

# UK application rates by country, region, sex, age and background

UCAS

(2014 cycle, January deadline)

UCAS Analysis and Research  
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## Key findings

### Application rates for 18 year olds in England, Wales and Scotland increase to new highs

- Application rates for 18 year olds for each UK country are at, or very near, the highest levels recorded.
- Application rates for English 18 year olds have increased by 1.4 percentage points to 35 per cent in 2014 making English 18 year olds 4 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than last year and more likely than in any previous cycle.
- This follows a similar increase between 2012 and 2013, with both increases typical of the annual increases between 2006 and 2011.
- This pattern is consistent with the model that the introduction of higher and more variable tuition fees in 2012 reduced the level of 18 year old demand for higher education, but did not materially alter the pattern of annual increases in that demand. Based on trends using revised population estimates, this model would suggest that the application rate is around 2.5 percentage points lower than it would have been if there had not been a decrease in the application rate in 2012.
- Application rates for 18 year olds in Wales have increased to 30 per cent, and in Scotland to 31 per cent, both at the highest recorded level. Application rates in Northern Ireland (47 per cent) remain around the same level that they have been since 2010 (varying between 46 and 48 per cent, the highest levels recorded).

### Application rates for young cohorts increase in all countries to highest ever levels

- Overall young demand for higher education can be measured through cohort rates that report the proportion of the cohort of young people that have applied either aged 18 or, a year later, aged 19. They give a fuller picture of young demand that is not affected by changes in the decision of the age of first applying to higher education.
- Cohort application rates have increased in 2014 for all countries of the UK; in England to 43 per cent, 54 per cent in Northern Ireland, 36 per cent in Scotland and 37 per cent in Wales. These are the highest recorded levels in each country.

### New demand from 19 year olds increases for the second year to set new highest values

- 19 year olds are the second largest single age group of applicants. New demand at age 19 is measured by 'first-time' application rates that exclude anyone who applied at age 18 a year earlier.
- The first-time application rate of 19 year olds increased in all four countries of UK in 2014 for the second successive year. In 2014, for England and Northern Ireland, this increase follows an increase in application rates at age 18.
- In 2014, these first-time application rates for 19 year olds were 9.3 per cent in England, 7.6 per cent in Wales, 6.2 per cent in Northern Ireland and 4.9 per cent in Scotland. These rates are the highest recorded levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, only 2010 had a greater rate.

### **Application rate increases for all age groups in England for the first time since 2010**

- Application rates are much lower for older age groups and it is harder to interpret trends, especially at the January deadline as proportionally more applications from older age groups are received later in the cycle than for young applicants.
- In England application rates have increased for all age groups. This is the first time that this has occurred since 2010 and, for every age group, application rates are higher than for all other years except 2010 and 2011.

### **Large differences between application rates between English regions but all increase in 2014**

- Application rates increase for all English regions in 2014. The largest increase in 2014 was for Yorkshire and the Humber where 18 year olds became 7 per cent more likely to apply to higher education. The lowest increases were in the East Midlands and the North East where 18 year olds became 2 per cent more likely to apply in 2014.
- The highest application rate is for 18 year olds from London (44 per cent in 2014) where 18 year olds are a quarter more likely to apply to higher education than 18 year olds from England as a whole. In 2014, the South West region of England has the lowest application rate (30 per cent). 18 year olds in London are over 40 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the South West or North East.
- Over the past decade, regions in the North of England and London have seen the greatest proportional increases in application rates for 18 year olds (over 40 per cent). Over the same period the South West has seen the smallest proportional increases in application rates for 18 year olds (16 per cent).

### **Application rates of disadvantaged 18 year olds across the UK increase to highest ever levels driving differences in application rates by background to lowest recorded values**

- Application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in all countries of the UK increased to the highest levels recorded in 2014.
- The application rates from the most disadvantaged areas in 2014 were 21 per cent in England, 26 per cent in Northern Ireland, 15 per cent in Scotland and 18 per cent for Wales.
- Between 2013 and 2014, 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in England became 10 per cent more likely to apply, 9 per cent more likely in Northern Ireland, 19 per cent more likely in Scotland and 17 per cent more likely in Wales.
- Compared with a decade ago, 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas across the UK are substantially more likely to apply for higher education in 2014. In England they are 94 per cent more likely, Northern Ireland 69 per cent more likely, Scotland 108 per cent more likely and Wales 65 per cent more likely.
- Differences in application rates between advantaged and disadvantaged areas have reduced over the past decade, reduced further in 2014 and are at the lowest level recorded. In 2004 advantaged UK 18 year olds were 4.4 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged 18 year olds. In 2014 this ratio fell for the tenth consecutive year with advantaged UK 18 year olds being 2.5 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged UK 18 year olds. A similar fall is seen for each country of the UK.

### **Young women more likely to apply than young men, especially in disadvantaged areas**

- 18 year old women remain more likely to apply to higher education than men – 30 per cent more likely in Northern Ireland, 33 per cent more likely in England, 42 per cent more likely in Wales and 49 per cent more likely in Scotland.
- In England, 18 year old women are more likely to apply than men across all backgrounds but to a greater extent in disadvantaged areas (55 per cent more likely) than advantaged areas (18 per cent more likely).

### **Reapplication rates of unplaced 18 year olds remain high in 2014 despite higher acceptance rates for this group in 2013**

- Around 15 to 20 per cent of 18 year old UK applicants are typically unplaced at the end of an application cycle.
- The proportion of these unplaced applicants who have reapplied in the 2014 cycle is 49 per cent in England, 47 per cent in Wales, 36 per cent in Scotland and 36 per cent in Northern Ireland.
- These reapplication rates are similar to levels in recent cycles and substantially higher than levels typical for cohorts that were 18 in 2006 and 2007.
- In England, reapplication rates have increased slightly despite the substantial increase in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds. The proportion of 18 year olds who, having applied in 2013, were either accepted in 2013 or have reapplied in 2014 has reached 92 per cent - the highest level recorded.
- In England, 2014 reapplication rates for those unplaced aged 18 in 2013 holding AAA (87 per cent) are higher than for those unplaced holding AAB (76 per cent), ABB (69 per cent), BBB (68 per cent). Reapplication rates for each of these grade profiles are similar to recent cycles.

### **January deadline application rates account for population changes and give the first reliable measure of young demand for higher education in 2014**

- January deadline application rates are the first reliable indicators of changes in demand for higher education from the UK.
- Application rates – the proportion of the population who apply – are the best measures of changes in application behaviour as they account for the size of the population.
- The 18 year old population is estimated to have reduced in size in 2014 by 7,000 in England, 200 in Northern Ireland, 300 in Scotland and 300 in Wales. These reductions are continuing a trend, so that there are now 5 to 7 per cent fewer 18 year olds in each country across the UK than there were in 2009.
- The January deadline application rates for 18 year olds are a particularly important indicator, since they have generally not had the opportunity to apply in earlier cycles and nearly all of their applications are made by this point.
- Almost all applications for full-time undergraduate study provided in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are included in these figures. In Scotland there is a substantial component of full-time higher education (around one third of young full-time higher education) where admissions are not processed centrally through UCAS. Consequently, this report reflects the trends in applications to the higher education provision that is recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

## Introduction

Applications for entry to higher education through UCAS provide the first measures of the demand for full-time undergraduate study. People who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline are considered 'on time' applicants for the large majority of courses. These deadline applicants account for the majority (typically 85 per cent) of all UK domiciled applicants in a cycle and almost all (typically 97 per cent) of 18 year old UK domiciled applicants. Their numbers can be used to measure trends in demand for this type of higher education.

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the applicants, and acceptances, recorded through UCAS represent the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate higher education. In Scotland there is a substantial component of full-time higher education (around one third of young full-time higher education) where admissions are not processed centrally through UCAS. Consequently the levels and trends for demand for full-time undergraduate higher education in Scotland in this report reflect that for the provision that is recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

One way to measure demand for higher education from the UK is through application rates. These report the proportion of a group of the population that make an application. As such they directly measure demand in terms of the propensity to apply to higher education. The advantage of using application rates is that they show trends in this measure of demand without being affected by year to year changes in the population size. This is important as changes in the population size can have a substantial effect on applicant numbers, often as large as any change in application rate, and the demographic trends for different age groups can be in different directions.

The population estimates used for the application rates in this report are based on the most recent Mid-Year Estimates and National Population Projections published by the Office for National Statistics, which have been revised following the 2011 Census. These are updated from the population estimates used for similar reporting in previous years. Updated population trends for the 18 year old cohort and a summary of the changes between these trends and previously estimated population trends are set out in Annex A. In summary, the revised population estimates are higher for the young age group, resulting in lower application rates. The key elements of the trends in application rates as previously reported are generally unaltered by the new estimates.

The main analysis looks at trends in the application rate of 18 year olds, by country and region, area-based background and sex. This age group has the highest application rate to UCAS; they account for around half of UK applicants at the January deadline, and (in previous cycles) nearly all of the cycle total (97 per cent) is recorded by the January deadline. They are a particularly important group when using application rate trends to assess demand for higher education; they will not have had a previous opportunity to apply to higher education and so their trends can be assessed without making allowance for application or entry rates in previous cycles.

After 18 year olds, the next largest age specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret since it is influenced by the application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds typically fall into one of two categories, applying for the first time or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18. Therefore the demand by country at age 19 is investigated through application rates for 'first-time' applicants, and the overall young demand by country is reported through cohort rates that measure the proportion of a young cohort that have applied either aged 18 or aged 19.

The January deadline is also the first opportunity to assess the extent to which unplaced 18 year old applicants from the previous cycle have made another application ('reapplication') through UCAS. These reapplication rates give another indicator of demand for higher education and are examined by country of domicile and by A level grades held. Reapplication rates can vary quite considerably from cycle to cycle, but when considered alongside the acceptance rate in the previous cycle give rise to a measure of persistent demand that is relatively consistent from cycle to cycle.

Application rates by country for older age groups are also reported. These are more complex to interpret as they have the potential to be affected by changes in the entry rate at earlier ages. Changes in the set of courses covered by the January deadline in the 2010 cycle can affect the trend for older age groups so the analysis of these age groups uses a subset of applicants to courses less affected by these changes.

Data files to allow the replication of all the figures in this report are available with this publication on the UCAS website.

## Application rates of 18 year olds by country

January deadline 18 year old application rates (the proportion of the 18 year old population making an application through UCAS by the UCAS January deadline) by UK country are shown in Figure 1. The 2014 application rates in all four countries are at or close to the highest recorded in the period.

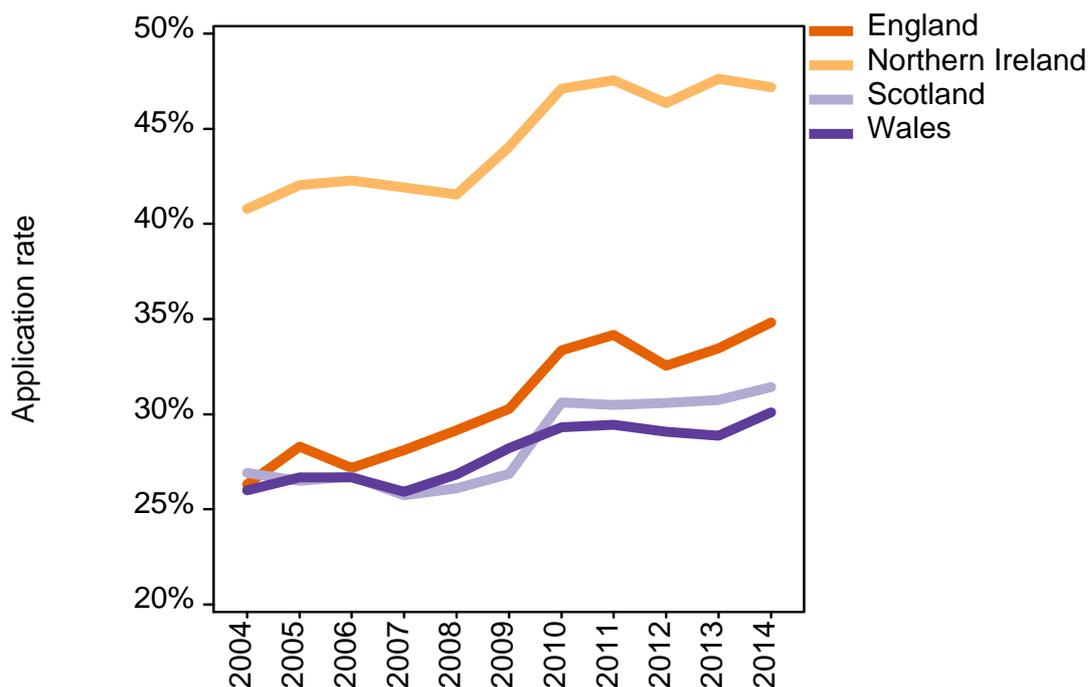
In England in 2014, 34.8 per cent of 18 year olds have applied for full-time higher education through UCAS by the January deadline, the highest level recorded and an increase of 1.4 percentage points (4.1 per cent proportionally) compared to 2013. This is the second successive similar size increase (around the same size as typical annual increases between 2006 and 2011) in the application rate following a decrease in 2012 (coinciding with the introduction of higher and more variable tuition fees). There was no above trend increase in the application rate between 2010 and 2011.

This pattern is consistent with the model that the introduction of tuition fees reduced the level of the application rate but did not materially alter the medium term trend of annual increases in the level of 18 year old demand for higher education. This model would suggest that the application rate in 2012 was around 2.5 percentage points lower than would have been expected if there had been a typical sized annual increase in the application rate in 2012, instead of a 1.6 percentage point decrease. This is a slightly larger effect than previously estimated as a result of the revision to the population estimates.

