

**Interim assessment of UCAS  
acceptances for the 2017 cycle,  
four weeks after A level results day**

**September 2017**

**UCAS Analysis and Research**

## Notes to the report

### Population estimates

The population estimates used for the entry rates in this report are based on the most recent mid-year estimates and national population projections published by the Office for National Statistics.

### Scotland

UCAS covers the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate provision for people living in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, so the statistics on placed applicants and entry rates can be taken as being very close to all recruitment to full-time undergraduate higher education. In Scotland, there is a substantial section of higher education provision that is not included in UCAS' figures. This is mostly full-time higher education provided in further education colleges, which represents around one-third of young full-time undergraduate study in Scotland, and this proportion varies by geography and background within Scotland. Accordingly, figures on entry rates or total recruitment in Scotland reflect only the part of full-time undergraduate study that uses UCAS.

In 2014, there were fewer very late acceptances than in other cycles recorded in the UCAS data for some Scottish providers. These changes may mean that the number of applicants and acceptances to Scottish UCAS providers in 2014 recorded through UCAS could be understated by up to 2,000, compared to how applicants and acceptances have been reported in recent cycles. This means that comparing 2014 applicants and acceptances for Scottish providers (or those from Scotland) to other cycles may not give an accurate measure of change.

In 2015, around 120 courses at Scottish providers which were previously part of the UCAS Teacher Training scheme moved into the UCAS Undergraduate scheme. As such, the number of applicants and acceptances to Scottish providers in 2015 recorded through UCAS will include those which were previously part of UCAS Teacher Training, meaning that comparing 2015 applicants and acceptances for Scottish providers (or those from Scotland, particularly those aged 21 or over) to previous cycles may not give a like-for-like measure of change.

In this report, placed applicant numbers exclude those who applied with a Record of Prior Acceptance (RPA). These are applicants who applied outside of the normal application process, for instance applying directly to the provider.

## Introduction

This report highlights some of the key patterns observed in placed applicants exactly four weeks after GCE A level results day. Typically, 95 per cent of applicants that will be placed by the end of the cycle have already been placed at this point, allowing an accurate assessment what the likely patterns will be once the cycle has closed.

Particular focus is given to comparing this cycle to previous cycles, and in many areas the patterns vary across different groups of applicants. Most notable is the overall reduction in the number of placed applicants compared to the same point last year. Such reductions in placed applicant numbers are rare, with just two other instances in the last eleven years, in 2010 and 2012. However, other patterns remain broadly unchanged from the longer-term trends, for example the number of placed 18 year olds from the UK continues to grow despite a fall in the underlying population.

References are also made to the patterns of demand for undergraduate higher education, measured through the number of applicants at June 30, the final day applicants could apply through the main UCAS application scheme. As UCAS has previously reported, this year the number of applicants at the June deadline was 4 per cent lower than in the previous cycle. However, in many cases, these reductions in demand have not translated into the size of the reductions in numbers of placed applicants that might have been expected.

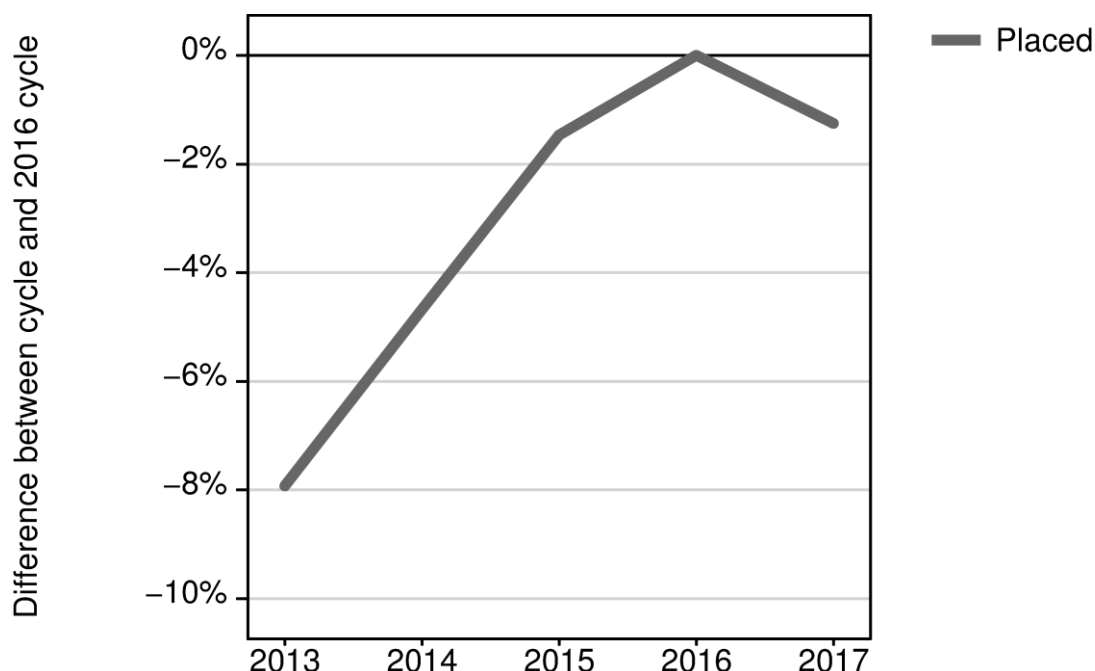
All numbers of placed applicants reported here can be found in the Daily Clearing Analysis reports for 14 September, which are available in the [Data and Analysis section](#) of the UCAS website. These reports contain additional breakdowns not reported here.

