



END OF CYCLE REPORT 2018

Summary of applicants and acceptances

CHAPTER 1

UCAS



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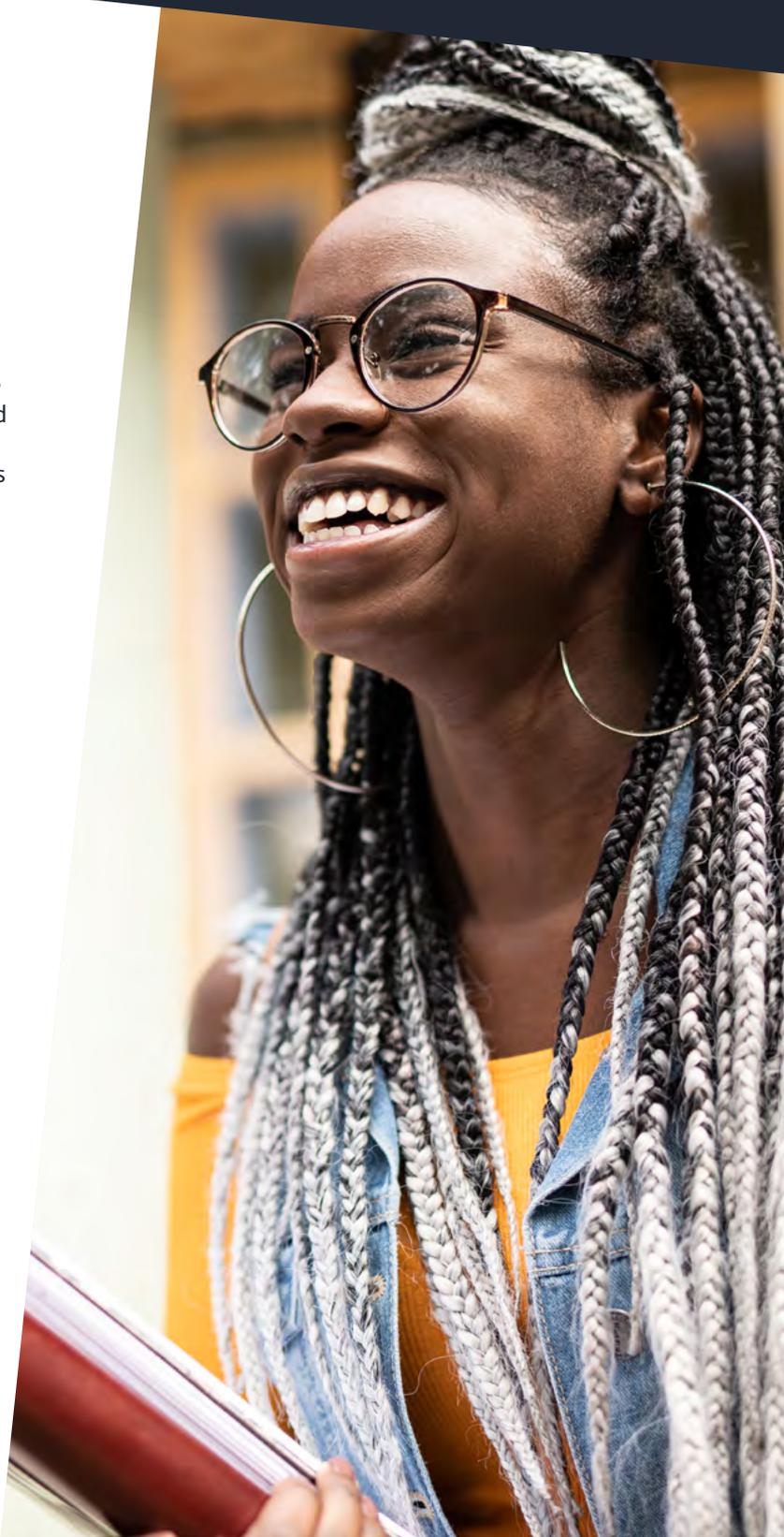
1. INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the first release of UCAS' End of Cycle Reports for the 2018 undergraduate admissions cycle.

