degree undergraduates in the South East.

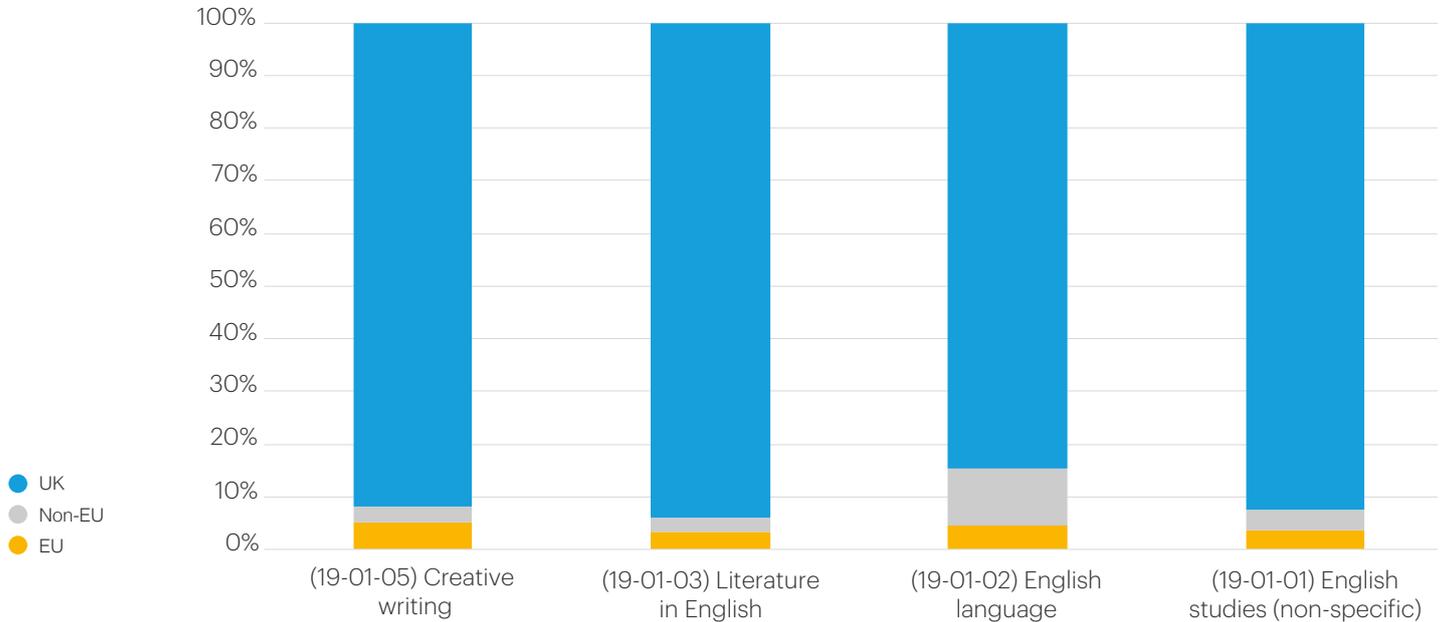
Figure 15. First degree undergraduate students in English Studies (aggregate) by region of study and domicile, 2020/21 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

In comparison to other English Studies courses submitted to CAH codes, 'English Language' had a higher proportion of first degree undergraduate students who were non-European Union domiciled in 2020/21. As seen in Figure 16 below, students who were domiciled in non-European countries made up 11% of total enrolments on English Language courses. Of first degree students submitted to English Language, 5% were European Union domiciled and 85% were UK domiciled. In comparison, of first degree students submitted to English Studies (non-specific), even proportions of students were European Union and non-European Union domiciled (4% each), while 92% were UK domiciled. First degree students submitted to Literature in English were also evenly spread among European Union and non-European Union domiciles, though the overall proportion was smaller in comparison to English Studies (non-specific) and English Language (3% each). UK domiciled first degree undergraduates made up 94% of first degree students submitted to Literature in English. Finally, 5% of first degree students submitted to Creative Writing were European Union domiciled, while 3% were non-European Union domiciled. As such 92% of first degree students submitted to Creative Writing were UK domiciled.

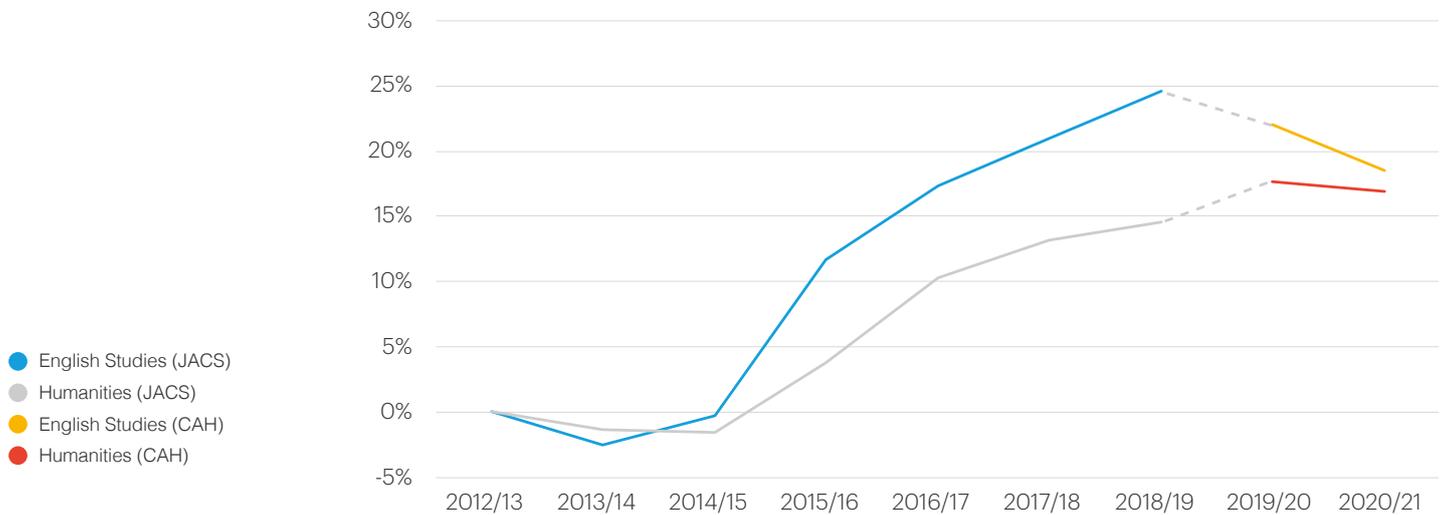
Figure 16. Domicile of first degree undergraduate students in English Studies by subject code, 2020/21 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Interviewees across a variety of institutions noted the impact of the UK's departure from the European Union on recruitment from member states. Longitudinal analysis, however, demonstrates a 25% increase in European Union domiciled first degree undergraduate students across English Studies codes between 2012 and 2019, as shown in Figure 17 below. Though HESA's change in coding in 2019 complicates the picture, European Union domiciled first degree undergraduates across English Studies increased by 25% between 2012 and 2019, but decreased by 3% between 2019 and 2021. This mirrors trends across humanities subjects, which saw a 15% increase in European Union domiciled first degree undergraduate students between 2012 and 2019, and a decrease of 1% between 2019 and 2021. Though data for first degree undergraduates suggests that European Student numbers were growing, multiple interviewees discussed falling numbers of European Union first degree students. This may suggest that increases in European Union domiciled students are not felt equally across higher education institutions or that the long term changes effected by the UK's departure from the European Union are yet to emerge in the data.

Figure 17. Percentage change in European Union domiciled first degree students across English Studies (aggregate) and humanities (aggregate), 2012 to 2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Domicile of postgraduate students

In 2020/21, 68% of students enrolled in postgraduate taught courses in English Studies were domiciled in England, while 5% were domiciled in Wales, 5% in Scotland, and 2% in Northern Ireland.⁵⁷ For international students, non-European Union countries made up 16% of total postgraduate taught enrolment domiciles. Students who were domiciled in the European Union made up 4% of students enrolled on postgraduate taught courses in the UK in 2020/21. Table 4 shows the percentage of postgraduate taught students in English Studies with HESA rounding conventions applied. Across postgraduate levels, the largest proportion of international students were domiciled in China, with this group making up 5% of total postgraduate English Studies students. Following China, the second largest proportion of international students studying in the UK were domiciled in the United States, making up 4% of the total, and third highest proportion were students domiciled in India, making up 2%.

Table 4. Postgraduate taught students in English Studies (aggregate) by domicile, 2020/21 (FPE)

Domicile	Percentage of postgraduate taught students (FPE)
England	68%
Northern Ireland	2%
Scotland	5%
Wales	5%
Non-European Union	16%
European Union	4%

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

⁵⁷

HESA notes that this field holds the country code of the student's permanent home address prior to entry on the course.

As seen from Tables 4 (above) and 5 (below), the domicile of students at postgraduate research level was similar to that at postgraduate taught level. In 2020/21, 60% of postgraduate research students across English Studies were domiciled in England, 6% in Scotland, 5% were domiciled in Wales, and 2% in Northern Ireland. However, in comparison with postgraduate taught students, international students made up a higher proportion of postgraduate research students in 2020/21. The largest proportion of students domiciled outside of the UK were from countries outside of the European Union, making up 22% of total postgraduate research enrolments. Students who were domiciled in the European Union represented 6% of students enrolled across English postgraduate research programmes.⁵⁸

Table 5. Postgraduate research students in English Studies (aggregate) by domicile, 2020/21 (FPE)

Domicile	Percentage of postgraduate research students (FPE)
England	60%
Northern Ireland	2%
Scotland	6%
Wales	5%
Non-European Union	22%
European Union	6%

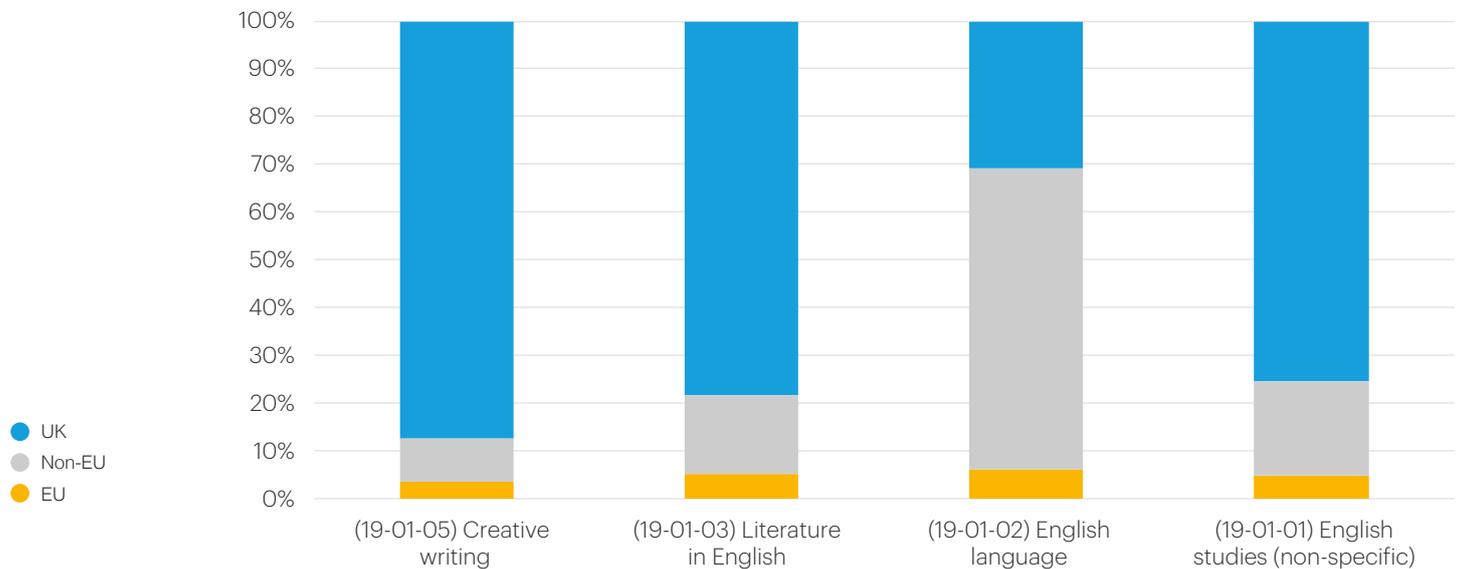
Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

As shown in Figure 18 below, in 2020/21 there were different patterns of domicile of postgraduate students across constituent English Studies codes. English Language had the largest proportion of non-European Union domiciled students, with 63% of students. UK domiciled students made up 31% of English Language postgraduates, while European Union domiciled students made up 6%. This may be due to English Language's intersection with Linguistics, which has typically has large international cohorts. Postgraduate students studying for an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) may also be included in this figure. As noted earlier in the chapter, many of our interviewees noted the shift to expanding international, or non-UK domiciled, students at postgraduate taught levels, and this was often raised by interviewees who specialised in English Language and Linguistics.

Creative Writing had the largest number of students who were UK domiciled, in comparison with other English Studies codes. Of postgraduate students submitted to Creative Writing in 2020/21, 87% were domiciled in the UK, 9% were domiciled in non-European Union countries, and 4% were domiciled in the European Union. Of students submitted to Literature in English, 78% of postgraduate students were UK domiciled, while 17% were non-European Union domiciled, and 5% were European Union domiciled. In English Studies (non-specific), 75% of postgraduate students were UK domiciled, 20% were non-European Union domiciled and 5% were European Union domiciled.

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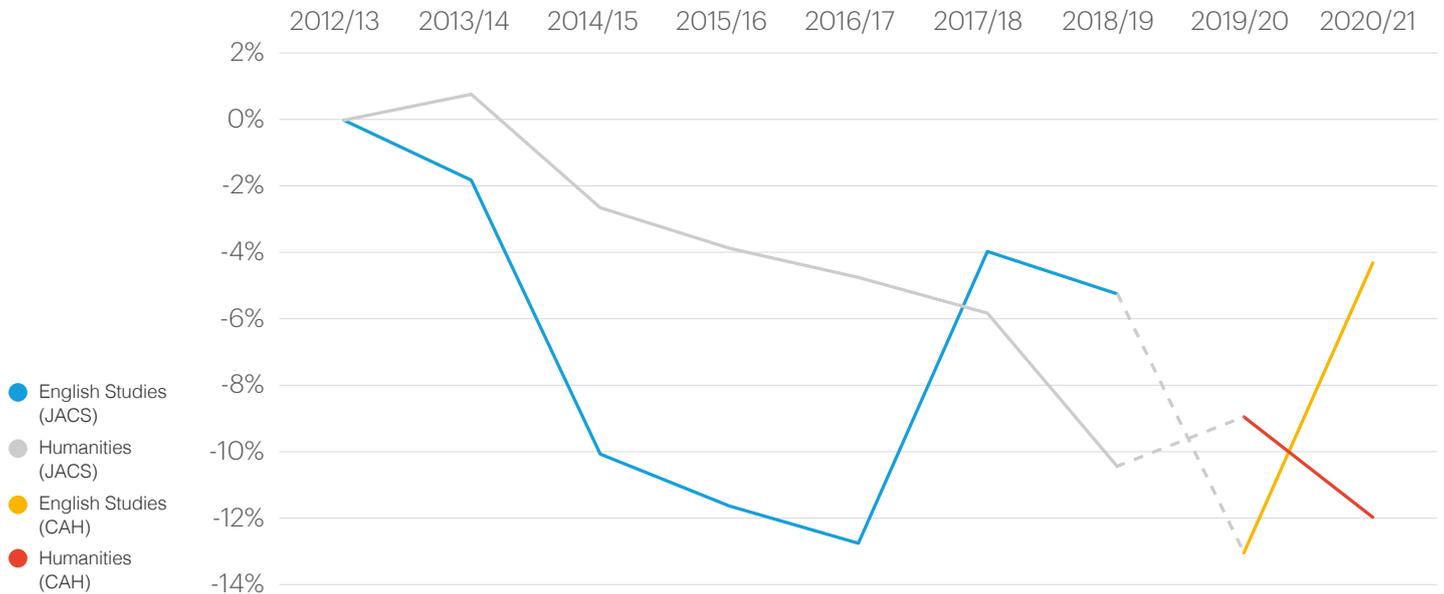
These figures are published in line with HESA percentage rounding methodology, so do not represent exact proportions.

Figure 18. Domicile of postgraduate students by English Studies code, 2020/21 (FPE)

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Changes in European Union domiciled are concerning at postgraduate levels. As shown in Figure 18 below, between 2012 and 2016, there was a decrease of 16% in postgraduate taught students who were European Union domiciled (from 310 to 260). Between 2019 and 2021, European Union domiciled postgraduate taught students increased by 8% to 295, though this is still 4% lower than in 2012. This picture is echoed at postgraduate research level, which saw a decline of 16% between 2012 to 2017 (from 170 to 145 students). Postgraduate research students who were European Union domiciled grew between 2019 and 2021 by 13%, though this also represented a 4% decrease from 2012. One interviewee highlighted this downturn in the number of students from the European Union as a cause for concern. They flagged that ‘Linguistics is predominantly a postgraduate discipline, and many of our students are actually international, and were predominately European — however we saw a huge downturn in numbers with Brexit’.

Figure 19. Percentage change in European Union domiciled postgraduate students across English Studies (aggregate) and the humanities (aggregate), 2012 to 2021(FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Ethnicity of English Studies students⁵⁹

HESA data remains one of the best resources for understanding ethnicity in UK higher education despite its limitations, including a lack of data on the ethnic identity of international students. As such, the data below is restricted to UK domiciled students. This section analyses HESA's six detailed ethnicity categorisations: Asian, Black, Mixed, Other, Unknown/not applicable, and White. We acknowledge issues with the limitations of these categorisations, including their homogeneity which does not allow for the nuance and complexities in identity and experience.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Students whose permanent address is in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man are required to report their ethnic origin. HESA's practice is to use national classifications, and align these to Census classifications.

⁶⁰ Advance HE. (2021), *Understanding Structural Racism in UK Higher Education: an introduction*, pp.3-8. We have utilised the 6-way ethnicity categorisations instead of the 12-way ethnicity categorisations in this report because of the small population sizes within this level of breakdown. Some of the 12-way ethnicity categorisations also conflate ethnicity with nationality in places, and it was felt that this was not helpful to better understanding the ethnic diversity of students.

Table 6. Proportion of UK domiciled first degree undergraduate students across English Studies (aggregate) by ethnicity, 2020/21 (FPE)

Ethnic identity	Proportion of UK domiciled first degree students across English Studies	Proportion of UK domiciled first degree students across the humanities
Asian	7%	6%
Black	3%	4%
Mixed	5%	5%
Other	1%	1%
Unknown/not applicable	1%	1%
White	83%	83%

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

As seen in Table 6 above, the proportions of first degree students by ethnicity are largely similar across humanities course codes; though were two slight differences across English Studies and the humanities codes. In 2020/21, first degree students who identified as Black made up a slightly larger proportion of overall humanities students in comparison with English Studies, while those who identified as Asian made up a slightly larger proportion of English Studies students in comparison with overall proportions across the humanities. Longitudinal analysis suggests that there have been some positive changes in the ethnicity of UK domiciled first degree students on courses coded to English Studies. Between 2012 and 2019, first degree English Studies students who identified as Asian increased by 1% between 2012 and 2019, and remained stable between 2019 and 2021. Students who identified as having a Mixed ethnic background increased by 4% between 2012 and 2019, and by 4% between 2019 and 2021. Those who identified as having Other ethnic backgrounds increased by 4% between 2012 and 2019, but decreased by 7% between 2019 and 2021. However, first degree students in English Studies who identified as Black decreased by 6% between 2012 and 2019, and decreased by a further 1% between 2019 and 2021. Furthermore, first degree English Studies students who identified as White fell by 25% between 2012 and 2019, and by 4% between 2019 and 2021.

Table 7. Proportion of UK domiciled postgraduate students across English Studies (aggregate) by ethnicity, 2020/21 (FPE)

Ethnic identity	Proportion of postgraduate students across English Studies	Proportion of postgraduate students across the humanities
Asian	3%	4%
Black	2%	3%
Mixed	4%	4%
Other	1%	1%
Unknown/not applicable	2%	4%
White	88%	83%

Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Those from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds made up a smaller proportion of the overall postgraduate student population in English, as shown in Table 7 above.

In 2020/21, 88% of postgraduate students in English Studies identified as White. This was a larger proportion compared to both first degree students in English Studies and wider proportions of postgraduates who identified as White across humanities disciplines, as also seen in Table 7. Postgraduate students who identified as Asian and Black also made up a slightly smaller proportion of English Studies postgraduates in comparison with proportions across humanities disciplines.

There have also been changes to the diversity of ethnic identities in English Studies at postgraduate level between 2012 and 2021; however the percentage changes detailed below should be caveated by the small numbers of postgraduate students, which means that small increases in absolute numbers can seem more dramatic as a percentage change. Over this period, there were significant percentage increases across different ethnic groups at postgraduate level. English Studies postgraduate students who identified as Asian increased by 53% between 2012 and 2019, with an increase of 17% between 2019 and 2021. Postgraduate students who identified as Black also saw a significant increase of 57% between 2012 and 2019, with an increase of 21% between 2019 and 2021. While postgraduate students who identified as having a Mixed ethnic background increased by 52% between 2012 and 2019, they saw a decrease of 3% between 2019 and 2021. Between 2012 and 2019, students who identified as having Other ethnic backgrounds increased by 35%, with an increase of 16% between 2019 and 2021. Finally, students who identified as White increased by 24% between 2012 and 2019, and by 9% between 2019 and 2021.

In 2021, English Studies across all levels was not fully representative of the population in England and Wales in terms of ethnicity. In the Census 2021, 9.3% of people identified as 'Asian, or Asian British'; 4% identified with 'Black, Black British, Caribbean or African'; 2.9% identified with 'Mixed or Multiple ethnic group'; and 81.7% identified as from a 'White' ethnic group.⁶¹ This suggests that at both first degree and postgraduate level, those who identified as 'Asian, or Asian British' were significantly underrepresented in English Studies. The representation of people who identified as 'Black, Black British, Caribbean or African' at first degree level was in close alignment with the population in England and Wales, but this group was underrepresented at postgraduate levels. At both first degree and postgraduate levels, English Studies had a larger representation of people identified as 'Mixed or Multiple ethnic group' when compared to census data. HESA data also suggests that English Studies at first degree and postgraduate levels was over-representative of people who identified as White.

Interviewees stressed the importance of representation, particularly in terms of ethnicity. Some noted specific schemes, such as pro:NE, designed to create paths into and through higher education for those who may face multiple barriers.⁶² However, it was noted that much more can and should be done to reduce barriers to higher education for students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Interviewees discussed both the moral imperative of increasing ethnic diversity — as the right thing to do — as well as the importance of diversity to the future health of the disciplines. Interviewees felt that greater diversity in those studying and participating in disciplines across English Studies would enrich the disciplines through the diversity of thought and perspectives brought to the study.

⁶¹ ONS (2022), '4. How ethnic composition varied across England and Wales', *Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021* [1 Dec 22].

