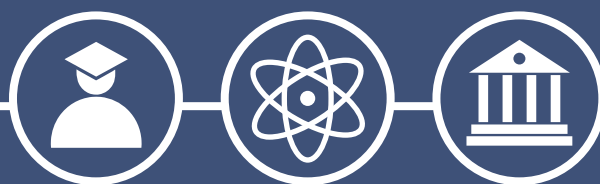


Students and graduates in UK physics departments



The Institute of Physics is a leading scientific membership society working to advance physics for the benefit of all. We have a worldwide membership, from enthusiastic amateurs to those at the top of their fields in academia, business, education and government. Our purpose is to gather, inspire, guide, represent and celebrate all who share a passion for physics. And, in our role as a charity, we're here to ensure that physics delivers on its exceptional potential to benefit society. Alongside professional support for our members, we engage with policymakers and the public to increase awareness and understanding of the value that physics holds for all of us.

This briefing outlines a short set of statistics on students and graduates studying physics and comparative subjects (astronomy, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and electronic and electrical engineering) in UK universities during the 2015–16 academic year.

The factors considered are:

- Level of study: undergraduate, master's¹ or PhD
- Domicile: UK, non-UK EU countries or non-EU countries
- Gender
- Area of the UK²

In summary, in 2015–16:

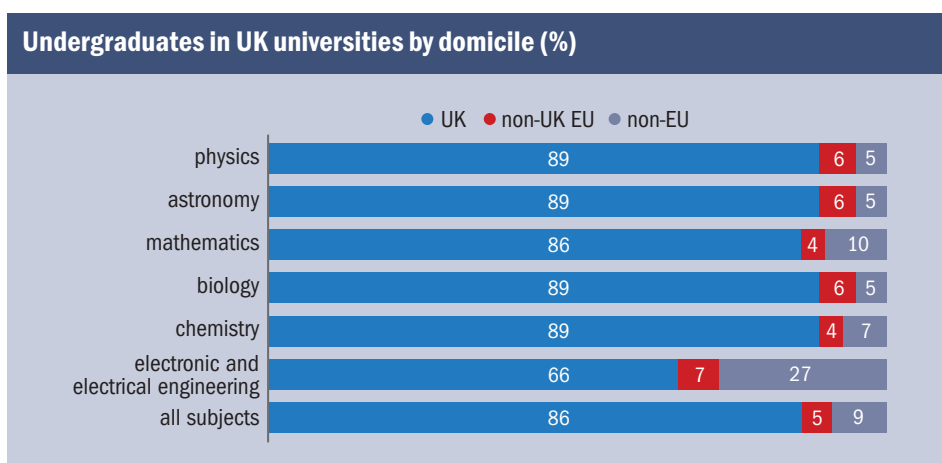
- 6% of undergraduate students in UK physics departments came from EU countries other than the UK, and 5% from non-EU countries. This is in line with other subjects and similar across all UK nations
- A higher proportion of students achieved a first-class or upper-second-class degree in physics (75%) than in the average for all subjects (69%). A higher proportion of students from non-UK EU countries achieved a first-class degree than UK students or non-EU students
- A higher proportion of master's students in physics came from EU countries other than the UK (16%) than the average for all subjects (9%)
- At master's and PhD level, universities in Scotland attract a higher proportion of non-UK EU students than other areas of the UK

Undergraduates

The majority of undergraduates in UK physics departments are from the UK. This is also the case for other subjects, as shown in the chart opposite.

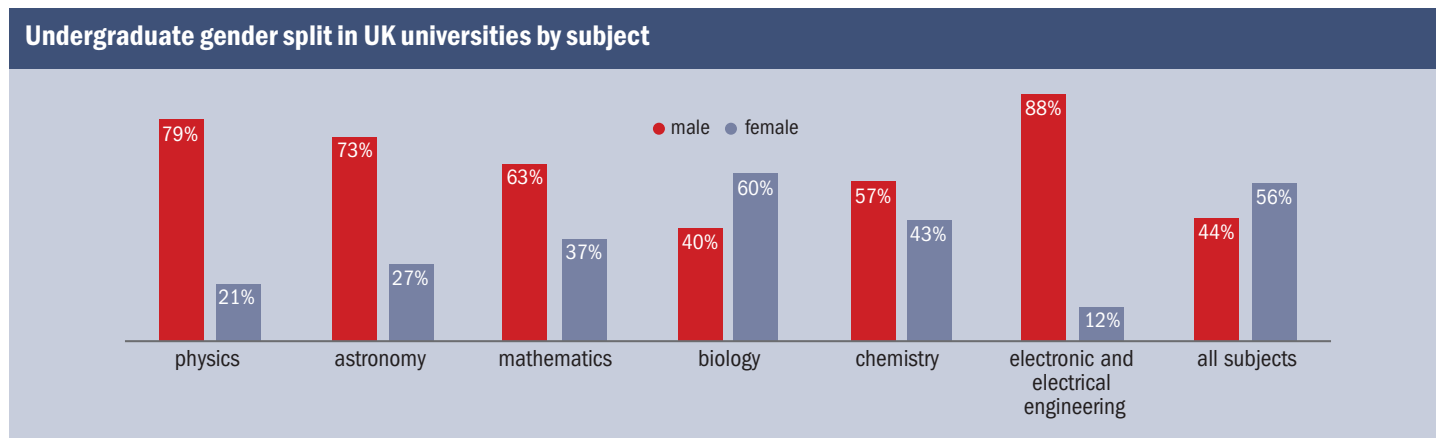
¹ Defined in HESA data as “postgraduate taught” or “postgraduate research”.