As an independent charity, UCAS publishes timely data and analysis about demand for, and progression and admission to higher education, to contribute to public debate about education, access, and social mobility.

This year, we are publishing our end of cycle data and analysis in four releases, between 29 November and 31 January 2019, with the first release published 25 working days after the 2018 cycle closed. Weekly, between 29 November and 13 December, we will publish a series of detailed analysis reports covering the entire 2018 cycle. These will cover acceptance, offer, and entry rates, and differences by applicant background. On 13 December, we will also publish a series of analysis reference tables and data sets for the 2018 cycle. On 31 January, we will publish end of cycle provider-level application data, together with provider-level data on unconditional offer-making. This release will include analysis of trends in application rates by country, sex, and background, with recent years for comparison, and further analysis of offer-making.

It is in the context of this series of publications about the admissions cycle for 2018, that this report provides a summary on trends in overall numbers of applicants, acceptances, and the acceptance rate. This report covers all applicants to full-time undergraduate degree level courses in the UK, with emphasis on overall numbers, applicant domiciles, age groups, UK domiciled main scheme applicants, acceptance routes, nursing applicants, and nursing acceptances by UK domicile.



2. APPLICANTS, ACCEPTANCES, AND THE ACCEPTANCE AND ENTRY RATES

2.1 Applicant numbers fall, but record entry rate

for young people, and total acceptances remain stable

This year, the total number of applicants to full-time undergraduate degree level courses in the UK decreased by 0.6 per cent, to 695,565. Contrary to this, the total number of acceptances has remained relatively stable, with just 525 fewer acceptances (-0.1 per cent), bringing the total to 533,360.

The decrease in applicants brings numbers to the lowest levels since 2013. 2013 was the year numbers began to increase following a decline in 2012, with the increases continuing until 2016, when they started to decline. Declines from 2016 onwards will have been for a number of reasons, particularly the 3.6 per cent fall in the UK 18 year old population over the past two years, as this is the largest group of applicants. It could also be due to the increased propensity for 18 year olds to enter higher education, resulting in a smaller pool of applicants available for entry aged 19.

The proportion of applicants who had a place at the end of the cycle is termed the acceptance rate, and reflects the relationship between total applicants and acceptances. The combination of a decline in applicant numbers and relative stability in acceptances this year means the acceptance rate has increased again, in keeping with the general trend since 2010. This year, the acceptance rate has increased by 0.4 percentage points, to reach 76.7 per cent, the highest seen since 2008. This indicates that providers may be choosing to expand the range of their usual entry requirements, to accept applicants with different grade profiles, or a different profile of qualifications, such as those held by mature applicants, or those domiciled outside of the EU, than they would have accepted in previous years. We analyse this in more detail in the offer-making chapter of this year's End of Cycle Report.

As well as the increase in acceptance rates, there has also been an increase in the entry rate – the proportion of the population who are placed in higher education by the end of the cycle, for UK 18 year olds, with the entry rate increasing by 0.4 percentage points, to reach 33.0 per cent. This shows that, despite decreases in applicant and acceptance numbers, the appetite for higher education remains strong, and continues to grow year-on-year among the largest group of applicants.

