UCAS

Admissions patterns for mature applicants
2017 cycle

June 2018

Foreword – Universities UK

Contents

Higher education has the power to transform lives. As the first in my family to go to university, I know from personal experience how it did this for me.

A university education opens doors to learning new skills, entering new careers, making life – long connections, and making meaningful contributions to society. It is crucial that these opportunities are made available as widely as possible to those who are qualified to take up these opportunities, and barriers do not stand in the way of these individuals, to develop their potential.

> **We are likely to see more people looking to learn and retrain throughout their lives**

Realising these opportunities must be possible over an individual's lifetime. Higher education should not be the preserve of the young – there are many reasons why individuals may wish to study later on in life, whether it is due to their personal circumstances, a change in career direction, or a desire to learn something new or try something different.

Unfortunately, the evidence shows that there is a declining proportion of students aged 21 and over (or mature) applying to and entering full – time higher education in the UK. The analysis in this UCAS report tracks the trends for these undergraduate students, and provides important insights into their characteristics and where they are choosing to apply.

We must not forget, however, that those wishing to study later in life may not be choosing to study full – time, but that they may wish to opt for more flexible ways of learning. They may need to study for a postgraduate, rather than an undergraduate, qualification. They may need to fit in study alongside family responsibilities, an existing job, and other commitments. Recent trends in those studying part – time show dramatic drops, though the picture does vary across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

As the economy and demand for skills change, we are likely to see more people looking to learn and retrain throughout their lives. Advances in digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning are also going to change the way we work and learn. It is therefore vital that our universities respond to these changing needs.

Barriers that stand in the way of those who wish to study more flexibly, but who ultimately choose not to, need to be addressed. I am leading a Universities UK advisory group on flexible learning which aims to identify these barriers, and to develop practical solutions to break these down. We are working jointly with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) on these solutions. It is not only students who lose out as a result of these barriers, but also employers – they are unable to access and tap into the untold talent and skills the UK economy possesses.

We need to develop a much clearer understanding as to how we can unlock this potential, using flexible learning routes. We also need to look at how older students make their decisions, and what support they need when studying – from both universities and their employers. The UCAS campaign for mature students will look at key aspects of this. Raising awareness of the issues will be critical, and there is no better time to be coming up with solutions – our project on flexible learning will be making recommendations to the ongoing independent review of post – 18 education and funding.

We need to seize this opportunity to equip our nation to compete effectively on the world stage, and to ensure the benefits of higher education supporting economic prosperity are shared as widely as possible, across all ages, communities, regions, and nations in the UK. There is a great deal at stake.

Professor Julie Lydon OBE, Vice Chancellor, University of South Wales, and Chair of the Universities UK project 'The economic case for flexible learning in higher education'.

Executive summary

Universities and colleges cater for an incredibly varied body of students, and the provision they offer is increasingly diverse to meet the needs of these different groups. The recent focus on mature students demonstrates how people of all ages can, and should, have the opportunity to benefit from higher education.

In 2017, there were 71,325 UK applicants to full time undergraduate courses aged 21 to 25, and 72,550 aged 26 and over. This meant there was a proportional decline of 7 per cent and 9.8 per cent respectively, compared to 2016. While changes to the funding of nursing courses in England has impacted this, it is not the sole cause. We have observed changes to the application rate for mature students since 2014, which pre – dates the changes to nursing, and our forecasts predict these declines will continue.

The decline of mature students (defined as those aged 21 and over) entering part – time education has also been well documented, with several recent reports investigating the drivers behind this.

This report, examining applicants and acceptances of mature students applying to full – time, undergraduate higher education courses in the UK, aims to further explore the characteristics of mature undergraduate students from the UK, and how these differ from 18 year old students – including when they apply, where they apply to, and the subject choices they make.

Key findings:

+ There was a fall in the overall number of applicants in the 2017 cycle – however, this was largely driven by older age groups. There were 282,380 18 year old applicants from the UK (+0.5 per cent proportionally compared to 2016), the highest number on record. In contrast, the number of applicants aged 19 or over fell, with the largest decline in the 21 – 25 age group (– 7 per cent proportionally), leading to an overall decline in the number of applicants.

+ Mature students are more likely to apply later in the application cycle, with 44 per cent of students aged 21 and over applying after the January deadline in 2017, compared to just 3.3 per cent of 18 year olds.

+ Half of 21 – 25 year old students live at home while studying, compared to nearly 80 per cent of those aged 30 and over. In comparison, 18 year olds are more likely to attend a provider over an hour away from their home, with 53.5 per cent having a drive time of 70 minutes or more.

+ Mature students are more likely to be drawn to a smaller range of courses, with subjects allied to medicine (including nursing) being the most popular subject area.

+ Students aged over 30 are more likely to make just one choice of university and course, with those aged over 36 the most likely to make a single choice across all cycles covered (2011 – 2017).

It is important we recognise these differences, to ensure the sector can fully support these students through the admissions process and beyond, including transitioning into higher education. A better understanding of these characteristics will help the sector tailor the support and provision available to mature students, and ensure their needs are met.

This report marks the start of a prolonged UCAS campaign during the remainder of 2018. Following this report, wider campaign activities will seek to explore the relationship between the economy and demand for HE from mature students, the factors mature students consider when making their HE choices, and the support universities and colleges offer to mature students to ensure they make an effective transition to HE. In addition, UCAS will continue to provide tailored information and advice to mature students to support them as they progress to HE.

We are grateful to Universities UK for contributing to this report, and are thankful to Professor Julie Lydon for offering her thoughts and insight.

1. Overall numbers – applicants, acceptances, and rates

If we consider the data for mature students over the past decade, some interesting patterns begin to emerge, which may offer some insight into the drivers behind the behaviour of older applicants.

Since 2008, we have seen salient dips in the application rate in 2012, and again in 2017. Both occurrences coincide with changes to the funding arrangements for undergraduate students in England – 2012 saw the introduction of increased tuition fees, while the NHS bursaries for nursing were abolished in 2017. This may indicate that the mature cohort is more debt averse, and their decisions are driven by financial considerations. However, as we explore the data in greater depth in this section, we will see an inverse relationship with the acceptance rates, which have increased for mature students.

