



**ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS**

**Packing them in -  
The student-to-staff ratio in UK  
higher education**

**AUT RESEARCH, October 2005**

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## Packing them in -

### The student-to-staff ratio in UK higher education

#### 1 UK data

Over the past three decades, the student:staff ratio (SSR) in UK higher education has increased from 9 students to 1 teacher, to 21 students to 1 teacher (table 1, chart 1). This is a rise of nearly 150%.

Over the same period, the pupil:teacher ratio (PTR) across all UK schools has fallen from 19 pupils to 1 teacher to 18 pupils to 1 teacher.

Since 2000-01 the higher education ratio has been higher than the schools ratio.

Higher education institutions in England are forecasting that the student:staff ratio will further increase in the period to 2008 – even though full-time undergraduate students will be paying up to £3,000 a year in variable top-up fees from 2006.<sup>1</sup>

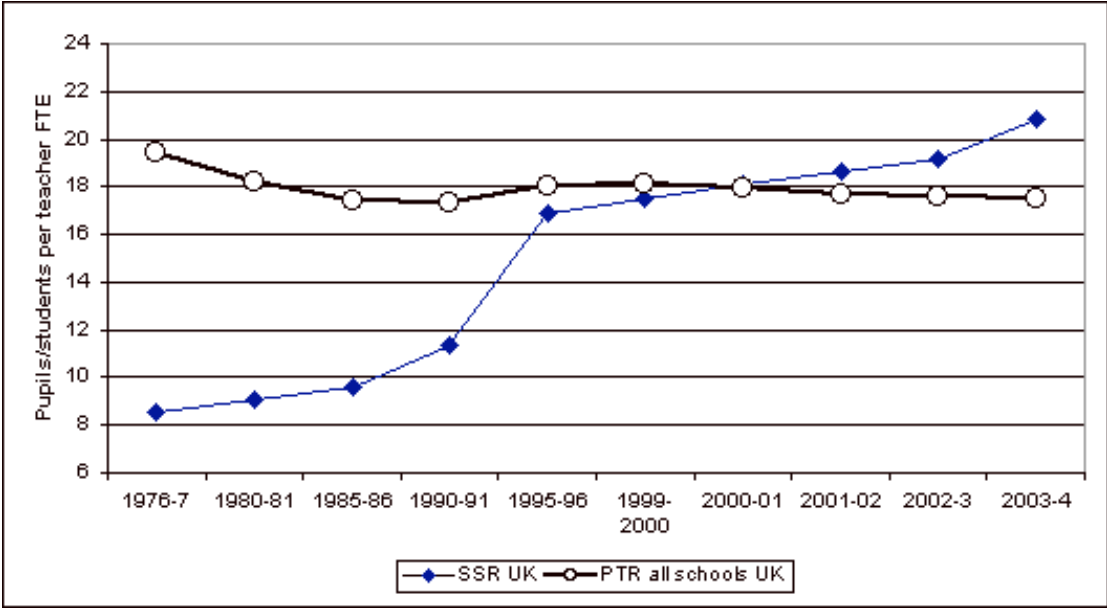
**Table 1 – student : staff and pupil : teacher ratios, UK**

	SSR	PTR
1975-76	8.6 : 1	19.4 : 1
1980-81	9.1 : 1	18.2 : 1
1985-86	9.6 : 1	17.4 : 1
1990-91	11.4 : 1	17.3 : 1
1995-96	16.9 : 1	18.0 : 1
1999-00	17.5 : 1	18.1 : 1
2000-01	18.1 : 1	17.9 : 1
2001-02	18.7 : 1	17.7 : 1
2002-03	19.2 : 1	17.6 : 1
2003-04	20.8 : 1	17.5 : 1

*SSR and PTR data based on full-time equivalents*

*Source: SSR data - AUT calculation based on USR data series and HESA Students and Resources series, including undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers, using a factor of 0.5 for part-time students and teaching staff; PTR data - Education Statistics for UK, series; Education & Training Statistics for the UK, series. First year for SSR is actually 1976-7 as earlier data not available from USR. SSR data prior to 1990-91 were for the university sector only; data from 1995-96 are for all higher education institutions. The PTR ratio is for all schools.<sup>2</sup>*

**Chart 1 - student:staff and pupil:teacher ratios, UK**



SSR and PTR data based on full-time equivalents  
 Source: SSR data - AUT calculation based on USR data series and HESA Students and Resources series, including undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers, using a factor of 0.5 for part-time students and teaching staff; PTR data - Education Statistics for UK, series; Education & Training Statistics for the UK, series. First year for SSR is actually 1976-7 as earlier data not available from USR. SSR data prior to 1990-91 were for the university sector only; data from 1995-96 are for all higher education institutions. The PTR ratio is for all schools.<sup>3</sup>

**2 International data**

Over a five-year period to 2003, OECD<sup>4</sup> data show the student:teaching staff ratio in UK higher education fluctuating at around 18:1 (table 2, chart 2).<sup>5</sup> This was consistently higher than the mean ratio for OECD countries, and was also considerably higher over that period than for the USA, Germany and Japan. Of leading competitor countries, only France had a SSR comparable with the UK's.

The OECD warns: 'Such comparisons in tertiary education, however, should be made with caution since it is still difficult to calculate full-time equivalent students and teachers on a comparable basis at this level.'<sup>6</sup> However, in broad terms a picture emerges which shows the UK at a considerable disadvantage to most of our leading competitor nations, and to OECD countries as a whole.

