



UK Application rates by country, sex, age and background (2013 Cycle, January deadline)

UCAS Analysis and Research, 30 January 2013

Key Findings

January deadline application rates

- January deadline application rates are the first comprehensive indicators of changes in demand for higher education from the UK.
- Application rates – the proportion of population who apply – are the best measures of changes in application behaviour as they account for the size of the population. The 18 year population has reduced in size in 2013, continuing a trend so that there are now 7 to 8 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.

Application rates of 18 year olds by country

- 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 one percentage point to 35 per cent in 2013. This increase is typical of the trend between 2006 and 2011 and takes the application rate back to the 2011 level after its decrease in 2012.
- Application rates for 18 year olds in Northern Ireland have increased to 48 per cent, application rates in Scotland (32 per cent) and Wales (30 per cent) are similar to the 2012 cycle.

Application rates of 18 year olds by background

- Application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland increase to the highest levels recorded in 2013; in Wales application rates for this group decline slightly (half a percentage point) but remain close to the high recorded in 2012.
- In 2013, 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas across the UK are between 50 per cent and 80 per cent more likely to apply for higher education than in 2004.
- Adjusting for the population size, in the 2004 cycle for every 10 who applied from disadvantaged areas, 45 applied from advantaged areas; in 2013 this has fallen to 27 have applied from advantaged areas for every 10 who have applied from disadvantaged areas.

Application rates of 18 year olds by sex and background

- 18 year women remain more likely to apply to higher education than men – ranging from a third more likely in England and Northern Ireland to over 40 per cent more likely in Scotland and Wales.
- In England, 18 year old women are more likely to apply than men across all backgrounds but to a greater extent in disadvantaged areas (50 per cent more likely) than advantaged areas (20 per cent more likely).

Application rates of older age groups

- Application rate trends for age groups older than 18 are less clear to interpret at this point in the cycle.
- Application rates for these older groups show mixed trends but are generally similar or higher than in 2012.

Reapplication rates

- 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 2013 cycle is 50 per cent in England, 45 per cent in Wales, 38 per cent in Scotland and 37 per cent in Northern Ireland.
- These reapplication rates are similar to levels in the 2011 cycle and substantially higher than levels typical in 2007 and 2008.
- In England, 2013 reapplication rates for those unplaced holding 'AAA' (87 per cent) are higher than for those unplaced holding 'AAB' (74 per cent), 'ABB' (71 per cent), 'BBB' (71 per cent). Reapplication rates for each of these grade profiles are similar to the previous cycle.

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.

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. Population trends for the 18 year old cohort are set out in Annex A.

The main analysis looks at trends in the application rate of 18 year olds, by country, 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.

Application rates for older age groups by country 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.

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.

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

The trend in January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by UK country is shown in Figure 1. For all countries, application rates generally increased in the five years leading up to 2011. There is no indication, in these application rates, of an above trend application rate from England in 2011. If young people who would normally have applied at age 19 in 2012 chose to apply at age 18 in 2011 instead, then the 18 year old application rate would have been expected to increase by more than typical year on year increases. If it is assumed that the trend of increasing application rates since 2006 would have continued in 2011, then the patterns observed suggest that there was no overall bringing forward of application year by this cohort in anticipation of the changes to higher education in 2012.

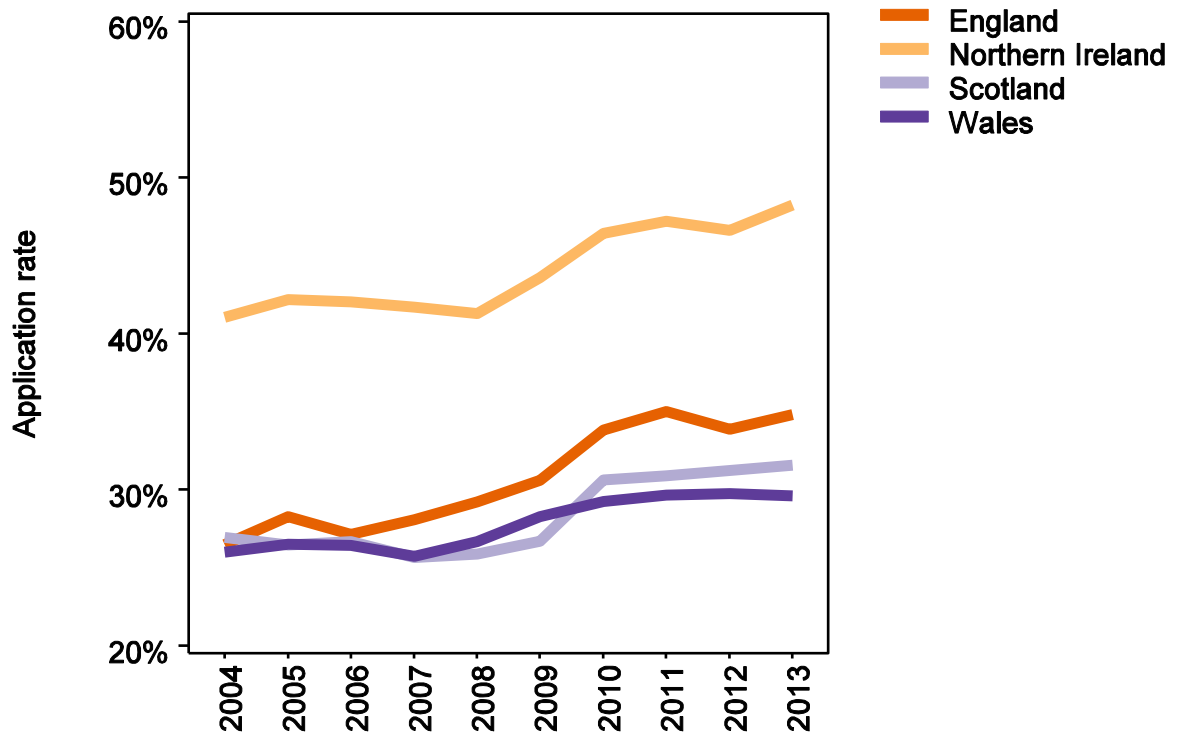
In the 2012 cycle, the application rate from England decreased by just over 1 percentage point, taking the application rate to 2 percentage points, less than might have been expected under an assumption that the trend since 2006 of increases of around one percentage point a year had continued. The application rates for Scotland and Wales stayed broadly the same and for Northern Ireland decreased slightly. However, these changes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were within the range of expected variability given the relatively small populations.

