UCAS submission to the call for evidence to the Commission on Child Poverty and Social Mobility

July 2014

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1.   Overall assessment

UCAS is responsible for managing admissions to higher education (HE) in the UK. The data UCAS possess is in relation to progression to higher education, therefore it is not appropriate for us to comment on broader developments regarding child poverty and social mobility.

The evidence we provide will detail the progress made in relation to widening participation and social mobility in recent application cycles and is drawn from published resources, such as the End of Cycle 2013[1].

The headlines are:
- In 2013 entry rates for the most disadvantaged English 18 year olds climbed to the highest level recorded
- The difference in entry rates between the most and least advantaged is continuing to decline
- The entry rate for English 18 year olds who received free school meals increased to a new high, with these students 50% more likely to enter HE in 2013 than in 2006
- Whilst the entry rate of the most disadvantaged to high tariff institutions remains low, the entry rate for English 18 year olds increased proportionally by 11% in 2013 compared to 2012.

In addition, looking at the 2014 admissions cycle, our January statistical release[2] shows a substantial increase in the application rates of disadvantaged 18 year olds, rising from 18.8% in 2013 to 20.7% in 2014.

3.   Early years and education

Changes in the education landscape such as A level reform, GCSE reform and HE funding changes will have impacts but it is in most cases too soon to tell in relation to entry to HE. However, UCAS does believe that all stages of education should be considered as a continuum and therefore be complementary.

4.   Higher education

The UCAS 2013 End of Cycle report analyses the entire application cycle and provides the most detailed understanding to date of admissions to HE. The 2013 report includes information about the entry rate of students by background and type of qualification held, as well as entry rate by income background and ethnic group.

Overall acceptances to HE

The total number of acceptances to HE for UK domiciled students aged 19 and under in POLAR2[3] quintile 1 (Q1) increased from 31,444 to 34,241, an increase of 8.9%.

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[1] The full report can be found here: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf
[2] The full report can be found here: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/jan-14-application-rates.pdf
[3] Developed by HEFCE and classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in HE. Each of these groups represents around 20% of young people and is 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).

Entry rate by background

Entry rate is the number of acceptances in an UCAS application cycle divided by the estimated base population. In the 2013 cycle, the entry rate for disadvantaged English 18 year olds increased again, by 1.4 percentage points to 16.9%, following the upwards trend seen over the last decade. Overall disadvantaged English 18 year olds were 70% more likely to be accepted to HE in 2013 compared to 2004[4].

Whilst advantaged 18 year olds in England are still much more likely to enter HE than those living in the most disadvantaged areas, the relative difference has decreased between 2004 and 2013[5]. Also, whilst entry rates for all POLAR groups have increased over the period since 2004 the highest rates of increase are seen in the most disadvantaged groups[6].

The entry rate to higher tariff institutions for disadvantaged 18 year olds has increased for all countries in both 2012 and 2013[7]. In all cases this takes the entry rate to a higher level than any other cycle. In 2013, the entry rate increased by over 10 per cent proportionally in each country. In England, the entry rate has increased proportionally by 11 per cent in 2013, and by a total of 26% between the 2011 cycle and the 2013 cycle, in contrast to a relatively stable period between 2004 and 2011. We have also seen the differences in entry rates to higher tariff institutions by background reduce across the UK[8].

In 2013 we also saw the entry rate from the most disadvantaged areas increase to all types of institution. In all three institution tariff groups there is a progression from lower to higher entry rates across the disadvantaged (quintile 1) to the advantaged (quintile 5) groups. The difference in entry rates between backgrounds is greatest for the higher tariff institutions and lowest in the lower tariff institutions[9].

For pupils attending state schools in England, UCAS has linked admissions data to that held in the National Pupils Database to gain a greater understanding of the progression trends of applicants who receive free school meals (FSM). In 2013 the entry rate for both FSM and non-FSM pupils increased to the highest recorded value. The entry rate for young people who received FSM was 12.5% in 2013, which compares to 27.4% for the non-FSM group. This is a proportional increase in entry rate of around 7% on 2012 for both groups. The entry rate for FSM pupils has increased proportionally by over 50% since 2006; more than twice the proportional increase seen in the non-FSM entry rate over the period[10].

