



END OF CYCLE REPORT 2018

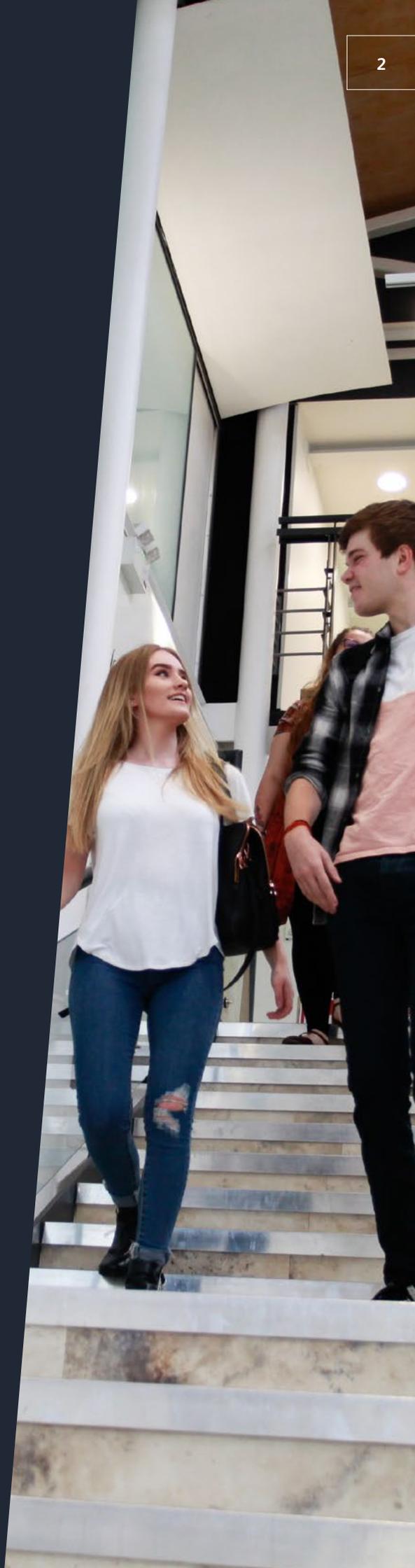
Patterns of unconditional offer-making by providers

CHAPTER 7

UCAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

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

This year, we have published our end of cycle data and analysis in four releases, between 29 November 2018 and 31 January 2019, with the first release published 25 working days after the 2018 cycle closed. Weekly, between 29 November and 13 December, we published a series of detailed analysis reports covering acceptance, offer, and entry rates, alongside differences by applicant background across the entire 2018 cycle. On 13 December, we also published a series of analysis reference tables and datasets for the 2018 cycle. As part of this release, we are publishing end of cycle provider-level application data, together with provider-level data on unconditional offer-making. This release will include analysis of trends in application rates by country, sex, and background, with recent years for comparison, and further analysis of offer-making.

This report is the seventh chapter in a series of eight end of cycle chapters, across four releases¹, and provides an in-depth analysis of unconditional offer-making to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh domiciled 18 year old applicants, from a provider perspective, in the context of the 2018 undergraduate admissions cycle. It builds on the analysis reported in chapter three of the 2018 end of cycle report, 'Unconditional offer-making to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales'².

Unconditional offers can be made where providers are satisfied that an individual has demonstrated sufficient attainment and potential to succeed on their chosen course. For example, in Scotland, young students often apply with their SQA Highers results, and receive unconditional offers on this basis. Across the UK, mature students applying to university normally have secondary-level qualifications, and work-based or other professional experience, that enables them to demonstrate their potential to complete a degree programme. As such, they are more likely to receive unconditional offers compared to those aged 18, whose qualifications are typically pending.

The analysis in this report covers English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year old applicants only, as these are a group of applicants who typically apply with their qualifications still pending, and with their predicted, rather than achieved grades. As many Scottish applicants apply with achieved Scottish Higher qualifications, which often form part of the entry requirements for courses, they are not considered here. Furthermore, a large proportion of students in Scotland apply to further education colleges, which are not covered by UCAS (see the note on Scotland at the end of this report).

¹ [2018 End of Cycle Report](#)

² [Unconditional offer-making to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales](#) Chapter 3: End of Cycle Report 2018 (PDF)



