



# **How have applications for full-time undergraduate higher education in the UK changed in 2012?**

UCAS Analysis and Research, July 2012

## **Key Findings**

### **Analysis of 18 million applications since 2004 to detect changes in UK applications for 2012**

Applications for entry to HE through UCAS provide the first measures of the demand for full-time undergraduate study. This analysis uses application, population and 2012 tuition fee data to assess changes in behaviour amongst applicants from the UK.

#### **Young application rates decline for England**

The application rate of 18 year olds from England has fallen by around one percentage point in 2012 against a recent trend of annual increases of a similar amount. This suggests that around one young applicant in 20 who might have been expected to apply in 2012 did not do so – approximately 15,000 applicants.

#### **Young application rates continue on trend for country flows with unchanged fees**

In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales applicants to courses in their own countries have similar tuition fee levels to 2011. In these countries, the young application rates for study in their own countries have broadly continued their recent trends. Young people from Wales applying to courses outside of Wales have similar tuition fees to previous cycles, and their application rate to study outside of Wales has continued to increase. The application rate of young people from Scotland and Northern Ireland to study outside of their home country, where fees have increased, has fallen.

#### **Application rates for older age groups in England show larger declines**

English people in age groups older than age 18 are between 15 and 20 per cent less likely to apply in 2012 than in 2011, representing around 30,000 fewer applicants than if application rates had remained at their 2011 levels. For some of these older age groups part of this fall may be accounted for by the higher acceptance rate in the 2011 cycle. For instance, for 19 year olds in 2012, the increase in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds in 2011 would account for just under half the fall. These falls also follow unusually large increases in application rates in 2009 and 2010 for some age groups. Application rates for older age groups from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales do not show declines in 2012.

#### **Large differences in application rates between backgrounds**

Over the past decade application rates for young people from all backgrounds have increased, with the largest increases for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The differential between the young application rates from advantaged and disadvantaged areas has reduced over the period but remains large. Young people living in the areas with the lowest overall participation in HE (a commonly used measure of disadvantage) have application rates of 19 per cent compared to 54 per cent for those living in the areas with the highest overall participation in HE.

#### **Greater declines in application rate between 2011 and 2012 for the more advantaged**

Application rates for young people from more advantaged backgrounds fell by more between 2011 and 2012 than those from less advantaged backgrounds. However, the trend has been for larger

increases for those from less advantaged backgrounds. Taking this into account, the proportional fall relative to this trend becomes more similar for those from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **Majority of applications from England are to courses with a tuition fee of £9,000**

Most courses applied to by English applicants have tuition fees (before any fee waivers or other support) at or near the maximum £9,000. The average 2012 tuition fee applied to by English applicants is £8,527 and the average proportion of their choices to £9,000 courses is 56 per cent.

### **No substantial move towards or away from higher fee courses**

Linking courses in earlier cycles to courses offered in 2012 enables us to assign a 2012 tuition fee to application choices made in previous cycles. For both young and older English applicants, the pattern of 2012 applications in terms of the 2012 tuition fee is substantially the same as the pattern of applications made in earlier cycles. Therefore, there has been no substantial move towards or away from higher fee courses compared to choices made by young applicants in previous cycles.

### **No substantial changes in tuition fee of courses applied to across backgrounds**

Applicants from more disadvantaged backgrounds apply to courses in 2012 with lower tuition fees than those from advantaged backgrounds: around £200 lower on average. However, looking at the pattern of applications from previous cycles (in terms of what their 2012 tuition fee would have been) shows that this differential has always been present and that it does not change substantially in 2012. Therefore, applicants from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds are making much the same choice of courses in 2012 as applicants from those groups in previous cycles.

### **Application rate of disadvantaged to higher tariff institutions unchanged in 2012**

The application rate of disadvantaged young people in England to higher tariff institutions in 2012 is materially the same as in 2010 and 2011, following increasing application rates since the 2006 cycle. Virtually all such higher tariff institutions charge the maximum tuition fee rate of £9,000.

### **No increases in the share of applications for live-at-home study in 2012 across UK**

Around 20 per cent of applications from young applicants in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and around 40 per cent for young applicants from Scotland, are for courses where they have indicated they intend to study whilst living at home. These proportions are materially unchanged in 2012 for applicants from England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The proportion for young applicants in Wales declines in 2012, continuing a recent trend.

### **No substantial change in applications by graduate salaries reported for courses**

Information sources available to applicants show that the historic graduate starting salary of courses vary by subject and institution from around £15,000 to £30,000. Young English applicants have not substantially changed their choices in 2012 in terms of the expected graduate salaries.

## Summary

### **Analysis of 18 million applications since 2004 to detect changes in UK applications for 2012**

1. This analysis addresses questions of how the level and nature of applications to higher education (HE) have changed in the 2012 cycle. It is based on 18 million UCAS course choices made by UK domiciled applicants between 2004 and 2012.
2. These are combined with population estimates so that application rates, the proportion of a group of the population who apply, can be calculated and changes in behaviour distinguished from changes in the population.
3. Tuition fees (as displayed to applicants by institutions for individual courses) are used as one measure to investigate the nature of applications. These fees relate to the domicile of the applicant and before any fee waivers or other financial support that may vary by domicile or individual background.
4. Particular attention is given to young (18 year old) applicants from England applying to English institutions as they experience higher and more variable tuition fees throughout the UK in 2012, without having had the opportunity of applying for higher education at a lower fee level in previous years.