For entry to higher tariff institutions, there have been large proportional increases in both 2012 and 2013. FSM pupils are 39% more likely to enter these institutions in 2013 than in 2011, twice the proportional increase for non-FSM pupils. In 2013, the entry rate of non-FSM pupils to higher tariff institutions is 4.4 times larger than that of FSM pupils, the equivalent ratios for medium and lower tariff institutions are 2.9 and 1.4 respectively[11].

Entry rate by qualifications held

The overall acceptance rate for English 18 year old applicants holding A level qualifications in 2013 was 86%, one percentage point lower than the highest acceptance rate for A level applicants recorded in 2008[12]. This follows an upward trend seen since 2010. 25.5% of the

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[4] Annex A Graph 1
[5] Annex A Graph 2
[6] Annex A Graph 3 and 4
[7] Annex A Graph 5
[8] Annex A Graph 6
[9] Annex A Graph 7, 8 and 9
[10] Annex A Graph 10
[11] Annex A Graph 11
[12] Annex A Graph 12

18 year old population in England entered HE holding at least one A level. This is the highest proportion ever recorded following a percentage point increase from 2012[13].

The entry rate for English 18 year olds holding A level qualifications increased for students of all backgrounds in 2013 (as defined by POLAR2[14]). However, a sharp differentiation continues to exist across each POLAR2 group, with young people from more advantaged areas substantially more likely to enter HE holding A levels than those living in more disadvantaged areas. 12.3% of 18 year olds in quintile 1 (more disadvantaged areas) holding held A levels were accepted into HE. This compares to 42.6% for 18 year olds in quintile 5 (those living in more advantaged areas).

Students who possess BTEC qualifications are more likely to be from a disadvantaged background. The entry rate holding BTECs for the English 18 year old population is lower than the entry rate for holding A levels, but has increased substantially for all groups over the past six cycles, and shows relatively little differentiation by background[15]. The entry rate for BTEC learners has increased substantially for all POLAR quintiles over the past 6 cycles and is around double what it was in the 2008 cycle[16]. Around 6% of the 18 year old population in each background group were accepted for entry in 2013 holding BTECs, with the exception of the most advantaged areas, where 4.6% of the population were accepted and held BTECs.

UCAS divides institutions into high, medium and low Tariff institutions based on the average levels of attainment of their accepted applicants (summarised through UCAS Tariff points) in recent cycles[17]. For example, when we look at the distribution of BTEC acceptances, we find that 35% of 18 year English domiciled students accepted to low Tariff institutions held BTEC qualifications. In contrast, we find that only 3% of 18 year old English domiciled accepted applicants that enter higher Tariff institutions hold BTEC qualifications[18].

Department for Education data show that the proportion of English 19 year olds achieving qualifications at Level 3 has grown from 42% in 2004 to 59% in 2013. Whilst this growth in achievement is welcomed, further analysis shows that the participation in A levels is little changed today compared to a decade ago, with participation being 37% in 2004 and 38% in 2013. This means that the vast majority of growth in attainment has been from vocational qualifications, which has increased from 3% to 17% over the same period.

The UK is also experiencing a decline in the size of the 18 year old population and is not estimated to recover until 2020.

Taking account of demographic changes, and assuming the proportion of 19 year olds attaining A levels remains at 38% whilst those attaining BTECs continues to increase at 1 percentage point a year, we estimate that in five years time there could be over 10,000 fewer potential UK A level applicants aged 19 and under and over 20,000 more holding vocational qualifications. This could be further skewed if the new, linear A levels being introduced in England from September 2015 are viewed as more challenging by students, teachers, and advisers. Changes to 16-19 funding, particularly at colleges, could further impact on the range of qualifications that applicants hold.

What this means is that widening participation for higher Tariff institutions may be more challenging because they are seeking to recruit from a declining population of 18 year olds, of which a declining proportion hold the academic qualifications that they require for entry.