For 2013, the application rates from Northern Ireland increased by 1.6 percentage points to 48.2 per cent. In Scotland, application rates continue the recent trend of increasing slightly (0.3 percentage points per year) to 31.5 per cent. Application rates in Wales decreased slightly (-0.1 percentage points) to 29.6 per cent, but this is within the range of expected year to year variability given the relatively small population.

In England, the application rate in 2013 increases by 0.9 percentage points to 34.8 per cent. This increase is similar to the typical increases seen between 2006 and 2011 but the application rate remains 2 percentage points below where it would be if there had been a similarly typical increase of 1 percentage point in 2012 as well.

The application rates for Northern Ireland and Scotland are the highest recorded in the period. The application rates for England and Wales are near (within a quarter of a percentage point) the highest values recorded.

Figure 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by 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 2 to 5. The application rates for women are substantially higher than those for men in all countries of the UK.

In England, in 2013, 40.0 per cent of 18 year old women have applied compared with 29.9 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 2013.

The same proportional difference in application rates is observed in Northern Ireland where, in 2013, young women are 33 per cent more likely to apply than men. In Scotland and Wales the proportional difference in application rates between women and men is higher at around 42 to 44 per cent. Within 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 2 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from England by sex

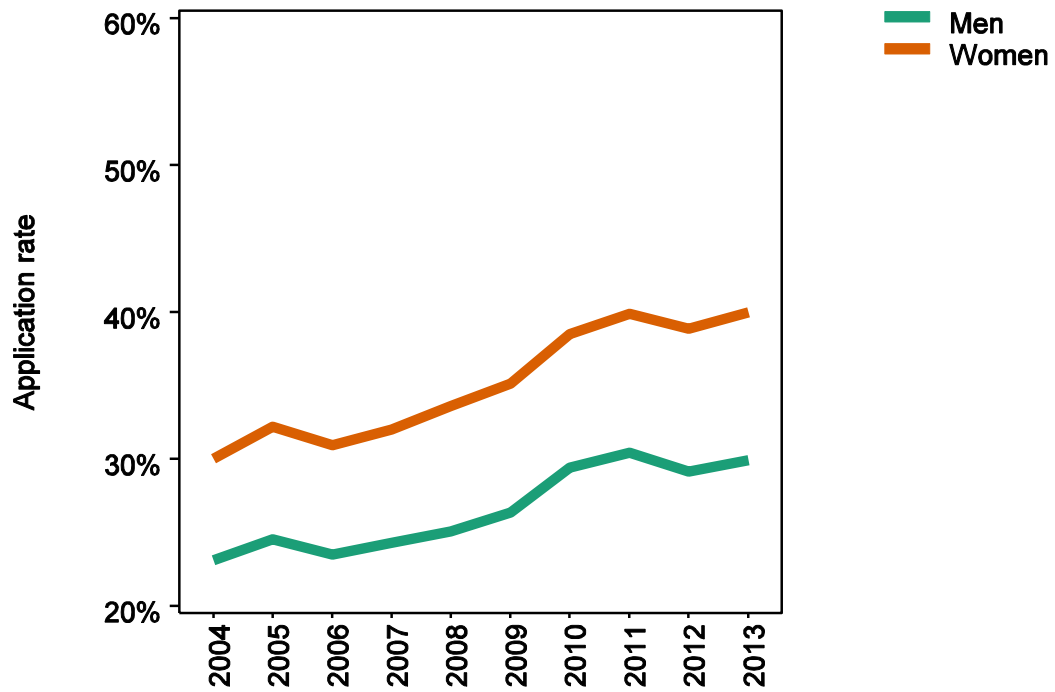


Figure 3 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Northern Ireland by sex

