

UK application rates by the January deadline

UCAS

2018 cycle

UCAS Analysis and Insights
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Contents

Key findings.....	3
Introduction	8
Application rates of 18 year olds by country	10
Application rates of 18 year olds by region	12
Application rates of 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency	18
Application rates of 18 year olds by sex	21
Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas (POLAR3)	24
Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas in Scotland (SIMD)	29
Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex (POLAR3)	31
Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas (POLAR4)	33
Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex (POLAR4)	38
Application rates of UK 18 year olds by qualification	40
19 year old 'first time' application rates by country	43
Cohort demand for higher education covering 18 and 19 year olds.....	45
Reapplication rates of previously unplaced 18 year old UK applicants	47
Interaction between the acceptance rate of 18 year olds and the reapplication rate	49
Application rates by age	51
Annex A: 18 year old population context	55
Incorporating population estimates	58
A note on numbers in Scotland	60
A note on POLAR3, POLAR4, and SIMD	61

Key findings

January deadline application rates provide the first reliable indication of demand from young people for full-time undergraduate higher education

UCAS is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. People who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline are considered 'equal consideration' applicants for the majority of courses. Application rates (the proportion of the population who apply) for those who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline, give the first reliable indicator of demand for full-time higher education from young people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, there is a substantial component (around one third of young full-time undergraduate study) where admissions are not processed through UCAS (see note at the end of this report). Consequently, for Scotland, this report reflects the trends in applications that are recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

Application rates for 18 year olds from England increased to new high

18 year olds from England were more likely to apply to higher education through UCAS than in any previous year, with an application rate of 37.4 per cent. This is an increase of 0.4 percentage points on 2017, meaning applicants were 1.1 per cent more likely to have applied this year than last year. This is a similar increase to that seen last year, and far smaller than the increases seen following the drop in 2012.

Wales (32.0 per cent) saw an increase of 1 per cent in its 18 year old application rate, reversing much of the decline from the previous year. The application rate for Northern Ireland (47.5 per cent) remained the same as in 2017, while Scotland (32.5 per cent) saw a decrease of 0.5 per cent in their 18 year old application rate.

Cohort application rates for young people decline in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Overall, demand from young people for higher education can be measured through cohort rates that report the proportion of the cohort of young people who have applied either aged 18 or, a year later, aged 19. They give a fuller picture of demand from young people that is not affected by year-to-year changes in whether applicants decide to apply for the first time aged 18 or 19.

The cohort application rates for those aged 18 in 2017 and 19 in 2018 have declined in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, and increased in Scotland. In England, they decreased to 45.1 per cent, 54.1 per cent in Northern Ireland and 39.0 in Wales. The Scottish cohort application rate increased to 39.4 per cent.

Application rates increased for all older age groups in Scotland, but decreased for most age groups in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales

Application rates are typically lower for older age groups, and it is more difficult to interpret trends at the January deadline, as there are proportionally more applications received from these groups later in the cycle, compared to young applicants.

The 'first time' application rates at age 19 only include those applicants who did not apply in the previous cycle. In 2018, the first time application rate decreased for 19 year olds in England (8.0 per cent) and Northern Ireland (6.4 per cent), with increases in Wales (7.2 per cent) and Scotland (6.0 per cent).

In 2018, the application rate in Scotland increased across all groups aged 20 years or older, with record high application rates across the majority of older age groups. The continues the general upward trend seen since 2006.

In England, application rates from the majority of older applicants decreased, with the exception of 21 year olds. Application rates in Wales showed similar declines, with increases seen only in 21, 23, and 40 to 60 year olds. Application rates in Northern Ireland also declined for older age groups, with the exception of 21, 25 to 29 and 40 to 60 year olds.

Increases in 18 year old application rates in two thirds of English regions

Application rates for the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, Scotland, and the East of England declined in 2018, by between -0.4 per cent and -4.6 per cent. However, the majority of regions saw growth in application rates, with the greatest growth being in the East Midlands, the South East, and London, where 18 year old applicants were respectively 3.0 per cent, 2.7 per cent, and 2.4 per cent more likely than last year to apply to higher education.

The highest application rate in England was for London (47.5 per cent in 2018), where 18 year olds were over a quarter more likely to apply to higher education than 18 year olds from England as a whole.

Similar trends in application rates can be seen at higher resolutions of geography, where the application rates of 18 year olds in each parliamentary constituency roughly follow regional trends. Because the 18 year old population in constituencies is smaller relative to regions, they are subject to larger fluctuations from year to year. 18 year old application rates by constituency vary between 18 per cent and 72 per cent – around 40 per cent of the constituencies had between 30 and 40 per cent of the 18 year old population apply to higher education in 2018.

Application rates of POLAR3 disadvantaged 18 year olds in the UK reach highest recorded levels

In 2018, application rates of 18 year olds living in educationally disadvantaged areas (POLAR3 quintile 1) in England increased to the highest levels recorded (22.6 per

cent). The rate also increased in Northern Ireland (24.5 per cent), and remained constant in Wales (19.7 per cent).

The application rate increased from the most advantaged backgrounds (POLAR3 quintile 5) in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales. The ratio of application rates between the most and least advantaged decreased, with advantaged UK 18 year olds being 2.3 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged UK 18 year olds, compared to 2.4 times in 2017.

Application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in Scotland, defined using the latest 2016 version of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation¹, decreased in 2018, to 16.7 per cent. This was the first decrease seen since 2008. The application rate for applicants living in the most advantaged areas in Scotland increased by 1.9 per cent, widening the gap between the most and least advantaged applicants.

Application rates of POLAR4 disadvantaged 18 year olds in the UK reach highest recorded levels

POLAR4 is the most recent classification of level of advantage, updated from the previous POLAR3 classification.

In 2018, application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in England and Northern Ireland increased to the highest levels recorded, and marginally decreased in Wales. Application rates from the most disadvantaged areas were 22.2 per cent in England, 25.6 per cent in Northern Ireland, and 19.9 per cent in Wales.

The application rate increased from the most advantaged backgrounds in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales. The ratio of application rates between the most and least advantaged remained stable, with advantaged UK 18 year olds being 2.4 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged UK 18 year olds.

Differences in application rates between 18 year old men and women in 2018 remain high

Across the UK, 18 year old women are more likely to apply than men. In England, women are 36 per cent more likely than men to apply to higher education, a small increase from last year.

In Scotland, an increase in the rate of 18 year old men applying, and a decrease in the rate for women applying, means that Scottish women are now 56 per cent more likely to apply than men, a reduction compared to 2017. In Wales, the difference in application rates in 2018 increased, with women being 48.0 per cent more likely to apply in 2018. In Northern Ireland, women are 40.4 per cent more likely to apply than men, a slight increase compared to 2017.

¹ Source: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

18 year old women are more likely to apply than men across all backgrounds, but to a greater extent in disadvantaged areas (by POLAR3 and POLAR4 classifications). In POLAR3 quintile 1 areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old women grew more than 1.2 times as much as the rate for men, meaning women are now 66 per cent more likely to apply than men in these areas than they were in 2006. In advantaged areas, 18 year old women are 21 per cent more likely to apply than men.

Stable application rate of applicants studying A levels in 2018 – BTEC application rate falls

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying for at least three A levels (not in combination with other qualifications) marginally decreased in 2018 to 23.5 per cent. 2018 is the first year that the proportion has not increased since 2013, after falling to its lowest level in 2012.

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying Level 3 BTEC qualifications has decreased again this year, after strong growth between 2012 and 2015. In 2018, the proportion who applied while studying only BTECs was 3.4 per cent, a drop of 0.1 percentage points compared to last year, but still 41 per cent higher than in 2012. The proportion who apply while studying for BTECs in combination with A levels was 1.6 per cent in 2018, the first time there has been a decrease in application rates for this qualification group.

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying for Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Highers or Advanced Highers, or the International Baccalaureate, has remained constant since 2010. In 2018, 2.2 per cent of UK 18 year olds applied while studying SQA Highers or Advanced Highers, and 0.3 per cent applied while studying for the International Baccalaureate.

Reapplication rates of unplaced UK 18 year olds drops marginally in 2018, but persistent demand reaches record high

Around 15 to 20 per cent of 18 year old UK applicants are typically unplaced at the end of the undergraduate application cycle.

The proportion of these unplaced applicants who reapplied aged 19 in the 2018 cycle is 42.5 per cent in England, 35.8 per cent in Wales, 37.9 per cent in Scotland, and 33.1 per cent in Northern Ireland. These reapplication rates have fallen in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales compared to recent cycles, although they are substantially higher than levels typical for cohorts aged 18 in 2006 and 2007.

In England, 19 year old reapplication rates decreased by 0.5 per cent, while the 18 year old acceptance rate for this cohort increased by 0.5 per cent. The proportion of 18 year olds who, having applied in 2017, were either accepted in 2017 or reapplied in 2018, has remained at 92 per cent for the fifth consecutive year.

January deadline application rates take account of population changes

January deadline application rates are the first reliable indicators of changes in demand for higher education from the UK.

Application rates – the proportion of the population who apply – are the best measures of changes in applicant behaviour, as they account for the size of the population.

The 18 year old population is estimated to have decreased in size in 2018 by 14,700 in England, 1,000 in Northern Ireland, 1,800 in Scotland, and 1,100 in Wales. These decreases are set against a longer term trend of a decreasing 18 year old population, and there are now 8.8 to 14.7 per cent fewer 18 year olds in each country across the UK than there were in 2009.

The January deadline application rates for 18 year olds are a particularly important indicator, since they have generally not had the opportunity to apply in earlier cycles, and nearly all their applications are made by this point.

Introduction

Applications for entry to higher education (HE) through UCAS provide the first measures of the demand for full-time undergraduate study. People who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline are considered 'equal consideration' applicants for the majority of courses. These deadline applicants account for the majority (typically 85 per cent) of all UK domiciled applicants in a cycle, and almost all (typically 97 per cent) of 18 year old UK domiciled applicants. Their numbers can be used to measure trends in demand for this type of higher education.

In England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, the applicants and acceptances recorded through UCAS represent the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate higher education. In Scotland, there is a substantial component of full-time higher education (around one third of young full-time higher education) where admissions are not processed centrally through UCAS (see note at the end of this report). Consequently, the levels and trends for demand for full-time undergraduate higher education in Scotland in this report reflect that for the provision that is recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

One way to measure demand for higher education from the UK is through application rates. These report the proportion of a group of the population that makes an application. As such, they directly measure demand in terms of the propensity to apply to higher education. The advantage of using application rates is that they show trends in this measure of demand without being affected by year-to-year changes in the population size. This is important as changes in the population size can have a substantial effect on applicant numbers, often as large as any change in application rate, and the demographic trends for different age groups can vary.

The population estimates used for the application rates in this report are based on mid-year estimates and national population projections published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and based on the 2011 census (see the note at end of this report for further details).

The main analysis looks at trends in the application rate of 18 year olds by country, region, parliamentary constituency, area-based background, sex, and qualifications. This age group has the highest application rate to UCAS – they account for around half of UK applicants at the January deadline, and (in previous cycles) nearly all the cycle total is recorded by the January deadline. They are a particularly important group when using application rate trends to assess demand for higher education – they will not have had a previous opportunity to apply to higher education, so their trends can be assessed without making allowance for application or entry rates in previous cycles.

After 18 year olds, the next largest age-specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret, since it is influenced by the

application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds typically fall into one of two categories – applying for the first time, or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18. Therefore, the demand by country at age 19 is investigated through application rates for ‘first time’ applicants, and the overall demand from young people by country is reported through cohort rates that measure the proportion of a young cohort that have applied either aged 18 or aged 19.

The January deadline is the first opportunity to assess the extent to which unplaced 18 year old applicants from the previous cycle have made another application (‘reapplication’) through UCAS. These reapplication rates give another indicator of demand for higher education, and are examined by country of domicile. Reapplication rates can vary considerably from cycle to cycle, but when considered alongside the acceptance rate in the previous cycle, give rise to a measure of persistent demand that is relatively consistent.

Application rates by country for older age groups are also reported. These are more complex to interpret, as they have the potential to be affected by changes in the entry rate at earlier ages.

Data files to allow the replication of all the figures in this report (see note on POLAR3, POLAR4, and SIMD at the end of this report) are available with this publication on the UCAS website.

Application rates of 18 year olds by country

January deadline 18 year old application rates (the proportion of the 18 year old population making an application through UCAS by the January deadline) by UK country, are shown in Figure 1.

In 2018, the application rate of 18 year olds in England who applied for full-time higher education through UCAS by the January deadline (37.4 per cent), reached the highest level recorded, for the fifth year running. The application rate in Wales (32.0 per cent) also increased, to the second highest on record, following a decrease the previous cycle. The application rate in Northern Ireland (47.5 per cent) remained the same, while Scotland (32.5 per cent) saw a decrease in application rate.

In England in 2018, application rates increased by 0.4 percentage points (1.1 per cent proportionally) from 2017. This is the sixth successive increase in the application rate following a decrease in 2012.

Application rates for 18 year olds in Wales increased in 2018 by 0.3 percentage points (1.0 per cent proportionally).

Application rates in Scotland changed very little between 2010 and 2013 – the increase in 2010 coincided with more HE in Scotland using UCAS, as generally not all HE in Scotland uses UCAS (see note at the end of this report). From 2014 to 2016, the application rate grew steadily, remaining at a similar level in 2017, then decreasing by 0.2 percentage points (-0.5 per cent proportionally) in 2018.

In 2018, the application rate in Northern Ireland remained unchanged from 2017. Since 2010, application rates for Northern Ireland have been at the same level (around 46 to 48 per cent) with some variations year-on-year, including a decrease in 2012 at the same time as application rates in England decreased.

Figure 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country

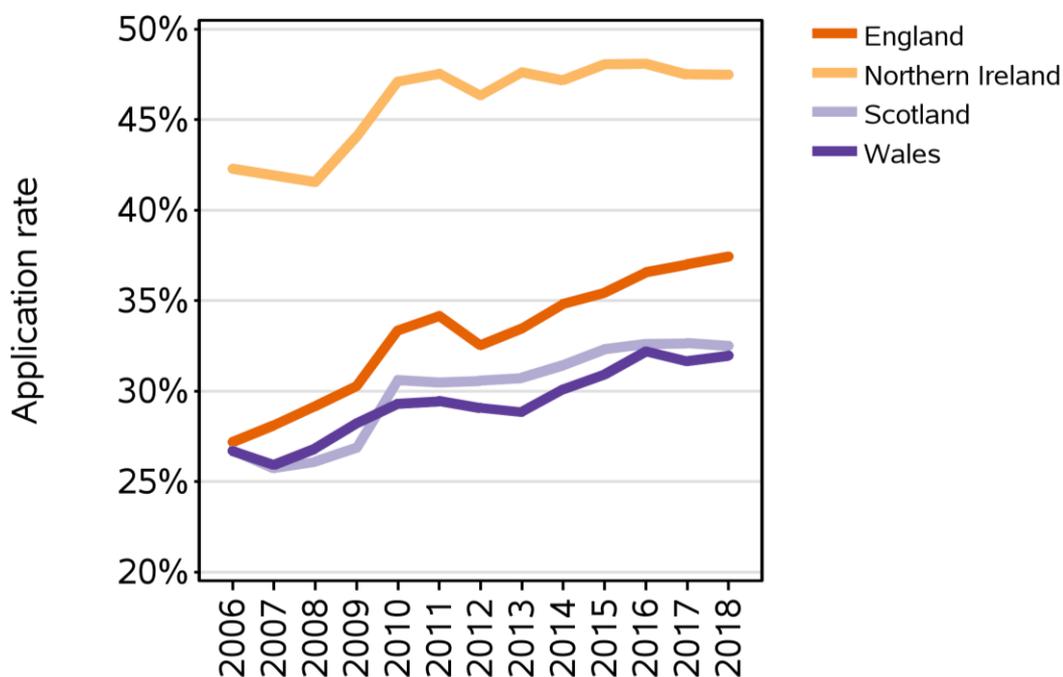


Table 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	27.2%	28.1%	29.2%	30.3%	33.4%	34.2%	32.5%	33.5%	34.8%	35.4%	36.6%	37.0%	37.4%
Northern Ireland	42.3%	41.9%	41.6%	44.1%	47.1%	47.6%	46.3%	47.6%	47.2%	48.1%	48.1%	47.5%	47.5%
Scotland	26.7%	25.7%	26.1%	26.9%	30.6%	30.5%	30.6%	30.7%	31.4%	32.3%	32.6%	32.6%	32.5%
Wales	26.7%	25.9%	26.8%	28.2%	29.3%	29.5%	29.1%	28.9%	30.1%	30.9%	32.2%	31.7%	32.0%
UK	27.6%	28.3%	29.2%	30.3%	33.4%	34.1%	32.7%	33.5%	34.7%	35.4%	36.4%	36.8%	37.1%

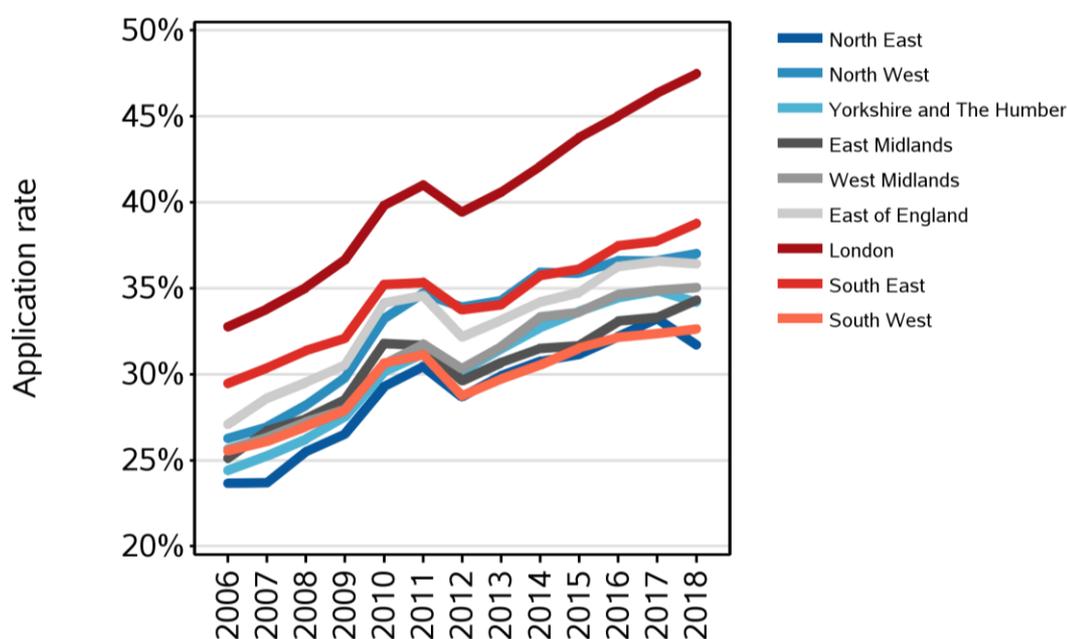
Application rates of 18 year olds by region

As the 18 year old population of England (around 610k) is much larger than the populations of Scotland (around 55k), Northern Ireland (around 25k), and Wales (around 35k), this allows the subdivision of application rates for England by region.