### **Young application rates decline for England**

5. Young (18 year old) people from England applying to HE in 2012 face substantially higher tuition fees than previously, wherever they study in the UK. Their application rate to HE has fallen by around one percentage point against a recent trend of annual increases of a similar amount. This suggests around one young applicant in 20 who would have been expected (had recent application trends continued) to apply in 2012 did not do so - approximately 15,000 applicants.

### **Young application rates continue on trend for country flows with unchanged fees**

6. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, applicants face higher fees than in previous cycles if they study outside of their own country, but similar levels if they study within their own country. The young application rates from people in Northern Ireland and Scotland to courses within their own country are unchanged or show slight increases. Where there are substantial application rates to courses in other countries, these have fallen.
7. Applicants from Wales face similar tuition fees to previous cycles, wherever they choose to study. Most young applicants from Wales apply to courses in Wales or England and these trends have continued unchanged in 2012. In particular the application rate to institutions in England has continued to increase.

### **No signs of applicants applying a year earlier than usual in 2011**

8. If people who would usually have applied to HE in the 2012 cycle decided to apply a year earlier in the 2011 cycle instead then we would expect to see an above-trend increase in the application rate for the 2011 cycle. There is no sign of such an increase for either young or old age groups across the UK.

Figure 1 Application rates for 18 year olds to institutions in their country of domicile

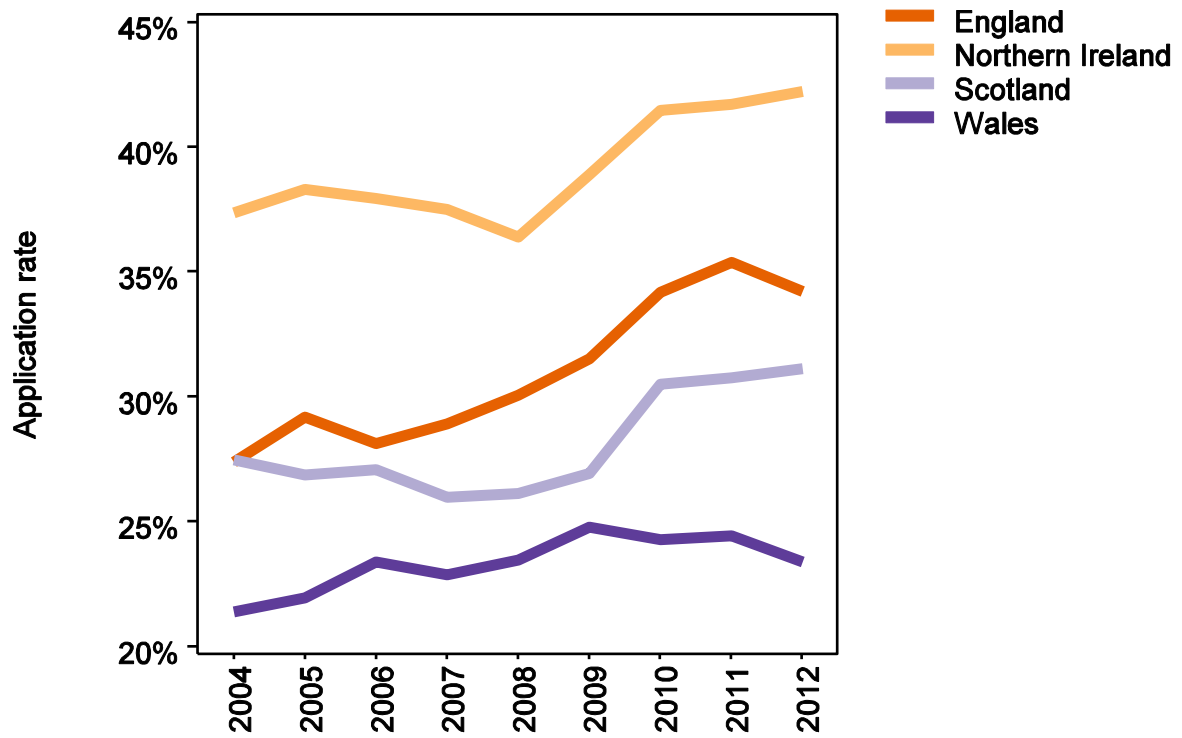
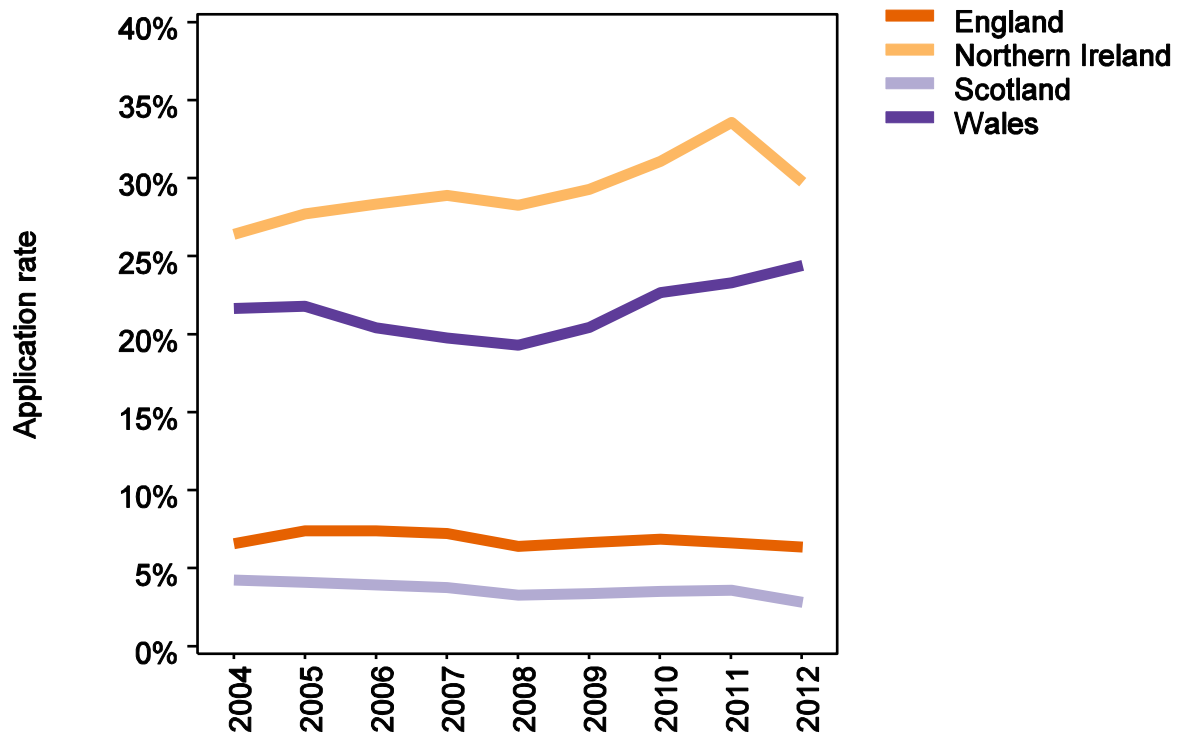