In 2014, the application rates in Wales (30.1 per cent) and Scotland (31.4 per cent) also reach the highest level recorded. Application rates in Wales remained broadly the same from cycle to cycle between 2010 and 2013, and the increase in 2014 represents the greatest percentage point increase (1.2 percentage points) and proportional increase (4.3 per cent) since 2009. In Scotland, application rates have changed little since 2010 (the increase in 2010 coincided with more HE in Scotland using UCAS, generally not all HE in Scotland uses UCAS). In 2014, there is a small (0.7 percentage points, 2.2 per cent proportionally) increase in the application rates from Scotland.

Application rates from Northern Ireland decrease slightly in 2014 to 47.2 per cent. This is a 0.4 percentage point decrease compared to 2013 (-0.9 per cent proportionally), a small change and within the range of expected variability given the relatively small population in North Ireland. Generally, application rates from Northern Ireland have been around the same level (around 46-48 per cent) since 2010, although there was a decrease in 2012 at the same time that application rates in England decreased.

**Figure 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country**



**Table 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	26.3%	28.3%	27.2%	28.1%	29.2%	30.3%	33.4%	34.2%	32.5%	33.5%	34.8%
Northern Ireland	40.8%	42.1%	42.3%	41.9%	41.6%	44.1%	47.1%	47.6%	46.3%	47.6%	47.2%
Scotland	26.9%	26.5%	26.7%	25.7%	26.1%	26.9%	30.6%	30.5%	30.6%	30.7%	31.4%
Wales	26.0%	26.7%	26.7%	25.9%	26.8%	28.2%	29.3%	29.5%	29.1%	28.9%	30.1%

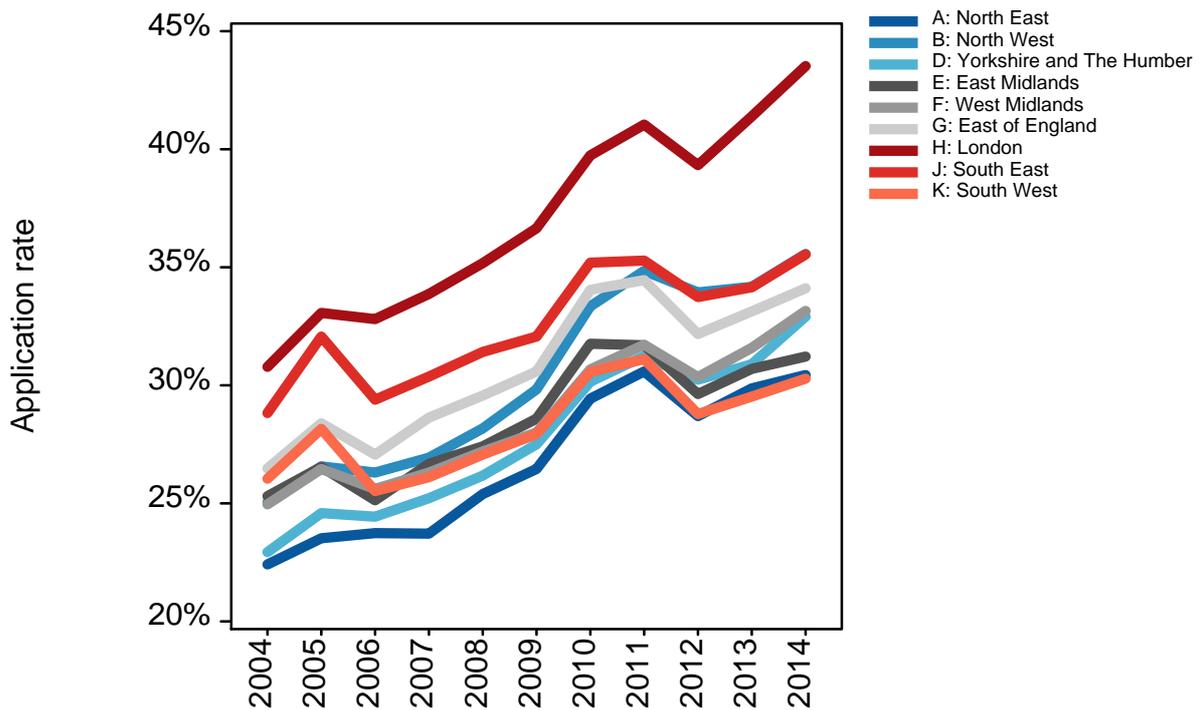
## Application rates of 18 year olds by region

The 18 year old population of England (around 600k) far exceeds the populations of Scotland (around 60k), Northern Ireland (around 25k) and Wales (around 35k). This larger population size allows the subdivision of application rates for England by region.

Figure 2 shows the 18 year old application rate for applicants from the regions of England. In all regions the application rate has increased since 2004 and, in general, each region reflects the national trend of increases or decreases. For instance the application rate in 2012 falls across all regions and increases in 2013 and 2014. The highest application rate in each year in the period is from London (44 per cent in 2014). For most of the period the lowest application rate is from the North East (ranging from 22 per cent in 2004 to 29 per cent in 2012) but in 2013 and 2014 the lowest application rate is from the South West (30 per cent in 2014). This variation across regions means that, in 2014, 18 year olds from London are (proportionally) 40 per cent more likely to apply compared to 18 year olds from the South West.

The greatest proportional increase in the application rate over the period is from the Yorkshire and The Humber region (43 per cent proportional increase: from 23 per cent in 2004 to 33 per cent 2014) and the smallest proportional increase is from the South West region (16 per cent proportional increase: from 26 per cent in 2004 to 30 per cent in 2014).

**Figure 2 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region**

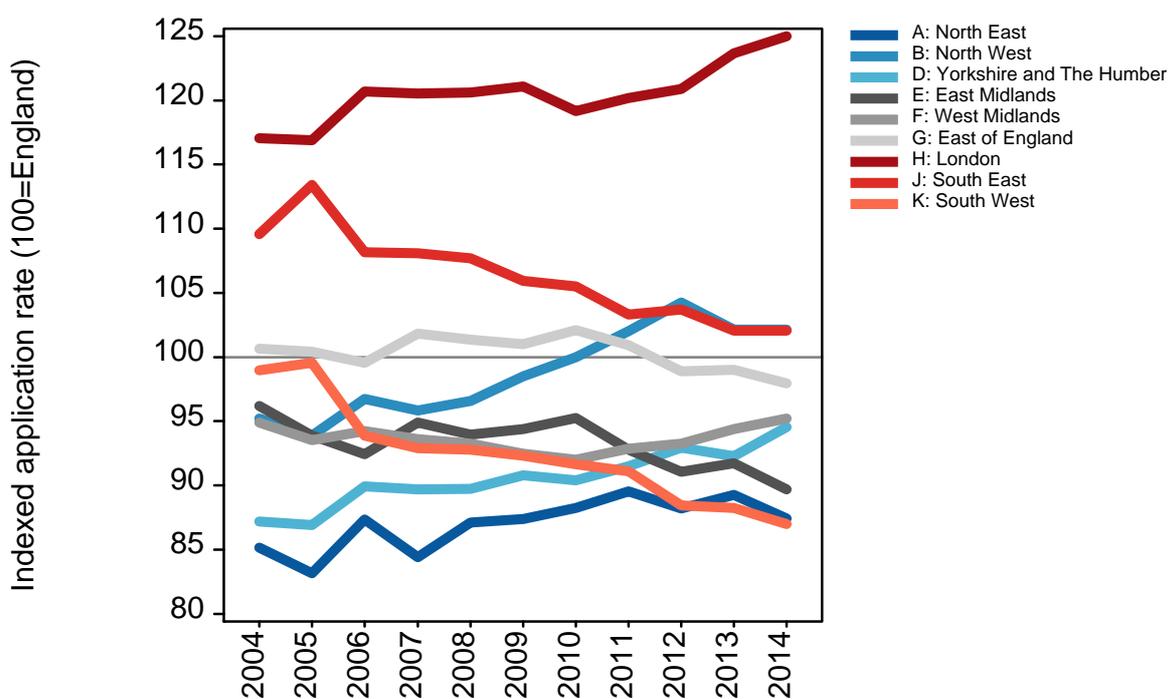


A large part of the year-to-year changes in each region's application rate are a reflection of the national trend and are the same for each region. Therefore, a clearer picture of how application rates by region are changing relative to each other is given by taking away the effect of the national trend. This is done in Figure 3 which uses the same application rates by region but shows them indexed to the national average, so that an index of 100 represents the 18 year old application rate for the whole of England that year. For example, in 2014 the application rate in London is 25 per cent higher (proportionally) than the national average, and therefore 18 year olds from London are a quarter more likely to apply compared to 18 year olds from England as a whole.

Since 2004, the application rate in the North West has increased from being around 5 per cent (proportionally) below the national average, to being higher than the national average in 2014. In contrast, over the same period the application rate from the South West has decreased from being about the same as the national average to being more than 13 per cent below it. The application rate from the South East region has seen a steady decrease relative to the national average, declining from a peak of 13 per cent above the national average in 2005 to 2 per cent above in 2014. The Yorkshire and The Humber region has seen a steady increase relative to the national average, increasing from 13 per cent below the national average in 2004 to 5 per cent below in 2014.

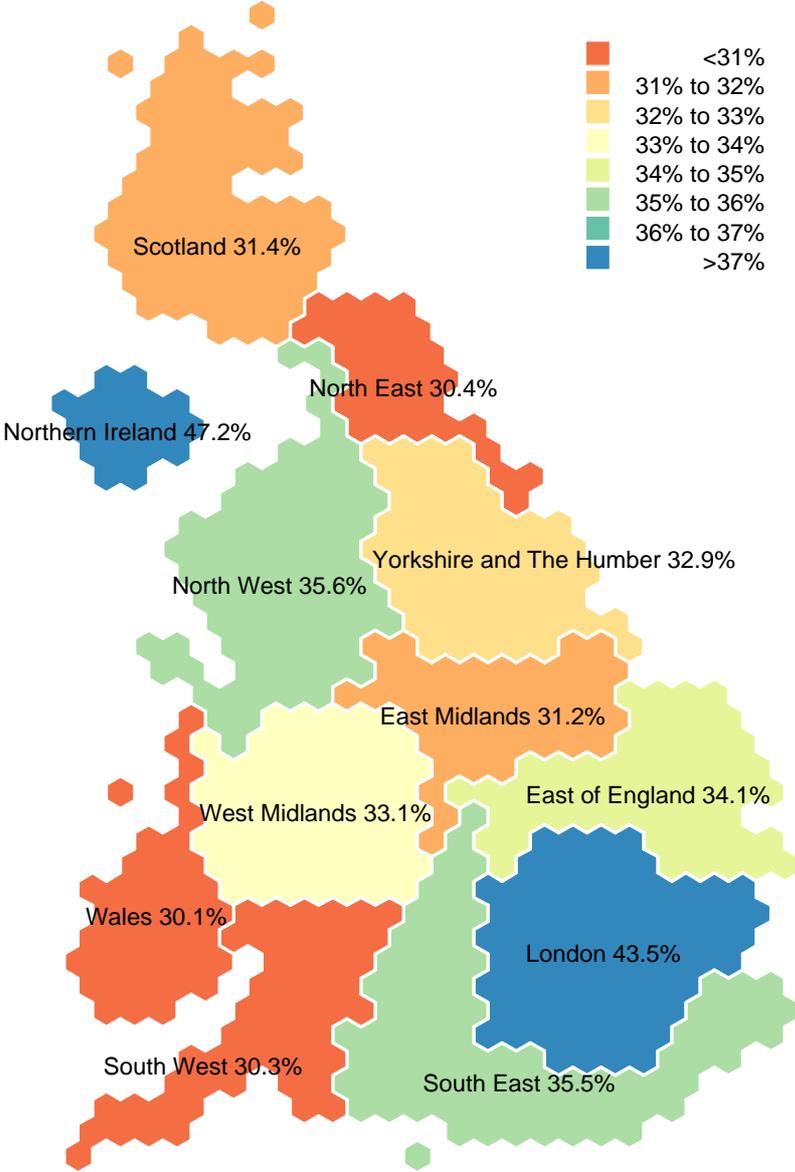
Some of these changes have reduced or reversed the relative application rate differences between regions over the period. In 2004, 18 year olds in the South East were nearly 15 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the North West; in 2014 there was no difference in application rate between these two regions. In 2004, 18 year olds in the South West were 14 per cent proportionally more likely to apply to higher education than those living in Yorkshire and the Humber. In 2014 this has been reversed to 18 year olds from Yorkshire and the Humber being 9 per cent (proportionally) more likely to apply than those in the South West.

**Figure 3 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region (indexed to 100 = England)**



The geographical patterns of English regional application rates, together with application rates for countries elsewhere in the UK (demand for HE in further education colleges in Scotland is not recorded), can be shown on maps. Figure 4 maps the 2014 application rates for 18 year olds. The maps used (see Thomas, B. and Dorling, D., 2007, *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press) are designed so that the size of each area approximates the size of its population and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the areas. Amongst these units of English regions and other UK countries, Northern Ireland (47%) and London (44%) have the highest application rates amongst their 18 year old populations in 2014. Wales, the North East and South West regions have the lowest application rates (30%) in 2014.

**Figure 4 January deadline application rates in 2014 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**



The geographical patterns of proportional changes in application rates between 2004 and 2014 are shown in Figure 5. Three regions, Yorkshire and The Humber, the North West and London, have seen the highest proportional increases, with application rates in each of these regions increasing by more than 40 per cent. The North East and the West Midlands have also seen high proportional increases of at least a third. Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the South West of England have seen the lowest proportional increases over this period (16-17 per cent).

