

# Unconditional offers – an update for 2018

**July 2018**

## Unconditional offers

Offers made by providers to applicants are described as either conditional or unconditional. This depends on whether the provider wishes to attach certain conditions, usually related to the academic attainment of specific qualifications and subject examination results.

Unconditional offers have always been a feature of university and college admissions, and used in a variety of circumstances. For example:

- to admit mature students who have already achieved sufficient qualifications to meet entry criteria
- to make offers to applicants following interviews, auditions, or portfolio reviews
- to reduce stress placed on some applicants during the high-pressure examination period

More recently, unconditional offers have been used as one of a variety of approaches to attract and retain interest from applicants in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

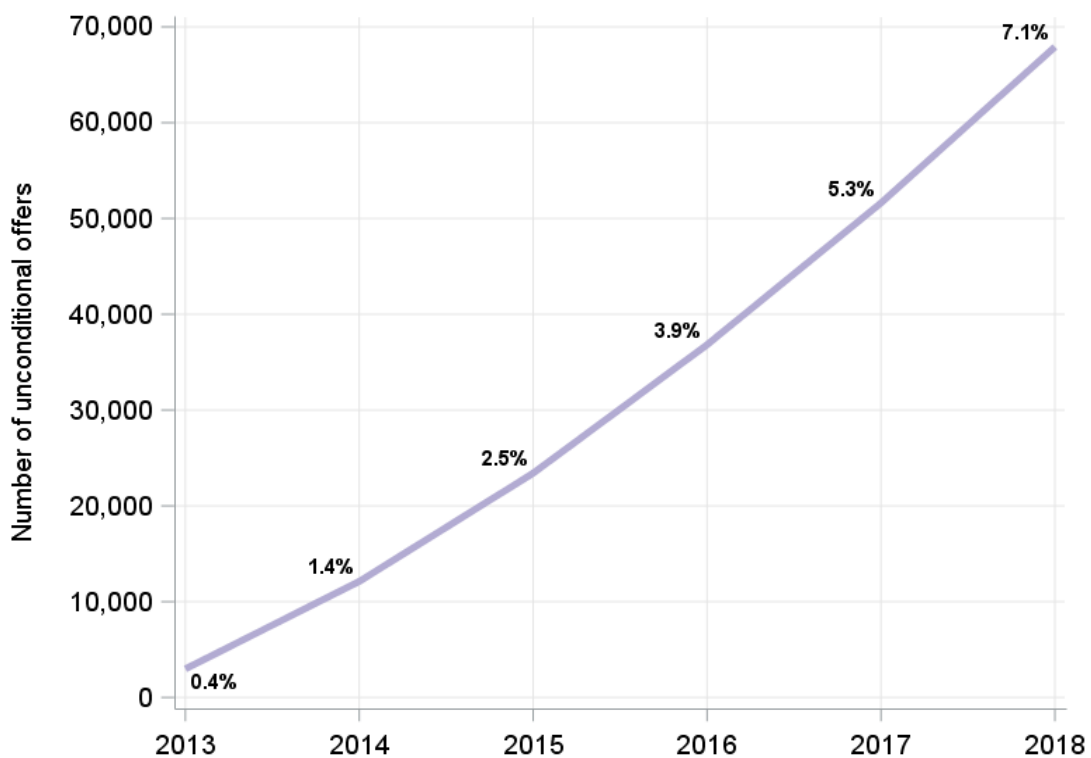
The increased prevalence of unconditional offer-making in recent cycles has brought with it a greater interest in the volume of this practice, especially to applicants who have not been awarded their final qualifications. To better understand this trend, this report focuses on 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales – a group that typically apply with most of their qualifications still pending, and with predicted, rather than achieved, grades. As most Scottish applicants have Scottish Higher qualifications, which often form part of the entry requirements for courses, they are not considered here.

## Unconditional offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, increase by nearly a third, in 2018

The [UCAS 2017 End of Cycle Report](#) showed how the number of unconditional offers made to 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales increased between 2013 and 2017. The number of unconditional offers made in each year across this period are shown in Figure 1 below, alongside the number for 2018.

In 2013, there were 2,985 offers recorded as unconditional, accounting for 0.4 per cent of all offers to that group of applicants. By 2017, unconditional offers increased to 51,615, accounting for 5.3 per cent of all offers made that year. In 2018, the number of unconditional offers increased again, by 16,295 (+32 per cent) to 67,915, accounting for 7.1 per cent of all offers.