1.1 Fall in the overall number of applicants in the 2017 cycle, but this was largely driven by older applicants

Figures 1.1a and 1.1b show UK applicant numbers by age group. In the 2017 cycle, there were 282,380 18 year old applicants from the UK, an increase of 1,340 (+0.5 per cent proportionally), and the highest number on record. In contrast, the number of applicants aged 19 or over fell. This resulted in an overall decline in the number of applicants.

The largest decline was in the 21 – 25 age group, with 71,325 UK applicants from this age group, 5,380 fewer (– 7 per cent proportionally) compared to 2016.

The majority of mature applicants are aged 21 – 25, with nearly as many applicants in this age bracket as there are aged 26 and over. In 2017, there were 72,550 UK applicants aged 26 and over – 7,885 fewer (– 9.8 per cent proportionally) compared to 2016.

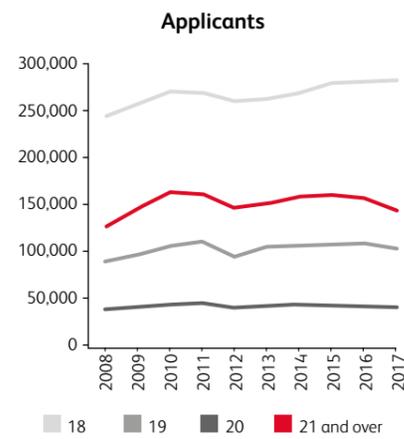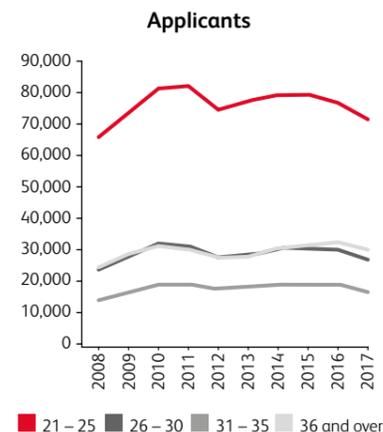**Figure 1.1a: UK applicants by age group (all ages)**

Applicants

Legend: 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 and over

Figure 1.1b: UK applicants by age group (mature age groups)

Applicants

Legend: 21 – 25 | 26 – 30 | 31 – 35 | 36 and over

1.2 Fewer acceptances for mature applicants mean an overall decline in acceptances in 2017, despite record number of 18 year olds accepted

Similar to the pattern in applicants, a record high was seen for 18 year old acceptances, with 2,645 more 18 year olds accepted (+1.1 per cent), bringing the total to 241,585. This increase occurred despite a 1.2 per cent fall in the UK 18 year old population.

For UK applicants aged 19 and over, acceptances fell by 5,185 (2.3 per cent), to 219,920 – the second consecutive fall since 2015. The majority of this decline came from the largest mature group (aged 21 – 25), with a decrease of 1,370 (– 2.6 per cent). This decline is likely related to the increased propensity for applicants to enter HE aged 18, reducing the number of potential first time applicants aged 21 – 25.

The only mature age group to have shown an increase was those aged 36 and over, which increased by 430 acceptances (2.3 per cent).

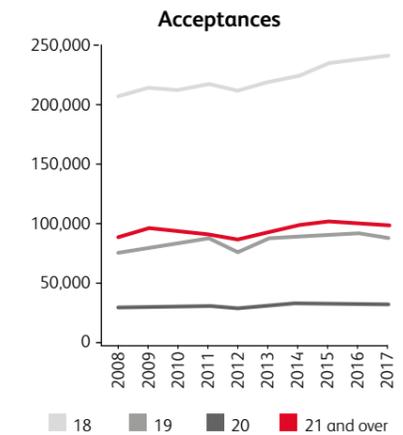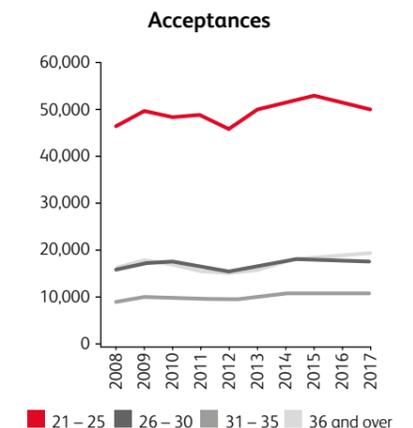**Figure 1.2a UK acceptances by age group (all ages)**

Acceptances

Legend: 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 and over

Figure 1.2b UK acceptances by age group (mature age groups)

Acceptances

Legend: 21 – 25 | 26 – 30 | 31 – 35 | 36 and over

1.3 Application rates decrease for mature applicants

The application rate is the number of applicants divided by the estimated base population. The application rate for 18 year olds is at a record high (38.1 per cent, +0.6 percentage points), however, the application rate for the mature population is in decline (0.54 per cent for the 21 – 50* age group, a decline of − 0.05 percentage points), most obviously among the 21 – 25 year old age group (1.67 per cent, − 0.11 percentage points).

Figure 1.3a UK application rates by age group (18 – 50 year olds*)

Application rate

18   19   20   21 – 50

Figure 1.3b UK application rates by age group (21 – 50 year olds*)

Application rate

21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 – 50

*Oldest age groups capped at age 50 to limit size of base population. Less than1 per cent of UK applicants and acceptances are aged over 50.

1.4 Large increase in offer and acceptance rates for mature applicants

The proportion of applicants who receive an offer is termed the offer rate. The proportion of applicants who have a place at the end of the cycle is termed the acceptance rate, and reflects the relationship between total applicants and acceptances. Both offer and acceptance rates across all age groups increased in the 2017 cycle.

It should be noted that a significant proportion of mature students apply to competitive courses, such as nursing, and this will influence the offer and acceptance rates.

