

‘Do graduates work in their home region?’

Northern Ireland Graduate Retention Analysis 2023/24

Introduction

Where students are from, where they study and where they work after graduation are considered in this report using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Graduate Outcomes Survey. Analysis is based on students studying at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their place of work 15 months after graduation. The main focus is on students from Northern Ireland.

Key points

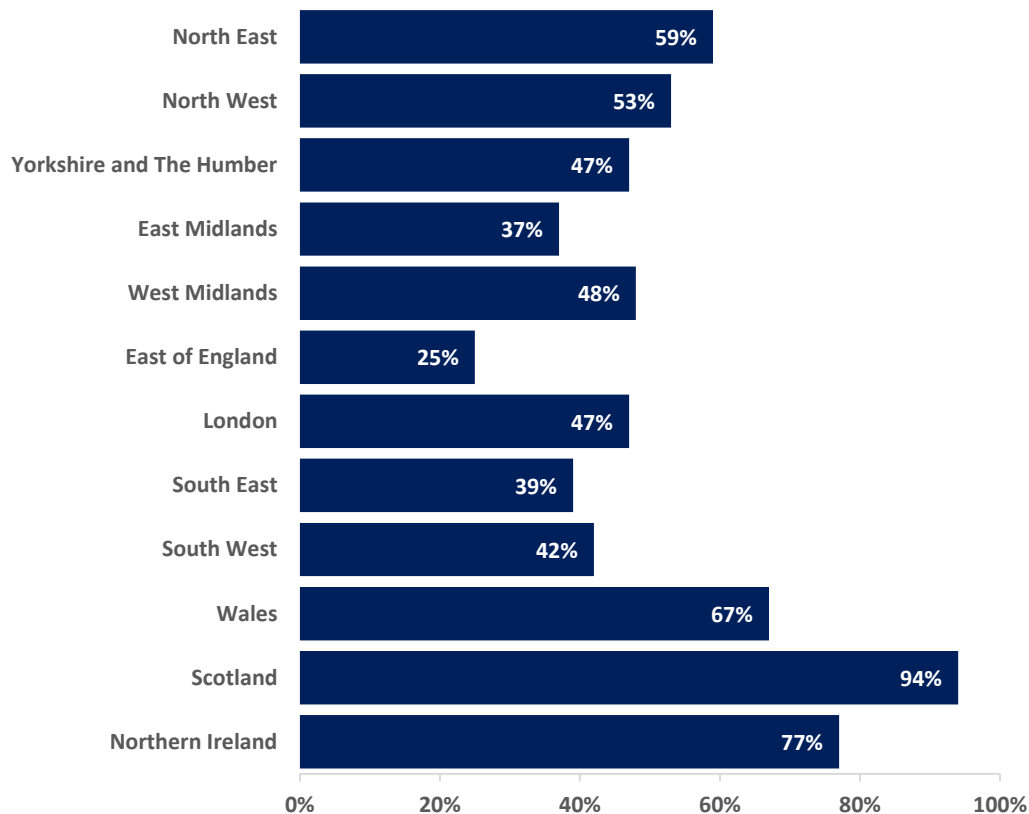
1. Overall, most Northern Ireland University students study locally and then work locally.
2. Approximately three-quarters of university students from Northern Ireland (who study in the UK), are studying at a Higher Education Institution in Northern Ireland.
3. Northern Ireland has the second highest proportion (85%) of graduates working in their home region fifteen months after graduation.
 - Students who are from and studied in Northern Ireland are very likely to work here after graduation (94% of graduates).
 - Half of all students from Northern Ireland who studied in Great Britain were working in Northern Ireland 15 months after graduation.
4. A small proportion of recent graduates working in Northern Ireland were not from and did not study in Northern Ireland.

Why focus on regions and not countries?

The commentary in this factsheet compares figures for Northern Ireland with those of Scotland, Wales, and the nine English regions, rather than England as a whole. Comparing Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales against the individual English regions provides a more meaningful comparison as the population sizes are much more similar.

Scottish students are the most likely UK University students to study in their home region

Figure 1: Percentage of UK domiciled students enrolled in their home region (2024/25)