A comprehensive analysis of the end of cycle figures will be published later this year, once the 2017 application cycle has closed.

## Fewer applicants placed in 2017 compared to last year, but highest ever number placed through Clearing

Four weeks after A level results day, 505,680 applicants had been placed on full-time undergraduate higher education courses at UK providers during the 2017 cycle. This is 1 per cent lower than the number placed at the equivalent point in the previous cycle (Figure 1), and marginally higher than the number placed at the same point in 2015. It is the first reduction in placed applicants for five years, and only the third reduction since 2006. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of placed applicants had increased between 1 and 6 per cent each year, so the reduction in 2017 represents a substantial change from the recent trend.

**Figure 1: Proportional change in all placed applicants to UK higher education providers, four weeks after A level results day**

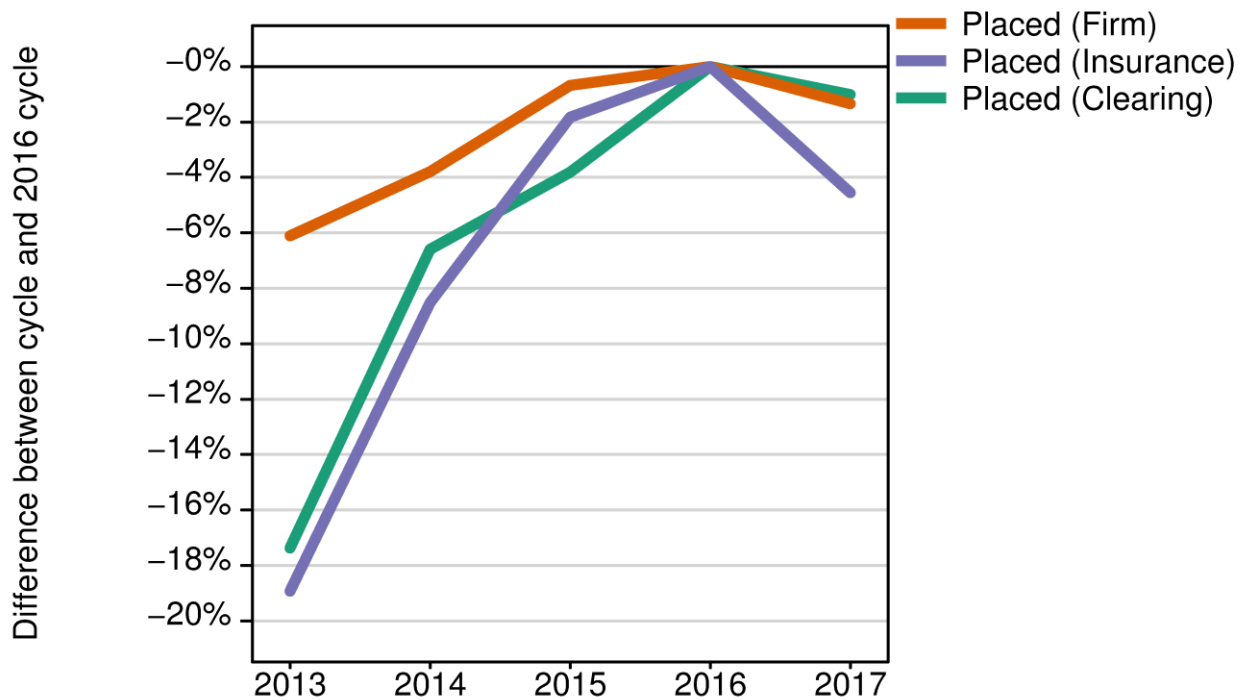


During the 2017 cycle 649,700 applicants made at least one application through the main UCAS application scheme, which runs between September and the end of June. This is a 4 per cent reduction on the number who applied in 2016. Of these, 492,040 have been placed, a reduction of 1 per cent on the number placed at the same point in 2016. The smaller proportional reduction in placed applicants, compared to that of applicants in general, means those who used the main UCAS application scheme were more likely to be placed this year than they were last year.

Figure 2 shows the route through which those who applied through the main UCAS application scheme were placed. 391,730 were placed at their firm (first) choice (1 per cent down on 2016), 37,020 were placed at their insurance choice (5 per cent down on 2016), and 46,310 were placed through Clearing (1 per cent down on 2016). An

additional 16,980 applicants were placed through other routes, for example Extra or Adjustment.

