

End of cycle report

2017

Patterns by age



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Applicants, acceptances, and the acceptance rate

Increase in 18 year old UK applicants, but falls in the number of older applicants

In 2017, there were 572,285 applicants from the UK to UCAS Undergraduate higher education courses, a decrease of 18,220 applicants (3.1 per cent proportionally), compared to 2016.

Figure 2.1 shows UK applicant numbers by age group. This year, there were 282,380 18 year old applicants from the UK, an increase of 1,340 (+0.5 per cent proportionally), the highest number on record. In contrast, the number of applicants aged 19 or over fell, which meant the share of all applicants this year who were aged 18 was 49.5 per cent, a 1.8 percentage point increase compared to 2016.

The second biggest UK applicant group by age was those aged 19. This year, there were 102,945 19 year old applicants from the UK, 5,605 fewer (-5.2 per cent proportionally) than in 2016.

The number of UK applicants aged 20 also fell in 2017. This year, there were 41,030 20 year old applicants from the UK, 630 fewer than in 2016, a proportional fall of 1.5 per cent.

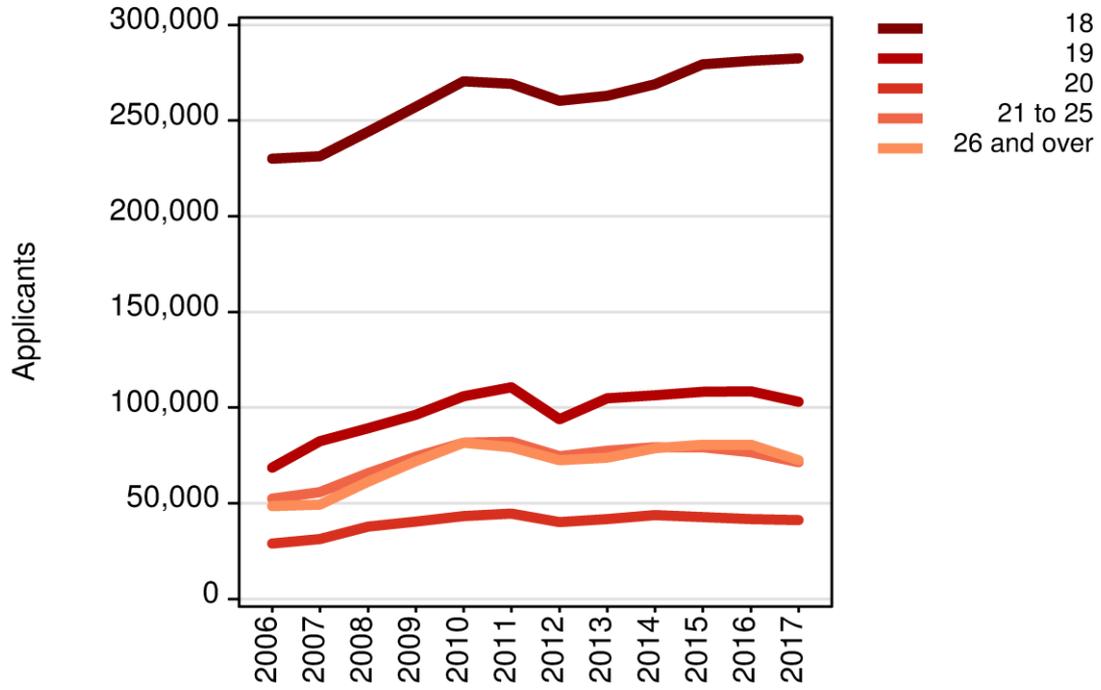
UK applicants aged between 21 and 25 are reported as a single group. In 2017, there were 71,325 UK applicants from this age group, 5,380 fewer (-7.0 per cent proportionally) compared to 2016.

Applicants aged 26 and over are also reported as a single group. This year, there were 72,550 UK applicants aged 26 and over, 7,885 fewer (-9.8 per cent proportionally) compared to 2016.

The larger falls among older age groups were, in part, due to the fall in applicants to nursing courses in England. As reported in June¹, there was a 23 per cent reduction in applicants from England to nursing courses this year. Because nursing applicants account for a large proportion of all applicants from older age groups (40 per cent of main scheme applicants aged 25 and over applied to nursing in 2016), the patterns for nursing will have had a large impact on the overall patterns shown in Figure 2.1.

¹ [2017 cycle applicant figures – June deadline](#)

Figure 2.1 UK applicants by age group



Record number of 18 year olds accepted, but falls among older age groups mean an overall decline in acceptances in 2017