Figure 1.4a UK offer rates by age group

Offer rate

18   19   20   21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over

Acceptance rates for all mature age groups in 2017 are the second highest on record following 2008, but remain below the rates of younger age groups.

+ 21 – 25 year old acceptance rate 70.9 per cent, +3.2 percentage points against 2016

+ 26 – 30 year old acceptance rate 67.1 per cent, +6.1 percentage points against 2016

+ 31 – 35 year old acceptance rate 67.1 per cent, +6.9 percentage points against 2016

+ 36 and over acceptance rate 66 per cent, +6.6 percentage points against 2016

Figure 1.4b UK acceptance rates by age group

Acceptance rate

18   19   20   21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over

1.5 Application rates for the mature population reflect the job market buoyancy

Figure 1.5 shows the proportional changes in UK application rates and job market indicators, indexed to 2009.

Throughout the covered cycles, the application rates for mature students aged 21 – 50 have broadly reflected the number of job vacancies[1]. When the number of vacant jobs was at its lowest points, between 2009 and 2011, the application rates for the mature population peaked, reflecting that applicants may have been attracted to applying to university when they were unable to find or retain a suitable job. From 2015 onwards, the number of job vacancies increased, while application rates declined, indicating that mature students look to job market when jobs are plentiful, and apply to HE when jobs are sparse.

Figure 1.5 UK application rates (for 21 – 50 year olds), job vacancies, and gross weekly earnings, indexed to 2009

Proportional change from 2008

21 – 50 application rates   Job vacancies[1]   Gross weekly earnings[2]

1.   Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates from the Annual Survey of hours and earnings (ASHE)

2.   Office for National Statistics VACS02: Vacancies by industry and Office for National Statistics: Vacancies by industry archive

1.6 Entry rates continue to decline for the mature population

The entry rate is the proportion of the population placed at a HE provider at the end of the cycle. In 2017, there were decreases in the entry rate across most age groups, with the only increase being for 18 year olds (32.6 per cent, +0.7 percentage points). Entry rates for those aged 31 – 35 and 36 – 50 remained stable at 0.25 and 0.13 per cent, respectively.

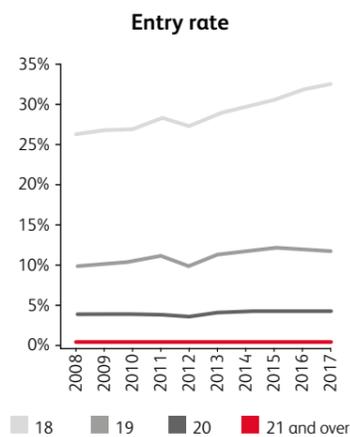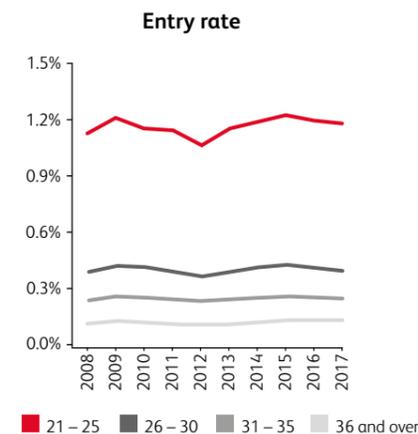**Figure 1.6a UK entry rates by age group (18 – 50 year olds*)**

Entry rate

18   19   20   21 and over

Figure 1.6b UK entry rates by age group (21 – 50 year olds*)

Entry rate

21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over

*Oldest age groups capped at age 50 to limit size of base population. Less than 1 per cent of UK applicants and acceptances are aged over 50.

1.7 Entry rates by region, with the mature population from London more likely to enter HE compared to elsewhere in England
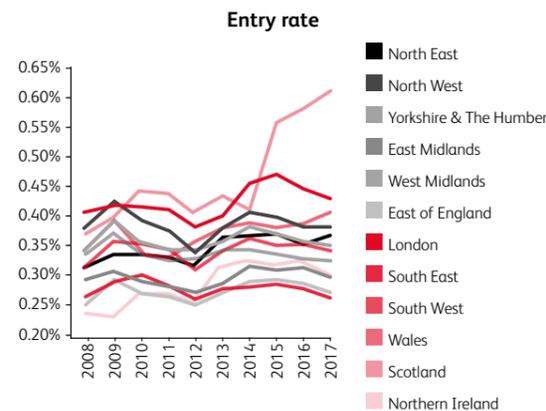
Figure 1.7a shows the entry rates for those aged 21 – 50 by region.

For mature students, regional entry rates in 2017 were at similar levels to entry rates in England in 2008, with the largest difference being seen in the North East (+0.054 percentage points), followed by the South West (+0.025 percentage points). The entry rates for all regions in England declined from 2009 to 2012, with the largest decline being in the North West (– 0.081 percentage points). For most regions, these declines were followed by increases up to 2014, then decreases to 2017.

For the majority of the covered cycles, in England, London has had the highest entry rates for mature applicants aged 21 – 50, between a low of 0.38 per cent in 2012, and a high of 0.47 per cent in 2015. 2009 was the only year in which the North West had higher entry rates than London (0.42 per cent, 0.005 percentage points higher). Since 2014, the South East has had the lowest entry rates (between 0.27 and 0.29), prior to which, the East of England had the lowest entry rates for most cycles.

Scotland saw a significant increase in mature entry rate between 2014 and 2015 (0.41 per cent to 0.56 per cent). Around 120 teacher training courses in Scotland were added into the UCAS Undergraduate scheme for the 2015 cycle. In 2014, there were around 90 Scottish domiciled applicants aged 21 – 50 accepted onto a course in JACS3 subject line X1 – teacher training. In 2015, this increased to around 2,050 acceptances, however, due to the inclusion of these courses in the UCAS Undergraduate scheme, a meaningful comparison between these cycles cannot be made.

