

# 15 JANUARY DEADLINE ANALYSIS

- > There are a total 568,330 applicants as of the 15 January deadline - up 1.2% on 2019.
- > A record 39.5% of all UK 18 year olds applied to HE, with more than 50% of 18 year olds from London applying.
- > The application rate gap between young students in POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5 narrows to a record low.
- > An increase in mature applicants to nursing courses drives overall rise in UK applicants aged 30+.
- > A record 73,080 applicants from outside the EU, 14.7% more than 2019 - driven by 33.8% and 32.9% increases in applicants from China and India respectively. EU applicants fall by 2% (-860).



UCAS



Explore all the 15 January deadline data in our interactive dashboard on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)<sup>1</sup>

### Overall applicant numbers

For most higher education courses, an application must be submitted to UCAS by 18:00 (UK time) on 15 January – the January deadline – to guarantee it will receive equal consideration by providers. In the last cycle, 88% of all main scheme applicants had applied by 15 January deadline, with this proportion rising to 98.3% for UK 18 year olds. Consequently, 15 January deadline applicant numbers provide a reliable statistical reference point indicating demand for full-time higher education.

This cycle, a total of 568,330 applicants applied by the 15 January deadline. This is an increase of 1.2% (6,910 applicants) from this point in 2019.

Additionally, the proportion of UK 18 year olds applying by the January deadline has reached a record high of 39.5%. This is an increase of 1.3 percentage points since 2019.

**1.2% INCREASE IN APPLICANTS, FROM 561,420 APPLICANTS IN 2019 TO 568,330 APPLICANTS THIS CYCLE.**

<sup>1</sup> [www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2020/2020-cycle-applicant-figures-15-january-deadline](https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2020/2020-cycle-applicant-figures-15-january-deadline)

# 73,080

APPLICANTS FROM OUTSIDE THE EU,  
14.7% HIGHER THAN IN 2019.

## Applicant domicile

There have been a record 73,080 applicants from outside the EU. This is an increase of 14.7% (9,390 applicants) since 2019. There has been rapid growth in the number of applicants from non-EU countries for the past 3 cycles, with over 20,000 more non-EU applicants in 2020 than in 2017, a relative increase of 39%.

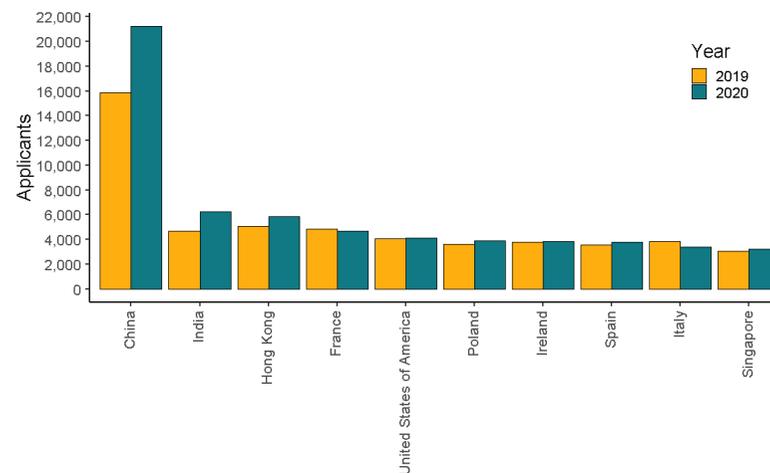
Meanwhile, the number of EU applicants (excluding the UK) has decreased by 2% (860) overall, to 43,030 applicants. Since the UK's referendum on EU membership in 2016, the number of applications from EU applicants by the 15 January deadline has been variable, with a low of 42,070 applicants in 2017 and a high of 43,890 in 2019 – although this figure remains beneath the high of 45,220 EU applicants in 2016. This cycle, the 2% year-on-year decrease in applicants is driven largely by a 4.6% decrease in the number of EU domiciled applicants aged between 19 and 24 years (inclusive). The number of 18 year old EU applicants has remained relatively stable year on year (+0.2%), and they remain the largest single age group from countries in the EU excluding the UK applying through UCAS

This year there have been 0.4% fewer applicants from the UK (-1,600), with this figure now standing at 452,220.