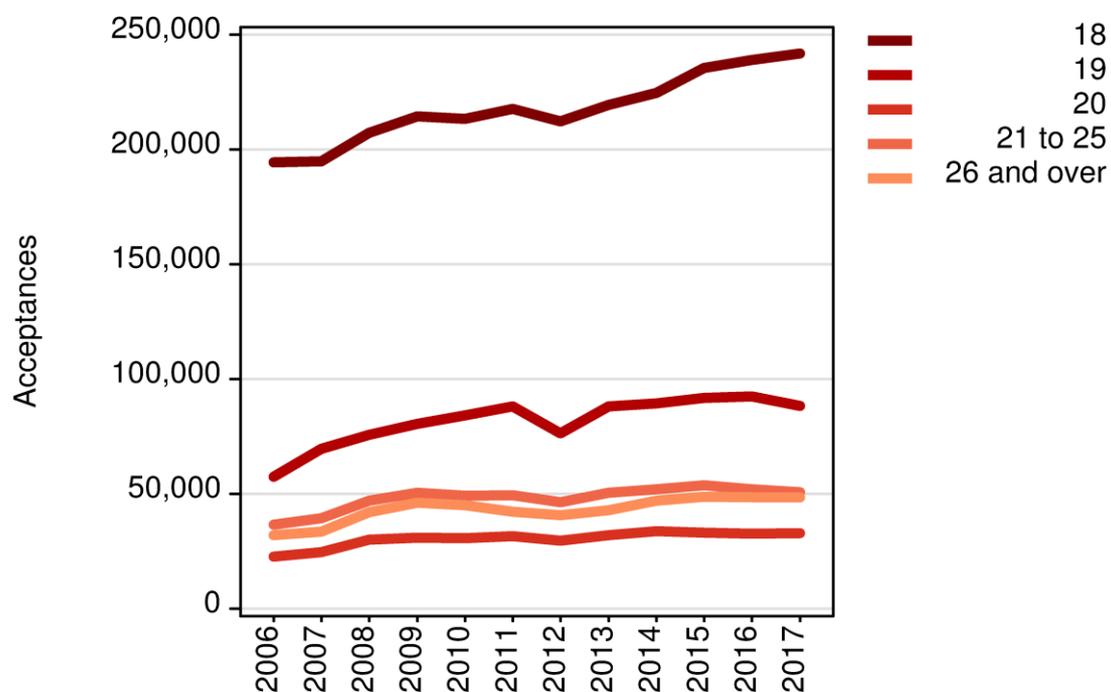
In 2017, there were 462,945 acceptances from UK domiciled applicants, a decrease of 2,535 applicants (-0.5 per cent proportionally), compared to 2016.

Figure 2.2 shows the number of acceptances from the UK by age group at the end of each cycle. The changes in acceptances in the 2017 cycle are similar to those in applicant numbers, with an increase in 18 year old acceptances, and a decrease in acceptances from older age groups. This year, 2,645 more 18 years olds were accepted (+1.1 per cent), bringing the total to 241,585, the highest number on record. This increase occurred despite a 1.2 per cent fall in the UK 18 year old population.

There were 219,920 UK acceptances aged 19 and over, a fall of 5,184 (-2.3 per cent), the second consecutive fall since 2015. Of these, 88,295 acceptances were aged 19, a decline of 3,950 (-4.3 per cent) compared to last year, and the first fall in this age group since 2012. The fall in 19 year old acceptances accounted for three quarters of the fall in all acceptances aged 19 and over.

Of those accepted this year, 32,665 were aged 20, an increase of 190 (+0.6 per cent). A further 50,590 were aged 21-25, a decrease of 1,370 (-2.6 per cent), and 48,370 were aged 26 and over, 55 fewer than in 2016 (-0.1 per cent).

Figure 2.2 UK acceptances by age group



Acceptance rates increase for all ages, with biggest increases for older age groups

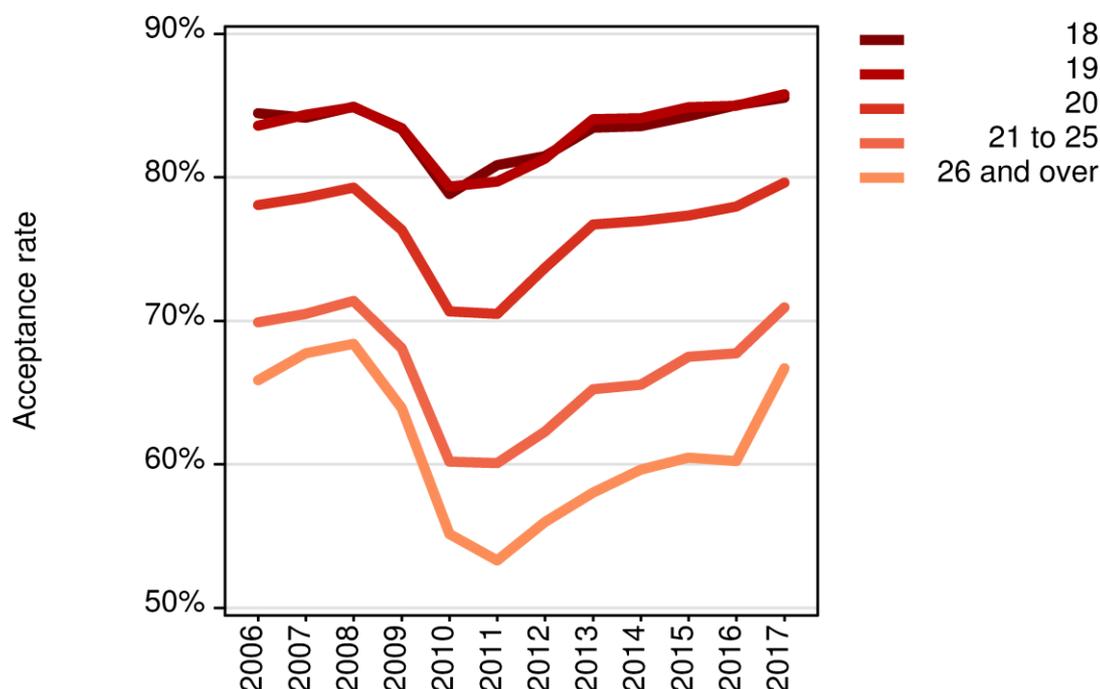
As shown in Figure 2.3, there are similarities in the acceptance rate trends across the age groups. Between 2006 and 2008, acceptance rates for all age groups increased. Then, after falling sharply, acceptance rates began to rise, increasing for all age groups in most years since 2012.

Across the period, 18 and 19 year olds had the highest acceptance rates. In 2017, the acceptance rates for 18 and 19 year olds were the highest on record, and reached 85.6 and 85.8 per cent respectively.