**Figure 5 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2004 and 2014 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**

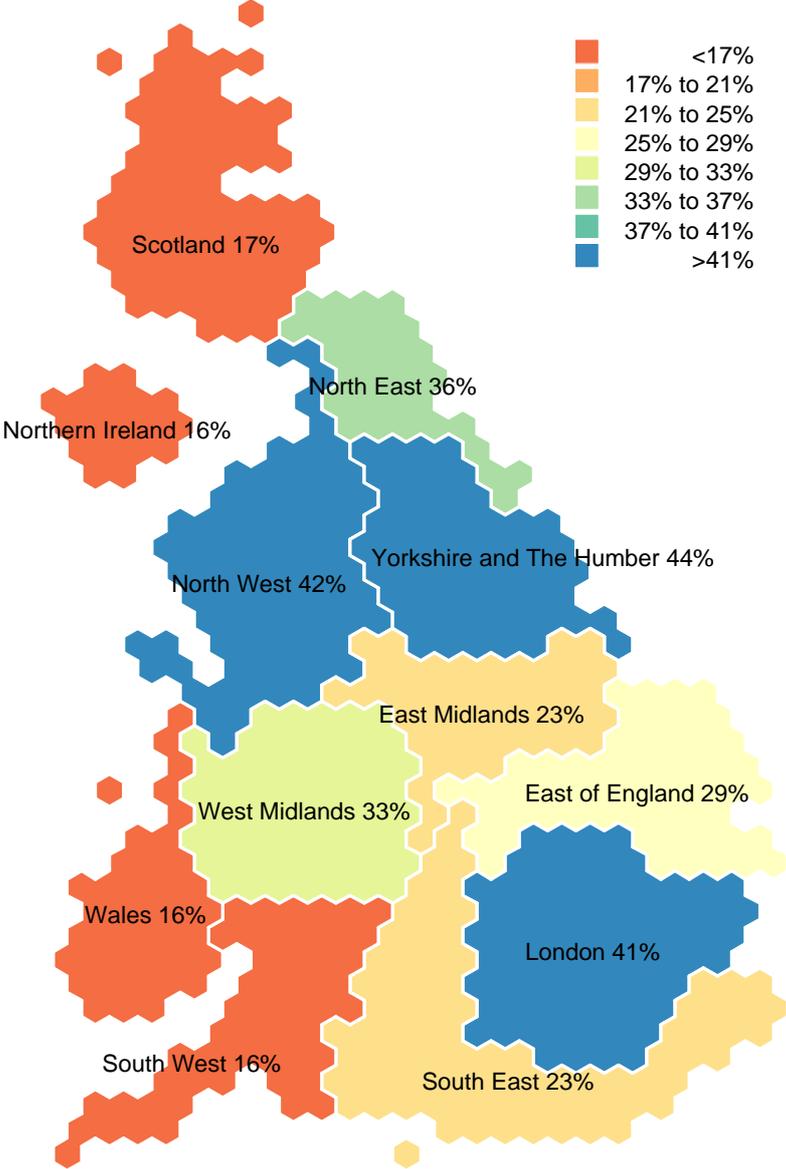
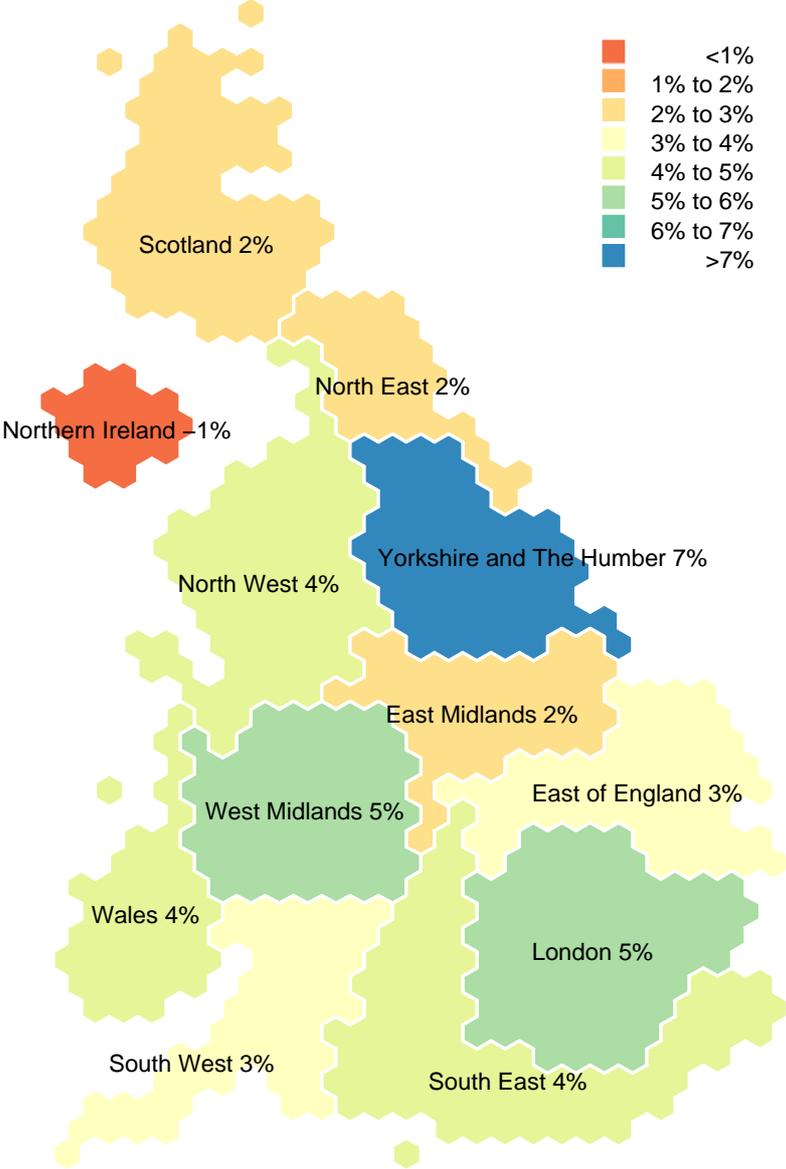


Figure 6 shows the proportional change in 18 year old application rates in 2014 compared with the previous cycle. The greatest proportional increase is for 18 year olds from Yorkshire and The Humber - 7 per cent more likely to apply in 2014 than 2013. The West Midlands and London have also seen high proportional increases (5 per cent) in 2014. The smallest proportional increases are for 18 year olds from East Midlands (2 per cent), North East (2 per cent) and Scotland (2 per cent) and the only decrease is for Northern Ireland (-1 per cent).

**Figure 6 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2013 and 2014 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**



## **Application rates of 18 year olds by sex**

The trend in January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by sex are shown for each country in Figures 7 to 10. The application rates for women are substantially higher than those for men in all countries of the UK.

In England, in 2014, 39.9 per cent of 18 year old women have applied compared with 30.0 per cent of men, making women a third more likely to apply for higher education at age 18 than men. This proportional difference has remained steady between 2012 and 2014.

A slightly lower proportional difference in application rates is observed in Northern Ireland where, in 2014, young women are 30 per cent more likely to apply than men.

In Wales, the proportional difference in application rates between women and men is higher, at around 42 per cent in 2014. This has decreased from around 44 per cent in 2013 due to a greater increase in the application rate from 18 year old men in Wales compared to the increase in the application rate from 18 year women in Wales.

The proportional difference in application rates between women and men in Scotland has increased from around 44 per cent in 2012 and 2013 to 49 per cent in 2014. This increase has been driven by an increase in the application rate from women, while the application rate for men has remained unchanged. Also, for Scotland, there was a significant widening of the gap in application rates between women and men in 2010. This coincided with the integration of the Scottish nursing admissions system (CATCH) into UCAS.

Figure 7 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from England by sex

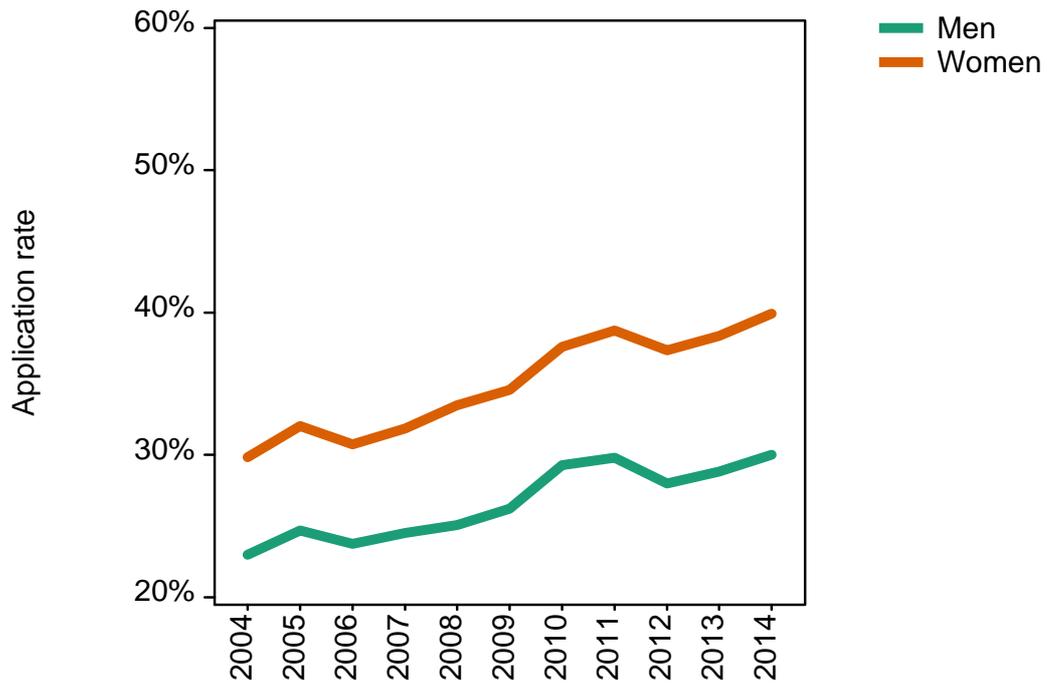


Figure 8 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Northern Ireland by sex

