

UCAS PREDICTED GRADES: **CONTEXT**

The following briefing shares the latest insight into UCAS predicted grades. It is intended to provide national context alongside UCAS predicted grade evaluation reports.

We know that this is a complex and sensitive issue, with many factors influencing UCAS predicted grades, submitted as part of the UCAS application. This briefing, alongside the reports, is intended to support advisers in guiding students toward courses, universities and colleges that best suit their needs. It is also our intention that together these resources will provide efficiencies for staff already managing high workloads through centralised data provision from UCAS.

Please do share this widely within your school or college, as it could offer valuable insight for leaders across the wider school or college community.

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WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY ABOUT UCAS PREDICTED GRADES

Applicants achieved slightly closer to UCAS predicted grades in 2024 than 2023

Long-term trends over the past decade have seen the gap between UCAS predicted and achieved A level grades widen.

To compare UCAS predicted and achieved A level grades, grades are converted to points. The table below shows examples of the extent of the difference between UCAS predicted and achieved grades for an applicant predicted BBB. For example, an applicant predicted BBB and achieving either BBC, or a grade profile with equivalent points, achieved one grade below predicted.

Examples of achieved grades by prediction band for UCAS predicted grade profile of BBB

Prediction Band	Example UCAS Predicted Grade	Example Achieved Grades
Achieved more than 3 grades below predicted	BBB	CCD, CDD, CDE
Achieved 3 grades below predicted	BBB	BCD, CCC, BBE
Achieved 2 grades below predicted	BBB	BCC, BBD, ACD
Achieved 1 grade below predicted	BBB	BBC, ACC, ABD
Achieved predicted	BBB	BBB, ABC, A*CC
Achieved 1 grade above predicted	BBB	ABB, AAC, A*AC
Achieved 2 grades above predicted	BBB	AAB, A*BB,A*AC
Achieved 3 grades above predicted	BBB	AAA, A*AB
Achieved more than 3 grades above predicted	BBB	A*AA, A*A*B,A*A*A

Figure 1 below shows the proportion of 18-year-old applicants from England with at least three UCAS predicted A levels achieving within one grade of predicted (above or below) across three A levels. Excluding years with pandemic grading (2020-2022), it shows a progressive decrease in the proportion achieving close to their UCAS predicted grades. However, there was a small increase in 2024.

Proportion achieving within one grade of their UCAS predicted grades

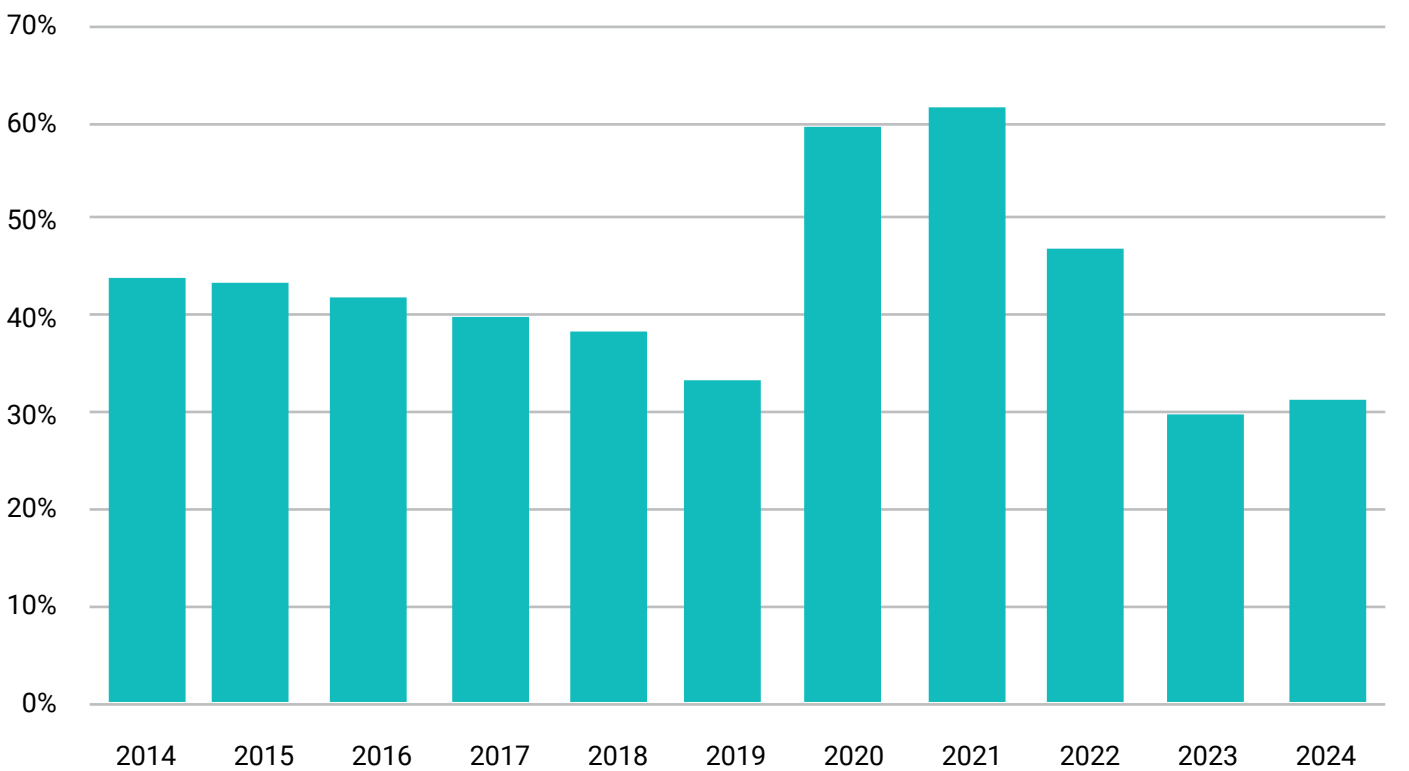


Figure 1: Proportion of applicants from England achieving within one grade of predicted

By contrast, UCAS predicted grades for qualifications with more regular assessment tend to be closer to achieved grades. For example, 69% of UCAS BTEC Extended Diploma predictions for English applicants in 2024 are within a single grade of what the student achieved, which is broadly in line with 2019.