Figure 2 shows the 18 year old application rate for applicants from the nine regions of England. In all regions, the application rate has increased since 2006 and, in general, each region reflects the national trend of increases or decreases. For instance, the application rate in 2012 fell in all regions, and generally increased in subsequent cycles. The highest application rate in each year from 2006 to 2018 was from London (47.5 per cent in 2018). The lowest application rate from the period was from the North East in 2006 (23.7 per cent) – the North East also had the lowest application rate for 18 year olds in 2018 (31.7 per cent).

This variation across regions means that in 2018, 18 year olds from London were 50 per cent more likely to apply, compared to 18 year olds from the North East. The greatest proportional increase in the application rate over the period is from London (45 per cent proportional increase, from 32.8 per cent in 2006 to 47.5 per cent in 2018), and the smallest proportional increase is from the South East (32 per cent proportional increase, from 29.5 per cent in 2006 to 38.8 per cent in 2018).

Figure 2 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region



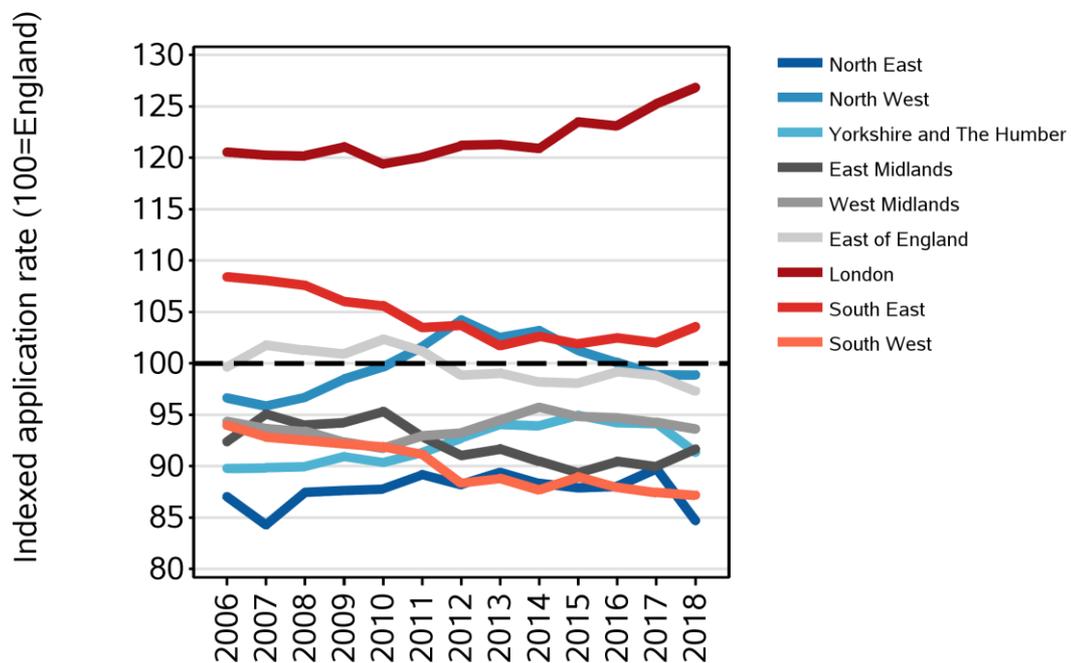
A large part of the year-to-year changes in each region's application rate is a reflection of the national trend. Therefore, a clearer picture of how application rates by region are changing relative to each other is given by taking away the effect of the national trend. This is done in Figure 3, which uses the same application rates by region, but shows them indexed to the national average, so that an index of 100 represents the 18 year old application rate for the whole of England that year. For example, in 2018, the application rate in London is 27 per cent higher (proportionally) than the national average, and therefore, 18 year olds from London are over a quarter more likely to apply, compared to 18 year olds from England as a whole.

Since 2006, the application rate in the North West has increased from being around 3 per cent (proportionally) below the national average, to being only 1 per cent below the national average in 2018.

In contrast, over the same period, the application rate from the South East has changed from being 8 per cent above the national average to being 4 per cent above it, despite an increase this year. The application rate from the South West has seen a steady decrease relative to the national average, changing from being 6 per cent below the national average to being 13 per cent below in 2018. The South East remains one of the regions with the lowest application rates in the country, alongside the North East. In 2018, application rates from the North East fell to 15 per cent below the national average, a fall of 5 percentage points from the previous year, making it the region with the lowest application rate, and reversing the entirety of the increase seen in 2017.

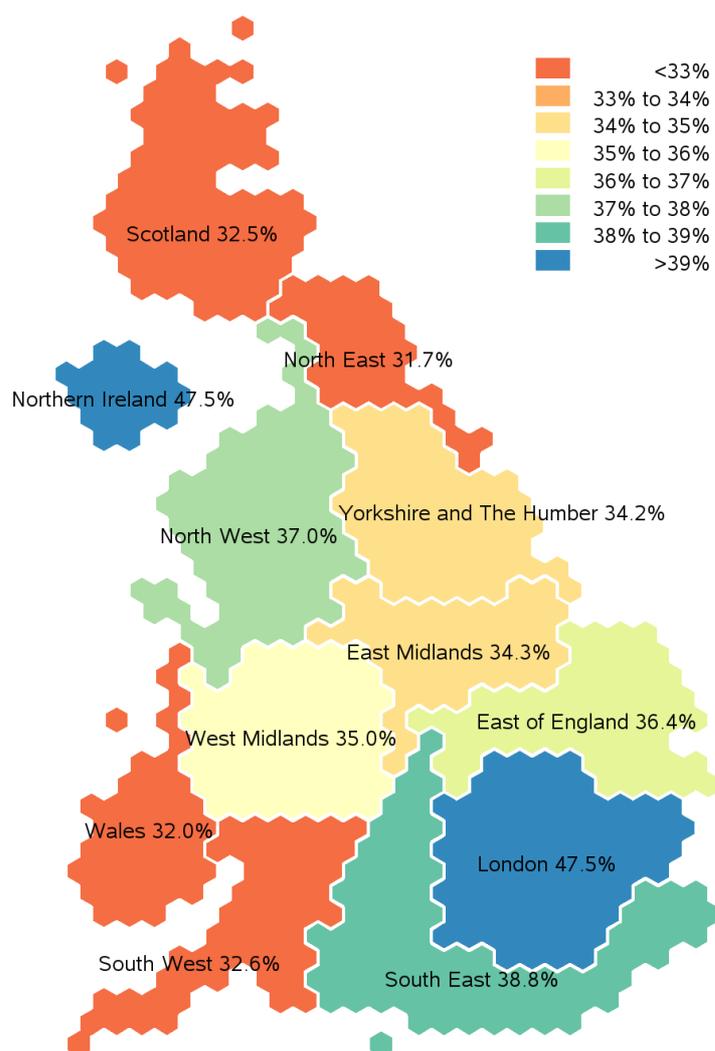
Some of these changes have reduced or reversed the relative application rate differences between regions over the period. In 2006, 18 year olds in the South East were 12 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the North West. In 2018, this decreased so that 18 year olds in the South East were 5 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the North West. In 2006, 18 year olds in the South West were 5 per cent proportionally more likely to apply to higher education than those living in Yorkshire and the Humber. In 2018, this has been reversed to 18 year olds from Yorkshire and the Humber being 5 per cent (proportionally) more likely to apply than those in the South West.

Figure 3 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region (indexed to 100 = England)



The geographical patterns of English regional application rates, together with application rates for countries elsewhere in the UK (for the most part, demand for HE in further education colleges in Scotland is not recorded – see note at the end of this report), can be shown on maps. Figure 4 maps the 2018 application rates for 18 year olds. The maps used (see Thomas, B. and Dorling, D., 2007, Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas, Bristol: Policy Press) are designed so that the size of each area approximates the size of its population, and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the areas. Among these units of English regions and other UK countries, Northern Ireland and London (both 47.5 per cent) had the highest application rates in 2018. The North East (31.7 per cent), Wales (32.0 per cent), Scotland (32.5 per cent), and the South West (32.6 per cent) are the regions where application rates were lowest in 2018.

Figure 4 January deadline application rates in 2018 for UK 18 year olds by region and country



The geographical patterns of proportional changes in application rates between 2006 and 2018 are shown in Figure 5. Three regions – London, the North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber – have seen the highest proportional increases, with application rates in each of these regions increasing by at least 40 per cent. The East Midlands, West Midlands, North East, and East of England have also seen proportional increases of over a third. Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland saw the lowest proportional increases over this period (under 23 per cent).

Figure 5 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2006 and 2018 for UK 18 year olds by region and country

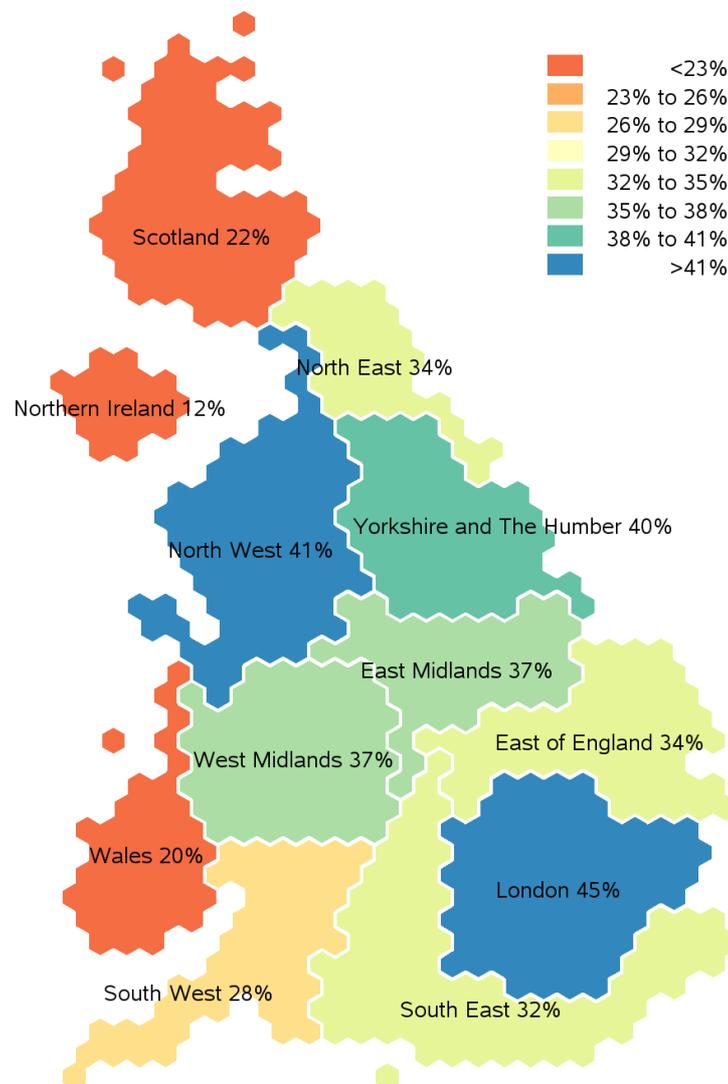
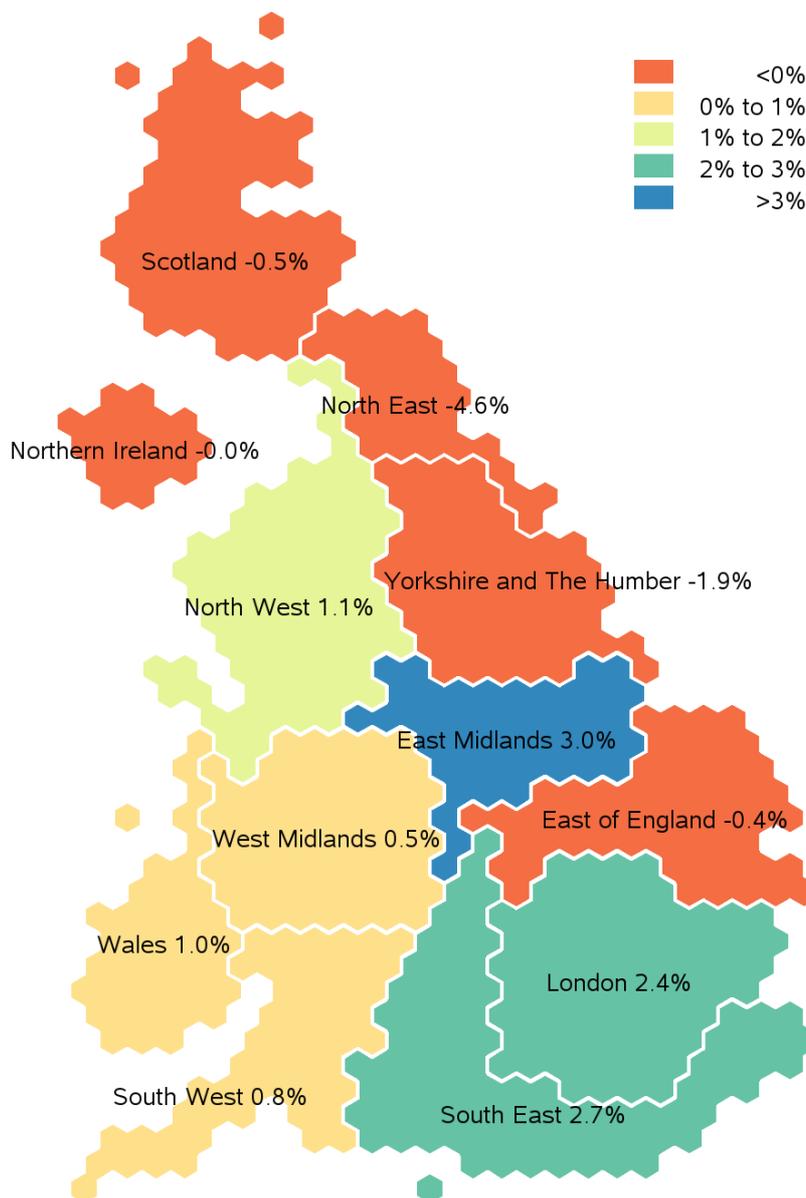


Figure 6 shows the proportional change in 18 year old application rates in 2018, compared with the previous cycle. The greatest proportional increases were from 18 year olds from the East Midlands, the South East, and London, who were around 2.7 per cent more likely to apply in 2018 than in 2017. The majority of regions in the west of the UK saw smaller increases in application rates, while Northern Ireland remained the same as last year.

Decreased application rates were seen in one third of the regions. The greatest proportional decreases were from 18 year olds in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber, who were over 1.5 per cent less likely to apply than the previous year.

Figure 6 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2017 and 2018 for UK 18 year olds by region and country



Application rates of 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency

There are 650 parliamentary constituencies in the UK (533 in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales, and 18 in Northern Ireland). Parliamentary constituencies are much smaller than regions, with typically just over 1,000 18 year olds, and are designed to have a more uniform population size than other geographies. This makes them a particularly suitable smaller geographical unit for reporting application rates.

Figure 7 shows 18 year old application rates in 2018 for all the parliamentary constituencies in the UK. On this map, each parliamentary constituency is shown as a circle, where the size of each circle approximates the size of a constituency's 18 year old population, and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the constituencies.

18 year old application rates by constituency vary between 18 per cent and 72 per cent, with those living in constituencies with the highest application rates almost 4 times more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates. Around 40 per cent of constituencies have 18 year old application rates that fall within a 10 percentage point band (between 30 and 40 per cent). A small number of constituencies have application rates lower than 20 per cent, or higher than 60 per cent.

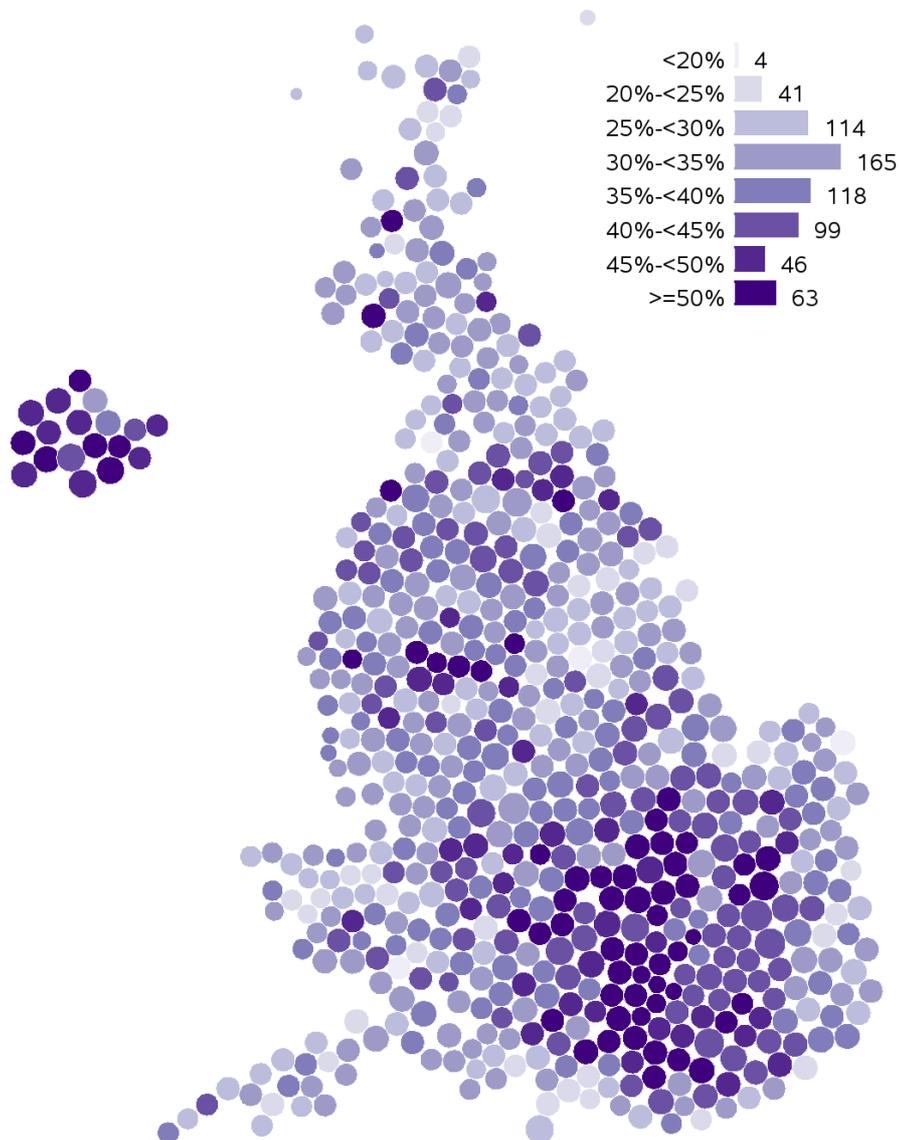
The pattern of application rates across constituencies mirrors those seen across regions, with many constituencies in London, Northern Ireland, and the South East having the highest rates, and constituencies in Wales, Scotland, the South West, and the North East having the lowest application rates. However, there is considerable variation across constituencies within regions. In the North West (the region with the largest variation), the application rates range from 18 per cent to 62 per cent, meaning those living in constituencies with the highest application rates in the North West are around 3.4 times more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates in that region. The East of England, and the South East, also have wide-spread application rates at constituency level, with their highest and lowest application rates differing by 42 and 41 percentage points respectively.