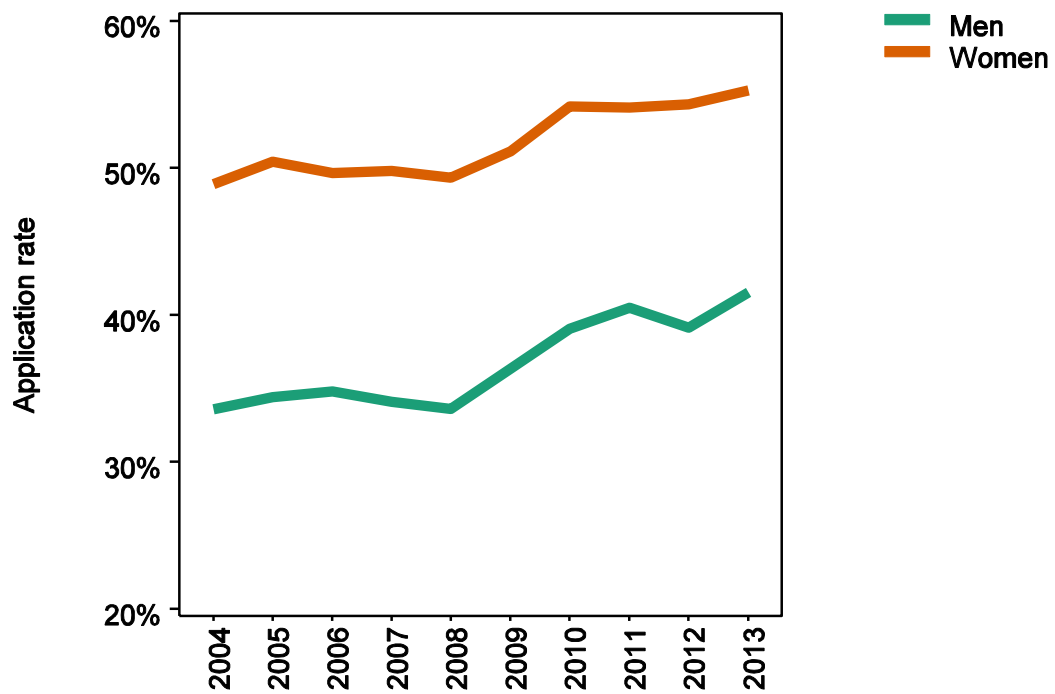


Figure 4 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Scotland by sex

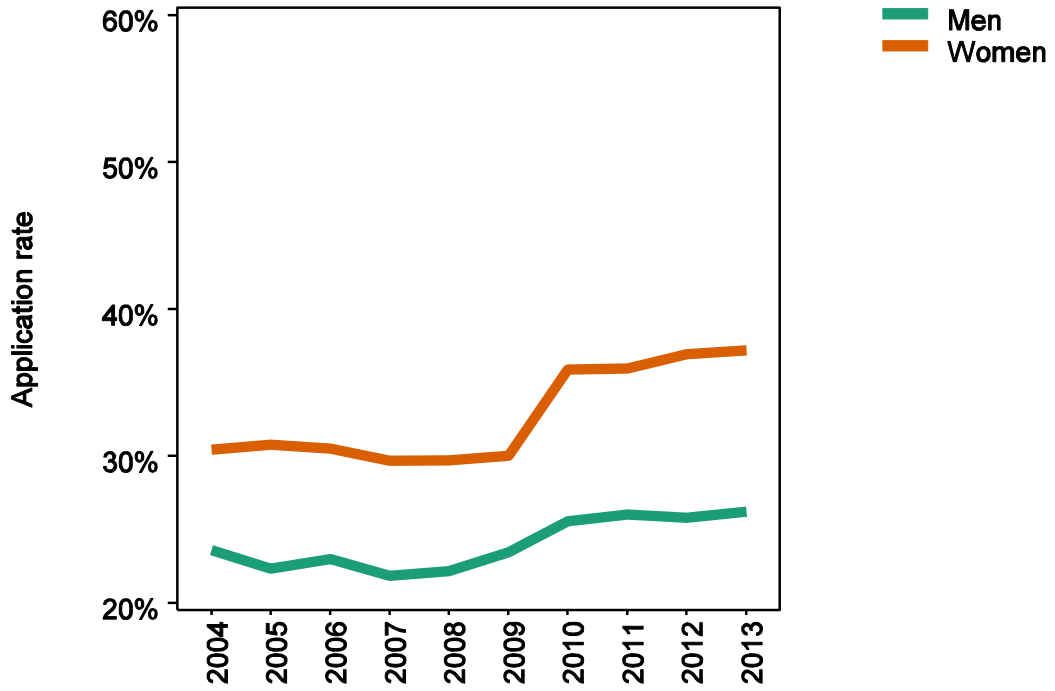
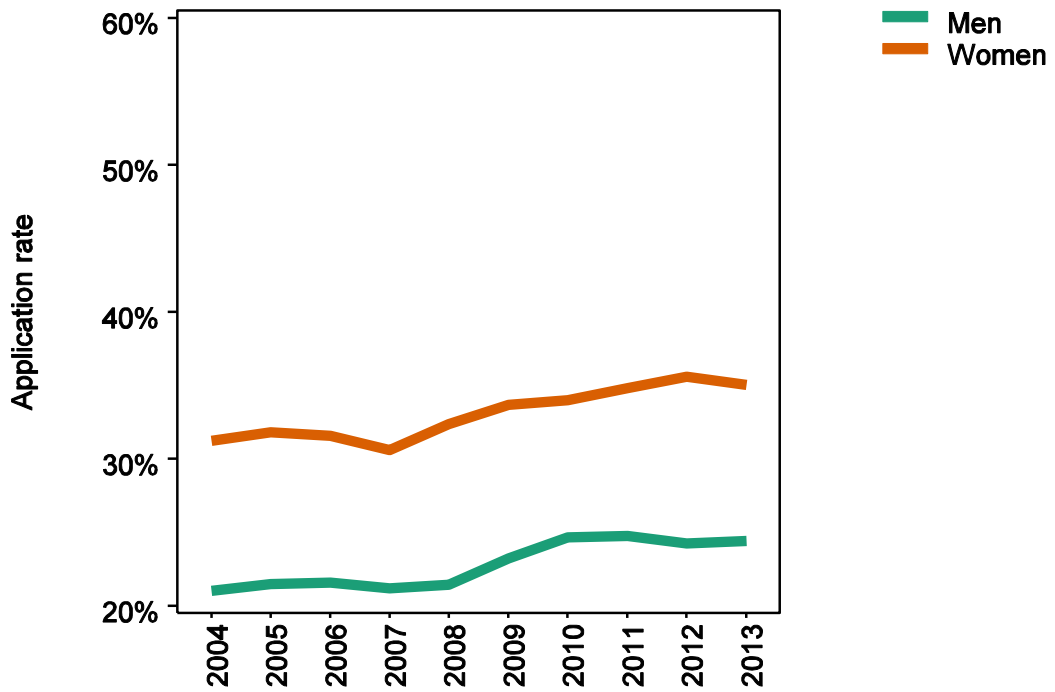


Figure 5 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Wales by sex



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) 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).

Figure 6 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 19.5 per cent in 2013. This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas in England are over 80 per cent more likely to apply to higher education in 2013 than nine years ago.

A similar pattern is evident across the UK: 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland were around 60 per cent more likely to apply in 2013 than in 2004, around 80 per cent more likely in Scotland and around 50 per cent more likely in Wales. The application rate in Wales decreased very slightly (-0.5 percentage points) in 2013 compared to 2012 but this is within the range of typical year to year variations given the small population.

The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged grouping (quintile 5) are shown in Figure 7. 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 or in recent cycles. In England, the application rate for the most advantaged group in 2013 is similar to that in 2012. 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 2.6 percentage point decrease in 2012.

In 2013, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in all countries are around 2.5 to 3.5 times as great as the application rates from the most disadvantaged areas. In England, 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are 2.7 times more likely to apply to higher education than those

from the most disadvantaged areas in 2013. In 2004, 18 year olds from the same areas were 4.5 times more likely to apply than those from the most disadvantaged areas (4.2 in 2005). 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.

Figure 6 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 1)