Figure 1.7a UK entry rates by region (21 – 50 year olds)

Entry rate

North East
North West
Yorkshire & The Humber
East Midlands
West Midlands
East of England
London
South East
South West
Wales
Scotland
Northern Ireland

The age distribution of the population varies across the countries and regions of the UK. For example, the mature population in London comprises a higher share of residents aged 21 – 35 compared to the other UK regions. In comparison, the South East and East of England have older populations, with over half their 21 – 50 year old population in the latter half of the age group, aged 36 – 50. This may mean that trends seen in regional entry rates for the mature population aged 21 – 50 (figure 1.7a) mask variations within tighter age bands, due to entry rates being weighted towards the most common age group. For this reason, figures 1.7b – 1.7e show UK regional entry rates in 2017, split by age group of the mature population.

For 21 – 25 year olds, the highest entry rate was in Scotland, where 1.88 per cent of the 21 – 25 year olds population was accepted to HE. This means that 21 – 25 year olds from Scotland were more likely than 21 – 25 year olds anywhere else in the UK to be accepted into higher education in 2017. This is also the case for 26 – 30 and 31 – 35 year olds, with entry rates of 0.72 and 0.44 per cent respectively. For 36 – 50 year olds, the highest entry rate was in London (0.21 per cent), followed by Scotland (0.18).

The second highest entry rates for 21 – 25 year olds were in London (1.49 per cent), followed by Northern Ireland (1.27 per cent). Although the entry rate in London is also high for 36 – 50 year olds, these high entry rates in London and Northern Ireland are not reflected across the other age groups. The entry rates in London fall into the middle of the range of regional entry rates, at 0.37 per cent for 26 – 30 year olds, and 0.24 per cent for 31 – 35 year olds. Entry rates in Northern Ireland are among the lowest of all regions for the older age groups, ranging from 0.06 to 0.28 per cent.

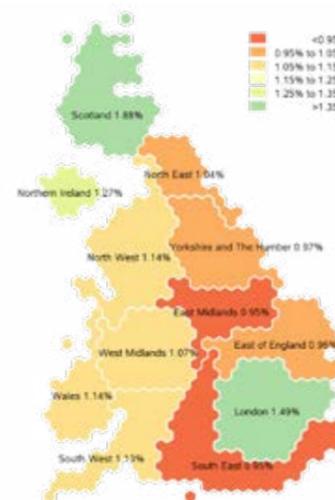**Figure 1.7b 2017 UK entry rates by region (21 – 25 year olds)**

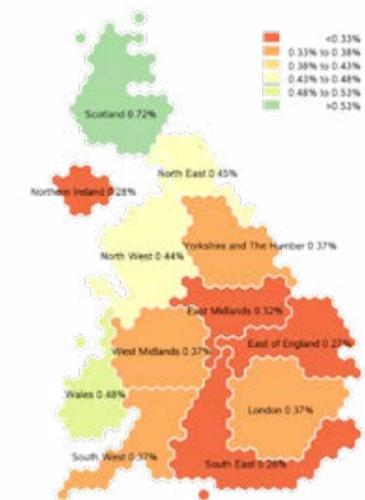**Figure 1.7c 2017 UK entry rates by region (26 – 30 year olds)**

Figure 1.7d 2017 UK entry rates by region (31 – 35 year olds)
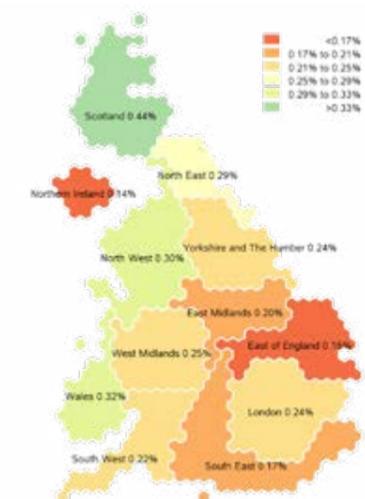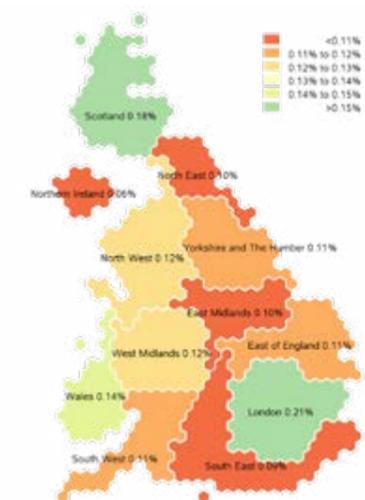

Figure 1.7e 2017 UK entry rates by region (36 – 50 year olds)

2. Provider groups

2.1 Older students tend to favour lower tariff providers

Higher education providers across the UK can be grouped based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old acceptances, summarised through UCAS Tariff points. Three groups are created, referred to as higher, medium, and lower tariff providers, which each account for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances. Higher tariff providers are those which have accepted, on average, UK 18 year old applicants with the highest Tariff points in recent cycles, while lower tariff providers are those which have accepted those with the lowest. Forming fixed groups of providers in this way allows trends in acceptances to be reported, such that year – to – year variations are not the result of providers moving between groups due to changes in the number, or Tariff scores, of acceptances.

Figures 2.1a – 2.1d show the behaviour of students aged 21 and over. The highest proportion of all age groups tend to choose lower tariff providers, with little variance over time in the percentage share, with the exception of the 36+ age group. For the older age group (36+), the percentage share of students entering lower tariff providers has increased over time, from 63.6 per cent in 2008 to 69.3 per cent in 2017.