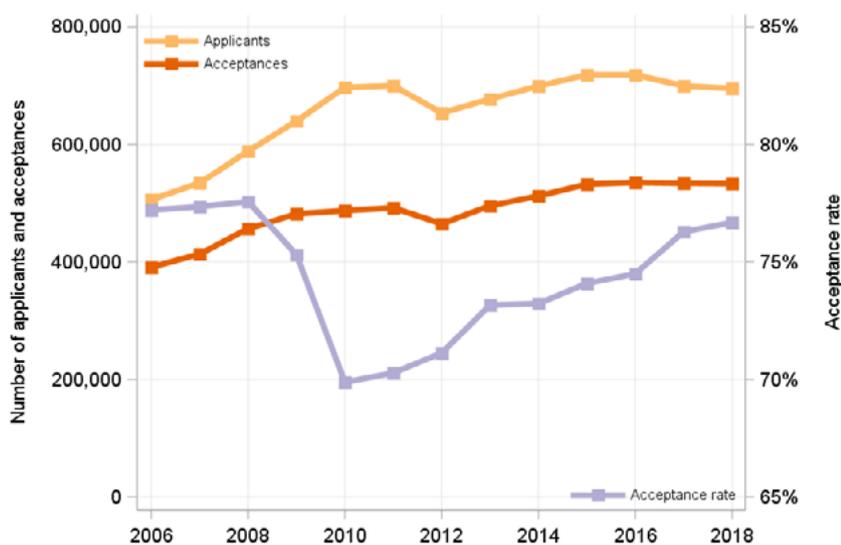


FIGURE 1:

Total applicants, acceptances, and the acceptance rate

As the largest groups of applicants often dominate the trends seen in overall numbers, the rest of this report investigates the number of applicants, acceptances, and acceptance rates, split by applicant characteristics, such as country of domicile, and age group, to report on underlying trends.



2.2 Acceptance rate increases for UK and EU

domiciled applicants, but declines for non-EU

80.7 per cent of applicants this year came from the UK. Non-EU domiciled applicants represent 11.7 per cent of all applicants, with those from the EU representing 7.6 per cent.

This year, the number of UK domiciled applicants decreased by 1.9 per cent to 561,615. This follows the declines over the past two years, resulting in a 5.1 per cent decrease over this period. The reduction in number of UK domiciled applicants is primarily as a result of the demographic decline in the UK 18 year old population, which has fallen by 5.7 per cent over the past three years.

While there have been decreases in the number of UK domiciled applicants, the number of applicants from non-EU countries has continued to grow this year, with growth also being seen from EU domiciled applicants. This year, applicants from non-EU countries have shown a large increase, of 6.5 per cent, bringing the total to 81,325. Applicants from the EU comprise a smaller group, but have also shown a sizeable increase, of 2.8 per cent, to reach 52,620 – the second highest recorded for this group of applicants following 2016. In 2016, there were 53,560 applicants from the EU, 935 more than this year, with the decline last year appearing to be an anomaly against a trend of increases seen since 2012, possibly due to uncertainty surrounding fee status after the announcement of Brexit.

The number of acceptances broadly reflects the pattern in applicants, with decreases in UK domiciled acceptances, and increases for acceptances from the EU and non-EU countries.

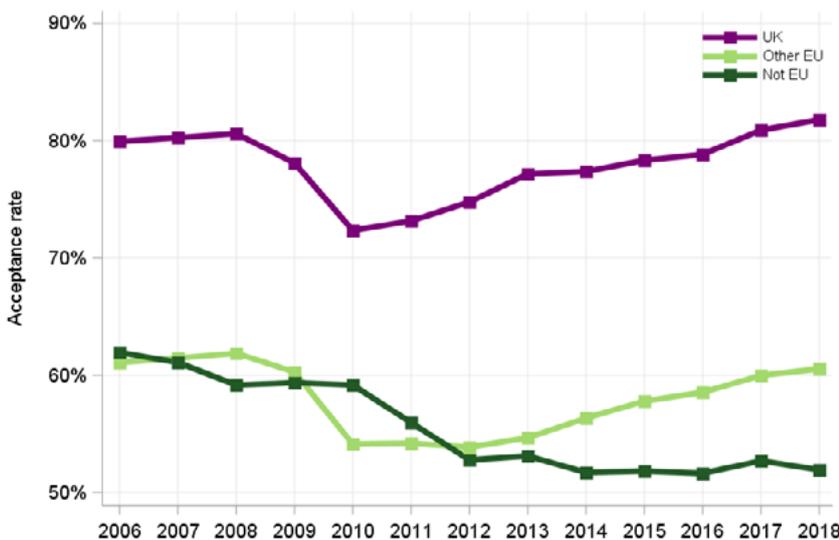
This year, the number of UK domiciled acceptances has been the lowest since 2014, at 459,285. This is a 0.8 per cent decrease from last year, and a 1.3 per cent decrease from the highest level in 2016. The decrease is apparent in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, with the largest percentage decline, of 3.1 per cent (-635 acceptances), in applicants from Wales. In comparison, there has been a smaller percentage decrease of 0.9 per cent from England. But, as England has a larger population, this equates to a larger decrease – of 3,345 acceptances. Scotland is the only UK domicile to show an increase, of 1.6 per cent, resulting in 570 more acceptances.

