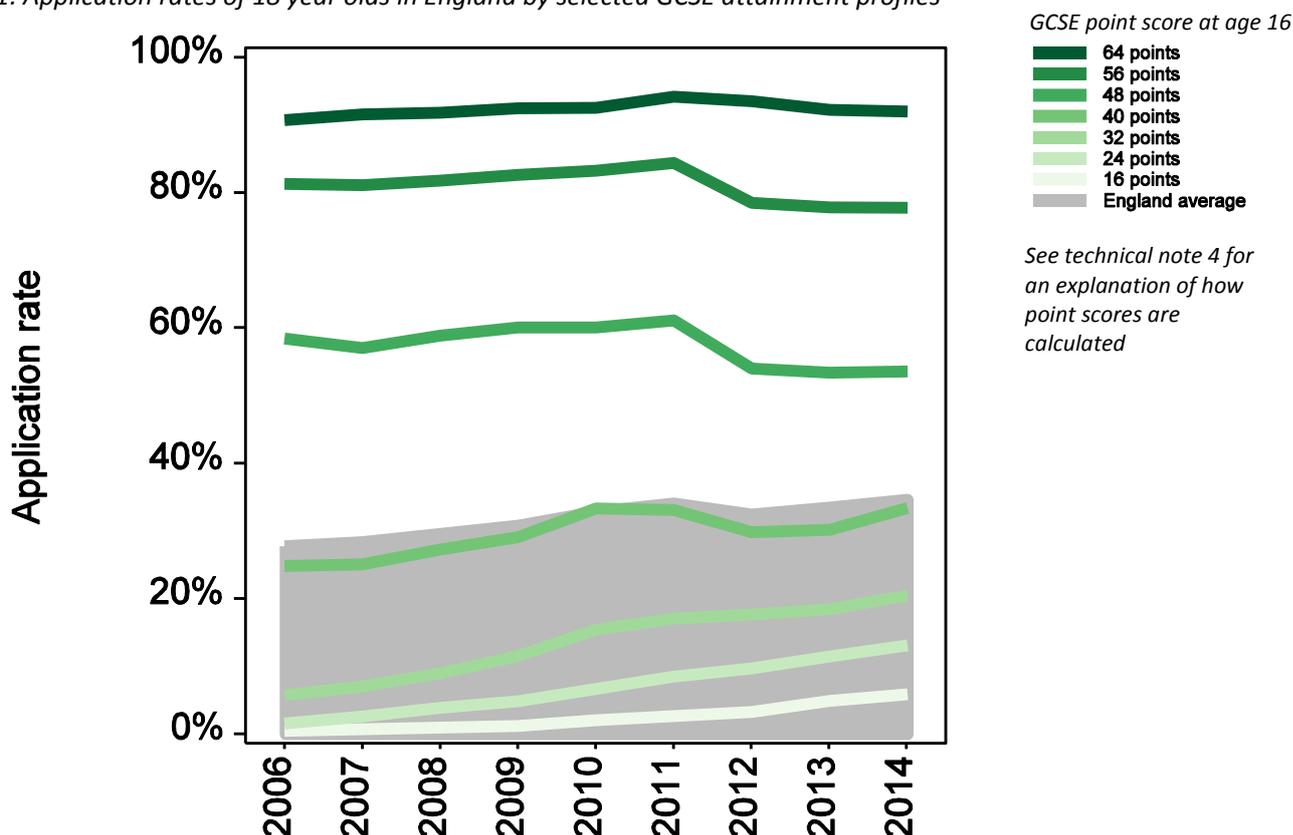




Over 90 per cent of 18 year olds with top GCSEs grades apply to university

Application rates of 18 year olds to higher education are strongly related to earlier GCSE attainment. Young people with higher GCSE grades have higher application rates than those with lower grades. Application rate trends between those with higher and lower GCSE grades have differed over recent application cycles.

Figure 1: Application rates of 18 year olds in England by selected GCSE attainment profiles



In 2014, 92 per cent of 18 year olds with eight A* grades at GCSE (a point score of 64) applied to university. The application rate progressively reduces for lower levels of GCSE attainment, for example the application rate is almost five times lower (at 20 per cent) for those with a GCSE point score of 32 (see technical note 4).