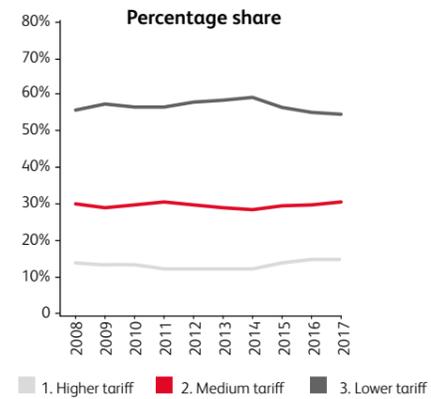**Figure 2.1a Percentage share of UK students (aged 21 – 25) by provider grouping**

Percentage share

1. Higher tariff   2. Medium tariff   3. Lower tariff

Figure 2.1b Percentage share of UK students (aged 26 – 30) by provider grouping

Percentage share

1. Higher tariff   2. Medium tariff   3. Lower tariff
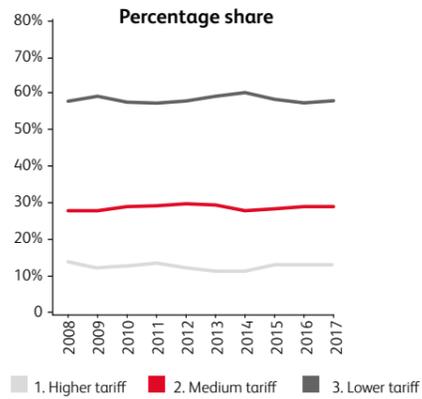
Figure 2.1c Percentage share of UK students (aged 31 – 35) by provider grouping

Percentage share

1. Higher tariff   2. Medium tariff   3. Lower tariff
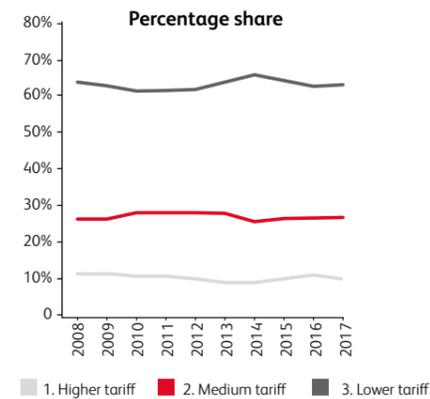
Figure 2.1d Percentage share of UK students (aged 36+) by provider grouping

Percentage share

1. Higher tariff   2. Medium tariff   3. Lower tariff
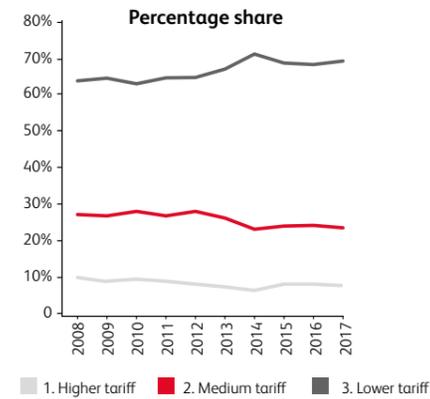
3. Mature student characteristics and behaviours

Mature students generally exhibit different characteristics and behaviours to their 18 year old counterparts.

Differences can also be seen across the age groups of mature applicants, here defined as 21 – 25, 26 – 30, 31 – 35, and 36 and over. These differences manifest in a number of scenarios, including equality statistics, such as gender and ethnicity, what qualifications the applicants hold, and behavioural factors, such as when applicants choose to apply, and how far they are willing to travel to a provider.

3.1 The difference in the number of men and women accepted increases as age increases, with the share of men decreasing with age

Over time, the percentage share of men entering higher education has been decreasing.

For mature students, the lowest percentage share of men is in the 31 – 35 and 36 and over age groups (both 29 per cent). In the 2017 cycle, there were declines in the share of men for all mature age groups.

+ 21 – 25 year olds: 56.6 per cent women, 43.4 per cent men (– 0.5 percentage point share of men)

+ 26 – 30 year olds: 66.5 per cent women, 33.5 per cent men (– 0.2 percentage point share of men)

+ 31 – 35 year olds: 71.3 per cent women, 28.7 per cent men (– 1.5 percentage point share of men)

+ 36 and over: 70.7 per cent women, 29.3 per cent (– 1.4 percentage point share of men)

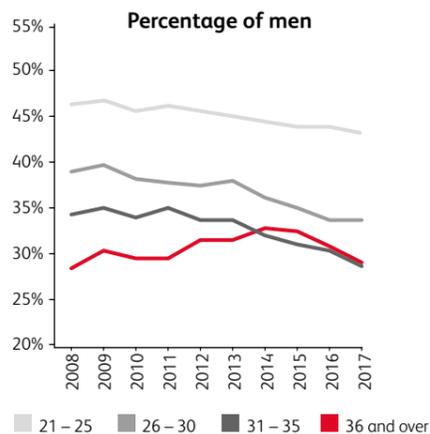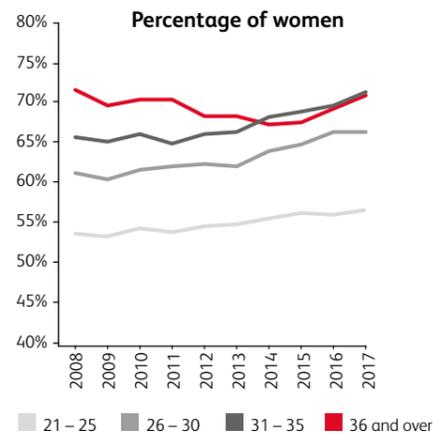**Figure 3.1a Percentage share of male accepted applicants (aged 21 and over)**

Percentage of men

21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over

Figure 3.1b Percentage share of female accepted applicants (aged 21 and over)

Percentage of women

21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over

3.2 As age increases, the percentage share of self – declared black students increases

Using self – declared ethnicity data from the 2008 – 2017 cycles, White is the most prominent ethnic group across all age groups.

As age group increases, the share of acceptances from the Black ethnic group also increases. In 2017, 10.6 per cent of acceptances aged 21 – 25 were in the Black ethnic group, 11.9 per cent in the 26 – 30 age group, 18.7 per cent in the 31 – 35 age group, and 31.3 per cent in the 36 and over age group.

The largest increase in share of acceptances from the Black ethnic group over the covered cycles was in those aged 36 and over, which increased from 17.1 per cent in 2008 to 31.3 per cent in 2017, an increase of 14.2 percentage points.