**Figure 2: Proportional change in placed applicants by route, four weeks after A level results day**



Although fewer main scheme applicants were placed through Clearing this year, the total number of applicants placed through Clearing has increased. So far this cycle, 59,950 applicants have been placed through Clearing, an increase of 1 per cent on the 2016 cycle. This increase is due to more people applying after the main UCAS application scheme closed at the end of June, and who went directly into Clearing. This year, 13,640 applicants have been placed in this manner, a 9 per cent increase on last year. This continues the trend of 8 to 9 per cent growth each year in the number of applicants placed directly through Clearing since 2014.

## **Placed applicants from England, Northern Ireland, Wales, and the EU down this year, but placed applicants from Scotland and non-EU up**

The majority (70 per cent) of people who apply to UCAS are domiciled in England. This means the patterns in placed applicants from England will strongly influence the patterns in overall numbers, and potentially hide variations in placed applicant numbers from different countries. Figure 3 shows the change in the proportion of placed applicants at UK providers split by domicile.

Compared to last year, there have been fewer placed applicants from England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the EU. In contrast, the number of placed applicants from Scotland and outside of the EU has increased.

This year, 370,650 applicants from England have been placed at higher education providers across the UK. This is 2 per cent lower than at the same point in 2016, and 1 per cent lower than in 2015. Similar proportional falls are seen in placed applicants from Wales, with 19,350 placed applicants in 2017 – 2 per cent lower than 2016, and 1 per cent lower than 2015. The reduction in placed applicants from England and Wales is a reversal of the recent trend of yearly increases.

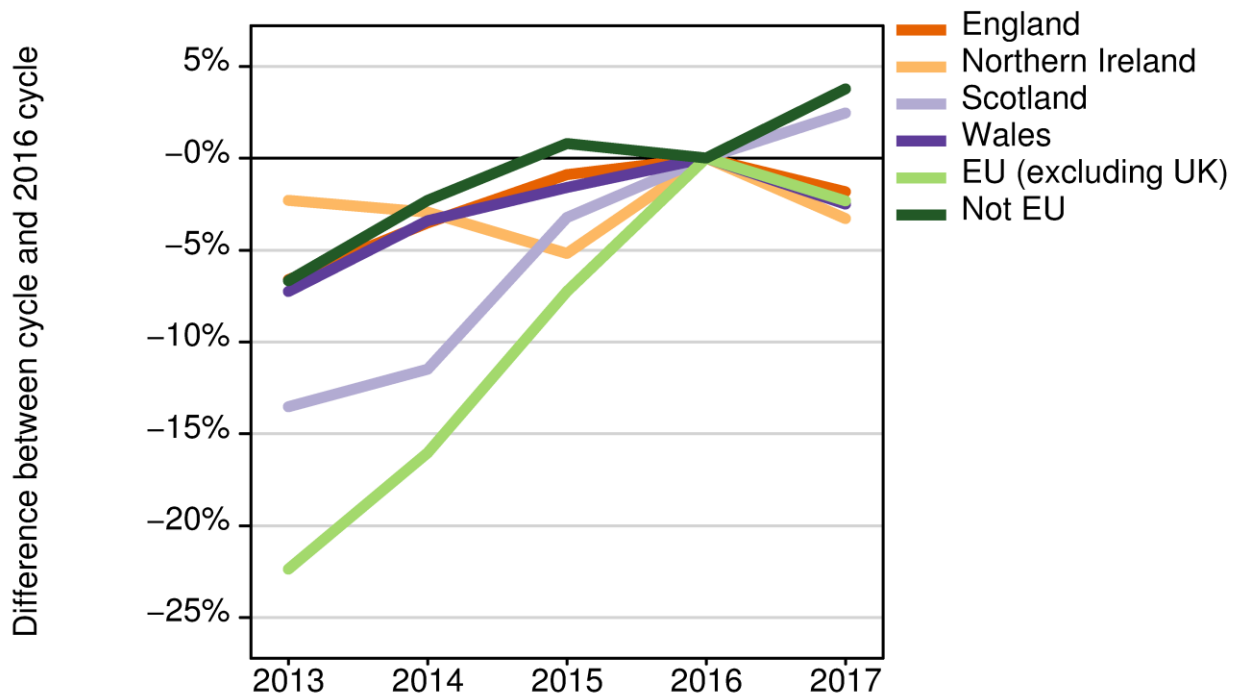
There were 14,400 placed applicants from Northern Ireland, 3 per cent lower than in 2016. The number of placed applicants from Scotland in 2017 is 34,580, an increase of 2 per cent on last year, and the highest number ever recorded at this point in the cycle. The increase in placed applicants from Scotland this year is a continuation of the year-on-year increases since 2013.

