

Office for Students postcode look-up tool: Change notes September 2021

1. This data release was published in September 2021. It supersedes the previous postcode look-up dataset published in March 2021.
2. This release uses updated Office for National Statistics (ONS) Postcode Directory (ONSPD) and ONS Postcode Lookup (ONSPL) data from May 2021. The ONSPD and ONSPL lists all postcodes in the UK, and links them to higher geographies. For more information see www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/postcodeproducts.
3. Please note that Northern Ireland postcodes are subject to a separate licensing agreement. The postcodes used in this data release are based on the January 2021 Northern Ireland Central Postcode Directory (CPD), see: www.nisra.gov.uk/support/geography/central-postcode-directory.
4. This note describes the changes to the information included in the postcode look-up data downloads (CSV and Excel format) and changes to our interactive postcode look-up. The information displayed in the interactive postcode look-up is a subset of the postcode look-up dataset.
5. Any questions or feedback related to these changes should be addressed to William Rimington at official.statistics@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Summary of annual update

6. We have added 18,132 new postcodes to the look-up.
7. Each year we update our postcode look-up dataset to account for new postcodes and changes to existing postcodes by comparing the ONSPD and ONSPL from May of the current year with versions of the ONSPD and ONSPL from previous years.
8. Newly created postcodes are assigned quintiles using the following method. First, geographical areas are assigned a quintile as per our calculations when creating the measures. Second, all the postcodes within that area are assigned that quintile. As such, all the postcodes within an area will have the same quintile. The geographical area used varies depending on the measure in question. Our older measures (POLAR3, Adult HE 2001, Gaps) used CAS wards, while our newer measures (POLAR4, TUNDRA MSOA, Adult HE 2011) use Middle layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs). Our TUNDRA LSOA measure uses Lower layer Super Output areas (LSOAs).
9. For consistency, it is important that the quintile associated with a postcode does not change year-on-year. However, as a result of postcodes being reused and sometimes moving to different areas, it would be possible for a postcode to be assigned to an area with a certain

quintile one year but to a different area with a different quintile another year. In circumstances where a postcode has been reused and moved to an area with a different quintile, instead of being assigned this new quintile the postcode is assigned an 'R' to denote it has been reused and moved to an area with a different quintile. If a postcode has been reused and kept in the same area or reused and moved to an area that is assigned the same quintile as the original area, then the postcode will keep its quintile. This is because, despite this reuse, the quintile assigned to the postcode has been consistent and at no point in the past was the postcode assigned a different quintile. Our postcode look-up dataset includes 'Reason removed flags' which detail if and why a postcode has had its area-based measure quintile set to 'R' instead of a number.

10. The assignment of postcodes to areas sometimes changes between versions of the ONSPD and ONSPL without the postcode being reused. When this happens we report the area-based measure quintile based on the original area. This minimises the changes to our area-based measures when compared with earlier publications. For this reason we include various area fields in the postcode look-up dataset to allow users to see the current area of the postcode (e.g. MSOA current) and the area when the quintile of the postcode was assigned (e.g. MSOA TUNDRA).

Summary of changes

11. We have created a new reason-removed flag named 'Reason removed Adult HE 2011'. This field follows the same logic of our 'Reason removed TUNDRA' fields and explains if and why a postcode does not have an Adult HE 2011 quintile as a result of changes in the use of the postcode. Previously, we applied our 'Reason removed TUNDRA MSOA' field to Adult HE 2011, with the exception of the not relevant 'U' (postcode is outside of England) and 'M' (too few Key Stage 4 pupils to do analysis) values. However, following our update to TUNDRA MSOA in March 2021, this application is no longer appropriate and we have created an independent Adult HE 2011 reason-removed flag that is specific to this measure and will not be impacted by any updates to TUNDRA MSOA.
12. The 'Reason removed Adult HE 2011' field can have the following values:
 - a. A - unsafe for measurement (according to our Reason removed POLAR field).
 - b. B - non-geographic postcode (according to our Reason removed POLAR field).
 - c. R - postcode has been reused since its initial geography assignment and new geography is associated with a different Adult HE 2011 quintile.
 - d. Missing – the vast majority (>99 per cent) of postcodes are assigned an Adult HE 2011 quintile and the reason-removed field is not relevant.
13. Like POLAR (MSOA POLAR) and TUNDRA (MSOA TUNDRA), a field representing the MSOA the postcode was assigned to when the Adult HE 2011 quintile was assigned has been produced named 'MSOA Adult HE 2011'.
14. We have added three new fields named 'MSOA current', 'LSOA current' and 'CAS ward current'. These fields represent the current MSOA/LSOA/CAS ward of the postcode according to the May 2021 ONSPL and ONSPD. These fields are used to assign the map boundaries

displayed in our interactive postcode look-up. For the majority of postcodes, these new 'current' fields will have the same values as the corresponding fields for the area-based measures (MSOA POLAR, MSOA TUNDRA, MSOA Adult HE 2011, LSOA TUNDRA, CAS ward measures). However, this is not always the case because the area-based measure fields represent the areas used when the quintile was assigned. As detailed in paragraph 11, a postcode can move area without being reused and where this happens, we use the previous area to maximise consistency. In these circumstances the area-based measure field will show the original area and as a result the current and area-based measure areas will be different.