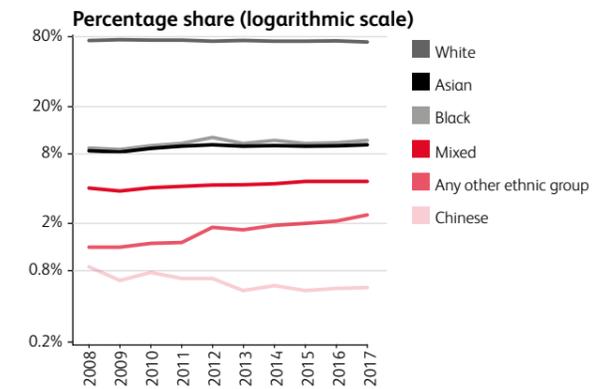**Figure 3.2a: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 21 – 25) by ethnic group**

Percentage share (logarithmic scale)

White, Asian, Black, Mixed, Any other ethnic group, Chinese

Figure 3.2b: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 36 and over) by ethnic group

Percentage share (logarithmic scale)

White, Asian, Black, Mixed, Any other ethnic group, Chinese

3.3 Mature students hold different qualifications on entering higher education, depending on their age

Looking at the most recent qualification a student applies with (pending or achieved), applicants aged 21 – 25 are far more likely to be accepted with just A levels (12.7 per cent) or vocational qualifications (26.4 per cent), such as BTECs, compared to the other age groups.

In the other age groups, the Access to HE Diploma becomes more prominent, although this seems to be declining over time. In 2017, 20.7 per cent of accepted applicants aged 36 and over had the Access to HE Diploma, down from 30.9 per cent in 2011.

The percentage share of applicants with GCSEs/O levels as their most recent qualification also increases with age (from 3.5 per cent in 21 – 25 year olds, to 7.3 per cent in those aged 36 and over).

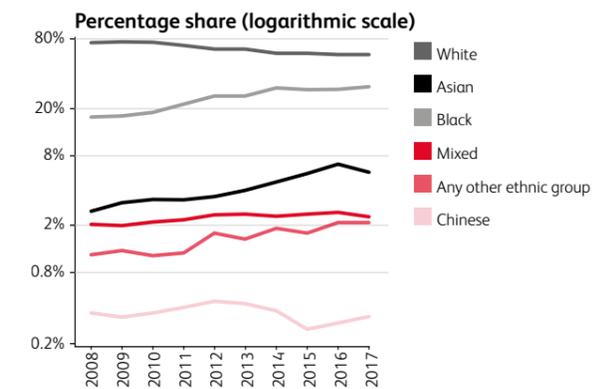In addition, in 2017, over 15 per cent of mature applicants from each age group had a degree as their most recent qualification.

Figure 3.3a: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 21 – 25) by pending and achieved qualifications

Percentage share

Degree, Access course, A level only, Vocational, occupational or QCF only, Scottish only, GCSE or O level, Other, non UK, Other
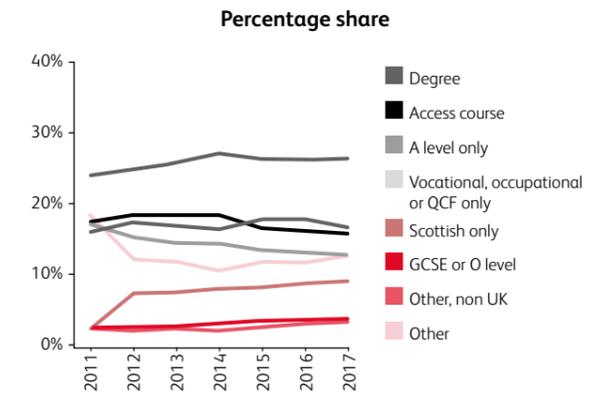
Figure 3.3b: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 36 and over) by pending and achieved qualifications

Percentage share

Degree, Access course, A level only, Vocational, occupational or QCF only, Scottish only, GCSE or O level, Other, non UK, Other

3.4 Students over 30 years old are most likely to live at home while they study

As age increases, so does the percentage of students saying they intend to live at home while they study. Half of students aged 21 – 25 live at home, compared to almost 80 per cent of those aged over 30. The percentage of accepted applicants intending to live at home has been relatively stable since 2012. Prior to that, increases were seen across all age groups, with the largest increase being in the 31 – 35 age group (+7 percentage points).

Over the past few cycles, the behaviour of applicants aged 31 – 35, and 36 and over, is becoming increasingly similar to one another, with the percentage of acceptances living at home converging to within a single percentage point. The converging towards one another can be seen in the characteristics of accepted applicants, as well as their behaviour, with the percentage share of male applicants (shown in figure 3.1) also converging to be within a percentage point for those aged 31 – 35, and 36 and over.

Figure 3.4: Percentage of UK students (aged 21 and over) intending to live at home while they study

Per cent living at home

21 – 25   26 – 30   31 – 35   36 and over
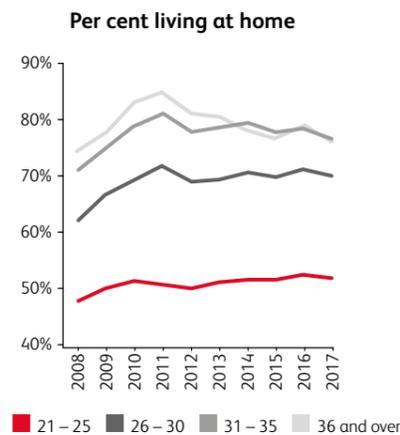
3.5 Mature students live closer to university

Figure 3.5 shows the percentage share of the time taken to drive (rounded to the nearest ten minutes) from the applicants' home postcode to the provider they were accepted at, using specific campus location where possible.

Mature students generally have a much lower drive time than 18 year olds, reflecting their likelihood to stay living at home while they study. Out of all mature students domiciled in the UK, 81.4 per cent attend a provider with a rounded drive time of 60 minutes or less, with 29.2 per cent having a rounded drive time of ten minutes.