Figure 2 Application rates for 18 year olds to institutions outside of their country of domicile



## **Large differences in application rates between backgrounds**

9. Over the past decade application rates for young people from all backgrounds have increased, with the largest increases for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The application rates of young people living in the most disadvantaged fifth of areas in terms of HE entry have increased by, proportionally, over 60 per cent between 2004 and 2012. The differential between the young application rates from advantaged and disadvantaged areas has reduced over the period.

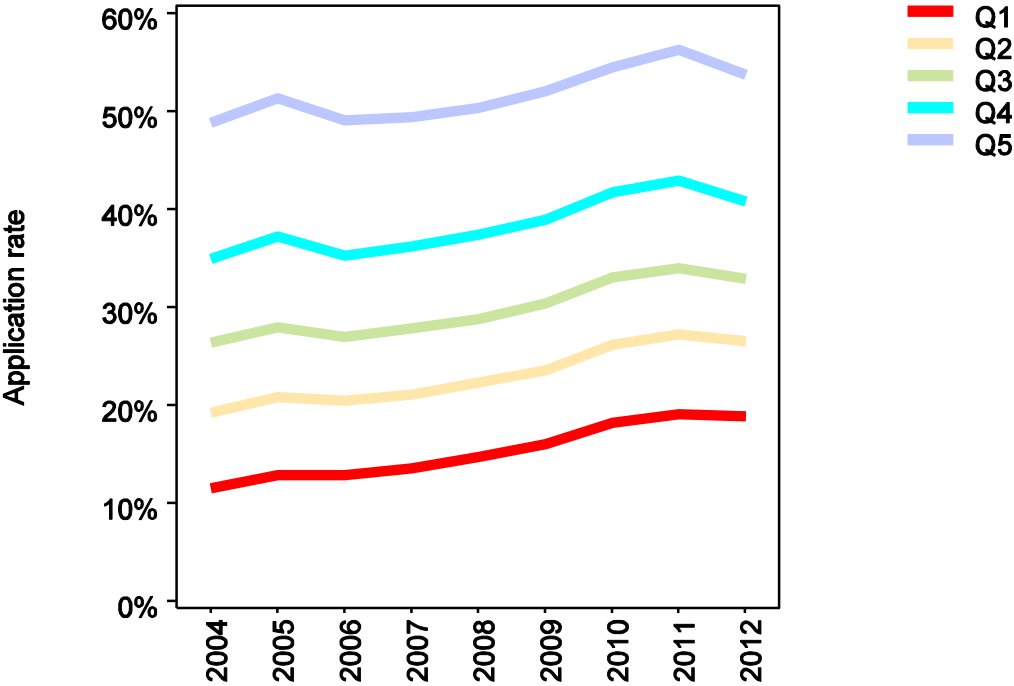
10. Despite this, young application rates remain highly differentiated by background. Young people living in the areas with the lowest overall participation in HE (a commonly used measure of deprivation) have application rates of 19 per cent compared to 54 per cent for those living in the areas with the highest overall participation in HE. Similarly, those living in the lowest income areas have application rates in 2012 of 23 per cent compared to 48 per cent for their peers living in the highest income areas.

## **Greater declines in application rate between 2011 and 2012 for the more advantaged**

11. The application rates for young people from all backgrounds have fallen in 2012 with the largest declines, both proportionally and in percentage points, for those from the most advantaged backgrounds. Application rates for the most advantaged fifth of areas have fallen by 2-3 percentage points compared to falls of 0.1-0.2 percentage points in the most disadvantaged areas. This result is the same when we measure advantage using areas ranked by either participation in HE or the proportion of children in low income households.

12. Since 2006, application rates for disadvantaged groups have increased more than for those from advantaged groups. The application rates for young people from different backgrounds in 2012 are lower than might be expected had recent differential trends continued, and the proportional falls against this expectation are more similar across backgrounds.