In Scotland, application rates ranged from 21 to 57 per cent, a difference of 36 percentage points. The UCAS 18 year old application rate will understate HE application rates in Scotland, especially for lower application areas, since for the most part, HE provided by Scottish colleges is not included in UCAS data.

Other regions show less variation. In the North East, those living in constituencies with the highest application rates are less than twice as likely to apply as those living in constituencies with the lowest rates (rates in the North East range between 25 per cent and 42 per cent). In Northern Ireland, those living in the constituencies with the highest application rates are around 67 per cent more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates.

In Wales, application rates varied between 20 and 46 per cent, meaning those living in constituencies with the highest application rates were over two times more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates.

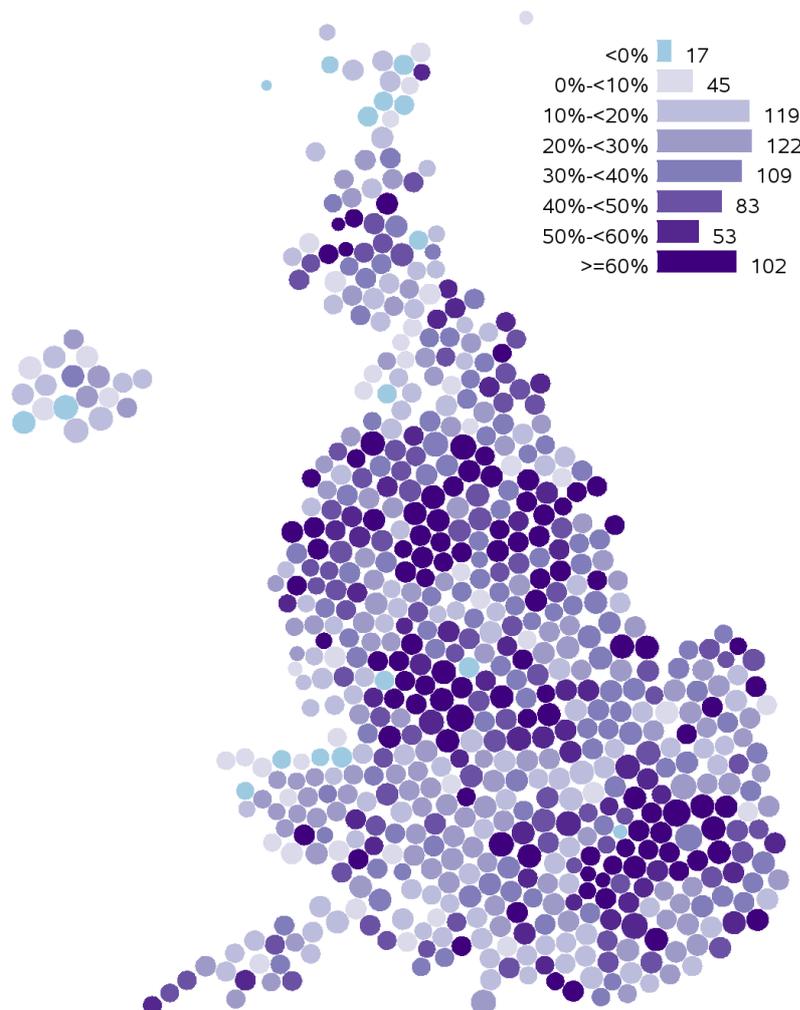
Figure 7 January deadline application rates in 2018 for UK 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency



The relatively small 18 year old population within constituencies (around 1,000) means the changes in application rates are subject to more year-to-year variation than application rates from areas with larger populations. Looking at changes over a longer period, where underlying changes may be greater, can reduce this (see Figure 8). Between 2006 and 2018, application rates increased in 97 per cent of constituencies. The proportional increase in application rates varied considerably between constituencies, with nearly a quarter of constituencies having increases of at least 50 per cent, and a small number (around 3.5 per cent of constituencies) having application rates that doubled.

The constituency level increases tend to reflect the patterns observed by region, with many constituencies in the North West and London having larger increases in application rates than constituencies in other parts of the country.

Figure 8 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2006 and 2018 for UK 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency



Application rates of 18 year olds by sex

The trend in January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by sex are shown for each UK country in Figures 9 to 12. The application rates for women are substantially higher than those for men in all countries of the UK.

In England, 43.3 per cent of 18 year old women applied to higher education in 2018, an increase of 0.6 percentage points (1.5 per cent proportionally) since 2017. In comparison, 31.8 per cent of men applied, a 0.2 percentage point increase from 2017 (0.8 per cent proportionally). The pattern of increases in 2018 result in the percentage point difference in application rates between 18 year old women and men increasing to 11.5 percentage points, meaning women were 36 per cent more likely to apply to higher education at age 18 than men. In 2017, the gap was 11.1 percentage points, with women 35 per cent more likely to apply to higher education at age 18 than men.

In Northern Ireland, the application rate for 18 year old women in 2018 was 55.8 per cent, a 0.2 percentage point increase from 2017 (+0.4 per cent proportionally). The application rate for men in 2018 was 39.8 per cent, the same as last year. These changes in application rate result in women in Northern Ireland being 40 per cent more likely to apply at age 18 than men, a 0.3 percentage point increase from 2017.

In Scotland, the application rate for women in 2018 was 39.7 per cent, a decrease of 0.7 percentage points from 2017 (-1.6 per cent proportionally). For men in Scotland, the application rate increased by 0.2 percentage points, after two successive years of decreases, to 25.5 per cent (+0.6 per cent proportionally). The convergence in application rates for men and women in 2018 means that the proportional difference in application rates has decreased, with women in Scotland now 56 per cent more likely to apply at age 18 than men, compared to 60 percent in 2017. For Scotland, there was a significant widening of the gap in application rates between women and men between 2010 and 2017. This coincided with the integration of the Scottish nursing admissions system (CATCH) into UCAS in 2010 (see note at the end of this report).

In Wales, the application rate for 18 year old women increased by 0.7 percentage points to 38.3 per cent (+1.8 per cent proportionally), while for men, the application rate remained at 25.9 per cent, the same as 2017. These patterns mean that the proportional difference in application rates between women and men increased by 5.6 per cent to 48 per cent. Despite the widening gap, the rate remains 4.7 per cent lower than the largest difference observed in 2016.

Figure 9 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from England by sex

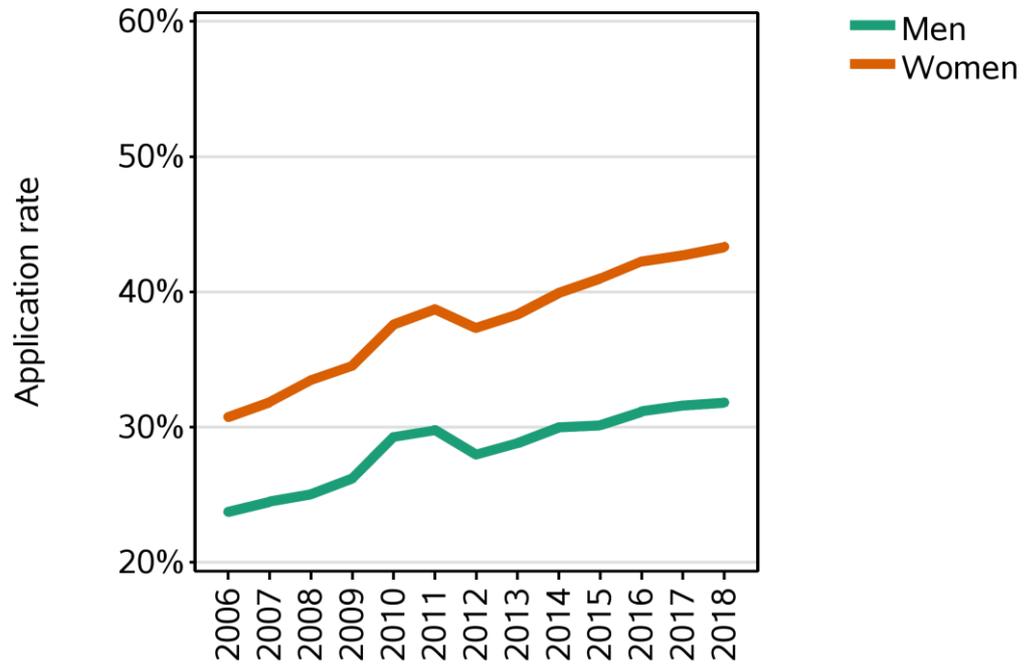


Figure 10 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Northern Ireland by sex

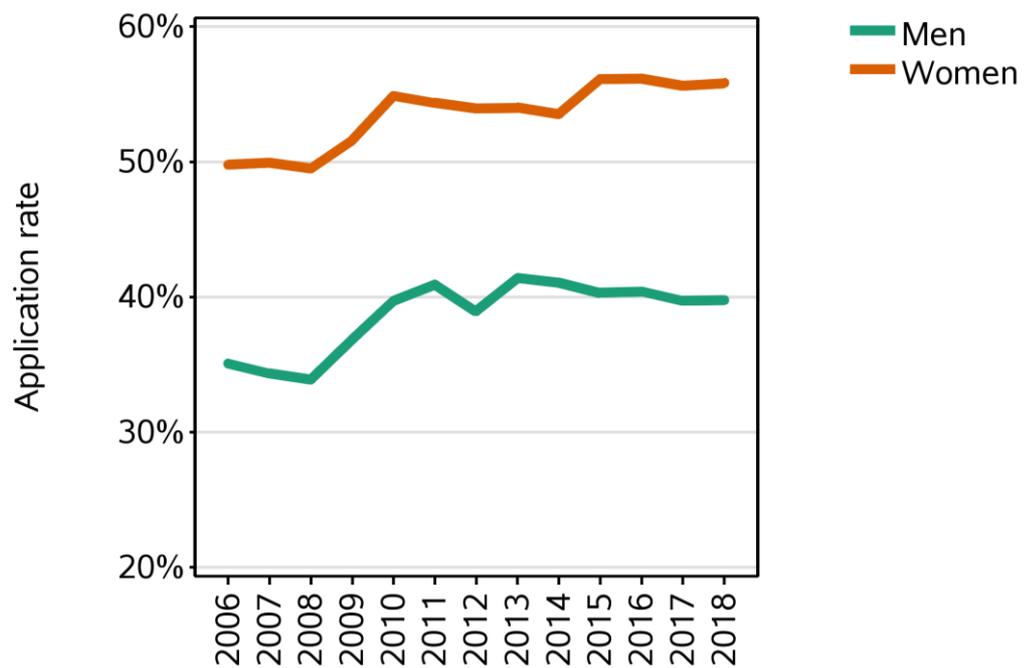


Figure 11 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Scotland by sex

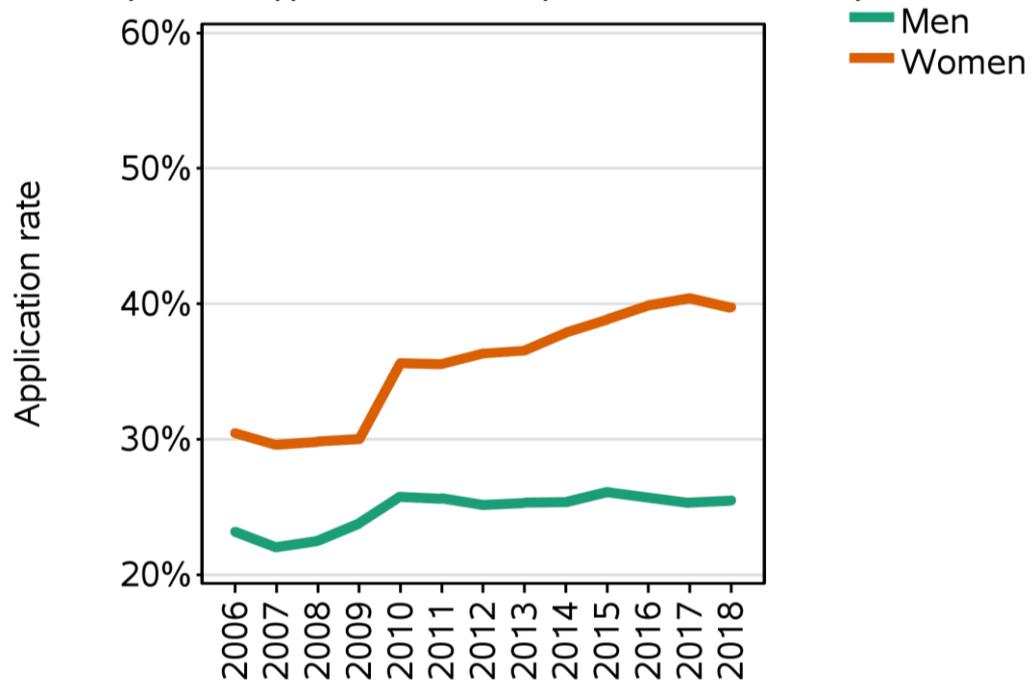
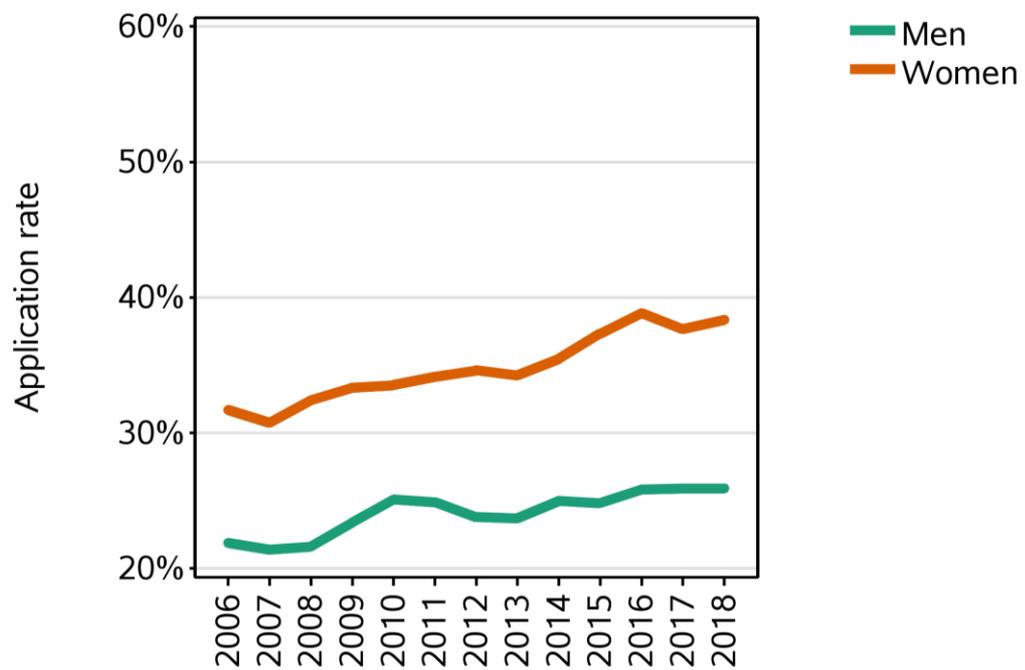


Figure 12 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Wales by sex



Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas (POLAR3)

The POLAR classification, developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)², classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in higher education (entry at age 18 or 19). Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people, and are ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged).

Population estimates have been created for each of the POLAR3 groups using small area population estimates for each of the four UK countries. These have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.

An update of the POLAR3 classifications (POLAR4) is available for the first time in UCAS' reporting since its launch in 2017 and is included further on in this report.

Figure 13 shows the application rates of UK 18 year olds by POLAR3 quintile. In 2018, the application rates increased for all five quintiles, continuing the longer term trends since 2006. The application rate for UK 18 year olds from POLAR3 quintile 1 increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.8 per cent proportionally) to 22.3 per cent, by 0.7 percentage points (2.3 per cent proportionally) to 30.0 per cent for those from quintile 2, by 0.2 percentage points (0.5 per cent proportionally) to 35.5 per cent for those from quintile 3, by 0.5 percentage points (1.2 per cent proportionally) to 41.9 per cent for those from quintile 4, and by 0.2 percentage points (0.3 per cent proportionally) to 52.2 per cent for those from quintile 5.