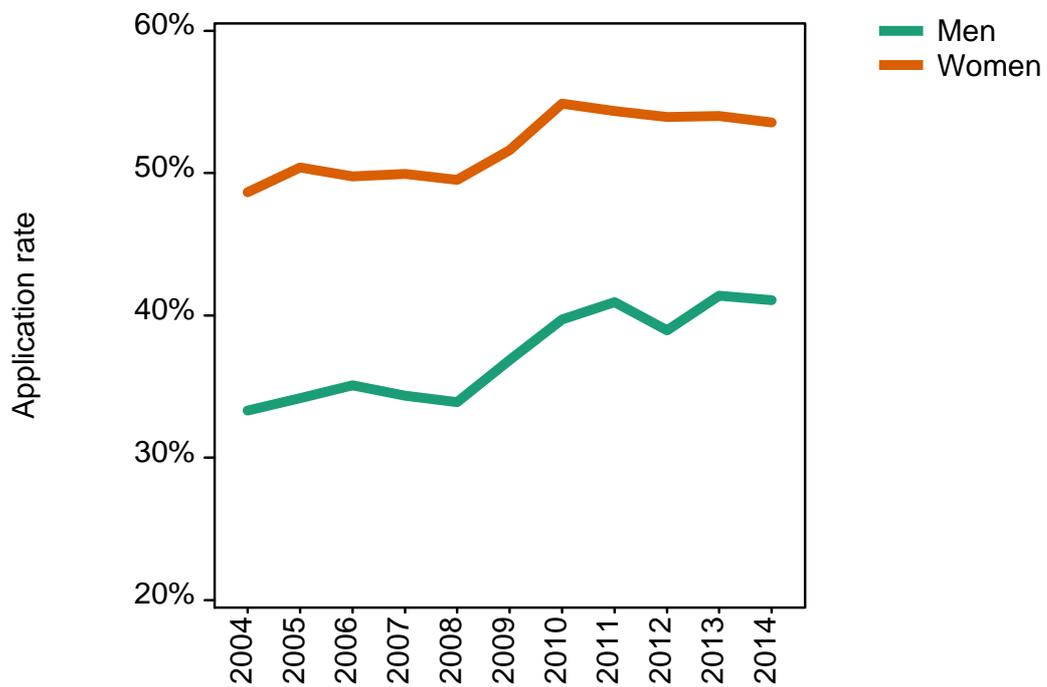


Figure 9 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Scotland by sex

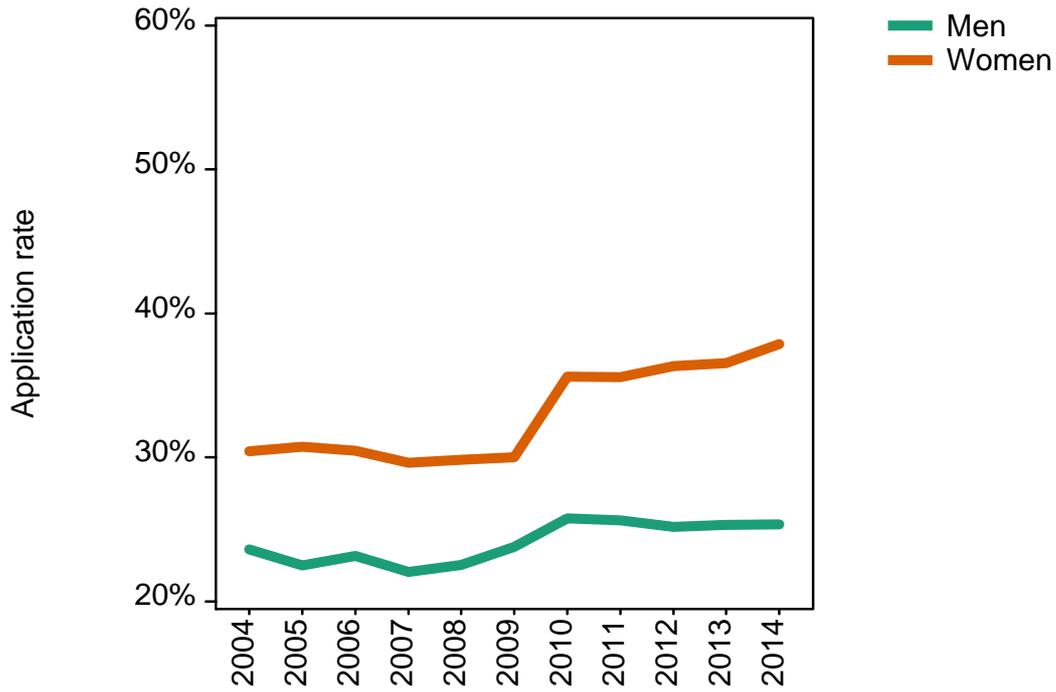
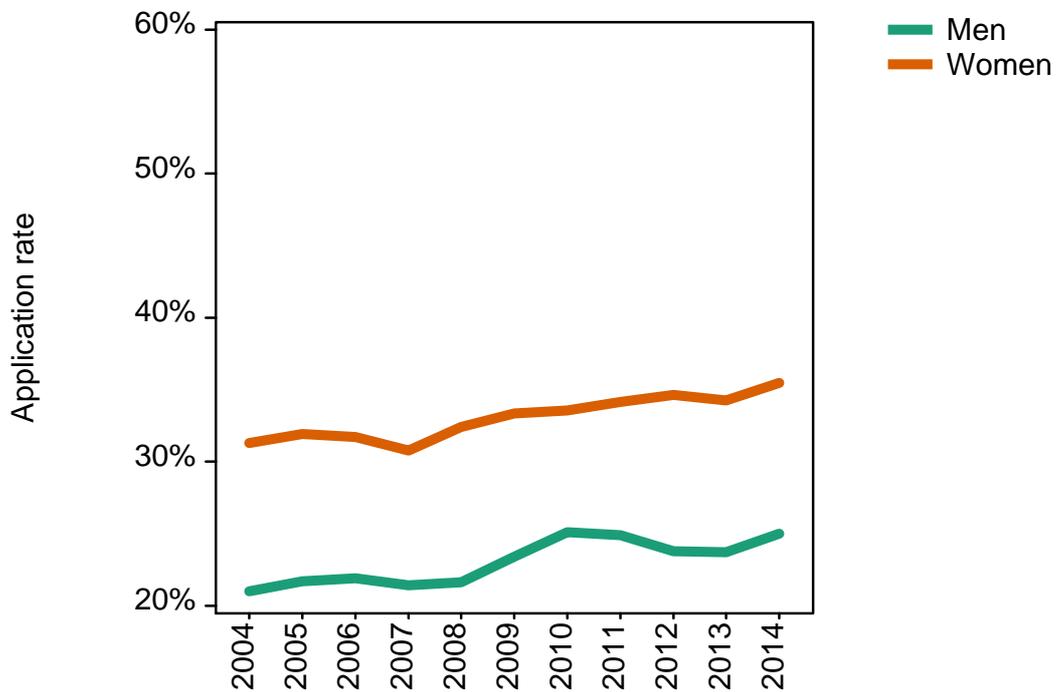


Figure 10 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Wales by sex



## Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas

The POLAR2 classification developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation (entry at age 18 or 19) in higher education. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people and are ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged).

Application rates are very closely related to young participation rates so that application trends by the POLAR groupings can be subject to distortions across the POLAR definition window boundaries (see paragraph 51 in HEFCE 2010/03, [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)) which complicates the interpretation of historical trends, especially for quintiles 1 and 5. To reduce the impact of this effect on this analysis we have used the POLAR2 grouping (definition window for 18 year olds 2000-2004) rather than the POLAR3 grouping (definition window for 18 year olds 2005-2009).

HEFCE provide small area population estimates by POLAR2 groups. For this report these have been revised to be consistent with the national-level revised population estimates. The small area estimates for the 2014 cohort are not yet prepared. For this report we have produced interim estimates by POLAR2 group for the 2014 cohort based on extrapolating the trends in quintile shares of the national population.

Figure 11 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1). The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 4,000), Scotland (around 5,000) and Wales (around 8,000) so that their application rate trends are subject to more year to year variation than for England (typical population size of around 140,000)

All four countries show a substantial increase in the application rates from the most disadvantaged group over the period. In England the application rate of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas has increased from 10.7 per cent in 2004 to 20.7 per cent in 2014. This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas in England are nearly twice as likely (94 per cent more likely) to apply to higher education in 2014 than ten years ago.

A similar pattern is evident across the UK: 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland were 69 per cent more likely to apply in 2014 than in 2004, 108 per cent more likely in Scotland (more than twice as likely) and 65 per cent more likely in Wales. In all four countries of the UK the application rate from disadvantaged areas is at record levels.

In 2014, the application rate from disadvantaged areas increased by 1.9 percentage points in England, 2.2 percentage points in Northern Ireland, 2.4 percentage points in Scotland and 2.6 percentage points in Wales. These increases mean that 18 year olds from disadvantaged areas in England are 10 per cent more likely to have applied by the January deadline in 2014 compared with 2013, 9 per cent more likely in Northern Ireland, 19 per cent more likely in Scotland and 17 per cent more likely in Wales.

The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged grouping (quintile 5) are shown in Figure 12. The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 6,000), Scotland (around 23,000) and Wales (around 8,000) so that their application rate trends are subject to more year to year variation than for England (typical population size of around 120,000).

The proportional changes in the application rates for this group over the period are much smaller than for quintile 1 and there has been little material change in application rates from the most advantaged areas in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales across the period. In England, the application rate for the most advantaged group in 2014 has increased by 1.1 percentage points, but is still lower than 2010 and

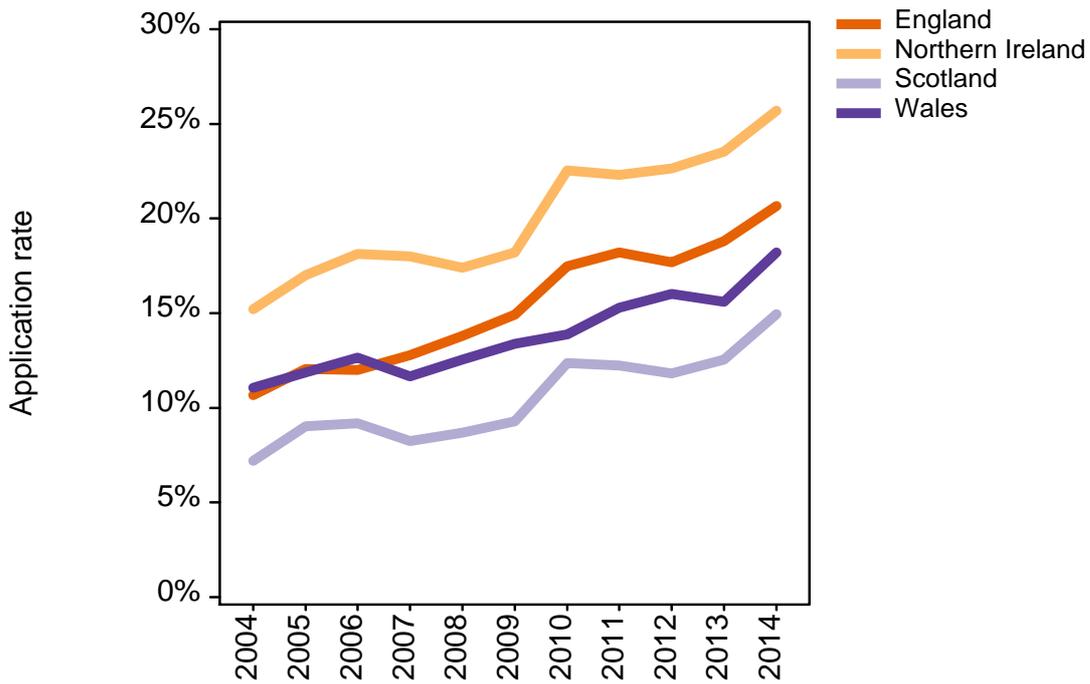
2011. There had been a steady rise in the application rate from these areas in England during the period 2006 to 2011, which was followed by a 3.3 percentage point decrease in 2012.

In 2014, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in all countries are around 2.3 to 2.9 times as great as the application rates from the most disadvantaged areas. In England, 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are 2.5 times more likely to apply to higher education than those from the most disadvantaged areas in 2014. In 2004, 18 year olds from the same areas in England were 4.4 times more likely to apply than those from the most disadvantaged areas. 18 year olds living in advantaged areas in England remain much more likely to apply to higher education, but this difference has substantially reduced across the period, driven by an increase in application rates in the most disadvantaged areas.

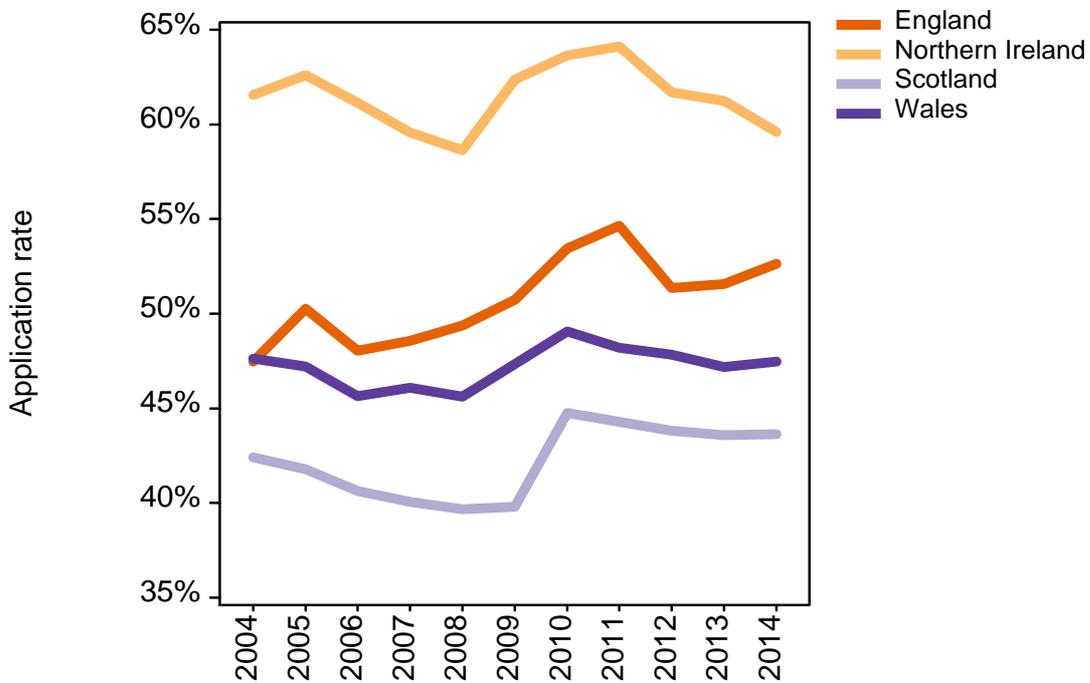
**Table 11/12 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds from POLAR2 quintile 1 (most disadvantaged areas), POLAR2 Q5 (most advantaged areas) and Q5:Q1 application rate ratio**

<b>POLAR2 Q1</b>	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	10.7%	12.1%	12.0%	12.8%	13.8%	14.9%	17.5%	18.2%	17.7%	18.8%	20.7%
Northern Ireland	15.2%	17.0%	18.1%	18.0%	17.4%	18.2%	22.5%	22.3%	22.6%	23.5%	25.7%
Scotland	7.2%	9.0%	9.2%	8.2%	8.7%	9.3%	12.4%	12.2%	11.8%	12.6%	15.0%
Wales	11.1%	11.9%	12.6%	11.6%	12.5%	13.4%	13.9%	15.3%	16.0%	15.6%	18.2%
UK	10.7%	12.1%	12.1%	12.7%	13.6%	14.7%	17.2%	18.0%	17.5%	18.5%	20.5%
<b>POLAR2 Q5</b>	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	47.5%	50.3%	48.0%	48.6%	49.4%	50.7%	53.4%	54.6%	51.4%	51.6%	52.6%
Northern Ireland	61.6%	62.6%	61.1%	59.6%	58.6%	62.4%	63.6%	64.1%	61.7%	61.2%	59.6%
Scotland	42.4%	41.8%	40.6%	40.1%	39.7%	39.8%	44.8%	44.3%	43.8%	43.6%	43.6%
Wales	47.6%	47.2%	45.6%	46.1%	45.6%	47.3%	49.1%	48.2%	47.8%	47.2%	47.5%
UK	47.3%	49.3%	47.3%	47.6%	48.1%	49.4%	52.4%	53.2%	50.5%	50.6%	51.4%
<b>Ratio Q5:Q1</b>	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	4.4	4.2	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.7	2.5
Northern Ireland	4.0	3.7	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.3
Scotland	5.9	4.6	4.4	4.9	4.6	4.3	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.5	2.9
Wales	4.3	4.0	3.6	4.0	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.6
UK	4.4	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.4	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.7	2.5

**Figure 11 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 1)**



**Figure 12 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 5)**



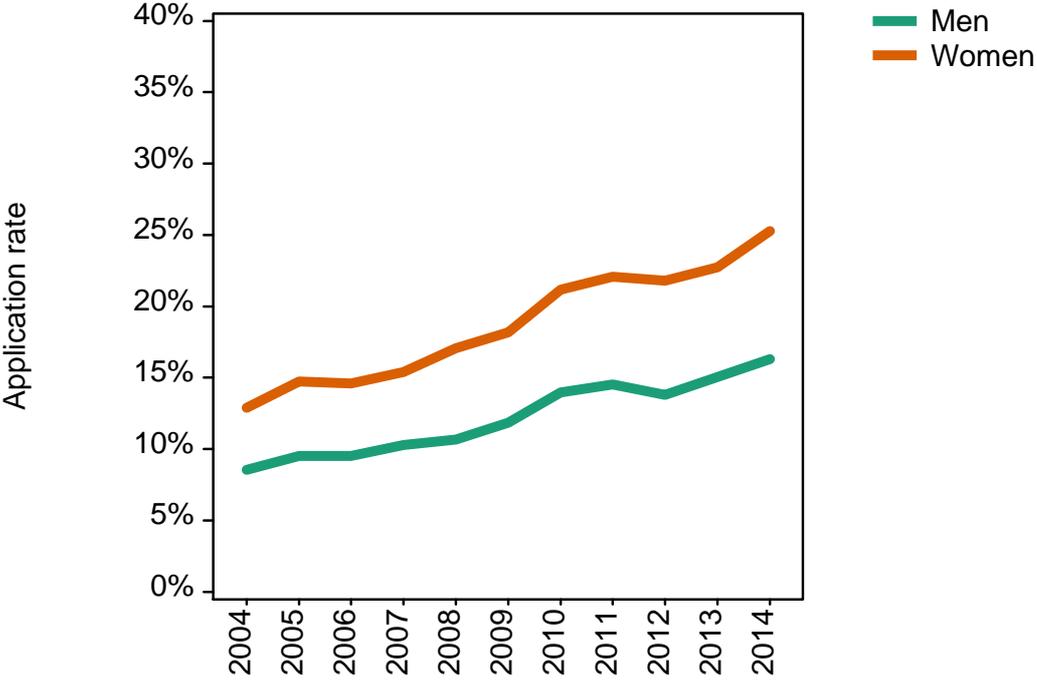
## **Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex**

Figure 13 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1) in England defined using the POLAR2 version of the HEFCE classification. The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) in England are shown in Figure 14. The population sizes by background and sex in the other countries of the UK are much smaller and this means that application rates are more variable year to year.