² Although UK statistics include Northern Ireland, statistics about Northern Ireland cannot be published alone in accordance with HESA's rounding and suppression policy, which can be viewed at [hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics).



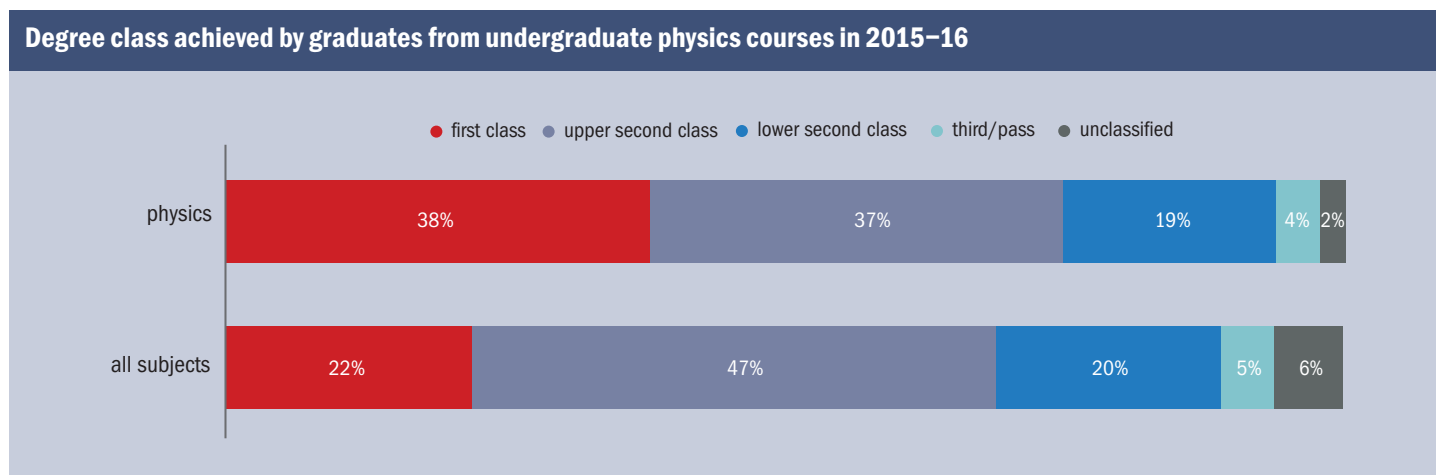
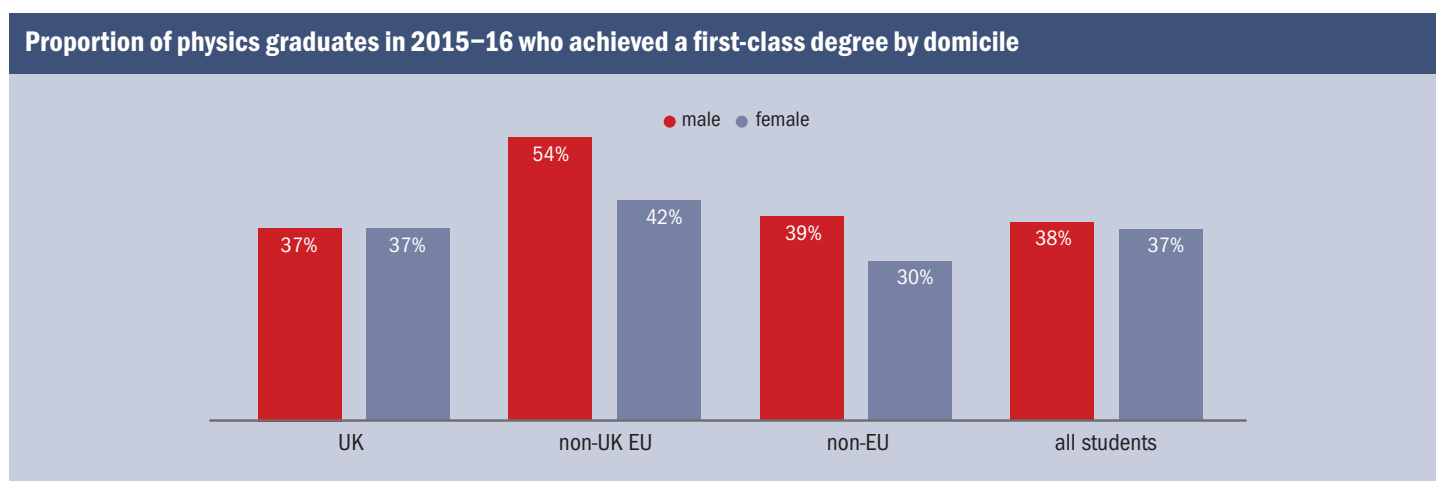


