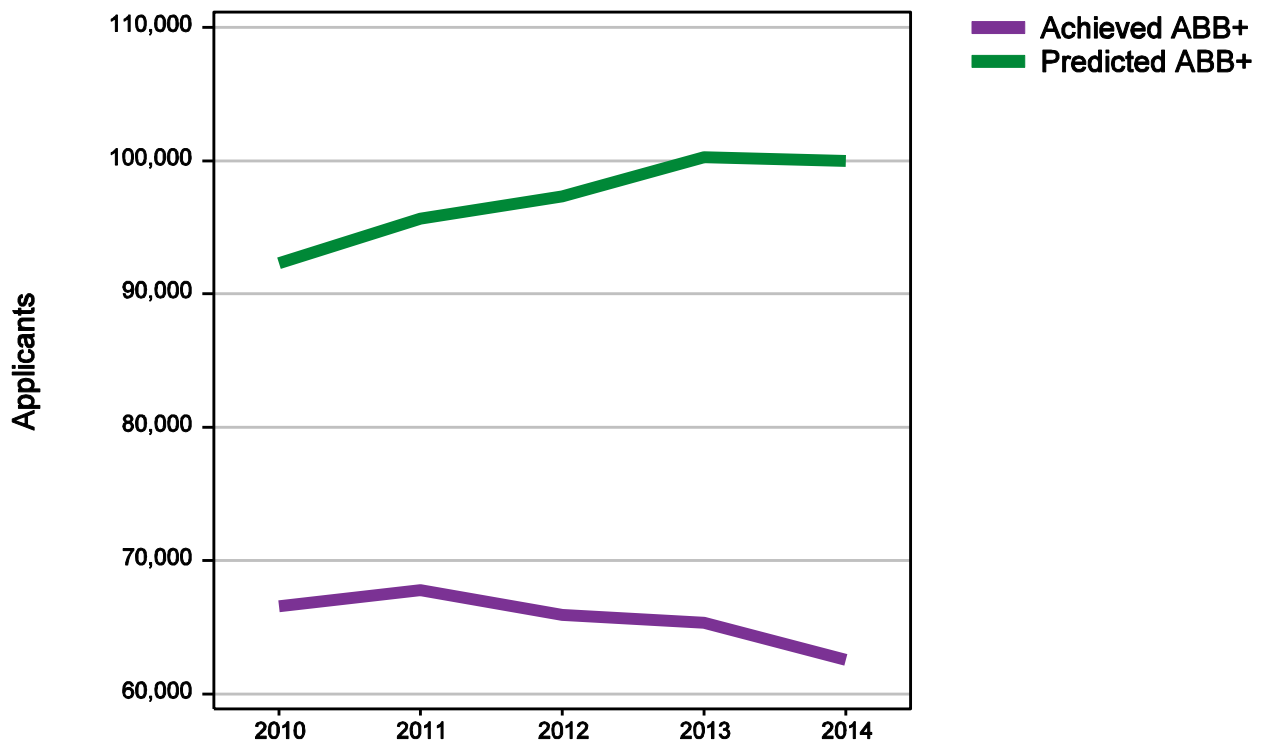




Fewer young applicants achieve top grades at A level in 2014

Most 18 year old English applicants apply with predicted A level grades, and in recent cycles the majority have been predicted grades of ABB or higher. A trend of rising numbers of English 18 year old applicants predicted grades of ABB or higher was replaced by a slight fall in the 2014 cycle. This change, together with a continuing reduction of attainment against predicted grades, has led to a fall of 4 per cent to 62,560 in the number of applicants achieving grades of ABB or higher in 2014 compared to 2013.

Figure 1: Number of 18 year old applicants from England predicted and attaining A level grades at ABB or higher



Most 18 year old applicants from England apply with predicted A level grades (79 per cent in 2014). Most of these applicants (58 per cent in 2014) are predicted by their schools to have the potential to achieve three A level grades of ABB or higher.

Between 2010 and 2013, the number of these applicants predicted grades of at least ABB increased each year, by between 2 to 4 per cent annually, from 92,320 in 2010 to 100,270 in 2013. This increase was despite a fall in the 18 year old population of 3.5 per cent, which was more than offset by a combination of rising application rates and higher predicted grades (consistent with improving GCSE results across these cohorts). In 2014, the number of these applicants predicted ABB or higher fell slightly to 99,970 (a fall of 0.3 per cent), also consistent with trends in earlier GCSE performance for that cohort.

Not all applicants achieve the potential indicated by their predicted grades, so that the number of 18 year old English applicants who achieve at least ABB from three A levels is around two thirds (63 per cent in 2014) of the total predicted ABB or higher. In 2010, 66,580 achieved ABB or higher. This increased to a high of 67,810 in 2011. Between 2011 and 2013, the number of applicants achieving ABB or higher fell each cycle, despite the increase in the numbers predicted ABB or higher, as achievement against predicted A level grades reduced (see technical note 1).

In 2014 the combination of no increase in the number predicted ABB or higher, together with a continued decline in attainment against predictions, led to the number achieving ABB or higher falling by 4 per cent from 65,350 in 2013 to 62,560 in 2014.

Recruitment patterns at 5 days after A level results day in 2014 suggest a corresponding fall in the number of English 18 year olds placed in higher education with grades of ABB or higher from A level of around 2,000 (4 per cent).

1. UCAS Analysis Note 2014/06 reports on trends in achieving A level grades of ABB or higher for widely held predicted grade profiles.
2. The applicant's school or college submit predicted grades for qualifications, including A levels, that the applicant is planning to complete during the UCAS application cycle.
3. The small fall in the number of applicants with predicted grades of ABB or higher in 2014 follows an increase year on year over the preceding period. This aligns to the pattern of GCSE attainment at 15 for each cohort that applied from 2010 to 2014.
4. Applicants who have applied by the January deadline are used for the analysis. Achieved A levels are measured through those supplied through the Awarding Body Linkage to UCAS. For 2014, achievement is measured at 5 days after A level results, for other cycles the A level grades are those recorded at the end of the cycle. In previous cycles there has been no material change in the patterns shown resulting from the small number of A level grades received after the 2014 reference point but before the end of the cycle.
5. The achievement of A level grades of ABB or higher is determined from the best three grades that an applicant achieves, not necessarily the three subjects used for the best three predicted grades. ABB or higher grades is determined by whether the total grade points achieved by an applicant from the best three A levels is equal to higher than 13 (one A level grade = 1 point). The same point method is used for whether predicted grades are ABB or higher.
6. The numbers achieving A level grades of ABB or higher are based on all English 18 year old applicants, not just those who were predicted ABB or above. However, very few of this group achieve A level grades of ABB or higher without having been predicted grades of ABB or higher.
7. The numbers of 18 year old applicants from England achieving ABB or higher at A level are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The number and change since 2010 in 18 year old applicants from England predicted and achieving ABB or higher A level grades

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of applicants	Predicted ABB+	92,320	95,630	97,320	100,270	99,970
	Achieved ABB+	66,580	67,810	65,910	65,350	62,560
Change since 2010	Predicted ABB+	0	3,310	4,990	7,940	7,650
	Achieved ABB+	0	1,230	-670	-1,230	-4,020
Proportional change since 2010	Predicted ABB+	0%	4%	5%	9%	8%
	Achieved ABB+	0%	2%	-1%	-2%	-6%