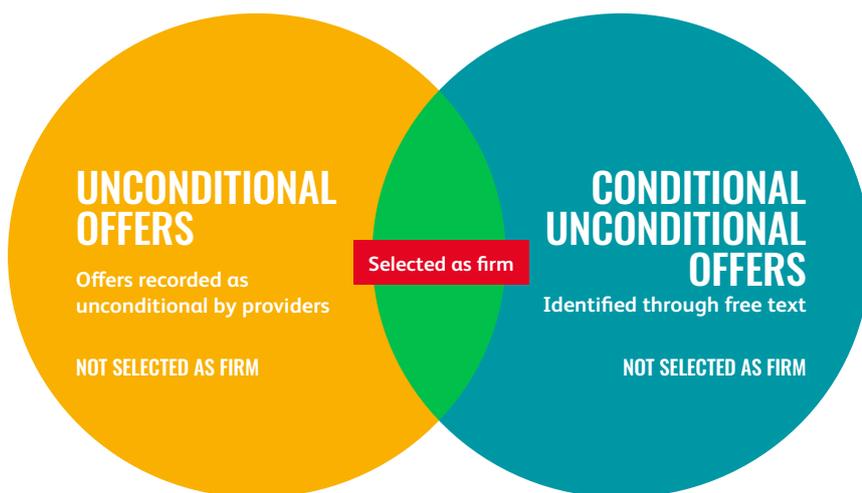
As with the 'Unconditional offer-making to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales' report², published as chapter three of the End of Cycle Report 2018, this report covers three types of unconditional offer:

- > **Unconditional offer** – an offer made by a provider where they are satisfied that an individual has demonstrated sufficient attainment and potential to succeed on their chosen course. This is based on the offer status at the 30 June application deadline.
- > **Conditional unconditional offer** – an offer made by a provider which was originally conditional, but becomes unconditional if the applicant selects that offer as their firm (first) choice. By definition, conditional unconditional offers that are selected as a firm choice by the applicant become unconditional, and are also included in the unconditional offers group (see above).
- > **Offer with an unconditional component** – all offers showing as having an element of unconditional offer-making – that is, unconditional offers plus conditional unconditional offers that have not been selected as firm (and hence remain conditional unconditional).

These types of offer, and their relationship to one another, are shown in Figure 1. There is an overlap between the offer types. By definition, unconditional offers include any conditional unconditional offers selected as an applicant's firm choice. This is because conditional unconditional offers (that are recorded as conditional when the offer is first made), are subsequently adjusted by the provider to be unconditional, once selected as firm. Conversely, conditional unconditional offers that are not selected as firm will remain recorded as conditional, and so are not defined to be unconditional offers.

FIGURE 1:

Relationship between the different types of offers considered in this report



Offers with an unconditional component = Unconditional offers + Conditional unconditional offers not selected as firm

² **Unconditional offer-making to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales**
Chapter 3: End of Cycle Report 2018 (PDF)

2.

NUMBER OF PROVIDERS MAKING UNCONDITIONAL OFFERS

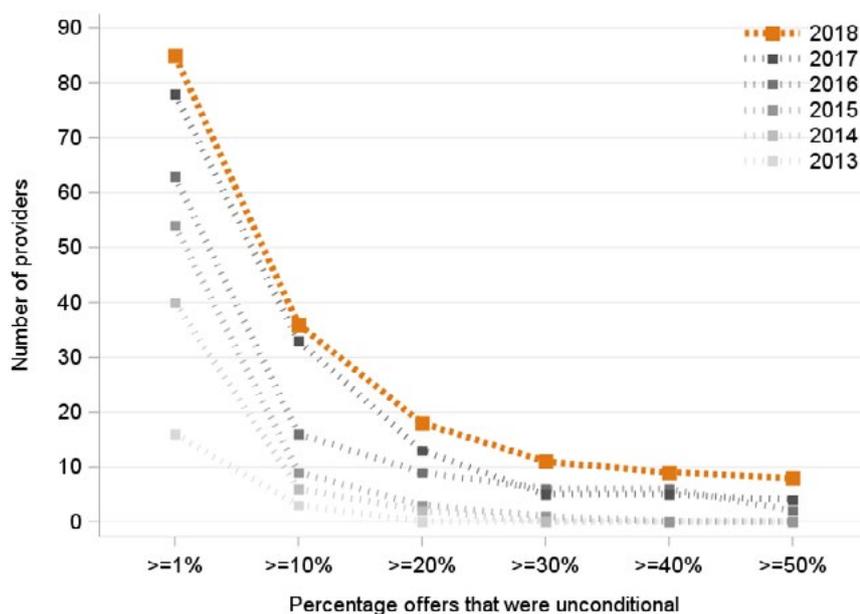
2.1 Unconditional offers are used by a growing number of providers as part of their approach to offer-making

The growth in unconditional offer-making since 2013 is the consequence of a combination of the growing number of providers that use unconditional offers, and among those providers, the increasing extent to which they do so. However, while the number of providers making unconditional offers has increased each year since 2013, a number of providers have only done so for one or two cycles, then reduced or halted their use of unconditional offer-making.

Figure 2 shows the number of providers for which unconditional offers represented different proportions of the total number of offers they made to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales. To avoid the large amount of variability that would be introduced by including smaller providers in this analysis, the patterns shown in figures 2 and 3 are restricted to the 140 largest providers that have used UCAS since 2012, with an average of at least 500 acceptances each year. These 140 providers represent over 95 per cent of all acceptances to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh applicants in the 2018 cycle. These providers made 95.0 per cent of all unconditional offers in 2018, and 99.8 per cent of all conditional unconditional offers.