Acceptance rates for 20 year olds were consistently lower than for 18 and 19 year olds, but higher than for older age groups. In 2017, the acceptance rate for 20 year olds was also the highest on record, at 79.6 per cent.

In 2017, acceptance rates for 21 to 25 year olds, and those aged 26 and over, were the highest since 2008. For 21 to 25 year olds, the acceptance rate in 2017 was 70.9 per cent, while for those aged 26 and over, it was 66.7 per cent. For both age groups, the increases in 2017 were the biggest on record, and are the result of much larger proportional falls in applicants, compared to acceptances, this year.

Figure 2.3 Acceptance rates for UK domiciled applicants by age group



More English 18 year olds accepted than ever before

18 year olds are the single largest group of acceptances in each UK country, representing between 41 per cent of acceptances in Scotland, to 58 per cent in Northern Ireland.

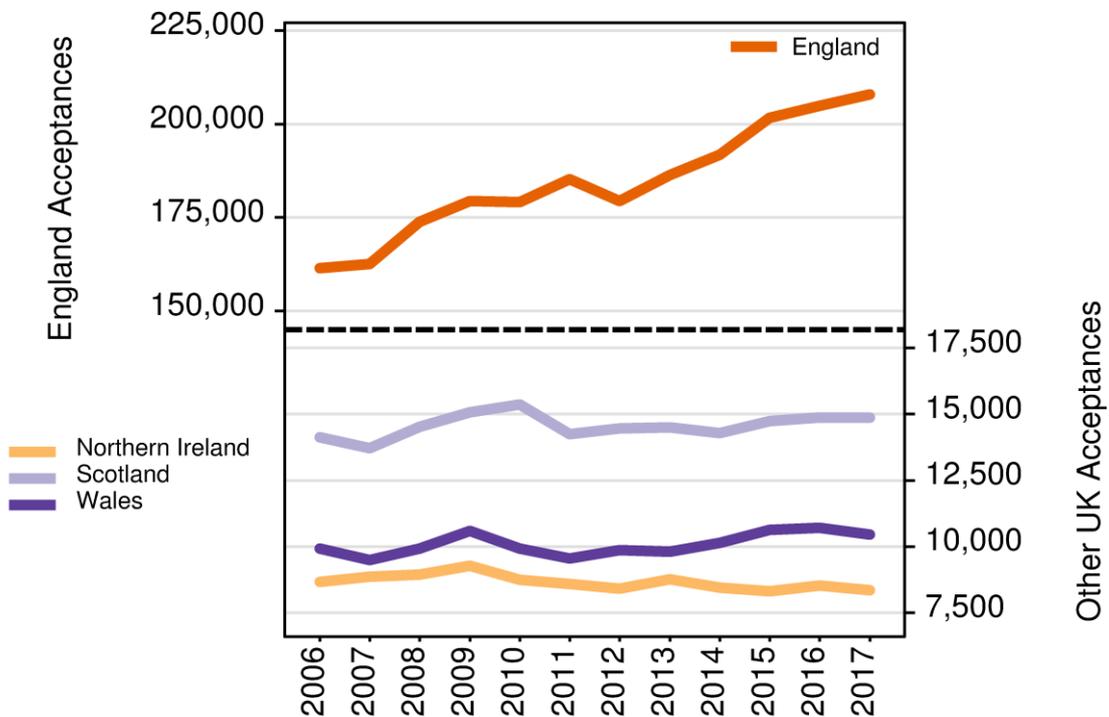
Because the majority (around 85 per cent) of all UK applicants come from England, trends in the other UK countries can often be masked. Figure 2.4 shows the number of acceptances from 18 year olds by country of domicile.

There were 207,920 acceptances from 18 year olds from England in 2017, the highest number on record. This is 3,075 (+1.5 per cent) higher than the number of acceptances in 2016. England was the only UK country which had an increase in the number of 18 year old acceptances in 2017.

The number of 18 year old acceptances from Scotland remained unchanged from last year, at 14,875.

The number of 18 year old acceptances from Wales and Northern Ireland fell in 2017. This year, 10,440 18 year olds from Wales were accepted, a fall of 2.4 per cent (-260). There were 8,345 18 year olds from Northern Ireland accepted this year, 2.1 per cent (-175) lower than in 2016.

Figure 2.4 UK 18 year old acceptances by UK country of domicile



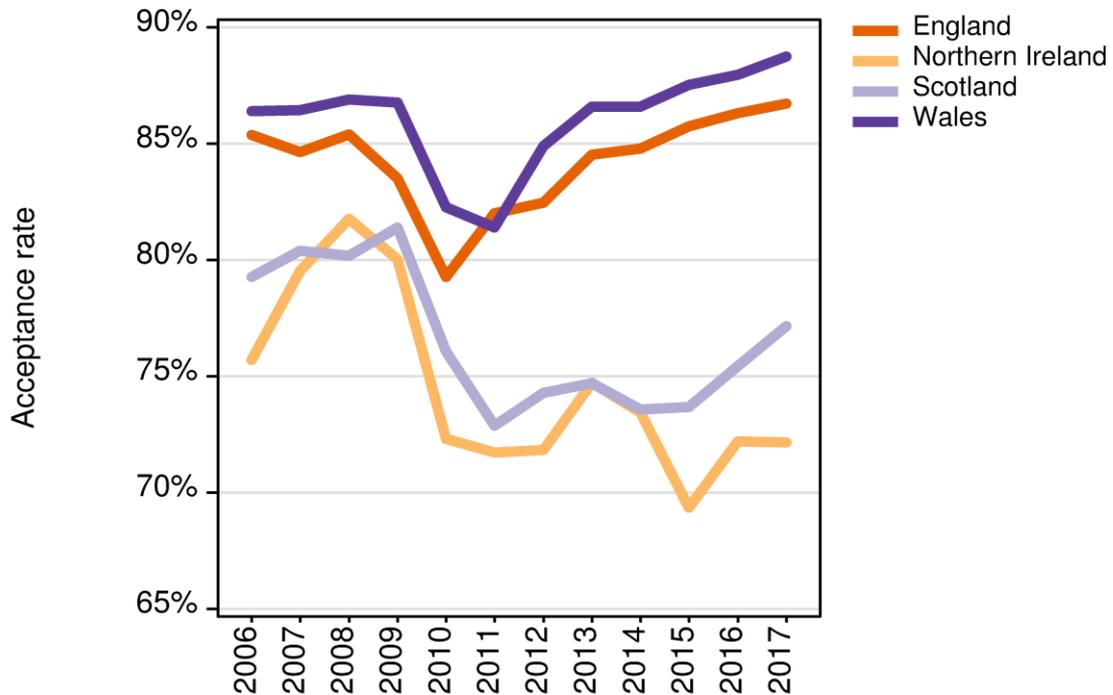
18 year old acceptance rates increase for England, Scotland, and Wales

