

Article

Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: August 2016 to July 2023

Estimates of suicides by sex, age, ethnicity, type of study, and term-time accommodation, using mortality records linked to Higher Education Statistics Agency student records. These are official statistics in development.

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This article supersedes our [previous articles](#) on higher education student suicides because of updated data linkage methods. Please refer to [Section 2: Overview of sources and methods for more information](#).

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1 . Main points

- After adjusting for age, higher education (HE) students in England and Wales had a lower suicide rate (6.9 deaths per 100,000 students) compared with the general population (10.2 deaths per 100,000 people of similar ages), between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023.
- We identified 1,108 suicides among HE students that occurred between August 2016 and July 2023, an average of around 160 each year; this is a rate of 6.9 deaths per 100,000 students over the period.
- The suicide rate for HE students rose from 5.5 deaths per 100,000 students in the academic year ending 2017 to 8.8 deaths per 100,000 students in the academic year ending 2019; this figure has since fallen to 6.0 deaths per 100,000 students in the academic year ending 2023.
- The suicide rate for male HE students was higher (10.4 deaths per 100,000 students, 720 suicide deaths) compared with female students (4.3 deaths per 100,000 students, 388 suicide deaths) between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023; this is in line with the general population, where suicide rates are higher among males.
- The suicide rate was lower for the "Black" and "Asian" ethnic groups (4.6 and 5.0 per 100,000 students, respectively) than for the "White" and "Other" ethnic groups (7.8 and 7.5 per 100,000 students, respectively), between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023.

Improvements in the linkage between Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data and our own death registration data have led to more records being linked than in our previous analysis. More information can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).

If you are a journalist covering a suicide-related issue, please consider following the [Samaritans' media guidelines on the reporting of suicide](#) and [their specific guidance for reporting on youth suicides](#) because of the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting. In particular, the guidelines advise on terminology and include links to sources of support for anyone affected by the themes in the article.

If you are struggling to cope, please call Samaritans for free on 116 123 (UK and the Republic of Ireland) or contact other sources of support, such as those listed on the [NHS help for suicidal thoughts web page](#). Support is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, providing a safe place for you, whoever you are and however you are feeling.

2 . Overview of sources and methods

Improvements in the linkage between Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data and our own death registration data have led to more records being linked than in our previous analysis. We have used this revised method for all years from academic year ending 2017. For this reason, these data should not be compared with the data seen in our previous release on this subject. Any increase seen in the number of suicides recorded between publications is not necessarily an indication of an increased suicide risk in the population. Future publications will be similarly updated. More information can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#) and in our [Providing a better understanding of suicides among higher education students blog post](#).

This article presents [official statistics in development](#) on suicides among higher education (HE) students in England and Wales between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2023 (these refer to the 12 months ending in July 2017 and the 12 months ending in July 2023), for deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. Individual [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) student records were linked to death records to obtain information from both sources.

Official statistics in development are those still undergoing development and in the testing phase. The strengths and limitations of these statistics are described in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#), along with information on how the data linkage was achieved.

The HESA collects, processes, and publishes data about HE in the UK. Data are collected from several types of providers in the UK. These are:

- HE providers in England registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in the Approved (fee cap) or Approved categories
- publicly funded HE providers in Northern Ireland and Scotland (these are not used in our report)
- providers in Wales that are funded directly for HE provision by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr) and providers in Wales that return data to HESA about specifically designated courses

For more information see the [HESA provider metadata](#).

All HESA records are collected according to the HESA reporting period. The reporting period is from 1 August to 31 July. For example, for the academic year ending 2023, student records were collected for the activity that took place between 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023.

This article updates our two previous [Estimating suicide among HE students articles](#) by looking at characteristics of student suicides to help monitor suicide prevention in HE, based on the best available linked data.

We use the accredited official statistics definition of suicide in this article. See [Section 8: Glossary](#) for more information. Detailed information on the definition of student suicide can also be found in the glossary. For example, this analysis does not include those studying in further education (FE), such as colleges and sixth form schools. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carried out the linkage process for all suicides in those aged 17 years and over.

We have previously produced estimates on the [number of student suicides in England and Wales](#) based on the occupation recorded on the death certificate by the informant.