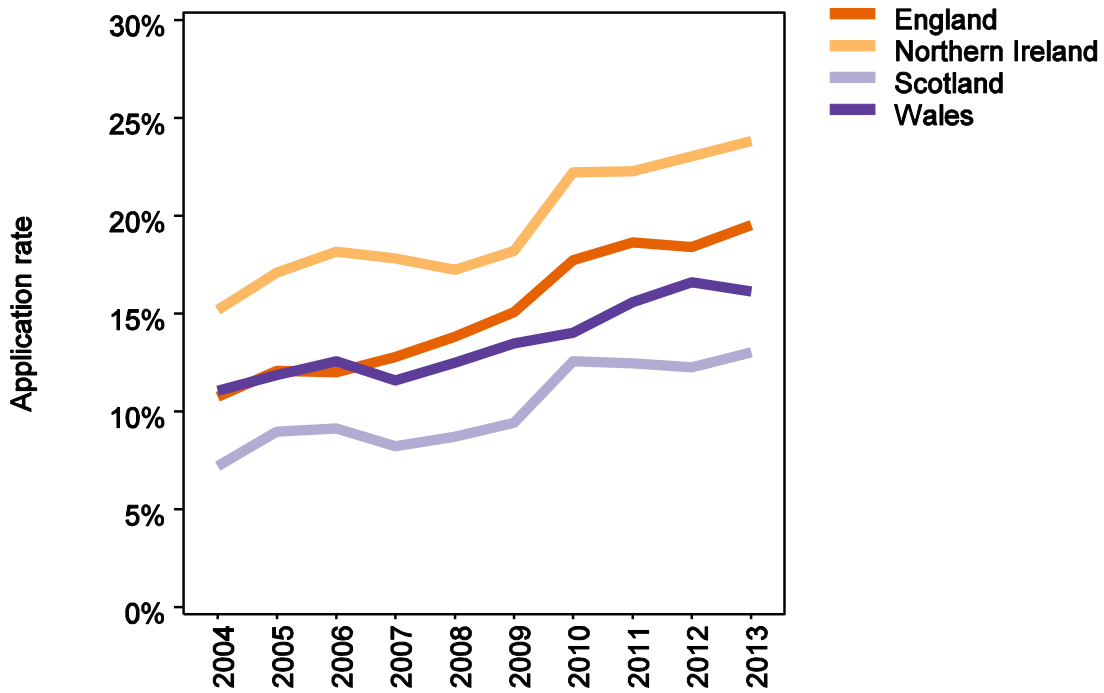
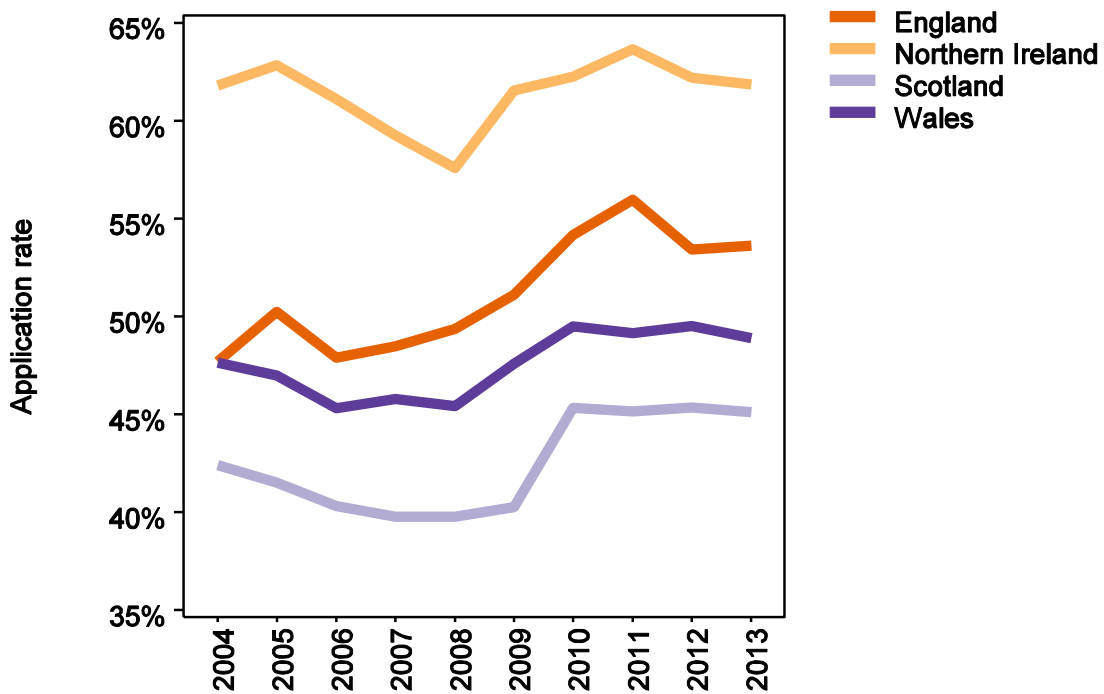


Figure 7 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 5)



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

Figure 8 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 9. 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 women are 50 per cent more likely to apply compared with advantaged areas where they are 20 per cent more likely to apply.

In disadvantaged areas the difference in application rates between women and men has narrowed in 2013 compared with 2012. Men in the most disadvantaged areas are 9 per cent more likely to apply in 2013, whereas women in the same areas are 4 per cent more likely to apply in 2013 compared with 2012.