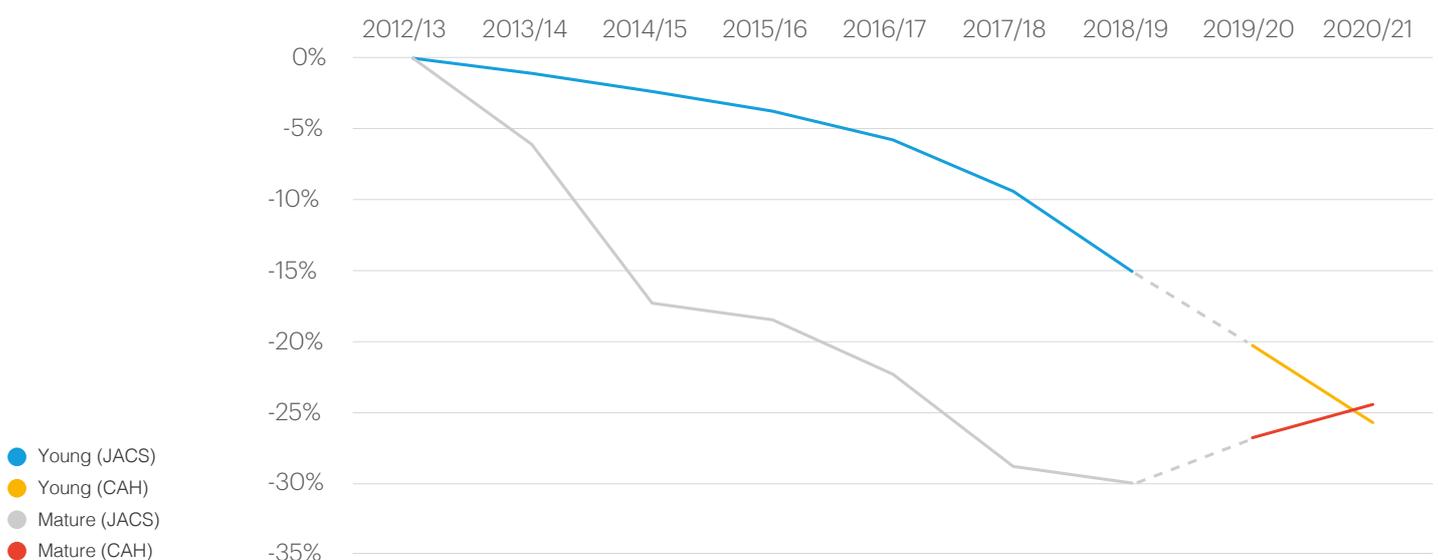
⁶² Pro:NE Project Home, [March 2023].

Age of English Studies students⁶³

In 2020/21, under 21 year olds made up the largest proportion of first degree undergraduates studying on English Studies, making up 62% of all students. 21-24 year olds made up 22% of first degree undergraduate population across English Studies, while those over 25 years made up 16% of students. This data aligns with discussions in our interviews, which highlighted significantly decreasing numbers of mature students in recent years, with an increased proportion of first degree students entering English Studies degrees at 18. Interviewees discussed changing recruitment strategies within their institution, which are now focused on young learners (i.e. under 21 year olds) rather than mature students. Other interviewees remarked that a decline in mature students at undergraduate level, partly driven by changes in the higher education fees and loans systems, is a loss to teachers and the classroom.

First degree students who are over 21 at the time of entry are traditionally classed as mature learners, while those under 21 are classed as young learners. As shown in Figure 20 below, the percentage change in enrolments of mature learners (or students over 21 at the time of entry) at first degree undergraduate level has decreased more rapidly than in students under 21 at the time of entry. Between 2012 and 2019, mature students across English Studies fell by 30%, compared to 15% across under 21 year olds. However, between 2019 and 2021, mature student enrolments increased by 3%, while enrolments of under 21 year olds fell by 7%. Figure 20 also supports discussions in interviews that the decline in mature students may be aligned to the rise in undergraduate fees, which came into effect in England in 2012/13. However, it also complicates this picture, as the percentage decline in young student enrolments has now reached a similar level to the decline in mature student enrolments, as seen in Figure 20. While the humanities overall have seen less steep percentage declines in young undergraduate students (a decrease of 5% between 2012 and 2019, and 4% between 2019 and 2021), they have seen a similar decline in mature learners, with a decrease of 24% between 2012 and 2019, followed by a slight increase between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 20. Percentage change in first degree undergraduate under 21 and mature students in English Studies (aggregate), 2012-2021 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Interviewees also noted that in recent years, students seem less ‘prepared’ for university and less aware of what is expected of them. This may be linked to a focus on examination at GCSE and A level, which equips students less well for the collaborative, creative and independent learning expected at higher education level. It was highlighted that students who had experienced formative levels of under-18 education online during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as those who started their undergraduate degrees online during this period, have struggled with a return to campus and in-person teaching. Interviewees also raised concerns that, while widening participation programmes have been successful in creating more diversity in the student body, universities have not necessarily provided the required mechanisms for support once those students have arrived. One interviewee noted that: ‘one of the issues is really fundamentally understanding that university is a strange and alien place, particularly for students who are first in family, who haven’t grown up with the assumption that they’d go to university’.

Finally, in 2020/21, of students at postgraduate taught level, 43% fell into the 21 to 24 age bracket – this was the largest proportion of postgraduate students across all age brackets. At postgraduate research level, the largest proportion of students (32%) were aged between 25 and 29 years. This may suggest that a majority of postgraduate students do not take a break between degrees.

Sex and gender of English Studies students⁶⁴

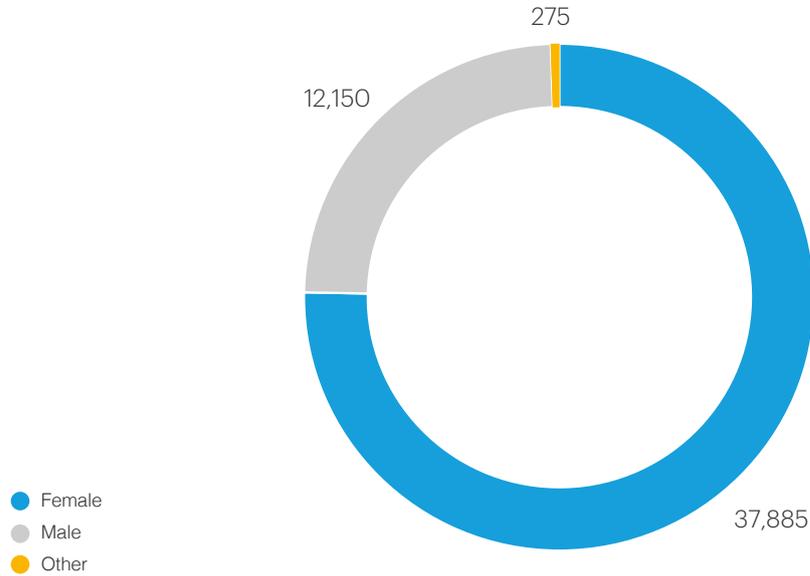
In 2020/21, across English disciplines and levels, a larger proportion of students were female than male, with female students making up 75% of total students across English Studies, male students making up 24% and ‘Other’ students making up 1%, as shown in Figure 21 below. HESA’s category of ‘Other’ is included for students whose sex identity aligns with terms such as intersex, androgyne, intergender, ambigender, gender fluid, polygender and gender queer.⁶⁵ Creative Writing had higher proportions of male students (32%), when compared to other English Studies codes. Courses coded to Literature in English had proportionally fewer male students than other English codes, as male students made up 21% of the cohort. Across all English Studies codes, those whose sex identity aligned with HESA’s category of ‘Other’ were proportionally very small, making up 1% or less across all codes. According to the 2021 Census, women and girls made up 51% of the population of England and Wales, while men and boys made up 49%. This means that English Studies is significantly over-representative of women when compared to the wider population.⁶⁶ For one interviewee, a lack of diversity in terms of the gender of students intersected with class – they noted that working class men in particular were underrepresented in English Studies. They highlighted that the best teaching and learning happens in classrooms that are diverse across multiple characteristics, including gender, sex and class.

⁶⁴ HESA and UCAS data on sex is self-identified. HESA use the categories female, male and other, while UCAS use the categories men and women. Under HESA guidance, respondents should use the sex recorded on legal documentation, such as birth certificate, Gender Recognition Certificate, or passport. HESA (2022), *Sex identifier – Amended – 12 May 2022*, [Feb 2023].

⁶⁵ HESA, ‘Definitions: Students’, *Definitions and data standards* [Dec 22].

⁶⁶ Census 2021 (2023), *Male and female populations* [April 23].

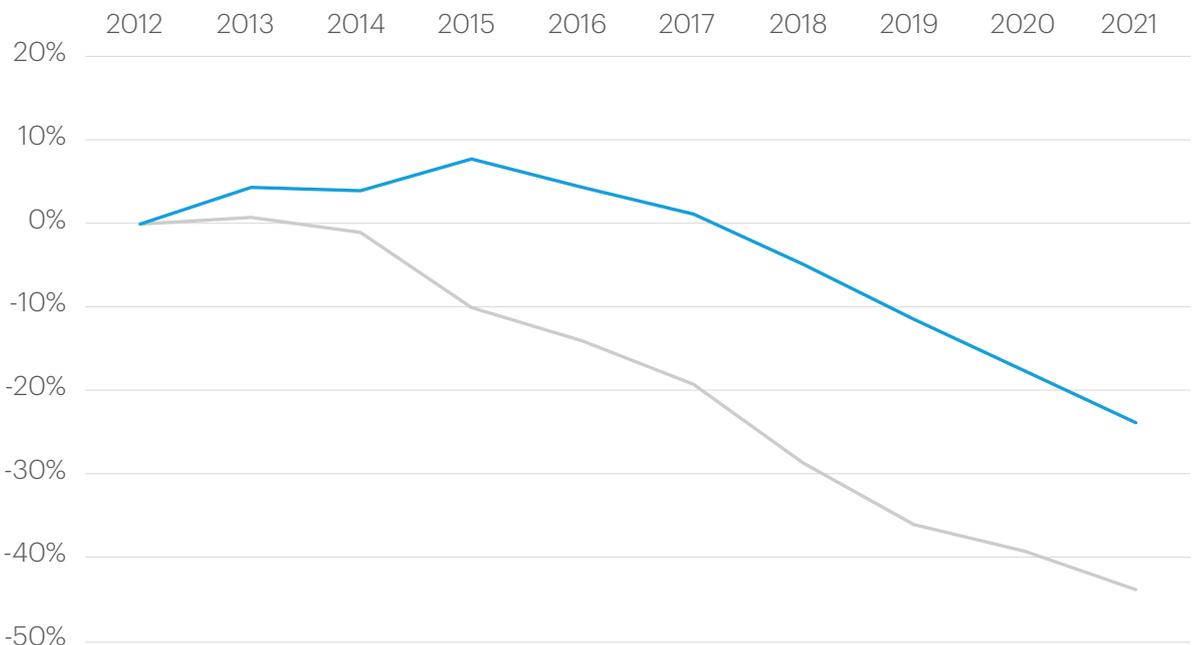
Figure 21. Number of male, female and 'Other' students across all levels of English Studies (aggregate), 2020/21 (FPE)



Source: HESA Student Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

UCAS data allows for analysis of the number of acceptances by men and women onto English Studies courses. As shown in Figure 22 below, while acceptances at undergraduate level are declining overall between 2012 to 2021, they are declining at a faster rate among men. Across Q3 - English Studies and W8 - Imaginative Writing, acceptances by men declined by 44% between 2012 and 2021, while acceptances by women also fell by 24%. As also seen in Figure 22 below, while acceptances of women were increasing between 2012 and 2017, since 2018 acceptances by women have experienced a similar rate of decline as acceptances by men.

Figure 22. Percentage change in UCAS acceptances across English Studies (aggregate) by sex, 2012-2021



Source: UCAS End of Cycle 2021 data resources [October 2022]

Closer analysis of Q3 – English Studies and W8 – Imaginative Writing shows different trends across subject categorisations. Acceptances by women onto undergraduate courses coded to Imaginative Writing grew by 30% between 2012 and 2021, while acceptances of men fell by 13% over the same time period. However, the decline of acceptances by men onto Imaginative Writing courses only began in 2016, with acceptances increasing by 12% between 2012 and 2016. This means that recent increases in acceptances onto courses submitted to Imaginative Writing have largely been driven by women undergraduates. This picture is different for English Studies, which has seen a decline in acceptances by men and women since 2012, with a decline of 48% among men and 27% among women. Though the acceptances of women were increasing between 2012 and 2015, with a peak of 7,435 acceptances in 2015, acceptances have fallen by 29% from 2015 to 2021. Notably, for English Studies, the decline in acceptances by men has been longer term and more dramatic than among women.

Reported disability in English Studies students⁶⁷

In 2020/21, 24% of students across all levels of English Studies self-reported a disability. This differs across constituent English disciplines. In English Language, 16% of students enrolled at all levels reported a disability, while 31% and 35% of students enrolled on courses categorised under Creative Writing and ‘others in English Studies’ respectively reported a disability. This represents a greater proportion than other humanities subjects, where around 21% of students reported a disability in 2020/21. The proportion of students who self-reported a disability is also higher than the population across the England and Wales, where the proportion of disabled people was 17.8% in 2021.⁶⁸ One interviewee from a university that specialises in distance learning noted that they have seen an increase in students with declared disabilities: they highlighted that this is having a positive impact on their institution’s teaching practice – for instance, in utilising disabilities studies in order to enrich their curriculum across teaching and research.

Summary

As seen through this chapter, while undergraduate recruitment onto English Studies courses is seeing a notable decline, particularly from 2015, data suggest that postgraduate taught and research degree recruitment is seeing more positive and stable trends. Overall, our interviews suggests that there is still a strong urge within the sector to improve the diversity of the discipline, particularly in relation to ethnic background. Compared to other disciplines in the humanities, English Studies has a large proportion of female students, which has its own implications for graduate outcomes, which we shall explore further in chapter 10.

⁶⁷ HESA data on disability is on the basis of the student’s own self-assessment: HESA, *Disability (DISABILITY)*, [Feb 23].
⁶⁸ ONS (2023), *Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021*, [March 2023].

4. Academic staff

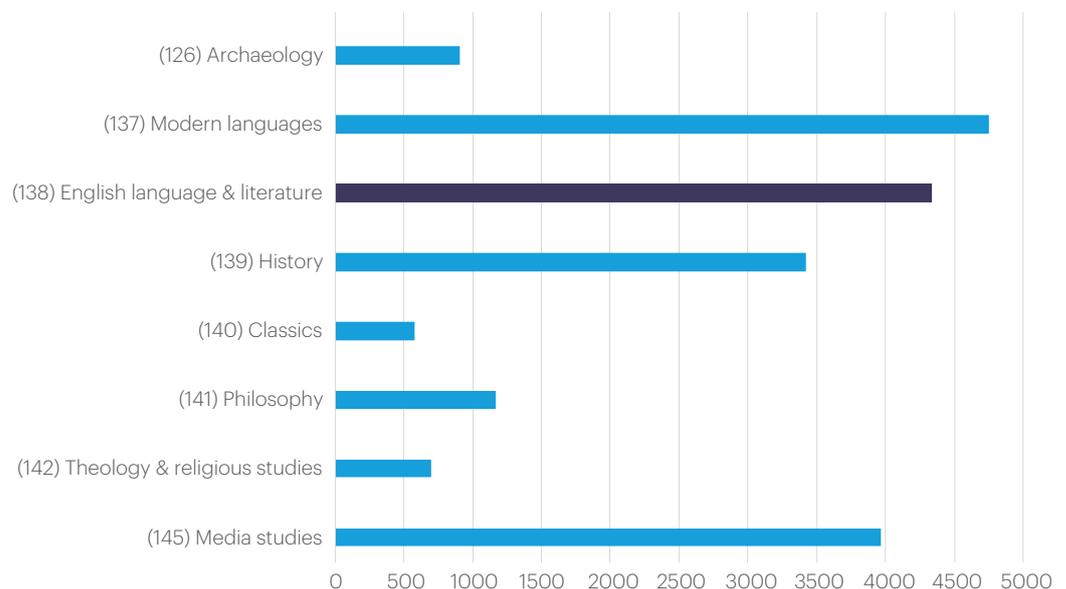
This chapter focuses on shift in academic staff for English Studies. Where possible, these changes are contextualised within wider changes to academic staff across the humanities. This chapter evidences changes not only in staff numbers, but also presents data on the contract types of English Studies staff. This feeds into the diversity section of this chapter, which mirrors that of the previous chapter, with analysis across nationality, ethnicity, sex, age and disability.

The HESA staff record provides a breakdown of academic staff in higher education institutions by the cost centres to which their contracts are assigned. However, it is not possible to gain a further breakdown of HESA staff cost centres, so the data analysed below may miss staff who teach and research in English Studies but were submitted to other cost centres. Additionally, some HEIs may submit staff to 138 English Language & Literature who are teaching courses not generally recognised as English Studies, such as English as a Second Language, academic skills, and translation. Therefore, there are some limitations in the use of this data to fully understand the health of the discipline at staff level. For the purpose of this report, we have focused analysis on cost centre 138 (English Language & Literature) – any reference to ‘English Language & Literature’ in this section refers to this cost centre. We also use the term ‘cost centre’ throughout this chapter and the next, in the acknowledgement that HESA cost centres are not directly representative of departments.

Academic staff in English Studies

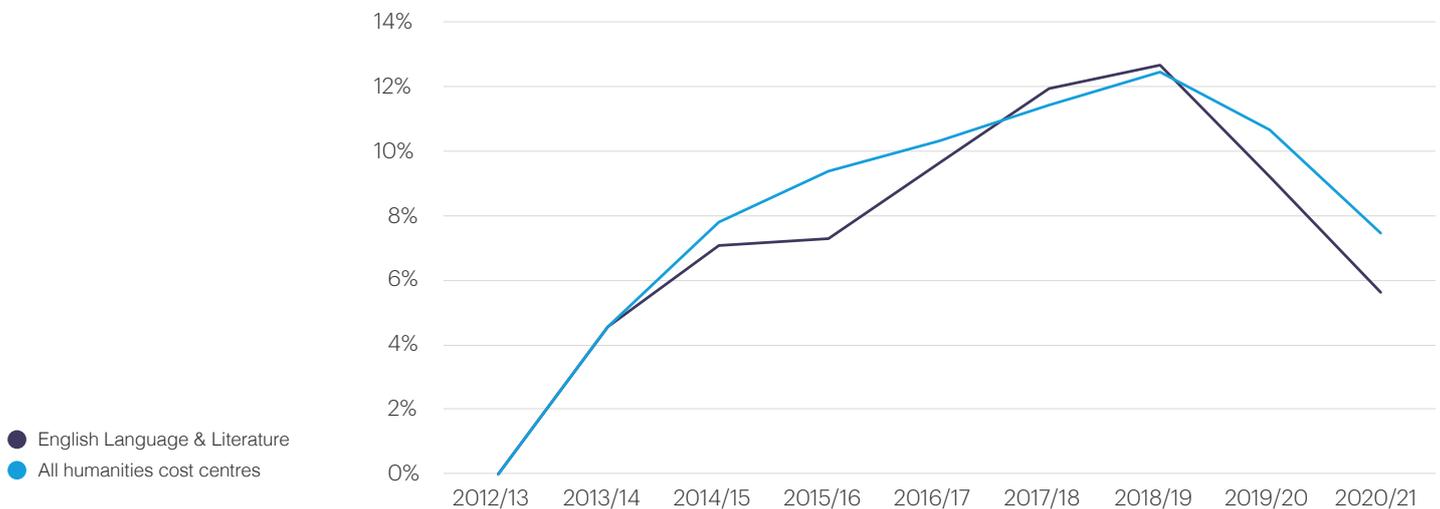
A total of 115 UK HEIs returned academic staff to cost centre 138 English Language & Literature in 2021, employing 4,335 academic staff. This represented 22% of total numbers of academic staff across humanities cost centres. In comparison, the largest number of staff were submitted to Modern Languages, with 4,755 academics, (24% of all humanities staff), while 3,420 academic staff were submitted to History (17% of all humanities staff). Staff submitted to English Language & Literature represented around 1% of all academic staff in 2020/21, making it comparable to cost centres for Pharmacy & Pharmacology, Civil Engineering, Mathematics and Architecture.

Figure 23. Number of academic staff submitted to humanities cost centres, 2020/21 (FTE)



Between 2012 and 2021, the number of staff submitted to English Language & Literature increased by 6%. However, as seen in Figure 24 below, this increase is a tale of two halves, with staff peaking at 4,595 in 2018, before experiencing a sharp decline of 6% to 2021. This is similar to patterns seen across humanities cost centres. Between 2012 and 2021, staff submitted to humanities cost centres increased by 7%. Like staff submitted to English Language & Literature, this peaked in 2018 at 20,745, before experiencing a decline of 4% between 2018 and 2021. It is difficult to tell what may be the key drivers of this decline, though interviewees noted that precarity, burnout and a shrinking job pool alongside a more general lack of positions in English Studies departments may be drivers for staff leaving the sector. As one interviewee said: ‘one of the problems of a financial contraction of an institution is that it’s very difficult to move — there have been very few jobs in English Literature for quite some time now’. These issues resonate across the humanities.

Figure 24. Percentage change in staff numbers submitted to English Language & Literature and humanities cost centres, 2012-2021 (FTE)

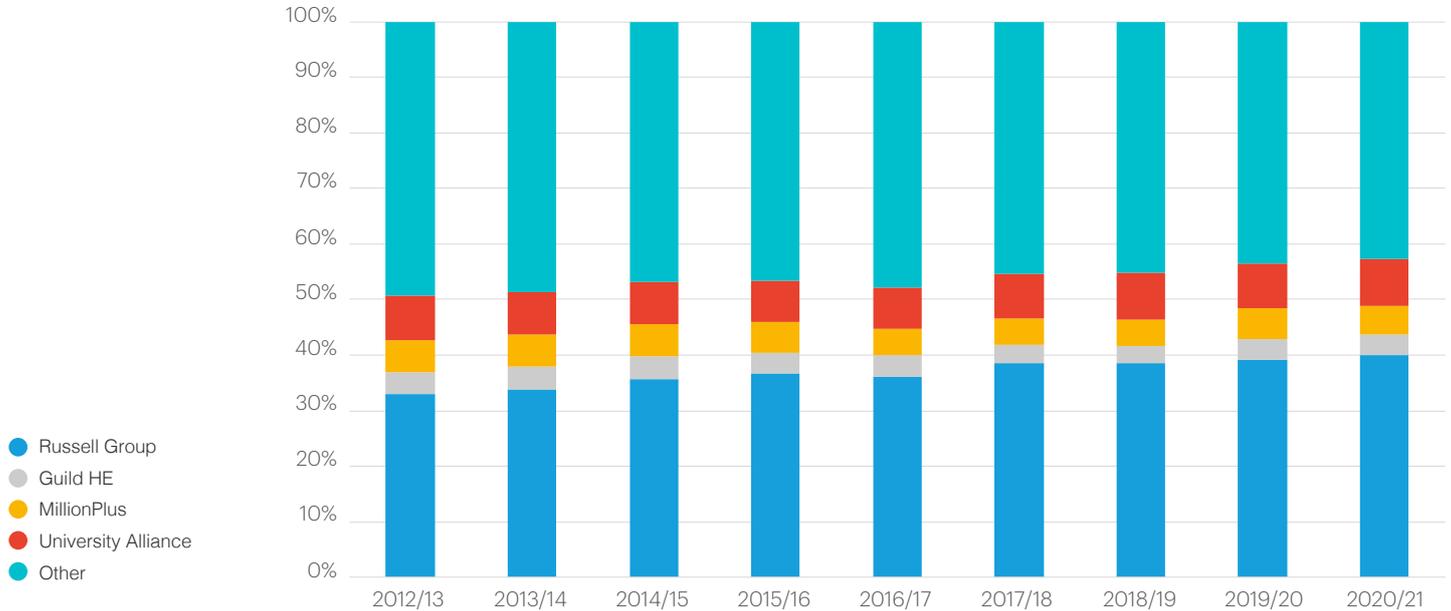


Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

However, data suggests that these broad increases in staff numbers were not felt equally across institution types. In 2020/21, 40% of academic staff in English Language & Literature were submitted from Russell Group universities. Other mission groups constitute smaller but significant portions of academic staff: 9% of academic staff were from institutions affiliated with the University Alliance, 5% of academic staff were submitted from Million Plus and 4% from Guild HE. The Russell Group represents 24 higher education institutions across the UK, with a focus on research-intensity, while Million Plus represent 21 modern universities. Guild HE represents over 55 UK higher education institutions, including at Further Education level, and represents smaller and specialist institutions. University Alliance represents 15 professional and technical higher education institutions.