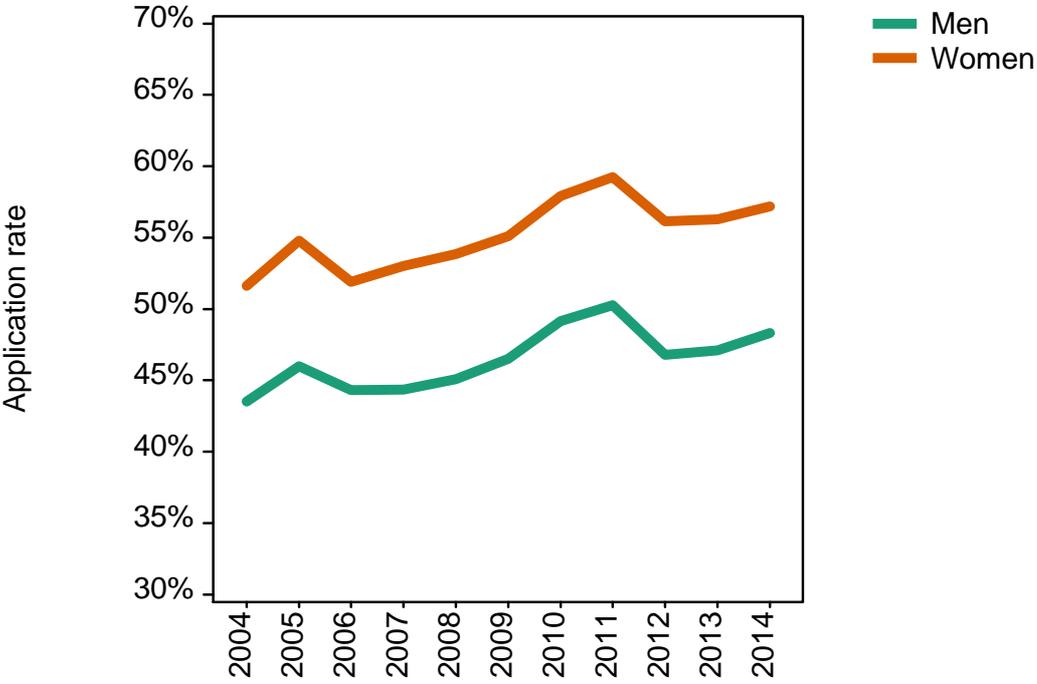
Within England, 18 year old women are much more likely to apply to higher education than men in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The proportional differences are largest in the most disadvantaged areas where, in 2014, women are 55 per cent more likely to apply compared with advantaged areas where they are 18 per cent more likely to apply.

In disadvantaged areas the difference in application rates between women and men has increased in 2014 compared with 2013. Men in the most disadvantaged areas are 8 per cent more likely to apply in 2014, whereas women in the same areas are 11 per cent more likely to apply in 2014 compared with 2013.

**Figure 13 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 1) by sex**



**Figure 14 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 5) by sex**



## 19 year old 'first-time' application rates by country

After 18 year old application rates, the next largest age specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret since it is influenced by the application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds typically fall into one of two categories, applying for the first time or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18.

The 'first-time' application rates at age 19 year only include those applicants who did not apply in the previous cycle. Unlike the application rate for 19 year olds as a whole, they are not directly influenced by the acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. However, they may be sensitive to changes in the application rate at age 18, since if the application rate at age 18 increases substantially it may result in a smaller pool of potential applicants to apply for the first time at age 19. Figure 15 shows the 'first-time' 19 year old application rates. Generally, this application rate increased between 2007 and 2010 in all four countries, and then fell in 2011.

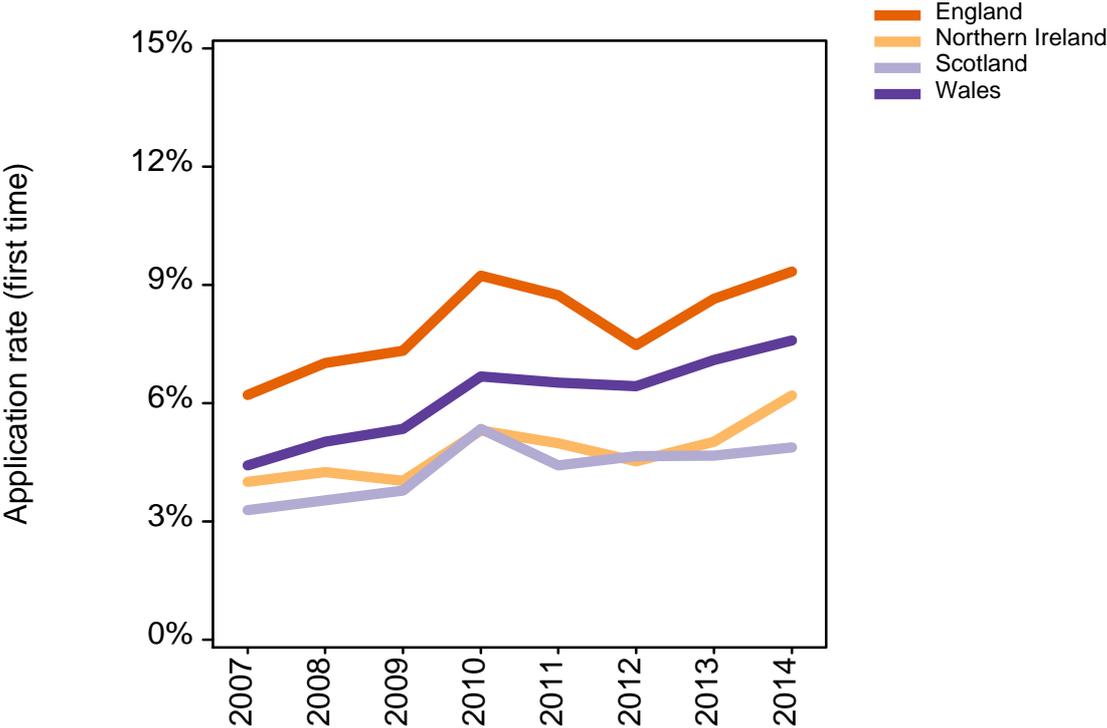
First-time 19 year old application rates are higher in England than elsewhere in the UK. The first-time application rate increased between 2007 and 2010 to 9.2 per cent. It then reduced by 0.5 percentage points in 2011 and a further 1.3 percentage points in 2012 to 7.5 per cent. This rate has increased in both 2013 (up 1.2 percentage points) and in 2014 (up 0.7 percentage points) to reach a new high of 9.3 per cent. In 2014, this increase follows a large increase in application rates at age 18 for the same cohort of young people in 2013.

In Wales, the rate was barely changed in both 2011 and 2012 (down 0.1 percentage points in both years), and then increased in both 2013 (up 0.7 percentage points) and in 2014 (up 0.5 percentage points) reached a new high of 7.6 per cent.

A similar trend appeared in Northern Ireland, but the decreases in 2011 (down 0.3 percentage points) and 2012 (down 0.5 percentage points) were greater; and the subsequent increases greater also (up 0.5 percentage points in 2013 and up 1.2 percentage points in 2014) resulting in the highest recorded rate in 2014 of 6.2 per cent.

In Scotland – where the measure will not include most demand for higher education provided at further education colleges – the first-time 19 year old application rate has been increasing gradually over the period; apart from an elevated demand in 2010 which reversed in the following cycle, and has not been matched since. In 2014, the first-time application rate of 19 year olds in Scotland is 4.9 per cent.

Figure 15 First-time application rates of 19 year olds by country



## Cohort demand for higher education covering 18 and 19 year olds

Applicant decisions about whether to apply at age 18 or 19 can vary from year to year. Material changes in the balance of applying at age 18 versus age 19 can make it more difficult to interpret trends for single age groups as an indicator of demand from young people as a whole.

One measure that is not influenced by the decision to apply at age 18 or age 19 is the cohort application rate. Each cohort includes all young people aged 18 within a particular academic year. The cohort application rate is the proportion of that cohort that applies for higher education either at age 18 or, a year later, at age 19 - people who apply in both years are only counted once. With this construction the rate is not affected if applicants decided to apply at age 18 instead of 19, or if changes in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds leads to more or fewer reapplicants the next year.

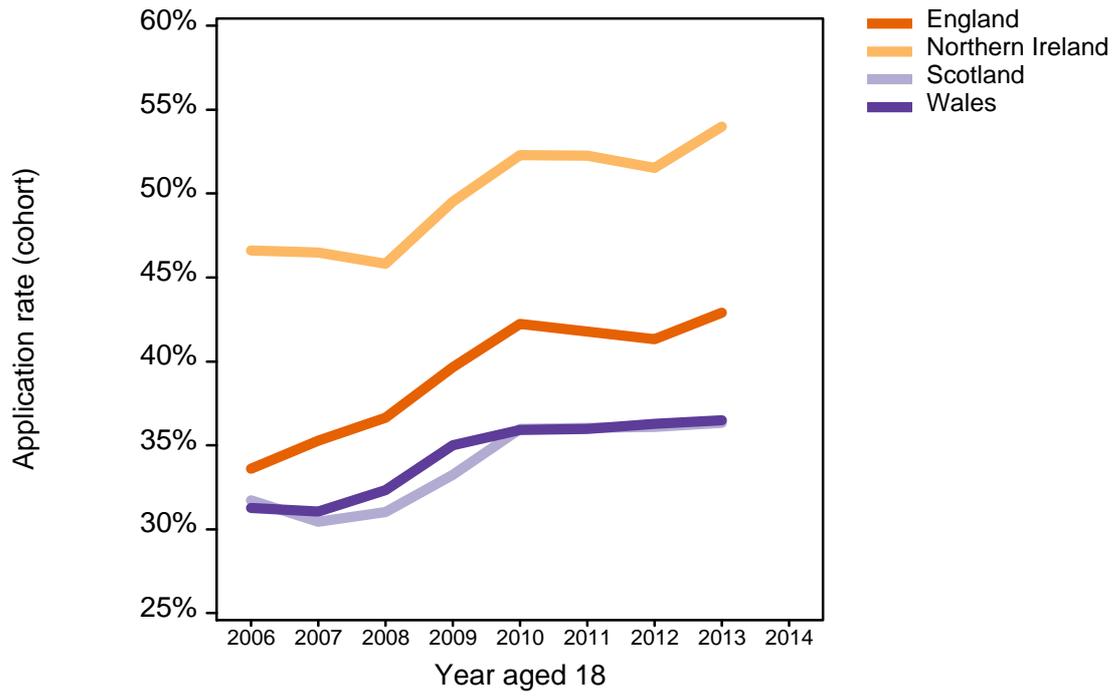
To calculate cohort rates an additional year is needed so that the cohort has had the opportunity to apply at age 19 as well as age 18. In this report we can look at cohort demand up to and including the cohort that were 18 in 2013 ("the 2013 cohort") and applied for the first time at age 18 in 2013 or the first time aged 19 in 2014.

The proportion of the English young people that applied for higher education by the age of 19 increased steadily from 33.6 per cent for those aged 18 in 2006 to 42.2 per cent for those aged 18 in 2010. There were small decreases in the cohort rate of 0.5 percentage points for both the 2011 cohort (where 19 year old applicants experienced higher and more variable fees for the first time) and for the 2012 cohort (where 18 year old applicants experienced higher and more variable fees for the first time). For the cohort that were aged 18 in 2013 the cohort rate increased by 1.6 percentage points, more than reversing the decreases in the rate seen for the previous two cohorts and reaching a new high in England of 42.9 per cent. The trend between the 2012 and 2013 cohorts is the first where both entry ages in both cohorts are subject to the higher fee arrangements.

A similar pattern is seen in Northern Ireland where the cohort rate was stable at around 52 per cent for the cohorts of young people who were aged 18 in 2010, 2011 and 2012, and has increased by 2.5 percentage points to 54 percent for the cohort that were aged 18 in 2013. In Wales and Scotland, cohort application rates are lower than elsewhere (the Scottish rate will not include application to higher education in further education colleges in Scotland), have increased over the period and increase by 0.2 percentage points in both countries for the 2013 cohort (36.3 per cent in Scotland and 36.5 per cent in Wales).