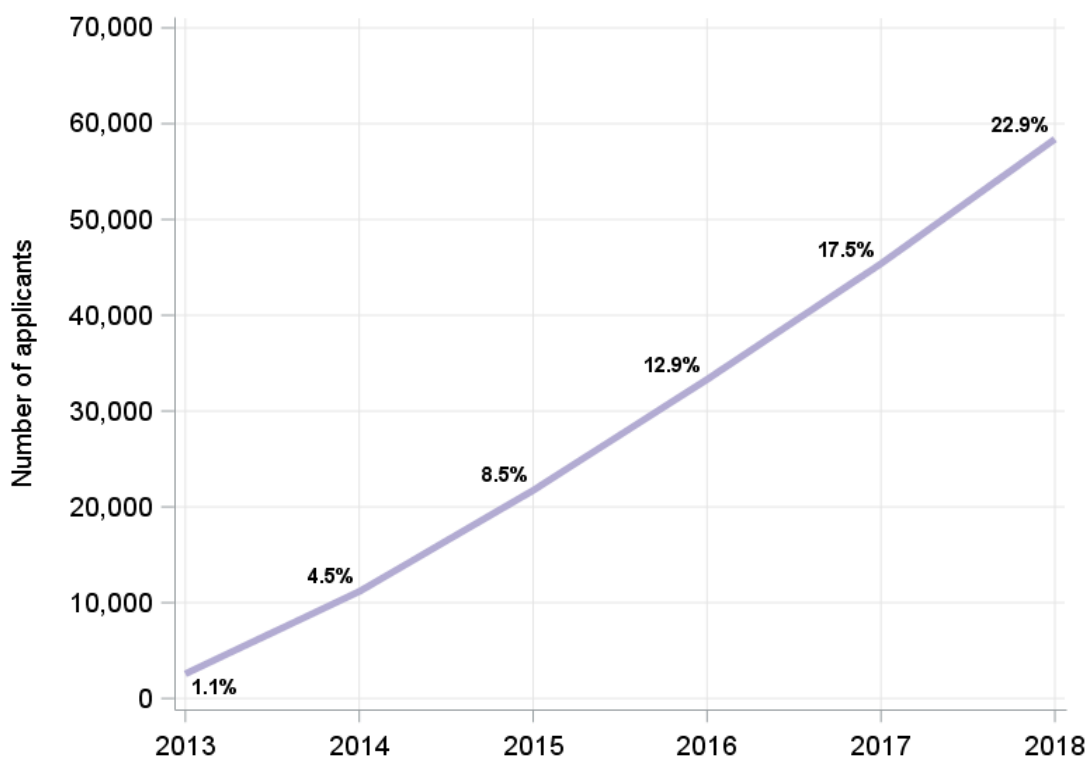
**Figure 1: Number and percentage of all offers to 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales that were unconditional, by year**



## More than a fifth of 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, received at least one unconditional offer in 2018

The number and percentage of 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales who received at least one unconditional offer is shown in Figure 2. In 2013, 2,570 applicants (1.1 per cent) received at least one unconditional offer. Since then, the number and percentage of applicants receiving at least one unconditional offer increased each year, reaching 45,385 (17.5 per cent) in 2017. In 2018, the number increased again, by 29 per cent, to 58,385, meaning more than a fifth (22.9 per cent) of 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, received at least one unconditional offer.

**Figure 2: Number and percentage of 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales who received an unconditional offer, by year**