2014 admissions cycle

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[13] Annex A Graph 13
[14] Annex A Graph 14
[15] Annex A Graph 13
[16] Annex A Graph 15
[17] Each group of institutions accounted for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances in recent cycles.
[18] Annex A Graph 16

Applicants who apply prior to the 15 January deadline account for the majority (typically 85%) of all UK domiciled applicants in a cycle and almost all (typically 97%) of 18 year old UK domiciled applicants. Their numbers can be used to measure trends in demand for this type of higher education. The 15 January statistical release shows that application rates for 18 year olds for each UK country are at, or very near, their highest ever recorded level[19].

The 15 January figures shows a substantial increase in the application rates from the most disadvantaged group for each country within the UK over the period analysed. In England the application rate of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas has increased from 10.7% in 2004 to 20.7% in 2014. This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas in England are 94% more likely to apply to higher education in 2014 than ten years ago[20].

In 2014 the application rate from disadvantaged areas increased by 1.9 percentage points in England, 2.2 percentage points in Northern Ireland, 2.4 percentage points in Scotland and 2.6 percentage points in Wales. These increases mean that 18 year olds from disadvantaged areas in England are 10% more likely to have applied by the January deadline in 2014 compared with 2013, 9% more likely in Northern Ireland, 19% more likely in Scotland and 17% more likely in Wales.

Within England 18 year old women are much more likely to apply for higher education than men in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The proportional differences are largest in the most disadvantaged areas where, in 2014, women are 55% more likely to apply compared with advantaged areas where they are 18% more likely to apply[21].

UCAS will shortly be publishing a series of analytical notes to further inform the sector of developments and application trends. These notes will include:
- The relationship between GCSE attainment and application rate
- Application trends in relation to applicants that receive free school meals
- Application trends in relation to applicants based on their Ethnicity.

UCAS will ensure that the Chair of the Commission receives sight of these analytical notes upon release.

UCAS has also been working closely with universities and colleges to support them in tracking and monitoring the effectiveness of interventions that seek to widen participation in higher education and contribute to social mobility. This autumn UCAS will be launching a new analytical service which will enable institutions to track whether students who participated in specific outreach and WP interventions went on to apply for HE and the outcomes of the admissions process.

5. Contribution of employers

The UCAS Tariff was designed to support admissions staff by providing information about a broad range of qualifications. It is also used as a mechanism for setting entry requirements and making offers to applicants, as well as supporting the management information needs of HEPs.

UCAS does not endorse the use of the Tariff for recruitment by employers. The key reasons are:
- pre-2001 qualifications are not included in the Tariff, therefore it is potentially unfair to older individuals

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[19] The full report can be found here:
http://www.ucas.com/system/files/ucas_2014_application_rate_jan_deadline2.pdf
[20] Annex A Graph 17
[21] Annex A Graph 18

- very few international qualifications attract Tariff points
- the Tariff includes approximately 1/3 of UK accredited Level 3 qualifications. There are a wide range of Level 3 qualifications that facilitate progression to HE such as the Access to HE Diploma and Advanced Apprenticeships which cannot be accommodated within the current Tariff.

The Commission may be interested to note that UCAS will be replacing the current Tariff with a new, simpler, more comprehensive and transparent methodology in 2017. Whilst this will enable a much wider range of qualifications to be allocated Tariff points we continue to recommend that employers do not use Tariff points to sift job applications as this undervalues the skills and experience that individuals have gained during their higher education.

6.   The Nations

The Undergraduate End of Cycle Report 2013 shows that the entry rate for disadvantaged 18 year olds continued to increase in Northern Ireland, whilst remaining steady in Scotland[22] and Wales[23].

In all UK countries the entry rate for 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR2 Q1) has increased since 2004. In 2013 the entry rate increased by 0.9% in Northern Ireland, 0.2% in Scotland and remained unchanged in Wales. Disadvantaged 18 year olds from Northern Ireland are now more than 6% more likely to be accepted in 2013 than in 2012.

These increases are a continuation of the trend we have seen across the period analysed. 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas are around 40% (Wales) and 50% (Northern Ireland and Scotland) more likely to be accepted for entry in 2013 than they were in 2004. By contrast, entry rates from the most advantaged areas (POLAR2 Q5) remain three to four times higher than those for the most disadvantaged group, but we have not seen the same degree of change since 2004.