As Figure 25 below shows, while the figures fluctuate across each year, between 2012 and 2021, academic staff submitted from Russell Group institutions increased by 34%, while those submitted from University Alliance increased by 13%. Significantly, academic staff submitted by Million Plus institutions decreased by 10% over the same time period, while those from Guild HE decreased by 5%. Staff members submitted to English Language & Literature whose institution was not affiliated to a mission group decreased by 8% between 2012 and 2021. As seen in Figure 25 below, there has been a significant 8 percentage point increase in the proportion of staff submitted from Russell Group institutions between 2012 and 2021.

Figure 25. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by mission group, 2012-2021 (FTE)



Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

English Studies academic staff contracts

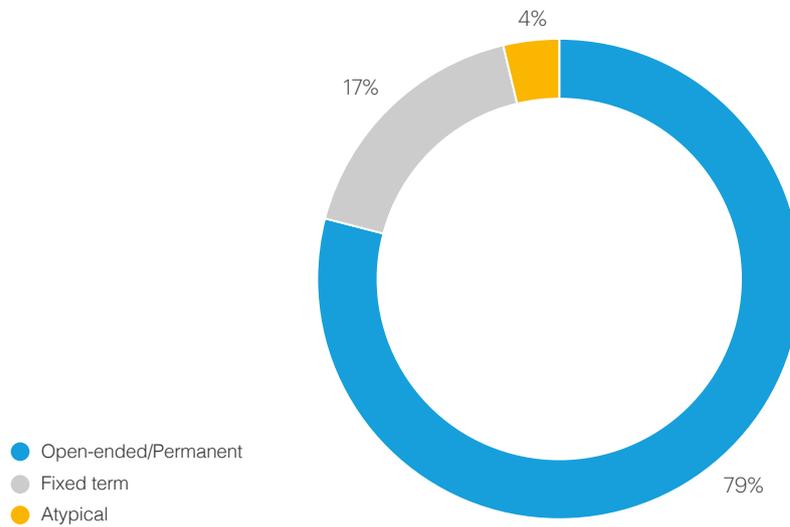
Turning to contract type, Figure 26, below, shows that in 2021 79% of academic staff in English Language & Literature were on open-ended or permanent contracts. Another 17% were on fixed-term contracts, and 4% were on atypical contracts. HESA defines fixed-term contracted staff as 'those employed for a fixed period of time or with an end date on their contract of employment', including 'staff on rolling fixed-term contracts'.⁶⁹ Atypical contracted staff are defined as those 'whose working arrangements are not permanent, involve complex employment relationships and/or involve work away from the supervision of the normal work provider'.⁷⁰ As we shall see later in this chapter, fixed-term and atypical contracts are also more likely to be held by women and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.⁷¹

⁶⁹ HESA, 'Terms of Employment', *Definitions: Staff* [2 Dec 22].

⁷⁰ HESA, 'Terms of Employment'.

⁷¹ This trend is also seen more widely across the sector. See: British Academy (2022), *The Teaching-Research Nexus*, p.21.

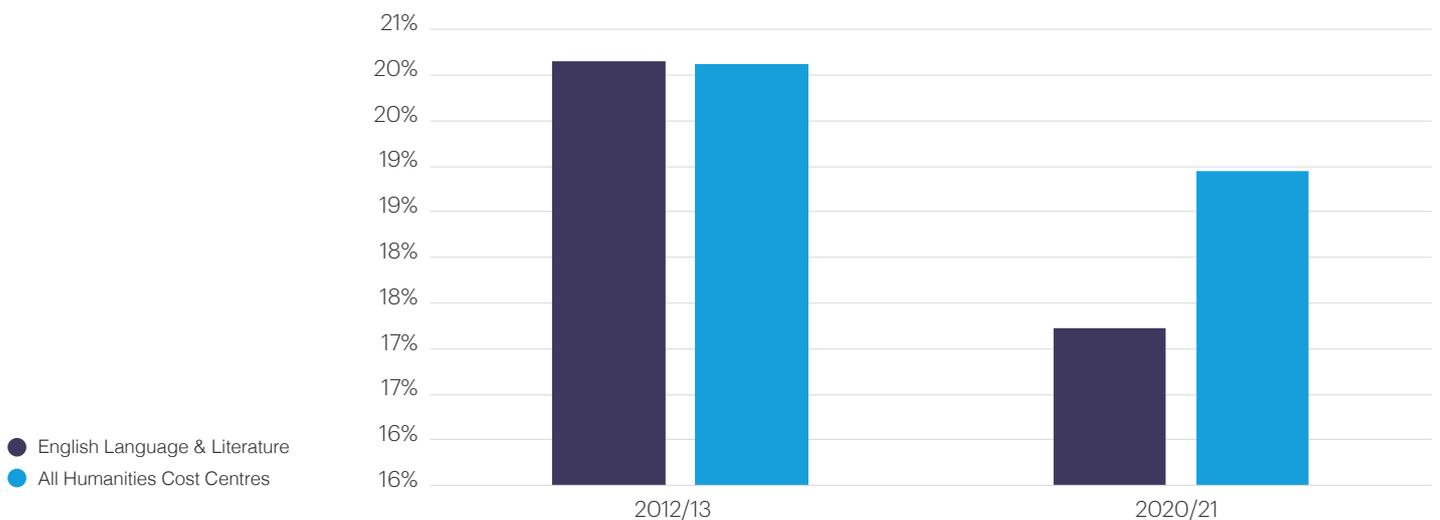
Figure 26. Percentage of academic staff in English Language & Literature on open-ended/permanent, fixed-term and atypical contracts, 2020/21



Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

In comparison with the average across other humanities cost centres, a smaller proportion of English Language & Literature academic staff were on fixed-term contracts in 2020/21. As shown in Figure 27 below, 17% of English Language & Literature staff were on fixed-term contracts in 2020/21, in comparison with 19% across all humanities cost centres. As also seen in Figure 23, this represents a 2.9 percentage point decrease in the number of staff on fixed-term contracts in English Language & Literature compared to 2012. This is a larger decrease than the 1.2 percentage points decrease of fixed-term contracts across humanities cost centres.

Figure 27. Percentage of academic staff on fixed term contracts across humanities cost centres and English Language & Literature, 2012/13 and 2020/21



Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

It is not clear from HESA data whether PhD students who are teaching as part of their studies or early career researchers who have short-term contracts are generally submitted to atypical or fixed-term contract types. Postgraduate researchers employed to teach in higher education institutions may be more likely to be on a short term, ‘teaching only’ contract (as they undertake their research as part of their doctoral studies). Analysis of ‘teaching only’ contract types suggests that higher proportions of this contract type are found under atypical and fixed term contracts, in comparison with open-ended/permanent contracts. These contract types are also more common in roles categorised as ‘other contract level’ (i.e. not at Professor or Senior Management levels). Of ‘other contract level’ staff submitted to English Language & Literature, around 23% were on teaching only contracts. This may represent some postgraduate research students and early career researchers teaching in higher education institutions. Our interviewees noted that early career researchers were groups likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts. This was identified by many interviewees as a barrier to careers in higher education, and it was widely acknowledged across our interviews that there has been an increase in people leaving the sector due to the prevalence of short-term and poorly paid teaching contracts during the early stages of academic careers. This issue is also widely recognised across the sector, with the Academy’s Teaching-Research Nexus report finding that teaching-only contracts can impact on the ability to effectively intertwine teaching and research, as well as potentially entrenching inequalities in academia.⁷²

Diversity and protected characteristics of academic staff

Nationalities of English Studies academic staff⁷³

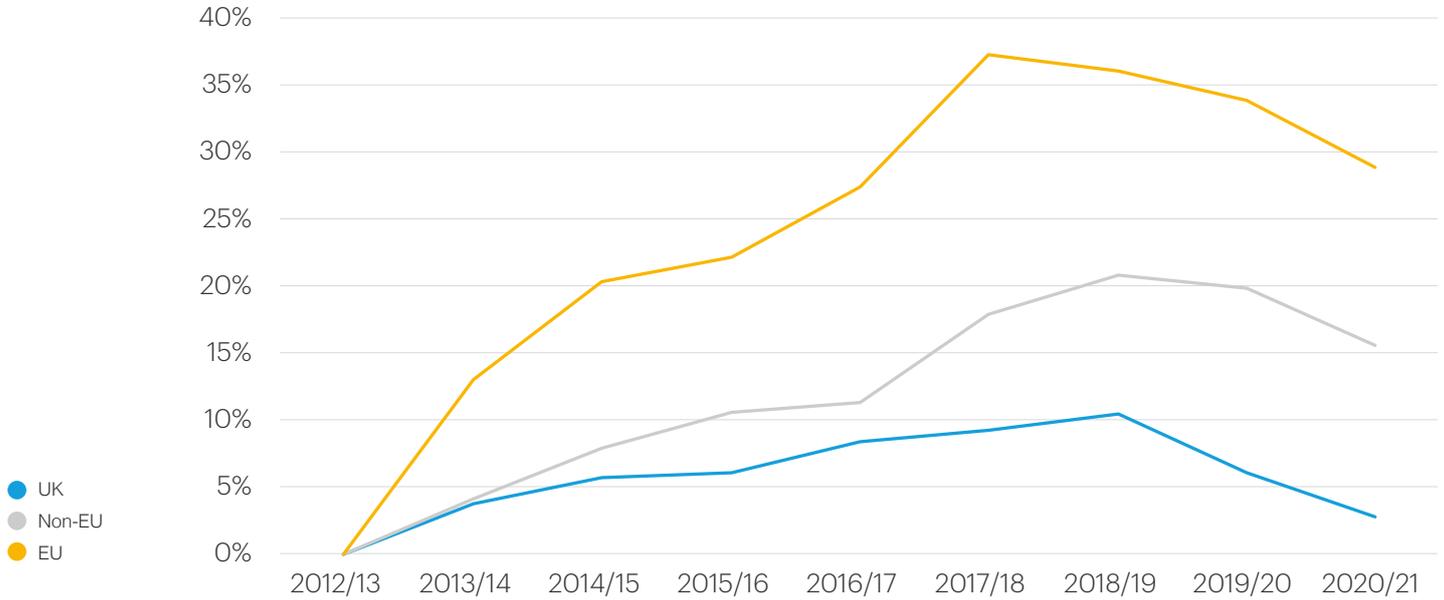
Compared to other humanities disciplines, cost centre 138 English Language & Literature had higher proportions of academic staff recording their country of nationality as the UK. In 2020/21, 79% of academic staff in English Language & Literature were from the UK. Furthermore, 11% of academic staff nationalities were European Union in 2020/21, and 9% of nationalities non-European Union. Only Media Studies had a greater proportion of academic staff from the UK than English Studies in 2020/21: 81% of Media Studies staff were UK nationals and 18% were international. In contrast, the humanities cost centres which recorded the highest numbers of international staff in 2020/21 include Modern Languages (44%), Classics (38%), and Philosophy (36%).

Longitudinal analysis suggests that the overall increase in academic staff has been uneven, with higher percentage increases in international staff. As seen in Figure 28 below, between 2012 and 2021, UK staff submitted to English Language & Literature increased by 3% while non-European Union staff increased by 16% and European Union staff increased by 29%. As also discussed earlier in this chapter, there have been declines in staff numbers between 2017 and 2021 — these declines have had different effects across staff nationalities. Staff from the UK fell by 6% during this period, while those from the European Union also fell by 6% and those from non-European Union countries fell by 2%. This is reflective of wider trends across the humanities over the same time period, which saw a 5% decrease in staff from the United Kingdom, a 4% decrease in staff from the European Union, and a 4% increase in staff with non-European Union nationalities.

⁷² The British Academy (2022), *The Teaching-Research Nexus*, pp.20-21.

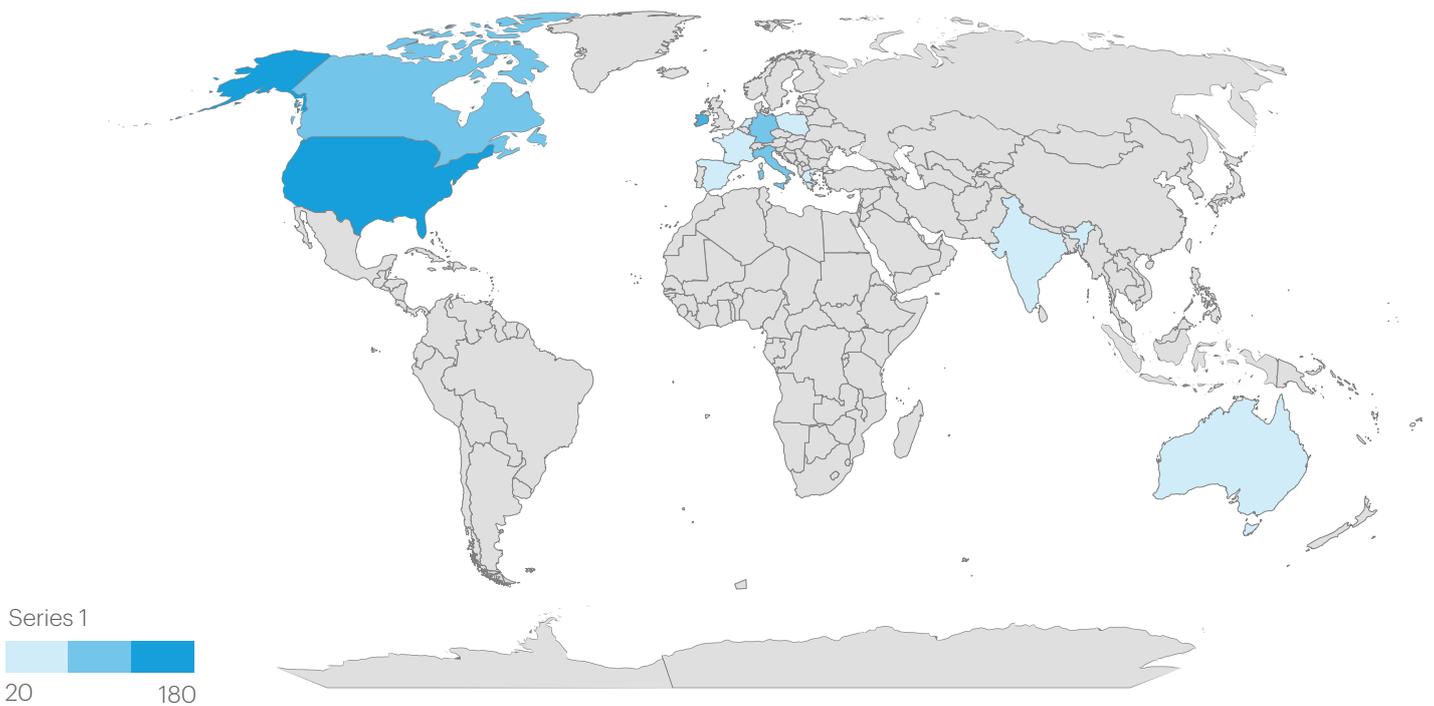
⁷³ HESA use of nationality is defined as the country of legal nationality. This is not necessarily the domicile – HESA do not collect data on staff domicile.

Figure 28. Percentage change in academic staff in cost centre 138, English Language & Literature by nationality, 2012-2021 (FTE)



Looking more closely at the recorded nationality of staff, in 2020/21 international staff largely came from the United States, Ireland, Germany, Italy and Canada. As also suggested by Figure 29, below, while the highest proportion of international staff were United States and Irish nationals, overall there was diversity of nationality among international staff in English Language & Literature.

Figure 29. Map of English Language & Literature staff nationalities, 2020/21 (FTE)

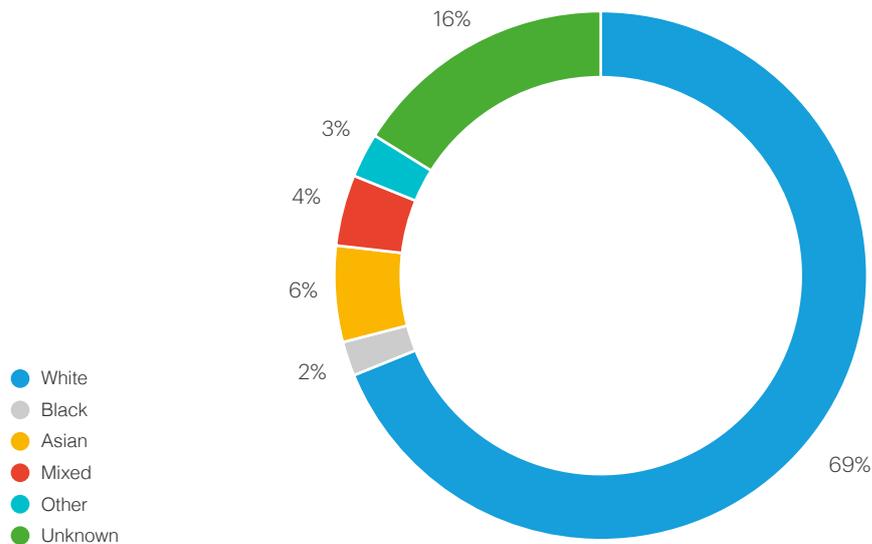


Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Ethnicity of English Studies academic staff

As shown in Figure 30 below, in 2020/21, around 69% of English Language and Literature staff identified as White, while 16% of staff's ethnicity was unknown. Furthermore, 6% of academic staff submitted to English Language & Literature identified as Asian, 4% identified as having Mixed ethnic backgrounds, 3% identified as having 'Other' ethnic backgrounds, and 2% identified as Black.

Figure 30. Proportion of English Language & Literature academic staff by ethnicity, 2020/21 (FTE)



Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

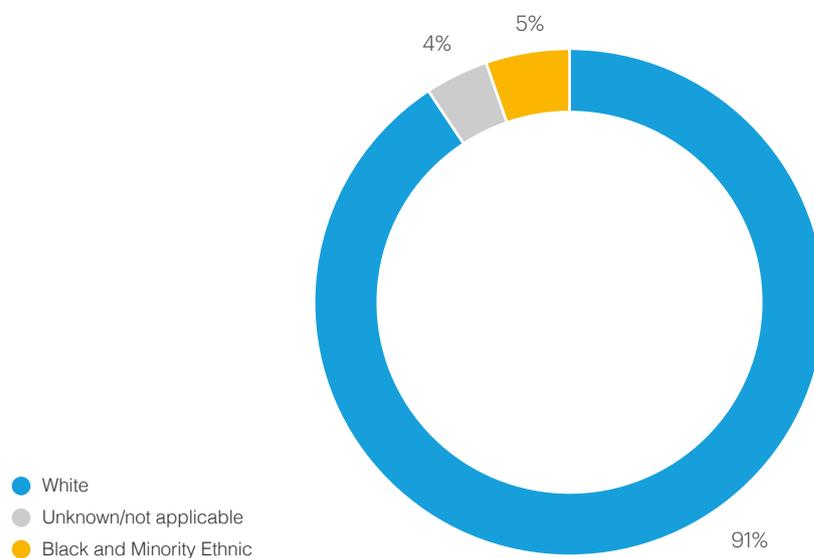
Between 2012 and 2021, there was a decrease of 18% in the number of English Language & Literature academic staff who identified as White. During this time, there were increases across a number of HESA's ethnic background categories for staff: the proportion of staff who identified as Black increased by 76%, while those who identified as having Mixed ethnic backgrounds and those who identified as Asian increased by 66% and 34% respectively. However, these significant percentage increases should be read relative to the size of the cohort.

As a point of comparison, the staff data across humanities cost centres in 2020/21 almost perfectly mirrors the ethnic diversity of cost centre 138 English Language & Literature, with staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds accounting for 15% of staff. In 2020/21, across humanities cost centres, 2% of staff were from Black ethnic backgrounds and 7% were from Asian ethnic backgrounds. While 4% were from Mixed ethnic backgrounds and 3% were from 'Other' ethnic backgrounds. The ethnic backgrounds of 17% of academic staff was also unknown.

Analysis against the wider UK population suggests that there are some alignments and some issues in terms of representation. According to Census 2021 data on England and Wales, 81.7% of the population in England and Wales identified as White, while 9.3% identified as 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh'; 4% identified as 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African'; 2.9% identified as 'Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups'; and 2.1% identified as being from 'Other ethnic' groups. This suggests that English Language & Literature staff data may be slightly under-representative of people who identify as Black and, perhaps surprisingly, White, with a slightly higher representation of people from Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic backgrounds. However, it should be noted that in 2020/21, the ethnic identity of 16% of staff in English Language & Literature was Unknown — this category is not reflected in census questions, so a direct comparison between these datasets should be used with caution.

Though 69% of staff submitted to English Language & Literature in 2020/21 were from White backgrounds, 91% of Professors in English Language and Literature were White, as shown in Figure 31 below. Only 5% of staff from across Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were Professors. Analysis of the proportions of English Language & Literature staff by both ethnicity and contract type suggests that staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be employed on a permanent contract. As seen in Figure 32 below, of staff who identified as White, 81% were employed on open-ended or permanent contracts. This is in comparison to 76% of staff who identified as Asian and 72% of staff from 'Other' ethnic backgrounds on open-ended or permanent contracts. Only 69% of staff from Mixed ethnic backgrounds and 66% of staff from Black ethnic backgrounds were on open-ended or permanent contracts.

Figure 31. Proportion of English Language & Literature academic staff employed at professor level by ethnicity, 2020/21 (FTE)



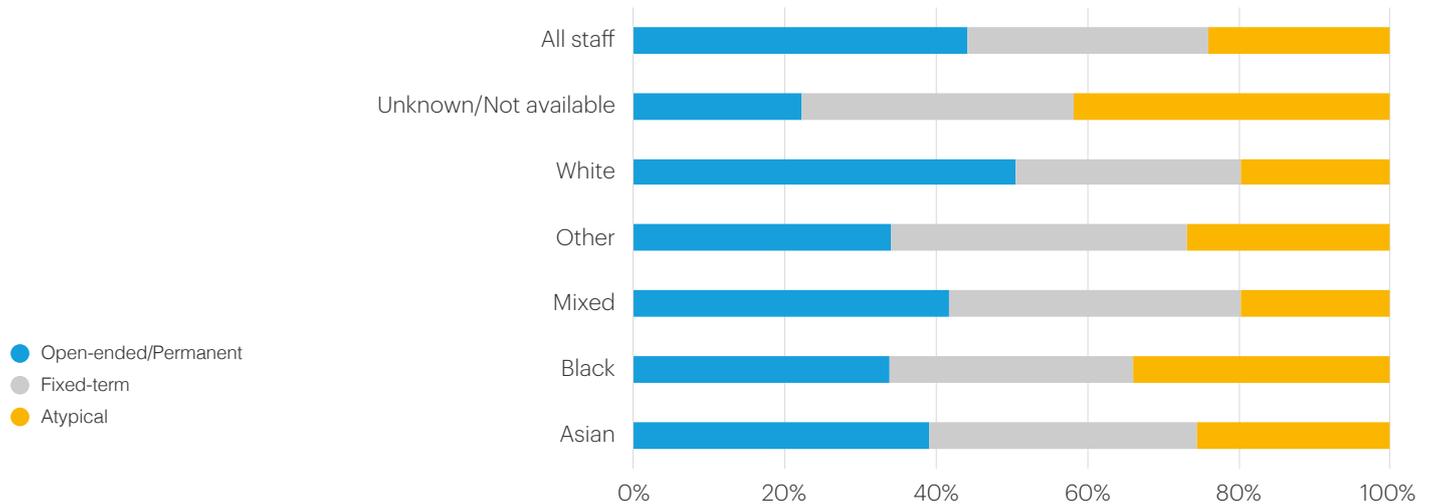
Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

The increased likelihood of fixed-term contracts among staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is also evident in Figure 32 below, which also notes the proportions of fixed-term and atypical contracts by ethnic background. In 2020/21, 27% of staff from Mixed ethnic backgrounds and 26% of staff who identified as Black were on fixed-term contracts. This is in comparison with 25% of staff from Other ethnic backgrounds and 19% of staff who identified as Asian were on such contracts. As a point of comparison, of staff members who identified as White, 16% were on fixed-term contracts. Figure 32 also highlights how staff from Black ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be on atypical contracts in 2020/21, with 8% of staff from Black backgrounds on atypical contracts, compared to 4% of all staff submitted to English Language & Literature. The precarity and pay conditions associated with fixed-term and atypical have been a focus of industrial action since 2018.⁷⁴ That staff who identify as Black, Asian and minority ethnic are disproportionately affected by such contracts may mean that there are additional structural barriers to pursuing a long-term academic career for these groups. It is also possible that changes created by initiatives to improve access and academic career development through the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion are yet to be seen in the long-term data. The latter is also suggested in the sub-section on the age of academic staff below.

