

Annex B: Additional firm choice deferrals estimation

The What happened to the COVID cohort? report refers to approximately 1,000 additional firm choice deferred acceptances among applicants with grade increases. This Annex describes the methodology through which this figure was estimated.

Inclusion criteria

As with all figures in the report (unless stated otherwise), this figure is based on UK domiciled 18 year old applicants.

In addition, the estimate is limited to applicants with a main scheme firm choice course on 30 June, whose firm choice was not deferred at that point, and who were placed on their firm choice course at the end of the cycle.

Producing the estimate

In both 2018 and 2019, 4% of applicants in this group held a confirmed place for deferred entry at the end of the cycle (henceforth 'late deferrals'). In both years this figure was highest among those with a firm choice at a medium tariff provider - 4.6% in 2019; among lower tariff providers it was 4.1% and higher tariff 3.3% in the same year. (In 2018 these figures were: 4.3% lower tariff; 4.7% medium tariff; and 3.1% higher tariff.) The 2019 figures are assumed to be the baseline 'late deferral rates' for UK 18 year old applicants meeting the above inclusion criteria.

In 2020, examination of the 'late deferral rate' for different groups of applicants meeting the inclusion criteria revealed that:

- There were 12,235 applicants with grade increases who were not placed on their firm choice course before providers received the revised grades (but were placed on their firm choice course by the end of the cycle)
- This group had an unusually high number of late deferrals – 1,520 deferrals (12.4%). Among lower, medium and higher tariff providers these figures were 4.7%, 10.5% and 14.3% respectively.

Compared with 'baseline' late deferral rates from 2019 (taking into account the varying late deferral rates by provider tariff) **there were 1,065 'additional' deferrals in the 2020 cycle** (the majority of which – 895 - were at higher tariff providers). (Note that, while this figure is reported to the nearest 5 applicants, it is based solely on 2019 deferral rates. It is likely that, even without the unique circumstances of the 2020 cycle, the late deferral rates would have varied from 2019. Consequently figures should be interpreted as indicative rather than precise estimates of additional deferrals and the report refers to 'around 1000' additional deferrals rather than a more precise figure.)

Interpreting the estimate and limitations

This estimate is limited to main scheme applicants with a non-deferred main scheme firm choice on 30 June, who were placed on this course at the end of the 2020 cycle. However, there may have been other applicant groups whose outcomes at the end of the 2020 cycle were affected by the policy change.

For example, some applicants whose preference was to start university this year may have been placed prior to 19 August on another course with a 2020 start date - at their firm choice provider, at their insurance choice provider, or at another provider – for example, through Clearing. These applicants may have decided to retain this place rather than accept a deferred place on their firm choice course.

In addition, the above analysis focuses on applicants placed on their firm choice course. There may have been other applicants placed (following grade increases) for deferred entry to a different course at their firm choice provider, or at another provider.

It should also be noted that some of the late deferrals may have been the applicant's choice (for example, due to pandemic-related concerns) – rather than a necessity due to all firm choice course places having been allocated prior to the policy change.