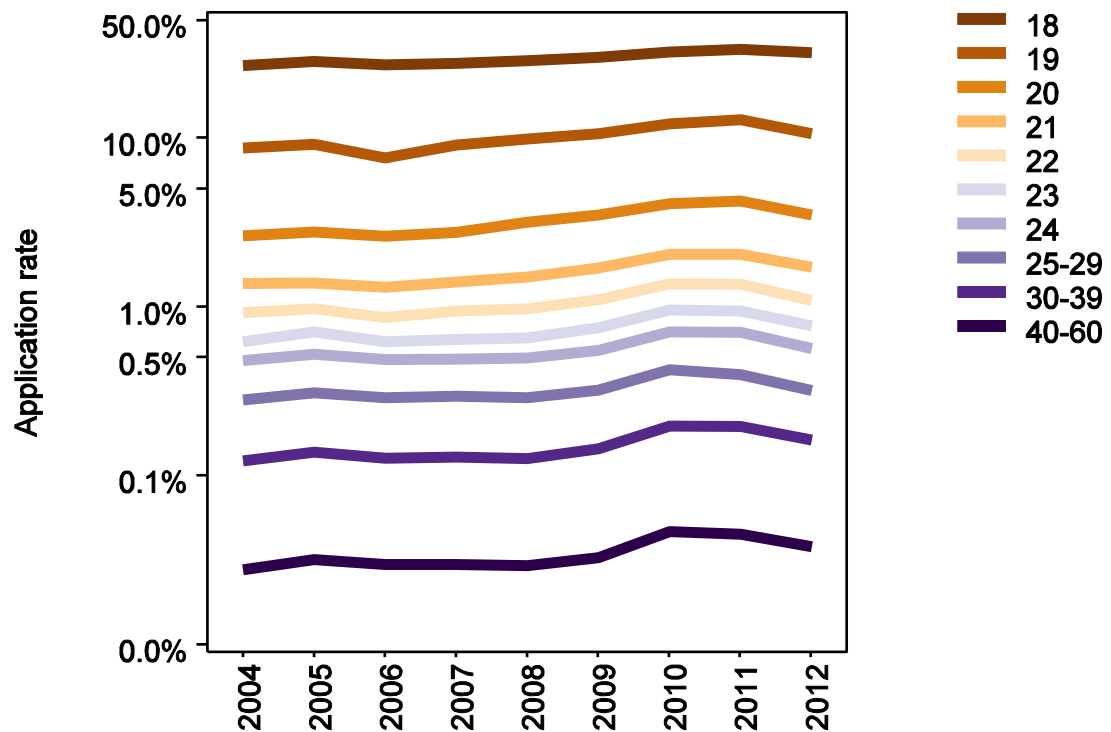
Figure 3 Application rates for English 18 year olds for areas grouped by young HE participation rates (POLAR2, Quintile 5 (Q5) = highest participation areas)



### Application rates for older age groups in England show larger declines

13. English people in age groups older than age 18 are between 15 and 20 per cent less likely to apply in 2012 than in 2011, representing around 30,000 fewer applicants than if application rates had remained at their 2011 levels. For some of these older age groups part of this fall may be accounted for by the higher acceptance rate in the 2011 cycle. For instance, for 19 year olds in 2012, the increase in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds in 2011 would account for just under half the fall. These falls also follow unusually large increases in application rates in 2009 and 2010 for some age groups. Application rates for older age groups from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales do not show declines in 2012.

Figure 4 Application rates by age from England



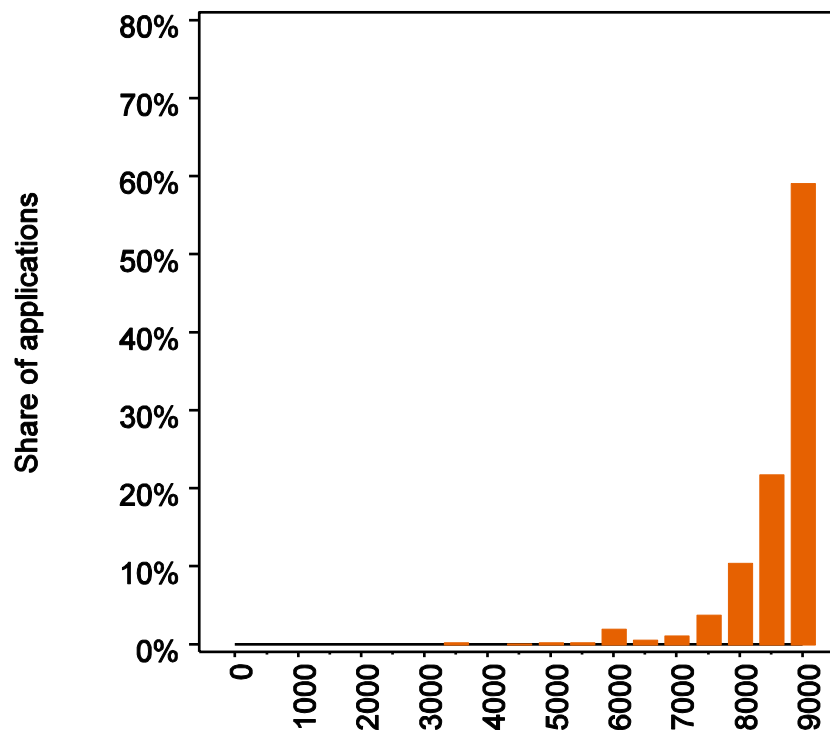


## Majority of applications from England are to courses with a tuition fee of £9,000

14. There is a material range in 2012 in the tuition fees of courses applied to by English applicants. However, most courses are at or near the maximum £9,000 and the extent of the range is a relatively small proportion of the tuition fee. Courses at £9,000 receive 59 per cent of all English applications, those around £8,500, 22 per cent, those around £8,000, 10 per cent and those around £7,500, 4 per cent.