The increases in EU and non-EU domiciled acceptances brings the number for these domiciles up to 31,855, and 42,220 respectively – the highest ever seen for both these groups of applicants. For the EU, this is a 3.8 per cent increase from last year, and for non-EU countries the increase is 4.9 per cent. This indicates that UK HE continues to be an increasingly viable option for non-UK applicants, despite a dip in EU applicants and acceptances last year.

The applicants and acceptances can be used to define the acceptance rates, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2:

Acceptance rates by applicant domicile group



Throughout the reported cycles, the acceptance rates for UK domiciled applicants have always been more than 10 percentage points higher than for the EU and non-EU countries. This year, acceptance rates for UK domiciled applicants have increased by 0.9 percentage points. This brings the acceptance rate to 81.8 per cent, which is the highest seen for this group of applicants.

There has also been an increase in acceptance rates for EU domiciled applicants, of 0.6 percentage points, bringing their acceptance rate to 60.5 per cent.

This year, acceptance rates for non-EU countries remain below that of EU countries, as they have since 2012. The acceptance rate for non-EU applicants has declined by 0.8 percentage points this year, to 51.9 per cent. These declines are apparent in a number of countries, including China and Hong Kong – the non-EU, International, countries with the most applicants and acceptances this year. Despite a decline in acceptance rates, the number of applicants from China and Hong Kong have increased this year, putting the total number of applicants at 17,110 and 6,585 respectively, following 12.0 and 2.7 per cent increases. The number of acceptances has also risen, but not by as much, with an increase of 10.4 per cent from China putting their total at 10,180 acceptances, and an increase of 2.0 per cent from Hong Kong putting their total at 3,775 acceptances.

2.3 Acceptance rates for young UK domiciled applicants

remain stable, but large increase for mature applicants

The largest single age group within acceptances is 18 year olds, comprising 51.9 per cent of all UK acceptances in 2018.

This year, the number of 18 year olds accepted to UK HE has declined by 1.3 per cent. The next largest group – 19 year olds – declined by 4.1 per cent, and 20 year olds declined by 1.6 per cent. These three age groups together comprise 77.3 per cent of all UK acceptances. The declines in number of 19 and 20 year olds accepted into higher education may have occurred as a result of the increased propensity for applicants to enter at age 18, resulting in a smaller pool available for entry at age 19 and 20, as previously discussed.

In contrast to their younger counterparts, and in a change from the decreases seen over the previous two cycles, the number of acceptances for the oldest age group, reported here as those aged 26 and over, increased by 6.7 per cent. This increase contributed an extra 3,230 acceptances, bringing their total up to 51,600. Acceptances from those aged 21 to 25 also increased this year, by 0.9 per cent, bringing their total to 51,050. Compared to the 1.4 per cent decline in the number of mature acceptances aged 21 and over last year, this increase does not follow previous trends.

Mature students have distinct characteristics, typically applying to and accepting places at providers closer to home. They also tend to apply later in the cycle, to a smaller range of courses, as reported in the 'Admissions patterns for mature applicants'¹ report, published earlier this year.