Historically, the AS was a useful data point in informing UCAS predicted grades, and this may be why in 2019 and 2024 we see more applicants achieving four or more grades below their UCAS predicted grades in England than in Wales and Northern Ireland (which feature the AS). The gap between UCAS predicted and achieved grades for Scottish Highers is also comparatively lower, possibly due to the qualification's grading structure.

Achieving further below UCAS predicted grades equates to reduced likelihood of acceptance

UCAS modelling shows that the further an applicant achieves below their UCAS predicted grades, the likelihood of acceptance onto their chosen course reduces. For instance, when we take the example of an applicant with average UCAS predicted grades (AAA) with an approximately 'average' course, a shift from achieving two to three grades below predicted is associated with a large reduction in probability of acceptance, as shown in Figure 2 below.

That said, there is significant variation by course and student background. Regarding the former, this likely reflects different entry requirements, and grades on entry between courses, as well as differing university and college offer making strategies. Last year UCAS launched its [Historical entry grades data](#), which allows students, along with their teachers and advisers, to see both offer rates and the historic grades held by previous successful applicants on admission to a particular course, in addition to the listed entry requirements published by universities. In terms of the latter, many providers deploy [contextual admissions](#) practices, which can result in greater flexibility for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Probability of an AAA predicted applicant being accepted to a selected firm choice course

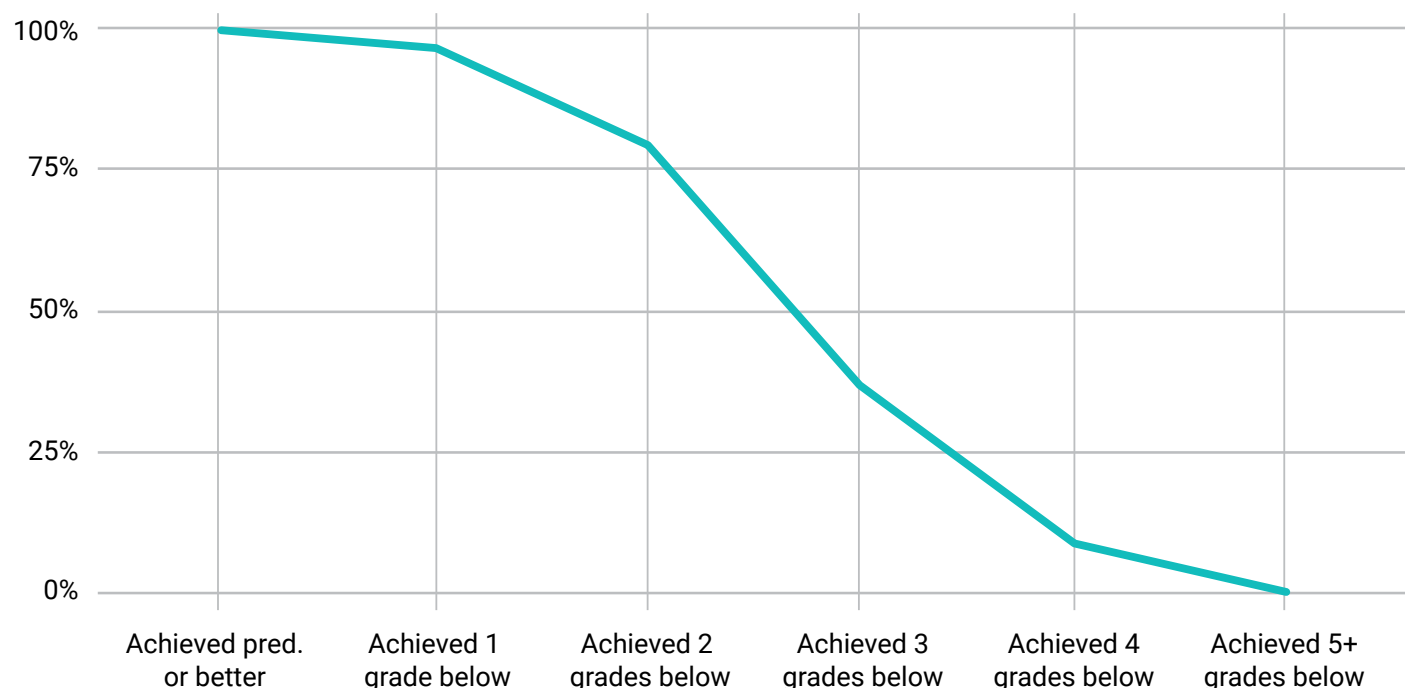


Figure 2: Predicted acceptance to firm for an applicant predicted AAA with a selected firm choice course

Achieving above UCAS predictions means applicants are more likely to pursue other options

In the 2023 cycle, only around 5% of 18-year-old applicants from England with three predicted A levels achieved above their UCAS predicted grades. Most were accepted to their firm choice. However, having been accepted at firm choice, this group was more likely to explore other options than other applicants placed at their firm choice. This means they were more likely to use Clearing to change course provider (with 5.1% choosing to do so), as well as being more likely to become unplaced (7.1%). Of those becoming unplaced, over two thirds reapplied in the following cycle.

Further information about the analysis contained within this briefing is available in the data and analysis section of the UCAS website.