15. The majority of applications by English domiciled applicants in 2012 are to courses with a tuition fee of £9,000. The average tuition fee applied to by English applicants is £8,527 and the average proportion of their choices to £9,000 courses is 56 per cent.

**Figure 5 Distribution of 2012 English applications by tuition fee of course**



## **No substantial move towards or away from higher fee courses**

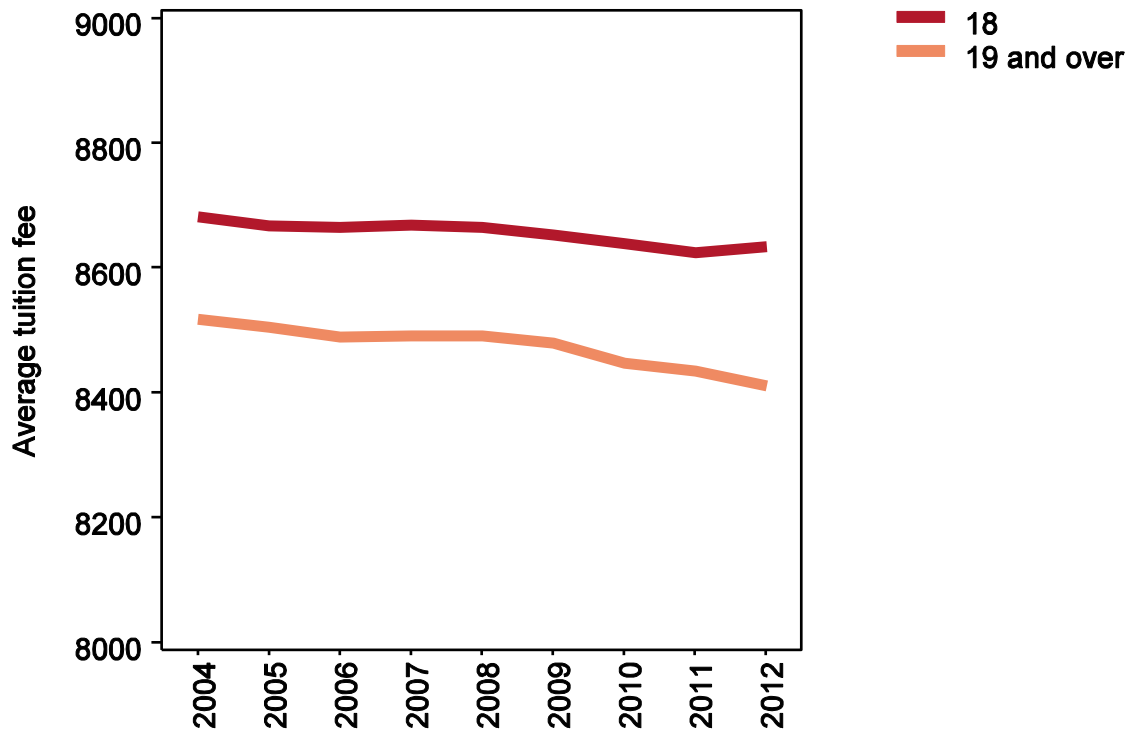
16. Linking courses in earlier cycles to courses offered in 2012 enables us to assign a 2012 tuition fee to application choices made between 2004 and 2012. Measuring the average of this linked 2012 tuition fee and the proportion of choices to £9,000 courses gives a measure of how the profile of courses applied to through time has varied in terms of the 2012 tuition fees.

17. For young English applicants the average tuition fee of courses applied to in 2012, and the proportion of choices to £9,000 courses, is substantially the same as in previous cycles. There has been no substantial move towards or away from higher fee courses compared to choices made by young applicants in previous cycles. Looking closely at the changes for 2012 shows an increase of around £10 (0.1 per cent) in the average tuition fee of courses applied to and an increase of one percentage point in the proportion applying to £9,000 courses compared to 2011. This is in contrast to recent cycles where there has typically been a slight shift in applications to courses which have (in 2012) lower tuition fees.

