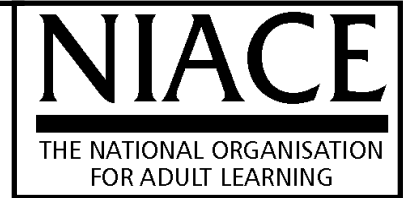


# Student non-completion (drop out)



The first step in improving retention rates would be for institutions to acknowledge and accommodate the experience and needs of a more diverse student body.

*Staying or leaving the course: non-completion and retention of mature students in further and higher education, NIACE, 1996*

Changes in the structure and funding of post-compulsory education and in the composition of the student body have focused attention on retention and non-completion rates. Institutions are now required to monitor retention rates and collect and record student data more carefully and in more detail than in the past. However, concerns about funding and reputation have made non-completion a sensitive issue and institutions are not always keen to publicise their rates.

## Sources and definitions

Although figures on student completion and drop-out rates can be obtained from the statistical branches of the further and higher education funding councils, different sectors define and measure completion and non completion in different ways and blanket figures camouflage considerable differences between institutions and subject disciplines. Completion rates vary significantly according to the type and size of institution, the student cohort, the subject studied, the qualification sought and attendance mode.

The completion rates of adult learners are particularly difficult to determine as statistics are not usually disaggregated according to different age cohorts and adult learning patterns tend to be part-time and spasmodic. Flexible learning patterns, modularised courses and transfers between learning modes, courses and institutions. also make the collection of student data difficult.

## Why students leave courses

The terminology used for abandonment of a course of study implies that leaving a course of study is always a negative step and non completion statistics often lump together those who have left because of academic failure, transferred to other courses or institutions or been obliged to interrupt a course for reasons

This is the third in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

Also available:

1. A history of the development of NIACE
2. What motivates people to learn

Let us know which issues you would like to see covered.

Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.  
Tel. No. 0116 2044 261  
E-mail: [information@niace.org.uk](mailto:information@niace.org.uk)  
They are also available on the website at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk).

If you require a different format - e.g. a large print version please let us know.

## The context

related to employment, caring responsibilities, maternity or ill health.

Many tutors object to the term 'drop-out' being applied to all students who fail to complete. They argue that students can leave programmes for positive as well as negative reasons: because they have achieved their learning goals, because they have been offered employment or because they wish to transfer to a more suitable course or institution.

Moreover, it is frequently found that non attending students intend to return to study when their personal circumstances allow. From an administrative point of view, however, they are deemed to have 'dropped out' if they fail to return within the cut-off periods specified by the funding councils.

Students usually abandon courses of study not for a single reason but for a mixture of causal factors. Often they have received little or prior information and preparation for the courses they follow.

## Resources on non-completion

**9,000 voices: student persistence and drop-out in further education** Further Education Development Agency. 1998. £12.00

**Additional support, retention and guidance in urban colleges** Adjei Barwuah, Muriel Green and Liz Lawson. Further Education Development Agency. 1997. ISBN 1460 7034. £12.00

**Improving student retention: a guide to successful strategies** Paul Martinez. Further Education Development Agency. 1997. ISBN 1 85338 453 4. £15.00

**Factors affecting student retention** Paul Martinez. Further Education Development Agency. 1995. Mendip Paper No 84. £5.00

**Staff development for student retention in further and adult education** Paul Martinez. Further Education Development Agency. 1998.

FE Matters Paper Vol 2 No 8. ISSN 1361 9977. £7.50

**Staying or leaving the course: retention and non completion of mature students in further and higher education** Veronica McGivney. NIACE. 1996. ISBN 1 872941 95 8. £12.00

**Student retention: case studies of strategies that work** Paul Martinez. Further Education Development Agency. 1997. FE Matters Paper Vol 1 No 6. ISSN 1361 9977 £7.50

**Undergraduate non-completion in higher education in England** M Yorke, J Ozga and L Sukhnandan. Higher Education Funding Council for England. 1997. HEFCE Research Series 97/29. £10.00

## Other information

FEDA operate a mailing list of people interested in retention and achievement. Send contact details to: Paul Martinez, FEDA, c/o North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, London Road, Hinckley, Leicestershire, LE10 1HQ. E-mail: [pmartine@fedac.ac.uk](mailto:pmartine@fedac.ac.uk)

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.  
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