Applicants domiciled in England have increased by 120 applicants, to reach 373,860 following four years of decreases. Meanwhile, the number of applicants domiciled in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have decreased by 1.9%, 2.2%, and 2.8% to 42,530, 18,430, and 17,400 respectively.

The growth in applicants from outside the EU is largely driven by significant proportional increases in the number of applicants from China, India, and Hong Kong, who have the largest numbers of applicants through UCAS. Applicants from China have increased by 33.8% (+5,370) to reach a record high of 21,250. There are now significantly more applicants at 15 January deadline from China than both Wales (18,430) and Northern Ireland (17,400). Given historically lower acceptance rates of Chinese applicants compared to UK domiciled applicants – approximately 57% compared to 82% – it is expected that

the number of acceptances from China will remain lower than from Wales but could be higher than from Northern Ireland at End of Cycle 2020. The number of applicants from India has increased by 32.9% to a record 6,230. Additionally, the number of applicants from Hong Kong – the next largest source of non-EU applicants – has risen by 15.2% (780 applicants) to reach a high of 5,870, after decreasing in the 2019 cycle.



**FIGURE 1:** The number of applicants from the largest ten contributors to the overall number of non-UK applicant numbers in the 2019 and 2020 cycle.

The decrease seen in EU applicant numbers is not uniform across all EU countries. For example, the number of applicants from Spain and Poland have increased by 6.2% (+240) and 6.7% (+260) respectively to reach 3,800 and 3,900 applicants – both now at record numbers. Whereas Italy has had a significant decrease in applicant numbers of 13.7% (-460) to 3,380 applicants, and France has experienced a small decrease in applicant numbers by 3.1% (-140) – following two years of increasing applicant numbers.



## 18 year old UK application rates by domicile

The increased application rate for UK 18 year olds, which has increased by 1.3 percentage points to 39.5%, is driven by a record application rate of 40.2% for students in England – with a record high of 237,040 18 year old applicants – an increase of 5,120 (2.2%) since the 2019 cycle.

This cycle, there are record application rates in every English region, with more than a third of 18 year olds in each region now applying to HE by the January deadline. London has experienced the largest increase in application rates where the proportion of students applying to HE has increased by 2.8 percentage points to reach 52.6%. It is the first time any region has seen more than half of its 18 year old population apply to HE by the 15 January deadline. Despite record high application rates across the English regions - the differing rate of increases, with London's application rate increasing more proportionally than any other region, has led to a widening in the gap in application rates between London and all of the other regions. 18 year olds in London are now 1.54 times more likely to apply to HE by the January 15 deadline than those in the North East - the region with the lowest application rate.

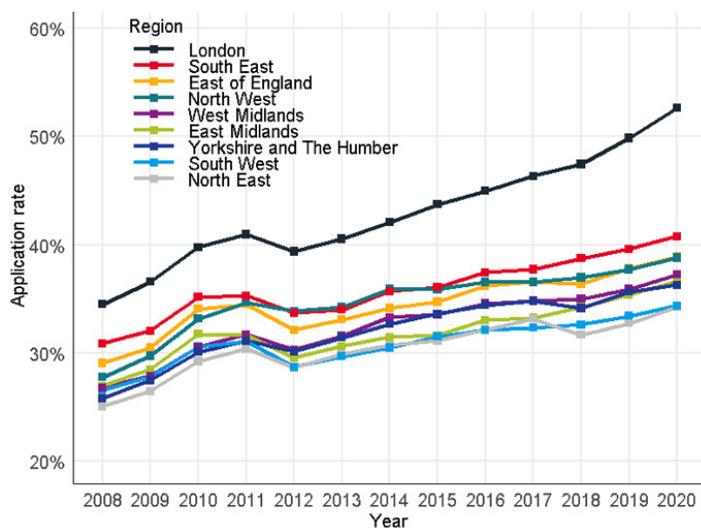


FIGURE 2: The application rate for 18 year olds by UK region

The number of 18 year old applicants from Northern Ireland has also increased by 1.9% after four years of modest decreases, to reach 10,670 applicants – 47.9% of all 18 year olds in Northern Ireland.