FIGURE 2:

Number of providers by the proportion of offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, that were unconditional, by year



In 2013, there were 16 providers where the number of unconditional offers to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, accounted for 1 per cent or more of all offers made by those providers. Of these, there were three providers where the number of unconditional offers accounted for 10 per cent or more of all offers. There were no providers where unconditional offers accounted for 20 per cent or more of all offers.

Since then, the number of providers making unconditional offers that accounted for 1 per cent or more, 10 per cent or more, or 20 per cent or more of all offers, has increased each year. In 2018, there were 85 providers for which unconditional offers accounted for 1 per cent or more of all the offers they made that year. Of these, unconditional offers accounted for 10 per cent or more of all offers made by 36 providers, and accounted for 20 per cent or more of all offers made by 18 providers. There were eight providers for which unconditional offers accounted for more than half of all the offers they made in 2018. Despite the increases in unconditional offer-making, unconditional offers from the majority of providers (104 of the largest 140 providers) accounted for fewer than 10 per cent of their offers.



2.2 Conditional unconditional offers were made by over

20 per cent of the largest 140 providers in 2018

Figure 3 shows how many of the largest 140 providers used conditional unconditional offers in 2018. In 2018, there were 28 providers where 1 per cent or more of offers made were conditional unconditional offers. For 23 providers, conditional unconditional offers accounted for at least 10 per cent of all offers, for 15 providers, they accounted for at least 20 per cent of all offers, and for 10 providers, they accounted for at least 30 per cent of all offers. In the case of four providers, conditional unconditional offers accounted for at least 40 per cent of all offers made. There was one providers where conditional unconditional offers accounted for at least half of all offers made in 2018.

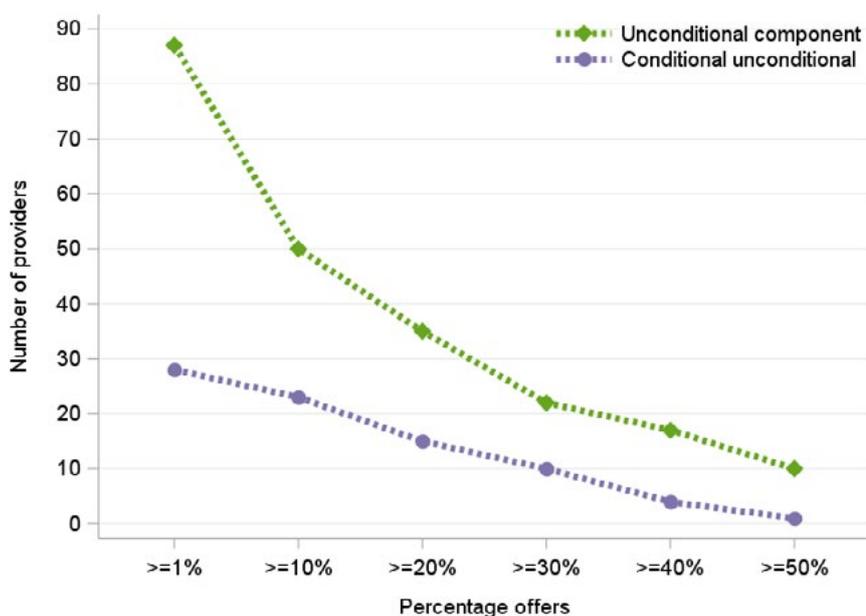
2.3 Most large providers made offers with a

unconditional component in 2018

Figure 3 also shows how many of the largest 140 providers made offers with an unconditional component. There were 87 providers (over 60 per cent of the largest 140 providers) where the number of offers with an unconditional component accounted for at least 1 per cent of all offers made. Among these, there were 10 providers where at least half of all offers made had an unconditional component. For the majority of providers (90 of the largest 140), fewer than 10 per cent of offers had an unconditional component.

FIGURE 3:

Number of providers by the proportion of offers that were conditional unconditional, or had an unconditional component, in 2018, made to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales



3



**PROVIDER
COUNTRY**

3.1 Growth in unconditional offer-making

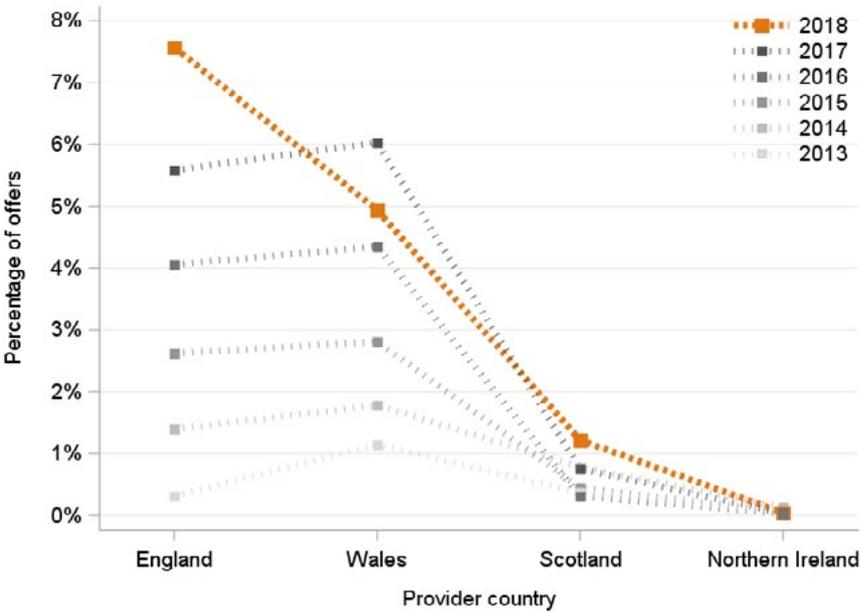
varies by UK provider country

For the majority of providers in England and Wales, there are currently no student number caps in place. However, for providers located in Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are caps on student recruitment each year, with providers unable to accept numbers of students over the limit. This is reflected in the differences in tuition fees across the UK countries with number caps (Scotland and Northern Ireland) accepting home domiciled applicants with reduced or no tuition fees, and the countries with no number caps (England and Wales) charging full tuition fees for home domiciled applicants. These differences in policy across the UK countries have led to each country adopting unconditional offer-making to a differing extent, with England and Wales using unconditional offer-making to a greater extent than Scotland and Northern Ireland, as there are fewer constraints around the number of applicants they are able to accept.

Although this section reports provider countries as a whole, there is large variation in the extent of offer-making practice for individual providers within each country. For analysis of individual providers, please see the provider-level unconditional offer-making reports³.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales that were unconditional, by the country in which the providers are located. These proportions act as a measure for, on average, how likely providers located in each UK country were to make unconditional offers during each cycle, to this group of applicants. They show that the growth in unconditional offers since 2013 was mainly among providers in England and Wales, with providers in Northern Ireland continuing to make very few unconditional offers. When Scottish providers are reported, this relates to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh, applicants applying to providers in Scotland. Scottish applicants are not covered in this report, as they often apply with achieved, rather than predicted, qualifications. Please see the note on Scotland at the end of this report for further details.

FIGURE 4:
Percentage of offers made to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, that were unconditional, by provider country and year



³ 2018 UCAS Undergraduate unconditional offer-making provider reports

In 2013, the proportion of offers to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year old applicants, by providers in each of the four UK countries that were unconditional, was small:

- > 0.3 per cent for providers in England
- > 1.1 per cent for providers in Wales
- > 0.4 per cent for providers in Scotland
- > 0.1 per cent for providers in Northern Ireland

Since 2013, the proportion of offers to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year old applicants that were unconditional, has varied across each of the four countries of the UK:

- > For providers in England, the proportion has increased every year.
- > For providers in Wales, the proportion increased each year up to 2017, then decreased in 2018.
- > For providers in Scotland, the proportion of unconditional offers has fluctuated since 2013, but has been rising each year since the lowest point in 2016.
- > For providers in Northern Ireland, unconditional offer-making has remained relatively stable, at between 0 and 0.1 per cent.

As a result of these differing patterns, by 2018, larger differences in the use of unconditional offers had emerged between providers in the different UK countries. In England, 7.6 per cent of offers made by providers were unconditional in 2018, while in Wales, 4.9 per cent of offers were unconditional.

For providers in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the proportion of unconditional offers was 1.2 and less than 0.1 per cent respectively, which is significantly lower than for England and Wales. This is reflected by the overall acceptance rates for Scotland and Northern Ireland, which were both around 10 percentage points lower than England and Wales in the 2018 cycle. This is a reflection of the number control policies that exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland.