18 year olds are more likely to attend a provider over an hour away from their home, with 53.5 per cent having a rounded drive time of 70 minutes or more. However, as with mature students, the most common drive time for 18 year olds is ten minutes, with 11.7 per cent having this drive time.

Figure 3.5: Percentage share of UK acceptances by drive time to chosen HE provider

Drive time (minutes)

18   21 and over
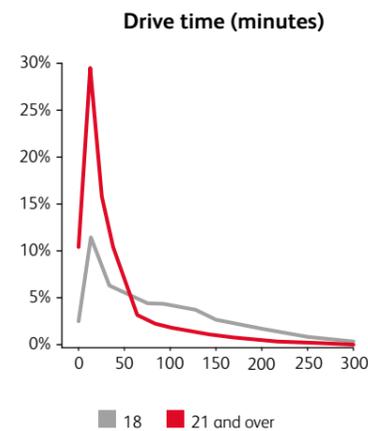
3.6 Mature students typically drawn to a smaller range of courses, predominantly subjects allied to medicine (including nursing) and education

Figure 3.6 shows the percentage point difference between the share of 18 year olds studying a subject, and the share of mature students studying that subject in 2017. The subjects with a bar to the left, such as biological sciences, have a higher share of 18 year olds, and those on the right have a higher share of mature students.

The share of mature students studying subjects allied to medicine (including nursing) is 17.9 percentage points greater than the share of 18 year olds, while the most comparatively popular subject for 18 year olds is biological sciences (4.8 percentage point difference).

The share of 18 year olds across subjects is more evenly split, meaning mature students are drawn to a narrower selection of subjects.

Figure 3.6: Percentage point difference between the share of 18 year olds and mature students studying a subject group

Percentage share

Percentage point difference
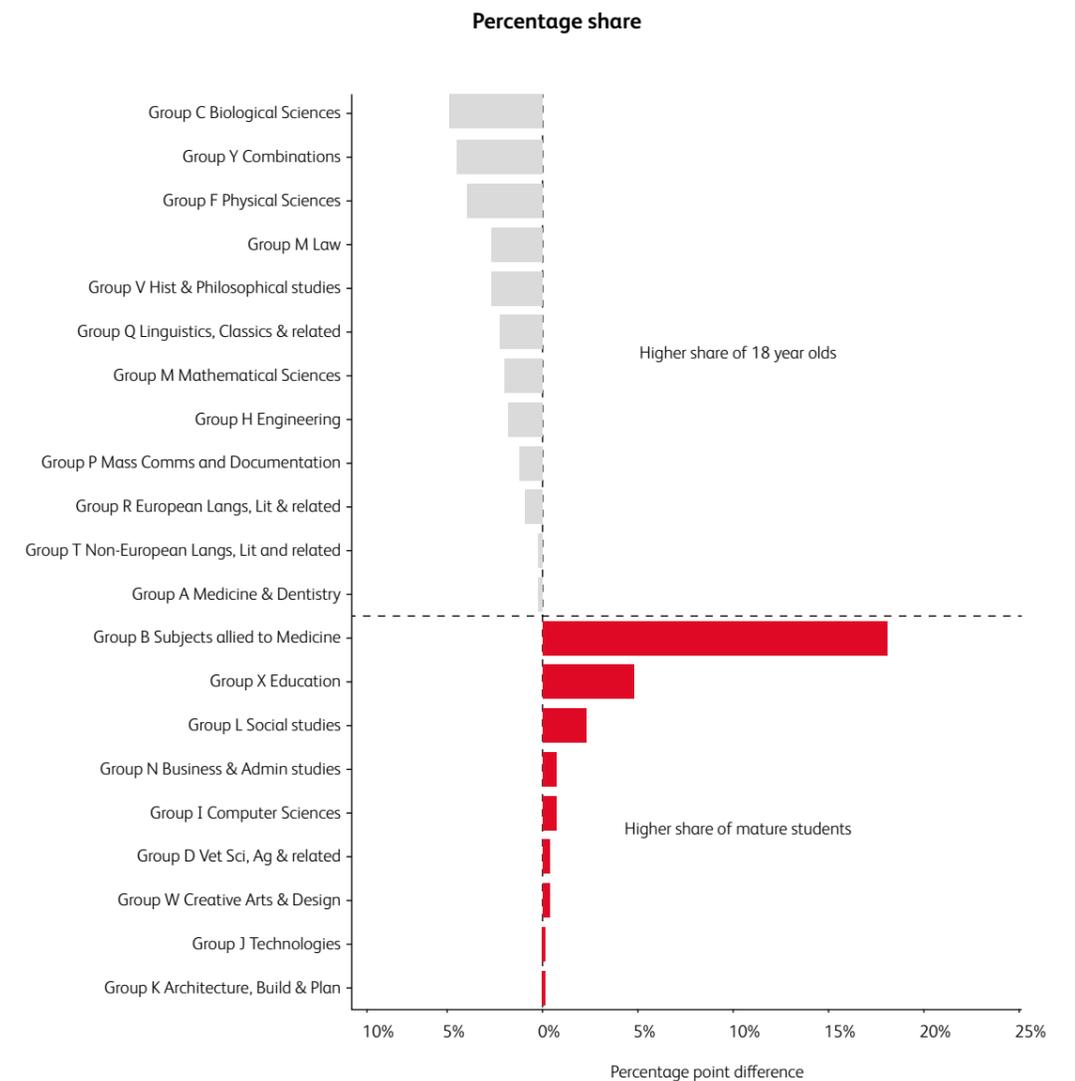
3.7 Mature students apply later in the UCAS cycle, with many more applying after the 15 January deadline compared to 18 year olds

Figure 3.7a shows the 2017 UCAS cycle with deadlines annotated, and the percentage of 18 year olds and those aged 21 and over that apply each week, and were accepted by the end of the cycle. The peak between the October and January deadlines is not associated to a UCAS deadline – this shows the lead up to the 2016 UK school Christmas holidays.