In 2020, the 18 year old population of Wales experienced a 3.2% year-on-year decrease. This means, although the number of 18 year old applicants has fallen by 1.8% this year to 10,620 applicants, the proportion of Welsh 18 year olds applying has reached a record high, with almost a third of all 18 year olds (32.7%) applying to HE.

In contrast to other UK countries, Scotland has a limit on the number of funded university places available. Scotland is the only UK country to experience a decrease in both 18 year old applicant numbers and application rate. The number of 18 year old Scottish applicants has decreased by 2.9% to 16,970 – 31.9% of all Scottish 18 year olds. There has been a 1.3% decrease in the Scottish 18 year old population into 2020, which will have partly contributed towards the decreasing applicant numbers. Additionally, due to around a third of full-time higher education in Scotland not being included in UCAS' figures<sup>2</sup>, it is possible these trends do not reflect those seen across the HE sector in Scotland.

## MORE THAN HALF OF 18 YEAR OLDS IN LONDON APPLY TO HE BY 15 JANUARY DEADLINE.

<sup>2</sup>In Scotland, there is a substantial proportion of higher education that is not included in UCAS' figures. This is accounted for mostly by full-time higher education provided in further education colleges. These students represent around one third of young, full-time undergraduate study in Scotland – this proportion varies by geography and background within Scotland. Accordingly, these figures on applications and application rates in Scotland reflect only those applying for full-time undergraduate study through UCAS. Within the next two years, we anticipate we will be able to extend our reporting on Scottish students by working with the Scottish Government, integrating additional datasets.



# 5.8% MORE APPLICANTS TO WELSH PROVIDERS OVERALL.

## Applicants by domicile to providers in each country

Overall, providers in Wales experienced the largest change in applicant numbers by 15 January. Welsh providers collectively received 62,320 applicants by 2020, a 5.8% (3,420) increase following three years of decreasing applicant numbers – although there is significant variation between providers. This growth is fuelled by a 22.2% (1,110) increase in applicants from non-EU countries, and increases of 6.2% (2,170) for applicants domiciled in England.

