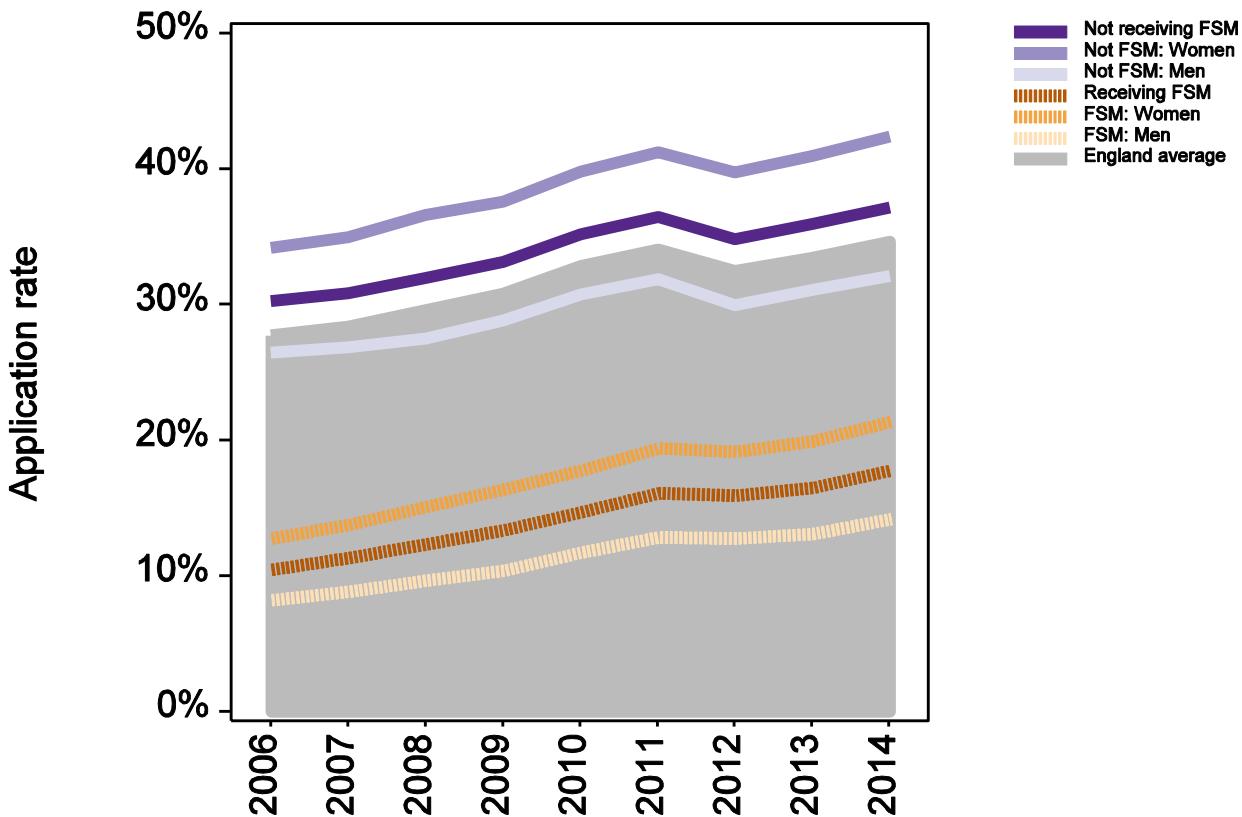




Demand for higher education from free school meal pupils increases by 8 per cent to highest ever recorded level

Free school meal pupils were 8 per cent more likely to apply in 2014 than last year and their application rate reached a new high of 18 per cent. Application rates for other pupils increased to 37 per cent, also the highest level recorded. Women have higher application rates than men, among free school meal pupils women are 50 per cent more likely to apply, and among other pupils 32 per cent more likely.

Figure 1: Application rates of 18 year olds in England by free school meal status and sex



Around one in eight English pupils receive free school meals (FSM) and their application rate at age 18 to higher education is around half that of other pupils.