Placed applicants from the EU currently stand at 29,850. This is a 2 per cent reduction on last year's numbers, but this is not as large a reduction as might have been expected given the 5 per cent fall in applicants reported at the end of June. However, it is worth noting that in each of the previous four cycles, growth in placed EU applicants was between 5 and 10 per cent. Had this level of growth continued into 2017, the number placed from the EU would have been around 7 per cent higher than it currently stands.

There have been 36,850 placed applicants from outside the EU so far this cycle, an increase of 4 per cent compared to last year, and a reversal of the fall in placed applicants in 2016. This is the highest number of non-EU placed applicants recorded at this point in the cycle.

The combined number of placed EU and non-EU applicants to UK providers has increased this year. In contrast, the combined number of placed applicants from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales is lower than it was this time last year.

Figure 3: Proportional change in placed applicants by country of domicile, four weeks after A level results day



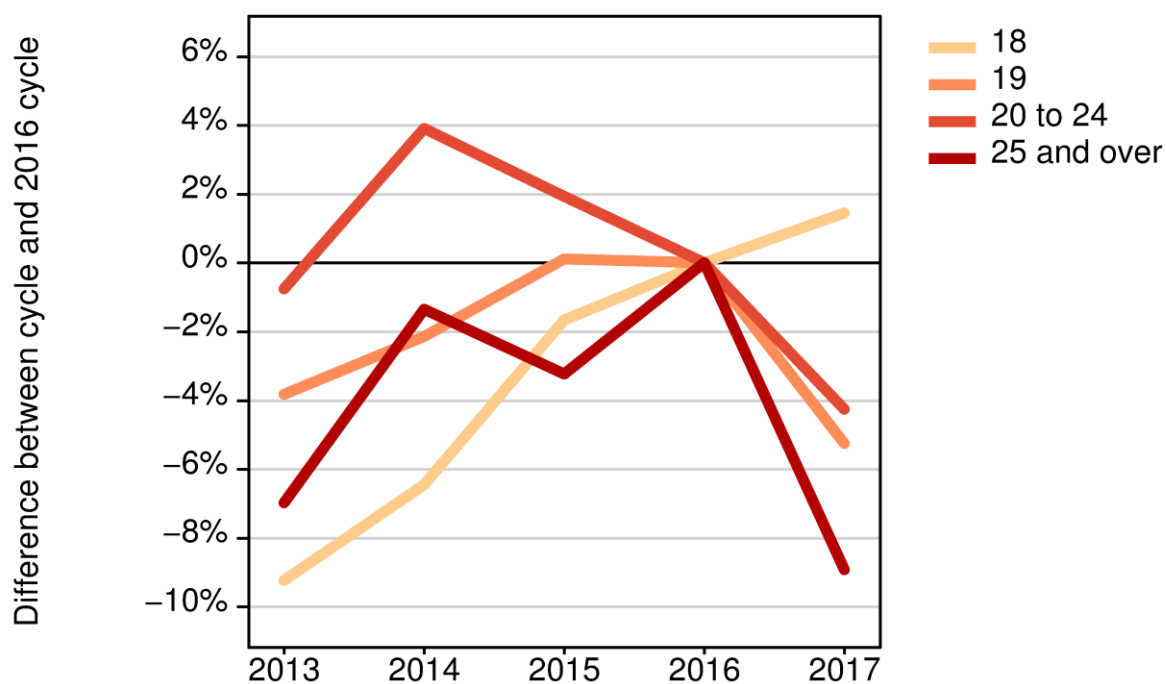
## Number of placed 18 year olds from England continues to increase, but reductions among older age groups

The reduction in the number of placed applicants from across the UK hides substantial variation in patterns by age. The number of UK 18 year olds placed into higher education this year has increased, despite a 1 per cent fall in the 18 year old population this year, while the number of placed applicants from older age groups has fallen.

Figure 4 shows the number of placed applicants from England by age, which closely matches the patterns across the UK as a whole. The number of placed 18 year old applicants is 207,720, an increase of 1 per cent compared to last year, and a continuation of the year-on-year growth in numbers since 2013.

In contrast, the number of applicants aged 19 or older placed this year has fallen sharply, with the number lower than at any point in the last four years.

**Figure 4: Proportional change in placed applicants from England by age, four weeks after A level results day**



The patterns by age group are different for each of the four UK countries. In contrast to England, the growth in the number of placed applicants from Scotland is entirely due to increases in older age groups, most notably those aged 25 and over, which has increased by 8 per cent to 6,610 in 2017. The number of placed Scottish 18 year olds grew modestly and currently stands at 14,610.



The pattern of placed applicants from Wales shows a clear separation between those aged 18 and 19, and those aged 20 and older. The number of 18 year olds from Wales placed this year is 10,350, a reduction of 3 per cent, while the number of 19 year old is 3,610, a reduction of 6 per cent. By contrast, the number of placed applicants from Wales aged 20 to 24 is 3,220, an increase of 2 per cent, while the number aged 25 and over currently placed is 2,160, an increase of 3 per cent.