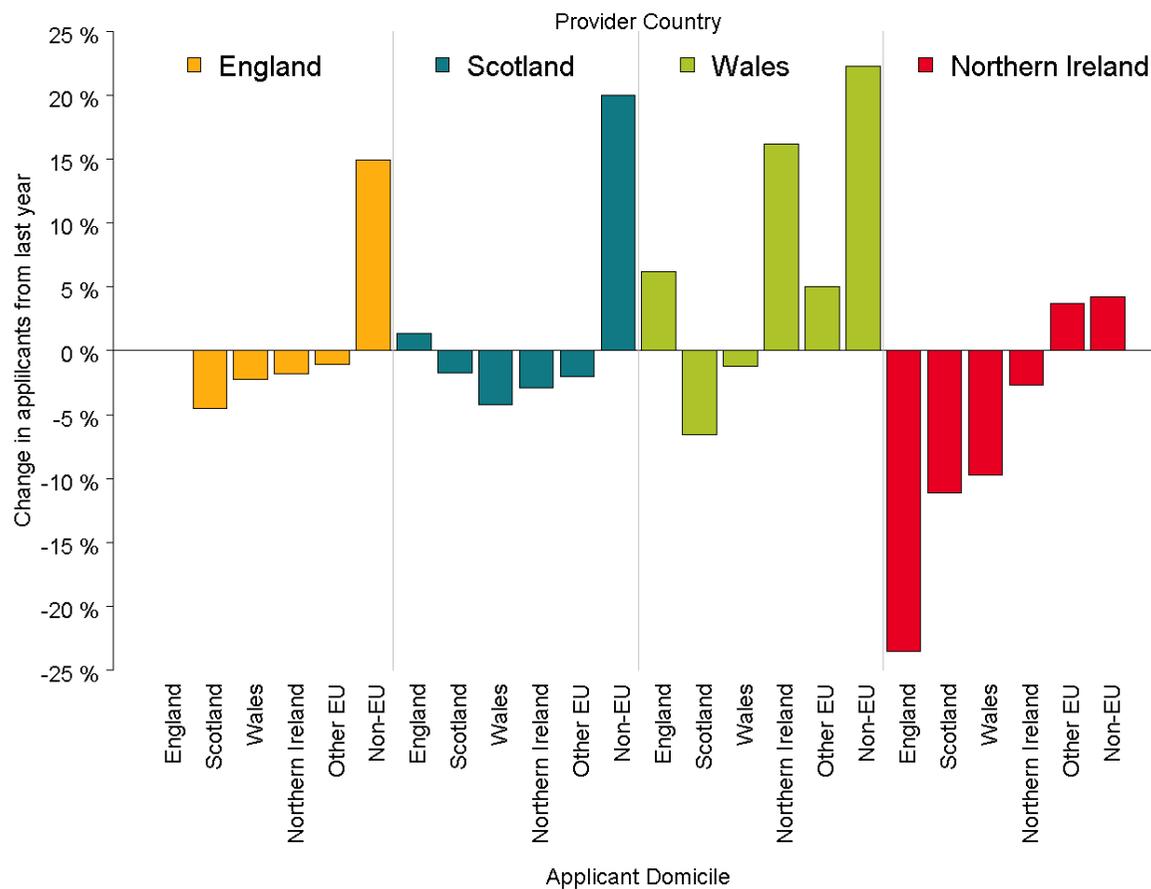
This year, 9.9% of all English applicants applied to at least one Welsh provider. This is 0.6 percentage points higher than in 2019, and follows three years of decreases. Similarly, the proportion of non-UK applicants applying to a Welsh provider has increased for the first time in three years.

The number of applicants from Wales applying to Welsh providers fell by 1.2%, however, this was mainly caused by a decreasing 18 year old population. The proportion of applicants from Wales who applied to Welsh providers grew from 75.5% to 76.3% in 2020.

Provider country	Domicile of applicant					
	ENGLAND	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND	WALES	EU	NON-EU
ENGLAND	99.8% (no change)	52.1% (+0.6pp)	8.6% (-0.3pp)	76.7% (-0.1pp)	86.4% (+0.7pp)	98.2% (+0.2pp)
SCOTLAND	8.2% (+0.1pp)	25.8% (-0.1pp)	98.6% (+0.1pp)	5.2% (-0.1pp)	40.1% (no change)	31.3% (+1.3pp)
WALES	9.9% (+0.6pp)	5.7% (+0.9pp)	0.4% (no change)	76.3% (+0.8pp)	9.1% (+0.6pp)	8.4% (+0.5pp)
NORTHERN IRELAND	0.5% (-0.1pp)	88.8% (+0.1pp)	0.4% (no change)	0.6% (no change)	3.8% (+0.2pp)	2.0% (-0.2pp)

**TABLE 1:** Proportion of applicants from each domicile with at least one choice at a provider in each country, and the percentage point change from the 2019 cycle.





**FIGURE 3:** Percentage change in the number of applicants from each domicile making at least one choice to each provider country.

Providers in England and Scotland also experienced increases in overall applicant numbers of 1.7% (8,380) and 2.5% (2,940) respectively. Again, the main driver of this increase was applicants from outside the EU. For providers in England, the number of applicants from outside the EU increased by 14.9% (9,310) to reach 71,740 applicants – 14.1% of the total 508,890 applicants to English providers. For providers in Scotland, the number of applicants from outside the EU increased by 20% (3,820) to 22,900 – 19.4% of the total 118,310 applicants to Scottish providers.