For young people domiciled in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales the cohort application rate for the cohort that were aged 18 in 2013 is the highest recorded level.

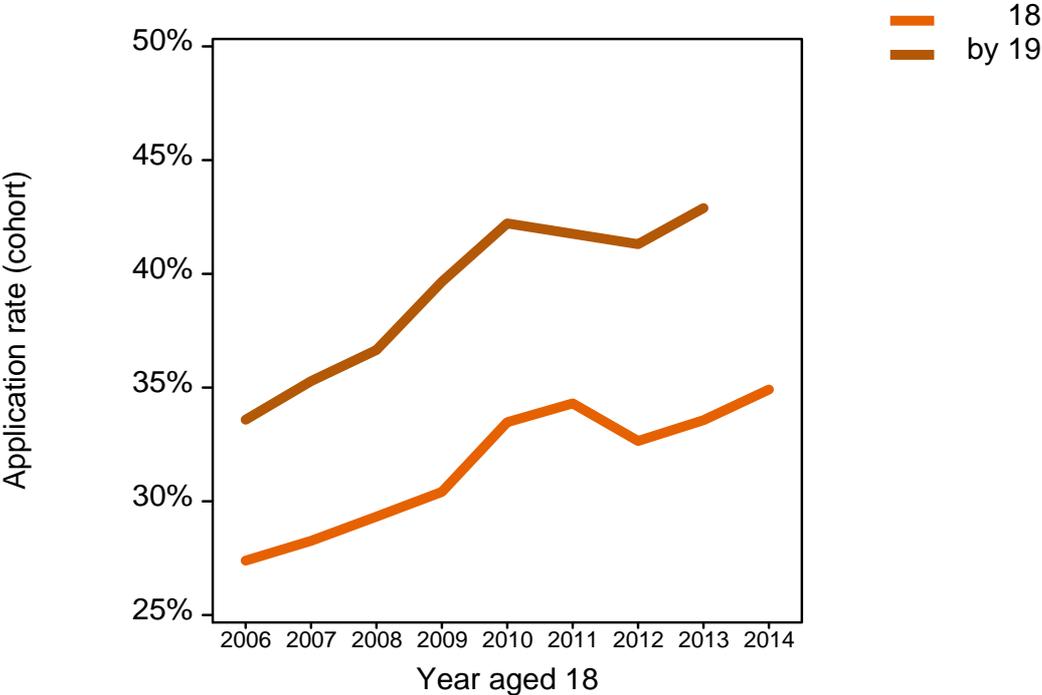
Figure 16 Cohort application rates by age 19 by country



In England, the cohort application rate fell slightly in 2011 and 2012, despite an on-trend increase in the 18 year old application rate in 2011, and a fall in the 18 year old application rate in 2012 (Figure 17). This difference is accounted for by the pattern of the 19 year old first-time application rate for these cohorts. One model that is consistent with this pattern is that the reduction in demand against trend seen for the 2012 cycle is being reflected in the cohort trend through, first, 19 year olds from the 2011 cohort, and then second both 18 and 19 year olds from the 2012 cohort. For the 2013 cohort both the 18 year old application rate and the first-time 19 year old application rates have returned to their earlier trend of annual increases (from a lower base). This is reflected in a renewed annual increase in the cohort rate for the 2013 cohort.

The 18 year old application rate for the 2014 cohort increased by 1.4 percentage points in 2014. If the first-time application rate at 19 (in the 2015 cycle) remains unchanged or increases slightly then the trends of increasing growth in the cohort rate will continue.

**Figure 17 England 18 year old application rates and cohort application rates by age 19**



## Reapplication rates of previously unplaced 18 year old UK applicants

Almost all 18 year old applicants from the UK are applying through UCAS for the first time. At the end of the application cycle most of these applicants will have been placed. A minority of these applicants – typically 15 to 20 per cent – will be unplaced at the end of the cycle.

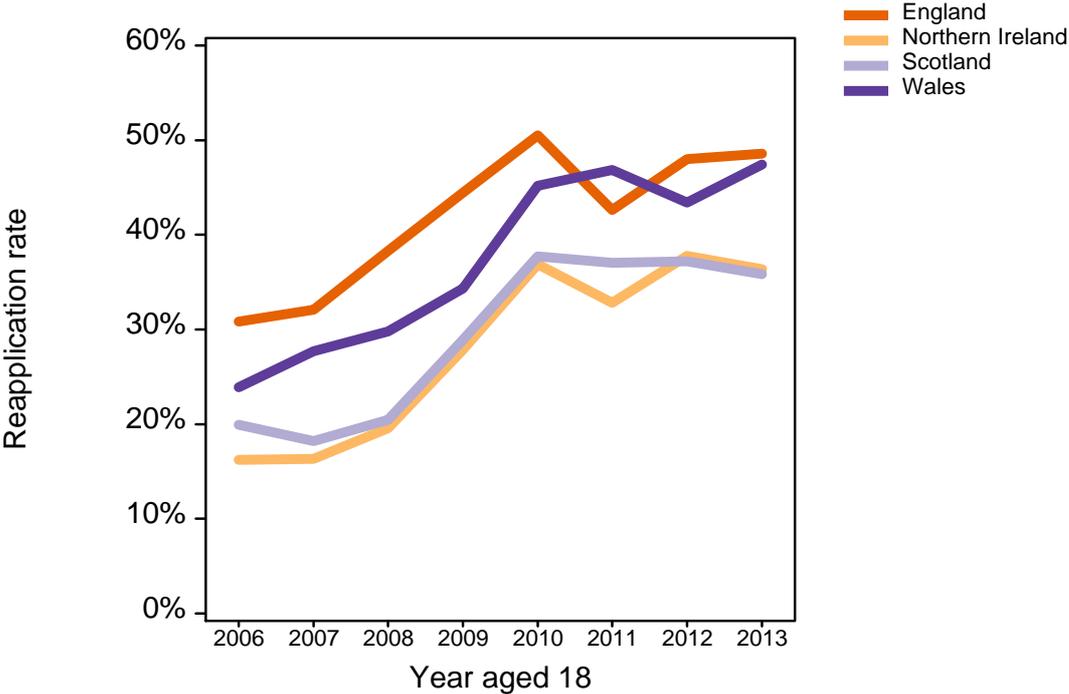
Some of these unplaced 18 year old applicants reapply the following cycle, aged 19. The proportion of the unplaced applicants who reapply in this way is the reapplication rate. Trends in this statistic can indicate both the extent of remaining demand for entry into higher education at the end of the original cycle, together with how applicants view the relative attractions of entering higher education in one cycle compared to the next.

Figure 18 shows the reapplication rates for unplaced 18 year olds by UK country of domicile. The rates are referenced by the cycle in which they were unplaced; for example, the proportion of unplaced 18 year old applicants from the 2013 cycle who reapply aged 19 in the 2014 cycle is shown against 2013.

Reapplication rates increased for all countries for those unplaced in the 2009 and 2010 cycles, mirroring the fall in acceptance rates for 18 year olds in those cycles. The reapplication rates in 2011 of 18 year olds unplaced at the end of the 2010 cycle were 51 per cent in England, 45 per cent in Wales, 38 per cent in Scotland and 37 per cent in Northern Ireland. For those unplaced in 2011, the reapplication rate (in 2012) in England fell by 8 percentage points, consistent with both the increase in the acceptance rate in 2011 and the reduction in English application rates seen in 2012.

The 2014 cycle reapplication rates for those aged 18 in 2013 in England are 49 per cent (+0.6 percentage points), Northern Ireland 36 per cent (-1.4 percentage points), Scotland 36 per cent (-1.4 percentage points) and Wales 47 per cent (+4.0 percentage points). These reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2013 are within 2 percentage points of the values from those aged 18 in 2010 within each country, but substantially higher than the reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2006 and 2007.

Figure 18 January deadline reapplication rates for UK 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle



## **Interaction between the acceptance rate of 18 year olds and the reapplication rate**

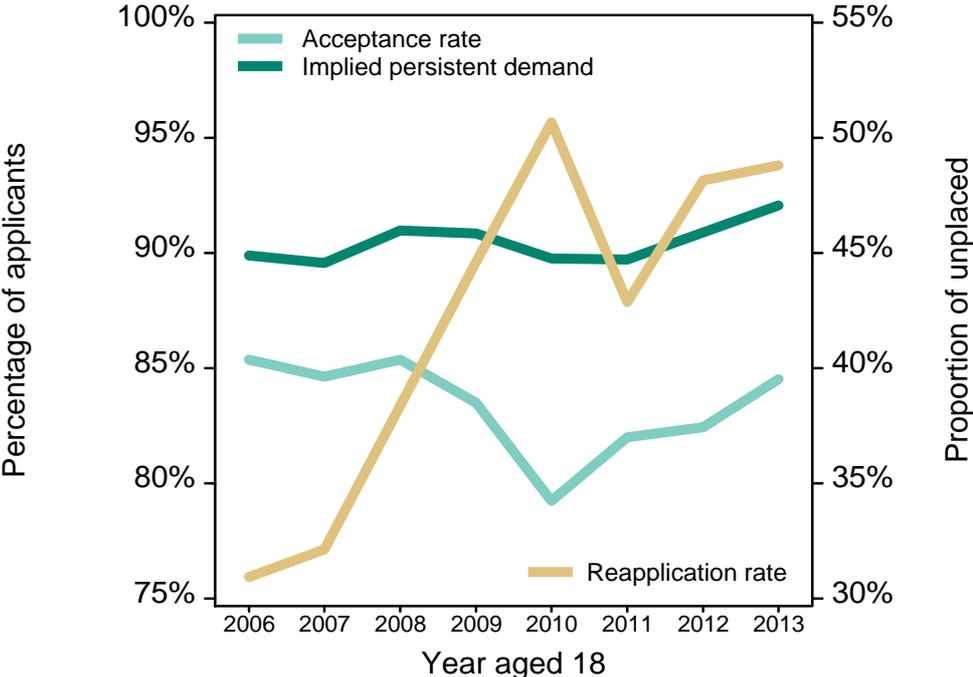
The acceptance rate for 18 year old applicants has varied from cycle to cycle, with part of this variation relating to the number of places effectively available in higher education. Consequently it is likely that the reapplication rate and the acceptance rate in the previous cycle may be associated.

Figure 19 shows the acceptance rate for English 18 year old applicants in each cycle (left axis) and the reapplication rate of those who are not accepted (right axis, shown against the cycle that they were unplaced). Both the acceptance rate and reapplication rate have varied considerably across the period. However, a combination of these measures (the proportion of 18 year old applicants who are either accepted or immediately reapply the next cycle) gives a statistic that is more constant. This measure describes the proportion of applicants who either translate their application into entry or, if not, have the persistence of demand to immediately seek to do so the next cycle.

This statistic can be interpreted as a measure of degree of persistence in demand for higher education amongst those who have already applied. The stability of this statistic at around 90 per cent of applicants over the measured period (despite large fluctuations in application, acceptance and reapplication rates) is suggestive that a steady proportion of those 18 year olds who apply will tend to persist in their applications to higher education. In particular, any increase in the 18 year old acceptance rate towards 90 per cent may lead to fewer 19 year old reapplicants.

However, 18 year olds from the last two completed cycles experienced increased acceptance rates and increased reapplication rates. This is especially notable for 18 year olds that applied in 2013 where the acceptance rate increased by 2.1 percentage points to 84.5 per cent, yet the reapplication rate of the smaller unplaced population also increased slightly (to 49 per cent) and is substantially higher than when the acceptance rate was last at this level (2009, acceptance rate 83.5 percent, reapplication rate 45 per cent). This increase in both the acceptance rate and the reapplication rate has caused the measure of persistent demand to rise to 92 per cent for 18 year olds that applied in 2013 - the highest level recorded in this period.

Figure 19 Acceptance rates, reapplication rates and implied persistent demand



## Reapplication rates by selected A level grade profiles

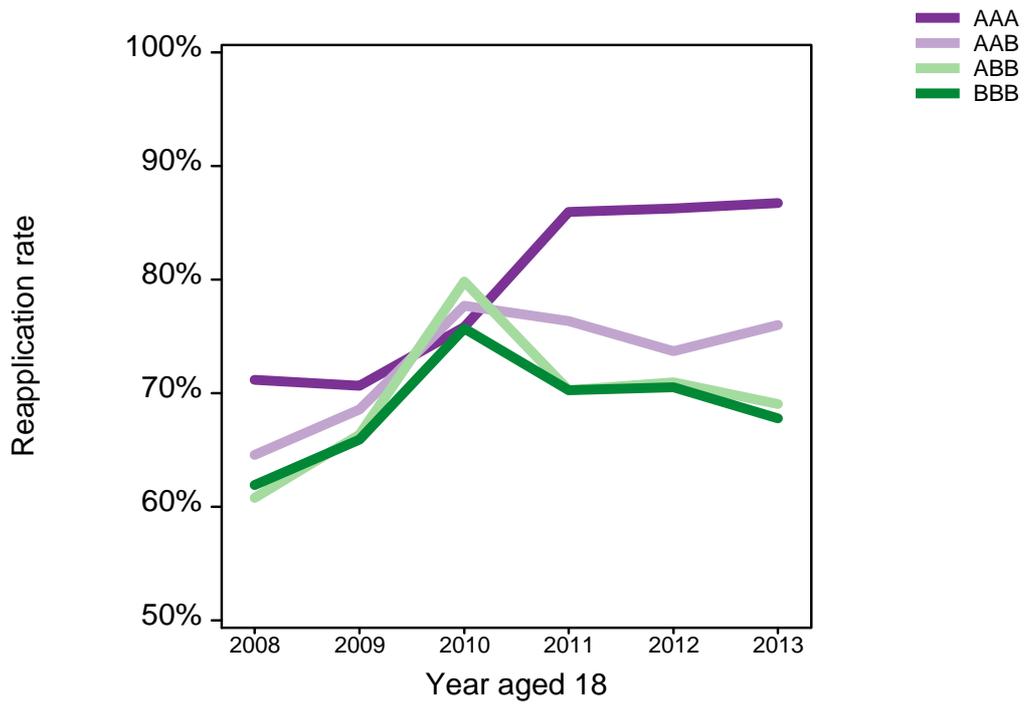
The majority of unplaced 18 year old applicants will have been awarded qualifications in the cycle that they applied. This allows the reapplication rates to be considered against the qualification level held by the unplaced applicants. Figure 20 shows the reapplication rates of English domiciled applicants who were holding selected qualification levels at the end of the previous cycle when they were unplaced. The qualification groups are based on the highest three A level grades held (A\* grades are treated as A grades for this purpose). A smaller proportion, typically around 10 per cent, of 18 year old applicants holding the grade profiles shown are unplaced at the end of the cycle; typically there are between 1,000 and 2,500 unplaced applicants in each of these grade profiles each cycle.