The number of placed applicants from Northern Ireland has fallen across all age groups this year, with the exception of the 20 to 24 year old group, which increased by 2 per cent.

## **18 year olds from England and Scotland more likely than ever to be placed into HE through UCAS**

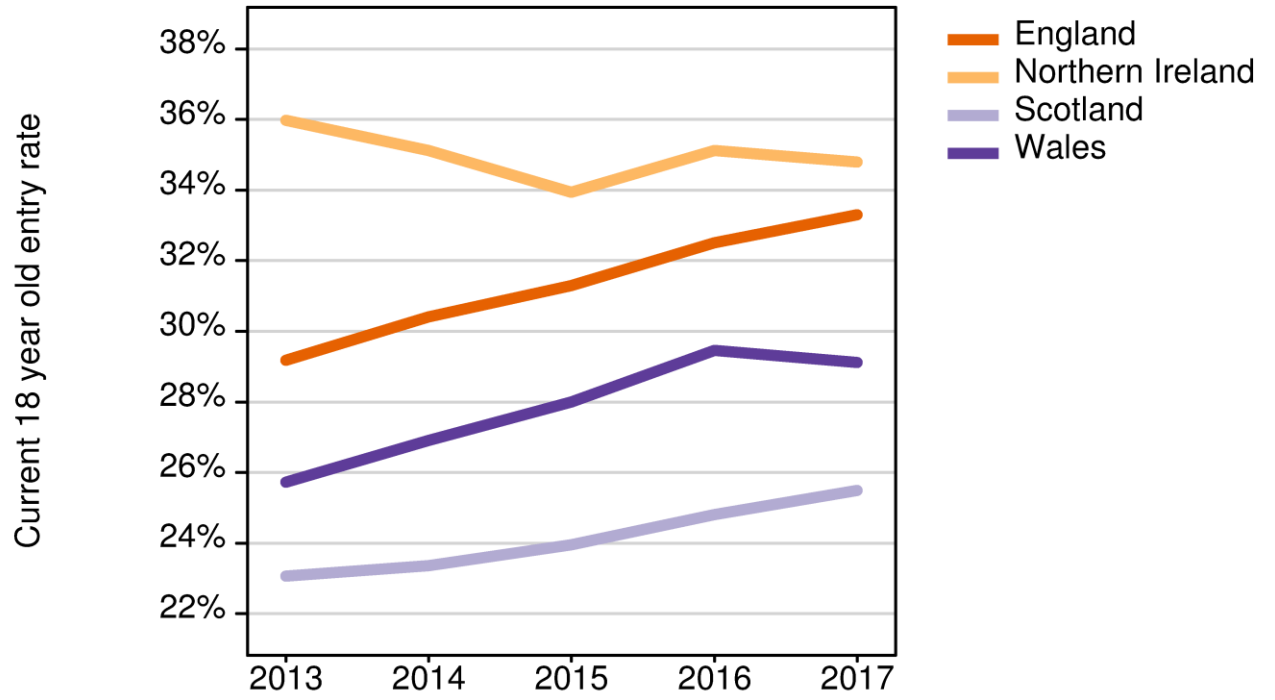
The 18 year old entry rate is the proportion of the 18 year old population accepted into higher education through UCAS, and measures how likely young people are to enter higher education in a particular year. Figure 5 shows the 18 year old entry rates four weeks after A level results day, for each of the four UK countries.

In both England and Scotland, the entry rates have increased every year since 2013 to reach their highest recorded values in 2017. This year, the 18 year old entry rate for England is 33.3 per cent, an increase of 0.8 percentage points, while for Scotland it is 25.5 per cent, an increase of 0.7 percentage points. These increases mean that 18 year olds in England are 2 per cent more likely to be placed into higher education than they were last year, while 18 year olds in Scotland are 3 per cent more likely.

In contrast, the entry rates in Northern Ireland and Wales have fallen this year. In Northern Ireland, the entry rate is currently 34.8 per cent, a 0.3 percentage point reduction on 2016, but broadly similar to the entry rates in recent years.

In Wales, the entry rate is currently 29.1 per cent, a reduction of 0.4 percentage points, but a marked deviation from the longer-term trend of increasing entry rates each year between 2013 and 2016. If this longer-term trend had continued, like it has for England and Scotland, an entry rate of around 31 per cent (2 percentage points higher than observed) might have been expected. Despite being slightly less likely to enter higher education this year, the entry rate for Wales is the second highest on record, with 18 year olds from Wales being per 4 cent more likely to enter than they were in 2015, and 13 per cent more likely to enter than in 2013.