Figure 2.5 shows that in 2017, 18 year old acceptance rates increased for applicants from England, Scotland, and Wales, and decreased slightly for applicants from Northern Ireland. For England, the change in acceptance rates reflects a proportionally larger increase in acceptances than applicants. For Scotland and Wales, changes in acceptance rates reflect a proportionally smaller decline in acceptances than applicants.

The acceptance rate for England increased each year since 2010, and this trend continued into 2017, when the acceptance rate reached 86.7 per cent, the highest on record. In 2015, the acceptance rate for England surpassed the previous high of 2008, and has since continued to increase to new highs each year.

The acceptance rate for Welsh applicants increased in the 2017 cycle to 88.7 per cent, the highest on record for any UK country. The acceptance rate for Scotland was 77.1 per cent, an increase of 1.7 percentage points compared to the previous cycle. The acceptance rate for Northern Ireland was 72.1 per cent in 2017, similar to the values in 2010 and 2011.

Figure 2.5 Acceptance rates for 18 year olds by UK country of domicile



Entry rates

UK entry rates continue to increase to new highs for 18 year olds, and decline for older age groups

The entry rate is the proportion of the population accepted onto an undergraduate higher education course through UCAS. The entry rate refers to the cycle in which an applicant is accepted, and includes both acceptances for immediate entry into higher education, and those that were deferred until the next academic year. Entry rates are a good indication of higher education acceptances in a wider population context.

Figure 2.6 and Figure 2.7 show the entry rates for different age groups. 18 year olds are the most likely to enter higher education through UCAS, with the likelihood decreasing for older age groups, with those aged 26 and over least likely to enter.

In 2017, the UK 18 year old entry rate was 32.6 per cent, the highest on record. This is 0.7 percentage points higher than in 2016, meaning UK 18 year olds were 2.3 per cent more likely to enter HE through UCAS than in the previous cycle. The UK 18 year olds entry rate in 2017 was 7.8 percentage points higher than at the beginning of the reporting period in 2006, meaning they were 31 per cent more likely to enter HE this year, compared to 11 years ago.

After increasing each year between 2012 and 2015, the entry rate for 19 year olds fell in 2016, and continued to fall in 2017. In the 2017 cycle, the 19 year old entry rate was 11.8 per cent.

The entry rates for those aged 20 and over have remained unchanged since 2014. In 2017, the entry rate for 20 year olds was 4.3 per cent, for the 21 to 25 age group, it was 1.2 per cent, and for those aged 26 and over age group, it was 0.1 per cent.

Figure 2.6 Entry rate by cycle and age group (18 and 19 year olds)

