JANUARY DEADLINE
ANALYSIS REPORT

2019

UCAS

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

As an independent charity, UCAS publishes timely data and analysis about demand for and progression to higher education, to contribute to public debate about education, access, and social mobility.

For most higher education courses, an application must be submitted to UCAS by 15 January to guarantee that it will receive equal consideration by providers. People who apply to UCAS by this deadline give the first reliable indicator of demand for full-time higher education in the UK, as most applicants apply by this deadline (roughly 80 per cent).

This report is published 17 working days after the 15 January deadline, and looks at the trends in applications to UCAS for all courses (including those with the earlier October deadline) and from all ages (except when otherwise stated), and how these differ geographically and by applicant characteristics. Applicants from outside the UK are grouped based on whether they have applied from the European Union (EU) or not. As the reported patterns and trends are summarised across all providers, they do not necessarily reflect the case at any given higher education provider.

2.
NUMBERS OF APPLICANTS
BY PROVIDER COUNTRY

2.1 Applicant numbers from within the UK decrease, but numbers increase internationally

This year, a total of 561,420 people from all domiciles and all age groups applied to higher education through UCAS by the January deadline – an increase of 0.4 per cent from this point in 2018. Overall, UK domiciled applicants have decreased by 0.7 per cent, while applicants from outside the UK have increased to their highest levels on record for both EU and non-EU countries.

EU applicants increased by 0.9 per cent to 43,890, and non-EU applicants increased by 9.0 per cent to 63,695. Although EU applicant numbers have increased by 0.9 percent overall, they have decreased in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with the only increase being in England, where they increased by 1.9 per cent to 37,595 (the second highest number on record after 2016). Figure 1 shows percentage changes in applicant numbers split by provider country.
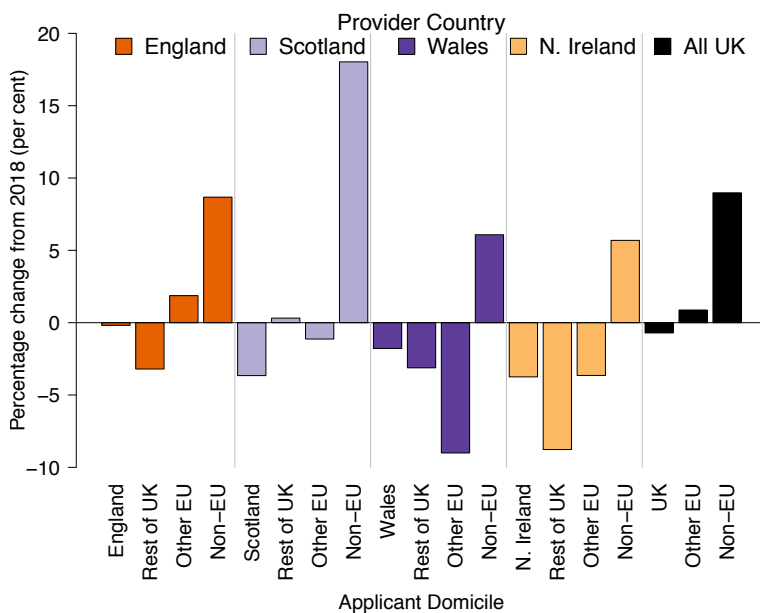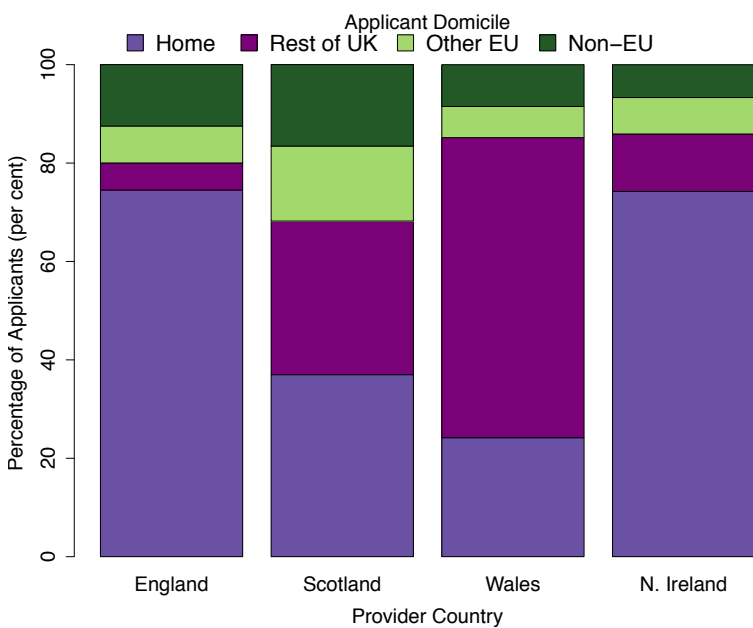

FIGURE 1:

Percentage changes in January deadline applicant numbers by applicant domicile and provider country from 2018 to 2019