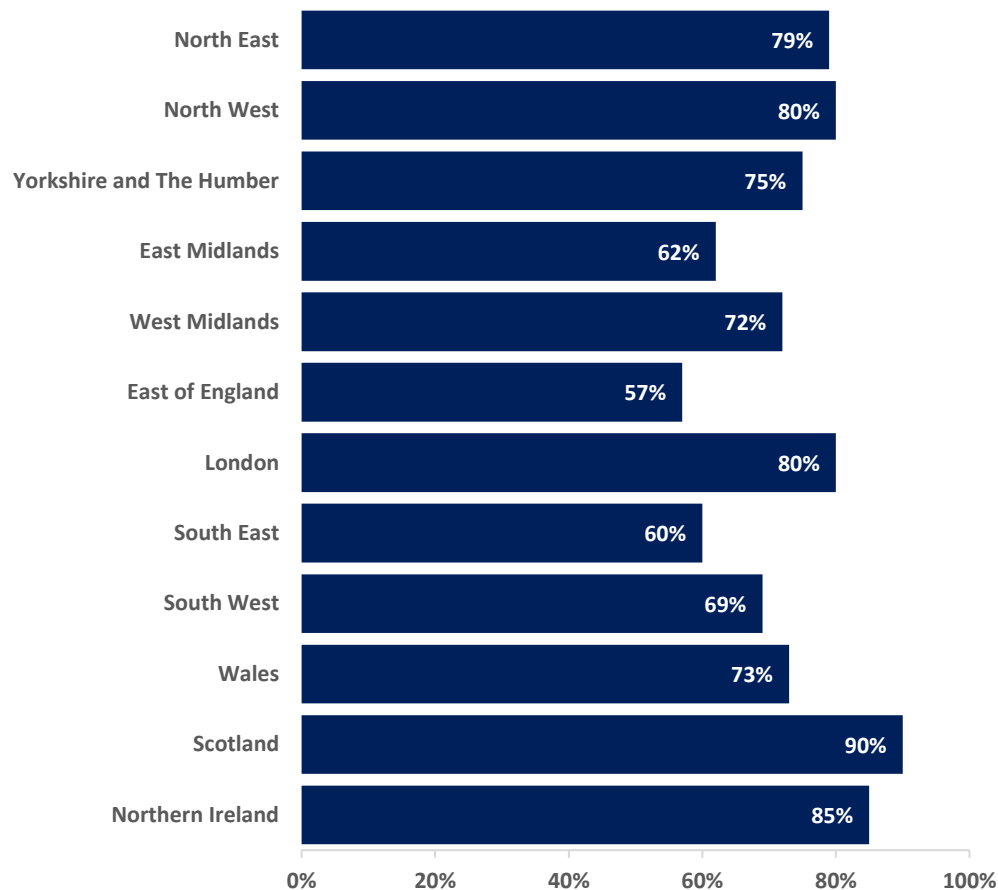


Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student enrolment data

- 94% of students from Scotland studied in Scotland. This is the highest proportion of students studying in their home region across the UK.
- Northern Ireland had the second highest proportion of students studying in their home region (77%), followed by Wales (67%).
- No single English region had as high a rate of student retention as Scotland, Northern Ireland, or Wales. The student retention rate ranged from 59% in the North East to 25% in the East of England.

Graduates employed in the UK are most likely to work in their home region

Figure 2: Percentage of UK domiciled graduates working in their home region (2023/24)