⁷⁴

Williams, T. (2023), 'UK university strikes 2023: a guide to what the dispute is about', *Times Higher Education* [March 2023].

Figure 32. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by ethnicity and contract type, 2020/21 (FTE)

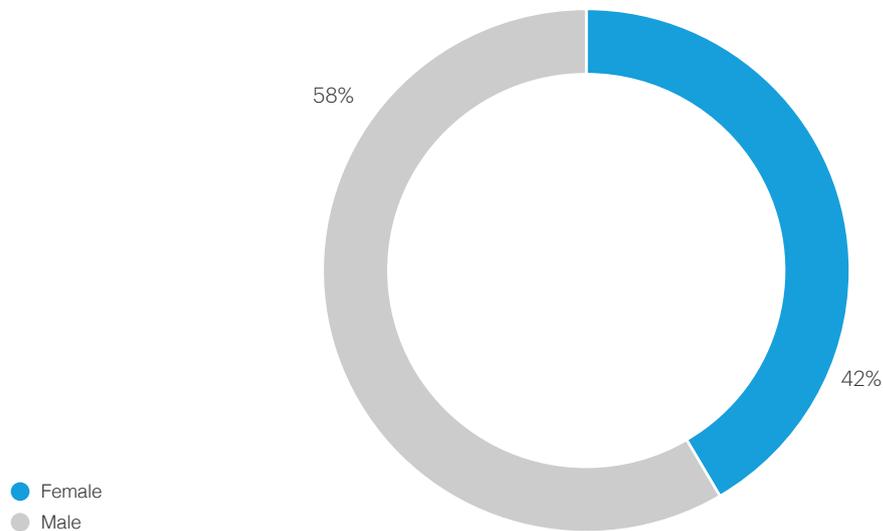


Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Numerous interviewees noted that their colleagues were predominantly White and that the staff cohort in their department was not diverse enough. The proportion of staff from across Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are almost identical across all humanities disciplines, and in some cases more diverse than the population according to recent census data. However, alongside contract-type, institutional environment can act as barriers to long-term academic careers. One interviewee noted that staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds might be one of only one or two among English Studies staff, and were understandably less likely to remain in post under these circumstances. A lack of diversity within an institution's research environment can potential become a barrier for members of staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds developing their academic career. This qualitative insight sits alongside this report's analysis that has shown that Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of staff coded to English Language & Literature were more likely to be on fixed-term and atypical contracts and less likely to have professor level roles in comparison to staff who identified as White.

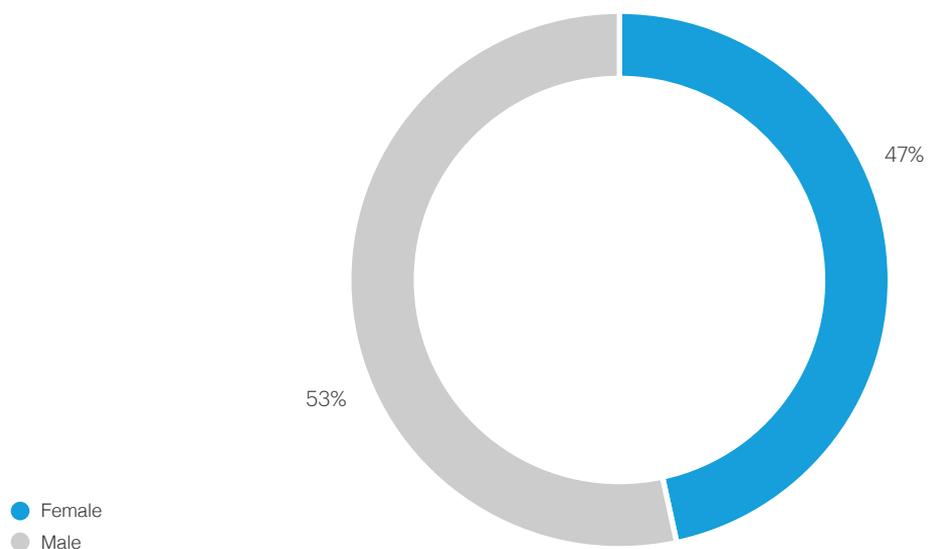
Sex and gender of English Studies academic staff

As shown in Figure 33 below, in 2020/21, female members of staff represented 58% of staff submitted to cost centre 138 English Language & Literature, while 42% were male. It has not been possible to publish information about staff who identify with HESA's categorisation 'Other' due to their small population. In comparison with staff across humanities cost centres, English Language & Literature had a larger proportion of female staff and a smaller proportion of male staff. In 2020/21, female members of staff made up 53% of humanities staff, while male staff made up 47% of all humanities staff. The proportion of male and female English Language and Literature staff largely remained static between 2012 and 2021, with female staff representing between 58% to 60% of all English Language & Literature staff, and male staff representing between 40% to 42% of staff.

Figure 33. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by sex, 2020/21 (FTE)

Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

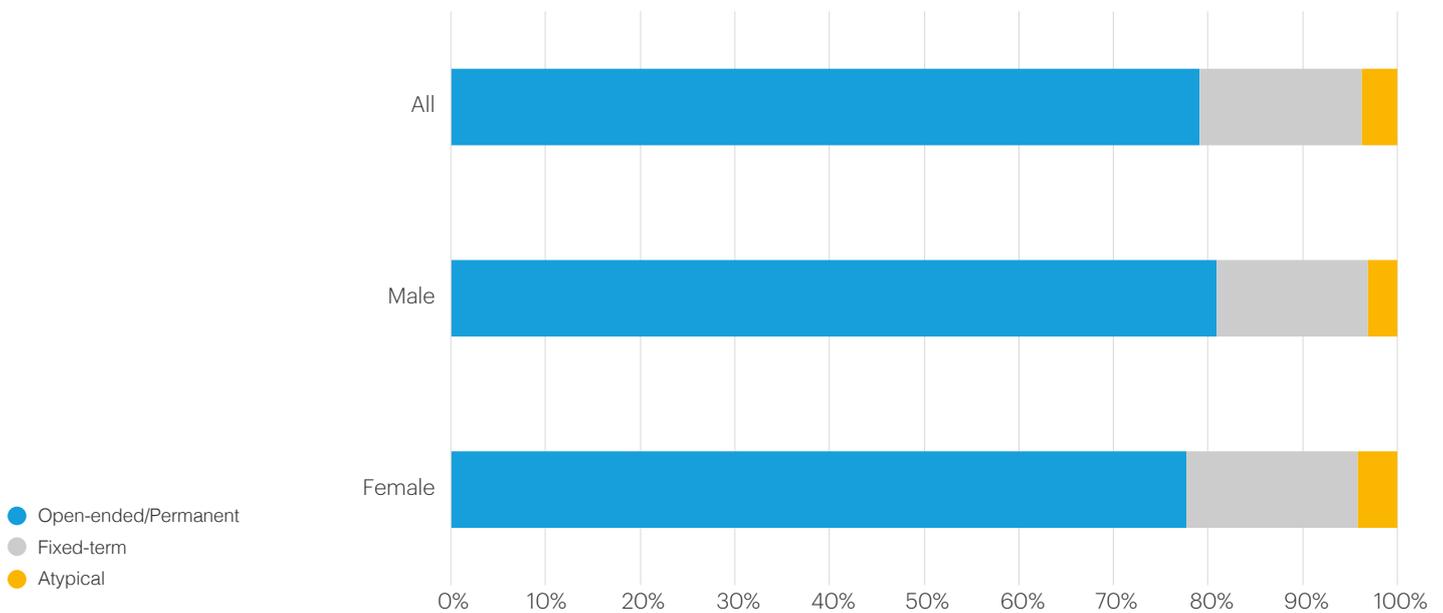
Notably, as shown in Figure 34 below, though female members of staff made up 58% of staff submitted to the cost centre for English Language & Literature in 2020/21, only 47% of staff submitted as Professors were female. This pattern is reversed for male members of staff submitted to English Language and Literature. In 2020/21, though 41% of staff were male, they held 53% of professor level contracts. Though this discrepancy is not as severe as that with ethnicity, overall proportions suggest that male staff members are over-represented at professor level. While this could be explained as a time-lag issues, female members of staff have represented at least 58% of staff since 2012/13.

Figure 34. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature contracted at Professor level, by sex, 2020/21 (FTE)

Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Additionally, HESA data indicates that male staff in English Language & Literature were more likely than female staff to be on long-term contracts in 2020/21. As shown in Figure 35, in 2020/21, 81% of male staff in English Language & Literature were in open-ended or permanent contracts, compared to an average of 79% of all staff and 78% of female staff. Figure 35 below also shows the proportions of fixed-term and atypical contracts by sex, highlighting increased precarity among female members of staff. In 2020/21, 18% of female staff members were on fixed-term contracts, compared to 16% of male staff.

Figure 35. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by sex and contract type, 2020/21 (FTE)

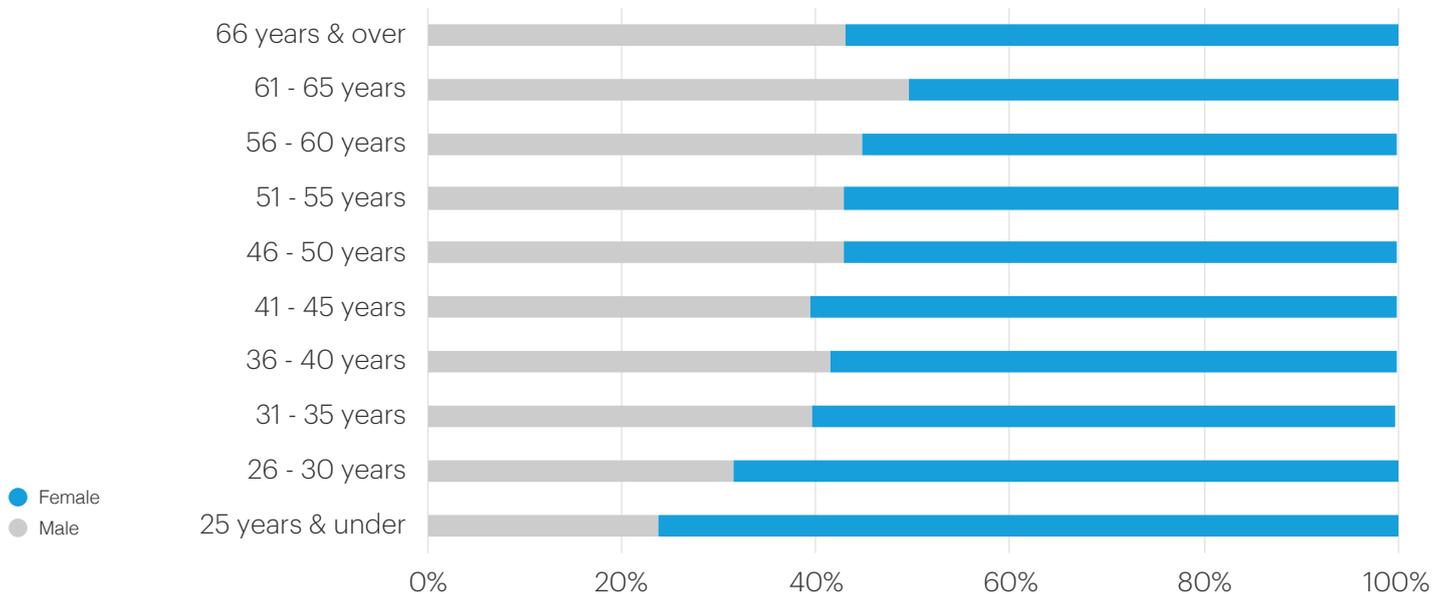


Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Age of English Studies academic staff

In 2020/21, the highest proportion of academic staff in cost centre 138 English Language & Literature were aged between 36 to 40 years, with 16% of staff in this age bracket. There was an even proportion of 15% across the age brackets of 41 to 45 years, 46 to 50 years and 51 to 55 years. Additionally, 13% of staff were aged between 31 to 35 years, while 6% of staff were aged between 26 and 30 years. However this picture is complicated by the intersections of gender and ethnicity, as seen below.

Figure 36. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by age bracket and gender, 2020/21 (FTE)

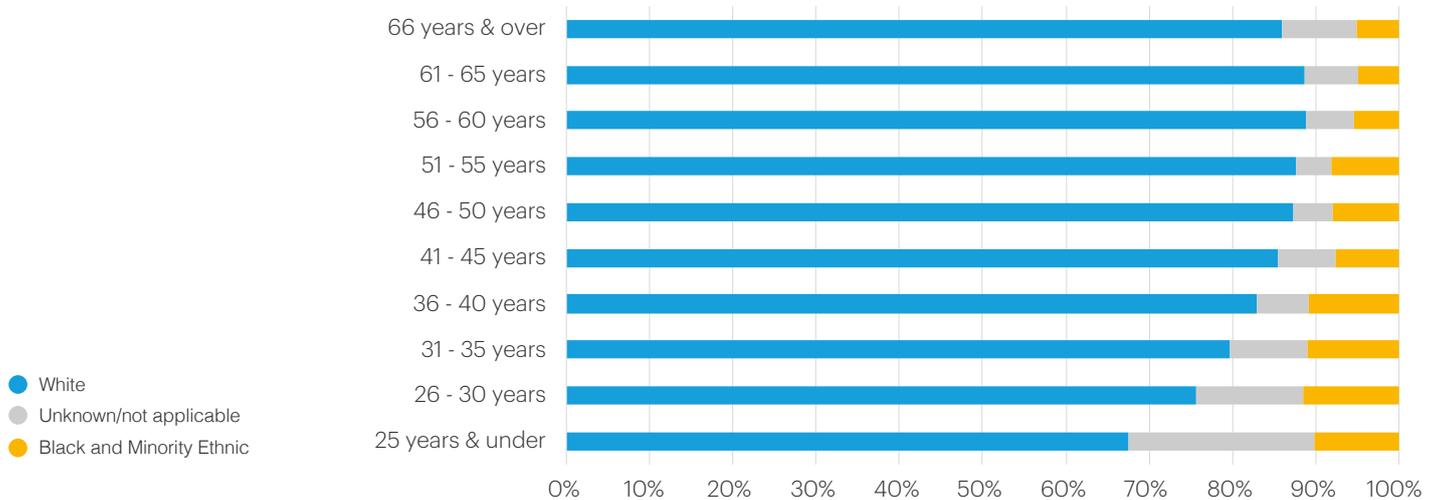


Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Analysis suggests that in 2020/21, the age brackets with the largest proportions of female academic staff were 25 years & under and 26 to 30 years old, as shown in Figure 36 above. While female members of staff made up the greater proportion of all staff in every age group, this was not evenly spread. Though female members of staff made up 76% of staff members aged 25 & under, and 68% of those 26 to 30 years old, they made up just 58% of 36 to 40 year olds and 57% of 46 to 50 year olds.

As seen in Figure 37 below, though numbers of staff from 'Black and minority ethnic' backgrounds remain small across age categories, there were higher proportions of staff from 'Black and minority ethnic' backgrounds in younger age brackets, particularly across the under 25 to 40 age brackets. This resonates with findings from the ethnicity section of this chapter, suggesting that progression may be more of a barrier than access. This picture also indicates that cohorts of younger members of staff in English Language & Literature may be more diverse in terms of sex and ethnicity than older cohorts. This data may suggest that recent changes to research culture and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion practices are starting to create positive shifts in representation at early to mid-career levels. It is vital that the sector continue to support (and to improve the support of) these groups in progressing further into academia and contributing to the genuine diversity of research across English Studies.

Figure 37. Proportion of academic staff in English Language & Literature by age bracket and ethnicity, 2020/21 (FTE)



Source: HESA Staff Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [January 2023]

Reported disability in English Studies staff

In 2020/21, 6% of English Language & Literature staff had reported a disability. This is a significant increase since 2012/13, where 3% of staff had reported a disability. These proportions are also comparable more broadly across the humanities: 6% of academics across humanities cost codes reported a disability in 2020/21. However, this is significantly smaller in comparison to 24% of English Studies students who reported a disability, as seen in the previous chapter, as well as 17.8% of the wider population of England and Wales who reported a disability.⁷⁵

Summary

As seen in this chapter, while diversity across several characteristics is increasing in English Language & Literature, with changes that are seeing the academic staff body become more representative of the wider population in the UK, there are still areas where access could be improved. That diversity across several protected characteristics is more marked among younger cohorts of staff is positive in terms of recent focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion practices at many higher education institutions. However, this chapter has highlighted complex, intersecting issues around contract type and protected characteristics, which may affect staff retention in the long term. In the next chapter, we look into academic research in English Studies across the Research Excellence Framework and research funding.

⁷⁵

ONS, *Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021*, [March 2023].

5. Academic research

This chapter examines the health of academic research in English Studies through two frameworks: research quality and research funding. The first section analyses the results of the Research Excellence Framework in detail, drawing upon the broad results for English Studies, as well as diving further into the sub-panel report to analyse outcomes for English Studies in more detail. This section also includes a sub-section on research impact alongside example case studies, which were compiled with the guidance of this report's Advisory Group. The second section focuses on research funding, covering the main research funding sources for English Studies, as well as further contextual detail against research funding within the humanities more broadly.

Research Quality: REF 2021

The Research Excellence Framework is the UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK higher education. The REF outcomes are used to inform the allocation of around £2 billion per year of public funding (or Quality Related research funding) across the UK higher education institutions. The recent results from the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021) provide a timely source of data to investigate the research landscape for English Studies in the UK. The exercise was organised by four main panels, with each of these divided into multiple sub-panels, or units of assessment (UOA), that correspond to different disciplinary areas. UOA 27: English Language and Literature is found in Panel D, which roughly covers the arts and humanities. The following analysis focuses on UOA 27 when referring to research in English Studies. However, we also acknowledge that some English Studies research, particularly in English Language and Linguistics, may not be included in UOA 27, and therefore that the analysis below does not capture all English Studies research.

Table 8. Overall quality profiles of Panel D, REF 2021

	Average percentage of research activity meeting the standard for:				
	4*	3*	2*	1*	Unclassified
Main Panel D	41	40	17	2	0
25 (Area Studies)	44	42	13	1	0
26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics)	41	40	18	1	0
27 (English Language and Literature)	48	39	12	1	0
28 (History)	43	37	18	2	0
29 (Classics)	45	39	15	1	0
30 (Philosophy)	40	41	17	2	0
31 (Theology and Religious Studies)	38	41	19	2	0
32 (Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory)	37	41	19	3	0
33 (Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies)	39	36	20	4	1
34 (Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management)	38	41	19	2	0

Source: Reproduced from REF21 UOA 27 Panel Report

The overall picture shown by these results is positive, as shown in the breakdown of results for English Language and Literature in Table 8 above. Overall, 48% of research activity in English Language and Literature was judged to be 4* (world leading), making English the strongest performing UOA in Panel D by that measure. As highlighted in Table 8, UOA 27 English Language and Literature performed above the average scores across Panel D and in the context of all four main panels. The results for English reflect a high performing discipline across all indicators of research excellence, including outputs, environment and impact, as shown in Table 9 below. Indeed, every English Language and Literature department that submitted to UOA 27 had some 4* research or impact, demonstrating the breadth of excellence of research across UK English Studies. Furthermore, the annual allocation of QR funding in England for English Language and Literature increased by 26% as a result of the disciplines' performances in the REF 2021 exercise.⁷⁶

Table 9. Breakdown of results for UOA 27: English Language & Literature, REF2021

	4*	3*	2*	1*	Number of submissions to the UOA	Number of category A staff FTE submitted to the UOA
Overall	48	39	12	1	92	267.131
Outputs	45.9	39.6	14.0	0.5		
Environment	53.2	37.7	8.6	0.5		
Impact	48.9	38.3	11.9	0.9		

Source: Reproduced from REF21 UOA 27 Panel Report

The UOA 27 REF panel report shows that there was a slight increase in the number of departments submitting to the REF compared to the previous exercise. REF 2021 data also suggest that the size of the research sector, or at least those that submit to the REF, has been relatively stable over the years leading up to assessment. The sub-panel report further notes that the overall research income associated with this UOA is positive; even allowing for the longer period of time corresponding to REF 2021, there is still a notable increase in research income for the discipline(s) when compared to REF 2014. Average annual income for the REF 2021 period was £19,384,659 across all submitting units. This is 27% higher than the average annual income for the REF 2014 period (which ran from 2010 to 2013), without taking into account inflation.

Moreover, the number of staff members submitted for this UOA was 35% higher than the figures for REF 2014. This is largely reflective of changes to the methodology of the REF, noted above, with all research staff now expected to submit work. English Language & Literature had more staff submitted to REF 2021 than any other UOA in Panel D, indicating a broad reach of research activity within the discipline. The increase in the number of staff submitted is broadly in line with the average increase for Panel D.

This stability and strength in generating research income paints a contrasting picture to recent closures and restructuring of English Studies courses. During interviews, Heads of Departments discussed the strength of research outputs, impact and environment across English Studies, demonstrating impact locally, nationally and globally. Some spoke about utilising institutional

⁷⁶

Grove, J. (2023), 'Leading departments face cuts under "unnoticed" REF funding shift', *Times Higher Education* [Feb 2023].

REF results and feedback to make decisions about future research funding priorities as well as where they want to see institutional improvement in their discipline. Interviewees also spoke about how strong performances in REF 2021 could aid a narrative defence against reduction in provision, staffing or funding: 'I think it was the department's success in REF 2021 that prevented the institution from going for forced cuts'. Other interviewees were more tentative about the relationship between excellent performance in the REF exercise and the stability of the department, with some noting that while the positive stories arising out of REF 2021 are to be celebrated, there may be little correlation between outstanding performance and departmental funding. Many in the community are dispirited by the reduction in staff numbers across multiple institutions that has followed the conclusion of REF 2021, despite the striking success of said departments in the exercise. These decisions, it is felt, fail to recognise the contribution that those departments made to the strength of the UK research base and risks its future sustainability. It is worth noting here that the data collected as part of this report will not yet capture these recent developments.

Diversity in the form and focus of research outputs

Those involved in the REF process have remarked on the impressive range and diversity included in submissions for English Language and Literature, including Creative Writing. The sub-panel report argues that this diversity is such that there is no longer a single dominant paradigm in the discipline. Further, the collective body of work submitted to the REF is comprehensive in its coverage of the history of Language and Literature, to such an extent that no time period is underexplored. The outputs were also varied in the form in which they were submitted. The breakdown of outputs for UOA 27 is distinguishable by a high percentage of authored books, edited books and scholarly editions compared to most other sub-panels, alongside a lower percentage of journal articles relative to the rest of panel D. Authored books made up 40.59% of all submissions for English.