Figure 2 shows the percentages of applicants from each domicile group split by provider country (with 'home' domiciled applicants being those from the same country as the provider they have applied to). Overall, 19.2 per cent of all applicants are from outside the UK. Wales is the only country where there are more applicants from the rest of the UK than there are home domiciled applicants (61.0 per cent compared to 24.2 per cent), predominantly due to the large number of English applicants to Welsh providers. Scotland has the greatest proportion of non-UK applicants (both EU and non-EU).[1]

FIGURE 2:

Proportions of 2019 January deadline applicants from each domicile group split by provider country

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[1] Not all higher education applicants in Scotland are recorded by UCAS
  (see note at the end of this report)

2.2 Applicant numbers from China increase by one third

Figure 3 shows the ten countries from outside the UK with most applicants this year. The list of countries and their order is unchanged from 2018.

The number of applicants from China has increased by 33.3 per cent this year – rising from 11,915 to 15,880. This follows an increase of 20.6 per cent last year, and brings Chinese applicant numbers to almost the same level as those from Wales and Northern Ireland (18,855 and 17,910 respectively). Other countries with large percentage increases in applicant numbers include Romania (+260, 10 per cent), Slovakia (+180, 26 per cent), and Saudi Arabia (+150, 24 per cent).

Although it has remained the second biggest source of non-UK applicants, Hong Kong had the second biggest drop in applicant numbers of any country (-220, 4 per cent). The biggest decrease was from Germany (-250, 8 per cent), and there were also large decreases in the number of applicants from Bulgaria (-185, 9 per cent), Lithuania (-145, 8 per cent), Finland (-125, 15 per cent), and Russia (-110, 14 per cent). This analysis does not take into account changes in population sizes for any of these countries (either overall or for younger people).
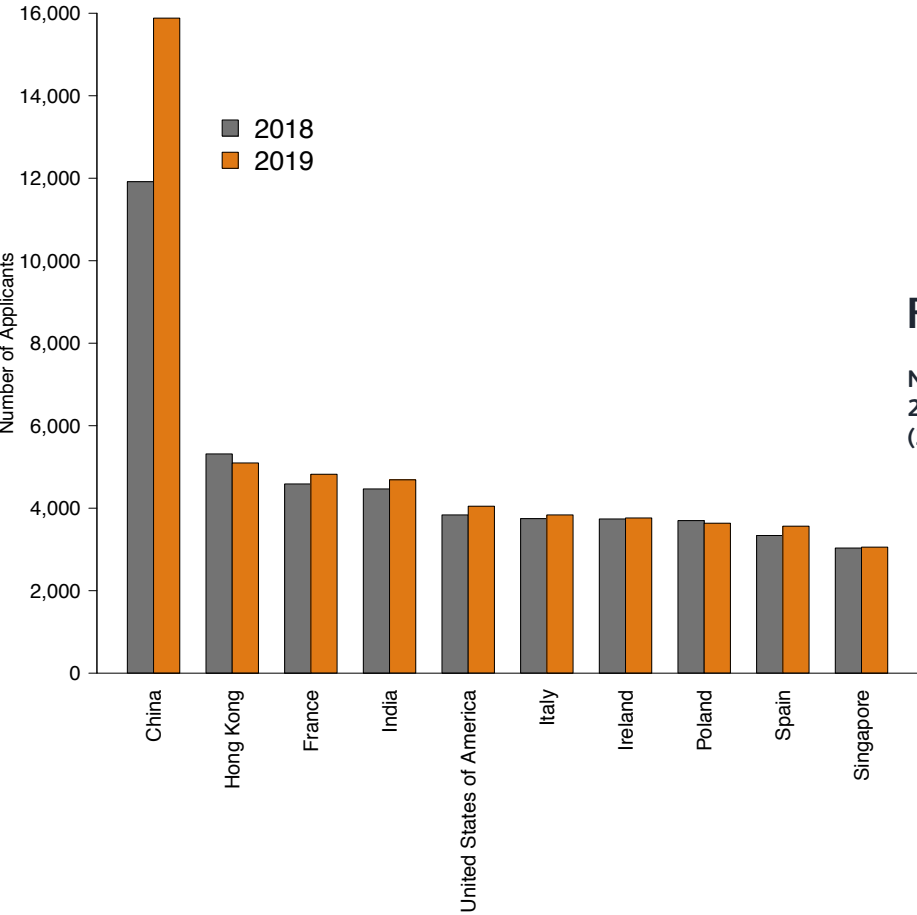

FIGURE 3:

Non-UK countries with most 2019 January deadline applicants (2018 – 2019)