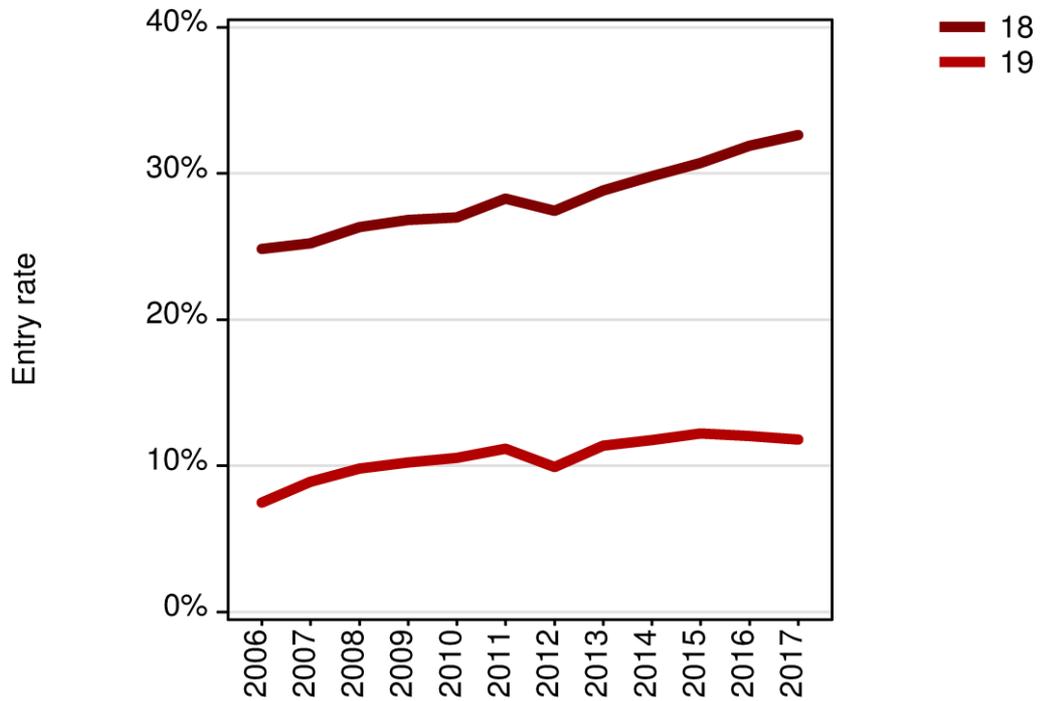
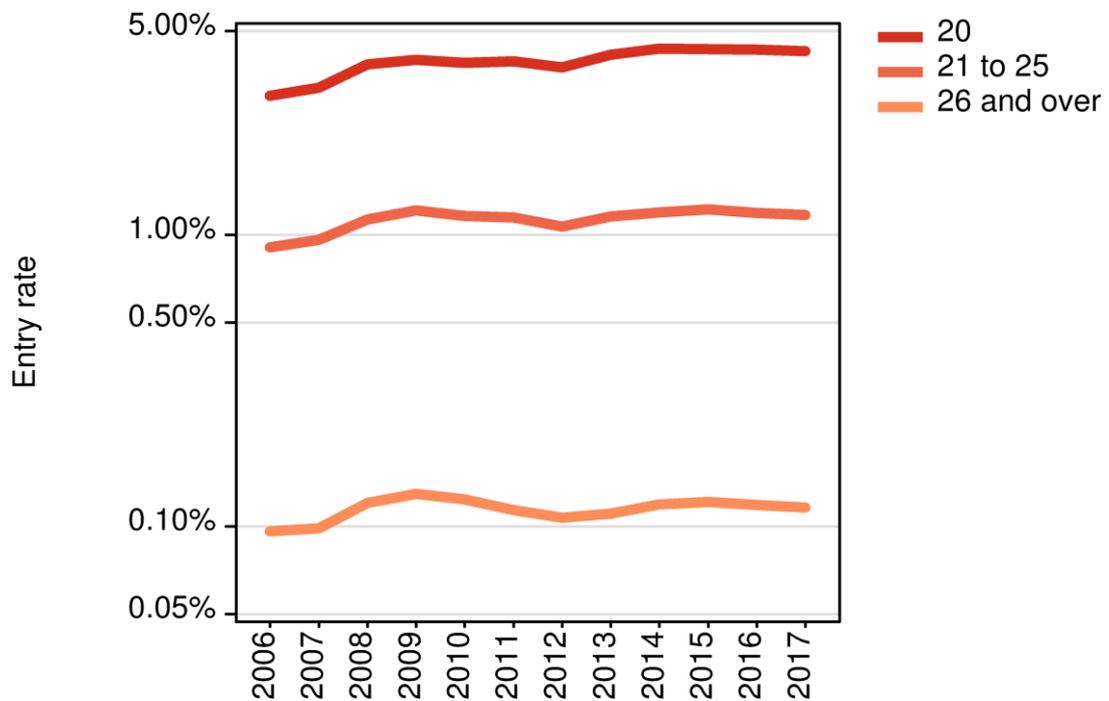


Figure 2.7 Entry rate by cycle and age group (20 and over)



18 year old entry rates reach record highs in England and Scotland

The majority of UK applicants are 18 years old, and since 2012, the share of 18 year olds accepted from England has increased. In the 2017 cycle, 85 per cent of UK acceptances were from England, meaning that patterns reported for the UK tend to reflect the pattern in England, and can mask patterns in the other UK countries. Figure 2.8 shows the entry rates for 18 year olds by country.

The 18 year old entry rate for England was 33.3 per cent in 2017, 0.8 percentage points higher than the previous year, and the highest ever recorded. Since 2012, entry rates for English 18 year olds have increased by between 1.6 and 0.9 percentage points each year.

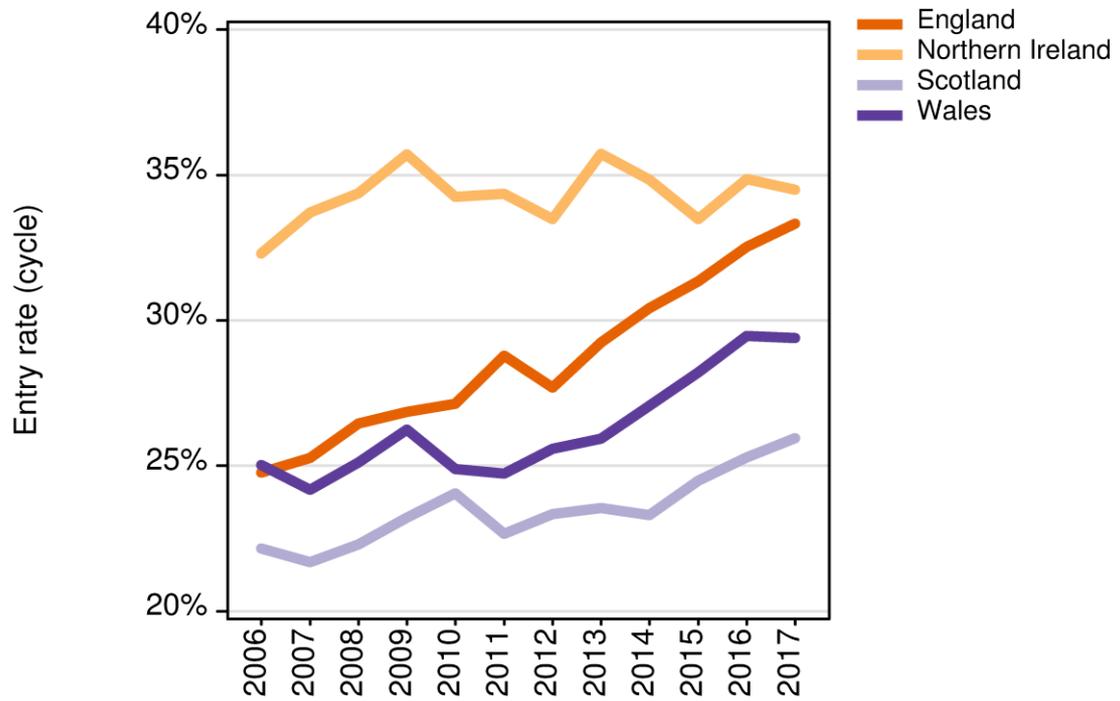
The 18 year old entry rate for Northern Ireland fell by 0.4 percentage points. Despite this, the entry rate of 34.5 per cent was similar to entry rates in recent years.