A higher share of 18 year olds applied at the October deadline for Oxford, Cambridge, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary courses (8.4 per cent, compared to 2.7 per cent of mature students). The most popular time for 18 year olds to apply was the lead up to the Christmas holidays (with a peak of 13.3 per cent).

A higher share of mature applicants applied in the week of the January deadline, which is the most popular time for mature students to apply (24.1 per cent), around twice the percentage of 18 year olds (12.4 per cent). There were also peaks for mature students at the June deadline (3.5 per cent), and at the very end of the cycle, most likely due to the submission of Records of Prior Acceptance (RPA) by providers.

Figure 3.7b shows the cumulative percentage of when accepted applicants applied over the 2017 cycle. In 2017, 44.2 per cent of mature students applied after the week of the January deadline, compared to 3.3 per cent of 18 year olds.

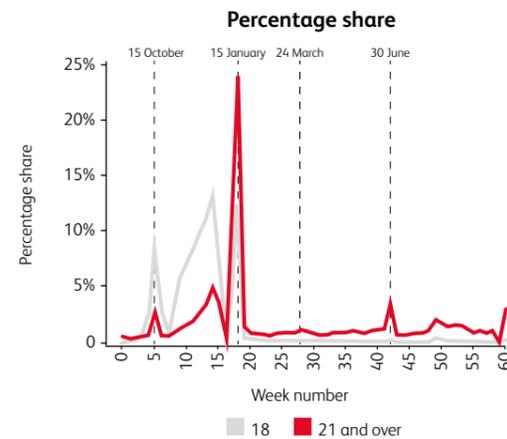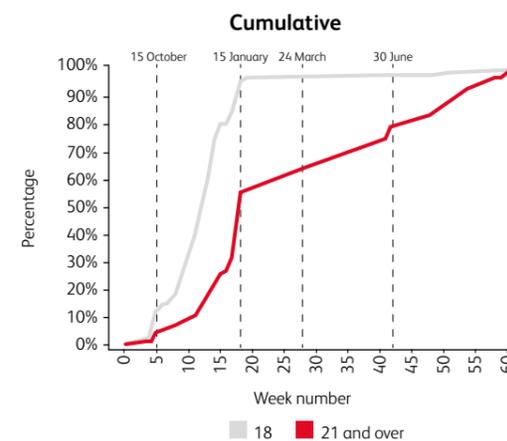**Figure 3.7a: Percentage share of UK acceptances by when they applied in the UCAS cycle**

Percentage share

18   21 and over

Figure 3.7b: Cumulative percentage of UK acceptances by when they applied in the UCAS cycle

Cumulative

18   21 and over

3.8 Mature students are more likely to make one choice to university as age increases

Throughout the covered cycles, mature students aged 21 – 25 and 26 – 30 were most likely to have made the full set of five main scheme choices, followed by making a single choice to HE. From 2011 to 2016, those aged 31 – 35 were also most likely to make five choices, followed by one. However, 2017 was the first cycle where this switched over, with 31 – 35 year olds becoming most likely to make a single choice.

Those aged 36 and over have been most likely to make a single choice through all the cycles covered, with this likelihood increasing over time, from 37.8 per cent of acceptances in 2011, to 41.3 per cent in 2017. The second most frequent number of choices made by those aged 36 and over was five throughout all the covered cycles.

Around 30 per cent of all mature applicants made between two and four choices across the covered cycles.

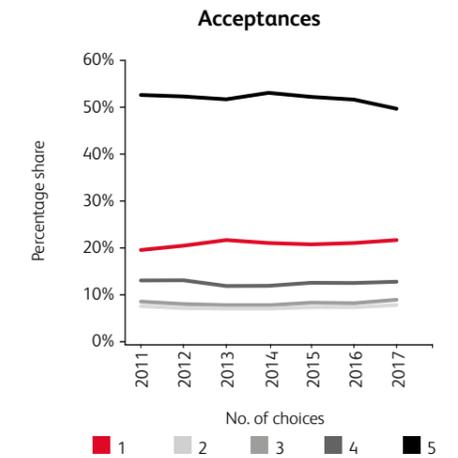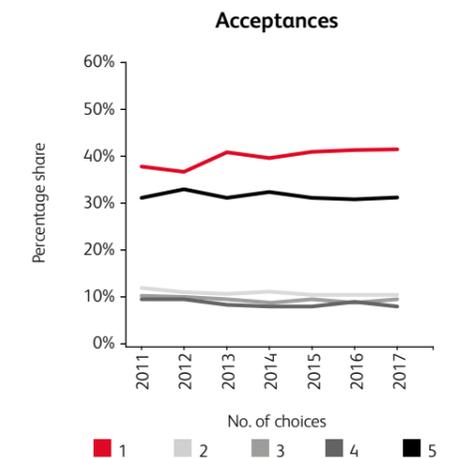**Figure 3.8a: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 21 – 25) by the number of main scheme choices**

Acceptances

1   2   3   4   5

Figure 3.8b: Percentage share of UK acceptances (aged 36 and over) by the number of main scheme choices

Acceptances

1   2   3   4   5

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).
Application rate	The number of applicants divided by the estimated base population.
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.
Cohort	A group of the population all born in the same academic year, who are therefore, for example, all aged 18 on a particular reference date.
Domicile	Declared area of permanent residence.
Entry rate	Number of acceptances from a UCAS application cycle divided by the estimated base population.
HE	Higher education.

Higher tariff provider	A provider that belongs to the higher tariff group, from the grouping of providers based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old accepted applicants (summarised through UCAS tariff points) in recent cycles. The other two groups are medium tariff providers and lower tariff providers. Each group of providers accounted for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances in recent cycles.
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System is a way of coding academic subjects. The system is co – owned and maintained by HESA and UCAS. JACS version 1.7 was introduced in 2002/03. It has been revised twice, with JACS 2.0 coming into effect in 2007/08, and JACS 3.0 in 2012/13.
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.
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.
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).
Tariff	A numerical summary of qualification level.
UK	United Kingdom. Excludes the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.