3.
18 YEAR OLD APPLICATION RATES BY GEOGRAPHY

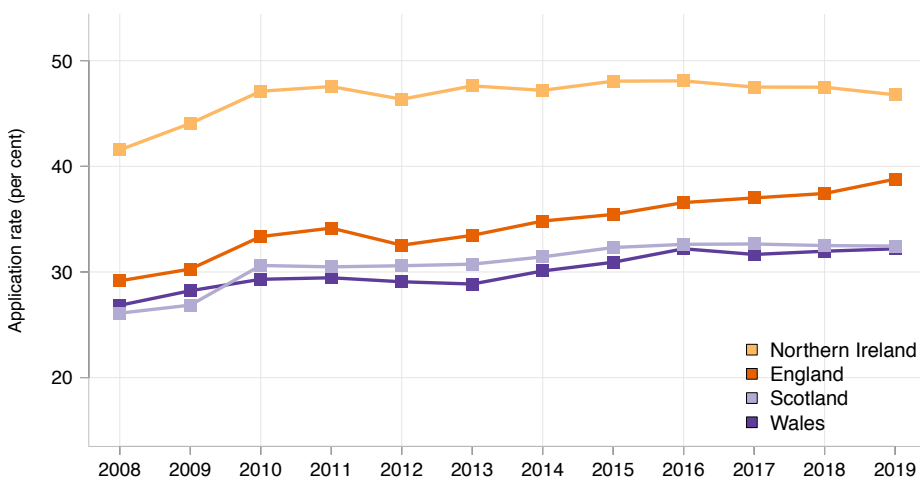## 3.1 Application rate in England continues to rise to highest level on record

Total applicant numbers do not take changes in population size into account. The number of 18 year olds in the UK has fallen each year since 2015 (falling by 2.0 per cent this year compared to last[2]), and overall figures as reported above are affected by the falling number of school leavers (roughly 80 per cent of UK applicants are 18 – 19 year olds). To allow for more informative comparisons of demand for higher education, application rates for UK 18 year olds as a percentage of the UK 18 year old population can be used. This analysis uses population estimates published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and country-specific age definitions (both of which are detailed in the glossary).

Figure 4 shows application rates for 18 year olds for each country. The application rate in England has risen every year since 2012 and is now at its highest on record (38.8 per cent), with this year having the biggest percentage point increase since 2014. The rate in Scotland[3] has remained unchanged at 32.5 per cent since 2018, and has been approximately at this level since 2015. The Welsh application rate is similar at 32.2 per cent, although it has risen slightly during the last two years. Both Scottish and Welsh rates are close to their record levels. Northern Ireland has the highest rate at 46.8 per cent, although it is the only country where the rate has decreased this year (falling from 47.5 per cent to 46.8 per cent). The overall 18 year old application rate for the UK increased from 37.1 per cent to 38.2 per cent.

FIGURE 4:

18 year old application rates by applicant domicile (2008-2019)

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[2] The 18 year old population fell in England by 1.8 per cent, Scotland by 3.1 per cent, Northern Ireland by 3.5 per cent, and Wales by 2.3 per cent.

[3] Not all higher education applicants in Scotland are recorded by UCAS (see note at the end of this report).
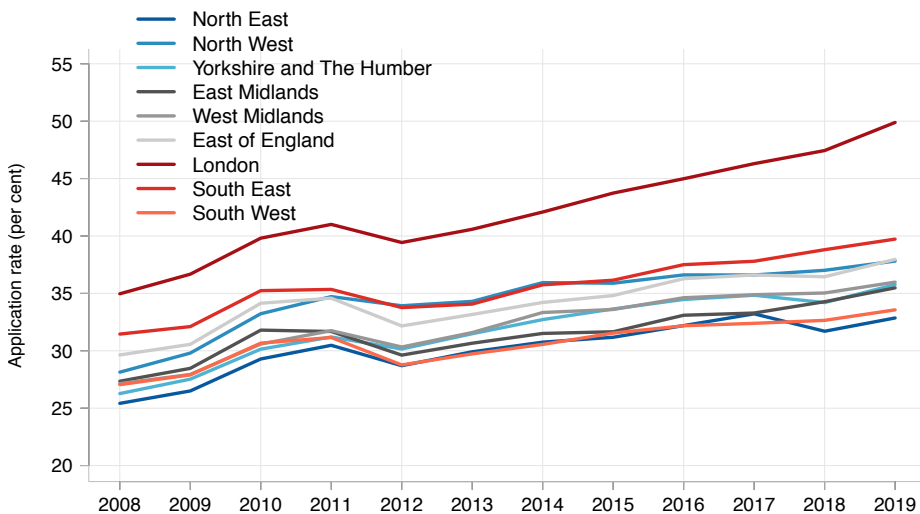
3.2 Application rates increase in every English region

Figure 5 shows 18 year old application rates for different regions of England. The order of regions by application rate is broadly similar to 2018, with London still having a considerably higher rate (49.9 per cent), and the North East having the lowest rate (32.9 per cent) for the second consecutive year. With the London rate increasing by 2.4 percentage points this year, 18 year olds in London are now 36 per cent more likely than 18 year olds in the rest of England to have applied to higher education (up from 33 per cent more likely last year). This is the first year since 2016 that application rates have increased in every English region, with rate increases outside London ranging from 0.8 to 1.6 percentage points.