Figure 5: 18 year old entry rates by country, four weeks after A level results day



## Similar increases in numbers of young UK men and women who have been placed this cycle, but the sex gap set to remain unchanged

More women apply and are placed into higher education than men. The UK 18 year old entry rate for women is also higher than that of young men, and over the last decade this gap in the chances of entering higher education between women and men has widened.

Figure 6 shows the changes in the number of 18 year old UK men and women placed into higher education this year with respect to the 2016 cycle. This year, 135,940 18 year old women have been placed, along with 105,150 18 year old men. This represents 1 per cent increases in the number of 18 year old UK men and women placed into higher education compared to the same point last year.

**Figure 6: Proportional change in 18 year old placed applicants from the UK by sex, four weeks after A level results day**

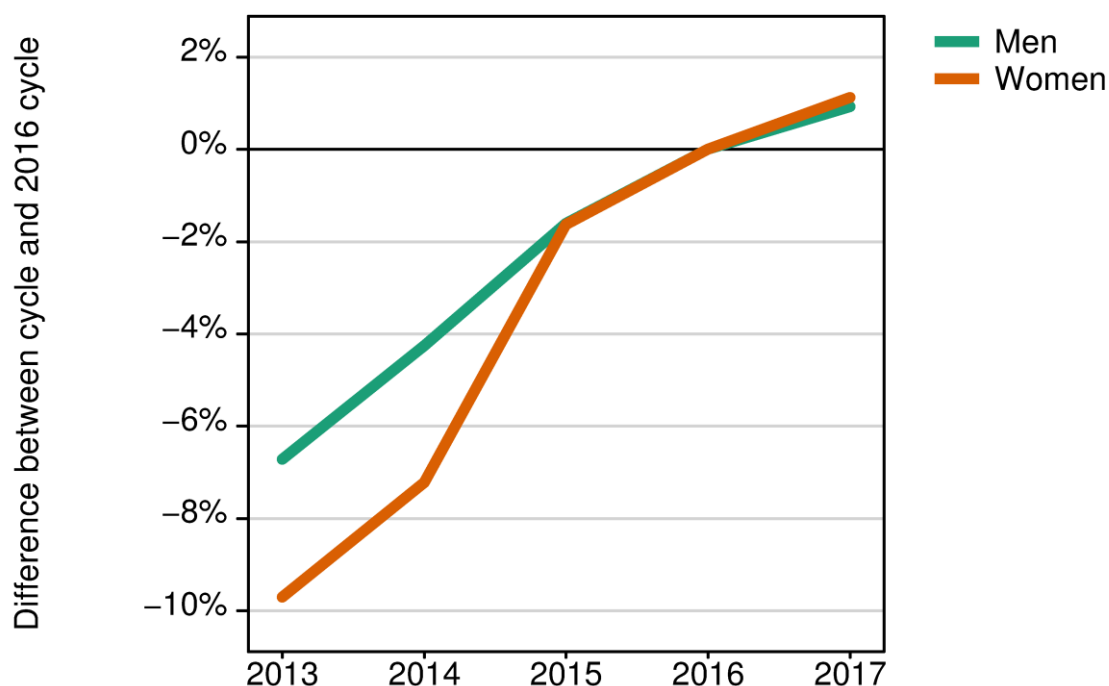
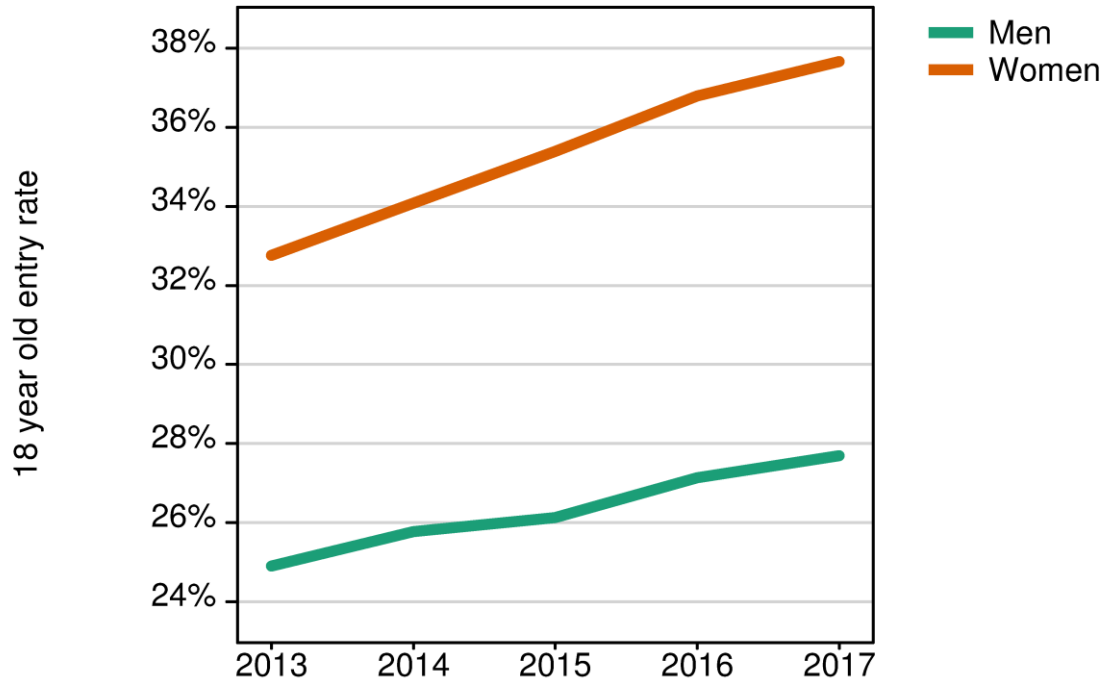