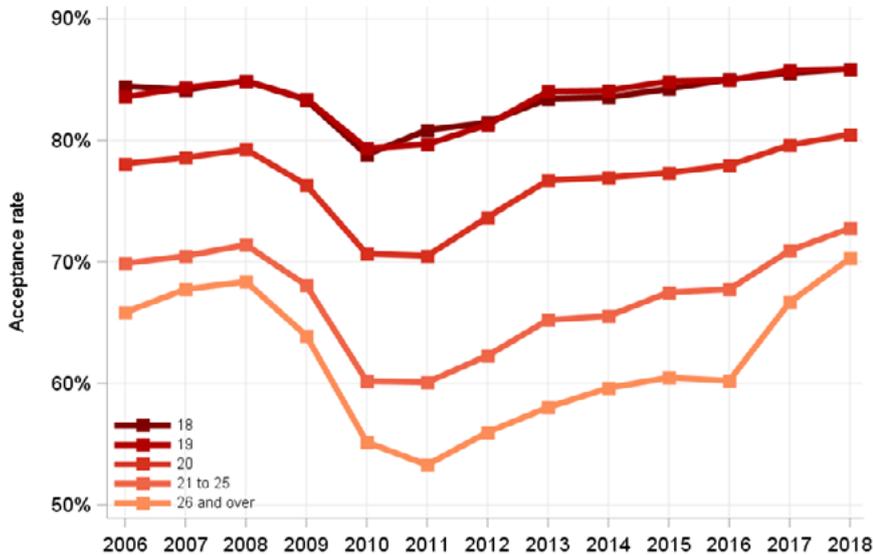
Acceptance rates by age group are shown in Figure 3 below. Acceptance rates for 18 and 19 year olds have always been higher than for the mature age groups, ranging from a low of 78.8 per cent in 2010, to a high of 85.9 per cent this year. The 18 and 19 year-old age groups are more likely to make the full set of five choices, compared to mature age groups, maximising their chances of receiving offers and being accepted to a provider. This year, acceptance rates for 18- and 19-year olds have marginally increased, to all-time highs of 85.9 per cent for both age groups.

1. [Admissions patterns for mature applicants](#)



FIGURE 3:

Acceptance rates for UK domiciled applicants by age group



All other age groups saw an increase in acceptance rates. The largest increase was for the oldest age group, defined here as those aged 26 and over, which increased by 3.6 percentage points to bring their rate to 70.3 per cent – the highest on record. The acceptance rates for those aged 21 – 25 also increased to their highest, at 72.8 per cent. This is a 1.8 percentage point increase from last year. The courses that mature applicants tend to apply to include subjects allied to medicine, business and admin studies, and education – all subject groups which had an increase in acceptance rates this year.



2.4 UK domiciled main scheme applicants are more likely to be accepted than ever before

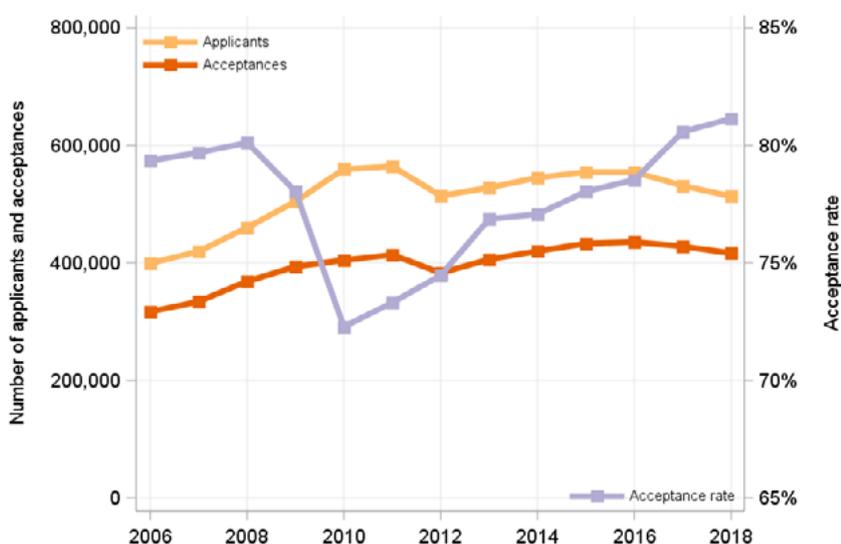
There are many routes through which an applicant can become accepted onto an undergraduate degree course. The majority of applicants apply through the main scheme, where they are able to make five initial choices, followed by the opportunity to use other routes such as Extra, Clearing, or Adjustment, later in the cycle. UK main scheme applicants make up the majority of all applicants, comprising 73.8 per cent in the 2018 cycle.