For the 2014 cohort, application rates for the FSM group reached 18 per cent (a 1.3 percentage point increase, 8 per cent proportionally, from the previous cohort), and the highest on record. Application rates for those not in receipt of FSM were also the highest on record, reaching 37 per cent (a 1.2 percentage point increase, 3 per cent proportionally). This pattern of annual increases, with a larger proportional increase for the FSM group, is typical of the 2006-2013 period (except 2012).

Women are more likely to apply to higher education aged 18 than men, whether they received FSM or not, but this difference between men and women is greater for the FSM group. In 2014, the application rate of young women in the FSM group (21 per cent) was 50 per cent higher than men (14 per cent). Amongst those not receiving FSM, the application rate for women (42 per cent) was 32 per cent higher than for men (32 per cent).

Application rates to higher education have a strong relationship with GCSE attainment. The differences in application rates between the FSM group and other pupils are smaller when looking at pupils with similar levels of GCSE attainment. For example, there is a 19 percentage point gap between the FSM group and other pupils overall but this difference falls to between 1 to 2 percentage points across a broad range of GCSE attainment profiles.

Technical notes

1. Ages are defined as those on the 31 August each year to align with school cohorts. The graph shows the application rate for cohorts of 18 year olds against the year in which they would be 18. For example the 2014 point on the graph relates to the application rate of young people who will be aged 18 on 31 August 2014 and have applied in the 2014 UCAS application cycle.
2. Application rates are based on applications made to UCAS by the 24 March deadline in each cycle. At this point almost all main scheme applications for 18 year olds have been received.
3. The analysis is based on individual level school pupil records, taken from the National Pupil Database (NPD, further information on the NPD can be found at www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-pupil-database) linked to UCAS application data. The NPD covers young people in England only. The NPD records the free school meal (FSM) status of pupils who attend maintained schools in England but does not record it for pupils in non-maintained schools, of which the majority attend independent schools. We treat pupils where FSM status is not recorded (including those in Independent schools) as not in receipt of FSM.
4. The percentage of young people claiming FSM has varied between 11 per cent and 13 per cent between 2006 and 2014. In the 2014 cohort, 13 per cent (80,000) were in receipt of FSM when aged 15.
5. GCSE attainment is summarised as the total point score of the best eight grades achieved at GCSE (single and double award non-vocational GCSEs only) at the end of the school year where the pupil was aged 16. The point score does not include any GCSE results obtained after this period. There is wide variation in the GCSE attainment of young people. For example, around one in ten attain eight A grades or higher and a similar proportion achieve eight G grades or lower.

The point scores for each GCSE grade are given in the table below.

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U/X/Q
Point score	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

6. The difference in application rates for the FSM group and other pupils was calculated for those with similar GCSE attainment. These differences were calculated across a range of best eight GCSE point scores (from those with a point score of 16, equivalent to eight F grades at GCSE, through to those with a point score of 64, equivalent to eight A* grades at GCSE). Across this set of attainment profiles the difference in application rates between the FSM group and other pupils was typically between 1 and 2 percentage points.
7. The population size, number of UCAS applicants and the application rate for 2006 and 2014 are given in the table below (counts rounded to nearest ten, application rate on unrounded figures).

	2006 cohort			2014 cohort		
	Population	Applicants	Application rate (%)	Population	Applicants	Application rate (%)
Not receiving FSM	562,010	170,030	30.3	539,240	200,150	37.1
Not FSM: Women	276,060	94,340	34.2	262,140	111,050	42.4
Not FSM: Men	285,960	75,690	26.5	277,100	89,100	32.2
Receiving FSM	82,910	8,720	10.5	79,720	14,230	17.9
FSM: Women	41,060	5,270	12.8	39,460	8,470	21.5
FSM: Men	41,850	3,450	8.2	40,260	5,770	14.3
England average	644,920	178,750	27.7	618,970	214,390	34.6

8. A data file for the data points shown in Figure 1 is available with this analysis note at <http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis>.