Notably, the sub-panel report dedicates a whole section to interdisciplinary trends, highlighting that English Studies across Language, Literature and Creative Writing is interdisciplinary by nature. The report picks out numerous areas of growth in excellence compared to the previous assessment exercise, including work along the literary-historical borders; the interface between Language and various art forms; Linguistics with healthcare; as well as

'ecocritically-engaged work that combines the insights of literary, linguistic, and creative research with biological and environmental studies, geography, archaeology, and anthropology'.⁷⁷

The variety and volume of Creative Writing and creative practice was also welcomed by the sub-panel report. The sub-panel praised the originality, rigour and significance, as well as the breadth of audience, of the best work in Creative Writing, noting that it

'extend[s] the traditional boundaries of research in the discipline of English in absorbing and often exhilarating ways. A further notable feature of REF 2021 is the increased volume, range, and richness of work submitted that combines the insights and methods of both critical and creative research'.⁷⁸

The sub-panel report also highlighted the digital humanities as an area of continuing and growing excellence. These areas of study were echoed across our institutional interviews; interviewees acknowledged centres of excellence across the sector, particularly across

⁷⁷ REF2021 (2022), 'Sub-Panel 27: English Language and Literature', *Overview Report by Main Panel D and Sub-Panels 25-34*, p.88.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.89.

burgeoning fields such as the medical and health humanities, disability studies, global Englishes, migration and identity. The richness and cultural relevance of this research is demonstrative of a thriving research culture across English Studies, connecting across and beyond disciplinary boundaries. The report also highlights the increasing quality of work submitted and the forging of deep connections with other disciplines. Adding to some of the areas mentioned above, the sub-panel report explicitly mentions some growing areas of collaboration that fall squarely outside of the social sciences, arts and humanities:

*'Other inherently inter- and multidisciplinary fields represented in the submission ... engage with questions of narrative and/or memory; with disability studies, medical and health humanities; or explore in interdisciplinary ways cultural understandings of place and heritage. Linguistics researchers are also working productively with collaborators and partners in Education, Psychology, and Computer Science, and their methodologies are being fruitfully applied to fields including Law, Medicine, Literary Studies, and Environmental Studies.'*⁷⁹

The case studies that illustrate key areas of impact are indicative of the embedded inter- and multidisciplinary methodologies that drive English Language and Literature research.

World-leading Research

One striking feature of the results for English Language and Literature is the proportion of submissions rated as 4*, a category of assessment which refers to submissions that are 'world-leading'. Overall, 48% of submissions were judged to be 4*, compared to 41% across all disciplines.⁸⁰

*'The vast majority of the work submitted is of world leading or internationally excellent quality. In terms of originality, rigour, and significance, the range, diversity, and quality of these outputs speak highly of the health and wealth of the research undertaken within the discipline.'*⁸¹

Notwithstanding the limitations in making direct comparisons with previous exercises as highlighted in this report's methodology section, the results from REF 2014 can contextualise these scores. The percentage of overall submissions in English rated 4* is notably higher than it was in REF 2014; however, this is not a trend that is unique to UOA 27. This shift is partially explained by the reduced minimum number of outputs per category A staff that institutions were required to submit. Across all the SHAPE (Social Science, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines, there was a ten percentage-point increase for the overall rating. The difference is more pronounced for English Language and Literature, however, with an increase of 15 percentage points overall when compared to REF 2014.

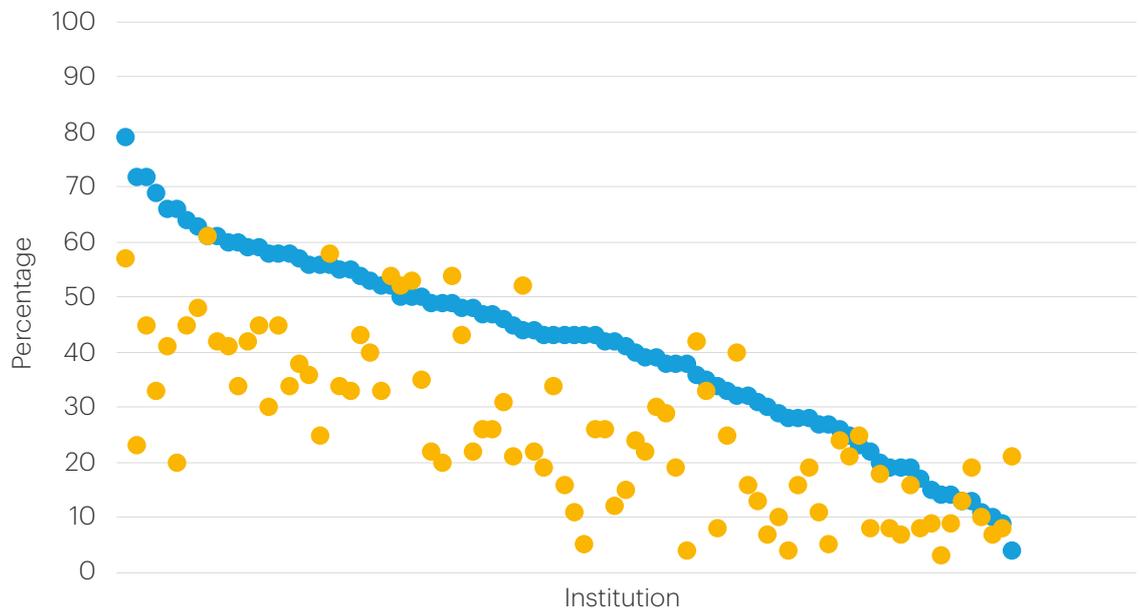
Figure 38, below, offers some perspective on changes in the 4* rating at an institutional level. The graph below shows institutional results (anonymised) for English Language and Literature. The proportion of 4* research for REF 2021 and REF 2014 is plotted on the graph, with institutions organised across the x axis in descending order based on REF 2021 results. If a blue dot is located directly above a yellow dot, this indicates an increase in the overall 4* percentage between the REF 2014 and REF 2021. It is evident from Figure 38 that the vast majority of institutions have a higher percentage of 4* research in this UOA compared to the previous exercise.

⁷⁹ REF2021, 'Sub-panel 27', p. 88.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.10, and REF 2021 (2022), REF 2021: Key Facts.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Figure 38. Percentage of 4* research in REF 2021 compared to REF 2014, by institution (Unit of Assessment 27: English Language & Literature)



Source: REF 2014 and REF 2021

Some of the increases for individual institutions are quite substantial, as can be observed in the figure, with some institutions increasing the percentage of 4* by more than 49 percentage points. The scale of increase in some institutions, and the fact that there are such widespread increases in 4* across a wide spectrum of institutions, indicates a strong research community that has grown in excellence. Even if changes to the methodology of the exercise enabled researchers to focus on higher quality and more ambitious outputs, English Language and Literature still performed exceptionally well. During our interviews, Heads of Departments noted that improvement to and/or maintenance of excellent REF results was often bolstered by maintaining a diversity of staff across research clusters, as well as appropriate internal support for impact projects, such as creative facilitators, and networks for collaboration.

Digging down into the results and the rise of 4* output

Across the assessment criteria of outputs, English Language and Literature has done particularly well this REF, signalling the strength of English Studies as a research discipline. Digging down into the different components, this overall rating has largely been driven by increases in 4* ratings within outputs and impact, two of the three main components of the assessment exercise. For outputs, the net shift in assessment was an increase in 4* and a reduction in 2*. One factor that is at play here, and particularly pertinent for the case of English Studies, is changes in the type and size of submitted work. As noted above, there was a reduced expectation on individual researchers in terms of the number of outputs submitted to REF 2021. This seems to have influenced the types of submissions, opening the scope and time for large-scale outputs, like monographs and scholarly editions, that may take longer to research and write than smaller-scale outputs, such as journal articles:

'The increase in the volume of monographs submitted, as well as longer form practice research outputs (including multi-component outputs), the increase in the use of the double-weighting provision for a range of output types, and the correlation between double-weighting, longer form outputs and higher scores have all contributed to an increase in the quality profile compared to 2014'.⁸²

All formats had the potential to attain 4*, but it appears that longer formats were found to be stronger on average. This was also noted in the sub-panel report for English Language and Literature.⁸³ This UOA had a particularly high percentage of outputs with a double-weighting request (24%). Double-weighting requests refer to substantial research outputs, such as large-scale, complex or intensive collaborative research, that may require lengthy or extended research periods.⁸⁴ Panels C and D expected most books, monographs, novels and longer-form outputs to warrant double-weighting.⁸⁵ While the main panel report acknowledges that the increase in quality profiles for outputs is 'largely attributable' to changes in the methodology of the exercise, it is also confident that this is being driven by increased research performance.

Research Priorities and Impact

The REF defines impact as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'.⁸⁶ English Language and Literature performed well with respect to impact in REF 2021, with 87% of impact rated as world-leading or internationally excellent. The sub-panel report remarked on the impressive array of types of impact evidenced through the submissions, the breadth of reach and the ability of the discipline to utilise knowledge to respond to societal problems. The sub-panel report for English summarised the extensive body of evidence within the impact case studies into seven main themes.⁸⁷ The following REF 2021 impact case studies have been identified by members of the Advisory Group for this report, as showcasing novel and innovative practice in research impact across diverse areas, including the economy, health, technology, culture and the arts, society and inclusion and the environment, along with a focus on diversity of institution type and region.

Economy

Impact case studies for English Literature and Language underline how research in this disciplinary area is a driver of economic growth and development. Case studies show that English Studies research can play a critical role in the space in which economic and cultural activity intersect. For example, Shakespeare North is a £35 million partnership project between Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Shakespeare North Trust with Liverpool John Moores University as the lead academic partner.⁸⁸ The project team is building a replica of Inigo Jones' Cockpit-in-Court theatre, enclosed within a modern building and performance garden, creating the Shakespeare North Playhouse (SNP). The SNP will be a local landmark, visitor attraction, economic stimulus, and hub for extensive educational and community activities. This case study underlines not only how English scholars can and do work effectively with networks of local partners (including local government), but also the potential for English Studies research to reach some of the more deprived areas of the UK. This has important implications for how English Studies research can help to address regional inequality.

⁸² REF 2021. (2022), *Overview report by Main Panel D and Sub-panels 25 to 34*, pp.18-19.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.90.

⁸⁴ REF 2021 (2020), *Index of revisions to the 'Panel criteria and working methods (2019/20)*, p.56

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ UKRI (2022), *How Research England supports research excellence*, [14 Feb 23].

⁸⁷ REF2021, 'Sub-panel 27', p.30-33.

⁸⁸ REF 2021. (2022), 'ICS2: Shakespeare North', *Impact case study database* [20 Feb 2023].

In a similar vein, the Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow has had demonstrable impact on local policy. The centre produced research which has documented the economic impact of Burns in tourism, festivals, food and drink sectors, housing and other areas.⁸⁹ Research has helped to generate new knowledge on how Burns and his legacy are utilised within public life, and therefore maximise the level of economic activity that can come from this. This is one of multiple examples from the case study database that show how English scholars are helping us to better understand economic life through their research, which creates a platform for more productive and sustainable economic development.

Additionally, there are case studies from REF 2021 that demonstrate how English Studies research is itself a driver of economic growth. Poets at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne have worked with regional companies to embed text-based creative practices in housebuilding projects.⁹⁰ One example of this is the collaboration that took place with the Westpark Residential Development in Darlington, where vernacular poetry became a resource for the regeneration of the landscape for residential use. The arts strategy developed has had a significant beneficial effect on housebuilding companies and ongoing guidance and policy, resulting in it being adopted as standard practice by Darlington Borough Council and other organisations in the region.

Health

Impact case studies from REF 2021 showed an impressive degree of reach of English Studies disciplines into the health sector, including the NHS, social care and community health projects. The case studies demonstrate a growing phenomenon of English Studies research being integrated in the development of health practice, with demonstrable benefits for the implementation of patient care and wellbeing. One area where it is particularly emergent is in relation to mental health initiatives. Research at the University of Sheffield exploring narrative and voice in social care has led to the application of policy at multiple levels which integrates patient voice and maximises service-user engagement.⁹¹ This involved devising workshops and resources that train doctors and social care workers to listen to, and more effectively support, patients and clients. This has enabled those suffering mental ill-health and their carers to articulate their experience, navigate support services, build a sense of community, and discover self-worth. Communicating the experience of mental illness has increased public understanding and helped in combating social stigma.

Another case study also relates to a care setting, but this time with regards to dementia patients. This is a health condition for which associated research and practice is becoming ever more interdisciplinary, and where the role played by the arts and humanities is growing significantly. This is all in a context of a society with an ageing population where the issues are becoming more pressing and the demand for innovation is growing. Research at Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd has identified poor communication as a critical issue to be addressed in relation to dementia care, and one that can compound existing confusion, frustration, stress and withdrawal in people living with dementia, as well as their families and professional carers.⁹² Researchers have developed principles for effective practices, based on new conceptualisations of what happens at the interface of social interaction and acquired cognitive disability. These principles have been used in workshops, animated films and new training materials, effecting dementia communication practices for professional and family carers, as well as a broader range of healthcare and allied support staff in the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand.

⁸⁹ REF 2021. (2022), 'Maximising the economic and cultural value of Robert Burns for Scotland through government consultancy, public engagement and authentication/provenance work', *Impact case study database*, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁰ REF 2021. (2022), 'Poetry as a Driver of Business Innovation: Westpark residential development', *Impact case study database*, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹¹ REF 2021. (2022), 'Narrative and voice in health and social care', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹² REF 2021. (2022), 'Improving dementia communication for practitioners, carers, and people with dementia in the UK and internationally', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

Literature and Technology

REF 2021 impact case studies evidence English Studies disciplines' diverse engagements with the intersections between literature, language and technology, with impact across policy, pedagogy and cultural engagement. Researchers at Birkbeck College, University of London, theorised and implemented the Open Library of the Humanities (OLH), which has transformed the space of scholarly communications.⁹³ Working from the premise that publications from publicly financed research should be widely and freely accessible, but recognising there were barriers to this in practice, researchers created a sustainable model for journals to become open access through the OLH. This platform is an economically viable model for scholarly communication which is now full operational and financially supported by 300 libraries worldwide. The OLH has changed economic and behavioural patterns of libraries, publishers, journal editors, and authors, while contributing significantly to public policy debates about the future of open access.

Alongside working at the forefront of open access, research at the interface of English Studies and technology has also shaped narratives on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Research at the University of Cambridge investigating the representation of AI in fictional and non-fictional narratives engaged in cross-sector dialogues in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including Boeing and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).⁹⁴ The project alerted policymakers and industrial partners to the influence of narrative on perceptions of AI, and engaged with beneficiaries in order to enhance critical reflection on AI narratives and AI itself. This showcases how English Studies research is at the forefront of the one of the most exciting (and contentious) technology debates and policy issues of the twenty-first century.

English Studies research also has contributed to global practice and policy issues in relation to emerging technologies in data science. Researchers at Birmingham City University developed a series of automated linguistic analysis and annotation tools to enable enhanced research insights alongside new teaching practices from what would otherwise be unmanageably large datasets.⁹⁵ The software tools have over 5000 monthly users in 190 countries, and outcomes include, but are not limited to, augmenting English Language teaching in German secondary schools; enriching the teaching of literary analysis and textual interpretation across HE, FE and schools; and informing decision-making by university planners and management at five UK institutions. These case studies not only showcase the innovative responses to challenges related to research and technology by English Language and Literature research, but also their global reach.

Culture and Arts

English Studies research has significant impacts across the sphere of culture and the arts. Many of these impacts intersect with other themes highlighted in this section of the report, including the economy, health, and society and inclusion. Researchers at Swansea University/Prifysgol Abertawe were commissioned by Literature Wales and supported by the British Council to tour the multi-media performance 'Dylan Live'.⁹⁶ Creative artists developed collaborative practices, with audiences in Wales, London and New York gaining an awareness of the bilingual contexts of Dylan Thomas' work, as well as a new understanding of his influence on American culture.

⁹³ REF 2021. (2022), 'Open Access and Open Library of the Humanities', Impact case studies database, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁴ REF 2021. (2022), 'AI narratives: shaping public debate, policy and cultural responses to the future of Artificial Intelligence', Impact case studies database, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁵ REF 2021. (2022), 'Developing automated linguistic analysis and annotation tools to support collaborative learning, professional translation, policy making and HE management decisions', Impact case studies database, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁶ REF 2021. (2022), "'Dylan Live": Influencing artistic practice, public knowledge, arts strategy and educational outreach through research-based multi-media performance', Impact case studies database, [20 Feb 2023].

The show resulted in Wales's national literature promotion agency developing an arts strategy that emphasised global collaborations based on creative practice. The Welsh Government also features 'Dylan Live' in its educational platform, leading to greater KS3 and KS4 understanding of Thomas' transatlantic impact.

Alongside working at the forefront of global understandings of literature, English Studies research is also tackling challenging cultural policy issues. This includes raising awareness of responsible media reporting and consumption, informing government policy related to social media and gender equality. Researchers at the University of Strathclyde worked under the theme of Responsible Media, examining a range of issues, from social media, body image and mental health to media coverage of traumatic content, such as suicide.⁹⁷ The research findings have been translated into accessible resources, such as toolkits for journalists, media guidelines, and public talks and blogs, which have been actively taken up and used by media companies, journalist associations, and third sector and government organisations. These case studies are a glimpse into the breadth of English Studies' enrichment of and engagement with culture and the arts, including cultural awareness, pedagogy and policy challenges.

Society and Inclusion

The role of English Studies research in improving social cohesion is also made evident through the impact case studies. Not only can engagement with research by different communities bring them together and introduce them — some for the first time — to universities, but this can also operate as a form of research in itself. At Queen's University, Belfast, a programme to connect marginalised communities through theatre has made a major contribution to public debate and understanding of those communities.⁹⁸ The research engaged theatre practitioners and participants from diverse marginalised communities to produce a play, *We'll Walk Hand in Hand*, which connected the past and present struggle for civil rights and equality in Northern Ireland. In doing so, the research has not only helped to inform community theatre practice and challenge public understandings of equality but it has also benefitted participants from different marginalised communities.

Challenging public understandings of equality was also a significant feature in research from the University of Nottingham, which explored the use of Linguistics in social contexts to highlight and combat discrimination.⁹⁹ *Reducing inequalities through language* addressed the everyday discrimination that is embedded in sociolinguistic communicative practices including in the law, politics, education, workplaces, and on the street. Not only did the project inform policy and public debate in the UK, but it has also had global impact, increasing the capacity for NGOs and charities operating in East Africa to combat inequality for women and girls.

This understanding of other cultures was central to many impact case studies of English Studies research. For many in the UK, English is not their first language, but is the way in which they are expected to learn and work. At Northumbria University at Newcastle, this highlighted a lack of educational research and resources on learning in a second language, and research identified this resource gap as a barrier for migrants, particularly those with limited schooling, to be able to meet their potential in the UK.¹⁰⁰ This research project developed new approaches to language learning and the pedagogic methods needed, resulting in a professional training package and digital literacy platform.

⁹⁷ REF 2021. (2022), 'Promoting a culture of responsible media reporting and consumption', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁸ REF 2021. (2022), 'Creative Connections and Civil Rights: Connecting the disconnected through theatre', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

⁹⁹ REF 2021. (2022), 'Reducing inequalities through language: influencing policies and changing communication practices to improve the lives of individuals and communities in the UK, Uganda and Kenya', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

¹⁰⁰ REF 2021. (2022), 'Supporting low-literate adult migrants and their teachers through novel digital learning platforms', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

Environment

The REF 2021 impact case studies highlighted the distinct relationship between humanities and the environment, and demonstrate the significant reach that English Studies research has across environmental understanding and wellbeing. Research at Bath Spa University utilises the perspectives of arts and humanities as a new lens through which to view environmental policy, particularly at the intersection between nature, wellbeing and health.¹⁰¹ By creating these new frameworks for environmental policy, the research has been used in a variety of contexts, from mountaineering festivals and wellbeing conferences to the World Health Organisation and the United Nations.

Literary research has also challenged perspectives on nature, connecting environmental issues with their cultural association. Research from the University of Oxford on the cultural importance of trees in the history of the British Isles has had wide-ranging impact. It has enhanced the work of organisations such as the Woodland Trust and the Royal Forestry Society and improved environmental policy-delivery at both national and local levels, creating common goals between disparate groups, including conservationists and commercial wood managers.¹⁰² The key output from the research, *The Long, Long Life of Trees* also informed the Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Overstory*. English Studies research is shaping global responses to the climate emergency and creating new resonances and relationships between people and their environment.

Research Funding

This section of chapter 5 turns to research funding, as captured by HESA data. For the purposes of this section, this report will be using cost centres 138 English Language & Literature (English Language & Literature). HESA data show that, in 2020/21, 210 higher education institutions received a total of £19.9 million of research grants and contracts funding to English Language & Literature. Research council funding made up £10,443,000 of English Language & Literature income, or 52% of its total income. The next largest revenue stream for research funding for this cost centre was UK-based charities, which accounted for £4,152,000 or 21% of total research funding for English Language & Literature. This was followed by EU government bodies, £2,853,000 or 14% of total funding, and UK central government bodies, local authorities, health and hospital authorities, which accounted for £1,538,000 or 8% of total funding for English Language and Literature.

Research in higher education in the UK is funded through a dual support system, consisting of specific grants for projects and programmes, and recurrent grants (in England this largely constituted by Quality Related or 'QR' funding), which can be spent at their own discretion. This section does not include analysis of recurrent or QR funding, as this funding data cannot be split by cost centre through HESA data. This does mean that a significant proportion of the funding picture is missing in the below analysis, particularly as research has shown that QR can support the entire research processes of theory-based disciplines, including those in the humanities.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ REF 2021. (2022), 'Changing Practice: bringing arts and humanities perspectives on nature, wellbeing and environmental crisis into new spaces', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

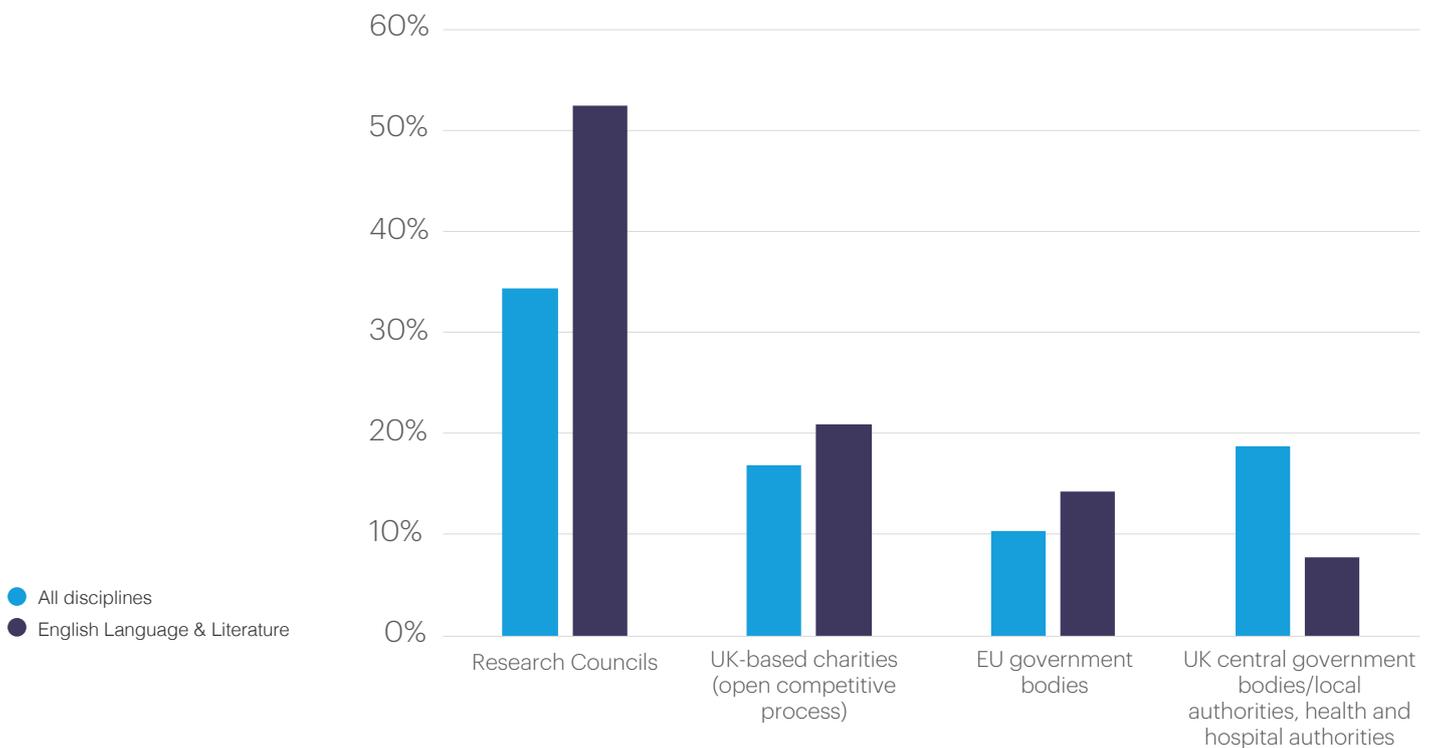
¹⁰² REF 2021. (2022), 'Enhancing public understanding of the cultural significance of trees, and assisting preservation of trees and woodland', *Impact case studies database*, [20 Feb 2023].