The attractiveness of UK higher education and continuing increases in numbers of non-UK students applying to, and being placed at UK providers, potentially masks the UK-only picture. This year, there have been 17,705 fewer UK domiciled applicants applying through the main scheme, making their total 513,570 – the lowest seen since 2009. This 3.3 per cent reduction can primarily be explained by the combined reduction of 1.9 per cent in the UK 18, 19, and 20-year-old population this year, together with an increased propensity for 18 year olds to enter higher education, leading to a reduced pool of available applicants aged 19 and over.

The number of acceptances for UK domiciled main scheme applicants has also decreased this year, by 2.7 per cent, to the lowest since 2013. These factors combined mean that the acceptance rate has increased, reaching 81.1 per cent, as shown in Figure 4. This means that four in every five UK domiciled main scheme applicants were accepted, with them having a higher chance of being accepted this year than they ever have before.

FIGURE 4:

Applicants, acceptances, and the acceptance rate for UK main scheme applicants only



3



ACCEPTANCE ROUTES



3.1 Declines in most acceptance routes,

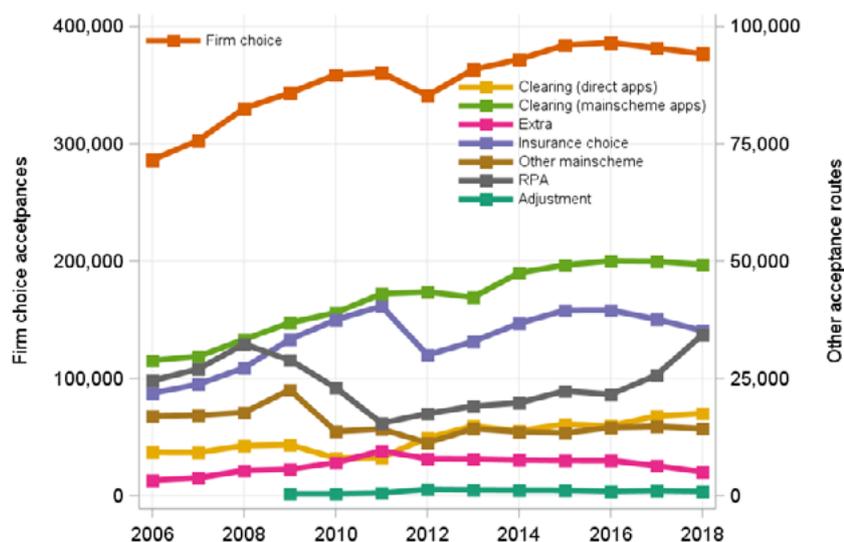
but an increase in direct to Clearing

There are a variety of ways that main scheme applicants can become placed. They may become placed at their firm, or insurance choice, or then go on to enter Extra, Adjustment, or Clearing. Applicants who did not originally apply through the main scheme (where applicants are able to make up to five choices and must apply prior to the 30 June deadline) have the ability to apply direct to Clearing, and become placed that way. Clearing is a route that opens late in the cycle, where applicants contact, or are contacted, directly by providers.

Some of these routes are more widely used than others. Placed through firm choice is consistently the most common acceptance route, with around 70 per cent of all acceptances being placed through this route each year. This is followed by main scheme Clearing, with around 9 per cent, then insurance choice (for applicants who were not accepted through their firm offer), with 7 per cent.

FIGURE 5:

Acceptances by acceptance route



This year, there have been decreases across the majority of acceptance routes, with the largest relative decrease, of 21.1 per cent, coming from applicants accepted through Extra. Extra is used by applicants who do not receive any offers from their five main scheme choices, or who decline any offers they do receive. This reduction has taken the number of Extra acceptances to the lowest seen since 2007. This can be explained by the high proportion of applicants being placed through their firm and insurance choices, meaning there are fewer applicants having the option to enter Extra.

Other notable declines were seen for applicants accepted through Adjustment, the route used by applicants to 'adjust' to a place at another provider, if they meet and exceed the conditions of their firm choice. Adjustment was one of the least used acceptance routes this year, with the decrease of 15.1 per cent reducing the total placed through this route to 880. Insurance choice acceptances (an applicant's second choice, used when the conditions of their firm choice are not met) also saw a decrease, of 6.4 per cent, to a total of 35,185.