The gender split at undergraduate level for physics is wider than for other STEM subjects, apart from electronic and electrical engineering. The average for all subjects shows that there are more female students than male students studying at undergraduate level.



Graduates from undergraduate degrees

There were 3,675 graduates from undergraduate physics courses in UK universities in the 2015–16 academic year.³ Of these graduates, 75% achieved a first-class or upper-second-class degree. This compares to 69% for all subjects. As the first chart shows, a roughly equal proportion of male and female graduates achieved a first-class degree overall, but a higher proportion of non-UK EU students achieved a first than students from the UK. This is the same for all subjects, as shown in the second chart below.

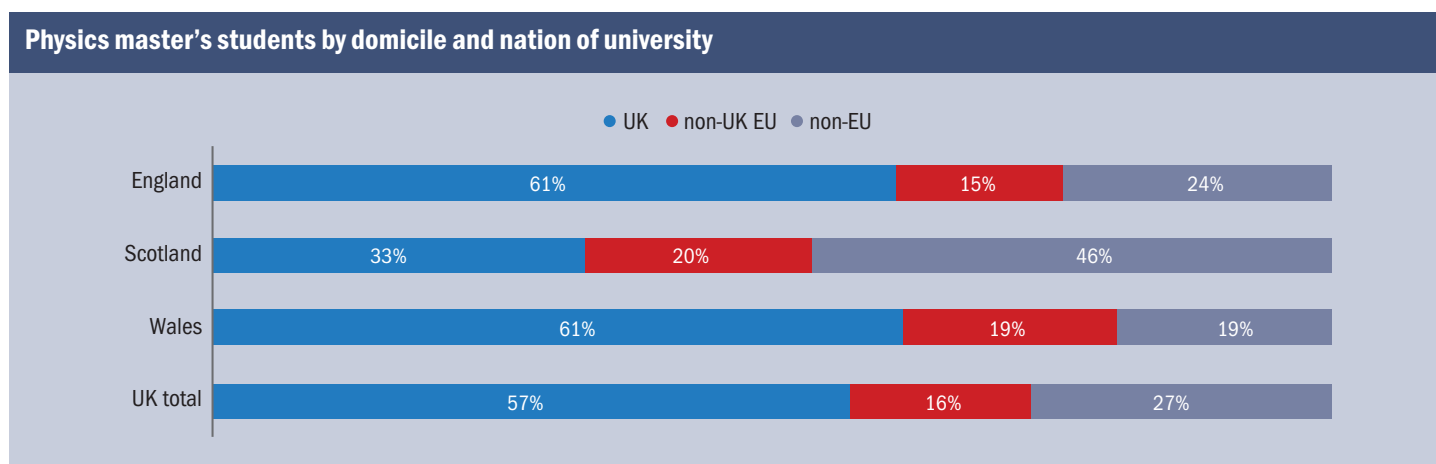
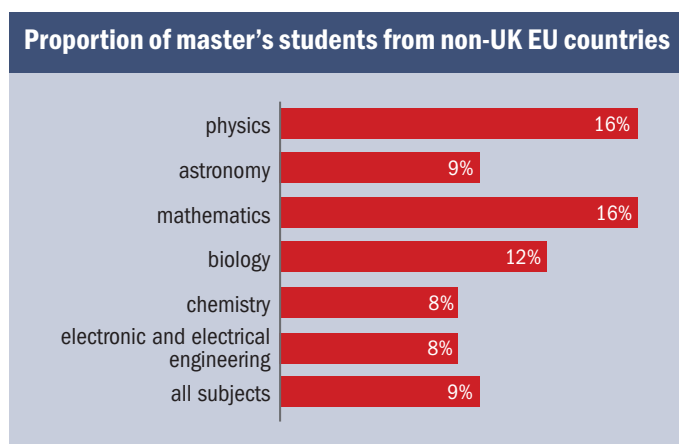
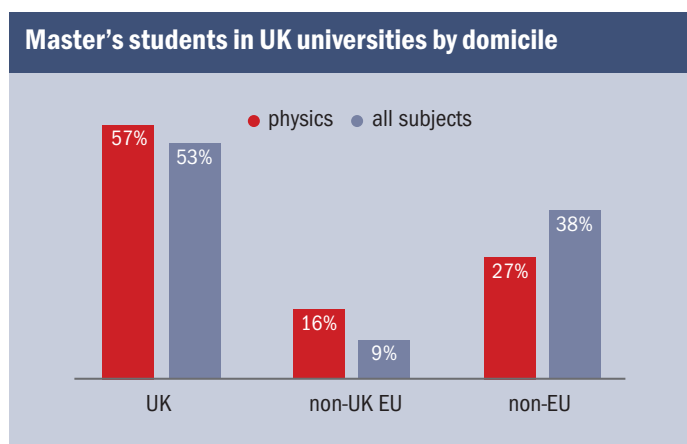