¹⁰³ Ioppolo, B., Wooding, S. (2021), *Exploring the value of QR on supporting researcher-scale activities*, The Bennett Institute, p.6.

English Studies research funding sources

Figure 39 below shows how these revenue streams compare to the proportion of total income for research grants and contracts across the sector. This shows that the English research eco-system is more reliant on research council funding than the wider sector. For the wider sector, research council income makes up just over a third of all research grants and contracts, whereas for English Language & Literature, it is over half. UK charities and EU government bodies also provided a higher proportion of funding for English Language & Literature in 2020/21 than was the case for the wider sector. The latter is especially pertinent, since the future of the UK's association to Horizon Europe remains in doubt at this time. UK-based SHAPE researchers are proportionally more successful in European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) awards, which are internationally recognised and prestigious. Indeed, up to a third of UK ERC and MSCA awards and funding between 2015 and 2020 have been in SHAPE disciplines.¹⁰⁴

Figure 39. Research grants & contracts income for English Studies and across all disciplines, 2020/21



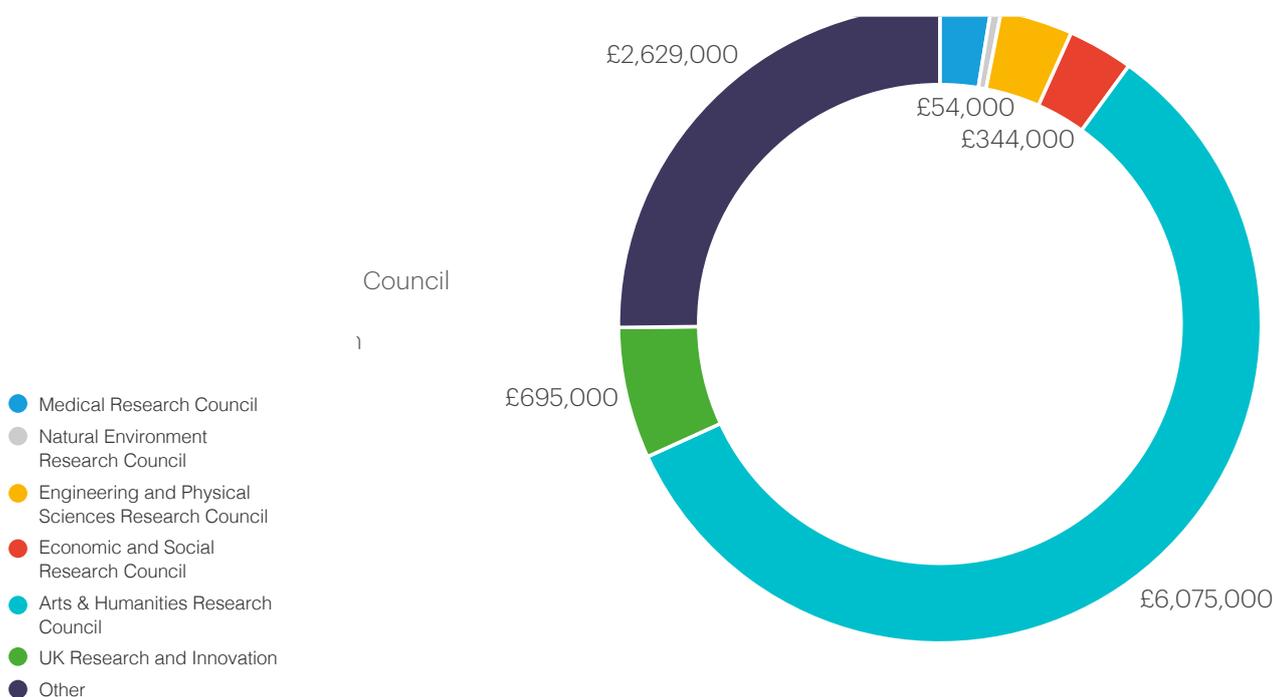
Source: HESA Provider Data: Finance 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [October 2022]

¹⁰⁴

British Academy (2022), *Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Landscape Review: A response from the British Academy*, p.4.

Figure 40, below, shows a breakdown of income from research councils and the National Academies for English Language & Literature across the sector. Unsurprisingly, the majority of research council income for this discipline comes from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). In 2020/21, AHRC funding accounted for 58% of research income for English. Following AHRC, the subsequent largest research council funding came from 'other', which in this context includes funding from the British Academy.¹⁰⁵ Notably, 4% of research council funding for English Language & Literature came from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and 3% from the Medical Research Council, demonstrating to some extent the level of interdisciplinarity that is present in English Studies research.

Figure 40. Research Councils and the National Academies income for English Language & Literature, 2020/21



Source: HESA Provider Data: Finance 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [October 2022]

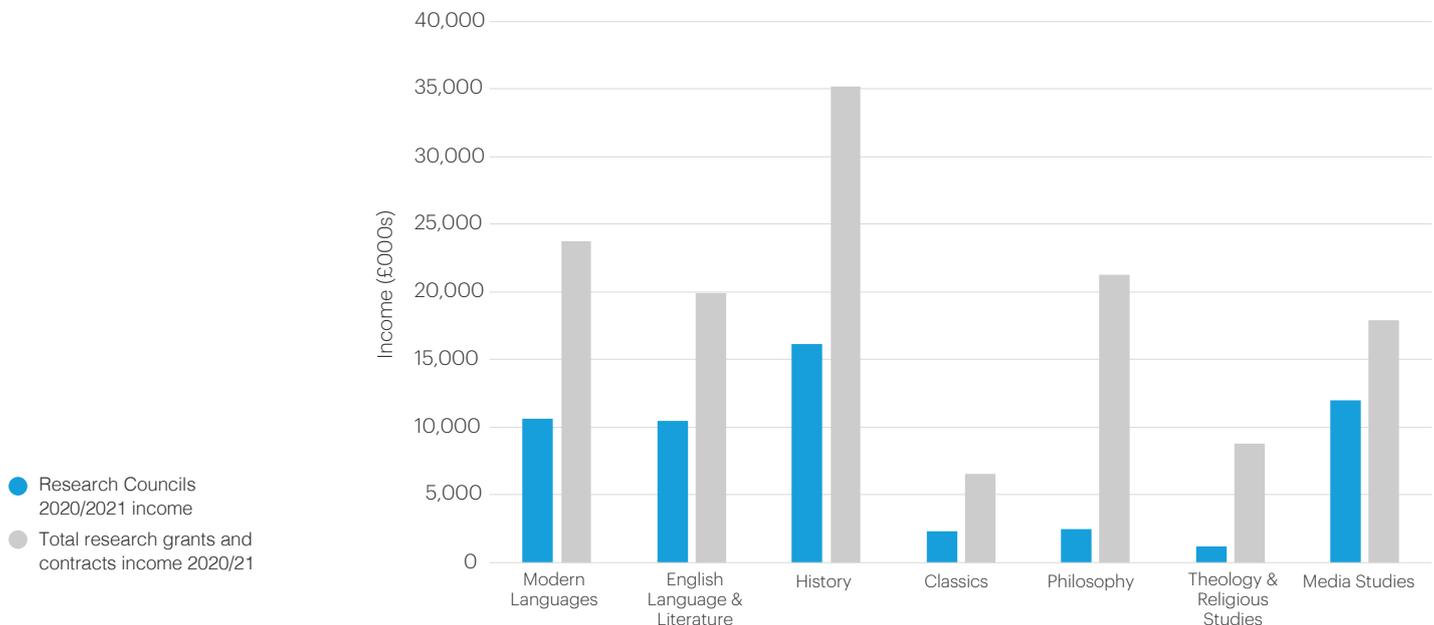
Contextualising English Studies research funding alongside the humanities

Figure 41, below, highlights the total amount of research funding across the different arts & humanities cost centres. In absolute terms, the overall research income for English Language & Literature sits about midway in comparison with other humanities cost centres. As a point of comparison, Figure 41 also shows the level of funding from research councils next to the overall funding level. It further develops the findings from Figure 40, and shows that research council income makes up a greater proportion of overall research funding for English Language & Literature than for most other humanities disciplines. Across all the humanities disciplines shown in Figure 41, research councils accounted for 46% of all research income in 2020/21, which was lower than the 52% for English Language & Literature.

¹⁰⁵

HESA, 'Definitions: Finances', HESA [24 Nov 22].

Figure 41. Research grants and contracts income across humanities cost centres (£000s), 2020/21



Source: HESA Provider Data: Finance 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [October 2022]

Whilst AHRC is often the main funder for English Language & Literature from the research councils, its overall budget is relatively small compared to other six research councils. The AHRC receives the smallest proportion of the UKRI Core R&I budgets for research councils: between 2021 and 2025, the AHRC is budgeted to receive £267m of this budget for distribution (or 2.6%), compared, for instance, to the Economic and Social Research Council's budget of £476m and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's budget of over £2b (representing the largest funding research council, with 24.9% of research council funding).

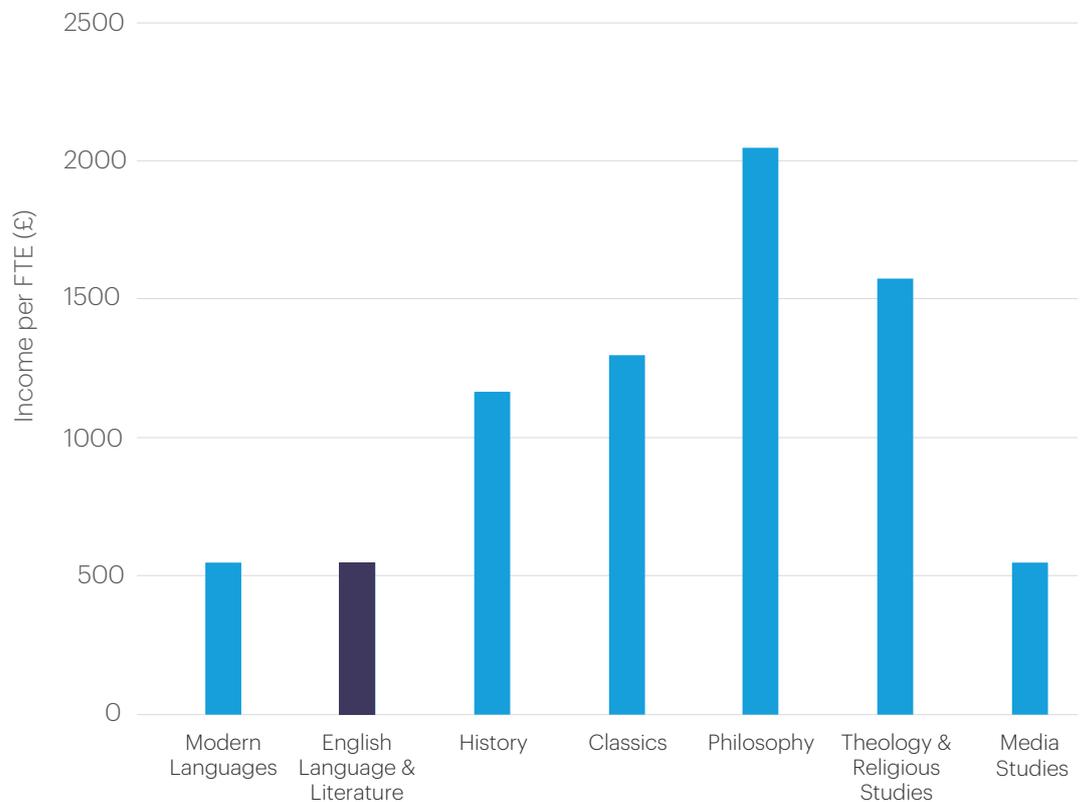
Interviewees flagged challenges associated with research funding for English Studies. Some felt there are smaller amounts of research council funding available across the board, and that such a squeeze may further drive disparities between research intensive institutions with large departments and smaller institutions. One interviewee suggested that, though English Studies is at the forefront of challenge-led research and teaching, as showcased by the REF 2021, funding issues could be exacerbated by assumptions by some stakeholders that English Studies does not lend itself to challenge-led research and funding.

As part of this research, we also analysed research funding per FTE academic staff, shown in Figure 42. The analysis of REF 2021 presented earlier in this chapter cites data on research income per FTE from the sub-panel report for English Language & Literature. This corresponds to the timeframe of the last research assessment exercise (2014 to 2020). Figure 42 highlights a snapshot of funding per FTE for the most recent data that is now available for 2020/21, showing total research grants and contracts income divided by the total number of research staff for different cost centres in the humanities.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶

To calculate this total, numbers have been generated for those on "research" and "research & teaching contracts". Those on teaching only contracts are not included.

Figure 42. Research grants & contracts income per FTE research staff in humanities cost centres, 2020/21



Source: HESA Provider Data: Finance 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [October 2022]

Figure 42 above highlights that English Language & Literature as a cost centre displays one of the lowest levels of research funding per FTE research staff member compared to other humanities cost centres. In 2020/21, English had an average of £549.54 of research grants and income per FTE research staff. This was a similar level to Modern Languages and Media Studies, which received £548.49 and £549.53 per FTE research staff respectively. It is not clear why some disciplinary cost centres are higher here than others. Further research is needed to understand how this level of funding is used and breaks down at an institutional level. It is important to note that this is not a measure of outputs or productivity. This analysis also only tells the picture over one year, rather than the more longitudinal analysis referenced in our REF chapter.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted the research excellence in English Language and Literature evidenced by the REF 2021 exercise. Not only is the research community producing world leading publications, it is also helping to tackle some of the most important challenges of our time, with case studies highlighting impact across social, cultural, economic and health issues. This chapter has also highlighted that a larger proportion of English Language & Literature research funding is drawn from research council funding in comparison to other disciplines. HESA data shows that English Language & Literature research grants are largely funded by the AHRC as well as 'other' funding bodies, such as The British Academy and The Leverhulme Trust. This reliance may make the discipline more vulnerable to changes in the overall level of Research Council funding, and less resilient to other income streams, such as changes to student numbers. The next chapter turns to graduate outcomes, considering the key skills and employment of graduates from English Studies degrees.

6. Graduate Outcomes

The following chapter provides a snapshot of English Studies graduate outcomes. The first section outlines the key skills developed during English Studies degrees, drawing on qualitative interviews with academics across English Studies. The second section analyses graduate outcome datasets in order to better understand what outcomes may look like for English Studies students. This includes graduate activity, salary outcomes, key industries and graduate reflections. Where appropriate, these outcomes have been differentiated by undergraduate and postgraduate leavers.

This chapter draws on multiple datasets, including the Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey, and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset.^{107/108} The GO survey was developed to replace the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey due, in part, to flaws in the latter. The GO and DLHE surveys are different exercises that measure different things. In addition, the introduction of HeCoS and CAH coding from 2019/20 means that it is not possible to compare GO data from 2017/18 and 2018/19 directly with GO data from 2019/20. As such, we have focused our analysis on the latest available data from GO (2019/20). As HESA collect this data through survey, we have also included confidence intervals in the appendix.

Development of key skills

During our interviews, employability and skills were highlighted as key areas of curriculum development for courses across English Literature, English Language and Linguistics, and Creative Writing. This discussion was nuanced, with interviewees noting the importance of key discipline-specific knowledge alongside making skills development a key component of learning outcomes for students. In interviews, Heads of Departments noted the breadth of careers and sectors that English Studies graduates pursue, from law, publishing and journalism to data science in the tech sector.

Most of our interviewees identified critical and creative thinking as key skills developed during an English Studies degree. Interviewees noted that an English degree equips students not only with the ability to think creatively and look at problems differently, but also to discover and harness their critical voice. Many interviewees stressed the importance of harnessing this critical voice as a skill not only for employment, but also for wider engagement with the community and society. It was emphasised that the study of English Literature, Language and Creative Writing is linked to the key challenges of our time.

Alongside critical thinking skills, interviewees highlighted advanced independent research, writing, and editing skills, alongside skills in information synthesis, understandings of humanity, creative approaches to problems and comfort with ambiguity. Graduates across all English Studies disciplines will also have advanced and nuanced communication skills; Creative Writing graduates, for example, gain practice-based skills such as professional formatting and layout skills, and media training. It was noted by interviewees that many of the key skills developed by English Studies students are often seen as ‘intangible’ and yet are vital for employers and a changing UK economy.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Graduate Outcomes is an annual social survey of UK graduates 15 months after they finish their studies. HESA, *HE Graduate Outcomes Data* [6 Dec 22].

¹⁰⁸ LEO data links tax, benefits and student loans data to enable analysis of how much UK graduates on different courses and different universities are earning, and in what sectors they are working, either one, three or five years after graduation. UK Government (2022), ‘LEO Graduate outcomes provider level data’, *Education Statistics* [6 Dec 22].

¹⁰⁹ See also The British Academy (2022), *SHAPE Skills at Work*, pp.6-7.

Interviewees emphasised the importance of integrating employability skills into the curriculum, alongside effective support systems within the university. Some interviewees noted that their department has embedded specific employability practices into their curriculum, including CV writing, job applications, and interview practice. In addition, interviewees raised the importance of nurturing student ability to articulate the skills developed through study. As one interviewee said, ‘they have to be able to say what their English degree gave them’.

In addition, interviewees highlighted the importance of assessments in developing employment skills. Many used examples of alternative methods of assessments that would have resonances beyond the academic seminar room, such as critical commentaries, blog posts, teaching resources, audio commentary, and editorial work. Interviewees raised the development of placements, with some institutions developing embedded creative placements and work-place learning opportunities in order to further develop employability skills and experiences.

Our discussion of skills and employability also highlighted the potential ‘intangibility’ of the skills developed through an English degree. Interviewees emphasised that education in the humanities is often life-long and difficult to quantify through post-qualification metrics. Interviewees also raised the challenges posed by rhetoric that focuses on and exemplifies STEM and vocational skills above all others, alongside a ‘culture wars’ discourse, in which English Studies departments have recently been a target. Interviewees highlighted articles that focus on specific departments and often simplify the nuanced considerations – which are often student led – that feed into pedagogical decisions. Many interviewees felt their institutions could better support and celebrate the skills developed during English degrees — and humanities degrees more broadly — which enable students to pursue a range of careers through high-level subject-specific expertise and transferable skills. Prior British Academy work, through our Skills Programme, has evidenced this value clearly.¹¹⁰

Employment and further study

English Studies graduate activity

As Figure 43 below shows, of first degree English Studies leavers in 2019/20, 43% were in full-time employment and 15% were in part-time employment.¹¹¹ Additionally, 14% were in employment and further study, while 13% were in full-time further study. As also shown Figure 43, 5% of English Studies first degree graduates were unemployed and 5% were active in other activity, such as travel or caring for someone. Furthermore, 2% of first degree graduates were unemployed and due to start work, while 1% were unemployed and due to start further study. Finally, 1% of first degree English Studies graduates were active in voluntary or unpaid work and 1% were in part-time further study.

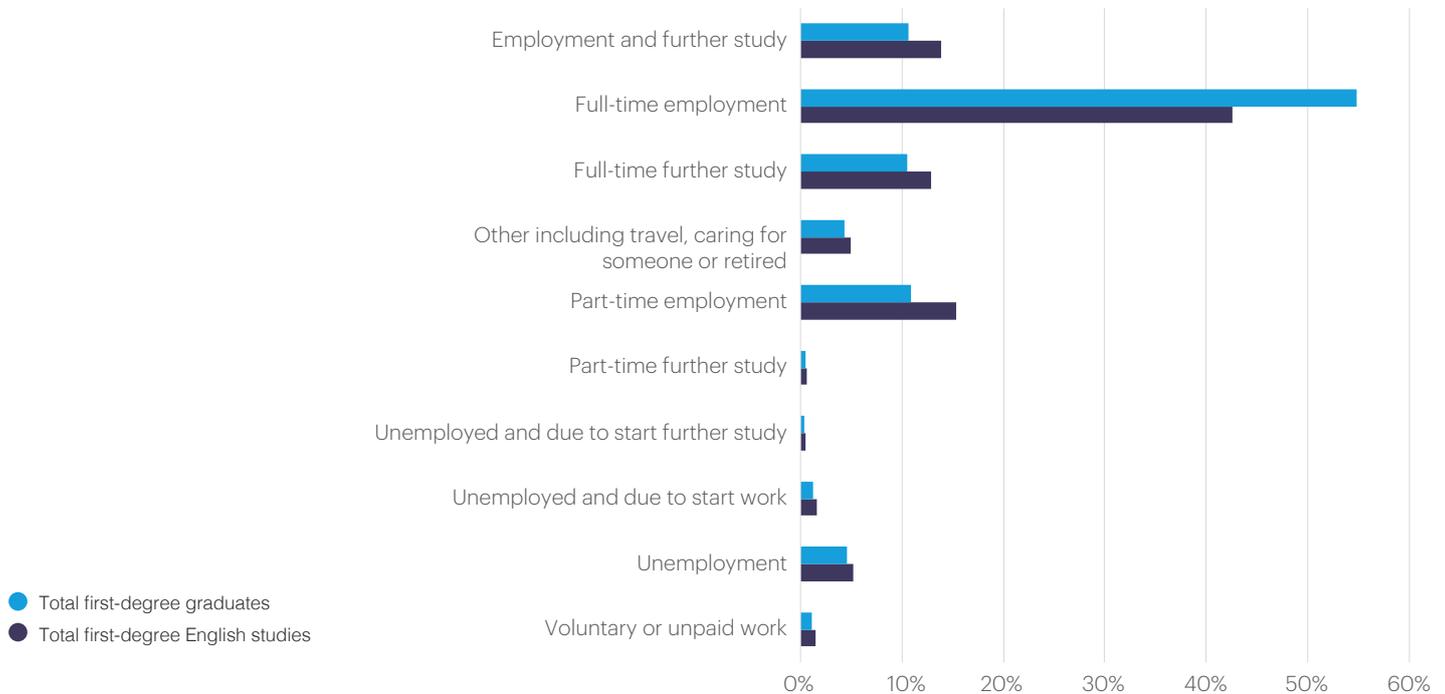
Figure 43 below also shows that, in 2019/20, a smaller proportion of English Studies undergraduates were in full-time employment when compared to the proportion across all disciplines 15 months after graduation (55%).¹¹² However, higher proportions of English Studies graduates were in part-time employment, full-time further study and employment and further study, when compared to graduate outcomes across all disciplines. Around 5% of English graduates were unemployed fifteen months after graduation in 2019/20. Across all graduates, 5% were unemployed in 2019/20, suggesting English displays similarity with overall figures for unemployment.

¹¹⁰ See British Academy (2020), *Qualified for the Future: quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills*.