The entry rates to higher Tariff institutions for disadvantaged 18 year olds increased to new highs in all countries in 2013 for the second successive year. In 2013 the entry rate increased by over 10% proportionally in each country[24].

As previously stated, differences in entry rates to higher tariff institutions by background are higher than other types of institutions but reduce across the UK in 2013. Annex A Graph 6 shows the ratios of the entry rates to higher tariff institutions from the most advantaged areas to the entry rates to higher tariff institutions for the most disadvantaged areas within each country. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales show a high degree of cycle-to-cycle variation in the entry rates (reflecting the small population and acceptance base), which translates into variable entry ratios. In each of these three countries, despite the cycle-to-cycle variation, the trend across the period has been for these entry ratios to reduce. There is still a much greater proportion of 18 year olds in the most advantaged areas entering higher tariff institutions, compared to 18 year olds in the most disadvantaged areas[25]. In 2013 the entry ratio is around 6 in Northern Ireland, 5 in Scotland and 6.5 in Wales.

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[22] Please note that the entry rates for Scotland are low on this measure due to not all HE providers in Scotland using UCAS, such as the majority of Scottish colleges.
[23] Annex A Graph 1
[24] Annex A Graph 5
[25] Annex A Graph 19

Annex A: End of Cycle Report 2013

**Graph 1: 18 year old entry rates for disadvantaged areas (POLAR2 Q1) by country of domicile**
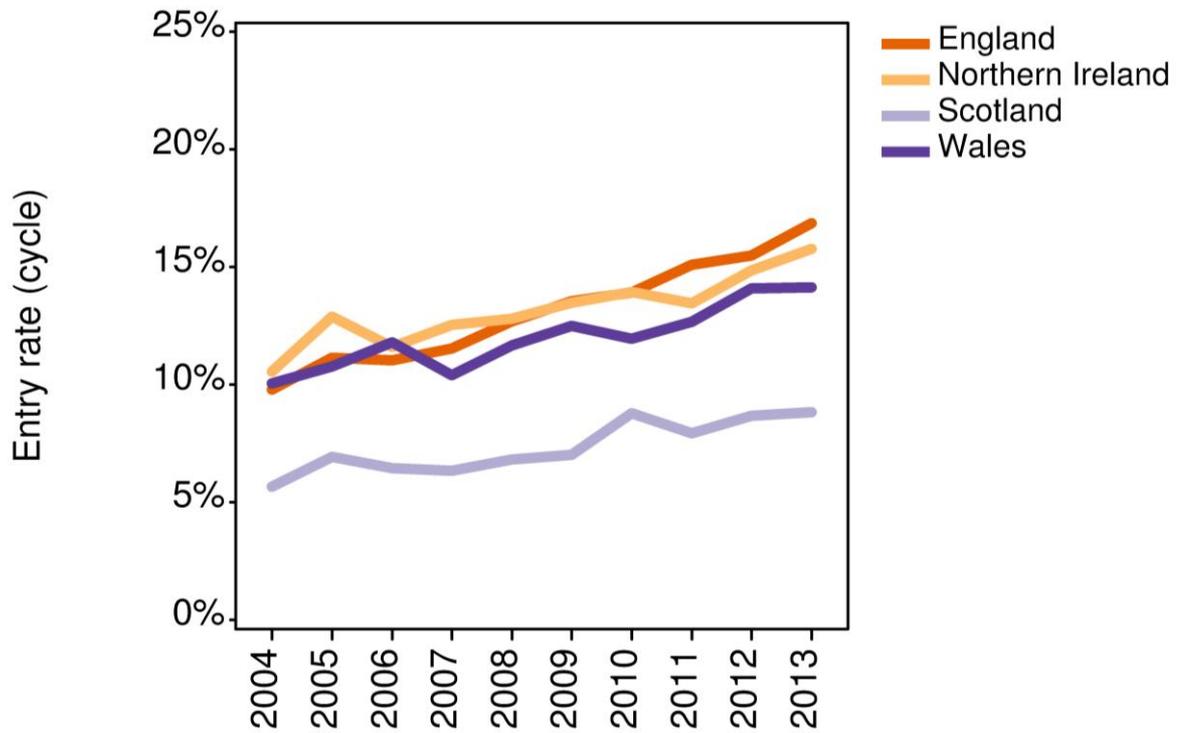
Graph 2: 18 year old entry rate ratios: most advantaged areas (POLAR2 Q5) relative to most disadvantaged areas by country of domicile