Figure 7 shows the trends in the UK 18 year old entry rates for men and women between 2013 and 2017. So far this cycle, 37.7 per cent of UK 18 year old women have been placed, compared to 27.7 per cent of 18 year old men. This means young women are currently 36 per cent more likely to have been placed into higher education this year than young men, a proportional difference that is unchanged from last year.

Figure 7: UK 18 year old entry rates by sex, four weeks after A level results day



## Increase in placed 18 year olds from all backgrounds, with the gap between most and least disadvantaged set to fall slightly

Figure 8 shows the change in the number of placed applicants, compared to 2016, by POLAR3 quintile. The POLAR3 classification aggregates small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in higher education. Areas in quintile 1 are those with the lowest young participation rates, and described here as the most disadvantaged, while areas in quintile 5 have the highest participation rates, and are described here as the most advantaged.

The number of placed 18 year old applicants has increased across all POLAR3 quintiles this year, with the largest increase among those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK. This year, 26,130 18 year old applicants from quintile 1 have been placed, a proportional increase of 3 per cent on last year.

**Figure 8: Proportional change in 18 year old placed applicants from the UK by POLAR3 quintile, four weeks after A level results day**

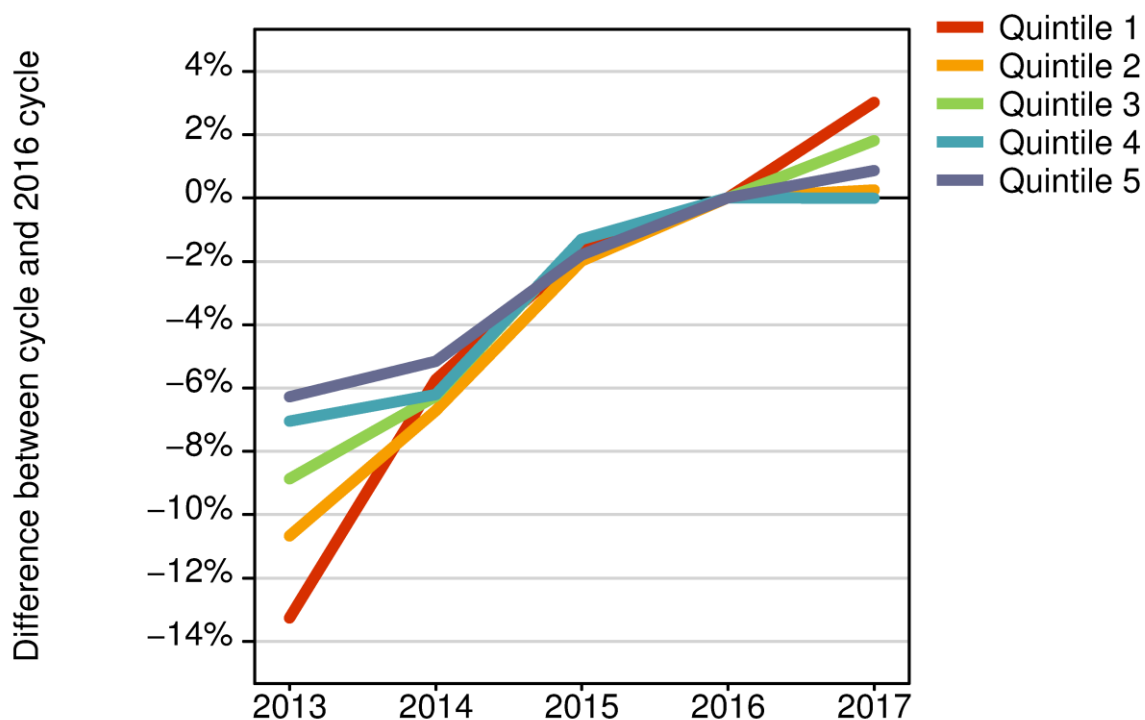
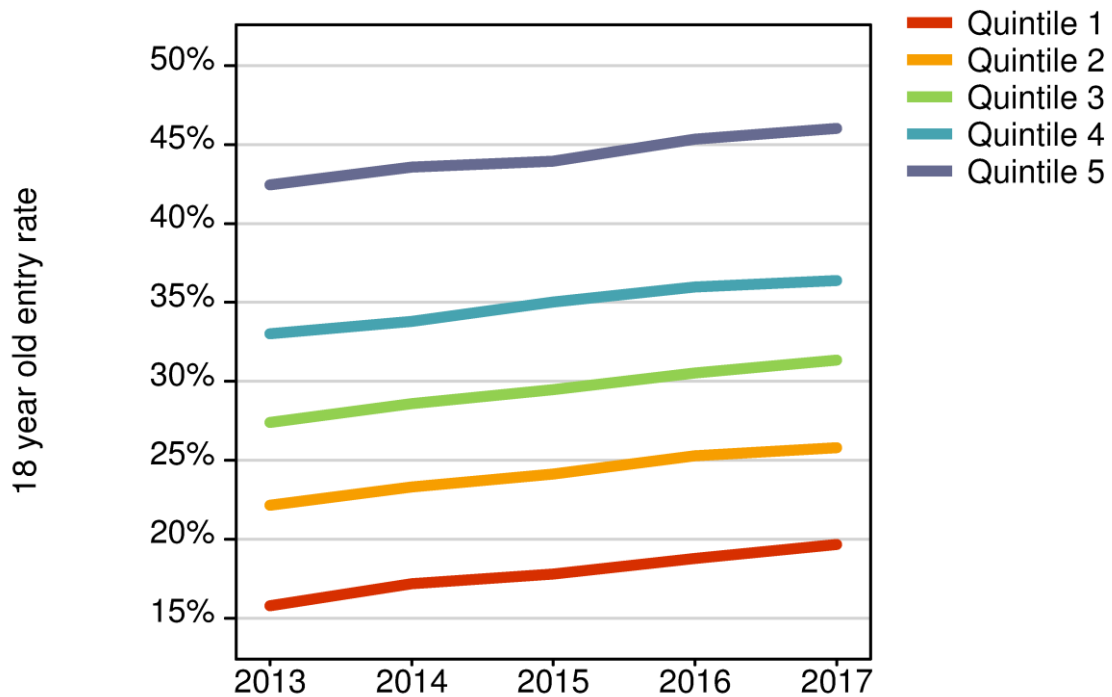