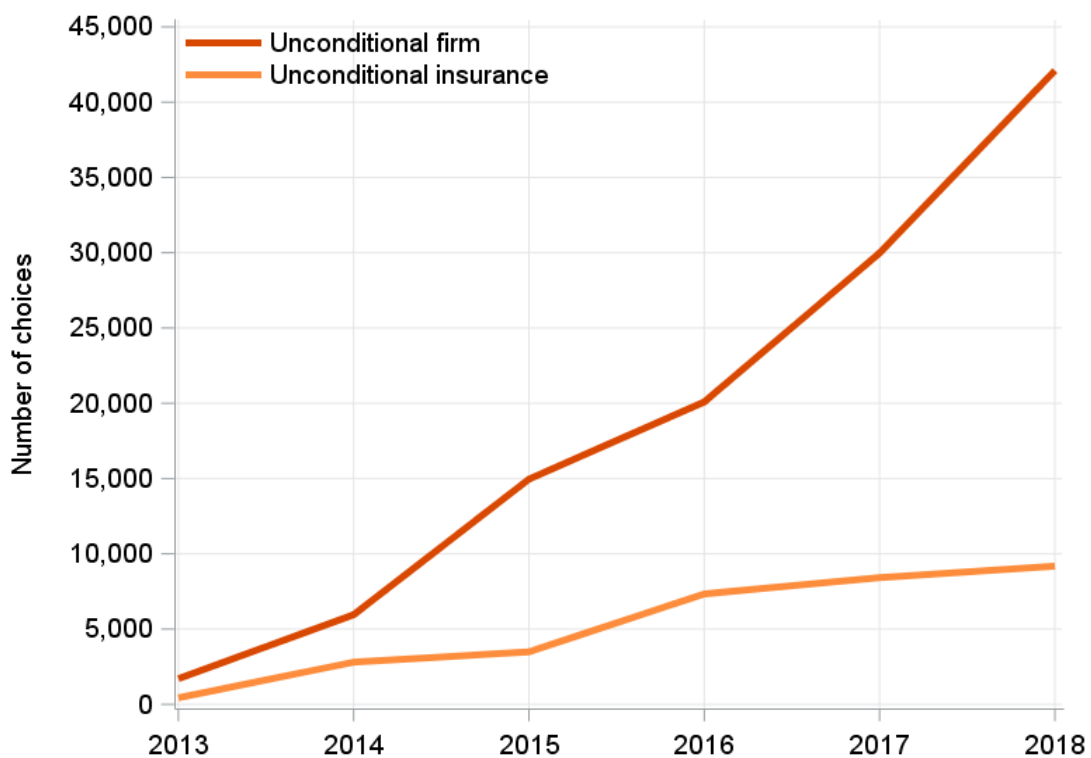
**42,100 unconditional offers selected as firm in 2018, with a further 9,185 selected as insurance**

When an offer is made, the applicant may select it as their firm choice, their insurance choice, or decline the offer. The number of unconditional firm choices, and unconditional insurance choices, resulting from offers each year between 2013 and 2018, is shown in Figure 3.

Since 2013, the number of unconditional firm choices has increased each year. In 2013, there were 1,710 unconditional firm choices. By 2017, this number increased to 29,980. In 2018, the number increased again, by 40 per cent, to 42,100.

The number of unconditional insurance choices is lower than the number of unconditional firm choices. However, since 2013, the number of unconditional insurance choices has increased each year. In 2013, there were 435 unconditional insurance choices, increasing to 8,420 in 2017. The number increased again in 2018, by 9 per cent, to 9,185.

**Figure 3: Number of unconditional firm, and unconditional insurance choices held by 18 year olds from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales**



## Glossary

<b>Age</b>	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, and on 1 July for Northern Ireland. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts.
<b>Applicant</b>	A person who has made an application in the UCAS system. Counts of applicants in this report refer only to those who applied through the main scheme.
<b>Conditional offer</b>	Provider decision to offer a place to an applicant, subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
<b>Decline</b>	The decision by an applicant to decline an offer, and not select it as either their firm or insurance choice.
<b>Firm choice</b>	An offer made by a provider, which has been confirmed by the applicant as their first choice.
<b>Insurance choice</b>	An offer made by a provider, which has been confirmed by the applicant as their second choice.
<b>30 June application deadline</b>	The final date by which an applicant can submit up to five choices to study on a higher education course through the UCAS main scheme. Applicants who apply after this date go directly into Clearing.
<b>Main scheme</b>	The main UCAS Undergraduate application scheme, through which up to five course choices can be applied for. Applications can be submitted in September.
<b>Offer</b>	Provider decision to offer a place to an applicant. May be subject to the applicant satisfying academic and/or other criteria.
<b>Provider</b>	A higher education provider – a university or college.
<b>Reply</b>	Applicant response to an offer they received – this could be firm, insurance, or decline.
<b>Unconditional offer</b>	Provider decision to offer a place to an applicant that is not subject to the them satisfying academic, and/or other criteria. Based on the offer status at the 30 June application deadline.