The only provider country to experience an overall decrease in applicants was Northern Ireland. Applicants to Northern Ireland decreased by 860 (4%) to 20,540. This was caused by decreases in applicant numbers from England in particular, and from within Northern Ireland.

## Age groups of UK applicants

The majority of UK applicants are 18 year olds. The number of 18 year old UK applicants has increased by 4,610 (+1.7%) to 275,300 this year. 18 year olds now account for 60.9% of the total number of UK applicants. This is despite a decrease in the UK 18 year old population of 1.5%.

19 year olds are the second largest group, representing 16% of all UK applicants. This group saw a large fall of 5,740 (-7.3%) to 72,490 applicants this cycle. The 19 year old UK population has experienced a drop of 2% into 2020. This, combined with year on year increases in entry rates for 18 year olds reaching a record high in 2019, may in part help explain the drop in 19 year old UK applicants.

Similarly, there were drops of between 2.4% and 2.6% in the 20 year old, 21-24, and 25-29 age groups. There are now 25,000, 35,820, and 16,570 applicants from each of these age groups, respectively.

In comparison, mature applicants have been rising. Applicants in the age group 30-34 have increased for the first time in five years. This group saw an increase of 210 applicants (+2.3%) to 9,370. There has also been a large proportional increase in applicants over 35, reaching 16,090 after an increase of 8.2% (1,220 people). However, these two age groups still only represent 5.6% of all UK applicants between them – up from 5.3% in 2019. The increase in mature applicants is mainly attributable to an increase of 16.2% (+5,720) in applications from mature applicants (aged 30+) for subjects allied to medicine – a group of subjects primarily made up of nursing related courses.

The smallest age group – 17 and under – increased marginally to 1,590 applicants this cycle.

## Application rates by gender

The application rates of both women and men have continued to rise in 2020. 46.4% of UK 18 year old women have applied for an undergraduate course, an increase of 4.1% proportionally (+1.8pp) since 2019. The application rate for men increased by 2.2% proportionally (+0.7pp), to 32.9%. Consequently, the gender gap has widened slightly from 1.38 to 1.41, meaning that women have been 1.41 times more likely to apply to HE by the January deadline, than men.

## Application rates by POLAR4

Application rates have increased for all POLAR4 quintiles. The application rate for 18 year olds in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK (POLAR4 quintile 1) increased by 5.8% proportionally (+1.3pp) to 24.6%. Meanwhile, the application rate of the most advantaged group (POLAR4 quintile 5) increased by 2.9% proportionally (+1.6pp), to 55%.

This narrowed the gap in application rates between advantaged and disadvantaged students to a record low, with the most advantaged students being 2.24 times more likely to apply to HE by the January deadline than the most disadvantaged, compared to 2.30 in 2019.

**POLAR4 QUINTILE 5  
2.24 TIMES MORE  
LIKELY THAN POLAR4  
QUINTILE 1 TO APPLY.**

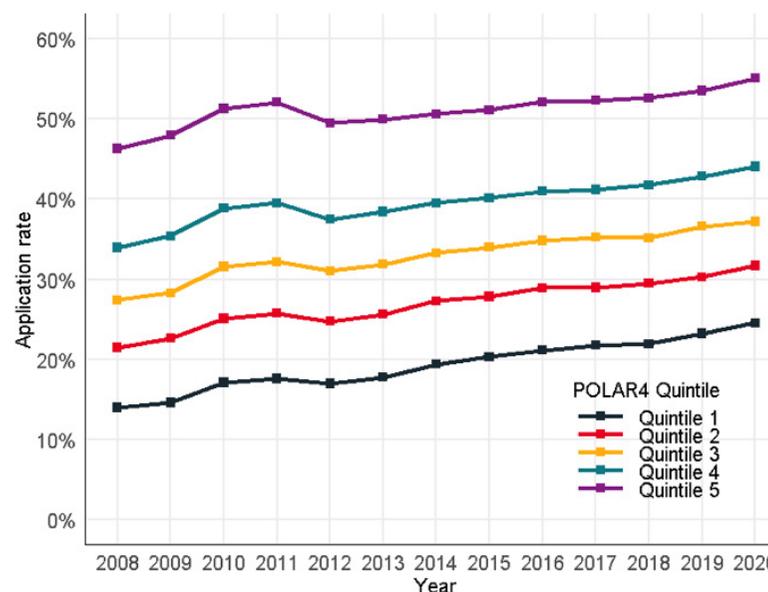


FIGURE 4: Application rates by POLAR4 quintile for UK 18 year olds.