After increasing each year since 2011, the entry rate for Wales fell by 0.1 percentage points to 29.4 per cent in 2017. This is a notable shift against the recent trend, but despite this, 18 year old entry rates in Wales are the second highest on record.

Having increased by 0.7 percentage points in the 2017 cycle, the entry rate for Scotland was 25.9 per cent, the highest on record, and the third consecutive year the rate had increased.

In 2017, the 18 year old entry rates for England, Scotland and Wales are substantially higher than at the beginning of the reporting period in 2006. In England, 18 year olds were 35 per cent more likely to enter higher education compared to 11 years ago, while in Scotland and Wales they were 17 per cent more likely.

Figure 2.8 Proportion of 18 year olds accepted for entry by cycle and country of domicile



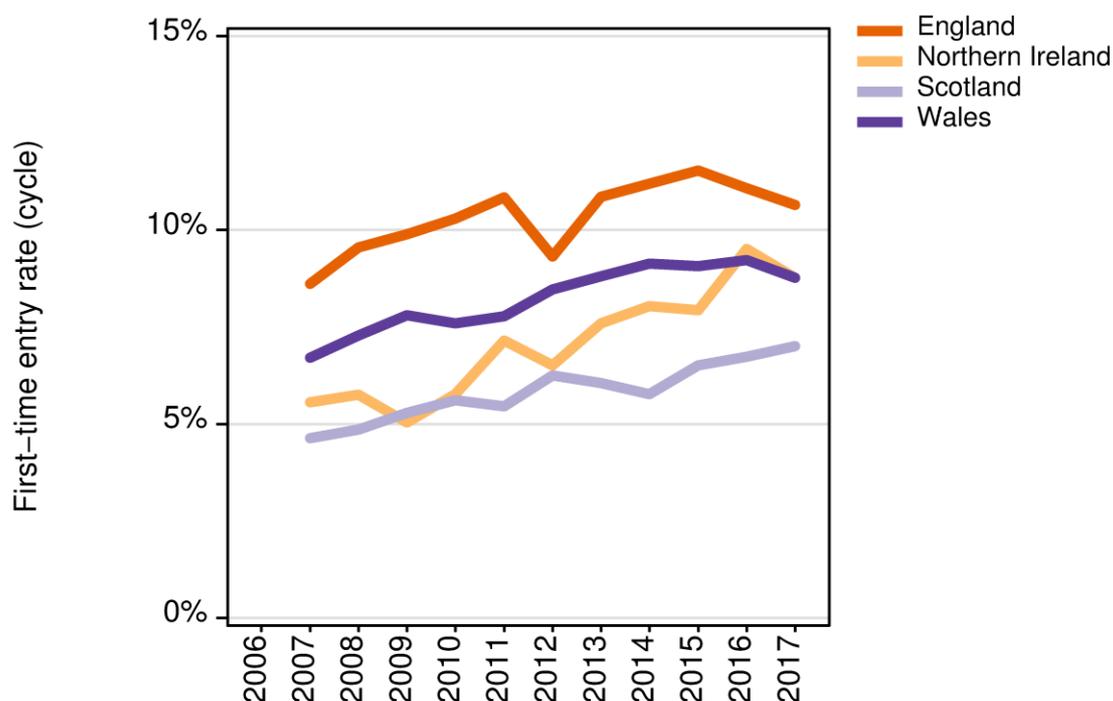
Increase in the first time 19 year old entry rate in Scotland, but falls elsewhere in the UK

19 year olds comprise approximately one fifth of all acceptances through UCAS, making them the second largest age group to enter higher education. Figure 2.9 shows the first time entry rate of 19 year olds – the proportion of the 19 year old population who are accepted for entry to higher education for the first time. It excludes the small number of accepted applicants who were accepted to start higher education aged 18, but who then applied and were accepted again aged 19. It does not include acceptances at age 18 who intend to start their courses aged 19 (deferred acceptances), since these are already included in the 18 year old cycle-based entry rate.

First time 19 year old entry rates for England fell in 2017, for the second year in succession, to 10.6 per cent. This is the lowest first time entry rate for 19 year olds since 2012. The falls may be related to the increasing proportion of young people in England who enter HE aged 18, resulting in a smaller pool available for entry age 19.

The first time 19 year old entry rates also fell in Northern Ireland and Wales, to 8.8 per cent in both countries. Scotland was the only UK country where the first time 19 year old entry rate increased. In 2017, this rate was 7.0 per cent, 0.3 percentage points higher compared to 2016, and the third consecutive year the rate had increased.

