

UCAS Verification Service Report 2021

Introduction

UCAS supports around 700,000 applications every year from domestic, EU, and international applicants to higher education in the UK. The role of the verification service is to help check that applications include true, complete and accurate information, and to support applicants in providing this. Verification activities also help prevent anyone from gaining an unfair advantage or securing a place by deception. UCAS' activities complement those undertaken by universities and colleges, and other service providers, such as the Student Loans Company.

Applications submitted to UCAS are subject to checks using fraud detection software, and personal statements are screened using similarity detection software. Universities and colleges may also identify issues with applications. If information is incorrect, missing or an issue is raised, the application will be flagged, and applicants or their referees will be asked to provide additional information or clarification. If, ultimately, the issues cannot be resolved, the application may be cancelled. Applicants may appeal cancellation decisions.

As part of our commitment to transparency, we publish an annual report and statistics on the performance of the verification service for the undergraduate admissions service, including numbers of applications that were flagged and cancelled, and an analysis of the characteristics of these applicants.

Statistical reporting on the 2021 cycle (UK domiciled applicants only)

In the 2021 cycle, 580 applications from UK domiciled applicants were flagged for further consideration, equating to 0.09% of the total UK applicant population. Of these, 110 applicants had their applications cancelled (0.018%). Table 1 shows that these results follow trends of fewer applications being cancelled.

In comparison to the 2020 cycle, 39.6% fewer applications from UK domiciled applicants were flagged, and 12% fewer applications from UK domiciled applicants were cancelled.

Table 1: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled for each cycle.

Cycle	Applicant baseline	Flagged	Reinstated	Cancelled	Suspended
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
2017	573,020	1,020	0	370	0
2018	562,260	1,815	0	240	0
2019	565,810	1,825	40	60	95
2020	577,575	960	20	65	60
2021	607,000	580	15	60	50
All	2,885,665	6195	75	785	205

UK domiciled applicants by ethnic group

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of flagged and cancelled applications by ethnic group.

The proportion of flagged applications across the ethnic groups has broadly remained the same as seen in the 2020 cycle. In the 2021 cycle, 41% of flagged applicants were classified as black in comparison to 39% in the 2020 cycle. The percentage of cancelled applications in the flagged black ethnic group remains at 41%, the same as in the 2020 cycle.

In the 2021 cycle, 27% of flagged applicants were classified as white in comparison to 34% in the 2020 cycle. The percentage of cancelled applications in the flagged white ethnic group has increased from 18% in the 2020 cycle to 27% in the 2021 cycle.

Table 2: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each ethnic group comprises (2021 cycle)

Ethnic group	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Asian	81,975	14	100	17	15	14
Black	55,665	9	235	41	45	41
Mixed	30,680	5	30	5	10	9
Other	14,745	2	40	7	10	9
Unknown or Prefer Not To Say	10,130	2	15	3	0	0
White	413,800	68	155	27	30	27
All	607,000	100	580	100	110	100

UK domiciled applicants by age

Mature applicants are defined as those aged 21 and over, and typically account for a quarter of UK domiciled applicants. Our figures show members of this group, who commonly apply without the support of a school or college, are more likely to find their applications flagged. In the 2021 cycle, this accounted for 65% of flagged

applicants. The proportion of cancelled applicants aged 21 and over has however declined from 81% in the 2020 cycle to 77% in the 2021 cycle.

Table 3: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each age band comprises (2021 cycle)

Age band	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
17 or under	2,235	0	0	0	0	2
18	316,235	52	85	15	5	5
19	89,260	15	80	14	10	9
20	36,850	6	40	7	10	9
21+	162,420	27	375	65	85	77
All	607,000	100	580	100	110	100

UK domiciled applicants by Apply centre (i.e. with the support of a school or college)

Independent applicants are defined as those who apply without the support of a UCAS-registered centre (typically a school or college). In the 2021 cycle, 31% of individuals applying to higher education were classified as independent applicants. Our figures show these applicants are more likely to have their applications flagged. In the 2021 cycle, 72% of flagged applications were classified as independent applicants.

Table 4: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each apply centre comprises (2021 cycle)

Apply centre	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Apply Centre	417,925	69	165	28	10	9
Independent	189,075	31	415	72	100	91
All	607,000	100	580	100	110	100

UK domiciled applicants by region

Our data shows that applicants living in London are more likely to have their applications flagged than those living in other parts of the UK. In the 2021 cycle, this accounted for 39% of flagged applications.

Table 5: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each region comprises (2021 cycle)

Region	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	3,795	1	10	1	5	5
East Midlands	37,370	6	25	4	0	0
East of England	50,390	8	45	8	10	9
London	110,750	18	225	39	40	36
North East	19,365	3	5	1	0	0
North West	65,040	11	80	14	20	18
Northern Ireland	19,700	3	0	0	0	0
Scotland	55,065	9	20	4	0	0
South East	79,630	13	45	8	5	5
South West	43,170	7	15	3	0	0
Wales	24,995	4	20	3	0	0
West Midlands	53,665	9	40	7	10	9
Yorkshire and The Humber	44,060	7	45	8	5	5
All	607,000	100	580	100	110	100