² Source: www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR

Figure 13 January deadline application rates by POLAR3 quintile for UK 18 year olds (quintile 5 is the most advantaged areas)

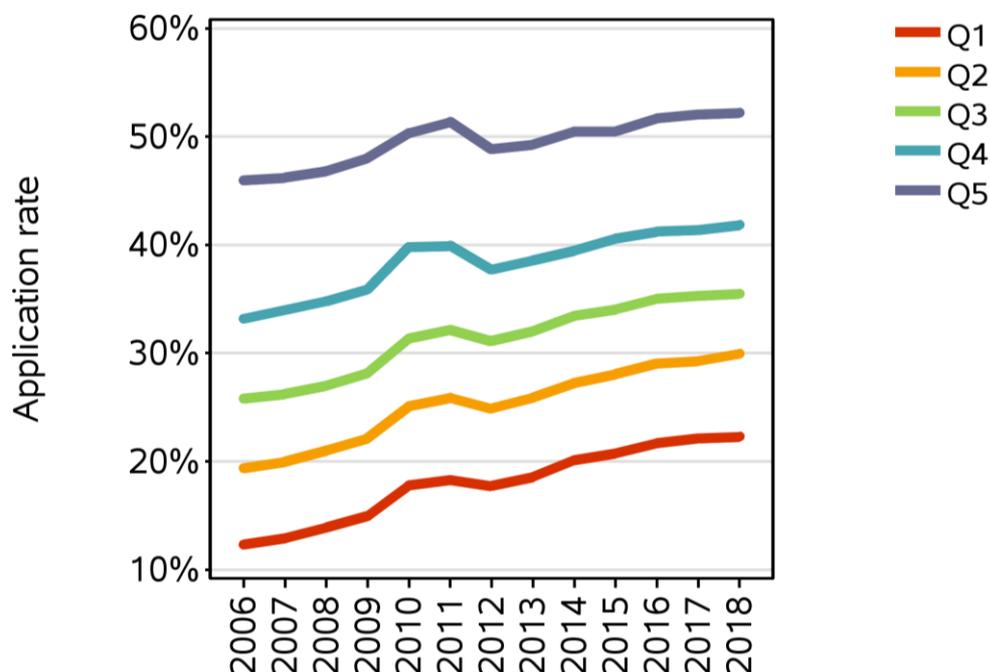


Figure 14 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1). The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 3,000), Scotland (around 5,500), and Wales (around 8,000), so their application rate trends are subject to more year-to-year variation than for England (population size of around 113,000).

All four countries show a substantial increase in application rates from the most disadvantaged group over the period. In England, the application rate of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas has increased from 12.2 per cent in 2006 to 22.6 per cent in 2018. This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas of England were 86 per cent more likely to apply to higher education in 2018 than 12 years ago. A similar pattern is evident across other countries of the UK – 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland were 30 per cent more likely to apply in 2018 than in 2006, 85 per cent more likely in Scotland, and 46 per cent more likely in Wales.

The application rate from disadvantaged areas in England increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.9 per cent proportionally), to reach a record high of 22.6 per cent. The application rates in Northern Ireland and Wales both increased by 0.1 percentage points, making their application rates 24.5 per cent and 19.7 per cent respectively. For Northern Ireland, this is the second highest on record following 2015. These changes mean that 18 year olds from disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland and Wales are 0.4 per cent more likely to have applied by the January deadline in 2018, compared with 2017.

In Scotland, the rate remained stable from last year, at 17.8 per cent.

The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) are shown in Figure 15. The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 6,500), Scotland (around 17,500), and Wales (around 5,500), so their application rate trends are subject to more year-to-year variation than for England (population size of around 132,000).

The proportional changes in the application rates for this group over the period are much smaller than for quintile 1 — 15.2 per cent in England, 8.6 per cent in Northern Ireland, 6.2 per cent in Scotland, and 8.6 per cent in Wales. In 2018, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in England increased by 0.1 percentage points (0.2 per cent proportionally), making the application rate the highest on record. The application rate increased by 0.2 percentage points in Northern Ireland (0.2 per cent proportionally), by 0.2 percentage points in Scotland (0.3 per cent proportionally), and by 0.8 percentage points in Wales (1.7 per cent proportionally).

In 2006, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in all countries were between 3.0 and 4.5 times as great as the application rates from the most disadvantaged areas. Since then, these differences have reduced such that in 2018, those from the most advantaged areas were between 2.3 and 2.6 times more likely to apply than those from the most disadvantaged areas. This reduction was mainly due to an increase in the application rate in the most disadvantaged areas.

In England, the ratio between application rates from advantaged and disadvantaged areas remained at 2.3 in 2018. Previously, when the ratio did not reduce compared to the previous cycle (in 2011 and 2016), the application rate for advantaged applicants increased by more percentage points than the application rate for disadvantaged applicants. However, in 2018, the application rate for the most disadvantaged increased marginally more than the application rate for the most advantaged.

Table 14/15 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds from POLAR3 Q1 (most disadvantaged areas), POLAR3 Q5 (most advantaged areas), and Q5:Q1 application rate ratio

POLAR3 Q1	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	12.2%	13.0%	14.0%	15.2%	18.0%	18.6%	17.9%	18.8%	20.4%	21.0%	22.0%	22.5%	22.6%
Northern Ireland	18.8%	17.5%	16.9%	17.8%	23.8%	21.9%	22.6%	23.4%	23.2%	25.5%	24.3%	24.4%	24.5%
Scotland	9.6%	9.0%	9.3%	9.8%	13.4%	12.2%	13.1%	13.2%	15.4%	15.8%	16.0%	17.8%	17.8%
Wales	13.5%	12.5%	13.8%	14.4%	15.9%	16.5%	16.8%	16.6%	18.4%	18.9%	20.3%	19.7%	19.7%
UK	12.3%	12.9%	13.9%	15.0%	17.8%	18.3%	17.7%	18.6%	20.1%	20.7%	21.7%	22.1%	22.3%

POLAR3 Q5	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	45.8%	46.3%	47.2%	48.5%	50.7%	51.8%	48.7%	49.1%	50.8%	50.6%	52.1%	52.6%	52.7%
Northern Ireland	57.3%	59.0%	58.8%	61.6%	61.9%	63.4%	62.4%	64.5%	62.3%	63.1%	61.8%	62.1%	62.2%
Scotland	43.0%	40.5%	40.9%	41.4%	45.1%	45.7%	45.5%	45.7%	45.1%	45.8%	46.0%	45.5%	45.7%
Wales	45.1%	46.1%	44.8%	43.9%	45.6%	46.8%	46.8%	46.9%	46.7%	47.3%	49.5%	48.1%	49.0%
UK	46.0%	46.2%	46.8%	48.0%	50.3%	51.4%	48.8%	49.3%	50.5%	50.5%	51.7%	52.1%	52.2%

Ratio Q5:Q1	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3
Northern Ireland	3.0	3.4	3.5	3.5	2.6	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Scotland	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.2	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.5	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.6	2.6
Wales	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.5
UK	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3

Figure 14 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 1)

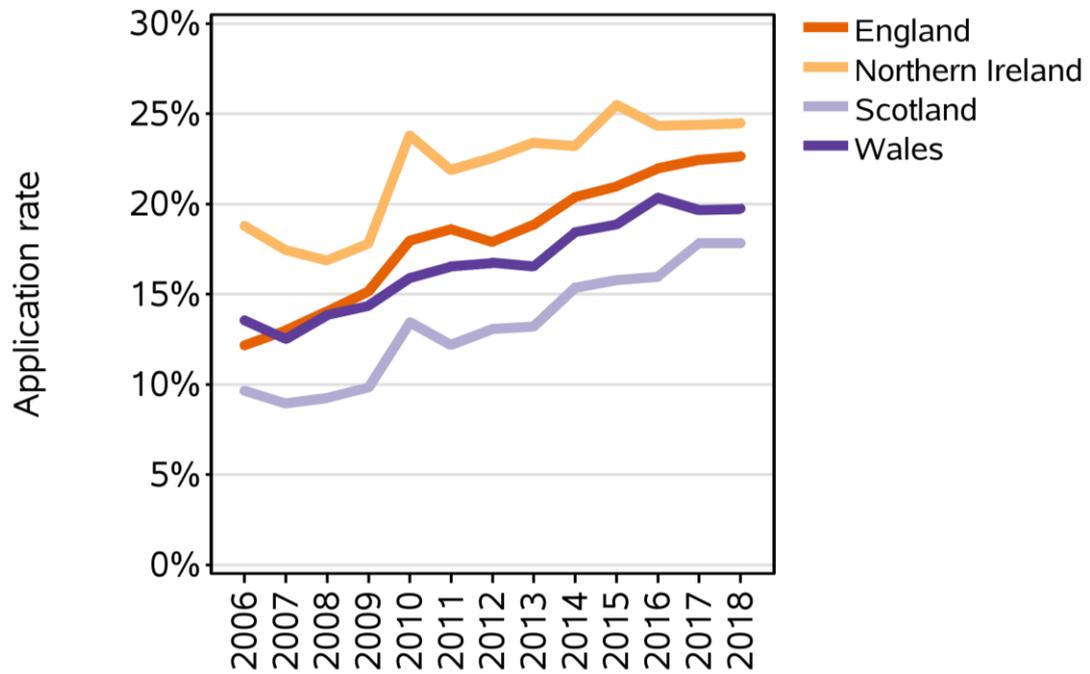
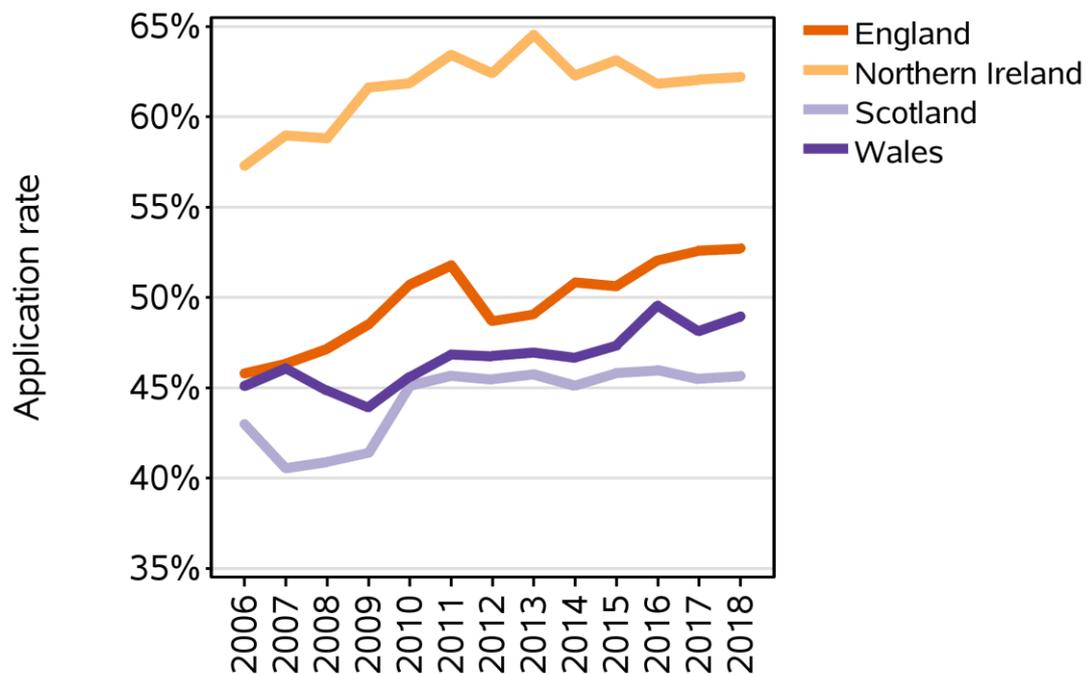


Figure 15 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 5)



Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas in Scotland (SIMD)

Figure 16 shows the application rates for Scottish 18 year olds by area-based background, using the latest version of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2016).³ SIMD ranks small geographical areas in Scotland by their relative level of deprivation across a range of measures, which are used to form five groups with approximately equal population sizes. Not all higher education providers in Scotland use UCAS, meaning there is a substantial section of provision (mostly offered through further education colleges) that is not included in UCAS' figures (see note at the end of this report). This means these entry rates will be lower than the total entry rate to higher education.

Application rates for Scottish 18 year olds have increased over the period for all five quintiles. The application rate for Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas increased from 10.0 per cent in 2006 to 16.7 per cent in 2018. This means that Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas are 67 per cent more likely to apply in 2018 than 12 years ago. This greatly contrasts with the much smaller change in the application rate from the most advantaged areas over time, which increased from 48.3 per cent in 2006 to 50.5 per cent in 2018, a proportional increase of 4.5 per cent.

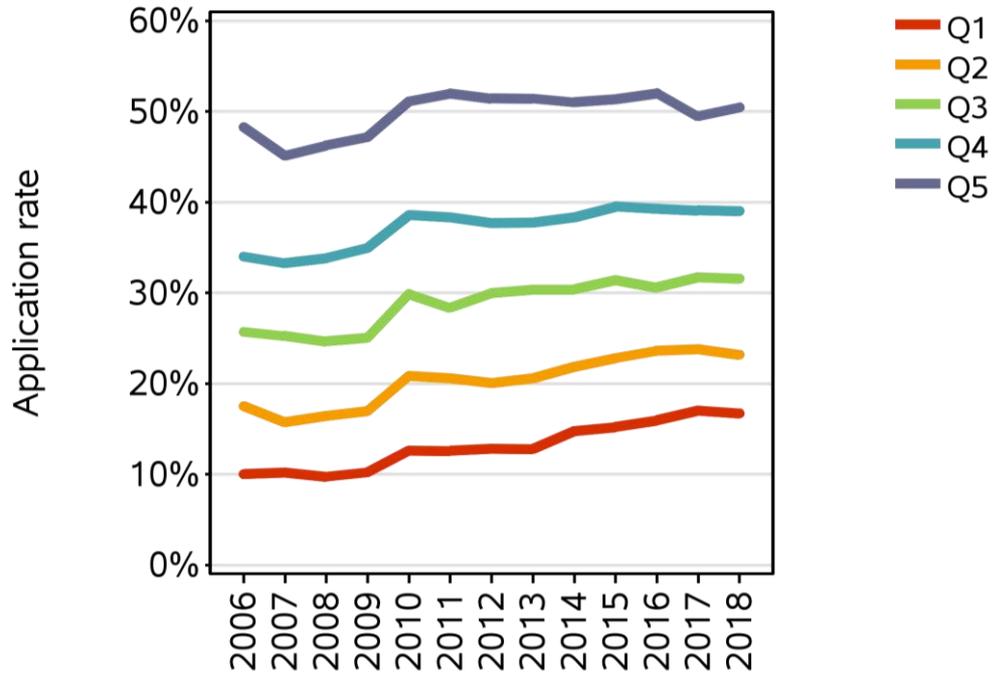
In 2018, the application rate for Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas decreased by 0.3 percentage points (-1.7 per cent proportionally). The application rate from the most advantaged areas increased by 1 percentage point (1.9 per cent proportionally).

The application rates for Scottish 18 year olds in the intermediate SIMD quintiles changed as follows in 2018: SIMD quintile 2 decreased by 0.6 percentage points (-2.6 per cent proportionally) to 23.2 per cent, SIMD quintile 3 decreased by 0.1 percentage points (-0.4 per cent proportionally) to 31.6 per cent, and SIMD quintile 4 decreased by 0.1 percentage points (-0.2 per cent proportionally) to 39.0 per cent.

This has resulted in an increased gap between the application rates of the most advantaged and most disadvantaged 18 year olds in Scotland compared to last year. This year the ratio is 3.0, an increase on last year's ratio of 2.9, which was the lowest value recorded.

³ Source: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

Figure 16 January deadline application rates by SIMD quintile for Scottish 18 year olds (SIMD quintile 5 is the most advantaged areas)



Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex (POLAR3)

Figure 17 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1) in England, defined using the POLAR3 classification. The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) in England are shown in Figure 18. The population sizes by background and sex in the other countries of the UK are much smaller, and this means application rates are more variable year to year.

In England, 18 year old women are much more likely to apply to higher education than men in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The proportional differences are largest in the most disadvantaged areas where, in 2018, women were 66 per cent more likely to apply, compared with advantaged areas where they were 21 per cent more likely to apply.

In disadvantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men decreased by 0.2 percentage points (-1.1 per cent proportionally), and increased by 0.6 percentage points (2.3 per cent proportionally) for women. These changes increased the proportional difference between men and women by 5.5 percentage points (9.2 per cent proportionally).

In advantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men remained at 47.8 per cent, the same as in 2017, and increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.4 per cent proportionally) for women. This increased the difference between application rates from men and women by 0.4 percentage points (1.8 per cent proportionally).