Figures for student suicide are based on the date the death occurred. Because of late death registrations, figures for all HESA years are subject to change. This has greatest impact for the 2022 to 2023 period. Read more in [Section 6: Registration delays](#).

3 . Suicides among higher education students

Linkage with Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data identified 1,108 students who died by suicide between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023. This is equivalent to a rate of 6.9 deaths per 100,000 students. Of these, 720 (65.0%) were males and 388 (35.0%) were females. Across the period, the median age at death was 23 years, this has gradually increased over time from 22 years in the academic year ending 2017 to 24 years in the academic year ending 2023.

The average number of student suicides across the period was around 160 per year. We saw an increase between the academic years ending 2017 and 2019 (5.5 to 8.8 deaths per 100,000 students) and then a decrease between the academic years ending 2019 and 2023 (8.8 to 6.0 deaths per 100,000 students).

A legal change in the standard of proof for suicides was implemented in 2018, which could have contributed to increases in the number of suicides recorded in the general population at the time. More information can be found in our [Change in the standard of proof used by coroners and the impact on suicide death registrations data in England and Wales article](#).

There were 155 suicides among higher education (HE) students in the most recent period (the academic year ending 2023), which is equivalent to a rate of 6.0 deaths per 100,000 students. While this rate is lower compared with the last few years, the small numbers per year make it difficult to identify clear differences (Figure 1).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) only knows about a death once it has been registered. For deaths caused by suicide, this generally means that a high proportion (over half of all suicide deaths) that occurred each year would be registered in the next year or later. The lower number of suicides among HE students in the academic year ending 2023 could be genuine, or explained by long registration delays (some coroner inquests are still ongoing).

As the number of HE student suicides is relatively small, there tend to be fluctuations in numbers from year to year. As seen in Figure 1, between the academic years ending 2017 and 2019, the rate of suicides increased. It then decreased between the academic years ending 2019 and 2020. From there, the rate of suicides remained relatively stable.

Figure 1: Following an initial increase, the overall student suicide rate decreased between the academic years ending 2019 to 2023, with the rate being consistently lower in females than males

Rate of student suicide in England and Wales, between the academic year ending 2017 and the academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. The HESA academic year begins on 1 August and ends on 31 July the following year.
5. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
6. The change in the standard of proof for suicides in 2018 saw an increase in the number of suicides recorded in the general population. More information can be found in [our article on the change](#).
7. Figures are based on students where data on sex are available. Missing data in a category can cause the rates to average out differently to the overall rate.

Higher education student suicide rate by sex and type of study

Annual numbers of linked deaths are small, so we have aggregated seven years of data (academic years ending 2017 to 2023) to estimate an annualised rate. This is to enhance the robustness of the estimates.

Over this period, the rate of suicide among female students was lower than the rate among males (Figure 1). This is seen when looking at overall student suicides as well as looking at those studying full-time or part-time, those doing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, and those in their first year or other years.

The overall suicide rate for males was 10.4 deaths per 100,000 students (720 suicide deaths). The overall suicide rate for females was 4.3 deaths per 100,000 students (388 suicide deaths).

Looking between categories, both postgraduate male and female students had a lower rate (7.8 and 3.5 deaths per 100,000, respectively) compared with male and female undergraduates (10.2 and 4.1 deaths per 100,000, respectively). Part-time male and female students had a higher rate (12.8 and 6.2 deaths per 100,000, respectively) compared with male and female students studying full-time (9.9 and 3.7 deaths per 100,000, respectively).

Figure 2: Student suicide rates were higher for males across all categories

Rate per 100,000 higher education students by sex (part- or full-time; undergraduate or postgraduate status and first year or other years), England and Wales, combined figure for academic year ending 2017 to academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. The HESA academic year begins on 1 August and ends on 31 July the following year.
5. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
6. Information on degree type, part- or full-time study, and year of study is based on information provided in the student record.
7. Figures based on students where part- or full-time study, level of study, year of study and sex data are available for the relevant category. Missing data in a category can cause the rates to average out differently to the overall rate.