Figure 8 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 1) by sex

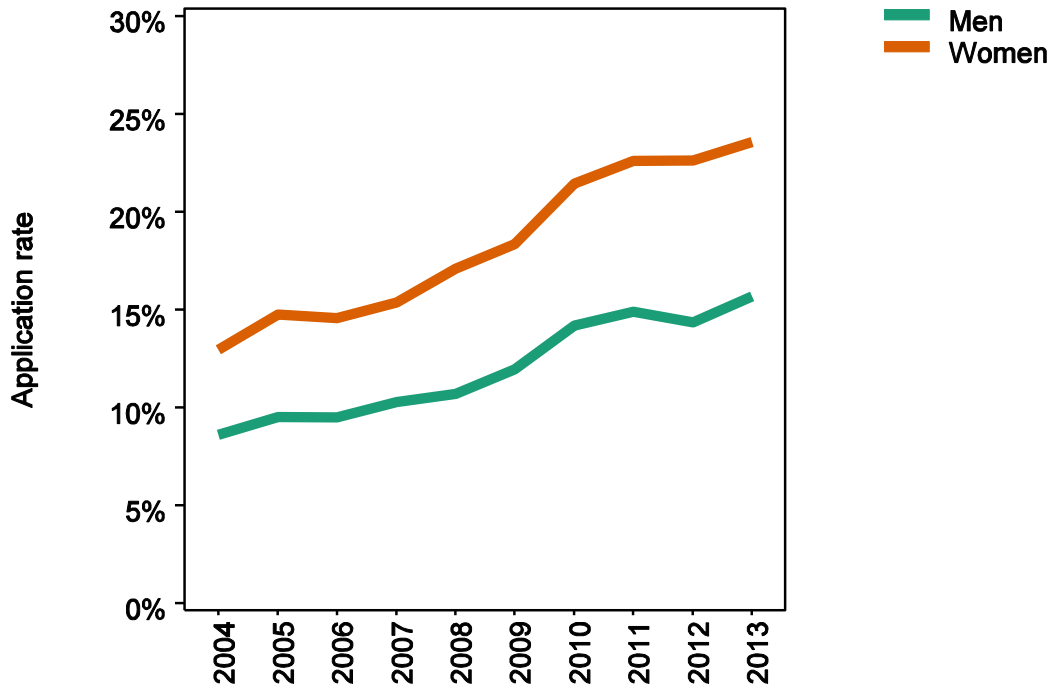
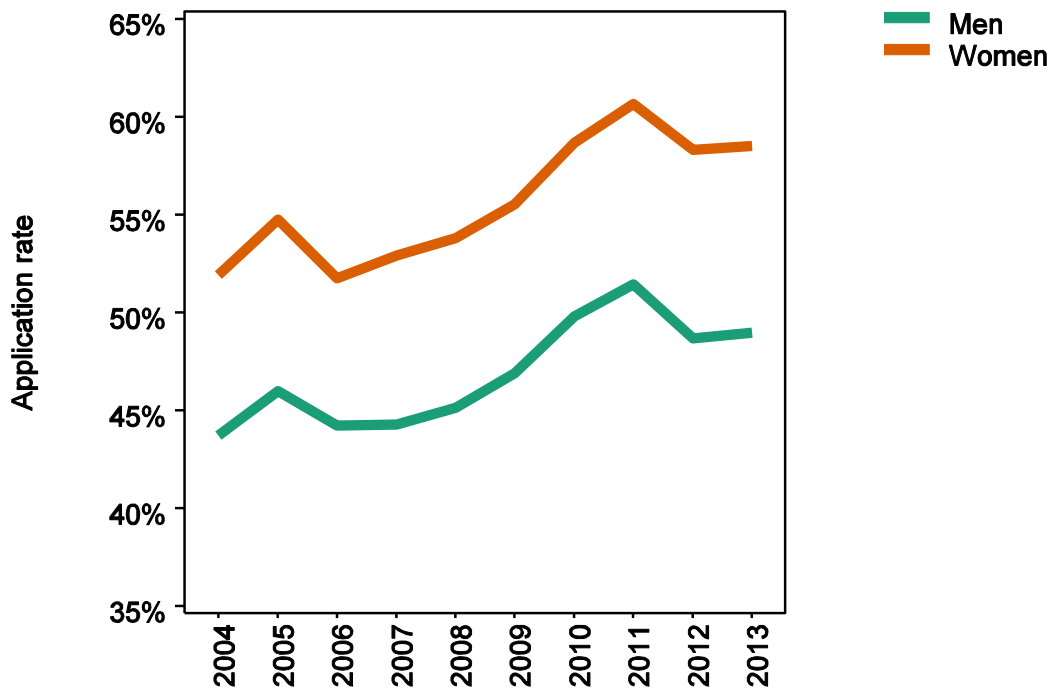


Figure 9 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR2 quintile 5) by sex



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. In particular, the 19 year old application rates are especially hard to interpret because they can be related to acceptance and entry rates at age 18. In particular, if a higher proportion of 18 year old applicants are accepted then it is likely to reduce the number of 19 year old applicants in the subsequent cycle (since unplaced 18 year old applicants have a high reapplication rate).

In addition, 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. An analysis of the application rates for older age groups up to the 2012 cycle that includes these courses is provided in the UCAS report [‘How have applications for full-time undergraduate higher education in the UK changed in 2012?’](#)

Figures 10 to 13 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 2013 across all countries. In England, the application rates of most older age groups have generally increased from 2012, are slightly lower than 2010 and 2011, but higher than all other cycles. For those aged over 30 there has been a slight fall in application rates in 2013, but the application rates remain greater than in 2009. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the application rates of older age groups in 2013 have generally continued recent trends of slight annual increases.