Figure 17 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 1) by sex

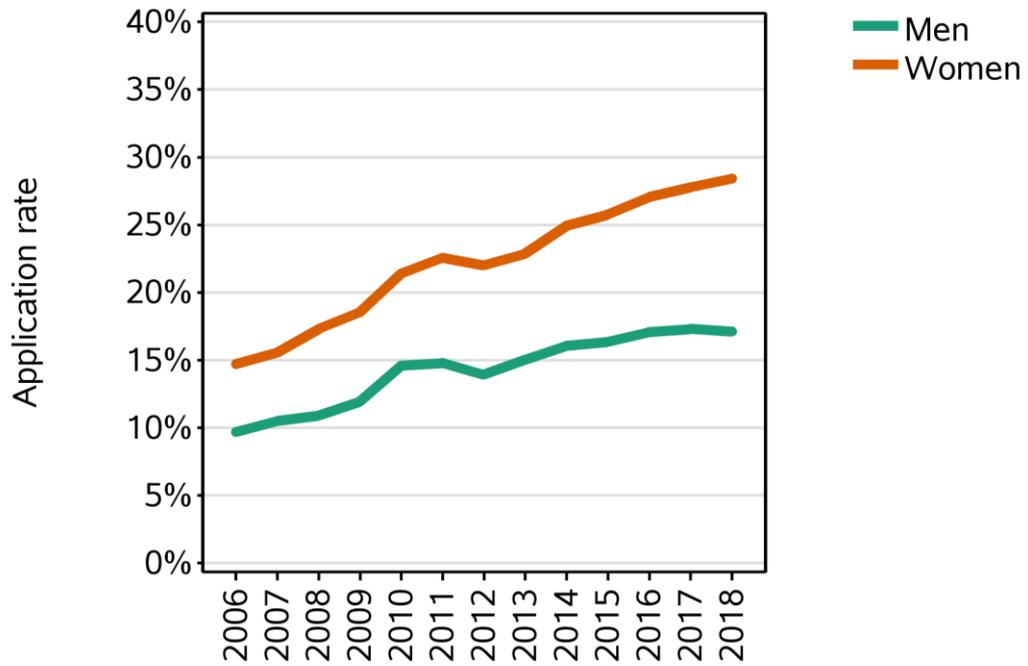
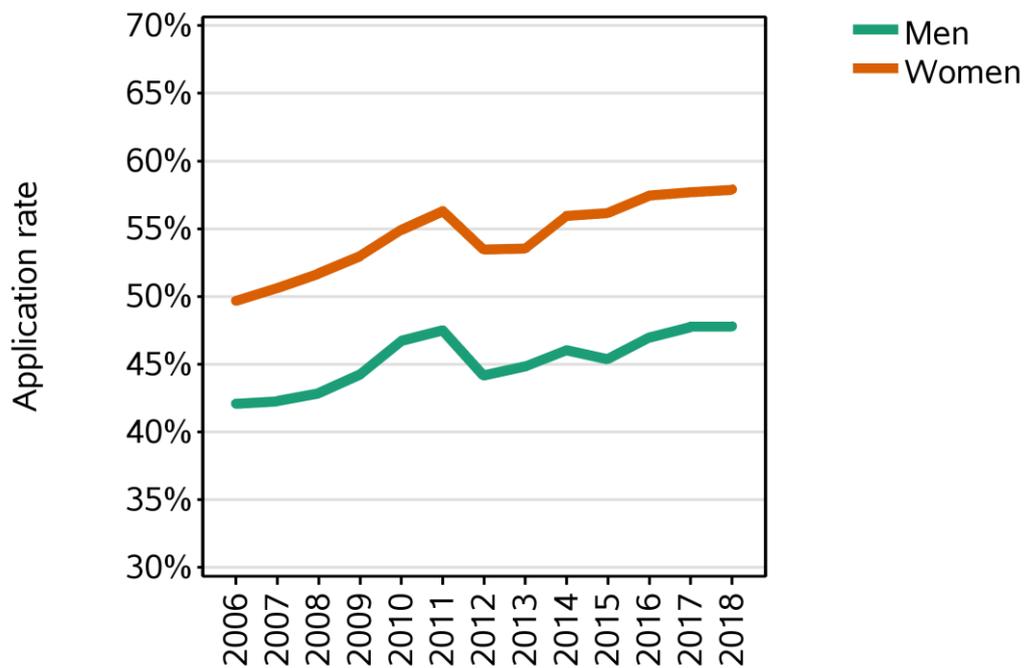


Figure 18 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 5) by sex



Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas (POLAR4)

POLAR4 is the most recent version of the POLAR classification, and is available for the first time in UCAS' reporting since its launch in 2017 (see note at the end of this report information).

The majority of trends for POLAR4 are similar to POLAR3, due to 55 per cent of postcodes mapping to the same quintile in the update, and the majority of other quintiles (35 per cent) being adjusted by just one⁴.

Figure 19 shows the application rates of UK 18 year olds by POLAR4 quintile. In 2018, the application rate for UK 18 year olds from POLAR4 quintile 1 increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.8 per cent proportionally) to 21.9 per cent, those in quintile 2 increased by 0.5 percentage points (1.9 per cent proportionally) to 29.5 per cent, those in quintile 3 marginally decreased by 0.1 per cent to 35.1 per cent, those in quintile 4 increased by 0.6 percentage points (1.4 per cent proportionally) to 41.7 per cent, and those in quintile 5 increased by 0.3 percentage points (0.5 per cent proportionally) to 52.6 per cent. The gap between most advantaged and most disadvantaged group increased by 0.1 percentage points, to a 30.7 percentage point difference.

⁴ For more details, see: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201729/

Figure 19 January deadline application rates by POLAR4 quintile for UK 18 year olds (quintile 5 is the most advantaged areas)

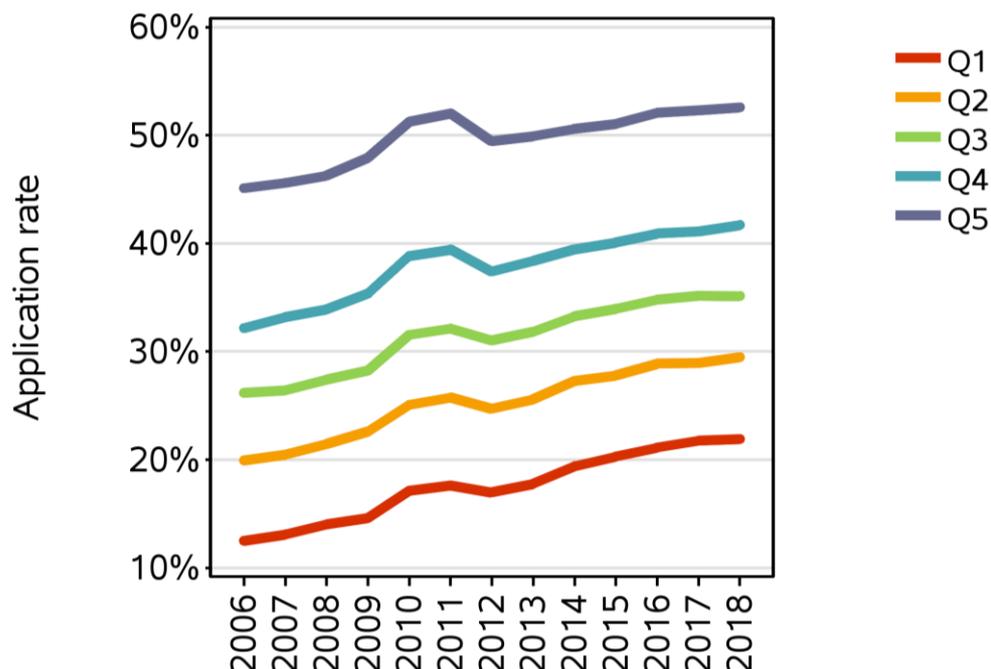


Figure 20 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1).

In England, the application rate of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas increased from 12.3 per cent in 2006 to 22.2 per cent in 2018, making them 81 per cent more likely to apply to higher education in 2018 than in 2006. 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland were 35 per cent more likely to apply in 2018 than in 2006, 68 per cent more likely in Scotland, and 36 per cent more likely in Wales.

In England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, the application rates from disadvantaged areas are at record levels – 22.2 per cent in England, 25.6 per cent in Northern Ireland, and 16.0 per cent in Scotland. The application rate in Wales this year dropped from the previous year’s record high, to 19.9 per cent.

In 2018, the application rate from disadvantaged areas increased by 0.2 percentage points in England, 0.7 in Northern Ireland, and 0.3 percentage points in Scotland. In Wales, the rate decreased by 0.1 percentage points. These changes mean that 18 year olds from disadvantaged areas in England were 0.8 per cent more likely to have applied by the January deadline in 2018 compared with 2017, 2.7 per cent more likely in Northern Ireland, 2.1 per cent more likely in Scotland, and 0.6 per cent less likely in Wales.

The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) are shown in Figure 21. The proportional changes in the application rates for this group

from 2006 to 2018 are 18.6 per cent in England, 9.3 per cent in Northern Ireland, 7.2 per cent in Scotland, and 16.4 per cent in Wales.

In 2018, the application rate for England increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.3 per cent proportionally), meaning the application rate for the most advantaged areas in 2018 is the highest on record. In Northern Ireland, application rates increased by 0.1 percentage points (0.2 per cent proportionally), in Scotland by 0.7 percentage points (1.4 per cent proportionally), and by 2.1 percentage points in Wales (4.1 per cent proportionally).

In 2006, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in all countries were between 3.1 and 4.6 times as great as the application rates from the most disadvantaged areas. Since then, these differences have reduced substantially such that in 2018, those from the most advantaged areas were between 2.4 and 3.0 times more likely to apply than those from the most disadvantaged areas, mainly due to an increase in the application rate in the most disadvantaged areas.

In England, the ratio between application rates from the most advantaged and disadvantaged areas was 2.4 in 2018, the same as the two previous years.

Table 20/21 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds from POLAR4 Q1 (most disadvantaged areas), POLAR4 Q5 (most advantaged areas), and Q5:Q1 application rate ratio

POLAR4 Q1	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	12.3%	13.1%	14.1%	14.9%	17.4%	17.9%	17.1%	18.0%	19.6%	20.5%	21.4%	22.0%	22.2%
Northern Ireland	19.0%	18.8%	17.9%	17.6%	22.0%	21.8%	21.9%	21.3%	23.4%	25.1%	25.3%	24.9%	25.6%
Scotland	9.5%	8.6%	9.1%	9.4%	11.5%	10.8%	11.6%	11.7%	13.8%	13.8%	14.0%	15.7%	16.0%
Wales	14.7%	13.4%	14.5%	13.5%	14.9%	16.2%	16.3%	16.8%	18.6%	19.2%	19.9%	20.0%	19.9%
UK	12.5%	13.1%	14.0%	14.6%	17.1%	17.6%	17.0%	17.8%	19.4%	20.3%	21.1%	21.8%	21.9%

POLAR4 Q5	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	44.4%	45.2%	45.8%	47.4%	50.7%	51.9%	48.9%	49.3%	50.4%	50.8%	51.9%	52.5%	52.7%
Northern Ireland	59.9%	60.3%	60.6%	65.0%	67.8%	68.4%	67.4%	70.4%	67.6%	67.2%	65.5%	65.3%	65.5%
Scotland	44.1%	42.3%	43.2%	44.3%	48.2%	47.7%	46.9%	47.5%	46.8%	47.6%	47.9%	46.6%	47.3%
Wales	44.9%	46.6%	49.3%	51.8%	54.7%	49.5%	49.5%	48.4%	48.3%	49.9%	53.2%	50.2%	52.2%
UK	45.1%	45.6%	46.3%	47.9%	51.3%	52.0%	49.5%	49.9%	50.6%	51.1%	52.1%	52.3%	52.6%

Ratio Q5:Q1	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4
Northern Ireland	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.7	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.3	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6
Scotland	4.6	4.9	4.7	4.7	4.2	4.4	4.0	4.0	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.0	3.0
Wales	3.1	3.5	3.4	3.8	3.7	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.6
UK	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4

Figure 20 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR4 quintile 1)

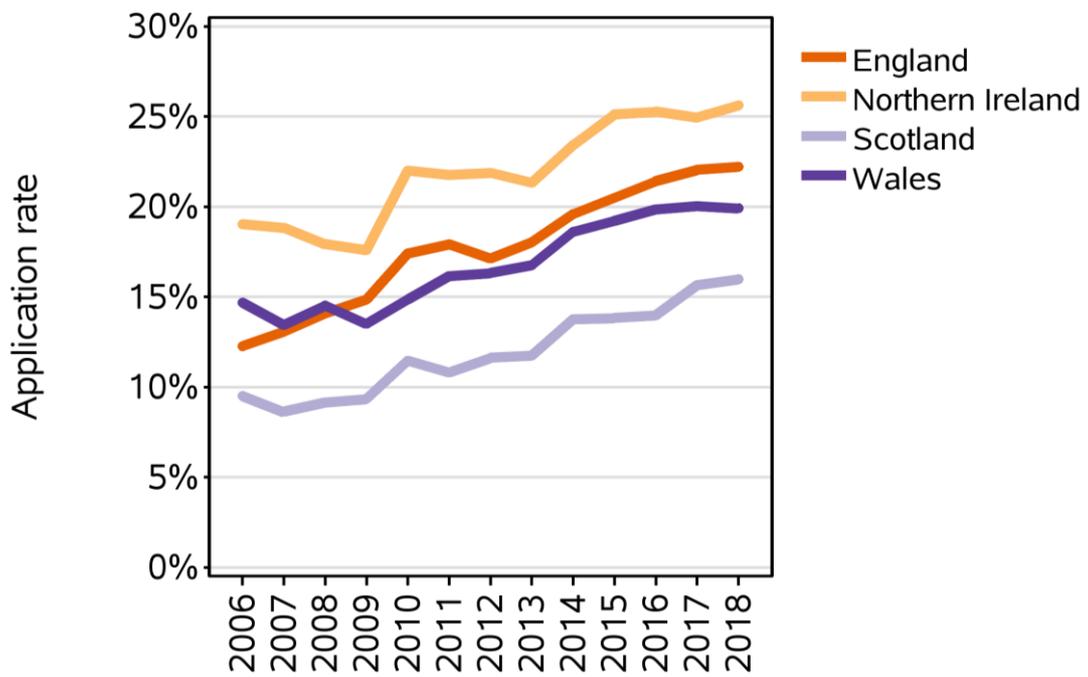
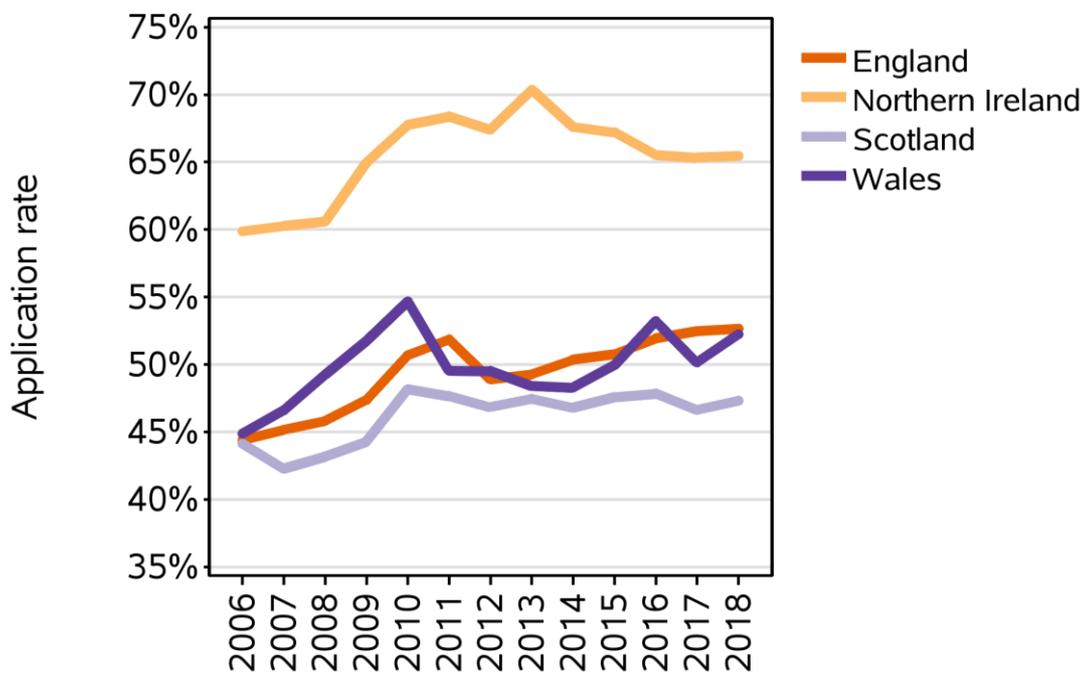


Figure 21 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR4 quintile 5)



Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex (POLAR4)

Figure 22 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1) in England, defined using the POLAR4 classification. The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) in England are shown in Figure 23. The population sizes by background and sex in the other countries of the UK are much smaller, and this means application rates are more variable year to year.

In 2018, women from the most disadvantaged areas in England were 63 per cent more likely to apply than men, compared with advantaged areas, where they were 21 per cent more likely to apply.

In disadvantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men remained the same as in 2017, and increased by 0.4 percentage points (1.4 per cent proportionally) for women.

In advantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men decreased by 0.2 percentage points (-0.3 per cent proportionally), and increased by 0.5 percentage points (0.9 per cent proportionally) for women.

Figure 22 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR4 quintile 1) by sex

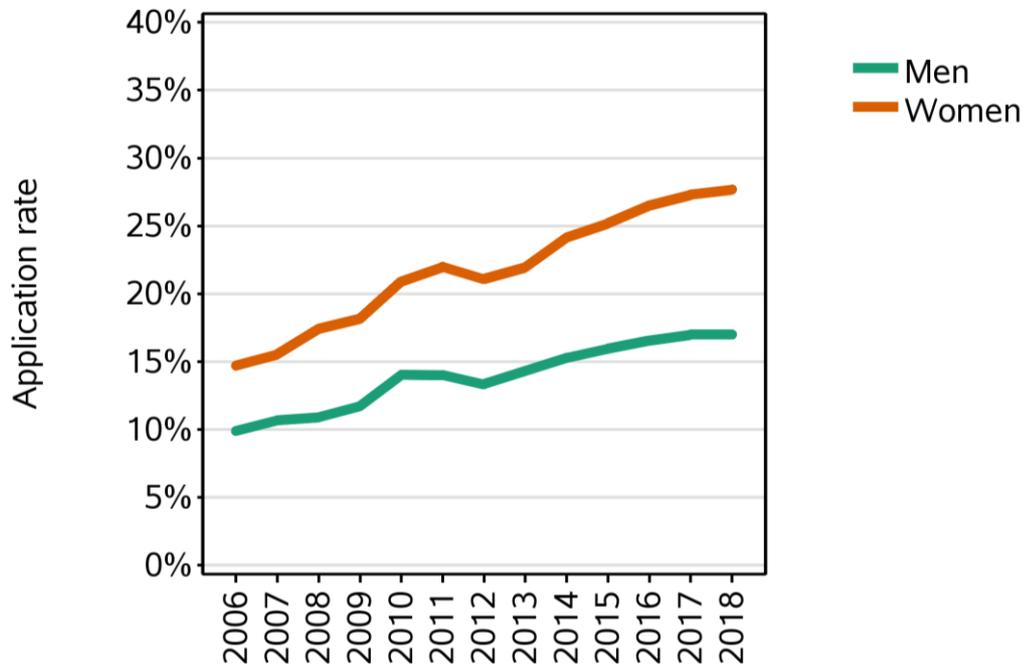
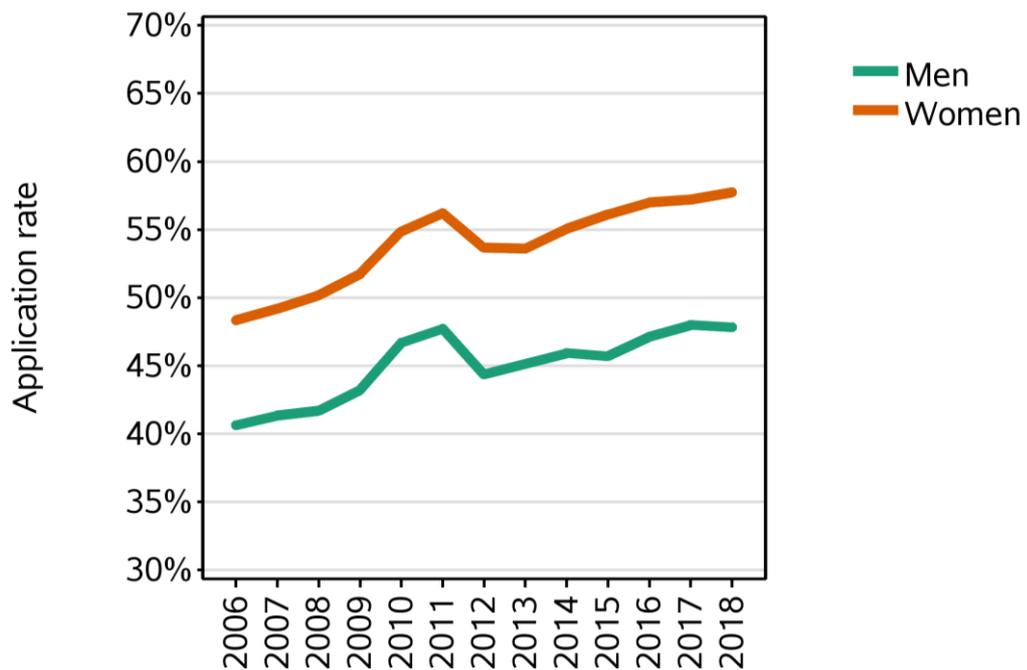


Figure 23 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR4 quintile 5) by sex



Application rates of UK 18 year olds by qualification

Entry to higher education is often determined by the type and strength of the qualifications held by an applicant. Most 18 year olds who apply to HE through UCAS do so while studying for the qualifications required for entry, and so apply with their qualifications pending.