18 year old application rates for each parliamentary constituency are available in the data sets published alongside this report.

FIGURE 5:

18 year old application rates in different regions of England (2008-2019)
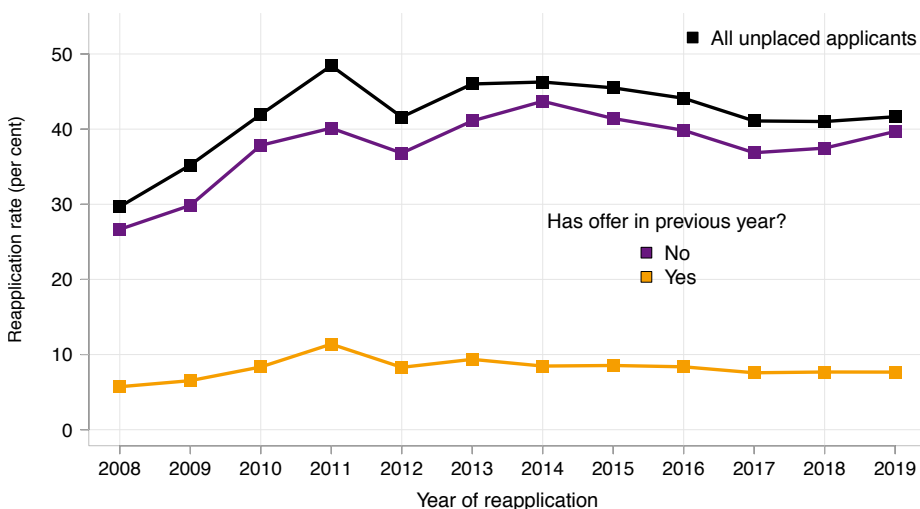
4. APPLICANTS ABOVE THE AGE OF 18

4.1 Increased reapplication rate from previously unsuccessful applicants

Although most applicants in each cycle are placed in higher education that year, a significant proportion are not. Many of these applicants choose to reapply the following year. Figure 6 shows the percentage of 18 year old applicants who reapply through UCAS the following year, having not been placed as a result of their initial application. These applicants can be grouped based on whether they received at least one offer from their first set of applications.

Although the overall rate of reapplication has been similar for three consecutive cycles, more variation can be seen when only looking at applicants who did not receive an offer when they applied at age 18. This removes applicants who had already made an active choice not to pursue higher education by declining all their offers, but also those who were unplaced due to not meeting the conditions of an offer. Looking only at previously unsuccessful applicants, the rate of reapplication has increased in each of the last two cycles, and increased from 37.5 per cent in 2018 to 39.7 per cent in 2019. This follows three consecutive years of falling reapplication rates from 2015 to 2017 (during which time the 18 year old application rate was rising), and may reflect actual or perceived changes in job markets and employment prospects over the last two years.

FIGURE 6:

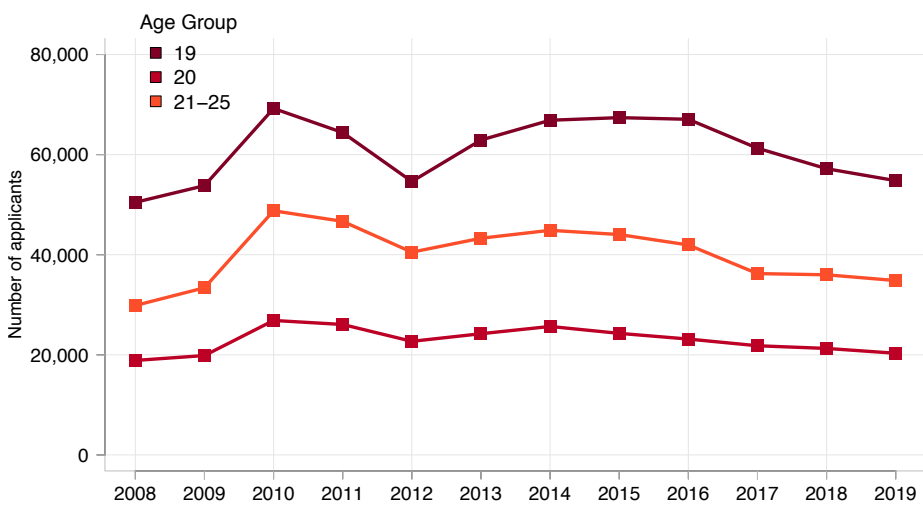**Rates of reapplication of 19 year olds (2008 – 2019)**

4.2 Slight decrease in first time applicants above the age of 18

The majority of UK applicants over the age of 18 are applying to higher education for the first time (almost 80 per cent). Figure 7 shows numbers of first time applicants from the UK split into different age groups (19, 20, and 21 – 25). The numbers of 19, 20, and 21 – 25 year old first time applicants have all decreased slightly this year (in line with falling population numbers and increasing 18 year old entry rates).