The reapplication rates of unplaced applicants holding these A level grade profiles are higher than those for unplaced English 18 year old applicants as a whole. Within these grade profiles the reapplication rates for those unplaced in the 2008, 2011, 2012 and 2013 cycles are higher for those with higher grade profiles but this is not the case for those unplaced in 2009 and 2010 where reapplication rates are similar for each grade profile.

Reapplication rates increased year on year for those aged 18 between 2008 to 2010 – 80 per cent of those unplaced in 2010 who held ABB reapplied in the following cycle, compared to 61 per cent of those unplaced in 2008. For those unplaced at age 18 in the 2011 cycle these trends diverge - those who were unplaced in the 2011 cycle and holding AAA became more likely to reapply in 2012, those holding the other grade profiles became less likely to reapply.

The reapplication rate in 2014 for those unplaced in 2013 holding AAA is 87 per cent, for AAB 76 per cent, for ABB 69 per cent and BBB 68 per cent. These reapplication rates are similar to those in the 2013 and 2012 cycles. There is no substantial pattern in the reapplication rates between 2012 and 2014 across unplaced applicants that matches the different groups under the 2012-13 or 2013-14 student number control arrangements for most courses at English institutions. In particular, although the reapplication rate for the ABB grade profile (considered exempt from number controls for the first time in 2013) declines the trend is similar for those achieving BBB (remaining within the number control system).

Figure 20 January deadline reapplication rates for English 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle for selected A level grade profiles



## Application rates by age

Interpreting application rate trends as a measure of demand for higher education for age groups older than age 18 is more difficult. The link to the background population is less clear (for example, a large and changing proportion will already have higher education qualifications) and the applicants themselves will, in many cases, have had previous opportunities to apply.

A lower proportion of total applicants in older age groups apply by the January deadline, making January deadline rates a less complete measure of demand, and this proportion has changed through time. In particular, some of the changes to the coverage of the UCAS application scheme, such as the changing of the deadline for Route B courses (mainly art and design) and integration of the nursing application schemes, have a much larger effect on older age groups. For this reason this section examines application rates using a reduced set of applicants with time-series consistent course choices.

Figures 21 to 24 show the application rate from all age groups from each country in turn. Application rates vary substantially across the age groups; for example in England 18 year olds have an application rate around 10 times greater than 20 year olds, a hundred times greater than 25 to 29 year olds and a thousand times greater than 40 to 60 year olds. To accommodate this range, and to allow the assessment of proportional changes, the rates are shown on a logarithmic axis.

Application rates for most age groups have increased in 2014 across all countries. In England, the application rates of all the older age groups have increased from 2013, are slightly lower than 2010 and 2011, but higher than all other cycles. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the application rates of older age groups in 2014 have generally continued recent trends of slight annual increases.

Figure 21 January deadline application rates from England by age

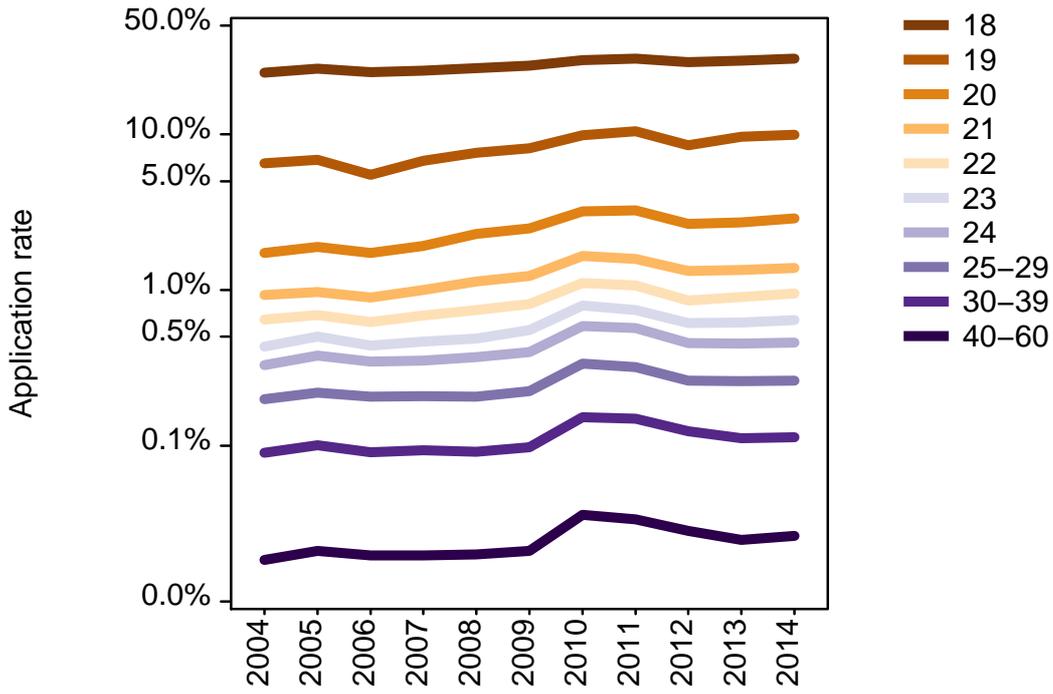


Figure 22 January deadline application rates from Northern Ireland by age

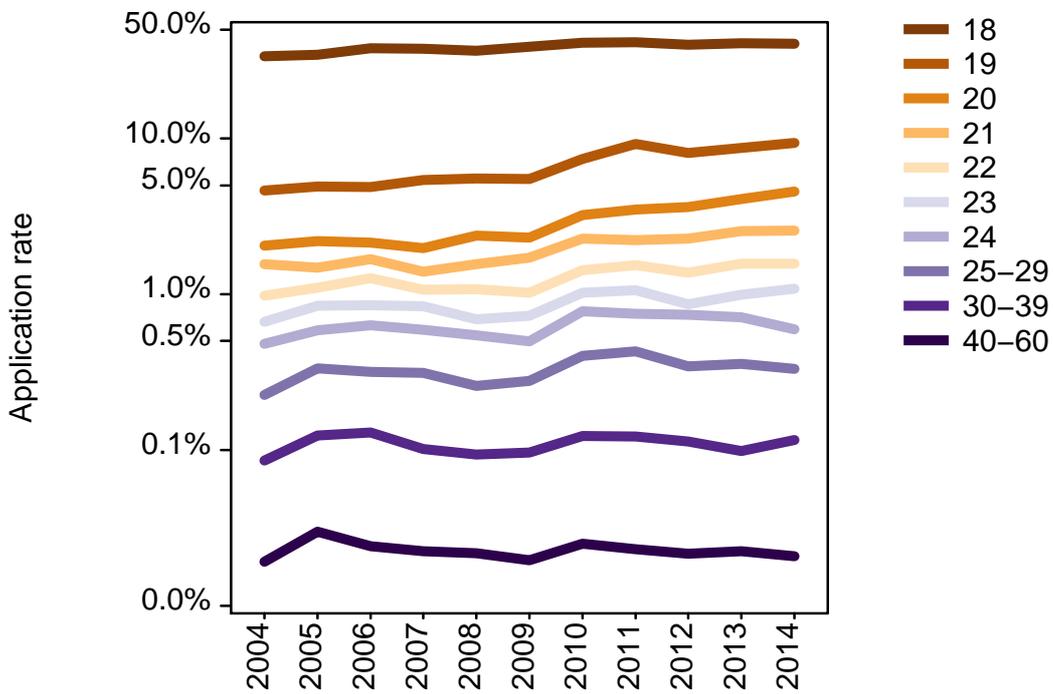


Figure 23 January deadline application rates from Scotland by age

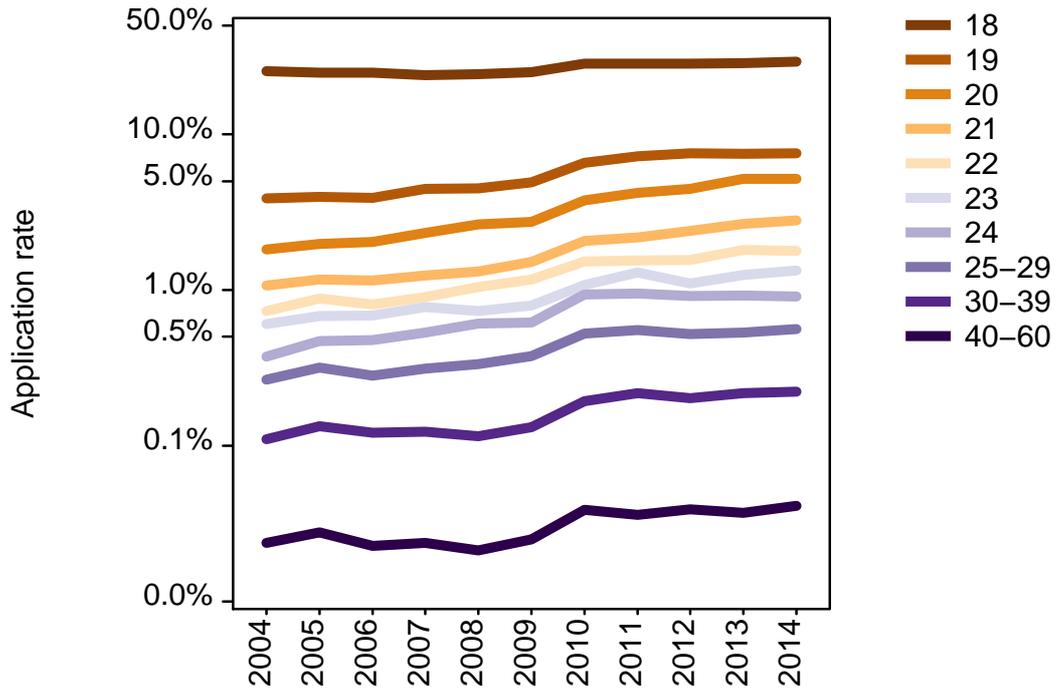
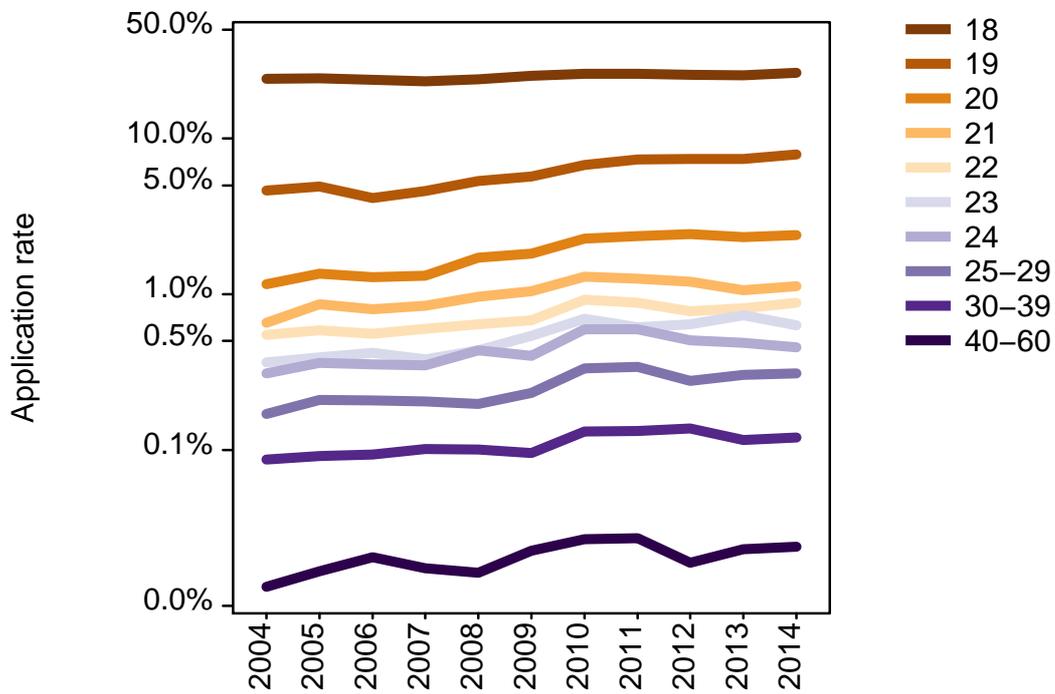


Figure 24 January deadline application rates from Wales by age



## Annex A: 18 year old population context

Over half of all UK applicants at the January deadline are aged 18. This analysis uses country-specific age definitions that align with the cut off points for school/college cohorts within the different administrations of the UK. For the 2014 cycle England and Wales ages are defined on the 31 August 2014, for Northern Ireland on the 1 July 2014 and for Scotland on the 28 February 2015. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts and means that the group of applicants treated as 18 year olds in each country will generally be applying to UCAS for the first time.