The type of qualifications being studied, and the associated predicted grades, are provided by each applicant when they apply. This information on pending qualifications is used to assess the trends in application rates for 18 year olds according to the type of qualifications they were studying on application. A levels are the most widely studied qualification among 18 year old applicants from the UK – around 70 per cent have at least one A level pending on application. Other qualifications that are commonly studied by this group are BTECs, Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers (abbreviated to SQAs for Scottish Qualifications Authority), and the International Baccalaureate (IB). Applicants are often studying combinations of qualifications, most frequently a combination of A levels and BTECs.

Applicants are grouped by the combination of the pending qualifications they were recorded to be studying for. Applicants studying for three or more A levels, and not studying for another of the other three qualification types, are reported in the 'A level only' group. Applicants studying Level 3 BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) but not studying any of the other three qualification types, are assigned to the 'BTEC only' group. Applicants studying for at least three Scottish Highers or Scottish Advanced Highers are in the 'SQA only' group. Applicants studying for the International Baccalaureate and not studying for any of the other qualification types, are in the 'IB only' group. Applicants studying for a combination of A levels and BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) are reported in the 'A level & BTEC' group. Applicants who are not assigned to any of these groups are not reported – in 2018, these accounted for around 16 per cent of UK 18 year old applicants.

Figures 24a and 24b show the proportion of the UK 18 year old population that applied, split by qualification group. The application rate for the A level only group is shown on a separate graph, as it is much higher than for the other qualifications. The application rate for the A level group has increased during the period from its lowest recorded rate of 22.2 per cent in 2012, to reach a record high of 23.6 per cent in 2017. In 2018, this rate declined slightly to 23.5 per cent, the second highest on record.

The BTEC only group is the next largest. Between 2012 and 2015, the application rate for this group increased proportionally by 60 per cent, to a high of 3.9 per cent. After remaining constant in 2016, the application rate fell by 0.3 percentage points in 2017. In 2018, the application rate fell by 0.1 percentage points to 3.4 per cent – still 41 per cent higher than its lowest recorded rate from 2012.

Applying while studying for both A levels and BTECs became more common between 2010 and 2017, rising from an application rate of 0.6 per cent to 1.7 per cent. 2018 was the first recorded year that showed a decline for this qualification group, with the application rate falling to 1.6 per cent.

Young people in Scotland applying to HE via UCAS generally hold, or are studying for, Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers (SQA awards). The proportion of UK 18 year olds applying with SQAs has remained relatively stable since 2010, ranging between 2.1 and 2.3 per cent. In 2018, 2.2 per cent of UK 18 year olds applied with SQAs.

The smallest qualification group in this report is the International Baccalaureate (IB) only group. The proportion of UK 18 year olds applying while studying for the IB in 2018 was 0.3 per cent, and has remained between 0.3 and 0.4 per cent during the period.

Figure 24a Application rates for UK 18 year olds by type of qualification being studied on application (A level only)

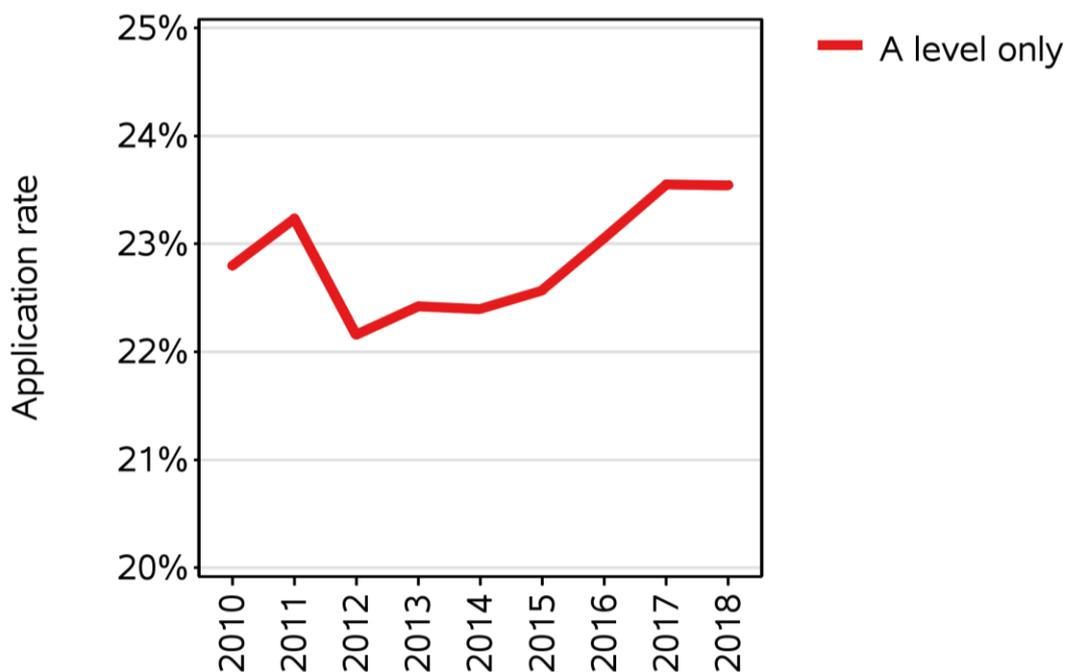
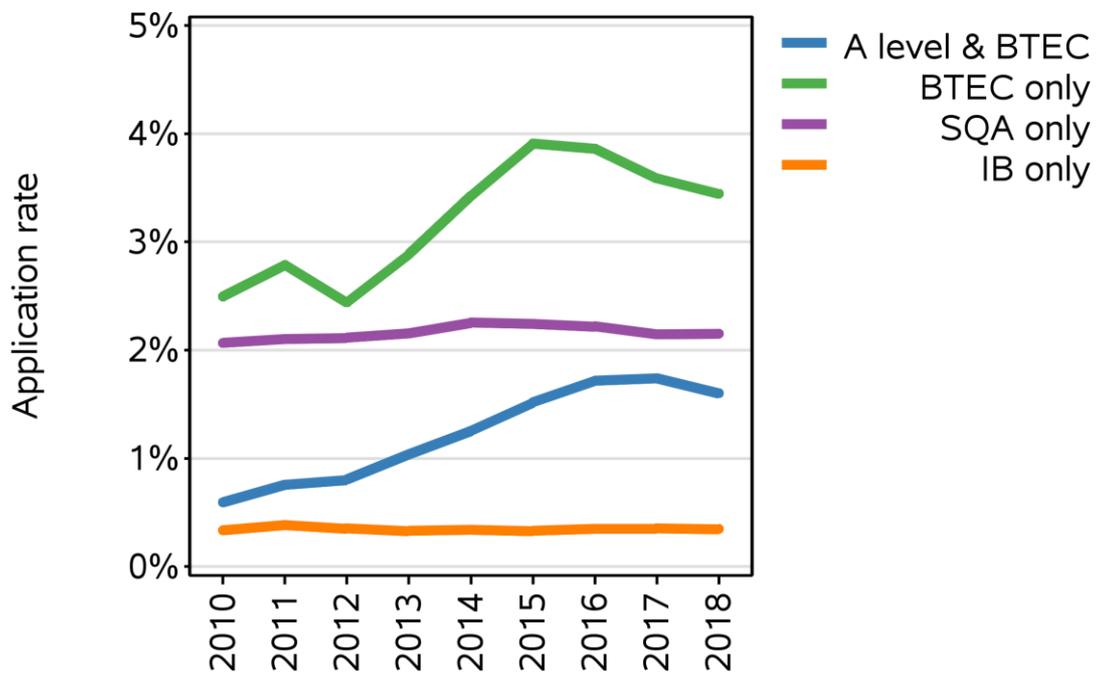


Figure 24b Application rates for UK 18 year olds by type of qualification being studied on application (excluding the A level only group)



Note: Due to the addition of some reformed BTEC qualifications, the BTEC application rates from 2017 may differ from previous publications.

19 year old 'first time' application rates by country

After 18 year old application rates, the next largest age-specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret, since it is influenced by the application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds typically fall into one of two categories – applying for the first time, or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18.

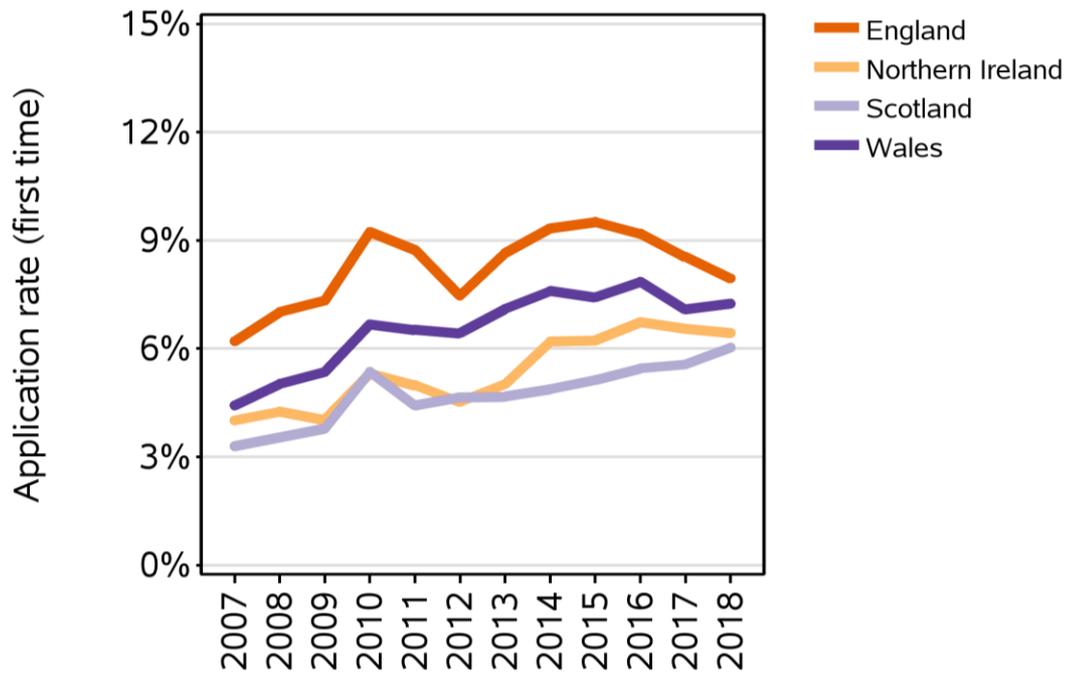
The 'first time' application rates at age 19 only include those applicants who did not apply in the previous cycle. Unlike the application rate for 19 year olds as a whole, they are not directly influenced by the acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. However, they may be sensitive to changes in the application rate at age 18, since if the application rate at age 18 increases substantially, it may result in a smaller pool of potential applicants to apply for the first time at age 19. Figure 25 shows the 'first time' 19 year old application rates.

First time 19 year old application rates are higher in England than elsewhere in the UK. The first time application rate in England reached a peak of 9.5 per cent in 2015, before dropping for the first time since 2012 the following year. Since 2015, the first time application rate for 19 year olds has continued to decrease each year, falling to 8.0 per cent in 2018, a reduction of 0.6 percentage points from 2017.

In Wales, the rate has generally been increasing over time, reaching a peak of 7.9 per cent in 2016, then decreasing in 2017. In 2018, much of this decline reversed, bringing the application rate to 7.2 per cent. A similar trend is seen in Northern Ireland, where in 2016, a high of 6.7 per cent was recorded, followed by declines in 2017 and 2018. The 0.1 per cent decline in the 19 year old first time application rate in 2018 brought the rate to 6.4 per cent.

In Scotland – where the measure will not include most demand for higher education provided at further education colleges (see note at the end of this report) – the first time 19 year old application rate has been increasing gradually over the period, apart from an elevated demand in 2010, which reversed in the following cycle. 2016 was the first year which saw the rate pass the previous high of 2010. In 2018, the rate increased by 0.5 percentage points, the largest single increase since 2010, to 6.0 per cent – the highest recorded.

Figure 25 First time application rates of 19 year olds by country



Cohort demand for higher education covering 18 and 19 year olds

Applicant decisions about whether to apply at age 18 or 19 can vary from year to year. Material changes in the balance of applying at age 18 versus age 19 can make it more difficult to interpret trends for single age groups as an indicator of demand from young people as a whole.

One measure that is not influenced by the decision to apply at age 18 or age 19 is the cohort application rate. Each cohort includes all young people aged 18 in a particular academic year. The cohort application rate is the proportion of that cohort that applies for higher education either at age 18 or, a year later, at age 19 – people who apply in both years are only counted once. With this construction, the rate is not affected if applicants decided to apply at age 19 instead of 18, or if changes in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds leads to more or fewer reapplicants the next year.

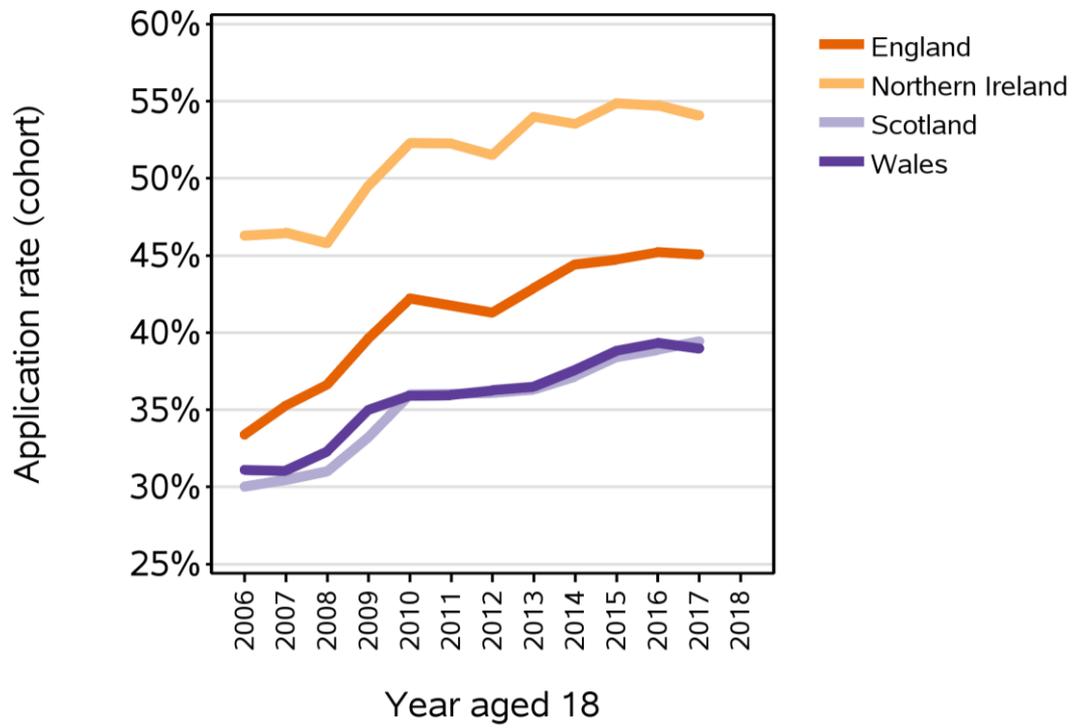
To calculate cohort rates, an additional year is needed, so the cohort has had the opportunity to apply at age 19 as well as age 18. In this report, we can look at cohort demand up to and including the cohort that was aged 18 in 2017 ('the 2017 cohort'), and applied for the first time aged 18 in 2017, or the first time aged 19 in 2018.

Over the reported period, the proportion of the English young population that applied for higher education by the age of 19 (Figure 26) has generally increased, despite small decreases in the 2011 and 2012 cohorts (where applicants began to experience higher and more variable fees for the first time). These decreases were more than reversed following the 1.6 percentage point increase in the 2013 cohort application rate, after which rates have shown year-on-year increases. 2017 is the first year to show decreases since then, with the cohort application rate decreasing by 0.2 percentage points, to 45.1 per cent, the second highest on record.

Up to 2013, a similar pattern was seen in Northern Ireland, leading to an application rate of 54.0 per cent for that cohort, after declines in the previous two years. Following this, the pattern of cohort application rates has been variable, with a decrease of 0.7 per cent in 2017, bringing the rate to 54.1 per cent, the third highest on record.

The cohort application rates in Wales and Scotland are lower than for England and Northern Ireland (the Scottish rate will not include applications to HE in many further education colleges in Scotland – see note at the end of this report), but have also increased over the period. Since 2010, the application rates for the two countries have remained very similar. In 2017, the application rate for Wales was 39.0 per cent and the application rate for Scotland was 39.4 per cent. Wales saw a 0.3 percentage point decline compared to 2016, while Scotland increased by 0.5 percentage points to the highest rate on record.