Higher education student suicide rate by age group

The overall student suicide rate among those aged 20 years and under (4.6 deaths per 100,000 students) is lower than those of the other age groups, between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023.

However unlike in the general population, where the rate of suicide increases with each age group, the rate of suicides in students over the age of 20 years stays relatively stable. Those aged 21 to 24 years had a rate of 7.9 deaths per 100,000 students, followed by 8.9 deaths per 100,000 students among those aged 25 to 29 years, the rate then falls to 8.7 deaths per 100,000 students among those aged 30 years and over.

Figure 3: The overall student suicide rate was lower in those aged 20 years and under than in the other age groups

Rate per 100,000 higher education students, by age group, England and Wales, combined figure for academic year ending 2017 to academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. The HESA academic year begins on 1 August and ends on 31 July the following year.
5. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
6. Figures are based on students where age data are available. Missing data in a category can cause the rates to average out differently to the overall rate.

Higher education student suicide rate by ethnic group

The overall suicide rate was higher among the "White" and "Other" ethnic groups (7.8 and 7.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 students, respectively) than among the "Black" and "Asian" ethnic groups (4.6 and 5.0 suicide deaths per 100,000 students respectively), between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023 (Figure 4). This is similar to the pattern in the general population, as discussed in our [Sociodemographic inequalities in suicides in England and Wales: 2011 to 2021 bulletin](#).

This trend is visible in the yearly data as well. However, because of low numbers, there are significant fluctuations in the rates seen in the "Other", "Black" and "Asian" ethnic groups. Although the suicide rate in the "Asian" and "Black" ethnic groups does not exceed the rate in the "White" ethnic group in any single academic year measured, the closest rate seen between them is in the academic year ending 2020, where the "Asian" and "White" ethnic groups were similar (8.3 compared with 8.5 deaths per 100,000 students, respectively).

Figure 4: The overall student suicide rate was higher in the “White” and “Other” ethnic groups

Rate per 100,000 higher education students, by ethnicity, England and Wales, combined figure for academic year ending 2017 to academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. The HESA academic year begins on 1 August and ends on 31 July the following year.
5. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
6. The “Other (including Mixed)” group includes the “Mixed: White and Black Caribbean”, “Mixed: White and Black African”, “Mixed: White and Asian”, “Other Mixed background”, “Arab”, and “Other ethnic background” groups.
7. Figures are based on students where ethnicity data are available. Missing data in a category can cause the rates to average out differently to the overall rate.
8. Data on ethnicity are taken from HESA student data.

4 . Comparison of suicides among higher education students and the general population

We calculated [age-standardised suicide rates](#) for the general population. We used Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) population estimates to create a standard population structure (rather than the European Standard Population). Age-standardisation is needed because of the different age distributions. For example, a greater proportion of the student population is aged 18 to 25 years, compared with the general population.

The overall suicide rate in the general population, which includes higher education (HE) students, is higher (10.2 deaths per 100,000 of the general population) compared with students (6.9 deaths per 100,000 students) for the academic years ending 2017 and 2023.

When broken down by sex, the suicide rate in the general population is higher than that seen among students for both males and females. However, there is a much smaller difference between the rate among females (approximately 21% higher among the general population than among students) than among males (approximately 45% higher among the general population than among students).

Figure 5: The suicide rate in higher education students was lower than the age-standardised rate in the general population

Rate by sex in the general population (including higher education students) and in higher education students, England and Wales, combined figure for academic year ending 2017 to academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
5. Rates for the general population have been age-standardised. This refers to a weighted average of the age-specific mortality rates per 100,000 people, standardised to the HESA student population. Age-standardised mortality rates allow for differences in the age structure of populations and therefore allow valid comparisons to be made.

We compared the number of suicides among HE students with all suicides among the general population (including HE students) by age group. For the academic years ending 2017 and 2023, HE student suicides made up approximately:

- 18.5% of all suicides among those aged 17 to 20 years
- 16.8% among those aged 21 to 24 years
- 5.2% among those aged 25 to 29 years
- 0.9% among those aged 30 years and over

5 . Other breakdowns

Comparison of suicides by where the student lives

Over the measured period between the academic years ending 2017 and 2023, the rate of suicides in students living with their parents or guardians was the lowest among where the student lives (3.8 deaths per 100,000 students). The next lowest rate in this category, was for students living in private sector halls at 5.4 deaths per 100,000 students.