Figure 2.9 Proportion of 19 year olds accepted for entry for the first time by country of domicile



Cohort entry rates reach new highs in England, Scotland, and Wales

Entry rates for single age groups do not account for changes in entry year, and can make it difficult to interpret whether young people are becoming more or less likely to enter higher education. One measure that is less influenced by changes in age of entry is a cohort-based entry rate, which combines entry into higher education for applicants aged 18 and 19.

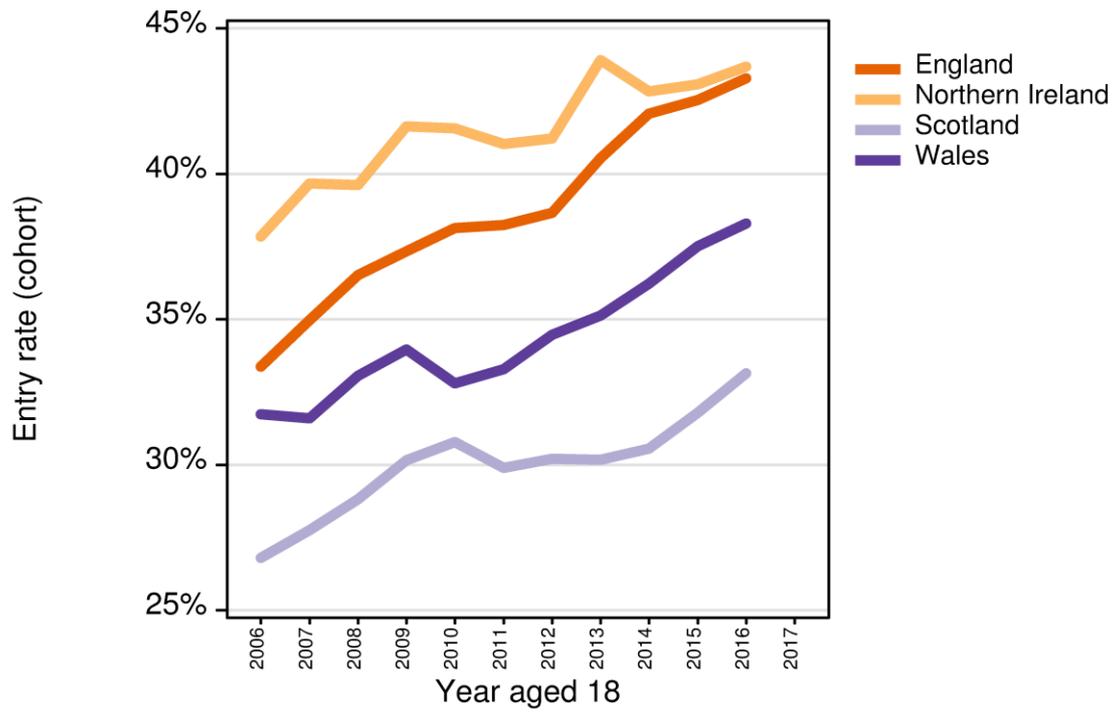
It has the advantage that it is unaffected by changes in the choice to apply and be accepted at age 18 or 19. It has the disadvantage that it cannot yet report a complete rate for the cohort aged 18 in 2017, since they are yet to have the opportunity to apply aged 19. Figure 2.10 shows the proportion of a young cohort (referenced by the year the cohort would be 18) that is accepted for entry aged either 18 or 19.

Northern Ireland has always had the highest entry rate for young applicants, followed by England, Wales, then Scotland. In 2016, young entry rates from all UK countries increased, continuing increases from the previous year. Northern Ireland had an entry rate of 43.7 per cent, while in England the entry rate was 43.3 per cent, in Wales it was 38.3 per cent, and in Scotland it was 33.1 per cent. These increases resulted in the highest cohort entry rates ever recorded for England, Scotland, and Wales.

For England, Northern Ireland, and Wales the increases were driven by higher proportions of 18 year olds entering HE in 2016, while in Scotland it was driven by an increase in both the 18 year old entry rate in 2016, and an increase in the first time 19 year old entry rate in 2017.

Over the reporting period, the cohort entry rate has been highest in Northern Ireland. In 2006, young people in Northern Ireland were 13 per cent more likely to enter HE by the age of 19 than young people in England. Since then, the cohort entry rate for England has grown faster than in Northern Ireland, such that in 2017, young people in Northern Ireland were just 0.9 per cent more likely than young people in England to enter HE by the age of 19.

Figure 2.10 Young entry rate (cohort) by country



Acceptance routes

UK 18 year olds: record number of firm and Clearing accepts

There are a number of different acceptance routes in the admissions cycle. Figure 2.11 shows the number of acceptances by acceptance route for UK 18 year olds using a logarithmic scale, so that the proportional changes can be seen more clearly across the large differences in numbers accepted through the various routes.

Being accepted via firm choice remains the most common route of entry, comprising 75 per cent of acceptances. In 2017, the number of UK 18 year old applicants accepted through their firm choice was 180,970, the highest number on record, and an increase of 0.8 per cent on the previous year (+1,500 acceptances).