Figure 10 January deadline application rates from England by age

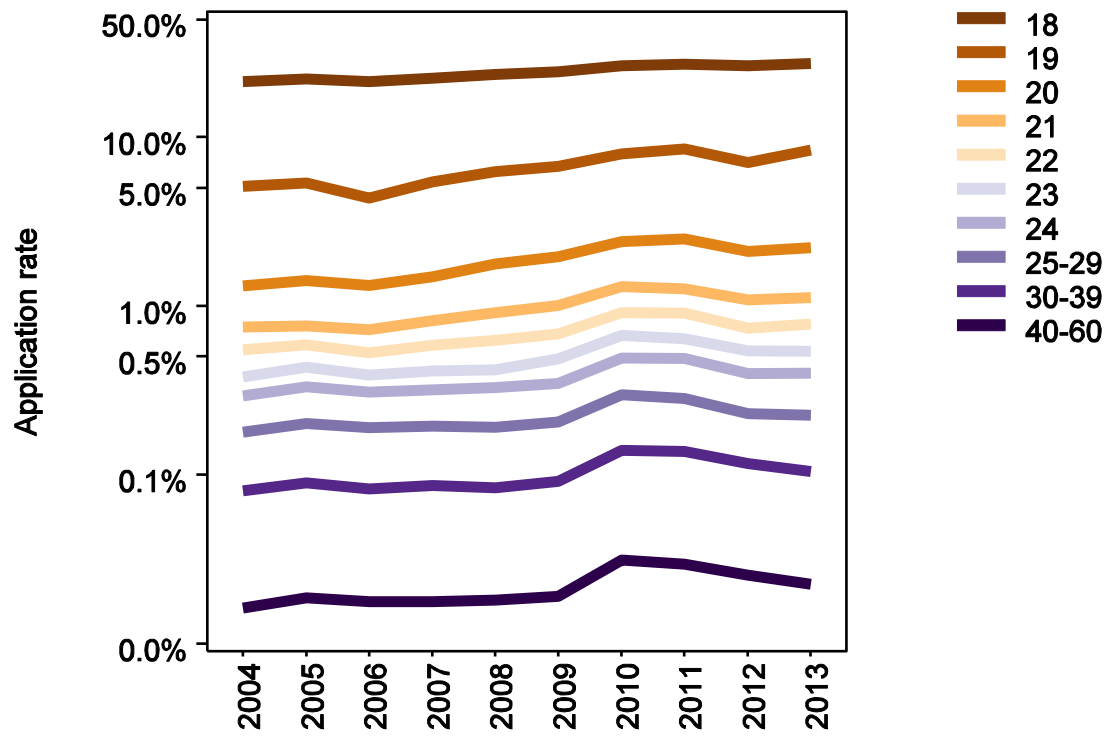


Figure 11 January deadline application rates from Northern Ireland by age

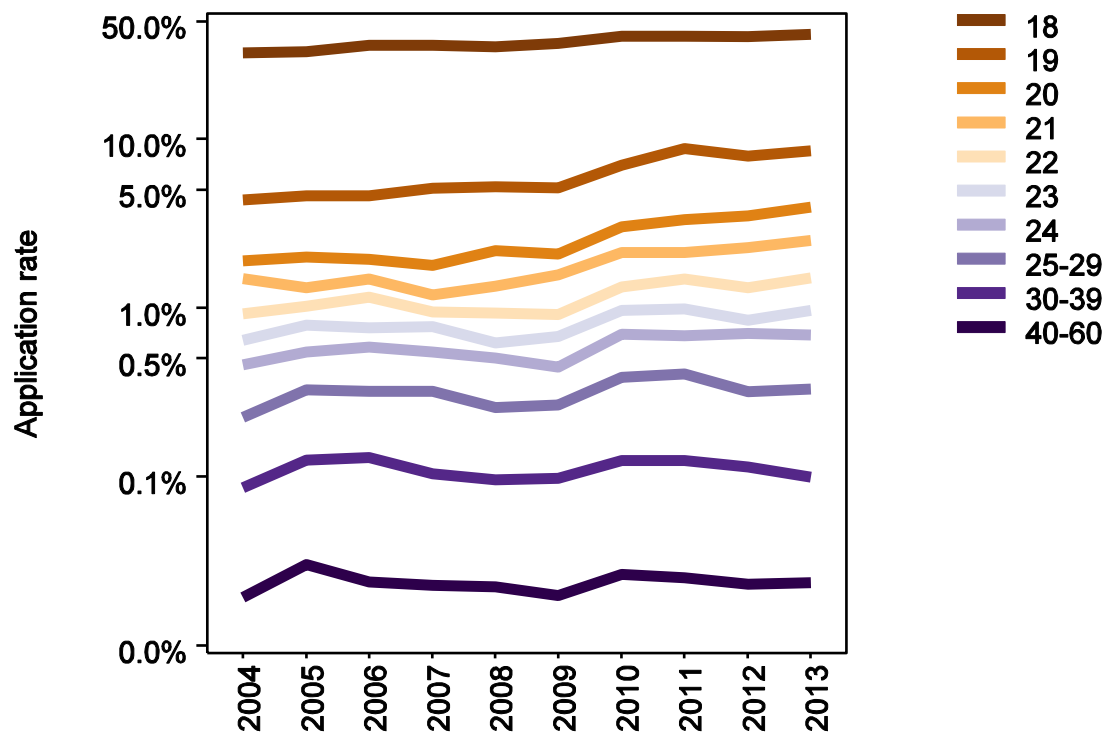


Figure 12 January deadline application rates from Scotland by age

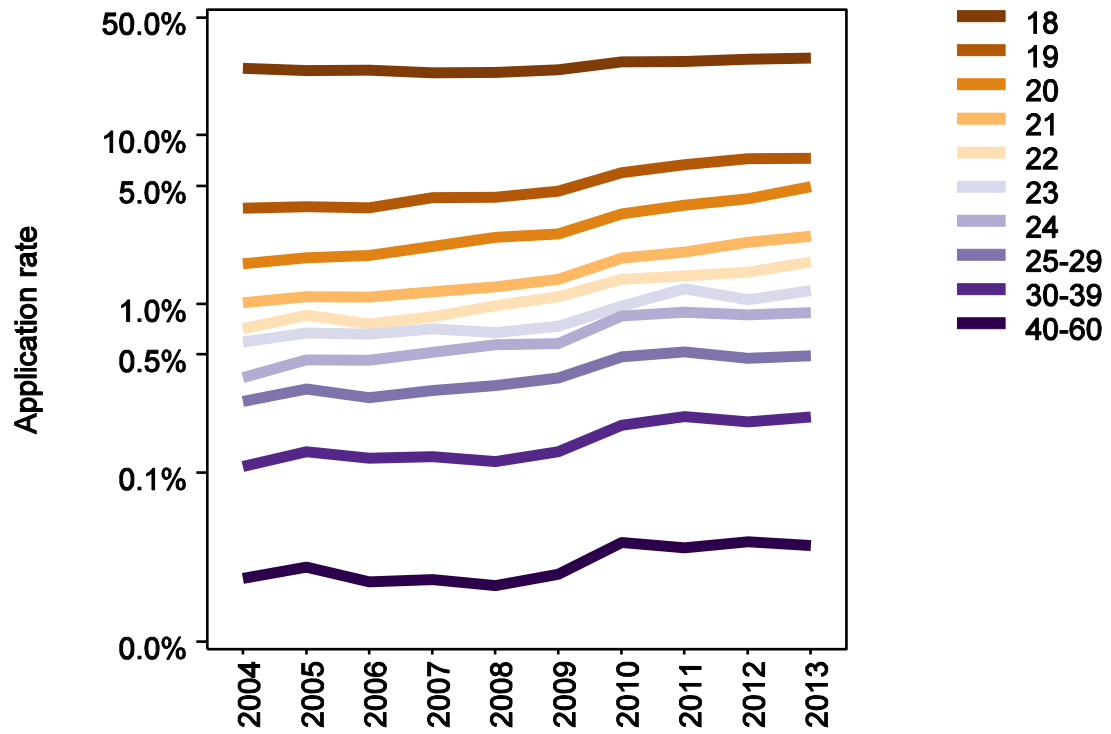
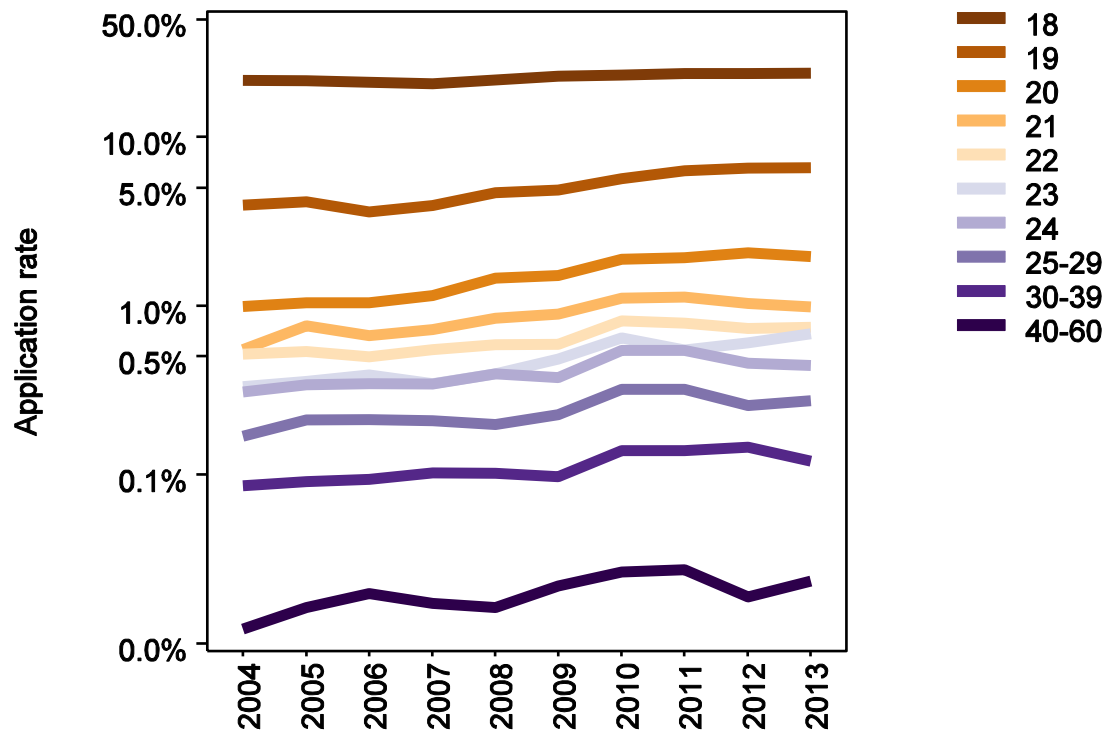