FIGURE 7:

Number of first time UK applicants above the age of 18 (2008 – 2019)

5. THE PATTERN OF 18 YEAR OLD APPLICATION RATES BY APPLICANT CHARACTERISTICS

5.1 Gender gap in application rates is unchanged overall but has widened outside England

Figure 8 shows 18 year old application rates split by gender. January deadline application rates have been steadily rising for both males and females since 2012, with the female application rate consistently higher than the male rate. This year, the female application rate increased by 1.3 percentage points to 44.5 per cent, and the male rate increased by 0.9 percentage points. Although this has increased the percentage point difference between male and female rates, their ratio is unchanged at 1.38. This means that females were 38 per cent more likely than males to apply to higher education by the January deadline at age 18.

FIGURE 8:

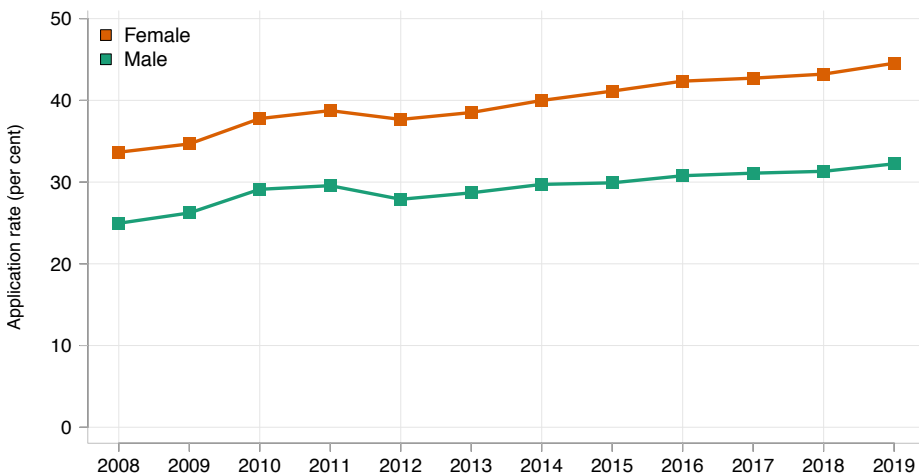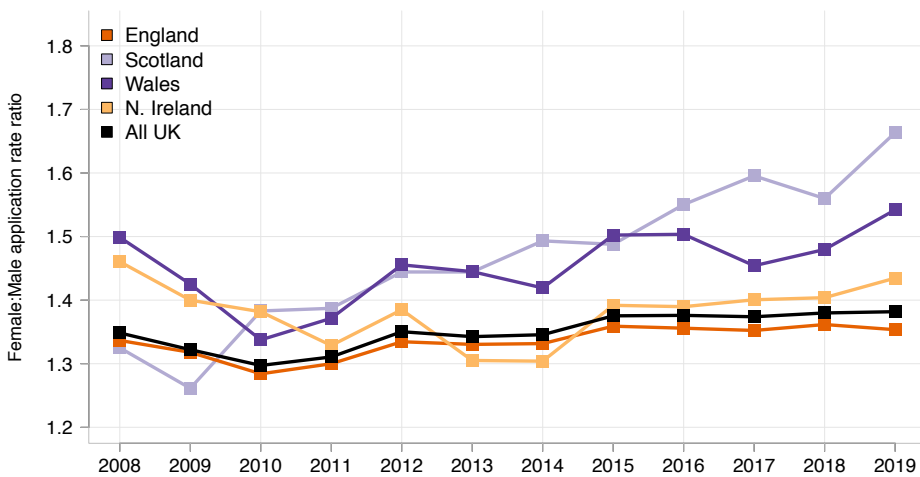**18 year old application rates split by gender (2008 – 2019)**