Figure 6: The suicide rate in students living at their parental or guardian's home was lower than other living arrangements

Rate by accommodation type in higher education students, England and Wales, combined figure for academic year ending 2017 to academic year ending 2023

Notes

1. The accredited official statistics definition of suicide is given in [Section 8: Glossary](#).
2. Figures are based on the date on which the death occurred. Because of late registration of deaths, figures for all Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) years are subject to change. This is particularly the case for the latest period (2022 to 2023) as it is based on deaths registered up to 31 December 2023. More details can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).
3. Figures are for people aged 17 years and over.
4. Crude rates per 100,000 students registered with HESA.
5. Figures are based on students where residency data are available. Missing data in a category can cause the rates to average out differently to the overall rate.

6 . Registration delays

In England and Wales, all suicides are certified by a coroner following an inquest. The death cannot be registered until the inquest is completed, which can take months or possibly years. We are not notified that a death has occurred until it is registered. The only exception to this is when someone will be charged with a criminal offence in relation to a death. In this instance, the coroner must adjourn the inquest and they may carry out an "accelerated registration". The full details of these deaths are not recorded until the inquest is complete, but the majority are eventually coded as assaults and therefore would not be included in the suicides data.

In 2023, the median delay in registering a suicide in England was 199 days. In Wales it was 293 days, with some deaths having a delay of over a year. For this reason, the incidences of suicide in the academic year ending 2023 are likely to be an underestimate.

More information can be found in Section 6: Registration delays of our [Suicides in the UK bulletin](#).

7 . Data on estimating suicide among higher education students in England and Wales

[Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 9 September 2025

Estimates of suicides among higher education students by sex, age and ethnicity. Based on mortality records linked to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student records. These are official statistics in development.

8 . Glossary

Ages included

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carried out the linkage for all suicides in those aged 17 years and over. For this reason, we have made comparisons with suicide rates in the general population based on those aged 17 years and over. Comparisons have been made to an aged standardised general population to minimise the impact of different age demographics between the general and the student populations.

Crude suicide rate

Crude suicide rate is defined as total suicide deaths per 100,000 population, or:

(Total suicide deaths divided by Total population) multiplied by 100,000.

Data collection periods

All Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) records are collected according to the HESA reporting period. The reporting period is from 1 August to 31 July. For example, the academic year ending 2017 Student record was collected for the activity that took place between 1 August 2016 and 31 July 2017.

More information can be found on the [HESA Student Record web page](#).

HESA

The [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) collects, processes, and publishes data about HE in the UK. HESA only collects information for UK publicly funded higher education institutions. For more information, please visit [HESA's definition webpage](#).

Record-specific detail

The student record includes all students registered at HE providers who follow courses that lead to the award of an HE qualification or provider credit. These qualifications are most often:

- a bachelor's degree, such as a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or a Bachelor of Science (BSc)
- a master's degree, such as a Master of Arts (MA) or a Master of Science (MSc)
- a higher degree, such as a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The student record includes those who are (or were) actively following a course at some time during the HESA reporting period.

Student

See [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#) for details of the specific definition of student used for this analysis.

Student suicide

Student suicide is defined as those who died by suicide or an event of undetermined intent before or on the end date of their studies, and where the death was registered in England and Wales. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) did not have access to deaths registered in Scotland or Northern Ireland for this study. For those cases without a study end date, the end date of the HESA year was used as an estimate (31 July).

Suicide

This release is based on the accredited official statistics definition of suicide for those aged 17 years and over. This includes deaths from intentional self-harm and deaths caused by injury or poisoning where the intent was undetermined. For further information on the definition, see our [Suicide rates in the UK quality and methodology information \(QMI\) report](#).

9 . Data sources and quality

Statistics on mortality are derived from the information provided when deaths are certified and registered.