¹¹¹ The margins of error for first degree English Studies (aggregate) graduates are between +0.1% and +1.2%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹¹² The margins of error for first degree graduates across all disciplines are between +0% and +0.2%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

Figure 43. Percentage of first degree graduates across English Studies and all graduates by activity, 2019/20 (FPE)



Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

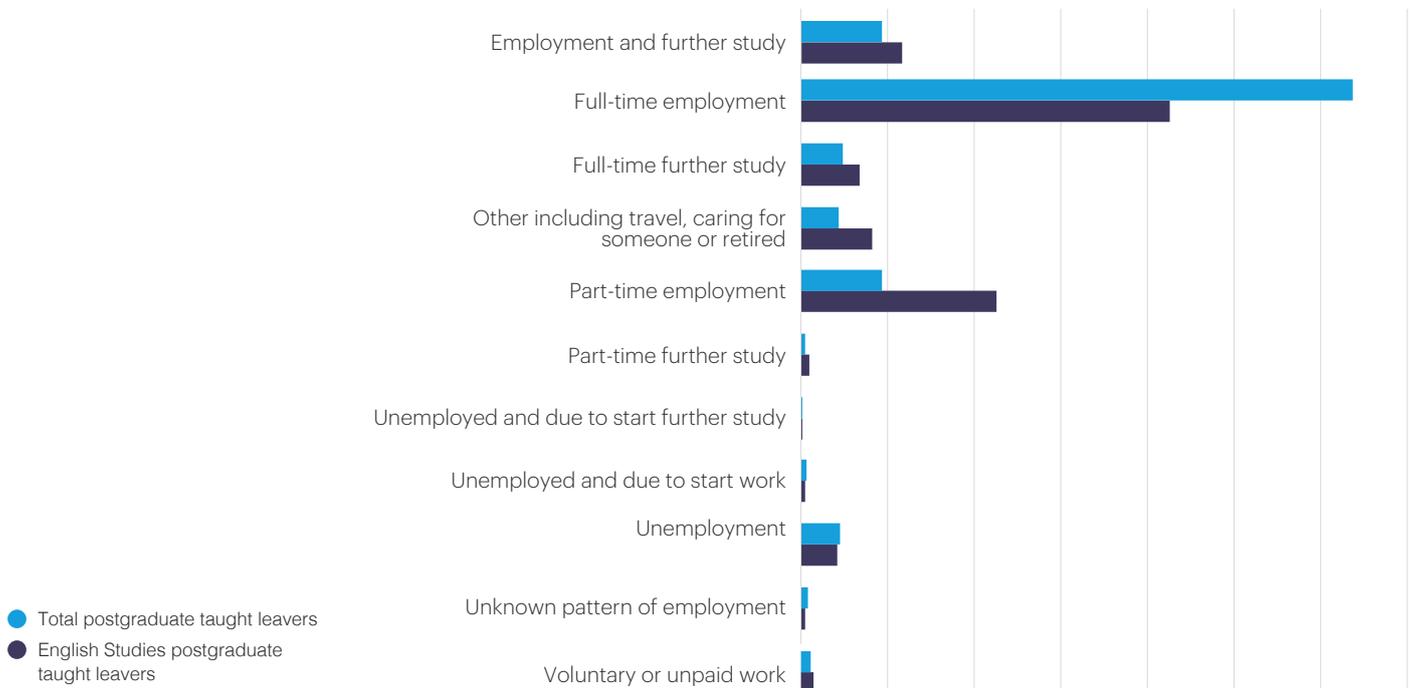
The activity of postgraduate leavers shifts slightly from undergraduate leavers. Figure 44, below, shows that 43% of English Studies postgraduate taught graduates were in full-time employment 15 months after graduating in 2019/20.¹¹³ This is lower than the overall proportion of postgraduate taught leavers, of whom 64% were in full-time employment.¹¹⁴ However, Figure 44 also shows that English Studies postgraduate taught leavers had higher rates of part-time employment when compared with all postgraduate taught leavers: 23% of English Studies postgraduate taught leavers were in part-time employment, compared to 9% of all postgraduate taught leavers. This may be impacted by the higher proportions of women on English Studies courses, as women are more likely than men to be in part-time employment.¹¹⁵ Additionally, a higher proportion of English Studies postgraduate taught leavers were in further study compared to postgraduate taught leavers across all disciplines: 7% of English Studies postgraduate taught leavers were in full-time further study and 9% were in employment and further study, compared to 5% and 9% respectively across all disciplines. A marginally smaller proportion of English Studies postgraduate taught leavers were in unemployment (4%), when compared to all postgraduate taught leavers (5%).

¹¹³ The margins of error for postgraduate taught English Studies (aggregate) graduates are between +0.1% and +2.1%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹¹⁴ The margins of error for postgraduate taught graduates across all disciplines are between +0.0% and +0.3%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹¹⁵ Irvine, S., Clark, H., Ward, M., Francis-Devine, B. (2022), 'Women and the UK Economy', *House of Commons Library*, p.6.

Figure 44. Percentage of postgraduate taught leavers across English Studies and all graduates by activity, 2019/20 (FPE)



Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

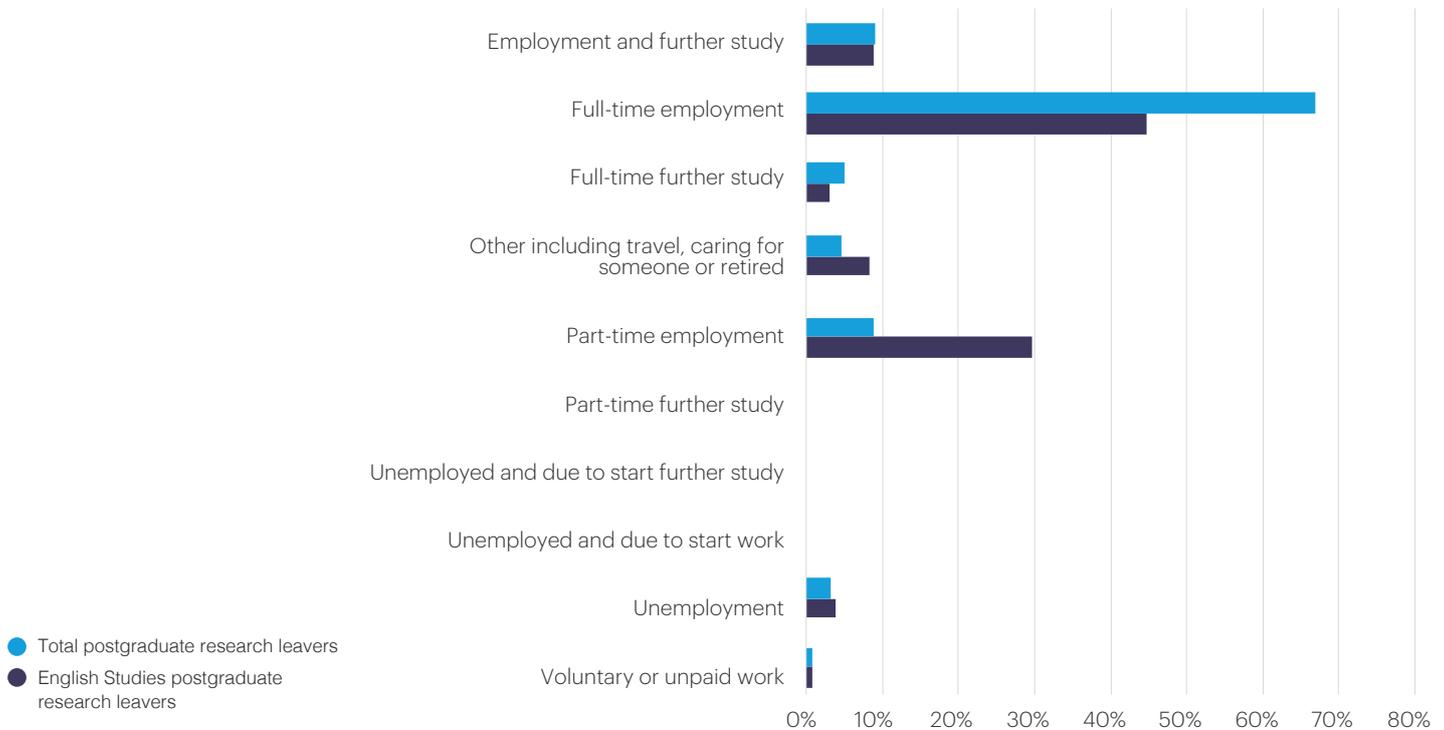
As shown in Figure 45 below, 45% of English Studies postgraduate research leavers were in full-time employment fifteen months after graduation in 2019/20.¹¹⁶ Though this aligns with analysis of both English Studies first degree and postgraduate taught level, it is less than the average across all postgraduate research leavers (67%).¹¹⁷ However, a significant proportion of English Studies postgraduate research leavers were in part-time employment: 29% of English Studies postgraduate research leavers were in part-time employment, compared to 9% across all disciplines. This reflects the higher proportions of part-time employment at first degree and postgraduate taught levels in English Studies, when compared across the sector. This may also be indicative of part-time and fixed-term teaching and lectureship roles higher education, which particularly affects early career researchers — though this affects all doctoral leavers, this issue is very prevalent in English Studies, as raised during our qualitative research (please see chapter 3, postgraduate students for further information).¹¹⁸ Postgraduate research leavers also had higher rates of alternative activity when compared to leavers from all disciplines, which includes travel and caring; 8% of English Studies postgraduate research leavers engaged in alternative activity, compared to 5% across all leavers.

¹¹⁶ The margins of error for English Studies (aggregate) postgraduate research graduates are between +0.0% and +5.3%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹¹⁷ The margins of error for postgraduate research graduates across all disciplines are between +0.0% and +0.7%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹¹⁸ Cornell, Beth. (2020), 'PhD Students and Their Careers', *HEPI Policy Note 25*, HEPI, p. 6.

Figure 45. Percentage of postgraduate research leavers across English Studies and all graduates by activity, 2019/20 (FPE)



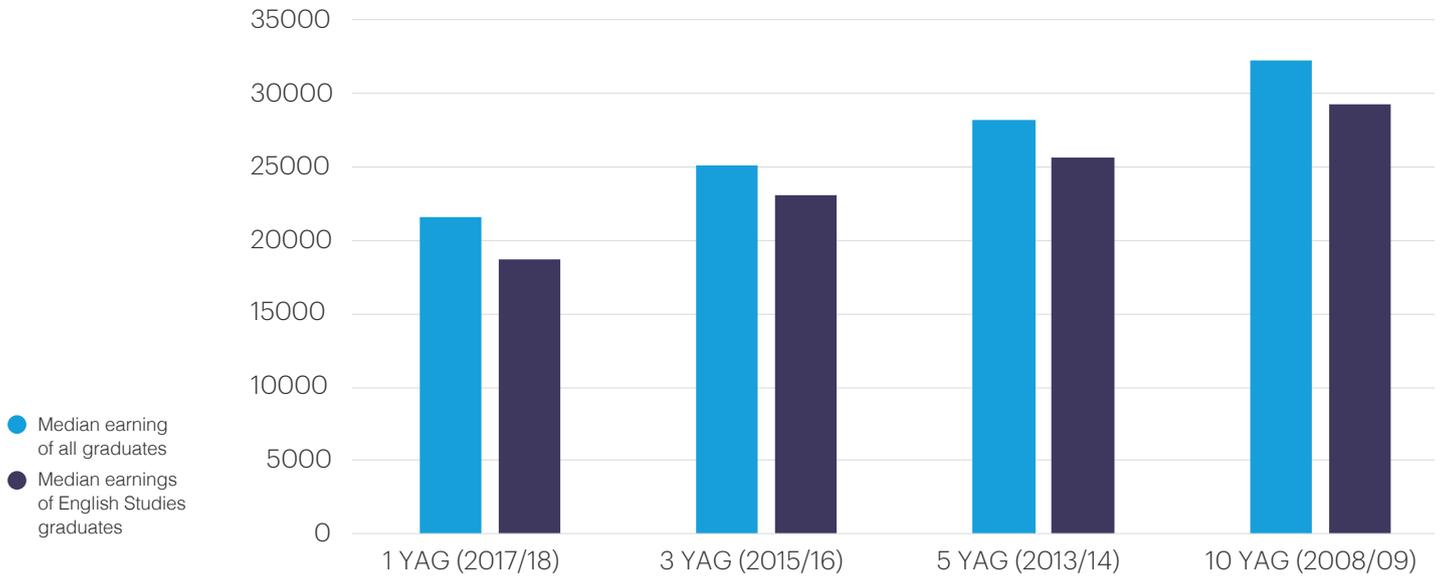
Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

English Studies graduate earnings

According to LEO data, graduates from English Studies earned a median of £25,600 per annum 5 years after graduation in 2019/20. As Figure 46 below shows, English Studies graduates median earnings were between £2,000 and £2,900 less than median earnings across all graduates, though cohorts experienced similar increases in median wages 1, 3, 5, and 10 years after graduation. As we will see later in this chapter, issues around gender parity in pay among graduate students may impact these figures, especially as English Studies has a majority female cohort. Previous research by the British Academy also shows that English Studies graduates make strong progress in salary: in the 10 years following graduation, English Studies and other SHAPE disciplines account for seven of the top ten annual wage growth rates across all disciplines.¹¹⁹

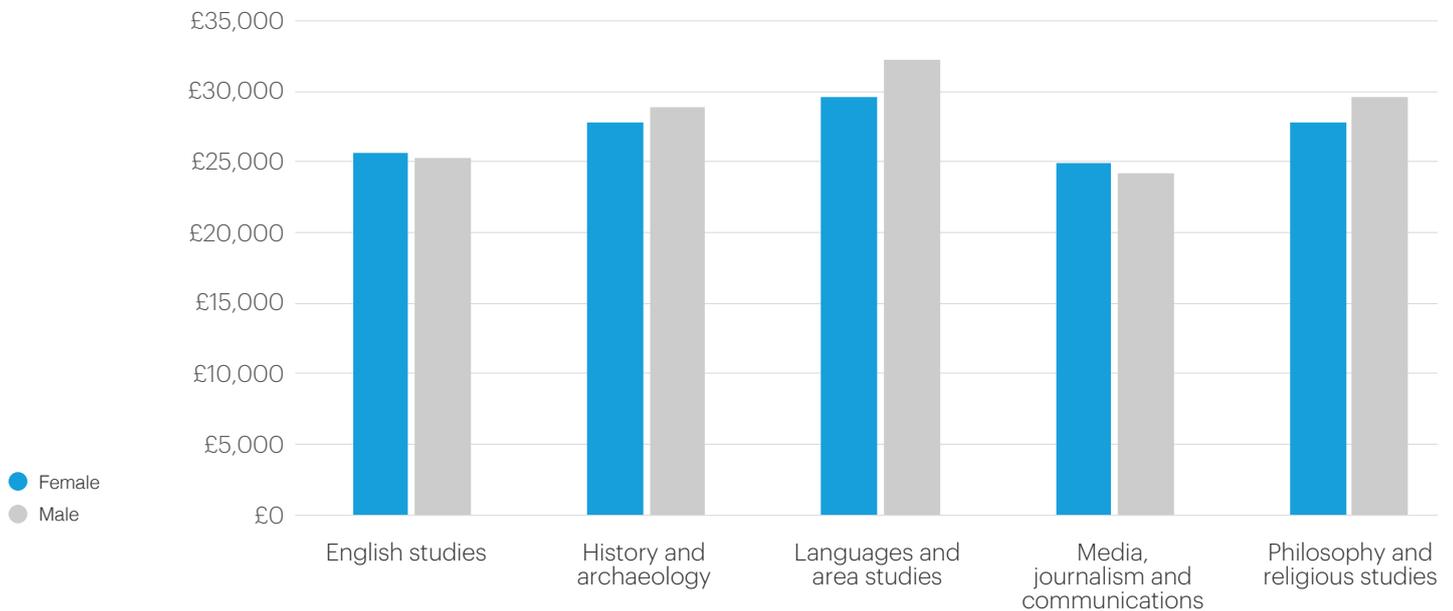
¹¹⁹

Figure 46. Median earnings of English Studies graduates and all graduates, 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation, 2019/20



Source: LEO Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes 2019/20 [February 2023]

As noted above, issues around gender pay parity may have disproportional impacts on the graduate outcomes of disciplines like English Studies, where student cohorts are predominately made up of women. As shown in Figure 47 below, English Studies had lower median graduate salaries in comparison to other humanities disciplines. However, in comparison to other humanities disciplines, first degree female graduates of English Studies may have better earning power against male graduates. Figure 47 shows that, 5 years after graduation the median salary among female graduates of English Studies was £25,600, which was £300 higher than male graduates' median salary of £25,300. The only other humanities disciplinary category where female graduates had better median salary outcomes than male graduates was Media, Journalism and Communication Studies, with a difference of £700, though this represented smaller overall median salaries. Though Languages and Area Studies had the largest median salaries of all humanities disciplines, this also represented the largest pay gap between the sexes, with female graduates' median earnings £2,600 less than male graduates.

Figure 47. Graduate median salaries five years after graduation by subject and sex, 2019/20

Source: LEO Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes 2019/20 [February 2023]

Sectors and occupations of English Studies graduates

According to HESA Graduate Outcomes data, of those English Studies graduates in employment in 2019/20, 57% of first degree leavers were considered to be in 'Professional' and 'Associate Professional' occupations 15 months after graduation. This figure was higher for postgraduate leavers, with 70% of master's leavers and 84% of doctoral leavers in employment working in 'Professional' and 'Associated Professional' roles.¹²⁰

To further add to the picture of outcomes 15 months post-graduation generated by HESA GO,¹²¹ we can consider the LEO data which tracks sectors that graduates enter.¹²² In 2019/20, 5 years after graduation, the top seven sectors by SIC code for English Studies first degree graduates:

- 1) Primary Education (11%)
- 2) Secondary Education (9%)
- 3) Publishing of books; periodicals and other publishing activities (5%)
- 4) Higher Education (4%)
- 5) Management consultancy activities (3%)
- 6) Computer programming; consultancy and related activities (3%)
- 7) Advertising (3%)

¹²⁰ Professional and associated professional roles include (but are not limited to): science, research, engineering and technological professionals and associated professionals; teaching and other educational professionals; business, media, and public service professionals and associated professionals; protective service occupations.

¹²¹ LEO (2018/19), 'Industry of graduate employment for graduates of English Studies by qualification', *Department for Education* [7 Nov 22].

¹²² SIC codes tell us about the industry of the company that the graduate works for, and does not tell us about the graduate occupations within that industry.

Notably, four of the seven sectors above are classed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as part of the fast growing creative industries, lending weight to the importance of critical and creative skills developed in English Studies degrees.¹²³ However, less than a third of English Studies graduates are captured in the figures above, which suggests that their choices of employment are varied and that English graduates are employable across a wide range of sectors. Smaller proportions of students were spread across a range of sectors, in job roles that related to Administration of the State and the economy and social policy of the community; hospital activities; legal activities; retail sale activities; motion picture, video and television programme activities; and creative, arts and entertainment activities, to name a few. This diversity of potential career paths was also raised by multiple interviewees. One interviewee suggested that English Studies may not set you on one career path, but instead opens up avenues into lots of different sectors and roles. This is corroborated by the Academy's Skills Programme, which found that graduates across all SHAPE disciplines are active across a variety of sector and are resilient to economic shocks.¹²⁴

It may be that salary expectations for English Studies graduates are impacted by the average pay of professions they pursue, which, as shown above, includes teaching at primary and secondary levels. In the 2022/23 academic year, qualified teachers in England (excluding London) had a minimum salary of £28,000, while unqualified teacher salaries in England (excluding London) had a minimum salary of £19,340.¹²⁵ Additionally, in 2021, the average starting salary in publishing was £22,788 while the overall average was £34,049.¹²⁶

Graduates from English Studies postgraduate taught degrees had similar patterns of employment by sector. While many go into education, this is by no means a majority. Smaller proportions of graduates were active across Administration of the State and economic and social activities; computer programming, consultancy and related activities; other social work activities; library, archives, museums and other cultural activities; legal activities; pension funding; television programming and broadcasting activities.

However, there is a shift for level 8 or doctoral level study. In 2019/20, 58% of postgraduate research leavers were in higher education 5 years after graduation. This is down from 74% in 2018/19. While it is not possible to tell what roles postdoctoral researchers are undertaking within higher education, our interviewees discussed the challenges facing postdoctoral researchers seeking careers in academia, particularly around issues of precarity. As noted in previous chapters, a number of interviewees expressed concern about talent leaving the higher education sector due to both the competitiveness of postdoctoral funding and the increasing time postdoctoral researchers may expect to be on short-term contracts. Postgraduate research leavers had job roles in primary and secondary education, with smaller proportions of leavers in roles across business support service activities; educational support activities; pension funding, other social work activities; computer programming, consultant and related activities; management consultancy activities; and Administration of the State and the economic and social policy of the community.

¹²³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2022), *Guidance: DCMS Sectors Economics Estimates Methodology*.

¹²⁴ British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, pp.8-12.

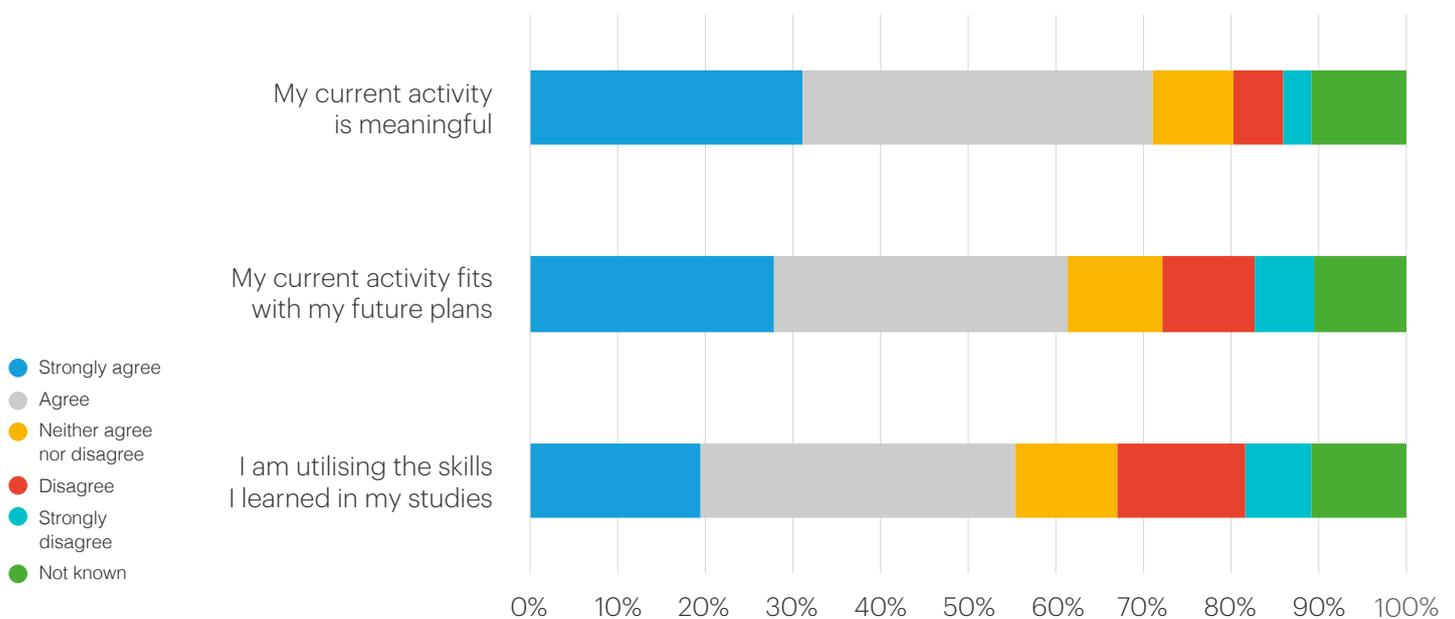
¹²⁵ Department for Education, 'Teaching Salaries', Teaching [8 Dec 22].

¹²⁶ Book Careers (2021), 'Salary Survey 2021 - Results' [8 Dec 22].

Graduate reflections

The 2019/20 Graduate Outcomes survey also included questions asking graduates to reflect on their use of skills developed during their studies, how their current activity fits with future plans and whether their current activity is meaningful. As seen in Figure 48 below, 71% of English Studies first degree graduates agreed with the statement, ‘my current activity is meaningful’, of which 31% strongly agreed.¹²⁷ While across the humanities, a higher proportion of 75% agreed with this statement, a smaller proportion of 30% strongly agreed.¹²⁸ Of first degree English Studies graduates, 61% agreed with the statement ‘my activity fits with my future plans’, of which 28% strongly agreed. In comparison, 66% of all humanities graduates agreed with this statement, and 27% strongly agreed. Finally, 55% of first degree graduates in English Studies agreed with the statement ‘I am utilising what I learned during my studies in my current activity’, of which 19% strongly agreed. This is compared to 61% of humanities graduates who agreed with this statement, of which 18% strongly agreed.