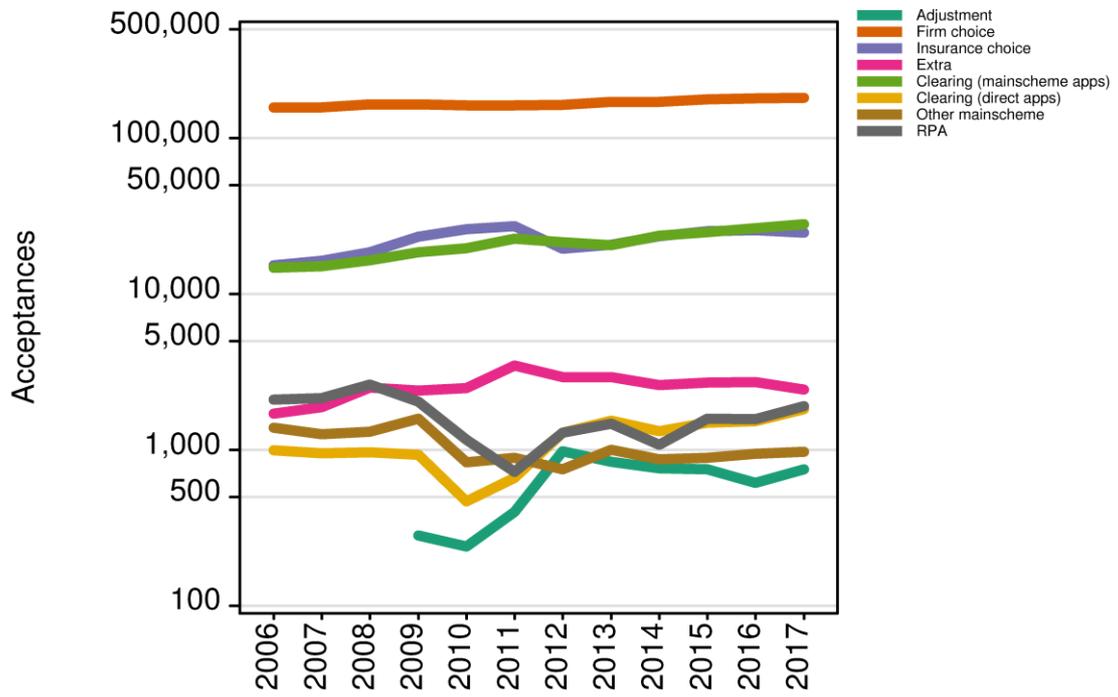
The number of applicants accepted through their insurance choice declined by 3.1 per cent (-795 acceptances) this year, to 24,785. This is the first decline since 2012.

The number of acceptances via both Clearing routes (main scheme and direct) increased in 2017, to total 29,780, a combined increase of 6.1 per cent proportionally (+1,730 acceptances). Main scheme acceptances comprised 94 per cent of all Clearing acceptances for UK 18 year olds in 2017. The number of main scheme Clearing acceptances increased by 5.4 per cent (+1,430 acceptances), bringing the total to 27,950, the highest on record. Applying and being accepted direct to Clearing is a less frequently used route for this group of applicants, with 1,830 applicants accepted this way in 2017. This is the highest number on record for this route, following an increase of 19 per cent (+300 acceptances) this year.

Applicants who do not receive any offers from their five main scheme choices, or decline any offers they do receive, are eligible to make choices through the Extra route. In 2017, the number of applicants accepted through Extra was 2,425, a reduction of 285 (-11 per cent) from the previous cycle. There was a similarly size reduction in the number of UK 18 year old applicants eligible to use Extra this year.

The number of UK 18 year olds accepted by Adjustment increased by 22 per cent in 2017, to 750 (+135 applicants). This reverses all the decline from the previous cycle, equalling the number placed through this route in 2015.

Figure 2.11 UK domiciled 18 year old acceptances by acceptance route



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 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.

Glossary

Acceptance	An applicant who, at the end of the cycle, has been placed for entry into higher education.
Acceptance rate	The number of acceptances divided by the number of applicants.
Age	This analysis uses country-specific age definitions that align with the cut-off points for school and college cohorts in the different administrations of the UK. For England and Wales, ages are defined on 31 August, for Northern Ireland on 1 July, and for Scotland on 28 February the following year. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts. For applicants outside the UK, a cohort cut-off of 31 August has been used.
Applicant	A person who has made an application in the UCAS system. Counts of applicants include those applying through the main scheme, late applicants direct to Clearing, and records of prior acceptance (RPAs).
Base population estimate	The population estimates are based on Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates, and national population projections (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 and entry 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 Research Agency. These small area population estimates have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.
Clearing	An acceptance route available late in the application cycle.
Cohort	A group of the population all born in the same academic year, and are therefore, for example, all aged 18 on a particular reference date.
Defer (deferred)	Most acceptances are into the academic year that starts immediately at the end of the cycle, for example into 2016/17 from the 2016 application cycle. Acceptances can also be deferred for entry into the following academic year, for example into 2017/18 from the 2016 cycle. These are called deferred acceptances.
Direct to Clearing	Applied via Clearing without an initial application through the main scheme (i.e. prior to the 30 June deadline).
Domicile	Declared area of permanent residence.

Entry rate	Number of acceptances from a UCAS application cycle divided by the estimated base population.
Extra	An acceptance route where applicants holding no offers, after using all five main scheme choices, can make additional choices.
HE	Higher education.
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England.
IB	International Baccalaureate Diploma.
Main scheme	The main UCAS Undergraduate application scheme through which up to five course choices can be applied for. This opens in September, and closes to new applications on 30 June the following year.
Main scheme Clearing	Where an applicant was unsuccessful in the main scheme (i.e. applied before 30 June), and subsequently found a place using Clearing.
Non-EU	Countries outside the European Union, including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.
Offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant. May be subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
Offer rate	The proportion of applications that receive an offer.
POLAR3	Developed by HEFCE and classifies small areas across the UK into five groups, according to their level of young participation in HE. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people, and is 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).
Provider	A higher education provider – a university or college.
RPA	Record of Prior Acceptance. When a provider informs UCAS of applicants it has accepted outside of the normal application process (e.g. individuals who have applied directly to the provider).
UK	United Kingdom. Excludes the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.