Figure 26 Cohort application rates by age 19 by country



Reapplication rates of previously unplaced 18 year old UK applicants

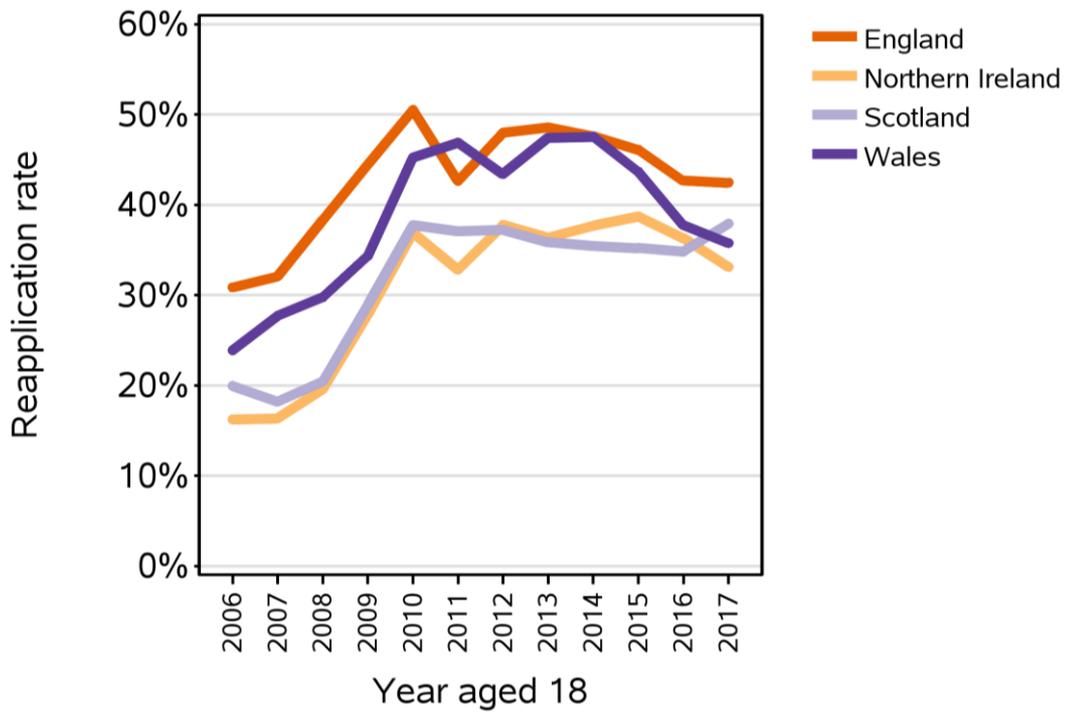
Almost all 18 year old applicants from the UK apply through UCAS for the first time. At the end of the application cycle, most of these applicants will have been placed. A minority of these applicants – typically 15 to 20 per cent – will be unplaced at the end of the cycle.

Some of these unplaced 18 year old applicants reapply in the following cycle, aged 19. The proportion of the unplaced applicants who reapply in this way is the reapplication rate. Trends in this statistic can indicate both the extent of remaining demand for entry into higher education at the end of the original cycle, together with how applicants view the relative attractions of entering higher education in one cycle compared to the next.

Figure 27 shows the reapplication rates for unplaced 18 year olds by UK country of domicile. The rates are referenced by the cycle in which they were unplaced – for example, the proportion of unplaced 18 year old applicants from the 2017 cycle who reapply aged 19 in the 2018 cycle, is shown against 2017.

The 2018 cycle reapplication rates for those aged 18 in 2017 fell for all UK countries except Scotland. In England, the reapplication rates decreased by 0.2 percentage points to 42.5 per cent, Northern Ireland had a decrease of 3.2 percentage points to 33.1 per cent, Wales had a decrease of 2.0 percentage points to 35.8 per cent, and Scotland had an increase of 3.1 percentage points to 37.9 per cent. The reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2017 are within 10 percentage points of the values from those aged 18 in 2010 in each country, and are still substantially higher than the reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2006 and 2007.

Figure 27 January deadline reapplication rates for UK 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle



Interaction between the acceptance rate of 18 year olds and the reapplication rate

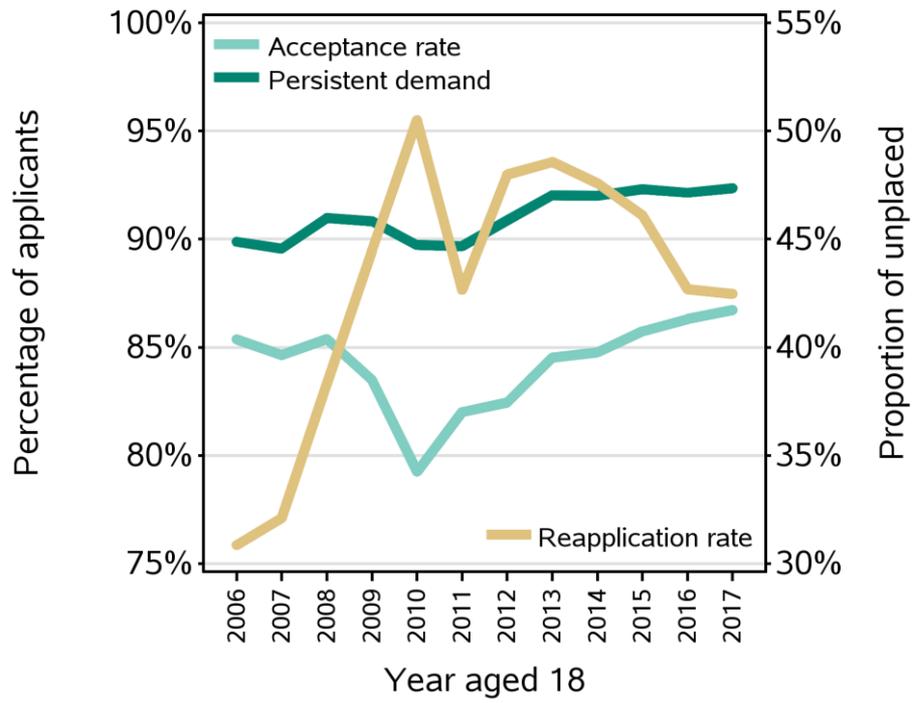
The acceptance rate for 18 year old applicants has varied from cycle to cycle, with part of this variation (prior to the 2015 cycle) relating to the number of places effectively available in higher education. Consequently, it is likely that the reapplication rate and the acceptance rate in the previous cycle may be associated.

Figure 28 shows the acceptance rate for English 18 year old applicants in each cycle (left axis), and the reapplication rate of those who are not accepted (right axis, shown against the cycle in which they were unplaced). Both the acceptance rate and reapplication rate have varied considerably across the period. However, a combination of these measures (the proportion of 18 year old applicants who are either accepted or immediately reapply the next cycle) gives a statistic that is more constant. This measure describes the proportion of applicants who either translate their application into entry or, if not, have the persistence of demand to immediately seek to do so the next cycle.

This statistic can be interpreted as a measure of degree of persistence in demand for higher education among those who have already applied. The stability of this statistic at around 90 to 92 per cent of applicants over the measured period (despite large fluctuations in application, acceptance, and reapplication rates), suggests that a steady proportion of those 18 year olds who apply will tend to persist in their applications to higher education. In particular, any increase in the 18 year old acceptance rate towards 90 per cent may lead to fewer 19 year old reapplicants. However, this is not apparent across all cycles, with 18 year olds from the 2012 and 2013 cycles having experienced increased acceptance rates and increased reapplication rates, causing the measure for persistent demand to rise.

In 2017, the acceptance rate increased to 86.7 per cent (+0.4 percentage points), and the 18 year old reapplication rate decreased to 42.5 per cent (-0.2 percentage points), resulting in the persistent demand being 92.4 per cent, an increase of 0.2 percentage points from the previous year.

Figure 28 Acceptance rates, reapplication rates, and persistent demand



Application rates by age

Interpreting application rate trends as a measure of demand for higher education for age groups older than age 18, is more difficult than it is for those aged 18. The link to the background population is less clear (for example, a large and changing proportion will already have higher education qualifications), and the applicants themselves will, in many cases, have had previous opportunities to apply. In addition, a lower proportion of total applicants in older age groups apply by the January deadline, making January deadline rates a less complete measure of demand, and this proportion has changed over time.

Figures 29 to 32 show the application rates for all age groups (except the 18 and 19 year old age groups, which have been reported earlier) from each country in turn. Application rates vary substantially across the age groups – for example, in England, 20 year olds have an application rate twice that of 21 year olds, over ten times greater than 25 to 29 year olds, and over 80 times greater than 40 to 60 year olds. To accommodate this range, and to allow the assessment of proportional changes, the rates are shown on a logarithmic axis.

In England, the rates in 2018 fell for all groups aged 20 and older, except 21 year olds who increased by 0.8 per cent proportionally. The largest proportional decrease was for the 30 to 39 age group (-11.3 per cent proportionally), followed by the 25 to 29 age group (-9.4 per cent). Across the reported period, the application rates increased by between 20 and 68 per cent for all age groups.

In Northern Ireland, the application rates increased for those aged 21, 25 to 29, and 40 to 60. Application rates fell for all other age groups shown here, with the largest decrease seen in those aged 23 (-14.4 per cent proportionally).

Scotland differed from the rest of the UK, with application rates increasing for all age groups. New highs were recorded in 2018 for those aged 20, 21, 22, and for the 30 to 39 and 40 to 60 age groups. The largest increase was from those aged 40 to 60 (14.3 per cent proportionally), followed by the 30 to 39 age group (8.4 per cent proportionally).

In Wales, the majority of age groups had declining application rates in 2018, except those aged 21, 23, or 40 to 60. The largest decrease was seen for those aged 24 (-15.5 per cent proportionally), and the largest increase was seen for the 40 to 60 age group (18.4 per cent proportionally).

Figure 29 January deadline application rates from England by age

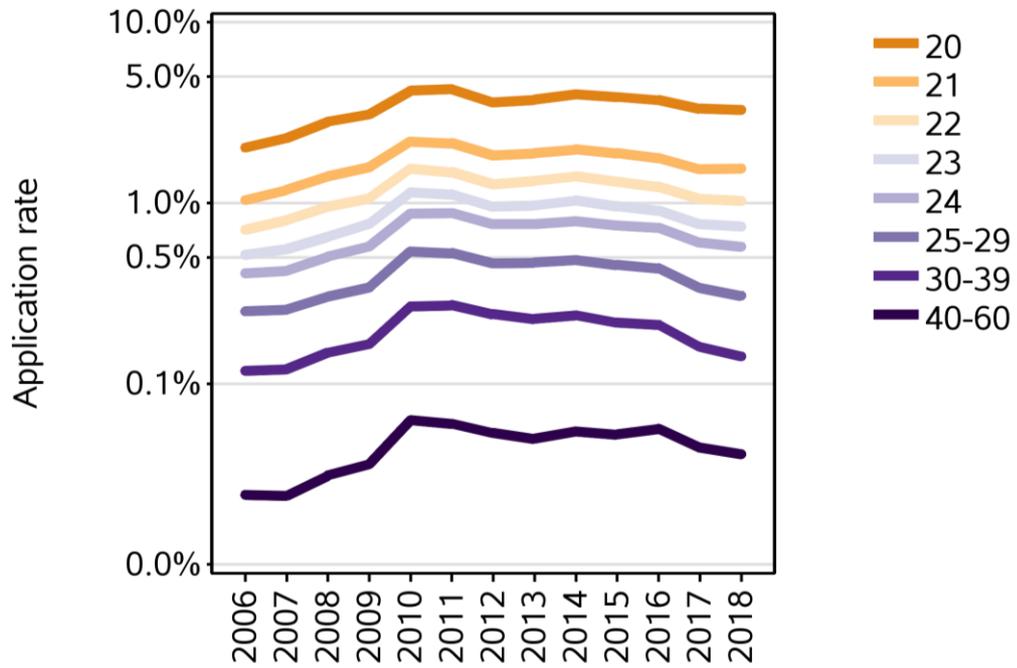


Figure 30 January deadline application rates from Northern Ireland by age

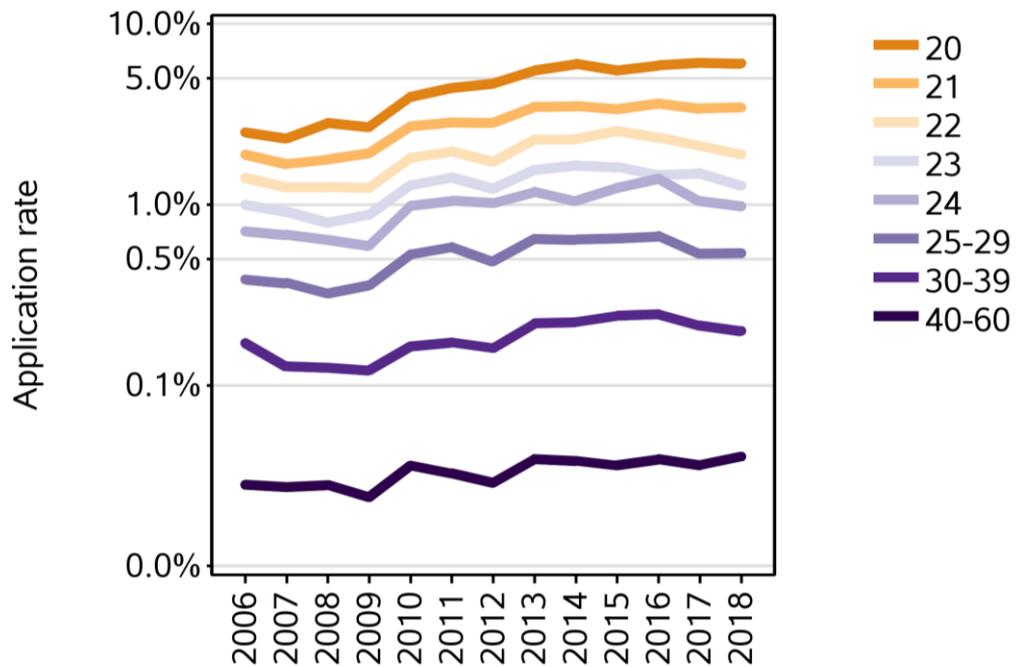


Figure 31 January deadline application rates from Scotland by age

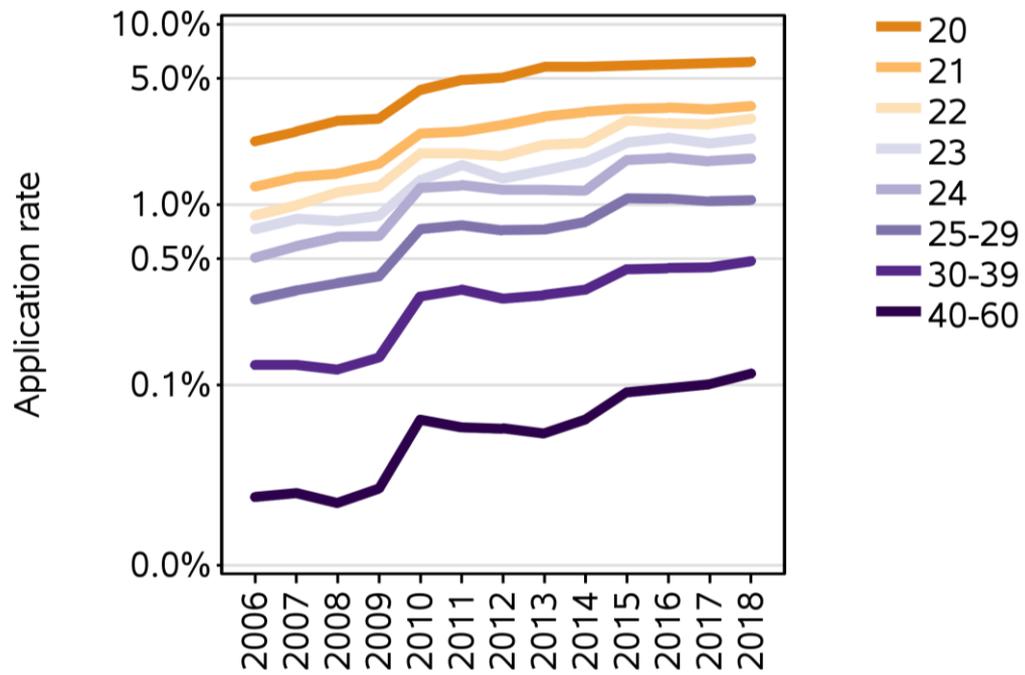


Figure 32 January deadline application rates from Wales by age

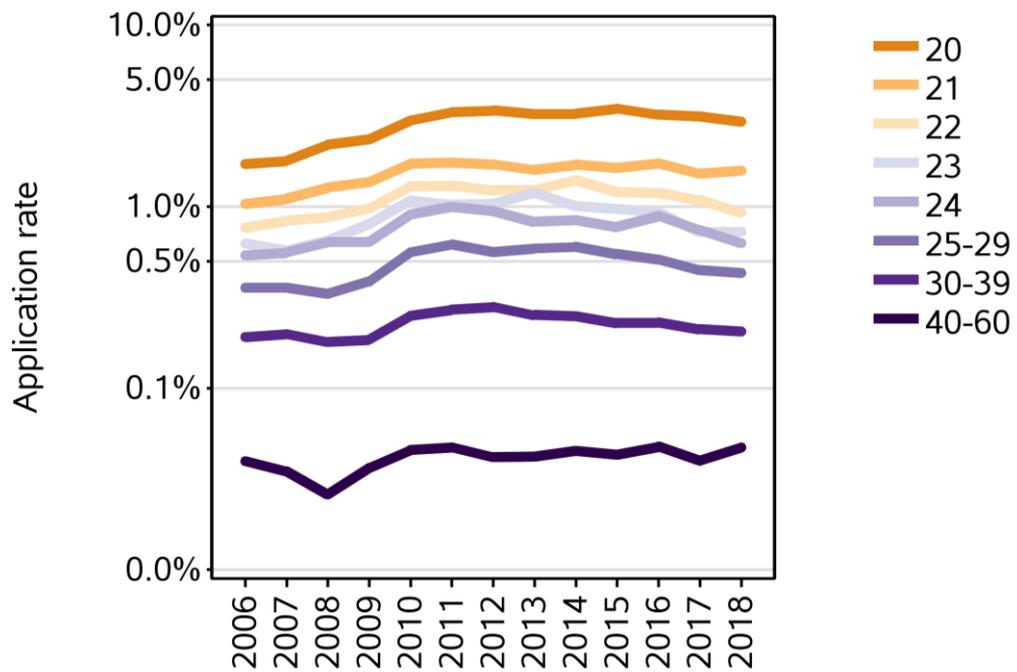
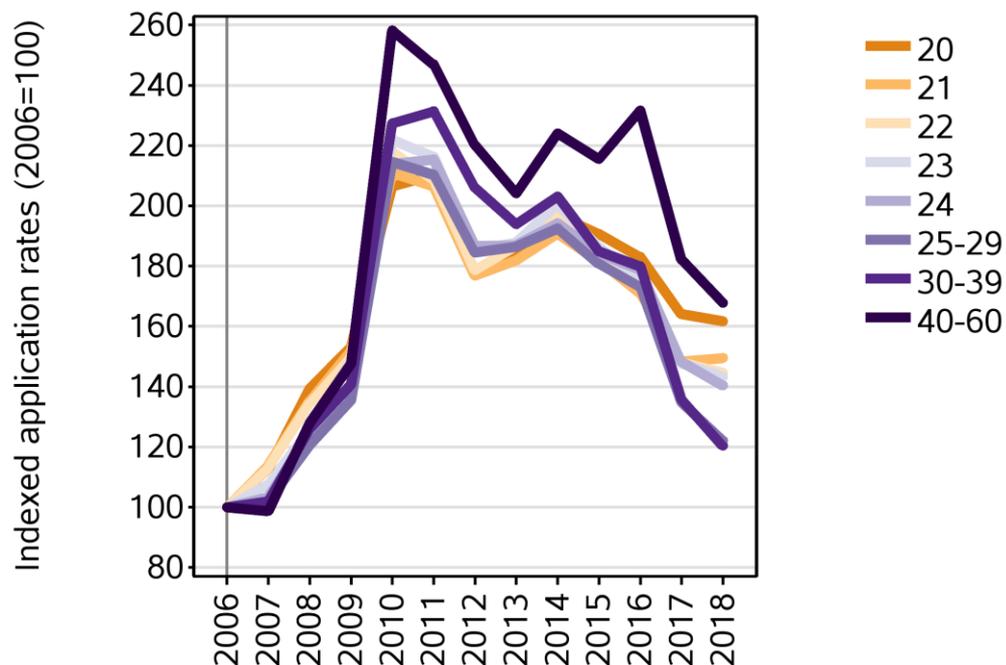


Figure 33 shows the application rates for all age groups (except the 18 and 19 year old age groups) from England, indexed such that the rate in 2006 equals 100. This shows how application rates for each age group have changed – in a proportional sense – in relation to the start of the reporting period. For example, a value of 200 means the application rate is twice that of the rate in 2006.