This year, there have been increases in acceptances from two routes: direct to Clearing, and Records of Prior Acceptance (RPAs). Direct to Clearing acceptances increased for the second year in a row, with the increase this year being 3.4 per cent. This shows that applying direct to Clearing is becoming an ever more common route for applicants to use, having delayed applying to providers until late in the cycle. The total number of RPAs increased to 34,295 this year.



4. ACCEPTANCES TO NURSING

4.1 Fall in number of nursing applicants translates into record high acceptance rates

A nursing applicant is defined as someone who made at least one application to a course or module in the principle subject B7 nursing at a higher education provider. This cycle, about 16 per cent of nursing applicants who were placed by the end of the cycle, were accepted onto a course other than nursing (B7).

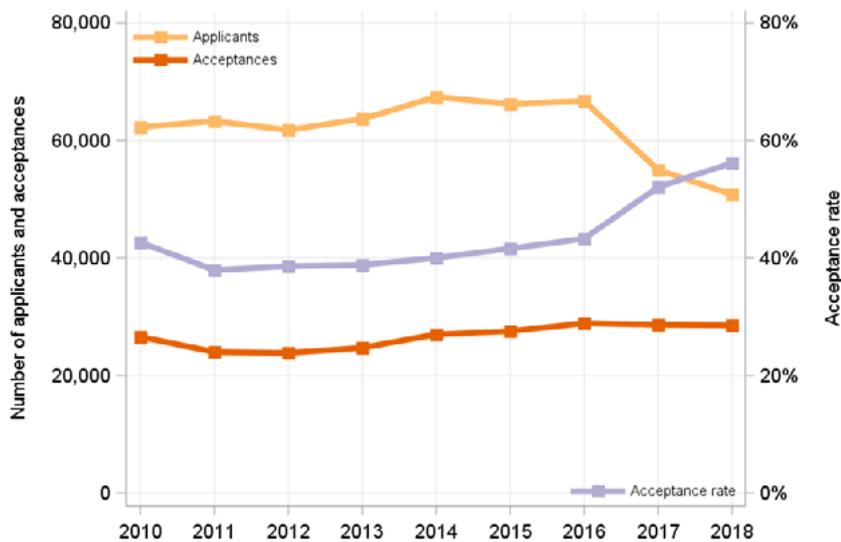
This cycle, the number of nursing students has remained in the spotlight, as this is the second consecutive year with new funding arrangements in place for nursing, midwifery, and most allied to health subjects at providers in England. Previously, these applicants were able to apply for NHS bursaries. This funding arrangement has now been replaced, with applicants being able to access the same financial loans as those applying to other undergraduate courses. These changes have enabled providers to offer up to 10,000 extra training places on pre-registration healthcare programmes. With applicants and acceptances from applicants domiciled in England historically comprising around 80% of all applicants and acceptances, the effects of changes in English applicant behaviour have a disproportionately large effect on the sector-wide picture.

The trends in applicants, acceptances, and the acceptance rate are shown in Figure 6.



FIGURE 6:

Nursing applicants, acceptances, and acceptance rate



This year, the number of applicants to B7 nursing courses declined for the second year in a row. This 7.6 per cent fall was less than half of the 17.6 per cent decline last year, when the funding changes first came into effect. This means the number of applicants has reached its lowest point, having declined by almost a quarter in the past two years, with the significant majority of this decrease being attributable to falls in the number of English domiciled applicants².

This large decline in applicants has not translated to acceptances, with only 80 fewer this year. This puts the total number of nursing acceptances at 28,540 – the third highest on record. Nursing is a subject group which remains oversubscribed, with generally around two applicants for every one acceptance, as reflected in the acceptance rate. This year, the acceptance rate for nursing applicants has increased by 4.1 percentage points to reach 56.2 per cent, meaning that, as with the trends in overall applicants and UK main scheme applicants, this year, nursing applicants, particularly English domiciled nursing applicants, were more likely than ever before to be accepted onto a nursing course. We analyse the pattern of acceptances by domicile in more detail in the next section.

