UK 18-year-olds make record number of applications for computing courses

Record numbers of choices have been made by UK 18-year-old applicants to computing, new UCAS data shows.

The latest deadline data from June 30, UCAS' final date to apply for up to five courses at the same time, shows there have been 94,870 applications to computing – up from 86,630 last year (+9.5%) and 71,150 in 2021 (+33.3%). This makes it the 7th most popular course, behind subjects allied to medicine (156,460 applications), biological and sports sciences (105,490), engineering and technology (96,180), social sciences (178,680), business and management (184,000), and design, creative and performing arts (126,310).

This has been driven by interest in computer science (+11% compared to 2022 and +35% on 2021), software engineering (+16% on 2022 and +45% on 2021), computer games and animation (+2% on 2022 and +28% on 2021) and artificial intelligence (+4% on 2022 and +16% on 2021).

For computing, there has also been an increase in the number of applications by UK 18-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR 4 Quintile 1) - 11,870 this year, up from 11,110 in 2022 (+7%) and 8,320 in 2021 (+43%).

Overall, there have been 195,690 applications to computing (all ages, all domiciles) – up +9% on 2022 and +26% on 2021.

Computing as a whole remains a male-dominated field, with only 18% of all UK 18-year-olds applications made by females – although this is higher than the 17% in 2022 and 16% in 2021.

It comes amid a rise in the popularity of artificial intelligence and gaming, as significant new advances in digital technologies, such as ChatGPT, come to the market.

Meanwhile, the data reveals the overall number of UK 18-year-old applicants is at the second-highest level – 319,570 in 2023, down from 326,190 in 2022 (-2%) but up from 311,010 in 2021 (+2.8%). There is also an uplift in rise in offers, with the offer rate for UK-18-year-olds standing at 76.2% compared to 73.9% at the same point last year.

All of this is occurring against a complex backdrop including geopolitics, the economy and job market, and rising cost of living.

Other key headlines from the June 30 Deadline data include:

- A total of 37,410 UK 18-year-olds from POLAR4 Quintile 1 have applied – down from the record of 38,310 in 2022 (-2.3%) but an increase on 34,840 in 2021 (+7.4%).

- A total of 74,240 UK 18-year-olds have shared their individual circumstances following the introduction of seven new widening participation questions to the UCAS application for 2023 entry onwards – equating to 23.2% of all UK 18-year-olds. Applicants have responded to at least one of the new questions as follows: sharing circumstances such as receiving free school meals (43,250), having caring responsibilities (11,590), being estranged (3,200), having a parent in the

armed forces (12,450), declaring themselves as a refugee or asylum seeker (2,770), being a parent (890) or having served in the armed forces (90).

- The number of international applicants (all ages) stands at 138,050, up from 134,870 in 2022 (+2.4%) and 130,390 in 2021 (+5.9%). This is driven by interest from India (+ 8.7), the Middle East (+20.8%) and Africa (+3.9%). Meanwhile, applicants from China are down by 2.2% which is most likely due to Covid-19 restrictions and disruption to learning.

- The number of UK 18-year-olds applicants who have declared their ethnicity as Asian, Black, Mixed or other has increased by 4.4% – 104,160 in 2023 versus 99,770 in 2022 and 89,560 in 2021 (+16.3%).

- A total of 1,740 people with predicted T-Levels have applied to higher education, up from 490 last year (252%).

Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS, said:

"We know that changes in the world around us translate into increased demand for certain courses, as we saw for economics post-2008, and for medicine and nursing during the Covid-19 pandemic. These new figures suggest students are becoming increasingly inspired to study computing thanks to the rise of digital and AI.

"We saw unprecedented demand for undergraduate courses during the pandemic as student ambition was high, and we expected a post-pandemic rebalance in the number of applicants. Today's numbers show the second highest number of UK 18-year-olds have applied this year, testament to the demand for UK higher education this year and the confidence of students in progressing.

"As we forecast an upward trajectory throughout the remainder of the decade, with up to a million higher education applicants predicted in a single year in 2030, it's paramount that we highlight the full range of post-secondary options and pathways available across both undergraduate study and apprenticeships.

"In the run up to results day, there will be a huge effort across the sector to support students entering the next step in their education journey. There will be plenty of choice available to students who are unplaced or use Clearing as an opportunity to rethink their plans. We really encourage students to think ahead and use the UCAS Hub to research the vast range of options available to them."

Rashik Parmar MBE, Chief Executive of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, said:

"Teenagers in the UK know that AI will change the world forever; it shouldn't surprise us to see this soaring demand for computing degrees.

"AI is already reshaping how cancer is diagnosed, how we tackle climate change, how we work and how we communicate. The thousands of young men and women applying for computing through UCAS do so because they want a say in this future.

"Ethics and diversity are vital in AI and we want people from every background to know that the tech profession needs them."

View the June 30 Deadline application data in our [interactive dashboard](#).

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Notes for editors

About UCAS' 30 June deadline

All applications, sent to UCAS by 18:00 BST (UK time) on this day, are sent on to the chosen universities or colleges. Applications received after 30 June will automatically be entered into Clearing. Clearing is UCAS' process where we recommend matches for applicants to any higher education courses that are yet to be filled. It is available to anyone who has made a UCAS undergraduate application and does not hold any offers.

About UCAS

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

Our services support young people making post-18 choices, as well as mature learners, by providing information, advice, and guidance to inspire and facilitate educational progression to university, college, or a degree apprenticeship.

We support 1.5 million students every year to explore entering higher education, employment and apprenticeships and manage almost three million applications, from around 700,000 people each year, for full-time undergraduate courses at over 380 universities and colleges across the UK.

We also provide a wide range of research, consultancy and advisory services to schools, colleges, careers services, professional bodies, and employers, including apprenticeships.

We're a successful and fast-growing organisation, which helps hundreds of thousands of people every year. We're committed to delivering a first-class service to all our customers — they're at the heart of everything we do.