3.2 Over 8 per cent of offers from providers in both England and Wales had an unconditional component in 2018

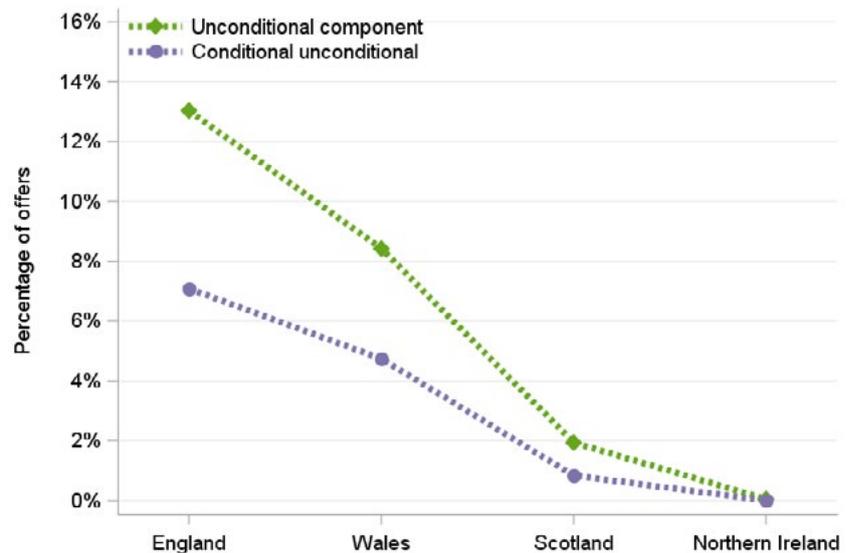
Similar patterns to those seen for unconditional offer-making to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year olds across UK countries, are seen for the proportion of offers identified as conditional unconditional, or as having an unconditional component (Figure 5).

In 2018, providers in England were more likely to make conditional unconditional offers than providers in the other countries of the UK. 7.1 per cent of offers made by providers in England, to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, were identified as being conditional unconditional. This compares to 4.7 per cent of offers by providers in Wales, 0.8 per cent of offers by providers in Scotland, and less than 0.1 per cent of offers by providers in Northern Ireland.

In England, Wales, and Scotland, the proportion of offers identified as having an unconditional component were even higher. In 2018, 13.0 per cent of offers by providers in England had an unconditional component, while for providers in Wales, 8.4 per cent of offers had an unconditional component. Providers in Scotland were much less likely to make offers with an unconditional component, with 1.9 per cent of their offers fitting this category. For providers in Northern Ireland, less than 0.1 per cent of their offers were classified as having an unconditional component.

FIGURE 5:

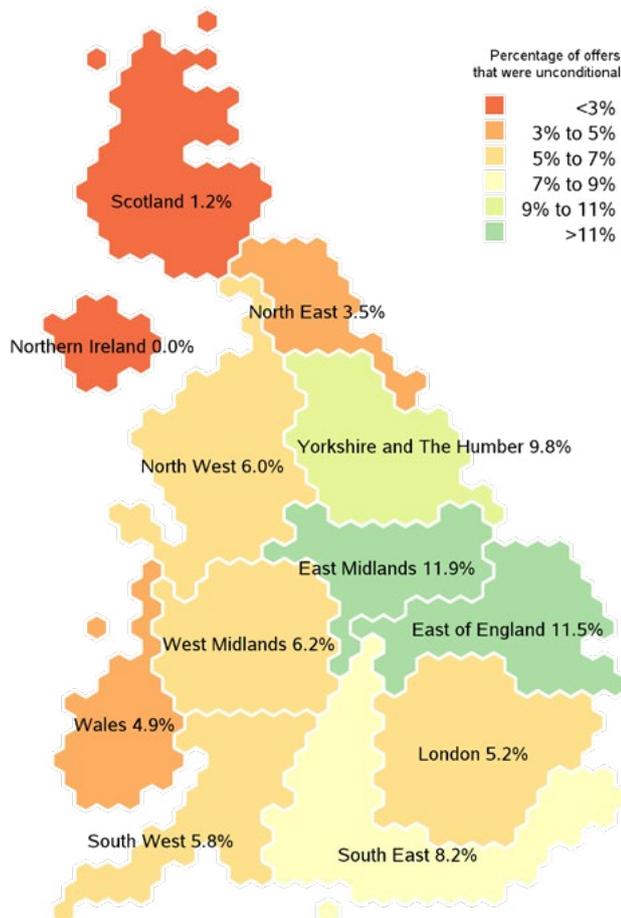
Percentage of offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales in 2018, that were conditional unconditional, or that had an unconditional component, by provider country



4. PROVIDER REGION

4.1 Offers from providers located in the East Midlands and East of England are most likely to be unconditional

Figure 6 shows the proportion of offers to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year old applicants that were unconditional in 2018, split by the region of the providers' locations. The map is designed so that the size of each area approximates the size of its population, and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the areas. Where possible, specific campus locations are used.



While this map shows the overall proportion of offers that are unconditional for all providers in each region, it is worth noting that the practice varies greatly for different providers within each region. For example, for providers in the East Midlands, the proportion of offers that are unconditional at each provider range from fewer than 1 per cent to over 50 per cent.