## Subject trends

Almost all 18 year old UK main scheme applicants apply by 15 January deadline. Consequently, their subject preferences will be a very good indicator of overall subject demand for this group across the 2020 cycle. Additionally, following several years of successive decreases, the 18 year old UK population is forecast to grow again from the 2021 cycle onwards, reaching 2010's levels by 2024. We would expect a growth of up to 13% in UK 18 year old applicants by 2024, assuming the current rate of participation holds constant, although this increase may vary regionally. The changing preferences of this particular applicant group will therefore significantly shape the course and subject portfolio of providers over this period.

Social sciences continues to have the most applications from UK 18 year olds at 148,910 (an increase of 0.9%). This is followed by business and management with 146,850 applications. Business and management also had the largest raw increase in applications with an increase of 7,040 (+5.0%).

The second largest increase in raw applications for UK 18 year old applicants was for subjects allied to medicine – a group which includes nursing courses – with an increase of 6,750 applications (+5.4%) to reach 131,740. Nursing courses have experienced a second year of increasing application numbers overall following two years of marginal declines after the funding changes in August 2017.

Applications for medicine and dentistry from UK 18 year old applicants increased by 5.1% (+2,480) to 50,600. This follows a significant increase in overall acceptances in the 2019 cycle. This cycle the number of medical school places available in England has expanded for the third year straight - this may partly explain the increase in applicants.<sup>3</sup>

UK 18 year old applications to mathematical sciences had a small increase of 130 (+0.5%) to 28,830. This increase follows the large decrease in acceptances for mathematics courses in the 2019 cycle<sup>4</sup> as reported in the End of Cycle Report for 2019<sup>5</sup>.

The subjects which experienced a large raw decrease in applications from UK 18 year old applicants in the 2020 cycle were historical, philosophical, and religious studies and language and area studies with decreases in applications of 5,240 (-9%) and 4,330 (-6.6%) respectively.

Trends in applications to other subject groups can be found in the accompanying data dashboard<sup>6</sup>.

UCAS is committed to providing personalised and relevant information and advice to all students, and in September 2019 launched the UCAS Hub.<sup>7</sup> It encourages students to explore and reflect on all their options, including apprenticeships in one place. 60% of students said the Hub has made them actively think about an option that they weren't initially considering, whether that be a different university or college, a new subject or an apprenticeship. The Hub is a personalised digital space designed for students to return to time and time again while they make, what could be, their first life-defining decision.

<sup>3</sup> [www.hee.nhs.uk/news-blogs-events/news/new-medical-schools-open-train-doctors-future](http://www.hee.nhs.uk/news-blogs-events/news/new-medical-schools-open-train-doctors-future)

<sup>4</sup> The decrease in acceptances to mathematics courses into the 2019 cycle is calculated using the JACS group mathematical sciences – as HECoS groups are unavailable before 2019. However, the increase seen this cycle in the number of applications to the HECoS group mathematical sciences is similar if we consider the equivalent JACS group.

<sup>5</sup> [www.ucas.com/file/292736/download?token=xurFczbC](http://www.ucas.com/file/292736/download?token=xurFczbC)

<sup>6</sup> [www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2020/2020-cycle-applicant-figures-15-january-deadline](http://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2020/2020-cycle-applicant-figures-15-january-deadline)

<sup>7</sup> [www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/new-ucas-hub-encourages-students-shoot-stars](http://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/new-ucas-hub-encourages-students-shoot-stars)



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