15. To allow consistency and easier differentiation from these new 'current' fields we have renamed 'LSOA' to be 'LSOA TUNDRA' and 'CAS ward' to be 'CAS ward measures'.
16. MSOA, LSOA and CAS ward names are now based on 'MSOA current', 'LSOA current' and 'CAS ward current' of the postcode rather than 'MSOA POLAR', 'LSOA TUNDRA' and 'CAS ward measures' as in previous publications.
17. The September 2021 postcode look-up dataset no longer contains 'NUTS2 code' and 'NUTS2 name'. These fields were directly from the ONSPD. From 1 January 2021 Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) were replaced with International Territorial Levels (ITLs) as part of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. As a result, the May 2021 ONSPD contained ITL rather than NUTS and our September 2021 dataset instead contains 'ITL2 code' and 'ITL2 name'. ITL are a direct replacement for NUTS and can be used in the same way. See the National Statistics Postcode Lookup (May 2021) User Guide for more information regarding this change.¹
18. In March 2021 the new versions of TUNDRA MSOA and TUNDRA LSOA were published for the first time. For this reason it was not possible for postcodes to have a value of 'R' (reused since initial geography assignment and new geography is associated with a different quintile) for these measures. Reflecting that TUNDRA MSOA and TUNDRA LSOA are not newly published measures in this update, some postcodes have now been assigned a value of 'R' and 'Reason removed TUNDRA MSOA' and 'Reason removed TUNDRA LSOA' can also now have a value of 'R'. See the notes associated with the postcode look-up datafile for more information regarding these reason-removed flags and their values.
19. While updating this data we detected a small error in the 'Postcode Status' field published in the March 2021 dataset and 496 postcodes were incorrectly classified, as detailed in Table 1. This field does not affect any other fields in the dataset and is included only to provide additional information regarding the history of the postcode in relation to POLAR quintile assignments. The September 2021 release of this data has corrected this error.

¹ Available at geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/documents/ons::national-statistics-postcode-lookup-may-2021-user-guide/about.

Table 1. Errors in March 2021 'Postcode Status' field

Incorrect March 2021 'Postcode status'	Correct March 2021 'Postcode status'	Postcodes
Reused in 2017/Moved CAS ward	Reused in 2017/Moved CAS ward and MSOA	136
Reused in 2019/Moved CAS ward	Reused in 2019/Moved CAS ward and MSOA	146
Reused in 2020/Moved CAS ward	Reused in 2020/Moved CAS ward and MSOA	1
Reused in 2020/No move	Reused in 2020/Moved CAS ward	74
Reused in 2020/No move	Reused in 2020/Moved CAS ward and MSOA	112
Reused in 2020/No move	Reused in 2020/Moved MSOA	27

Changes to interactive postcode look-up

20. We have made a number of small changes to our interactive postcode look-up. These are primarily aesthetic changes resulting from the feedback we have received from the user survey we have been running during the past year.
21. Postcode geographic boundaries and postcode locations pins are now based on latest boundaries and postcode longitudes and latitudes in the May 2021 ONSPD and ONSPL. This allows users to see the location and boundary of the searched postcode as per the more recent data. Previously these boundaries and locations were associated with the assignments of the area-based measures (e.g. MSOA POLAR) and thus for a small number of postcodes they did not reflect what a user might expect for the searched postcode given its current location. The postcode pin and geographic boundary visualisations are simply a tool to help users better understand our measures and this change has no impact on the measures themselves.
22. We have added our 'Reason removed Adult HE 2011' flag to the reason-removed table in the look-up.
23. Most feedback we received from our survey related to frustration with the tool not telling users whether they are eligible for bursaries or contextual offers. However, this is not the purpose of the tool and it is not feasible for us to add this information given providers all have their own admissions policies. We have changed our look-up to help make users more aware of what information the tool can provide and what information it cannot.
24. Users are now required to read the details of the look-up in advance of accessing the search option. In adding this extra layer to the look-up, we anticipate new users with no knowledge of our area-based measures (the vast majority of users) will have a greater understanding of the results and an easier, though slightly longer, user experience. We have endeavoured to apply these changes while ensuring experienced users can still quickly and easily access the search option and results page.