³ All numbers are rounded to intervals of 5 in accordance with HESA's rounding and suppression policy.

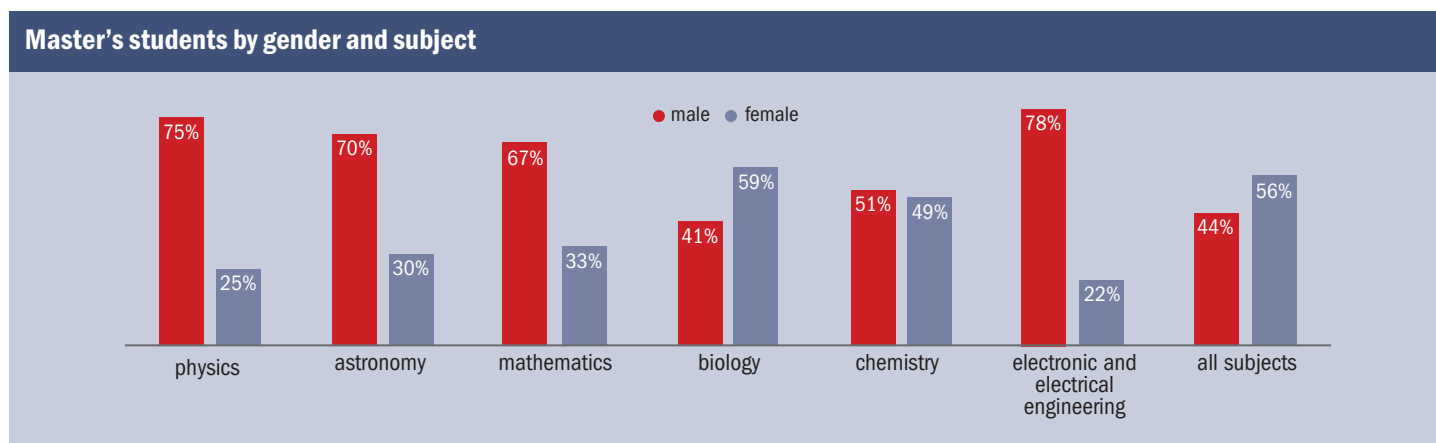


Master's students

Non-UK EU students and non-EU students make up a higher proportion of the cohort studying physics at master's level than at undergraduate level: this may be because integrated master's courses are more popular with UK students. A small number of students study for master's courses in physics: there were 610 graduates from physics master's programmes in UK departments in the 2015–16 academic year. The graphs below show the make-up of master's students by domicile in physics compared with other subjects and all subjects as a whole.⁴



The gender split for master's students in physics compared to other subjects is shown below. In a similar pattern to other levels of study, physics along with astronomy, mathematics, and electronic and electrical engineering have a larger proportion of male students than biology and the total for all subjects.