**Table 2 – OECD ratio of students to teaching staff in tertiary educational institutions\***

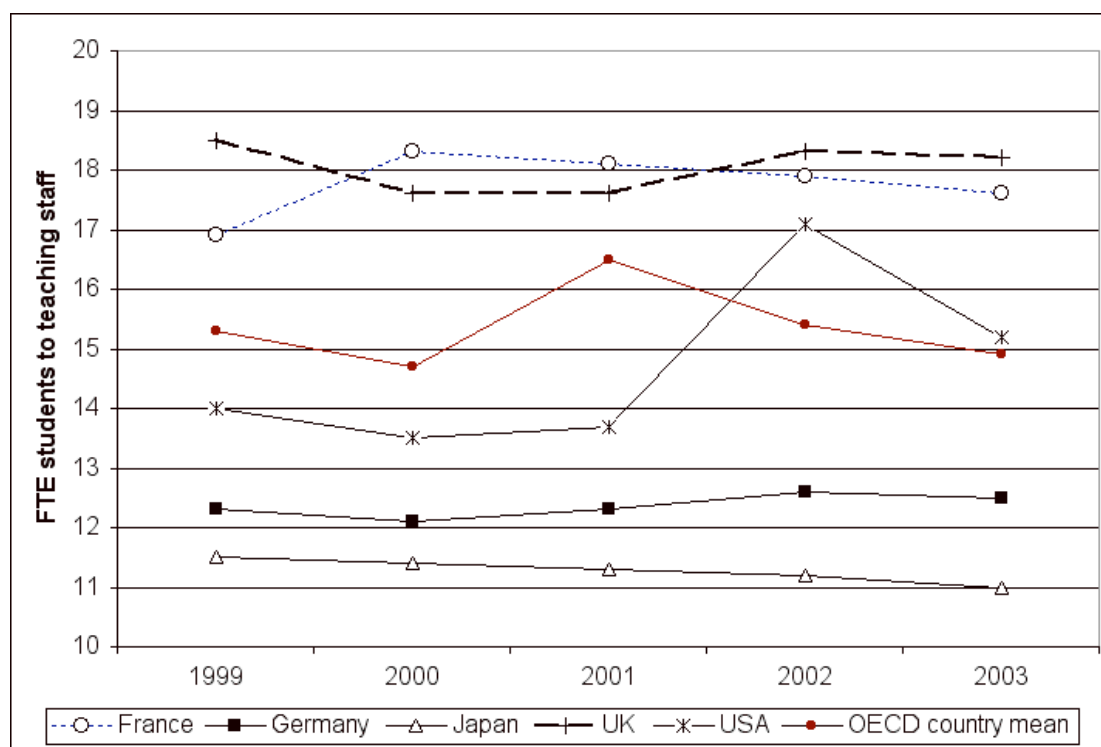
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
France	16.9 : 1	18.3 : 1	18.1 : 1	17.9 : 1	17.6 : 1
Germany	12.3 : 1	12.1 : 1	12.3 : 1	12.6 : 1	12.5 : 1
Japan	11.5 : 1	11.4 : 1	11.3 : 1	11.2 : 1	11.0 : 1
UK	18.5 : 1	17.6 : 1	17.6 : 1	18.3 : 1	18.2 : 1
USA	14.0 : 1	13.5 : 1	13.7 : 1	17.1 : 1	15.2 : 1
OECD country mean	15.3 : 1	14.7 : 1	16.5 : 1	15.4 : 1	14.9 : 1

Based on full-time equivalents

\* includes Type A 3+ year mainly theoretical degrees & advanced research programmes, and Type B shorter more practical courses

Source: OECD Education at a Glance, series, Table D2.2

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Based on full-time equivalents

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**AUT research**

**October 2005**

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05\\_06/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_06/) para 44

<sup>2</sup> In FTE calculation, part-time = 50% of full-time, except for 2003-4, when HESA New Individualised Staff Record FTE figure used; academic staff includes teaching-only and teaching-and-research staff, but excludes research-only staff. HESA's New Individualised Staff Record from 2003-4 results in a break in continuity in the data: the NISR in 2003-4 is designed to include academic staff working on less than a 25% FTE contract, and shows a large increase in part-time teaching-only staff, and a slight decrease in teaching-and-research academic staff. The 2003-4 NISR provides a staff FTE figure using proportion of contract data, and is therefore more accurate than the staff FTE for previous years.

<sup>3</sup> In FTE calculation, part-time = 50% of full-time, except for 2003-4, when HESA New Individualised Staff Record FTE figure used; academic staff includes teaching-only and teaching-and-research staff, but excludes research-only staff. HESA's New Individualised Staff Record from 2003-4 results in a break in continuity in the data: the NISR in 2003-4 is designed to include academic staff working on less than a 25% FTE contract, and shows a large increase in part-time teaching-only staff, and a slight decrease in teaching-and-research academic staff. The 2003-4 NISR provides a staff FTE figure using proportion of contract data, and is therefore more accurate than the staff FTE for previous years.

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

<sup>5</sup> The difference between the SSRs for the UK in tables 1 and 2 may be due to the use of different factors in calculating the full-time equivalent ratio: the factor used in table 1 was 0.5; the factor used in the OECD full-time equivalent data was not stated.

See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/36/35324994.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2005, p. 348