Figure 9 shows female to male application rate ratios for each country. Although the female to male application rate ratio has remained unchanged for the whole of the UK, individual countries show differences. The gender gap has widened in Scotland (from 1.56 to 1.66), Wales (from 1.48 to 1.54), and Northern Ireland (from 1.40 to 1.43). This means that females in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are 66 per cent, 54 per cent, and 43 per cent respectively more likely to apply to higher education than males in the same country. In England, the ratio has decreased slightly from 1.36 to 1.35.
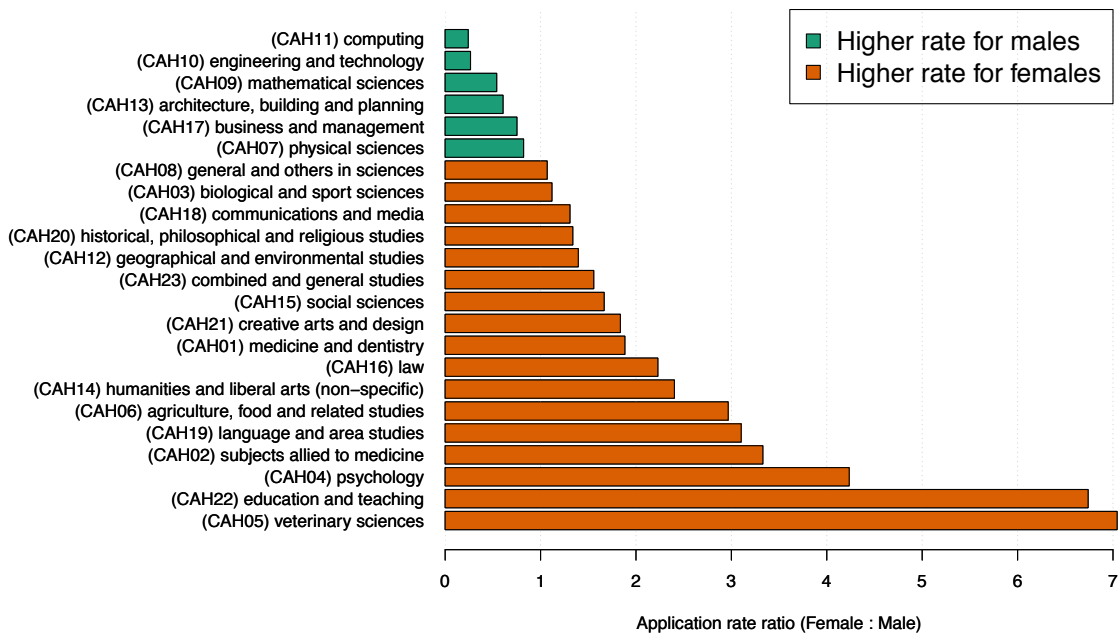
FIGURE 9:

Female to male application rate ratio by applicant domicile (2008 – 2019)

As well as having different rates of application to higher education in general, male and female application rates can vary by subject area. Figure 10 shows female to male application rate ratios for different subjects classified using the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) system and grouped using the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH1)[4] . Courses are apportioned across up to five HECoS codes, in weightings specified by the provider. Ratios greater than 1 indicate female application rates are higher, while ratios between 0 and 1 mean male application rates are higher. Females are more likely than males to apply to courses from 17 of the 23 CAH1 groups and were roughly seven times as likely to apply for courses in both veterinary sciences, and education and learning. Males were around four times as likely to apply to courses in both computing, and engineering and technology. Subject groups with application ratios closest to 1:1 were physical sciences, general and others in sciences, and biological and sport sciences, with ratios of 0.82, 1.07, and 1.12 respectively. The subject groups with the highest application rates for 18 year old females were subjects allied to medicine (8.4 per cent), social sciences (7.8 per cent), and creative arts and design (5.6 per cent). The subject groups with the highest application rates for 18 year old males were business and management (6.2 per cent), social sciences (4.7 per cent), and engineering and technology (4.6 per cent). Application rates and ratios for all subject groups are available in the data sets published alongside this report.

FIGURE 10:

Female to male 18 year old application rate ratios split by CAH1 groupings of HECoS subjects (2019)

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[4] **The Higher Education Classification System (HECoS) and the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)**
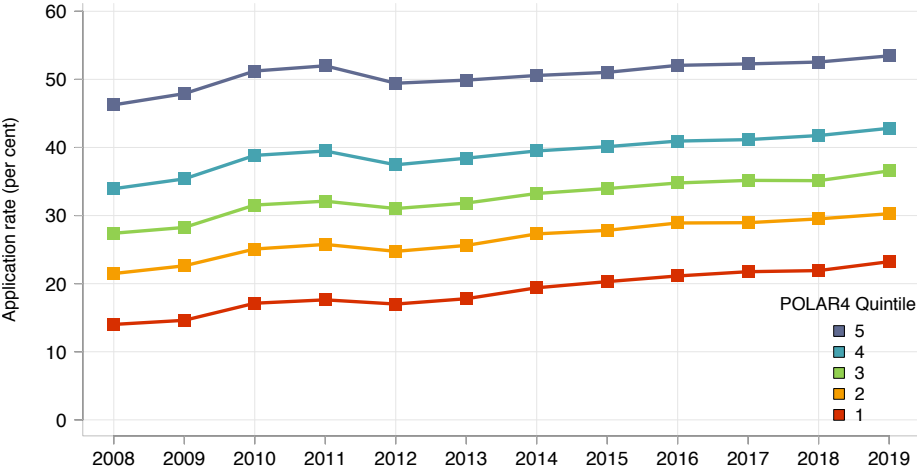
5.2 Gap in application rates between advantaged and disadvantaged applicants decreases

POLAR4[5] is a geography-based measure of disadvantage which divides areas into quintiles based on the proportion of their young population (defined as 18 and 19 year olds) who enter higher education. Areas classified as POLAR4 quintile 1 (Q1) are those with the lowest rates of higher education participation, and are considered to be the most disadvantaged areas, while those in quintile 5 (Q5) have the highest participation rates and are considered to be the most advantaged areas.