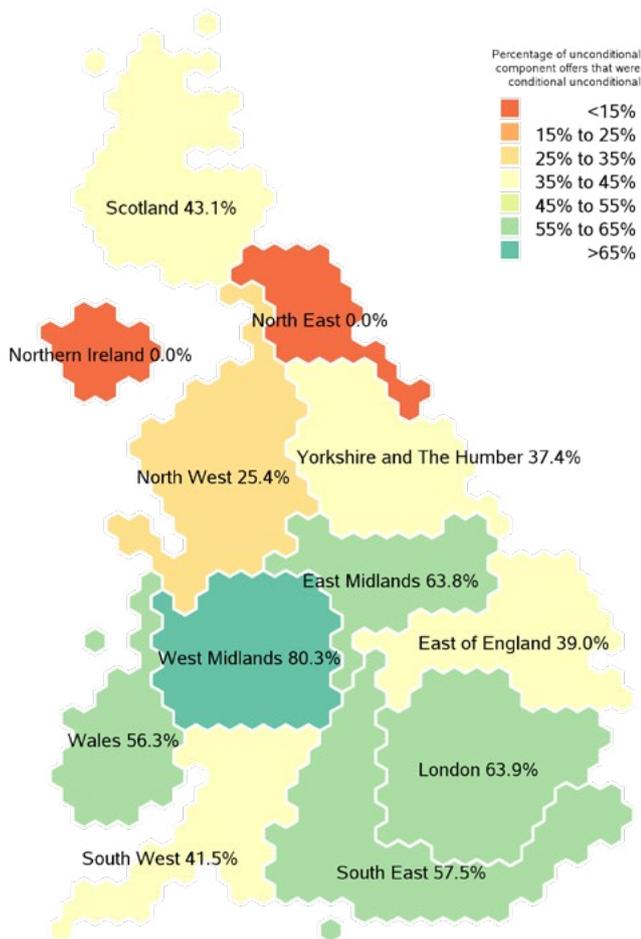
In 2018, the regions with the highest proportion of their offers being unconditional were the East Midlands and the East of England, with 11.9 and 11.5 per cent respectively. The English region with the lowest proportion of unconditional offers was the North East, with 3.5 per cent of their offers being unconditional.

FIGURE 6:

Unconditional offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, by provider region (2018 cycle)

4.2 Out of all offers with an unconditional component, those from the West Midlands and the South East are most likely to be conditional unconditional

Figure 7 shows the proportion of all offers with an unconditional component given to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh 18 year olds in 2018, that were conditional unconditional offers, split by English region and UK country. The proportion of offers with an unconditional component that were conditional unconditional in 2018 ranged from 0 per cent to over 80 per cent.



The North East had the lowest proportion of their offers with an unconditional component being conditional unconditional, out of all the English regions, with 0.0 per cent of offers from providers in this region falling into this category. This was followed by providers in the North West, where just over a quarter were conditional unconditional. Conversely, providers in the West Midlands gave the highest proportion of conditional unconditional offers, at over 80 per cent of offers with an unconditional component.

As shown in figures 4 and 6, providers in Northern Ireland gave very few unconditional offers, and this is reflected in Figure 7, with less than 0.1 per cent of their few unconditional offers being detected as conditional unconditional. For Scottish providers, 43.1 per cent of their offers with an unconditional component were conditional unconditional in 2018. For providers in Wales, the proportion is higher, with over half of their offers with an unconditional component (56.3 per cent) being conditional unconditional.

FIGURE 7:

Proportion of offers with an unconditional component that were conditional unconditional, by provider region (2018 cycle)

5



**PROVIDER
TARIFF
GROUP**

5.1 Unconditional offer-making in England aligns

with patterns of demand and recruitment

Higher education providers across the UK can be grouped based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old acceptances, summarised through UCAS Tariff points. Three groups are created, referred to as higher, medium, and lower tariff providers, which each account for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances between the 2004 and 2011 cycles. Higher tariff providers are those which have accepted, on average, UK 18 year old applicants with the highest Tariff points in the 2004 – 2011 cycles, while lower tariff providers are those which have accepted those with the lowest. The tariff groups are created to enable aggregate analytical reporting, not to classify individual providers. Their purpose is to produce groups of providers for which we can have confidence that any patterns observed are actual trends, as opposed to random variations.

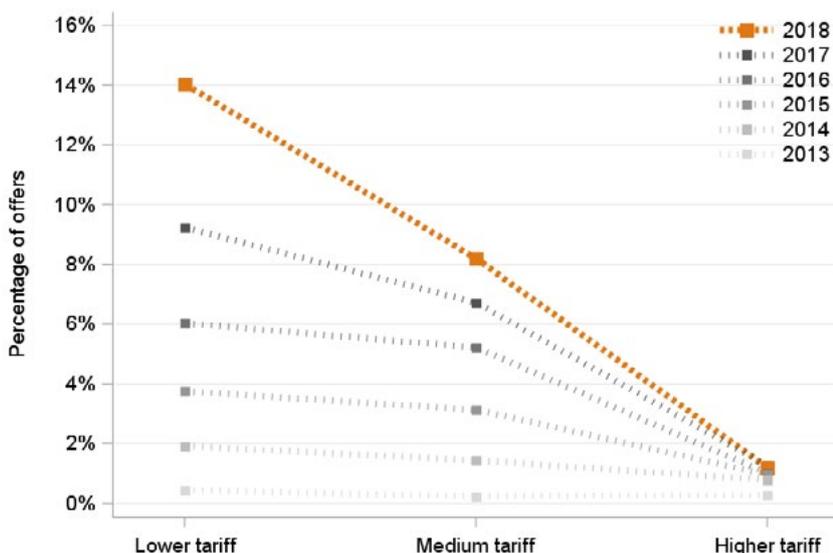
While this analysis groups providers into one of three tariff groups for analytical purposes, unconditional offer-making practice varies widely between providers within each tariff group, so conclusions should not be drawn around the practice of individual providers based on this analysis. For data on individual providers, please see the provider-level unconditional offer reports.