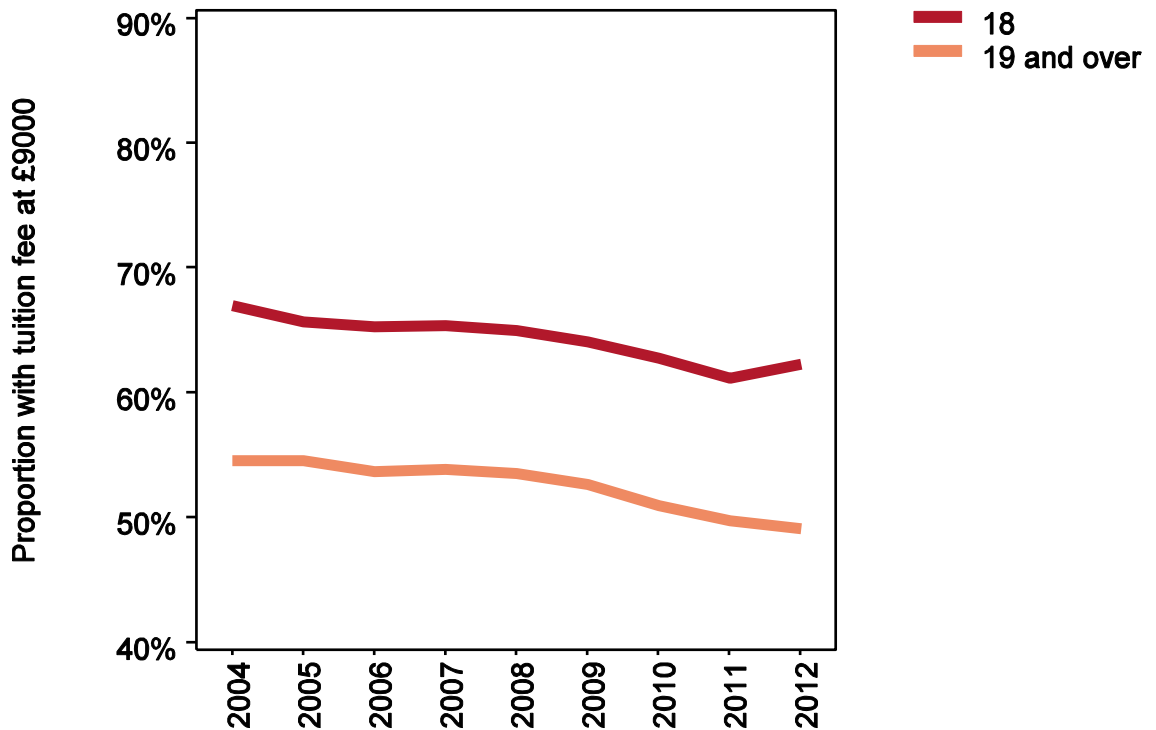
18. If this trend were expected to continue, then the changes observed in 2012 would be equivalent to around one applicant in 40 changing all of their choices from £8,200 to £9,000 courses with the remaining applicants making the same choices as before. Alternatively, the observed change may be caused by the one in twenty young English applicants estimated to be missing from the 2012 cycle compared to what would have been expected if recent application rate trends had continued. If these 'missing' applicants had applied to courses with an average tuition fee some £400 lower than other applicants (around £8,200) then their removal would lead to the changes observed. It is also possible that institutions may have changed the range of courses they offer or how they present them. However, this analysis rules out the possibility that there has been any substantial shift towards or away from any courses on account of their higher fees under the new arrangements.

19. For older English applicants there is no deviation from trend in the tuition fee of courses applied to.

**Figure 6 Average 2012 tuition fee of courses applied to by English applicants to English institutions**



**Figure 7 Proportion of English applicants applying to courses at English institutions with 2012 tuition fee at £9,000**



## **The average 2012 tuition fee of courses applied to varies across applicant groups**

20. Groups of applicants have often shown different profiles of applications, for example, by the nature of courses applied to in previous cycles. A new way of characterising applicants' choices in 2012 is by the tuition fee of the course. As with other measures, the average tuition fee of courses applied to by English applicants in 2012 varies across groups of applicants. Younger applicants and those from backgrounds with higher levels of educational, income or occupational advantage apply to courses with higher average fees (around £200), and make more choices to £9,000 courses, than older applicants or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

21. The average tuition fee applied to by 18 year old applicants is £8,632, for 19 year olds £8,484 and around £8,300 to £8,400 for older age groups. The proportion of choices to £9,000 courses is 63 per cent for 18 year olds, 53 per cent for 19 year olds and around 40 to 50 per cent for older age groups.

22. Young English applicants from areas with low entry rates to HE or low household incomes typically apply to courses with an average tuition fee of around £8,500 (50-55 per cent of choices to £9,000 courses). Young English applicants from areas with high entry rates to HE or high household incomes apply to courses with an average tuition fee of around £8,700 (around 70 per cent of choices to £9,000 courses).

23. English applicants from older age groups from areas with low incomes or low proportions of HE qualified adults apply to courses with an average tuition fee of around £8,300 (around 40 per cent of choices to £9,000 courses). In areas with high incomes, or high proportions of HE qualified adults the average fee for courses applied to by older applicants is around £8,450 (52 to 56 per cent to £9,000 courses).

## **No substantial change in tuition fees of courses applied to across backgrounds**

24. Applicants from different backgrounds do not show substantial changes in the average tuition fee of the courses they apply to between the 2011 and 2012 cycles. That is, applicants from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds are making much the same choice of courses (in terms of their 2012 tuition fee) as applicants from these groups in previous cycles. This result is consistent across background groups defined through education, income and occupation measures. However, young applicants from all backgrounds show a small shift towards higher fee courses in 2012. This effect is not observed for older applicants.

Figure 8 Average 2012 tuition fee of courses applied to by 18 year old English applicants to English institutions for areas grouped by young HE participation rates (POLAR2, Quintile 5 (Q5)= highest participation)