18 year old applicants from the UK are assigned a POLAR quintile based on their postcode. As some postcodes could not be assigned a POLAR quintile (due to issues such as typographical errors and creation of new postcodes), counts for each quintile were adjusted by adding the estimated number of missing applicants in each country. For example, if there were 100 unclassified applicants for England, and 30 per cent of classified English applicants were in Q5, the Q5 total for England would be increased by 30.

Figure 11 shows UK 18 year old application rates for each POLAR4 quintile. Application rates have increased for all quintiles. The application rate for Q1 increased by 1.3 percentage points to 23.2 per cent, which is its biggest increase since 2014. The Q5 rate increased by 1.0 percentage points to 53.5 per cent, causing the Q5:Q1 application rate ratio to decrease from 2.40 to 2.30, meaning that the gap in application rates between advantaged and disadvantaged applicants has narrowed slightly.

FIGURE 11:

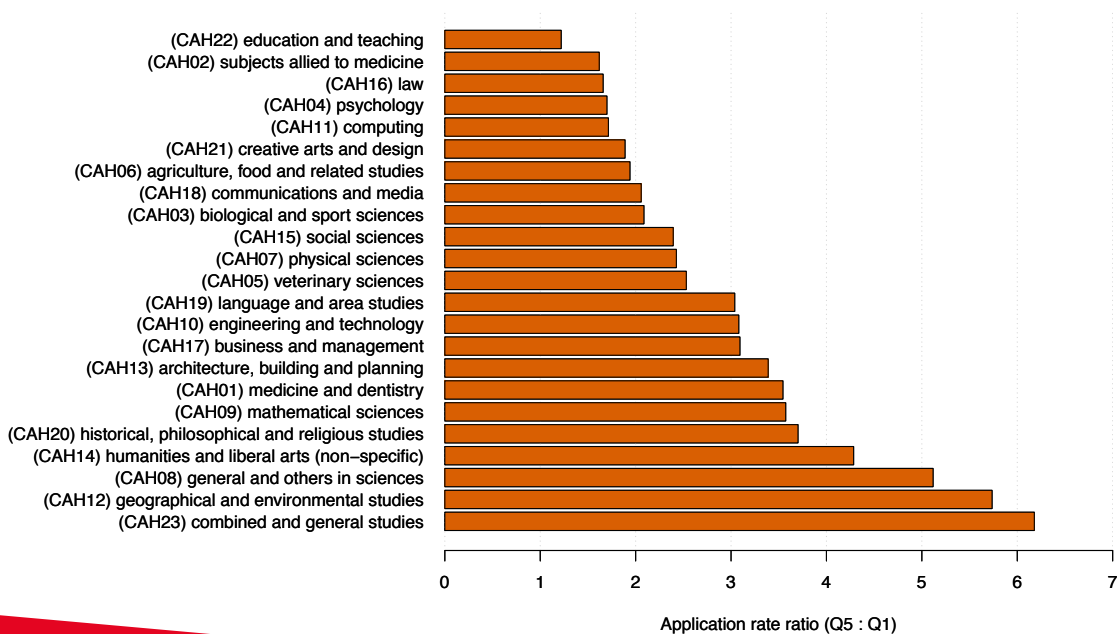**UK 18 year old application rates by POLAR4 quintile (2008 – 2019)**

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5 **Participation of local areas (POLAR) 4.** The **Multiple Equality Measure (MEM)** developed by UCAS was not used in this report, due to data availability at time of writing.

As with gender, there are differences in the Q5:Q1 application ratios between subject areas. Figure 12 shows Q5:Q1 application ratios for different CAH1 groupings of HECoS subject groups. 16 of the CAH1 groups have Q5 application rates of at least double their Q1 application rates, with the highest ratios for combined and general, and geographical and environmental studies – 6.18 and 5.74 respectively. The lowest ratio was 1.22 for education and teaching, and relatively low ratios (1.62 to 1.71) were also seen for subjects allied to medicine, law, psychology, and computing. Application rates for Q1 were highest for social sciences (3.8 per cent), subjects allied to medicine (3.8 per cent), and creative arts and design (2.9 per cent). Application rates for Q5 were highest for social sciences (9.1 per cent), business and management (8.4 per cent), and subjects allied to medicine (6.1 per cent).