Figure 13 January deadline application rates from Wales by age



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 (see pages 25, 82-83 in the [UCAS End of Cycle Report 2012](#)).

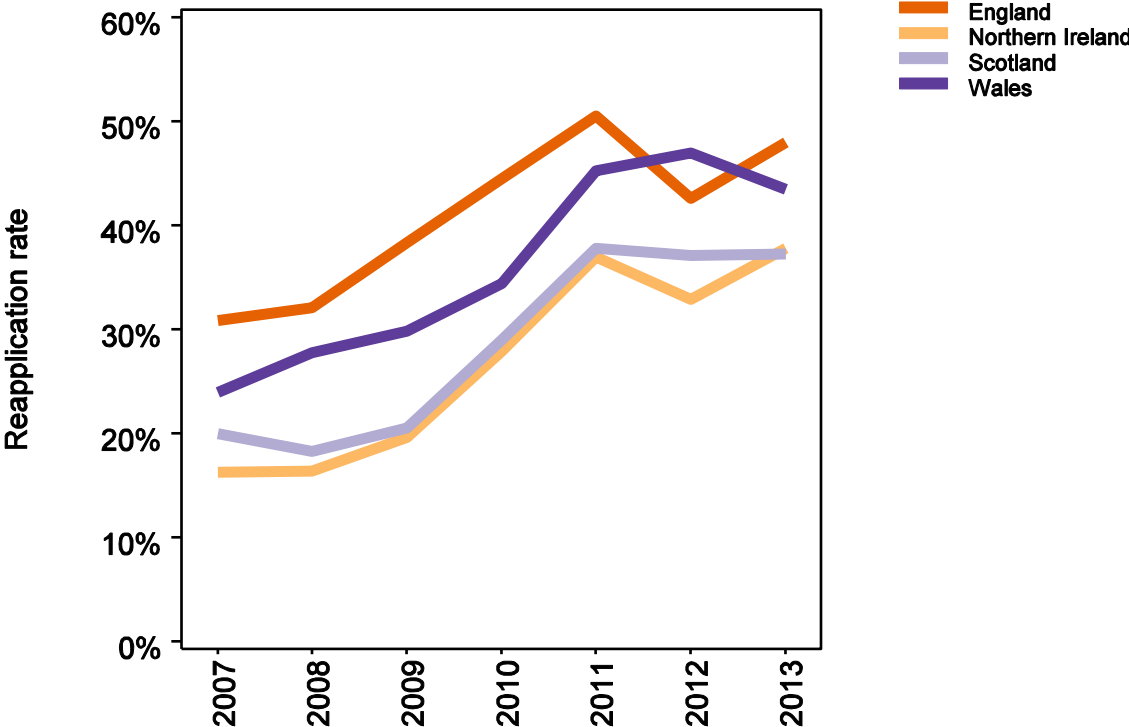
Some of these unplaced 18 year old applicants reapply the following cycle, aged 19. The proportion of the unplaced applicants who reapply in this way is the reapplication rate. Trends in this statistic can indicate both the extent of remaining demand for entry into higher education at the end of the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

Figure 14 shows the reapplication rates for unplaced 18 year olds by UK country of domicile. The rates are referenced by the cycle in which they reapply; for example the proportion of unplaced 18 year old applicants from the 2012 cycle who reapply aged 19 in the 2013 cycle is shown against 2013.

Reapplication rates increased for all countries in the 2010 and 2011 cycles, mirroring the fall in acceptance rates for 18 year olds in the 2009 and 2010 cycles. The reapplication rates in 2011 of 18 year olds unplaced at the end of the 2010 cycle were 50 per cent in England, 45 per cent in Wales, 38 per cent in Scotland and 37 per cent in Northern Ireland. In 2012, the reapplication rate 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 2013 cycle reapplication rates for England are 48 per cent, Northern Ireland 38 per cent, Scotland 37 per cent and Wales 43 per cent. Reapplication rates have increased by around 5 percentage points in England and Northern Ireland. In Wales (where acceptance rates in the 2013 cycle increased), the reapplication rate has reduced by 3.5 percentage points. Reapplication rates in Scotland are similar to the previous cycle. Reapplication rates for 18 year olds in 2013 are within a couple of percentage points of the values from 2011 cycle.

Figure 14 January deadline reapplication rates for UK 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle



Reapplication rates by selected A level grade profiles

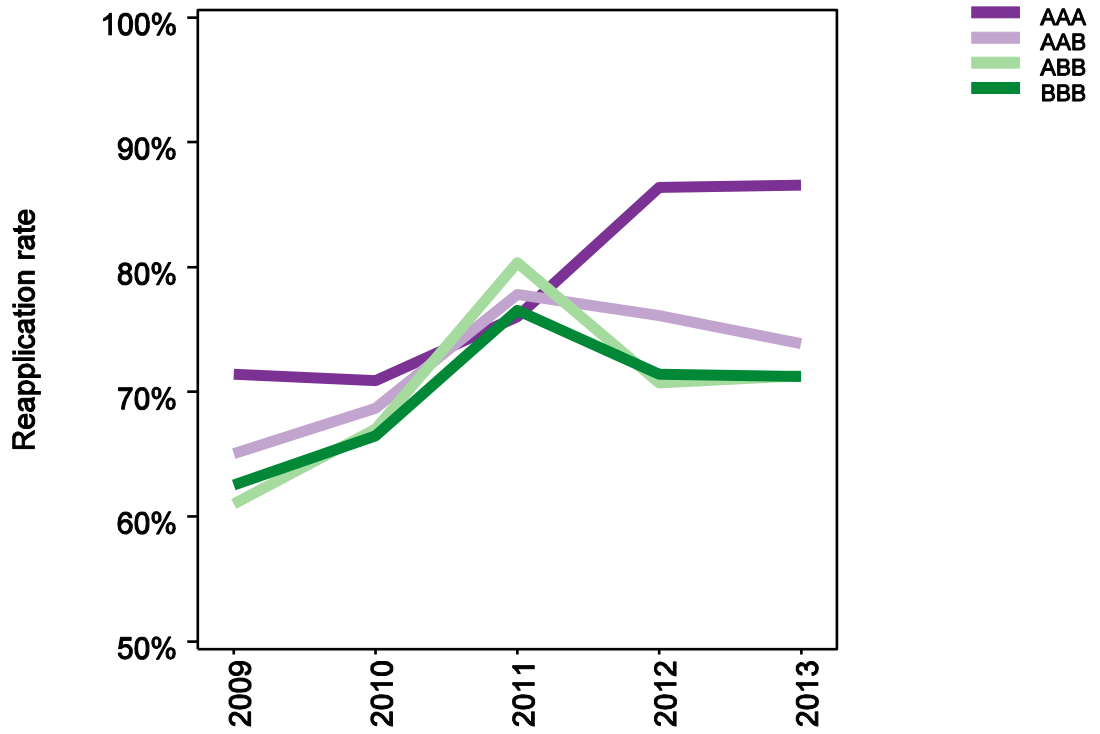
The majority of unplaced 18 year old applicants will have been awarded qualifications. This allows the reapplication rates to be considered against the qualification level held by the unplaced applicants. Figure 15 shows the reapplication rates of English domiciled applicants who were holding selected 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 in the 2009, 2012 and 2013 cycles are higher for those with higher grade profiles but this is not the case in 2010 and 2011 where reapplication rates are similar for each grade profile.

Reapplication rates increased across the 2009 to 2011 cycles – in the 2011 cycle, 80 per cent of those who were unplaced in the previous cycle and held 'ABB' reapplied, compared to 61 per cent in the 2009 cycle. In the 2012 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 2013 for those unplaced in 2012 holding 'AAA' is 87 per cent, for 'AAB' 74 per cent, for 'ABB' and 'BBB' 71 per cent. These reapplication rates are similar to those in the 2012 cycle. There is no substantial divergence in the reapplication rates between 2012 and 2013 across unplaced applicants who were in different groups under the 2012-13 student number control arrangements for most courses at English institutions.

Figure 15 January deadline reapplication rates for English 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle for selected A level grade profiles



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 example, in the 2013 cycle, ages in England and Wales are defined on the 31 August 2013, for Northern Ireland on the 1 July 2013 and for Scotland on the 28 February 2014 (the following year). 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 Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates and National Population Projections controlled to UK countries. 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 16 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 2013 18 year old cohort size to nearest thousand (proportion of UK cohort) is 616,000 (84 per cent) for England, 24,000 (3 per cent) for Northern Ireland, 60,000 (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 17 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 2009, the size of the cohort has reduced for each country and each cycle. In the 2013 cycle, the 18 year old cohort changes (proportionally) against the 2012 cohort by -1.6 per cent in England, -3.2 per cent in Northern Ireland, -1.2 per cent in Scotland and -2.2 per cent in Wales. These different changes include a component resulting from the different age reference dates.

In 2013, the 18 year cohort is 7 to 8 per cent smaller than in 2009, a reduction across the UK of around 60,000 in total. If the observed 2013 application rates were to be applied to a population of the same size as the 2009 cohort, then there would have been around 20,000 more 18 year old applicants (with around 4,000 of that difference being due to the population change between 2012 and 2013).

Figure 16 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK

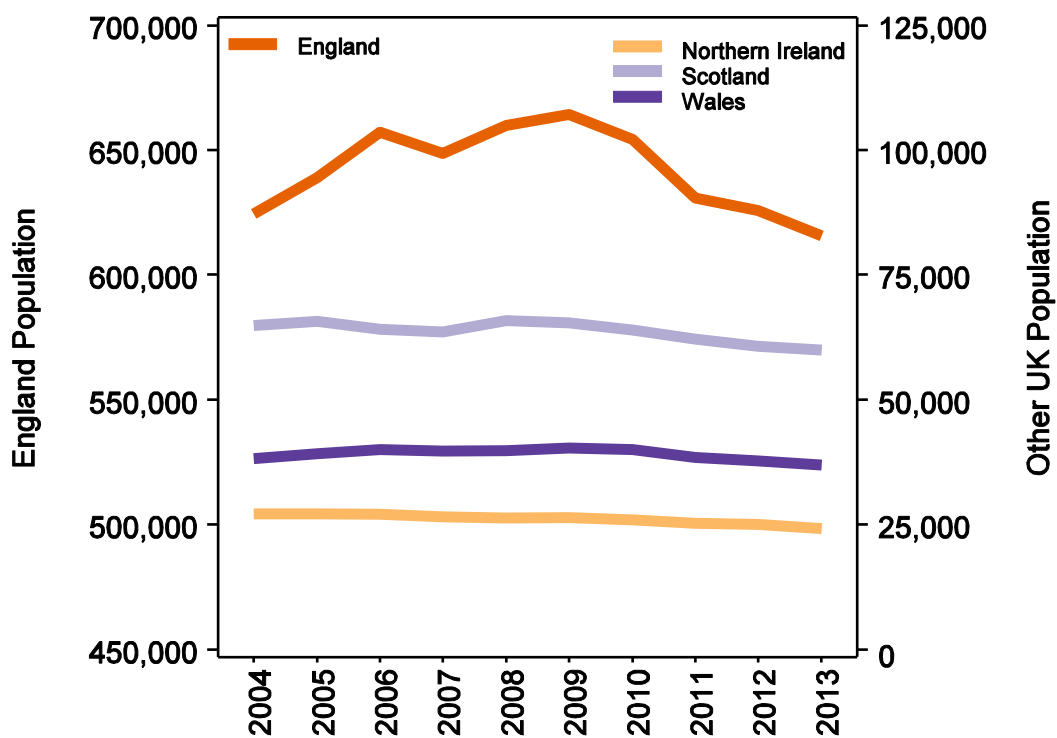


Figure 17 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK (indexed to 2009=100)