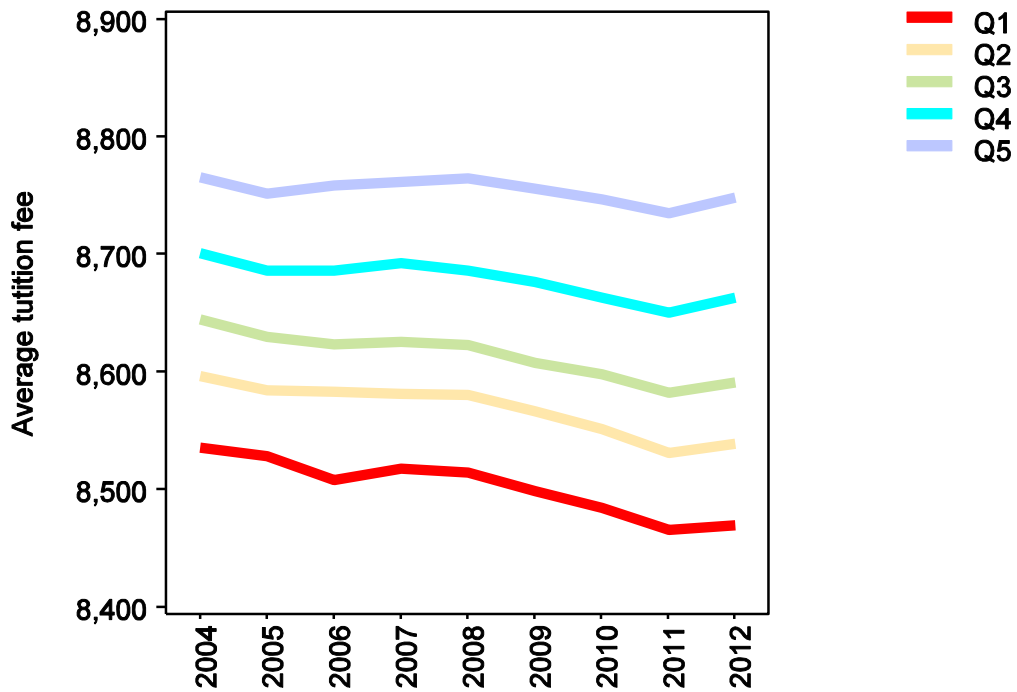
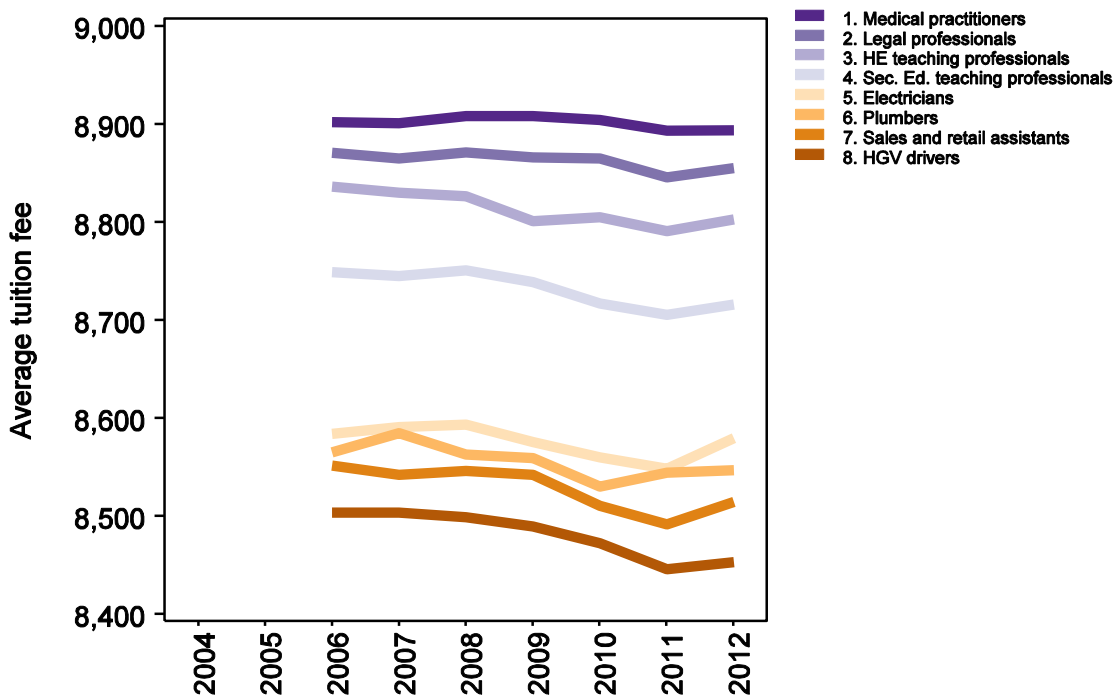


Figure 9 Average 2012 tuition fee of courses applied to by 18 year old English applicants to English institutions for selected parental job title classifications



### **Average tuition fees vary across groups of institutions**

25. Institutions whose accepted applicants have, on average, higher tariff points from the qualifications they hold, have higher tuition fees. The average tuition fee of courses applied to by English applicants at the higher tariff third of institutions is £8,978, and 97 per cent of the applications to those institutions are for courses with a tuition fee of £9,000. For medium tariff institutions the average fee of courses applied to is £8,778 (68 per cent of applications at £9,000). For lower tariff institutions the average fee is £8,172 (26 per cent of applications at £9,000).

### **Application rates to higher tariff institutions increase by less and are more differentiated than applications to all institutions**

26. The young English application rate to higher tariff institutions has increased by less, and the difference between the application rate from advantaged and disadvantaged areas is greater, than for applications to all institutions.

### **Application rate of disadvantaged to higher tariff institutions unchanged in 2012**

27. The application rate of disadvantaged young people in England to higher tariff institutions is materially the same in 2012 as for the previous two cycles, following increasing application rates since the 2006 cycle.

28. The application rate for advantaged young people to higher tariff institutions is lower in 2012 than for 2011 but within the range of application rates seen for this group over recent cycles.