The application rate for all 18 year olds in England has increased over the period, but fell in 2012. There are different trends in application rates for young people with different levels of GCSE attainment. The application rate for those with the highest attainment (eight A* grades, 64 points) has been broadly constant, between 90 and 94 per cent, since 2006. The application rates for those with 32 points (or lower) have increased each year. The national fall in the application rate in 2012 is concentrated among those with a GCSE point score of between 40 points and 56 points.

Between 2006 and 2011, the application rate of those with 56 points increased from 81.3 per cent to 84.4 per cent. The application rate for this group decreased to 78.5 per cent in 2012, a fall of 5.9 percentage points (7 per cent proportionally) and has remained around 78 per cent in 2013 and 2014. The application rate for those with 48 points shows a similar pattern (a reduction followed by no change). There was also a fall in the application rate for those with a GCSE point score of 40 points, but this has been followed by increases in 2013 and 2014, reversing the fall in 2012.

The application rate for those with 32 points at age 16 has more than trebled between 2006 and 2014, increasing from 5.7 per cent to 20.4 per cent. Most of this increase is due to those who have 32 points that include five GCSEs at grade C or above, and most applicants from this group in 2014 had five C grades or better at age 16. There have also been increases in the application rates for those with lower point scores at age 16 (to 13.1 per cent in 2014 for those with 24 points, and to 5.9 per cent for those with 16 points) as more of these pupils achieve A* to C grades at GCSE.

Technical notes

1. Ages are defined as those on the 31 August each year to align with school cohorts. The graph shows the application rate for cohorts of 18 year olds against the year in which they would be 18. For example the 2014 point on the graph relates to the application rate of young people who will be aged 18 on 31 August 2014 and have applied in the 2014 UCAS application cycle. Their GCSE attainment is that achieved at the end of the school year two years earlier (in the 2011-12 school year for the 2014 cohort in this example).
2. Application rates are based on applications made to UCAS by the 24 March deadline in each cycle. At this point almost all main scheme applications for 18 year olds have been received.
3. The analysis is based on individual level school pupil records, taken from the National Pupil Database (NPD, further information on the NPD can be found at www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-pupil-database) linked to UCAS application data. The NPD covers young people in England only.
4. GCSE attainment is summarised as the total point score of the best eight grades achieved at GCSE (single and double award non-vocational GCSEs only) at the end of the school year where the pupil was aged 16. The point score does not include the GCSE results at ages 17 and 18. There is a variation in the GCSE attainment of young people. For example, around one in ten attain eight A grades (56 points) or higher and a similar proportion achieve eight G grades (16 points) or lower.

The point scores for each GCSE grade are given in the table below.

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U/X/Q
Point score	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

5. The analysis uses pupils who achieve a selection of the possible GCSE point score totals to investigate differences and trends. For example, the results for those described as holding eight A grades at GCSEs represents those who achieved a total point score of 56 points. This can be done through eight A grades but also includes those with the same points but with, for example, four A* grades and four B grades. Similarly, those in the eight D grades group may hold eight D grades or four C grades and four E grades. For those with fewer than eight GCSEs the total point score is calculated from those GCSEs held.

Almost all pupils in the 40 point score group, and all pupils in the 48, 56 and 64 point score groups also achieve at least five A* to C grades at GCSE at age 16. The proportion of pupils in the 32 point score group who also achieve at least five A* to C grades at GCSE has increased from 7 per cent in 2004 to 36 per cent in 2014. Most (54 per cent in 2014) of the applicants from 32 point group hold at least five A* to C grades amongst the GCSE grades they achieved at age 16. The proportion of pupils in the 24 point score group who achieve at least four A* to C grades within that total has also increased, from 2 per cent in 2006 to 25 per cent in 2014.

The point score profiles used in the analysis are narrow (in that they allow only a single point total, rather than a range). Therefore the trends reported are not affected by any changes in the distribution of point totals that may occur within a wider band, but the distribution of the way that a point total is obtained (for example, eight A grades versus four A* grades and four B grades) may change over the period. The selection of point score totals used in the analysis is a subset of the total pupil population since those with, for example, 55 points are not included. The general trends and patterns reported in this analysis are not particular to the profiles or the way the point total is obtained.

6. A data file for the data points shown in Figure 1 is available with this analysis note at <http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis>.