FIGURE 12:

Q5:Q1 18 year old application rate ratio split by CAH1 groupings of HECoS subject groups (2019)
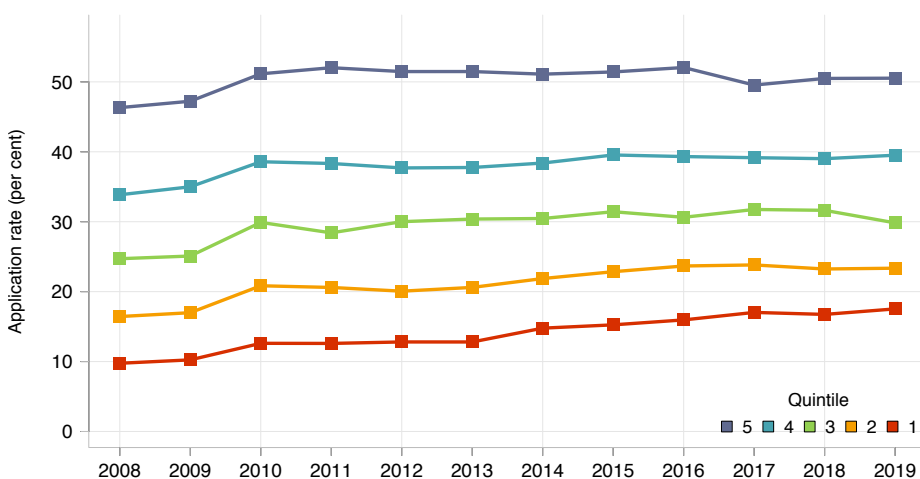
5.3 Narrowing gap in application rates between most and least deprived parts of Scotland

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a geography-based measure of deprivation which divides areas of Scotland into quintiles based on their relative levels of deprivation across a range of measures. Quintile 1 (Q1) represents the most deprived areas of Scotland, while quintile 5 (Q5) represents the least deprived areas. As for POLAR4, SIMD is assigned using an applicant's postcode and some applicants cannot be assigned to a quintile. Unassigned applicants are redistributed using the same method described for POLAR4.

Figure 13 shows 18 year old application rates for Scottish applicants by SIMD quintile. Application rates have been relatively stable for most quintiles over the last three cycles, although an increase of 0.8 percentage points for quintile 1 has decreased the Q5:Q1 application rate ratio from 3.02 to 2.88, meaning that people from the least deprived areas are 2.88 times as likely to apply for higher education than those from the most deprived areas. Application rates for Q3 decreased by 1.8 percentage points this year to 29.8 per cent.

FIGURE 13:

18 year old application rates in Scotland, split by SIMD quintile (2008 – 2019)

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[6] **The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation**

NOTE ON NUMBERS IN SCOTLAND

UCAS covers the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate provision for people living in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, so the statistics on acceptances or entry rates can be taken as being very close to all recruitment to full-time undergraduate higher education.

In Scotland, there is a substantial section of higher education provision not included in UCAS' figures. This is mostly full-time higher education provided in further education colleges, which represents around one third of young full-time undergraduate study in Scotland, and this proportion varies by geography and background within Scotland. Accordingly, figures on entry rates or total recruitment in Scotland reflect only the part of full-time undergraduate study that uses UCAS.

In 2014, there were fewer very late acceptances than in other cycles recorded in the UCAS data for some Scottish providers. These changes may mean the number of applicants and acceptances to Scottish UCAS providers in 2014, recorded through UCAS, could be understated by up to 2,000, compared to how applicants and acceptances have been reported in recent cycles. This means that comparing 2014 applicants and acceptances for Scottish providers (or those from Scotland) to other cycles, may not give an accurate measure of change.

In 2015, around 120 courses at Scottish providers which were previously part of the UCAS Teacher Training scheme, moved into the UCAS Undergraduate scheme. As such, the number of applicants and acceptances to Scottish providers in 2015 recorded through UCAS will include those which were previously part of UCAS Teacher Training. This means, comparing 2015 applicants and acceptances for Scottish providers (or those from Scotland, particularly those aged 21 or over) to previous cycles, may not give a like-for-like measure of change.

GLOSSARY

Age	This analysis uses country-specific age definitions that align with the cut-off points for school and college cohorts in the different administrations of the UK. For England and Wales, ages are defined on 31 August, for Northern Ireland on 1 July, and for Scotland on 28 February the following year. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts.
Applicant	A person who has made an application in the UCAS system, including those applying through Records of Prior Acceptance (RPAs).
Base population estimate	The population estimates are based on Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates, and national population projections (published in June 2015). For 16 to 20 year olds, the estimates are obtained by ageing 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 ageing. 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 and entry rates by area-based background are supported through small area population estimates, available from the Office for National Statistics, National Records for Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency. These small area population estimates have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.
Conditional offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant, subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
Domicile	Declared area of permanent residence.
Entry rate	Number of acceptances from a UCAS application cycle divided by the estimated base population.
Non-EU	Countries outside the European Union, including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.
Offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant. May be subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
Offer rate	The percentage of applications which received an offer. It is at the 'application level' as it is an aggregate across all applications, regardless of the number of choices an individual applicant may have.
POLAR4	Developed by the Office for Students (OfS), and classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in higher education. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered the most disadvantaged), to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged).
Provider	A higher education provider – a university or college.
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland, providing a relative measure of deprivation among small areas (data zones). In this report, SIMD 2016 has been used.
UK	United Kingdom. Excludes the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.
Unconditional offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant that is not subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.

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