Figure 10 English 18 year old application rates to higher tariff institutions for areas grouped by young HE participation rates (POLAR2, Quintile 5 (Q5)= highest HE participation rates)

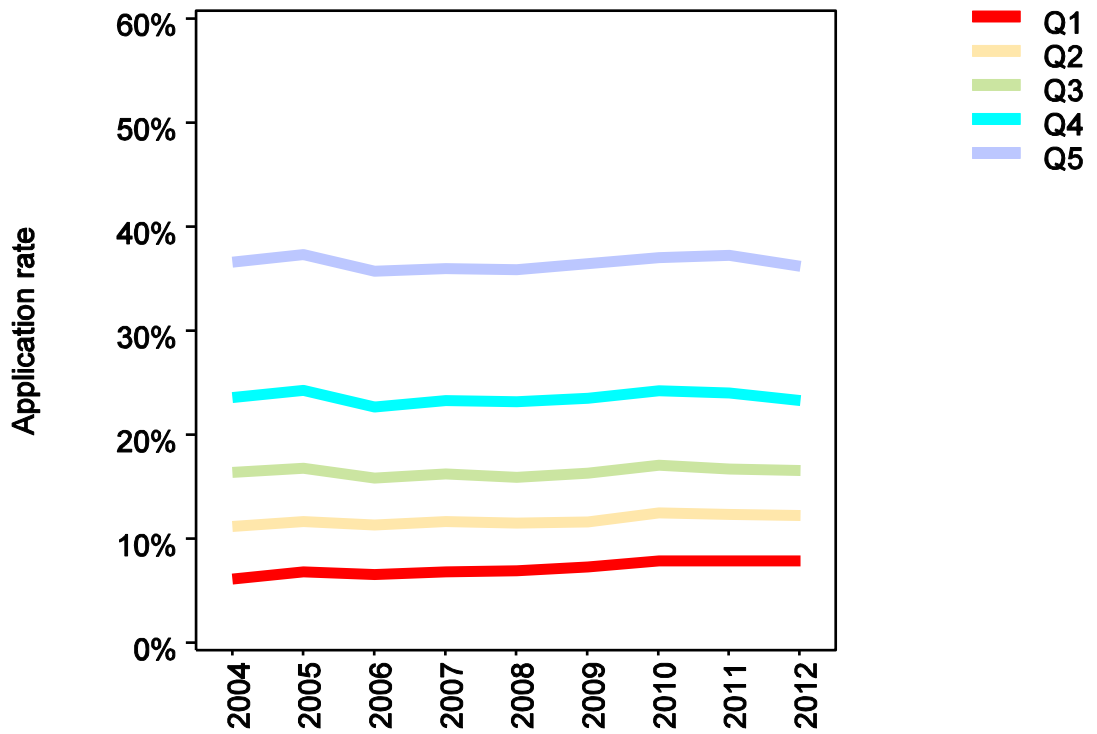
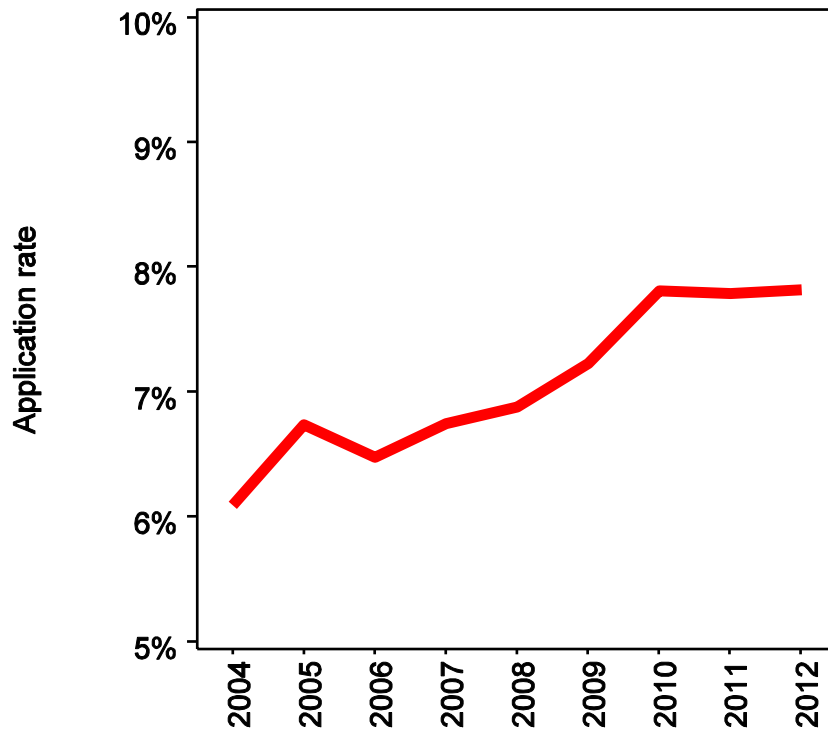


Figure 11 English 18 year old application rates to higher tariff institutions for areas with lowest levels of young HE participation (POLAR2, Quintile 1)



### No increases in the share of applications for live-at-home study in 2012 across UK

29. Around 20 per cent of applications from young applicants in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and around 40 per cent for young applicants from Scotland, are for courses where they have indicated they intend to study whilst living at home. These proportions are materially unchanged in 2012 for applicants from England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The proportion for young applicants in Wales declines from 16 per cent to 14 per cent to 2012, continuing a recent trend and consistent with a greater proportion of Welsh applicants applying to courses in England.

### No substantial change in applications by graduate salaries reported for courses

30. Information sources available to applicants show that the historic graduate starting salary of courses vary by subject from around £15,000 to £30,000. The average graduate salary of courses applied to by young English applicants has been in a narrow range around £18,800 since 2004. There is a slight increase against trend (£65) in 2012 but this is very small relative to variation between subjects and within the range seen in recent cycles.

**Figure 12 Average anticipated graduate salary of courses applied to by English 18 year olds to English institutions**