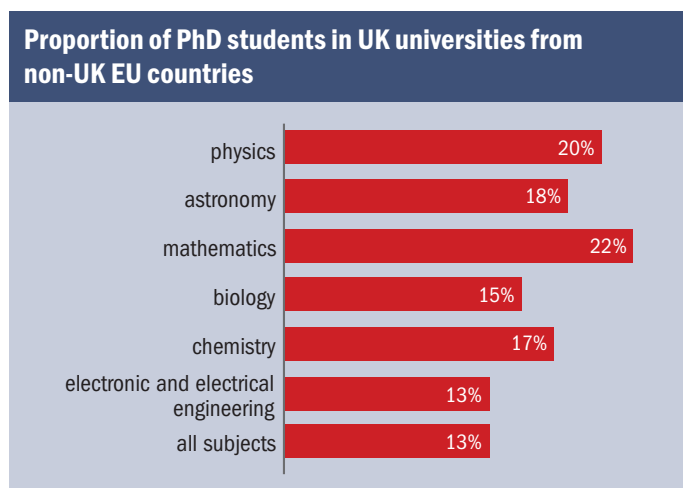
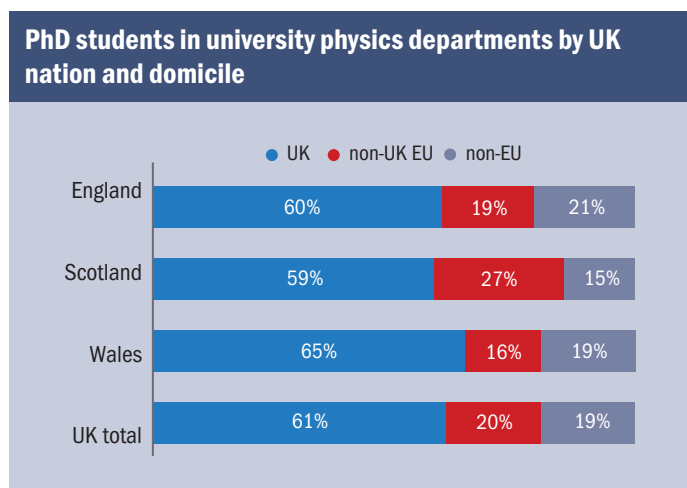


⁴In some instances percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.



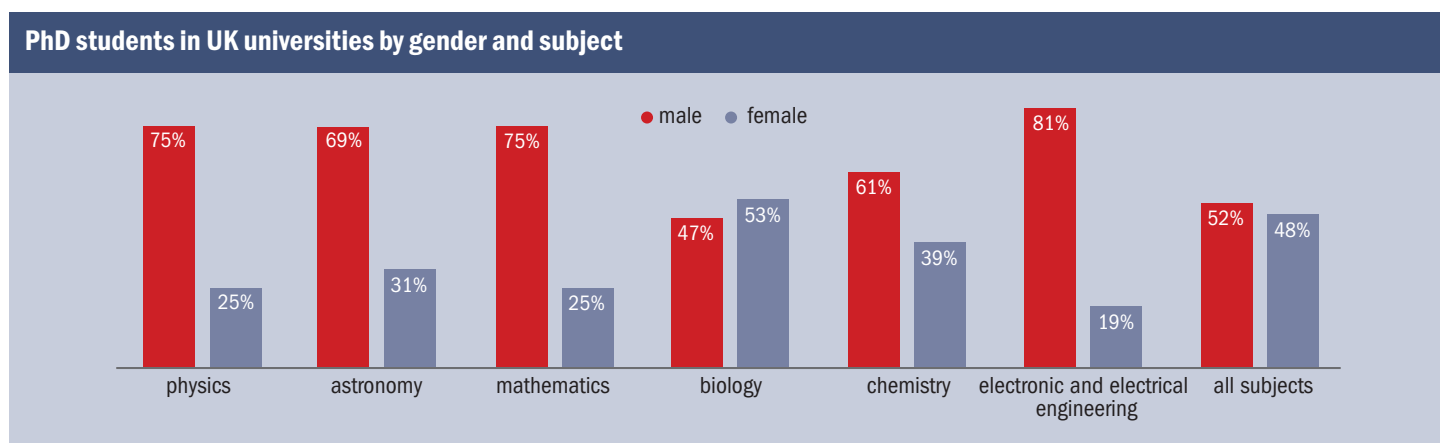
PhD students

There were 3,430 students and 830 graduates with a doctorate from UK physics departments in the 2015–16 academic year. Students from outside the UK made up 39% of PhD students in UK physics departments. Scotland has a larger proportion of non-UK EU PhD students than England and Wales. The second chart compares the proportion of PhD students in physics from non-UK EU countries.



PhD students by gender

The proportion of male students to female students at PhD level is similar to undergraduates in physics: around three quarters of physics PhD students are male and one quarter are female. Across all subjects as a whole there is a more even split between male and female students.



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July 2017

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