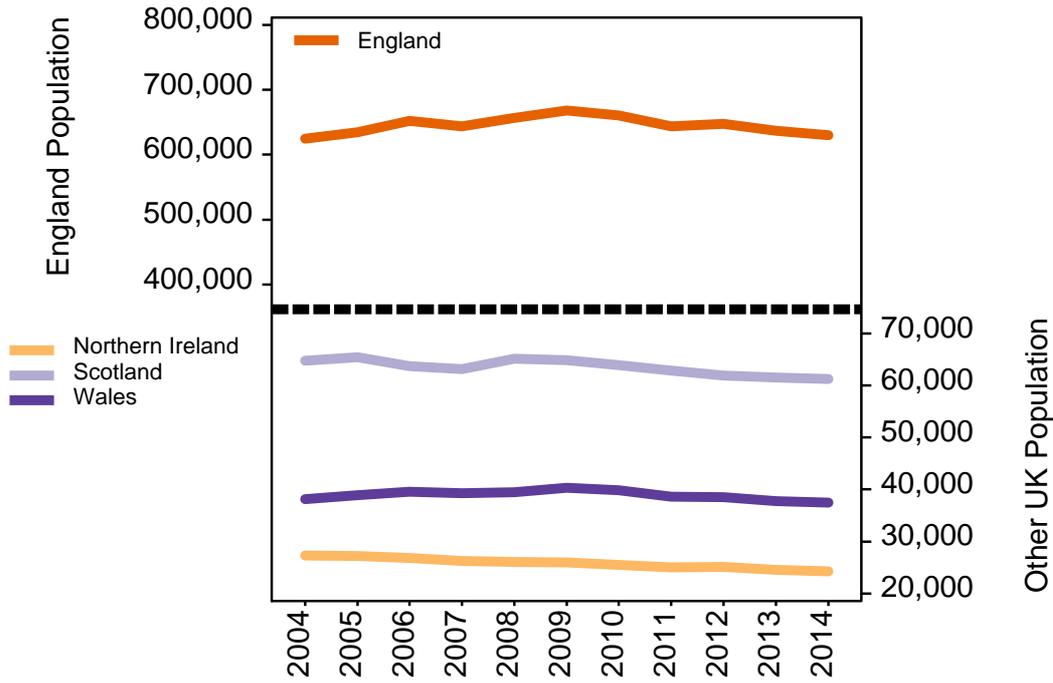
The population estimates are based upon the most recent Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates and National Population Projections controlled to UK countries (published in December 2013). For 16 to 20 year olds the estimates are obtained by aging 15 year olds from the appropriate number of 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 aging. 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 rates by area-based background are supported through small area population estimates provided by HEFCE.

Figure 25 shows the population of the 18 year old cohort by UK country for the cohorts covered in this report. England is shown on a separate axis (left hand side) to the other countries of the UK. On the basis used in this report the 2014 18 year old cohort size to nearest thousand (proportion of UK cohort) is 630,000 (84 per cent) for England, 24,000 (3 per cent) for Northern Ireland, 61,000 (8 per cent) for Scotland and 37,000 (5 per cent) for Wales. The relatively large size of the cohort in England (10 to 25 times that in the other UK countries) means that some analysis, such as application rates by background and sex, are easier to interpret for England than for the other countries where small base population sizes introduces appreciable year-to-year variations.

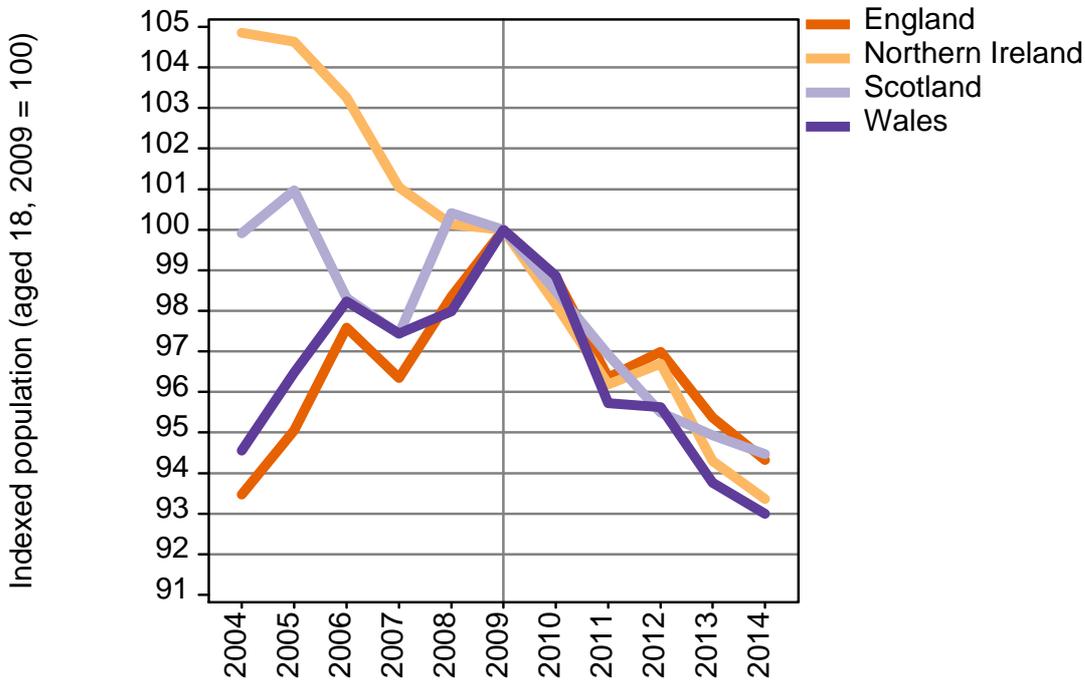
Figure 26 shows these same figures indexed to the size of the 2009 cohort being 100 to show the trends in cohort size between the different countries more clearly. Since the 2009 the size of the cohort has reduced for each country and each cycle. In the 2014 cycle the 18 year old cohort changes (proportionally) against the 2013 cohort by -1.1 per cent in England, -1.0 per cent in Northern Ireland, -0.5 per cent in Scotland and -0.8 per cent in Wales. These different changes include a component resulting from the different age reference dates.

In 2014, the 18 year old cohort in England is 5.7 per cent smaller (-37,900) compared to 2009, 6.6 per cent smaller (-1,720) in Northern Ireland, 5.5 per cent smaller (-3,590) in Scotland and 7.0 per cent smaller (-2,830) in Wales. This is a reduction across the UK of around 46,000 since 2009, 5.8 per cent proportionally. If the observed 2014 application rates were to be applied to a population of the same size as the 2009 cohort then there would have been around 16,000 more 18 year old applicants (with around 3,000 of that difference being due to the population change between 2013 and 2014).

**Figure 25 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK**



**Figure 26 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK (indexed to 2009=100)**



## **Incorporating revised population estimates**

The population estimates used in this report are different to those used in previous reporting of January 15 deadline application rates. This is because the population estimates used in this report are based on the most recent Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates and National Population Projections, which have been revised in light of the 2011 Census, whereas estimates used for previous reporting had not been revised (we refer to these respective estimates as 'revised' and 'non-revised').

The 15 year old population in these estimates (apportioned to school cohorts, rather than age at mid-year) is of particular interest, since it is this group that is aged to give the core 18 year old estimates (the 'derived' 18 year old estimates). This group is aged, rather than the 18 year olds being used directly, to avoid inaccuracies that can relate from varying numbers of non-UK domiciled 18 year olds being resident at age 18 (for example, international students).

The size of the difference in the derived UK 18 year old population between revised and non-revised Mid-Year Estimates varies across years (Figure 27). Specifically, between 2005 and 2008 the revised population estimates are lower than the non-revised (between -0.5 per cent and -0.8 per cent during this period), but are greater than the non-revised between 2009 and 2014 (with the difference increasing from 0.4 per cent in 2009 to 4.6 per cent in 2014).

The use of the revised estimates results in a difference in the direction of population change for derived 18 year olds between 2013 and 2014 (based on the 15 year olds in 2010 and 2011); the revised estimates show a 0.5 per cent increase in the population between these years, while the non-revised estimates show a fall of -0.7 per cent.

The increasing trend in the derived 18 year old population given by the revised Mid-Year Estimates also differs from trends derived from other administrative population sources (including school statistics and benefit records<sup>1</sup>). In each case the revised derived 18 year old population estimates show the 18 year old population to have risen between 2013 and 2014, compared to the other administrative sources which show the population to have fallen.

The difference in these trends is due to the revision of the Mid Year Estimates to be consistent with the 2011 Census. These estimates cover all ages and, because of the estimation methods involved in the Census are intended to be most accurate for age bands rather than single years of age<sup>2</sup>. The Office for National Statistics have advised that adjustments to the 2011 Census to account for missing data are thought to have led to a small over-estimation of the number of 15 year olds, and under-estimation of the number of 16-19 year olds, predominately those aged 16.

This effect for 15 and 16 year olds in 2011 will mostly affect the number of 18 year olds in the derived estimates used in this work for 2013 and 2014. To minimise this issue, the derived estimates are based on the revised estimates but with an adjustment for 15 year olds in 2010 (who are based on 16 year olds in the 2011 Census) and 15 year olds in 2011 (based on 15 year olds in the 2011 Census). For these years an adjustment is made so that the proportional changes in the population across 2009, 2010 and

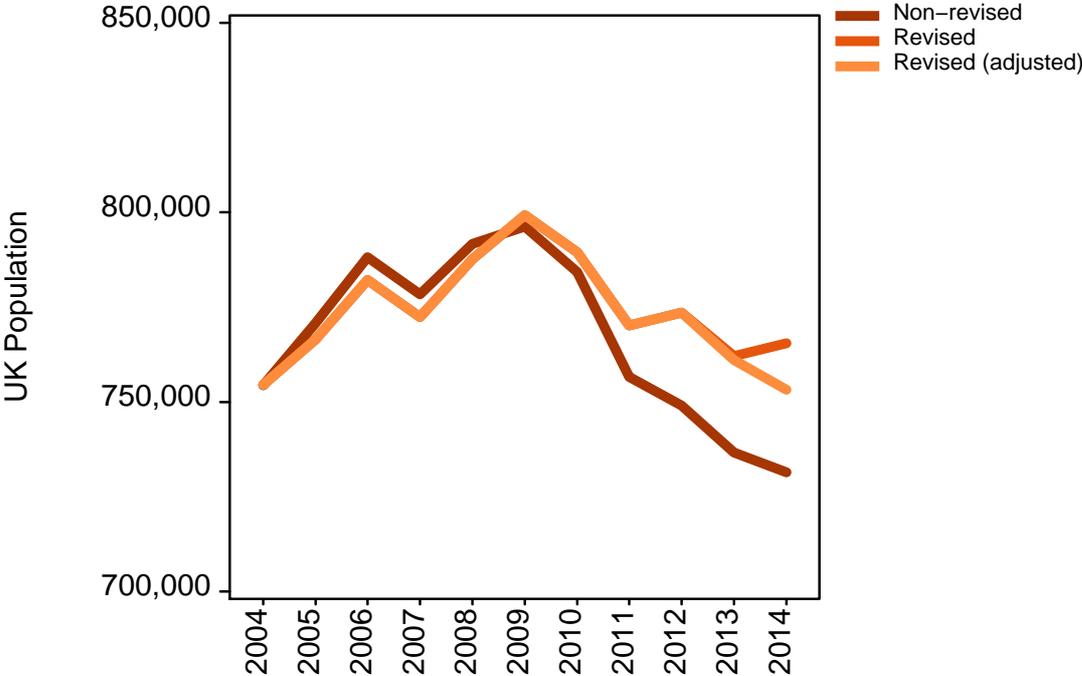
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<sup>1</sup> See the Section D of the technical notes in the Department for Education Statistical First Release Participation in education, training and employment by 16-18 year olds in England ([SFR 22/2013](#))

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/2011-census-user-guide/quality-and-methods/quality/quality-notes-and-clarifications/index.html>

2011 match those observed for the total number of UK 15 year old school pupils<sup>3</sup>. That is, the revised estimates of 15 year olds in 2009 (based, in part, on 17 year olds in the 2011 Census) are taken as correct and then the 2010 and 2011 figures derived by proportional changes from that figure. This adjustment results in the derived 18 year old population for 2013 being 0.1 per cent lower than when based on the (unadjusted) revised Mid-Year Estimates, while for 2014 they are 1.6 per cent lower.

**Figure 27 Revised (adjusted), revised and non-revised UK 18 year old population estimates**



<sup>3</sup> Numbers given in Table 5 of the Education and Training Statistics for the UK: 2013 ([V01/2013](#)), published by the Department for Education. Adjustment applied to derived figures on same age definition.

**Effect of revisions and adjustments on application rate levels and trends**

The use of revised Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates, including the adjustment for the 15 year old population in 2010 and 2011, means that the trends in application rates reported here are different from those reported previously. Figure 28 shows how the UK 18 year old application rate differs according to which set of population estimates are used. The trends in application rates are broadly similar between 2004 and 2009 but begin to differ from 2010 onwards, with the larger populations of the revised estimates causing the application rate to be lower than when calculated on the non-revised estimates.

The size of the downward revision of rates is larger for more recent years such that by 2013 the size of the revision is one percentage point in the application rate. This pattern also means that the growth in the application rate between 2010 and 2011 was less than previously reported (0.7 percentage points compared to 1.1 percentage points), while the decline in the rate between 2011 and 2012 was greater than previously reported (1.4 percentage points compared to 0.9 percentage points). The downward revision in the application rate in 2014 is one percentage point.

**Figure 28 UK 18 year old application rates for revised (adjusted), revised and non-revised population estimates**