Figure 9 shows the trends in the entry rates of UK 18 year olds from each POLAR3 quintile. The entry rates have increased in all quintiles to reach the highest levels on record, indicating that young people from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than ever before to enter higher education this year.

The entry rate for quintile 1 this year stands at 19.6 per cent, up by 0.8 percentage points on the same point in the previous cycle. The entry rate for quintile 5 is currently

46.0 per cent, an increase of 0.7 percentage points on 2016. This bigger increase in entry rate among the most disadvantaged means that the gap in entry to higher education between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged has reduced. This year, young people from the most advantaged parts of the UK are 2.3 times more likely to enter higher education than those from the most disadvantaged areas, down from 2.4 times more likely last year.

**Figure 9: UK 18 year old entry rates by POLAR3 quintile, four weeks after A level results day**



## **Fall in placed applicants concentrated among lower tariff providers, as medium and higher tariff providers continue to grow**

The removal of student number controls in England, the reduction in the UK 18 year old population, an increasing proportion of older age groups gaining HE-level qualifications at a younger age, reforms to Level 3 qualifications, and uncertainty around future financial support for EU students have all contributed to an increasingly competitive higher education market for providers over recent years.

The 2015 cycle gave the first indication that the growth seen across the sector in previous cycles was not sustainable, and that while some providers continued to increase their student intake, the increasingly competitive market was resulting in other providers to undergo reductions in recruitment. These differences can be seen in Figure 10, which shows how higher and medium tariff providers have increased their placed applicant numbers each year since 2013, while lower tariff providers have not grown since 2014, and have reduced in size each year since 2016.

The number of placed applicants at higher tariff providers currently stands at 149,300, an increase of less than 1 per cent compared to 2016. This is relatively modest growth compared to the larger proportional increases between 2013 and 2016, and suggests these providers may be consolidating their growth in recent cycles.

The biggest increase in placed applicants this year has been at medium tariff providers, which have placed 169,430 applicants this cycle, an increase of 2 per cent. Although this is a smaller proportional increase than seen for this group of providers in recent years, it may suggest that medium tariff providers wish to increase in size this year.

Lower tariff providers have placed 186,950 applicants so far this cycle. This is a 5 per cent reduction compared to the same point last year, and 7 per cent lower than at the same point in the 2015 cycle. The [2016 UCAS End of Cycle Report](#) shows how the reduction in lower tariff providers was due, in part, to medium tariff providers placing more applicants with attainment levels that lower tariff providers would typically recruit. The patterns described above suggest the same could be happening this cycle.



**Figure 10: Proportional change in all placed applicants to UK providers by tariff group, four weeks after A level results day**