Figure 8 shows the proportion of unconditional offers made to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, by English providers in each tariff group. In 2013, a small proportion of offers made by each tariff group were recorded as unconditional – 0.4 per cent of offers made by lower tariff providers, 0.2 per cent of offers by medium tariff providers, and 0.3 per cent of offers by higher tariff providers.

Since 2013, the proportion of offers made by English providers in each tariff group that were unconditional has increased. By 2018, 14.0 per cent of offers by lower tariff providers were recorded as unconditional, as were 8.2 per cent of offers by medium tariff providers, and 1.2 per cent of offers from higher tariff providers.

FIGURE 8:

Percentage of offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales that were unconditional, by provider tariff group and year (providers in England)



⁴ UCAS Tariff points

⁵ 2018 UCAS Undergraduate unconditional offer-making provider reports

5.2 Wide variation in the range of offer-making behaviours

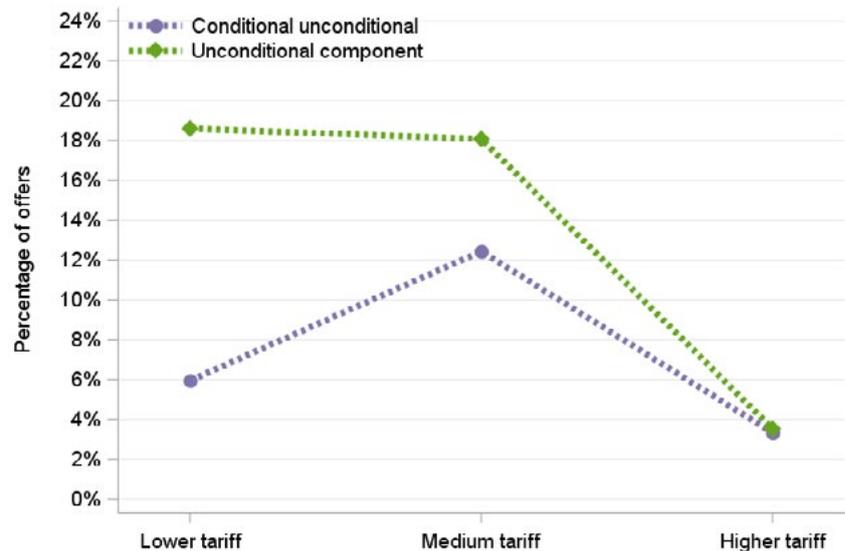
A different pattern of offer-making is seen across tariff groups, when conditional unconditional offers are considered (Figure 9). In 2018, medium tariff providers were most likely to make conditional unconditional offers, with 12.4 per cent of all offers identified as conditional unconditional. The proportion of offers by lower tariff providers, identified as conditional unconditional, was 5.9 per cent. Higher tariff providers were least likely to make conditional unconditional offers, with 3.3 per cent of offers made by this group identified as being of this type.

5.3 The average proportion of offers with an unconditional component varies

Similar shares of offers by lower and medium tariff providers were identified as having an unconditional component in 2018 – 18.6 per cent for lower tariff providers, and 18.1 per cent for medium tariff providers. These proportions are between four and five times higher than the proportion of offers by higher tariff providers, identified as having an unconditional component, which was 3.5 per cent.

FIGURE 9:

Percentage of offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales in 2018 that were conditional unconditional, or had an unconditional component, by provider tariff group (providers in England)



5.4 Approaches to unconditional offer-making appear to differ

The patterns in figures 9 and 10 show the different approaches to unconditional offer-making by tariff groups in 2018. Lower tariff providers were, marginally, the most likely to make offers with an unconditional component. Just under a third of these offers from lower tariff providers were identified as being conditional unconditional.