Figure 48. English Studies first degree graduates, responses to GO reflection questions, 2019/20 (FPE)



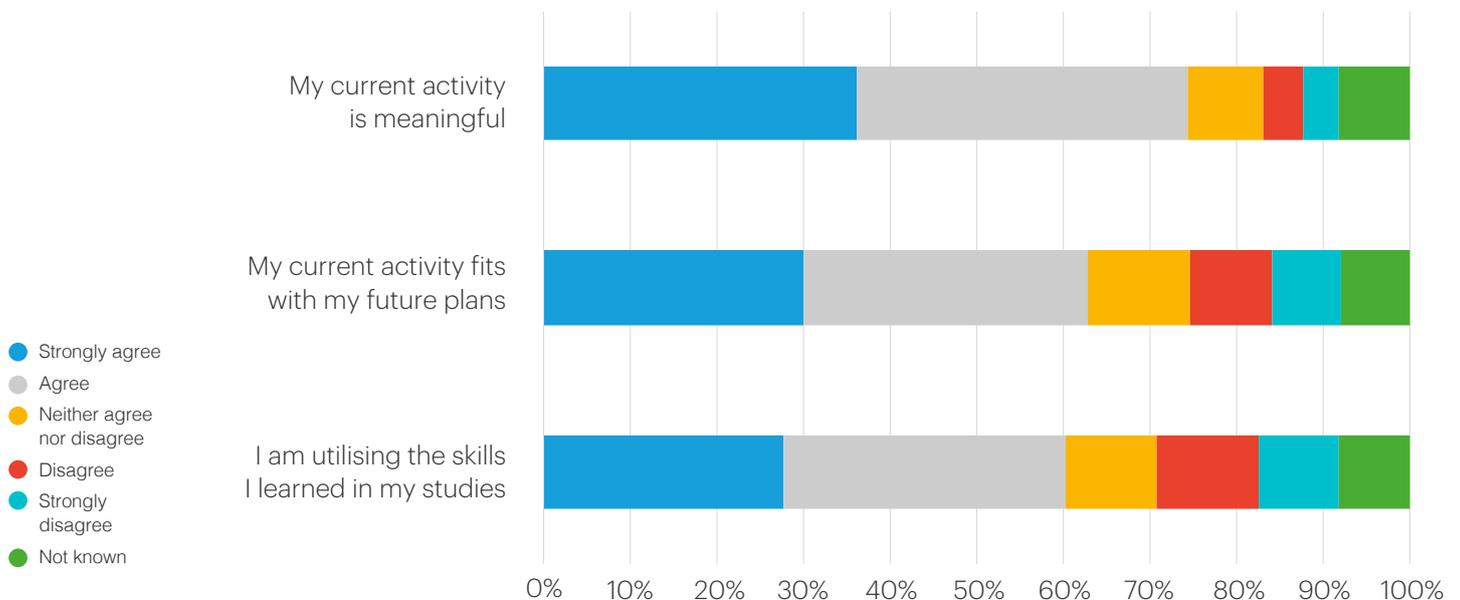
Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

¹²⁷ The margins of error for English Studies (aggregate) first degree graduates are between $\pm 0.4\%$ and $\pm 1.2\%$. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹²⁸ The margins of error for humanities first degree graduates are between $\pm 0.3\%$ and $\pm 0.6\%$. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

As seen in Figure 49 below, 74% of English Studies postgraduate leavers agreed with the statement ‘my current activity is meaningful’, with 36% of leavers strongly agreeing with this statement.¹²⁹ This is aligned with postgraduate leavers across the humanities: while 75% felt that their activity was meaningful, 35% strongly agreed with this statement.¹³⁰ A slightly smaller proportion of postgraduate leavers from English Studies felt that their current activity fits with their future plans, when compared to the proportion across the humanities: 63% of English Studies agreed with this statement, with 30% strongly agreeing, compared to 66% and 32% respectively across humanities disciplines. Finally, 60% of English Studies postgraduate leavers agreed that their current activity is meaningful, with 28% strongly agreeing. These proportions are again reflected in the wider humanities, with 61% of humanities postgraduate leavers agreeing with this statement, and 27% strongly agreeing. Overall, GO reflections suggest that high proportions of English Studies graduates felt positive about their career paths and the meaningfulness of their activity after their degree.

Figure 49. English Studies postgraduate leavers, responses to GO reflection questions, 2019/20 (FPE)



Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data 2012/13 - 20/21 © Jisc [March 2023]

Summary

This chapter has considered some of the graduate outcomes for English Studies students, including activity, salary outcomes, key industries and graduate reflections. These data suggest that a majority of English Studies first degree graduates pursue careers in a wide range of careers. This chapter has also acknowledged the higher proportions of female English Studies graduates on higher or equal earnings to male graduates, when compared with other humanities disciplines. In addition, we have also reflected on the skills developed during the course of an undergraduate degree in English, highlighting critical and creative thinking as key expectations for skills developed during English Studies degrees. The next chapter considers opportunities and challenges for English Studies based on the evidence presented in this report.

¹²⁹ The margins of error for English Studies (aggregate) postgraduate graduates are between +0.4% and +1.9%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

¹³⁰ The margins of error for humanities postgraduate graduates are between +0.3% and +0.8%. Please see appendix 1 for further detail.

7. Reflections: opportunities and risks for the provision English Studies in higher education

This report has aimed to dig under the headlines and assemble a comprehensive evidence base through which to better understand the nuanced changes experienced by English Studies at staff and student levels. We have worked closely with the English Studies academic community to showcase both the vibrancy of English Studies research and teaching, and the challenges faced by the disciplines connected to it. The data analysis carried out during this report demonstrates that the 'health' of English Studies is evolving, changing across cohorts, institutions, and courses. This report can only provide an assessment using a snapshot of the data, and so its conclusions, while robust, should be considered as another piece of the puzzle, rather than the whole picture. The report aims to equip English Studies communities with the evidence base from which to develop further activity to discuss and promote the health of the discipline.

This section provides a summary of key themes and trends that have emerged across the qualitative and quantitative analysis undertaken in this report. Some of these represent challenges for the disciplines encompassed by English Studies, while others present opportunities for future health and success. It is intended as a spring board for the community, consolidating the evidence presented in this report.

Risks

Uneven trends and concentrations in recruitment at undergraduate level risk volatility in income to support the teaching and research of English Studies at university, which can threaten the sustainability of some departments.

Between 2012 and 2019, first degree undergraduates across English Studies fell by 20%, with a decrease of 3% between 2019 and 2021. The disciplines have seen a particularly steep decline since 2015, but one which was not evenly spread across the UK. While first degree students domiciled in England, Wales and Northern Ireland fell significantly over this period, those from Scotland increased by 12%. As well as differing higher education funding models, policy reform to pre-university qualifications, most notably changes to English Studies GCSEs, may have contributed to this divergence.

Despite an overall decline in student numbers for English Studies in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, evidence suggests that there are highly uneven patterns of student numbers across different institutions within these jurisdictions. Some institutions have experienced growth in student recruitment while others have shrunk, often – though not always – characterised by whether a university has high or low tariff entry. Decreasing student demand can put pressure on individual institutions to restructure departments or close courses. As a sector, the majority of higher education funding comes from teaching income, rather than through Quality Related (QR) or other sources of public funding for teaching and research. As such, a decline in student numbers does collateral damage to the funding available to support excellent research.

Imbalances in diversity of students and staff highlight that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations are still important across all levels.

The English Studies student and research community are working hard, often in collaboration with one another, to diversify curricula and instigate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) best practice in pedagogy and research. The ethnic diversity of the UK domiciled students in English Studies was not fully representative of the ethnic diversity of England and Wales in 2020/21, with students who identified as Black or Black British underrepresented across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. English Studies was also under-representative of male students, with significantly higher proportions of women studying English Studies in higher education compared to men. Additionally, evidence presented in this report shows that between 2012 and 2019, part-time first degree undergraduates across English Studies fell by 46%, while those studying full-time fell by 14%. First degree undergraduates who were mature learners decreased by 30% over the same period, compared to 15% across under 21 year olds. Another important context are decreasing undergraduate students at lower tariff universities – the continuation of this trend will make it harder for the English Studies community to rectify diversity issues and expand access and inclusion across the discipline.

While diversity across several characteristics is increasing in English Language & Literature staff, with changes that are seeing the academic staff body become more representative of the wider population in the UK, there are still areas where access could be improved. This report has tentatively highlighted that younger staff cohorts are more diverse in comparison with older groups. However, it has also drawn out complex and intersecting issues around contract type and protected characteristics, with women and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds less likely to be employed at professor level and more likely to be employed on short-term contracts. These issues may affect staff diversity in the long term.

A lack of diversity was cause for concern among many interviewees, particularly in terms of fostering an innovative and open research and learning culture. Interviewees noted the importance of intersecting issues of socio-economic background and protected characteristics when considering access to higher education. One way to embed this understanding in practice is for university and departmental leaders to continue to work closely with organisations with expertise in EDI, including the National Association for Teaching of English, the Postcolonial Studies Association, University English and the English Association.

Casualisation of the workforce may impact pipelines from postgraduate research to early career researchers and beyond.

Casualisation and precarity are well known issues among postgraduate research students and early career researchers teaching in all areas of higher education; they have been a central part of early career experiences for at least the last decade. As noted above, women and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are currently also less well represented at professor level, with 5% of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds employed at professor level, despite making 15% of overall staff in English Studies. It may be that EDI initiatives currently underway will impact this picture in time, particularly as there is increased diversity of staff in younger age brackets. However, our interviewees consistently raised concerns about the numbers of early career researchers who are forced to exit higher education due to precarity, and the long term impact of this on the strength and diversity of the research community.

Risks in the level and diversity of sources for research grants and contracts for English Studies.

In 2020/21, over half of research grants and contracts (excluding Quality Related or recurrent funding) for English Studies came from research council funding, predominantly from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This makes English Studies more reliant on research council funding when compared to the average across all disciplines, with 52% of English Studies income from research councils compared with 34% of all disciplines' grants and contracts income streams. The AHRC receives the smallest proportion of the UKRI Core R&I budget for a research council, meaning that English Studies researchers are fighting in a competitive market of multiple disciplines for a smaller pot of funding. Because research council funding makes up a greater proportion of English Studies research grants and income, the discipline as a whole could be more vulnerable to changes in the overall level of research council funding and less resilient to changes in other income streams such as student numbers, particularly from those students paying unregulated fees, notably postgraduate and international students.

This issue is likely to become more pressing as other avenues of funding, such as European Research Council funding, may become less accessible to UK researchers if the UK is unable to secure association to Horizon Europe. English Studies staff also had lower levels of research funding per FTE compared to other humanities disciplines in 2020/21. Further research is needed to understand the factors that impact funding per FTE staff and the reasons why this may be lower for English Studies.

Furthermore, though the success of English Studies in the REF 2021 exercise has led to an estimated increase of 26% in Quality Related (QR) funding for the discipline in England, universities differ in how they allocate QR funding internally. This may be part of the reason why some departments are under extreme pressure despite excellent institutional and disciplinary performance in the REF 2021. And, notwithstanding an increase in QR or recurrent funding, there are still financial pressures on English Studies departments, not least that the real terms value of teaching income, grants and fellowships is being eroded by inflation.

Opportunities

The REF 2021 evidences the strength, relevance and resilience of English Studies research across the UK.

This report has showcased the breadth and diversity of English Studies research, and its innovative impact on audiences from local communities to national policymakers. The REF 2021 impact case studies, of which just a handful were discussed in this report, demonstrate the various ways in which English Studies research continues to contribute to social, cultural and economic challenges in vibrant, exciting and unexpected ways.

Furthermore, this report has highlighted the strength of research in English Studies. One indicator of this is the REF 2021 exercise, which found that 48% of research in English Studies was world leading. The research assessed by the REF 2021 exercise found that there is excellence in English Studies across all regions and institution types as well as department sizes. The REF 2021 also showed that English Studies has responded to changing conditions innovatively and with versatility — researchers across the disciplines are carrying the practices of English Studies into the future of research, including the areas of technology and digitisation, eco criticism, the medical humanities, postcolonialism and migration studies.

And while English Studies has significant national and international impact across social, cultural, health and technology challenges, the higher education community, including the British Academy, should continue to evidence and articulate this strength to business leaders, university management and policymakers, particularly as English remains the dominant global language. English Studies should be understood and celebrated as an innovative subject that has global reach and recognition.

English Studies is growing in interdisciplinary research and teaching, including across constituent English Studies subjects.

Interdisciplinarity is embedded in English Studies teaching and research. The new QAA subject benchmark statement for English Studies will support this by creating a more holistic understanding of English Studies and highlighting integrative learning and skills across English Language, Literature and Creative Writing. This development emphasises how English Studies disciplines work across one another in vibrant and interdisciplinary ways. Furthermore, the REF 2021 panel assessment showcased the intra- and interdisciplinary working of English Studies, evidencing the discipline's breadth of focus and innovative research that is impacting activity and measures across health, the economy and the environment. The REF 2021 exercise particularly evidenced new strengths in creative-critical approaches and methodologies.

The increasing popularity of Creative Writing further demonstrates student interest in self-expression and practice-based learning, as well as thinking both creatively and critically. In 2020/21, 49% of English Studies postgraduate taught students were enrolled on Creative Writing, making it the most popular subject within English Studies at this level. Interviewees discussed the incorporation of creative responses and approaches to assessment as a positive development across English Studies disciplines. This highlights just how adaptable English Studies is to changing environments across teaching and research. Indeed, English Studies graduates are active across sectors within the growing creative industries sector, which contributed £109b to the UK economy in 2021.¹³¹

There is a clear opportunity here in that cross and interdisciplinary skills and expertise are in demand from both students and employers. The overall methodological breadth of subjects within English Studies is testament to interdisciplinary working, from the intersections of English Language with social sciences to creative practices in English Literature and Creative Writing.

English Studies students numbers are expanding at postgraduate taught and research levels.

Between 2012 and 2019, English Studies has seen an increase of 27% in postgraduate taught students, with a further increase of 8% between 2019 and 2021. Postgraduate research students in English Studies increased by 4% between 2012 and 2019, with a further increase of 8% between 2019 and 2021. This is a positive indication of the continued development of an environment that facilitates and nurtures high quality research. Postgraduate leavers develop careers across a wide range of sectors, entering the employment market with important transferable skills and subject expertise.

As shown in this report, international postgraduate taught and research students represent an important proportion of English Studies postgraduate students. International students represented 20% of postgraduate taught students across English Studies, and 28% of postgraduate research students in 2020/21. There is a real opportunity to present English Studies as a source of international soft power and strategic advantage in relation to higher education, and the UK more broadly, which is a priority for the current government.¹³² This international context will likely continue to be an important part of the future of the discipline.

¹³¹ House of Lords Library (2022), *Arts and creative industries: The case for a strategy*.

¹³² HM Government (2023), *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world*.

English Studies graduates have positive employability rates across 'Professional' and 'Associated Professional' occupations.

This report has showcased the versatility of English Studies graduates who pursue a diverse range of careers, and are active at 'Professional' and 'Associated Professional' levels. The evidence shows there is no single linear route from a degree in English Studies into a specific profession. Instead, English Studies graduate activity covers a breadth of sectors, including notable levels of progression into education, publishing, management consultancy, computer programming and consultancy, and advertising. As noted above, many these sectors are part of the fast growing creative industries. Furthermore, English Studies graduates are vital to the education sector at secondary and primary levels, particularly as English Language and Literature are compulsory subjects below the age of 16 across the UK and the discipline faces teacher shortages. English Studies graduates had positive responses to the Graduate Outcome reflection questions with 71% of English Studies graduates agreeing with the statement 'my current activity is meaningful', while 66% agreed that their current activity fits with their future plans. As the Graduate Outcomes Survey continues to gather data on graduate satisfaction with study, this will build a useful evidence base for the community.

Yet there is still a significant opportunity to articulate the resilience of English graduates in the face of an ever-changing economy, and the flexibility of their knowledge and skillset, over the course of their lifetime/career. This resilience and flexibility, evidenced by the breadth of careers English Studies graduates pursue, supports them into work that is fulfilling. There is also a need for more research on the lifetime benefits and outcomes of English Studies graduates to help policymakers and the community understand the full picture of graduates' career paths.

Summary

The opportunities and risks highlighted in this section may resonate with some areas of the English Studies community more than others. As outlined in the foreword, chapter 1 and as suggested by the complexity surrounding data codes, English Studies captures multiple disciplines that are by no means homogenous. The nuances in changes to student numbers across UK devolved administrations and institution types underline how some opportunities and risks may be more pertinent than others. However, much of what is highlighted here resonated across our qualitative interviews and in discussions with our Advisory Group and wider Fellowship throughout this project, regardless of institution type.

The English Studies community is intensely collaborative, with initiatives and activity across multiple learned societies and subject associations. This report has aimed to equip these vibrant and engaged communities with a holistic evidence base from which to develop future activity related to the health and sustainability of the discipline.

Glossary

Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)

The Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) was developed to provide standard groupings that can be applied to both HECoS and JACS subjects, allowing for consistent analysis across both coding frames. As this coding system was introduced in 2019/20, this report uses CAH coding for its 2019 to 2021 student data.

Cost Centres

HESA cost centres are used predominantly in their staff and finance records as a way of coding higher education activities.

First degree

An undergraduate degree, also known as a bachelor's degree, which will normally be a three-year programme if studied full-time. First degree students make up the largest proportion of higher education provision.

Foundation degree

An undergraduate course which combines academic and vocational elements of learning, equivalent to two-thirds of a first (Bachelor's) degree and usually studied over two years if full-time. Foundation degrees are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are often focused on specific professions and frequently lead to further study as they can be used towards a degree by taking an additional 'top-up' year.

Graduate Outcomes (GO) Survey

The GO survey is run by HESA. All graduates who complete a higher education course in the UK will be asked to take part in the survey 15 months after finishing their studies. It aims to contact over 700,000 graduates over four survey periods through the year, depending on when the graduate completed their studies.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

HESA is the official agency for the collection, processing and publishing of data about higher education in the UK.

Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS)

HECoS is a new student coding system, which replaces HESA's previous subject coding system, the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) which was used in years prior to 2019/20. This report draws on Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH), which was introduced in 2019/20 with the aim of providing standard groupings across HECoS and JACS subjects for time series analysis.

HESA Cost Centre

HESA uses cost centres as a way of coding higher education activities, such as income and expenditure or staffing. There are both academic and administrative cost centres and institutions code their financial returns and their staff record by cost centre. The current cost centre codes have been in use since 2012/13.

Higher Education Institution (HEI)

A term used in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to describe any provider of higher education that is one or more of the following: a UK university; a higher education corporation; an institution designated as eligible to receive public grant money from one of the UK higher education funding bodies.

Joint Academic Coding of Subjects (JACS)

JACS is a way of classifying academic subjects and modules in higher education. The current version, JACS 3.0, has been used since 2012/13 and has different levels of detail. For most of our analysis, we refer to the ‘principle subject’ level of coding as this is the most detailed level of coding available in HESA student data.

Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO)

LEO is a dataset of education records joined to tax and benefits data. This shows whether graduates were employed and how much they were paid.

Other Undergraduate

Undergraduate level courses that are not first (bachelor’s) degrees and include foundation degrees (although these are sometimes counted separately in statistics), diplomas in higher education (such as those for nursing, social care, and veterinary science), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), and the Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE).

Postgraduate Taught (PGT)

Courses at postgraduate level, usually taken after completing an undergraduate first degree or equivalent, and include Master’s degrees, Postgraduate Certificates, and Postgraduate Diplomas, of which there is a taught element.

Postgraduate Research (PGR)

Courses that require a student to produce and present original research, usually under the supervision of an academic staff member. These include Master’s by research or dissertation, Master of Philosophy (MPhil), research doctorates (PhD, DPhil), and professional or specialist doctorates.

Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The REF is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, managed by Research England. It replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and was first used in 2014, assessing the period 2008 to 2013. Results in the REF are used to determine the distribution of quality-related (QR) research funding, an allocation of public funding for research given to higher education institutions. In this report, we use results from REF 2021.

REF 2021 Impact Case Studies

A measure of research impact was introduced in the 2014 and 2021 Research Excellence Frameworks to assess the positive effect that research has beyond academia. Impact is defined by REF 2021 as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia. Impact is assessed through the submission of impact case studies, five-page documents describing the impact of research and containing further information about the underpinning research.

Standard Occupation Classification (SOC)

The standard occupational classification (SOC) is a common classification of occupational information for the UK. It is used in the HESA Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey to code responses of graduates in employment.

Student Domicile

The term “domicile” relates to the country of a student’s permanent home address prior to entry on their course. UK Home students are those who were resident in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man for at least three years prior to the start of their course. EU domiciled students are those who were living in a European Union country other than the UK prior to their course. Non-EU overseas students are from any country outside the European Union.

Appendix 1

Margins of Error for Graduate Outcomes Survey

Activity	First degree		Postgraduate taught		Postgraduate research	
	English Studies graduates	All First Degree graduates	English Studies leavers	All Postgraduate Taught leavers	English Studies leavers	All Postgraduate Research leavers
Voluntary or unpaid work	± 0.3%	± 0.0%	± 0.5%	± 0.1%	± 1.0%	± 0.1%
Unknown pattern of further study	± 0.1%	± 0.0%	± 0.1%	± 0.0%	± 0.0%	± 0.0%
Unknown pattern of employment	± 0.2%	± 0.0%	± 0.3%	± 0.0%	± 0.6%	± 0.1%
Unemployment	± 0.6%	± 0.1%	± 0.8%	± 0.1%	± 2.0%	± 0.3%
Unemployed and due to start work	± 0.3%	± 0.0%	± 0.3%	± 0.0%	± 0.6%	± 0.1%
Unemployed and due to start further study	± 0.2%	± 0.0%	± 0.2%	± 0.0%	± 0.0%	± 0.0%
Part-time further study	± 0.2%	± 0.0%	± 0.4%	± 0.0%	± 0.0%	± 0.1%
Part-time employment	± 0.9%	± 0.1%	± 1.7%	± 0.2%	± 4.8%	± 0.4%
Other including travel, caring for someone or retired	± 0.5%	± 0.1%	± 1.1%	± 0.1%	± 2.9%	± 0.3%
Full-time further study	± 0.8%	± 0.1%	± 1.0%	± 0.1%	± 1.8%	± 0.3%
Full-time employment	± 1.2%	± 0.2%	± 2.1%	± 0.3%	± 5.3%	± 0.7%
Employment and further study	± 0.9%	± 0.1%	± 1.3%	± 0.2%	± 3.0%	± 0.4%

Graduate Reflections	English Studies First Degree Graduates	English Studies Postgraduate leavers	Humanities First Degree Graduates	Humanities Postgraduate leavers
I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity				
Strongly agree	± 1.0%	± 0.5%	± 0.5%	± 0.8%
Agree	± 1.2%	± 0.6%	± 0.6%	± 0.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	± 0.8%	± 0.4%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
Disagree	± 0.9%	± 0.5%	± 0.5%	± 0.5%
Strongly disagree	± 0.7%	± 0.4%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
Not known	± 0.8%	± 0.4%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
My current activity fits with my future plans				
Strongly agree	± 1.1%	± 1.8%	± 0.6%	± 0.8%
Agree	± 1.2%	± 1.8%	± 0.6%	± 0.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	± 0.8%	± 1.2%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
Disagree	± 0.8%	± 1.1%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
Strongly disagree	± 0.6%	± 1.0%	± 0.3%	± 0.4%
Not known	± 0.8%	± 1.0%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
My current activity is meaningful				
Strongly agree	± 1.2%	± 1.9%	± 0.6%	± 0.8%
Agree	± 1.2%	± 1.9%	± 0.6%	± 0.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	± 0.7%	± 1.1%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%
Disagree	± 0.6%	± 0.8%	± 0.3%	± 0.4%
Strongly disagree	± 0.4%	± 0.8%	± 0.2%	± 0.3%
Not known	± 0.8%	± 1.1%	± 0.4%	± 0.5%