Although the acceptance rates have increased, to become closer to that seen in overall applicants, the characteristics of nursing applicants remain distinctly different from that of the general population of applicants. Nursing acceptances are more likely to be female compared to overall applicants, and the vast majority are aged 21 and over.

² <https://www.ucas.com/file/177196/download?token=ZjA4akHS> (PDF)

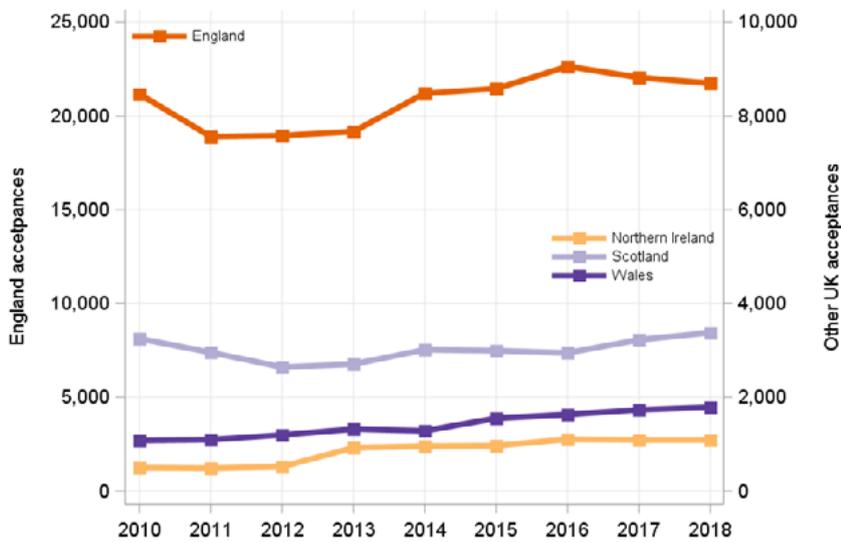
4.2 Nursing acceptances from England continue to fall, but Scotland and Wales see increases

As with the majority of provision, the majority of nursing acceptances apply, and are accepted to, courses in their domicile of residence, e.g. applicants from England tend to apply and become accepted to providers in England. The majority of nursing acceptances are domiciled in England (77.7 per cent this year), followed by Scotland (12.1 per cent), Wales (6.4 per cent), and Northern Ireland (3.9 per cent).

Figure 7 shows the number of acceptances to nursing courses by UK domicile group, which are likely to be affected by the recent changes to funding arrangements.

FIGURE 7:

Nursing acceptances by UK domicile group



The number of acceptances for applicants domiciled in England has decreased by 1.4 per cent this year, to 21,745. This is the first time over the reporting period that acceptances have decreased for two consecutive years.

However, the opposite can be seen in Scotland and Wales, where the number of acceptances has increased. In Scotland, the number of acceptances has risen for the second year in a row. This year, the increase has been 4.7 per cent, a smaller increase than last year, but brings the total up to the highest seen, at 3,375.

In Wales, the increase has been smaller than that in Scotland, of 3.2 per cent, bringing the total up to 1,785. In Northern Ireland, acceptances have remained stable, at 1,090.



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.
Adjustment	An acceptance route where applicants who have met and exceeded the conditions of their firm choice choose to take up an alternative offer.
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).
Clearing	An acceptance route available late in the application cycle.
Direct to Clearing	Applied through Clearing without an initial application through the main scheme (i.e. prior to the 30 June deadline).
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.
Firm choice	An offer made by a provider which has been confirmed by the applicant as their first choice. These can be either conditional (dependent on achieving specified conditions), or unconditional (applicant has met specific conditions and assumed to be accepted or placed at the provider).
Insurance choice	An offer made by a provider which has been confirmed by the applicant as their second choice, in case the conditions of their firm choice are not met. These can be either conditional (dependent on achieving specified requirements) or unconditional (no further requirements to be met).
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.
Provider	A higher education provider – a university or college.

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