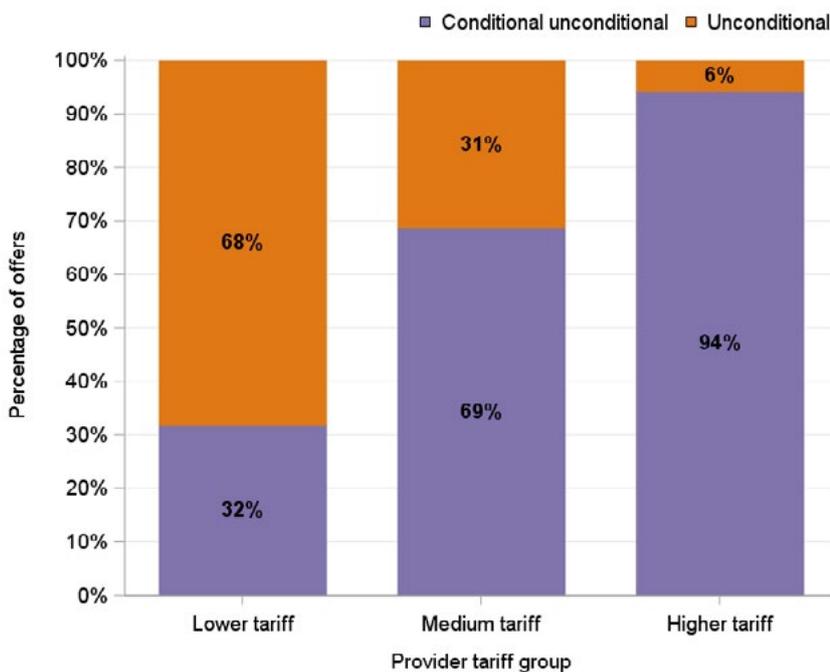
Medium tariff providers were slightly less likely to make offers with an unconditional component, compared to lower tariff providers, but far more likely to make conditional unconditional offers than lower tariff providers. Around two thirds of offers that had an unconditional component by medium tariff providers were conditional unconditional offers.

Higher tariff providers were least likely to make offers with an unconditional component. However, almost all offers that had an unconditional component by higher tariff providers were conditional unconditional offers.

Figure 10 shows the share of offers identified as having an unconditional component, that were also identified as conditional unconditional offers, for each provider tariff group.

FIGURE 10:

Conditional unconditional offers as a share of all offers identified as having an unconditional component, to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, in 2018, by tariff group



ANNEX A

A NOTE ON SCOTLAND

A.1 Overall applicant coverage

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.

A.2 Coverage of unconditional offers

18 year old applicants domiciled in Scotland are not considered in this report. This is because many have already gained the qualifications (typically SQA Highers) necessary for admission to some undergraduate courses in Scotland, and so receive unconditional offers on this basis. It is for this reason that the coverage of Scottish providers in this report relates solely to offers given to English, Northern Irish, and Welsh domiciled 18 year olds. For the rest of the UK, 18 year old applicants typically apply before taking their final Level 3 examinations, and instead apply with predicted grades, and GCSE results, meaning coverage of providers in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales covers all 18 year old applicants domiciled in these countries.

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. For applicants outside the UK, a cohort cut-off of 31 August has been used.
Applicant	A person who has made an application in the UCAS system. Counts of applicants include those applying through the main scheme, late applicants direct to Clearing, and Records of Prior Acceptance (RPAs).
Conditional offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant, subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
Decline	The decision by an applicant to decline an offer, and thus not select it as either their firm or insurance choice.
Conditional unconditional offer	An offer made by a provider which is originally stated as being conditional, then is converted to an unconditional offer once the applicant selects that offer as their firm (first) choice.
Firm choice	An offer made by a provider which has been confirmed by the applicant as their first choice. These can be either conditional (dependent on achieving specified conditions), or unconditional (applicant has met specific conditions, and is assumed to be accepted or placed at the provider).
Insurance choice	An offer made by a provider which has been confirmed by the applicant as their second choice, in case the conditions of their firm choice are not met. These can be either conditional (dependent on achieving specified requirements) or unconditional (no further requirements to be met).
30 June application deadline	The final date by which an applicant can submit up to five applications to study on a course of higher education through the UCAS main scheme. Applicants who apply after this date go directly into Clearing.
Largest 140 providers	The providers that have accepted applicants through UCAS each year from 2012 to 2018, having an average of 500 or more acceptances each year.
Offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant. May be subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
Offer description	Description of the offer, as communicated by the provider to the applicant through UCAS.

GLOSSARY

Offer with an unconditional component	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant, that is not subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria. Offers with an unconditional component cover all unconditional offers, plus conditional unconditional offers that the applicant does not select as their firm choice.
Provider	A higher education provider – a university or college.
Reply	Applicant response to any offers received – this could be firm, insurance, or decline.
Tariff group	Provider tariff groups are based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old acceptances (summarised through UCAS Tariff points). There are three tariff groups: lower tariff, medium tariff, and higher tariff. Each group of providers accounted for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances in recent cycles.
Unconditional offer	Provider decision to grant a place to an applicant, that is not subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria. This is based on the offer status at the 30 June application deadline. An unconditional offer will include conditional unconditional offers that were selected as an applicant's firm choice.

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The UCAS logo is displayed in white text on a dark grey background. The letters 'UCAS' are in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter 'A' is stylized with a red diagonal line through it.