Between 2006 and 2010, the application rates for all age groups more than doubled. Since then, application rates have followed a downward trend, despite all age groups increasing in 2014. In 2018, application rates from 21 year olds increased, while all other age groups decreased.

Figure 33 January deadline application rates from England by age (indexed to 2006 = 100)



Annex A: 18 year old population context

Over half of all UK applicants at the January deadline are aged 18. This analysis uses country-specific age definitions that align with the cut-off points for school/college cohorts in the different administrations of the UK. For the 2018 cycle, England and Wales ages are defined on 31 August 2017, for Northern Ireland on 1 July 2017, and for Scotland on 28 February 2018. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts, and means the group of applicants treated as 18 year olds in each country will generally be applying to UCAS for the first time.

The population estimates are based on ONS' mid-year estimates and national population projections controlled to UK countries (published in June 2015). For 16 to 20 year olds, the estimates are obtained by ageing 15 year olds from the appropriate number of years earlier. This approach avoids the estimates being susceptible to changes in net migration (including overseas students) during these ages. Older ages are obtained from the mid-year estimates and national population projections without ageing. In both cases, the estimates are adjusted from age at mid-year to age on the country-specific reference dates, using the monthly distribution of births. Analysis of application rates by area-based background are supported through small area population estimates available from the Office for National Statistics, National Records for Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. These small area population estimates have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.

Figure 34 shows the population of the 18 year old cohort by UK country for the cohorts covered in this report. England is shown on a separate axis (left hand side) to the other countries of the UK. On the basis used in this report, the 2018 18 year old cohort size to the nearest thousand (proportion of UK cohort) is 609,000 (84 per cent) for England, 23,000 (three per cent) for Northern Ireland, 56,000 (8 per cent) for Scotland, and 34,000 (5 per cent) for Wales. The relatively large size of the cohort in England (11 to 26 times that of the other UK countries) means that some analysis, such as application rates by background and sex, are easier to interpret for England than for the other countries, where small base population sizes introduce appreciable year-to-year variations.

Figure 35 shows these same figures indexed to the size of the 2009 cohort, to show the trends in cohort size between the different countries more clearly. Since 2009, the size of the cohort has reduced for each country. In the 2018 cycle, the 18 year old cohort changed proportionally against the 2017 cohort by -2.3 per cent in England, -4.1 per cent in Northern Ireland, -3.1 per cent in Scotland, and -3.2 per cent in Wales. These different changes include a component resulting from the different age reference dates.

In 2018, the 18 year old cohort compared to 2009 is 8.8 per cent smaller (-58,900) in England, 10.8 per cent smaller (-2,800) in Northern Ireland, 14.3 per cent smaller (-9,300) in Scotland, and 14.7 per cent smaller (-5,900) in Wales. This is a reduction across the UK of around 76,900 since 2009, -9.6 per cent proportionally. If the

observed 2018 application rates were to be applied to a population of the same size as the 2009 cohort, there would have been around 28,500 more 18 year old applicants in 2018.

Figure 34 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK

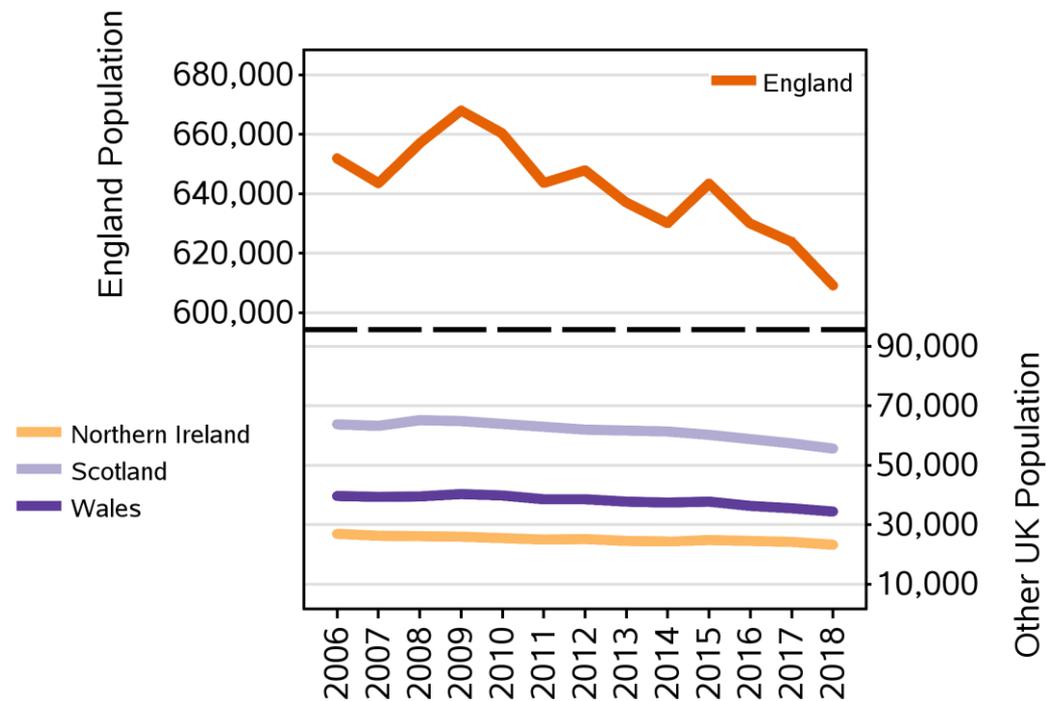
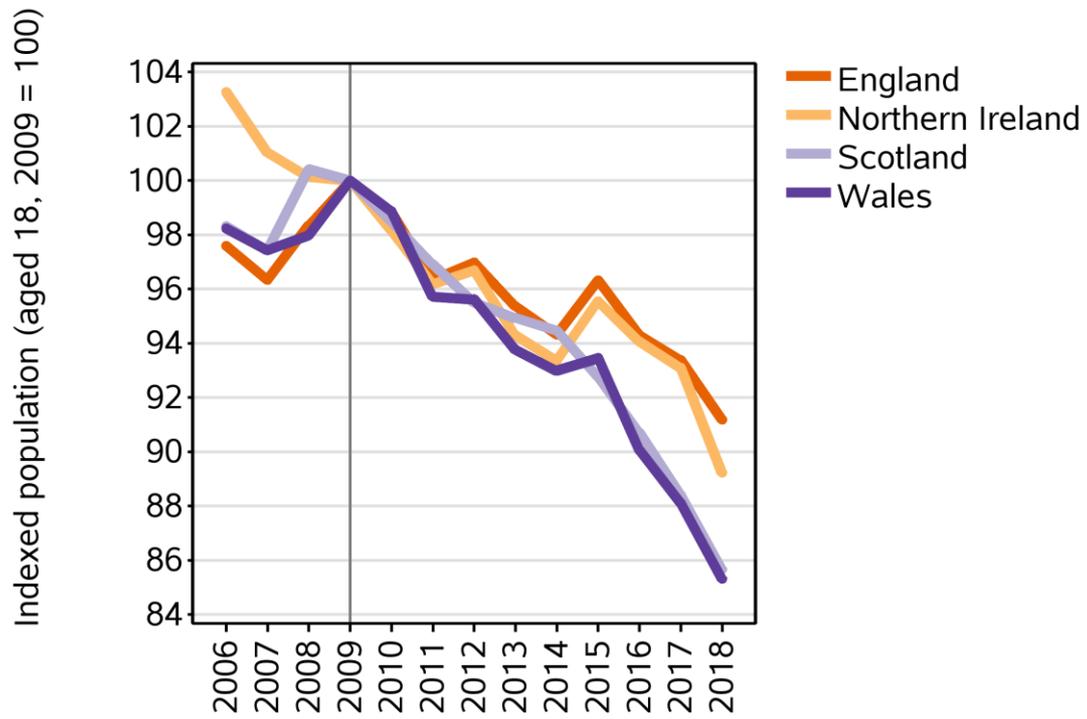


Figure 35 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK (indexed to 2009 = 100)



Incorporating population estimates

The population estimates used in this report are based on ONS mid-year estimates and national population projections, which have been aligned to the 2011 census.

The 15 year old population in these estimates (apportioned to school cohorts, rather than age at mid-year) is of particular interest, since it is this group that is aged to give the core 18 year old estimates (the 'derived' 18 year old estimates). This group is aged, rather than the 18 year olds being used directly, to avoid inaccuracies that can relate from varying numbers of non-UK domiciled 18 year olds being resident at age 18 (for example, international students).

The use of these estimates results in a difference in the direction of population change for derived 18 year olds between 2013 and 2014 (based on the 15 year olds in 2010 and 2011). The ONS mid-year estimates show a 0.5 per cent increase in the population between these years, while trends derived from other administrative population sources (including school statistics and benefit records) show a 1 per cent decrease. In each case, the derived 18 year old population estimates show the 18 year old population to have risen between 2013 and 2014, compared to the other administrative sources which show the population to have fallen.

The difference in these trends is due to the revision of the mid-year estimates to be consistent with the 2011 census. These estimates cover all ages and, because of the estimation methods involved in the census, are intended to be most accurate for age bands rather than single years of age.⁵ The ONS has advised that adjustments to the 2011 census to account for missing data are thought to have led to a small overestimation of the number of 15 year olds, and under-estimation of the number of 16 to 19 year olds, predominately those aged 16.⁶

This effect for 15 and 16 year olds in 2011 will mostly affect the number of 18 year olds in the derived estimates used in this work for 2013 and 2014. To minimise this issue, the derived estimates are based on the mid-year estimates, but with an adjustment for 15 year olds in 2010 (who are based on 16 year olds in the 2011 census), and 15 year olds in 2011 (based on 15 year olds in the 2011 census). For these years, an adjustment is made so the proportional changes in the population across 2009, 2010, and 2011 match those observed for the total number of UK 15

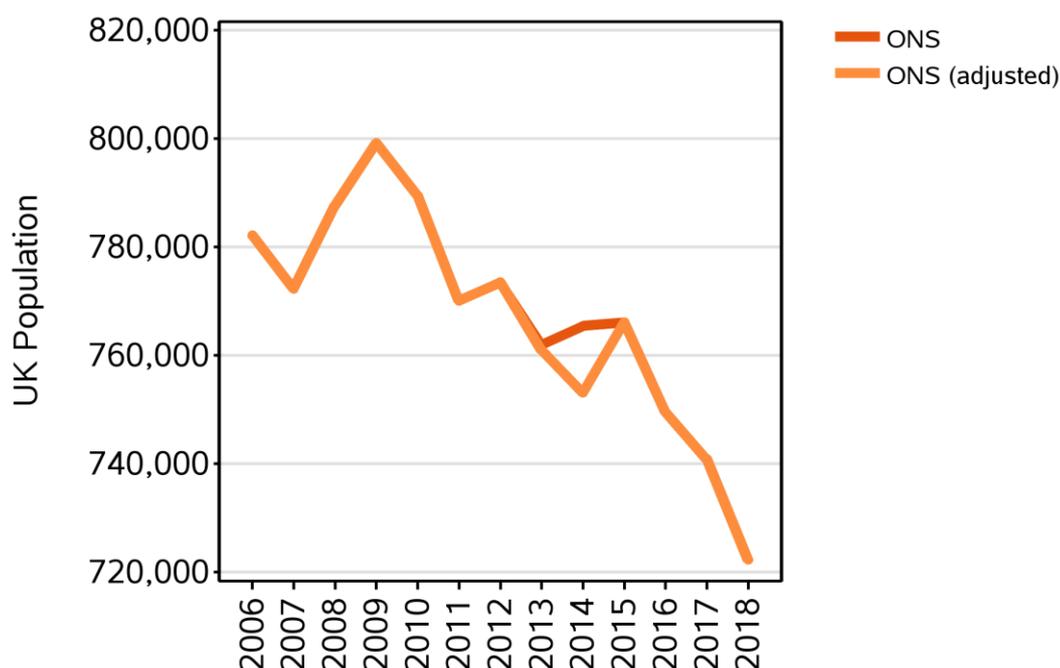
⁵ See Section D of the technical notes in the Department for Education Statistical First Release Participation in education, training, and employment by 16-18 year olds in England (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR_end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf).

⁶ See www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/2011-census-user-guide/quality-and-methods/quality/quality-notes-and-clarifications/index.html

year old school pupils.⁷ That is, the mid-year estimates of 15 year olds in 2009 (based in part on 17 year olds in the 2011 census) are taken as correct, then the 2010 and 2011 figures derived by proportional changes from that figure. This adjustment results in the derived 18 year old population for 2013 being 0.1 per cent lower than when based on the (unadjusted) mid-year estimates, while for 2014, they are 1.6 per cent lower.

Because the ONS mid-year population estimates for 2015 are unlikely to be materially affected (as 2011 census population estimates for 14 year olds, who would be aged 18 in 2015, are unaffected by adjustments to account for missing data), they are not adjusted, and comparison between these estimates and the total number of UK 15 year old school pupils, shows a similar proportional increase in the population between 15 year olds in 2011 and 2012 (18 year olds in 2014 and 2015). For similar reasons, no adjustments are made for the 2016, 2017, or 2018 population estimates.

Figure 36 ONS 15 year old mid-year population estimates with and without adjustment



⁷ Numbers given in Table 5 of the Education and Training Statistics for the UK: 2013 (www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-and-training-statistics-for-the-uk-2013) published by the Department for Education. Adjustment applied to derived figures on same age definition.

A note on numbers in Scotland

UCAS covers the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate provision for people living in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, so the statistics on acceptances or 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 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 2010, the Scottish Centralised Applications to nursing and midwifery Training Clearing House (CATCH) was incorporated into the UCAS Undergraduate admissions scheme. Data from 2010 onwards includes nursing and midwifery diploma courses in Scotland.

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 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. This means 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.

A note on POLAR3, POLAR4, and SIMD

The POLAR classification, developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)⁸, classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in higher education (entry at age 18 or 19). Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people, and are ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged). POLAR4 is the most recent version of the POLAR classification, and is available for the first time in UCAS' reporting since its launch in 2017.

The SIMD⁹ classification (the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) ranks small geographical areas in Scotland by their relative level of deprivation across a range of measures, which are used to form five groups with approximately equal population sizes. The groupings follow the same format as POLAR, with quintile 1 representing the most disadvantaged applications, and quintile 5 representing the most advantaged applicants.

18 year old applicants from the UK are assigned a POLAR quintile based on their postcode, with all 18 year olds in Scotland also being assigned an SIMD quintile. Each cycle, there are a number of applicants who are unable to be assigned a quintile due to their postcode being unclassified¹⁰. For POLAR3, in 2018, missing applicants accounted for 0.4 per cent of all applicants (0.4 per cent for each of the countries). For POLAR4, in 2018, 0.5 per cent of all applicants were not assigned to a quintile (0.5 per cent for England, Scotland, and Wales, and 0.4 per cent for Northern Ireland). 0.3 per cent of Scottish applicants were not assigned to an SIMD quintile in 2018.

All applicants who are not assigned to a quintile are equally distributed among applicants in their country of domicile, by adjusting the weighting for each applicant with a known quintile in that country. Applicants with no known quintile are given a weighting of 0. For example, if there were 1,000 applicants in England with a known POLAR quintile, and 10 applicants with unknown quintiles, each of the known 1,000 applicants would have a weighting of 1.01, with the unknown applicants having a weighting of 0. This ensures that the weighted proportion of applicants in each quintile is the same as the proportion of known applicants in each quintile. These weightings are then used to calculate the application rates. As such, application rates will not match those derived from using the population estimates, and the number of POLAR3/ POLAR4/ SIMD applicants reported in the deadline applicant statistics.

⁸ Source: www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR

⁹ Source: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

¹⁰ Source: www.hefce.ac.uk/postcode/