This release uses the accredited official statistics definition of suicide, which is consistently used by government departments, agencies and the devolved administrations across the UK.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the mortality data were created is available in:

- our [Mortality statistics in England and Wales quality and methodology information \(QMI\)](#)
- our [Suicide rates in the UK QMI](#)
- our [User guide to mortality statistics](#)

Data linkage

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) was provided with annual files that contained individual Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) records from the academic year ending 2017 to the academic year ending 2023 for the UK. These files included the records of any student studying in a higher education (HE) institute for an HE qualification. The data were processed securely and linkage was approved by the [National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee \(NSDEC\)](#).

Duplicates (for example, the same student death appearing in each year they studied) were removed from the dataset so that each unique person only appeared once in the dataset.

The ONS extracted suicides for the registration period 2016 to 2023 registrations. The codes were extracted for intentional self-harm and injury or poisoning of undetermined intent, which is the accredited official statistics definition of suicide.

The linkage was completed using the Demographic Index (DI) which integrates education, health, and tax and benefit administrative data to provide a composite data source of the population interacting with administrative data sources.

HESA and death registration data were linked separately to the DI, creating two individual datasets of:

- HESA data linked to DI
- deaths data linked to DI

HESA data were linked using HESA student identification (ID), with duplicated entries removed. Death registration data were linked to the DI using NHS number, again with duplicated entries being removed.

The DI includes a unique ID which refers to all administrative records that belong to a person. Therefore, linking to the DI meant that both the HESA and deaths data then had a common unique identifier. Both data sources were linked to one another using this ID to create a dataset of individual records for deaths registered between 2016 and 2023, where the individual had attended HE during that time.

Within data linkage, two types of error can occur. False links can be made, known as false positives (FPs), and genuine links can be missed, known as false negatives (FNs). The standard approach to estimate error in linked data is to perform clerical review (manual checking) on a sample of links and rejected record pairs.

For the first part of the quality assurance review, we focused on assessing false positives (FPs). The size of the linked data was small enough to allow for the review of all the links made (1,115 record pairs). The linked data was clerically reviewed using the ONS's Clerical Review Online Widget (CROW) tool with support from the clerical review team. The total number of FPs found was seven (record pairs), which corresponds to a total FP rate of 1%. These seven records were excluded from the analysis which left 1,108 record pairs for analysis.

The variables used as part of the clerical review were: First name, Surname, DOB, Gender, Postcode1, Postcode2. There were several challenges in the review of linked data. In the HESA dataset, there was no middle name variable, which increased difficulty when reviewing common name and surname combinations. Additionally, there were definitional differences in postcode variables across the two datasets, which reduced the ability of clerical reviewers to make their assessment with confidence.

In the HESA dataset, postcode referred to "Registered postcode" and, in the Deaths dataset, postcode referred to "Last known postcode". An additional postcode variable from each dataset was added to help with the clerical assessment. In the HESA dataset we added "Term time postcode" and in the Deaths dataset we added "Place of death". The presence of an additional postcode variable was helpful to triangulate the information between the two data sources, however, it didn't eliminate the issue altogether.

We also quality assured our linkage results by comparing the number of records linked for this analysis to the number that were linked in our previous analysis.

More information on the linkage can be requested by emailing health.data@ons.gov.uk.

Definition of "student"

Caution should be exercised when comparing the rates of student suicide in this report, which relate only to those in HE, and as such represent a proportion of all students. Other studies may define "student" more broadly.

The term "student" can often be interpreted to mean anyone engaged in study, from those in school (for example, studying for GCSEs), to those engaged in apprenticeships, further education or other forms of study. In this analysis, the term "student" does not include:

- those registered as studying wholly overseas
- postdoctoral students
- overseas students who were not resident in England and Wales at the time of death
- those students registered with an institution covered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that does not offer HE

For the purposes of this analysis, a student is defined as a person registered at an HE provider in England and Wales that reports to the HESA, and who follows a course that leads to the award of a qualification or HE provider credit.

More quality and methodology information

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in:

- our [Mortality statistics in England and Wales QMI](#)
- our [Suicide rates in the UK QMI](#)
- our [User guide to mortality statistics](#)

10 . Related links

[Suicides in England and Wales: 2023 registrations](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 August 2024

Registered deaths from suicide in England and Wales, analysed by sex, age, area of usual residence of the deceased, and suicide method.

11 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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