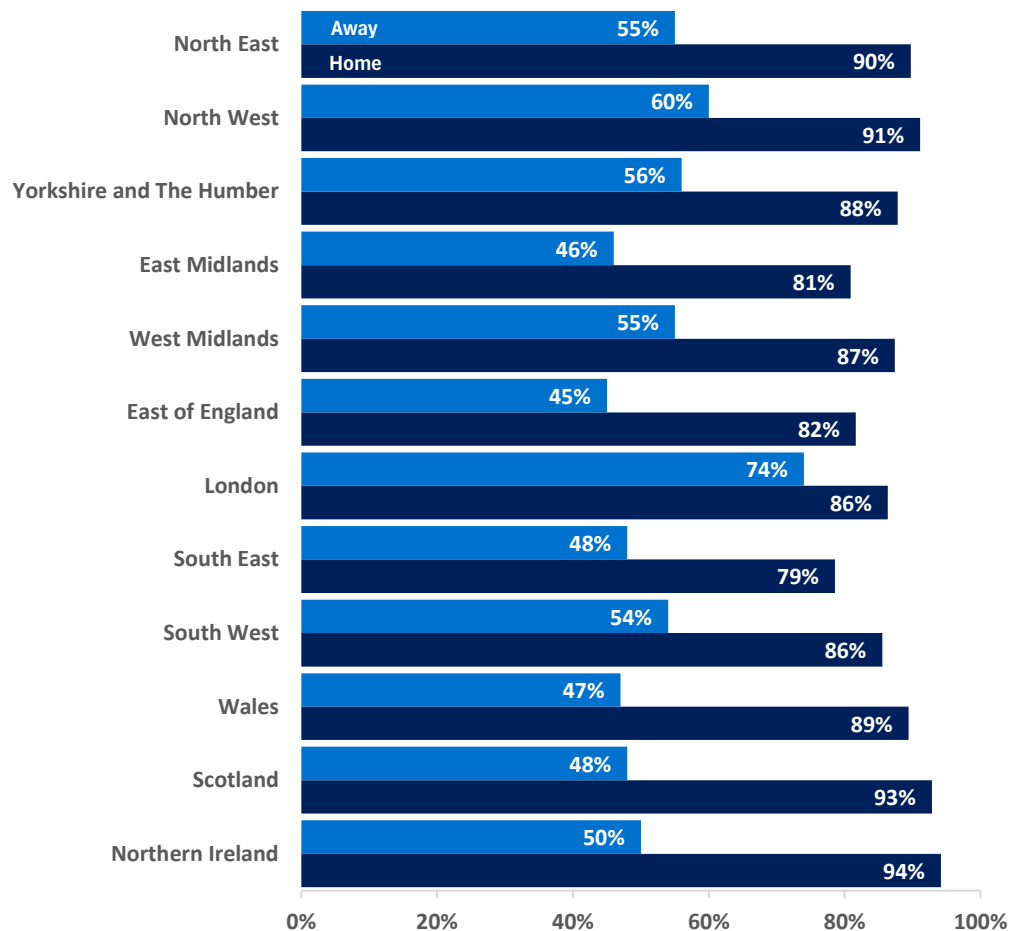


Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Graduate Outcomes Survey

- Scotland (90%) has the highest proportion of home students working in their home region 15 months after graduation.
- Northern Ireland has the second highest proportion of graduates working in their home region (85%), higher than the English regions of London (80%) and the North West (80%).
- 15% of Northern Ireland domiciled graduates worked outside Northern Ireland; 12% worked in England, 3% in Scotland, and 1% in Wales.

Graduates who studied in their home region were more likely to work in their home region than those who studied away

Figure 3: Percentage of UK domiciled graduates in employment in their home region, after studying in their home region vs after studying away (2023/24)



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Graduate Outcomes Survey

- Northern Ireland has the highest proportion (94%) of graduates remaining in their home region for work 15 months after graduating from a HEI in their home region.
- The regions with the next highest proportion of home graduates working in their home region are Scotland (93%) and the North West (91%).
- Among the Northern Ireland domiciled graduates who studied outside of Northern Ireland, half (50%) work in the rest of the UK, while half (50%) returned to Northern Ireland to work within 15 months after graduating.
- Northern Ireland ranks mid-table on this measure and is similar to the proportion in Scotland (48%) and Wales (47%) returning to their home region to work.
- Graduates from London (74%) are significantly more likely to return to their home region for work after graduating from a HEI in another region.

A small proportion of recent graduates working in Northern Ireland were not from and did not study in Northern Ireland

Figure 5: Proportion of recent graduates working in Northern Ireland by home location and place of study (2023/24)

	From NI	Not from NI
Studied in NI	84%	1%
Did not study in NI	12%	3%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Graduate Outcomes Survey

- 84% of the graduates were domiciled in Northern Ireland and graduated from a NI HEI.
- 12% were domiciled in Northern Ireland before higher education but left to study at a HEI elsewhere in the UK, and since returned to Northern Ireland for work.
- 3% of the graduates were neither domiciled in NI before attending higher education, nor had they graduated from a HEI in NI.
- 1% of the graduates weren't domiciled in NI before attending higher education, but had graduated from a HEI in NI.

Notes:

- Enrolment data is sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) annual student returns. The most up to date published HESA data relates to 2024/25.
- The graduate outcomes data is sourced from [HESA's annual Graduate Outcomes Survey](#). The Graduate Outcomes survey is the UK's national survey of higher education graduates, covering UK higher education providers and further education colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Data is collected from graduates approximately 15 months after completion of the higher education course. The survey collects information about what graduates are doing since completing their course; including employment, further study, and other activities, within the UK.
- The 2023/24 Graduate Outcomes survey had a response rate of 32% complete responses. When including graduates who partially completed the survey, this response rate rises to 35%.
- The main limitation of the Graduate Outcomes survey is the low response rate as it raises the question of representation and whether the self-selecting sample of respondents accurately represents the wider body of graduates.
- Figures within this report were calculated using the available rounded outputs published in HESA's annual Graduate Outcomes Survey report, rather than the underlying unrounded data.
- Students from Northern Ireland studying at Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Ireland are not included in the analysis. According to the [Higher Education Authority](#), 1,585 students from Northern Ireland were enrolled in Higher Education Institutions in Ireland in the 2024/25 academic year, of which 150 were new entrants.

Links:

Data from this fact sheet are available in open data format at the following link:
[Higher Education Statistical Factsheets](#)

More Higher Education statistics are available from:
[Higher Education Statistics and Research](#)