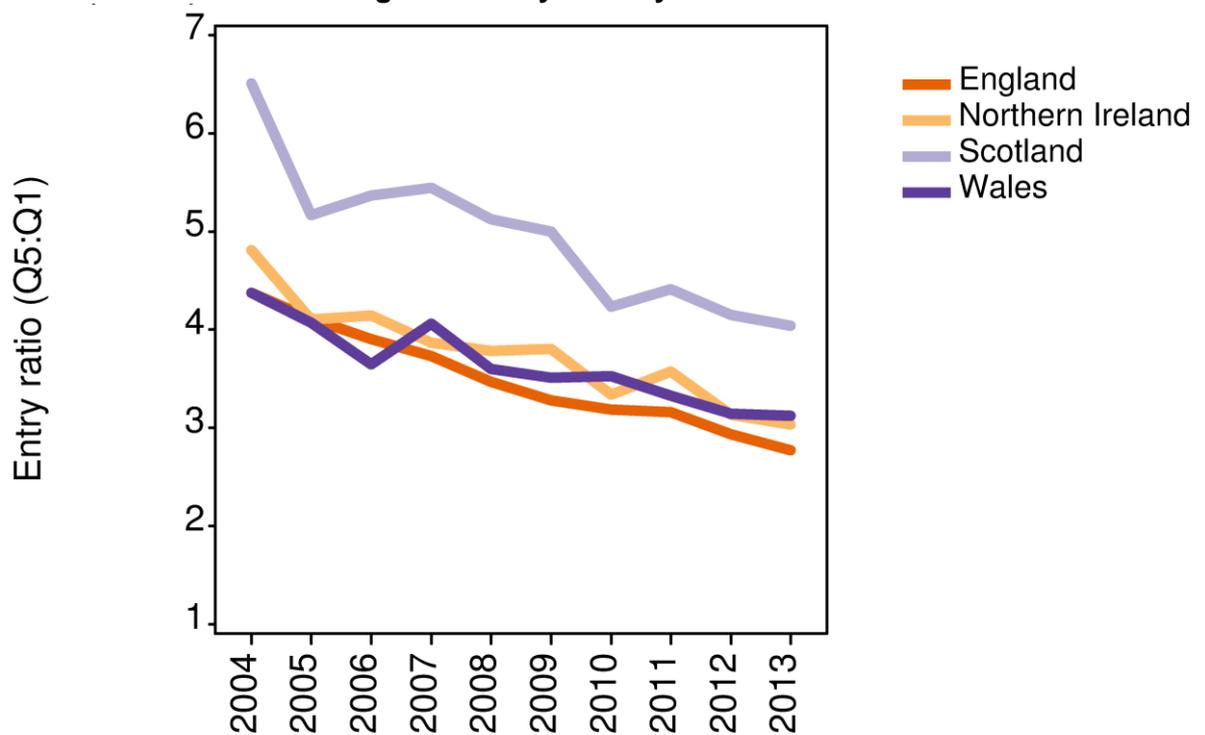
**Graph 3: 18 year olds in England entry rates (cycle based) by POLAR2 groups**
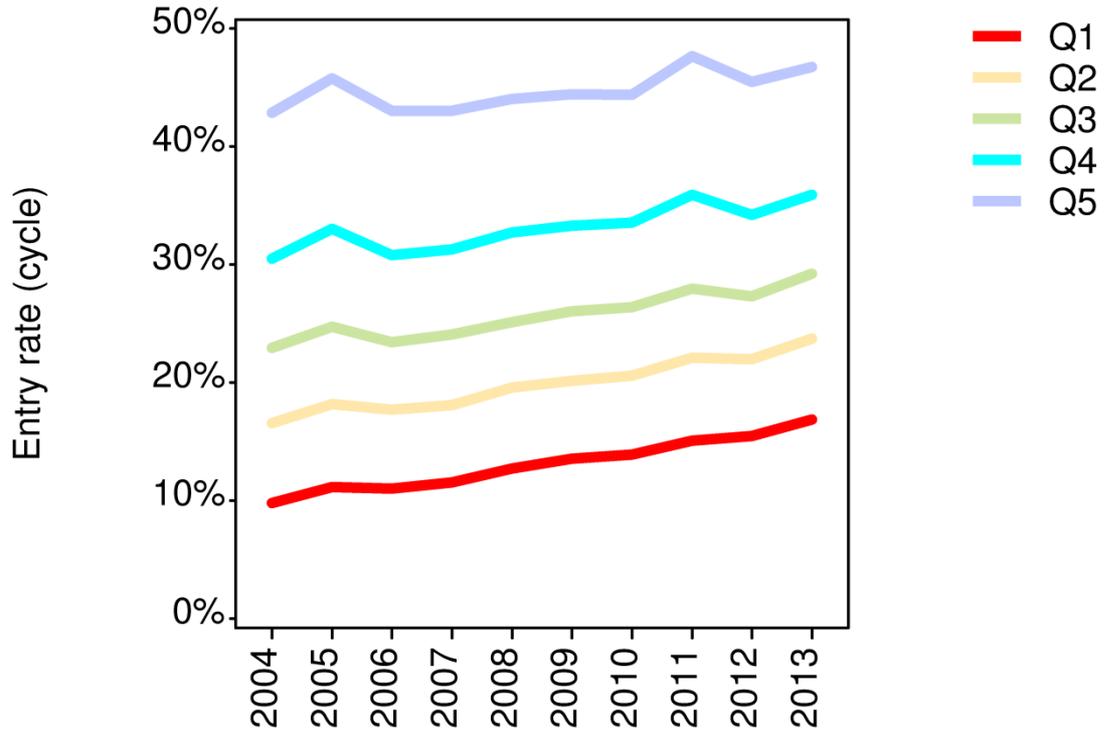
Graph 4: 18 year olds in England entry rates (cycle based) by POLAR2 groups (logarithmic scale) with extrapolation of 2006 to 2010 trend
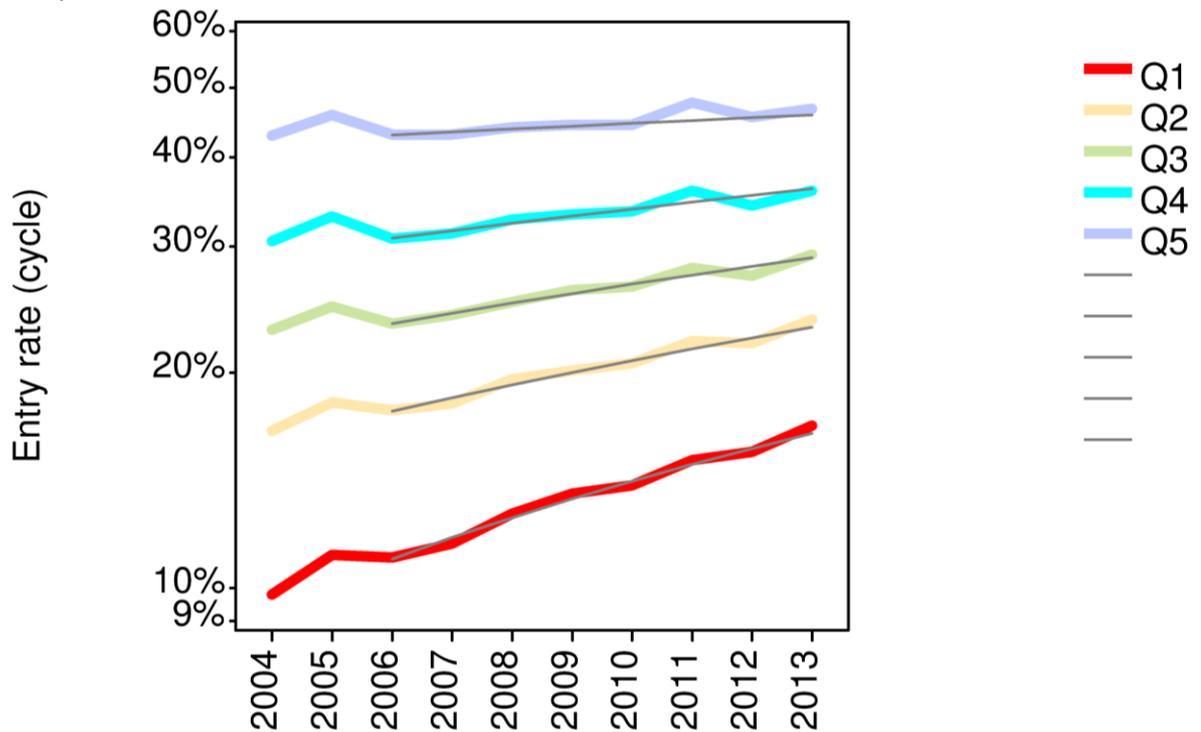
Graph 5: 18 year old entry rates to higher Tariff institutions for disadvantaged areas (POLAR2 Q1) by country
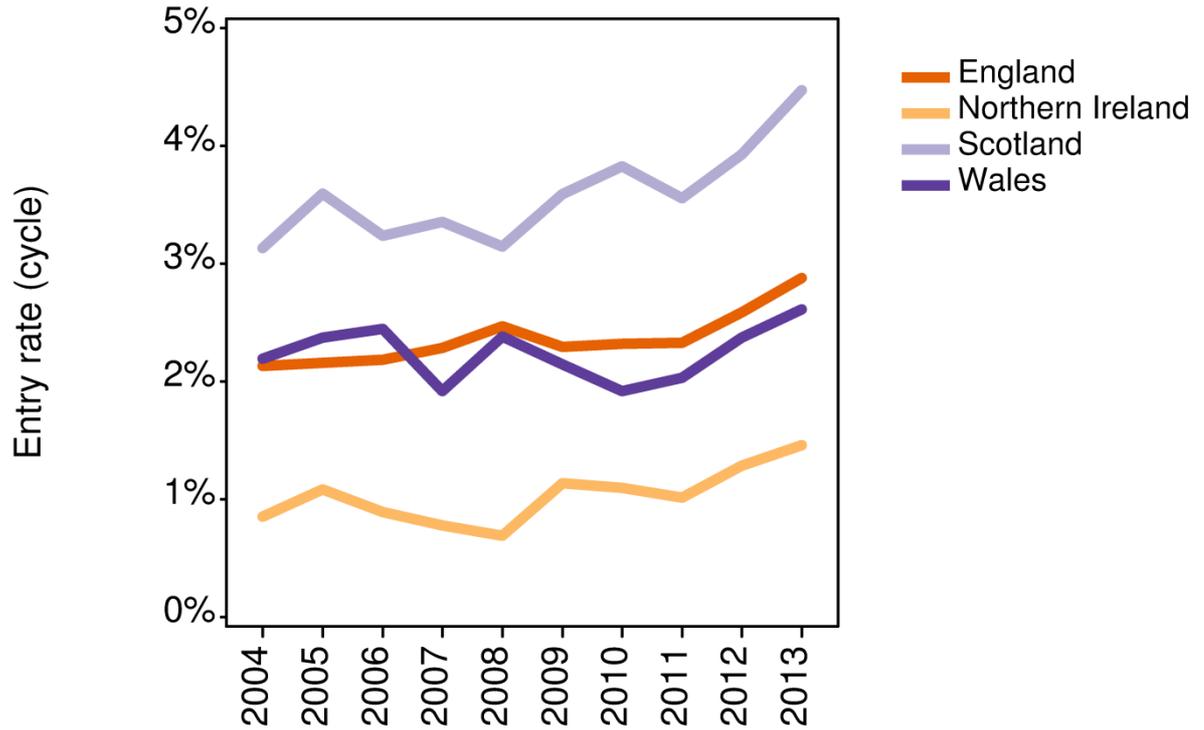
Graph 6: 18 year old entry rates (higher tariff institutions): most advantaged (POLAR2 Q5) to most disadvantaged areas by country of domicile
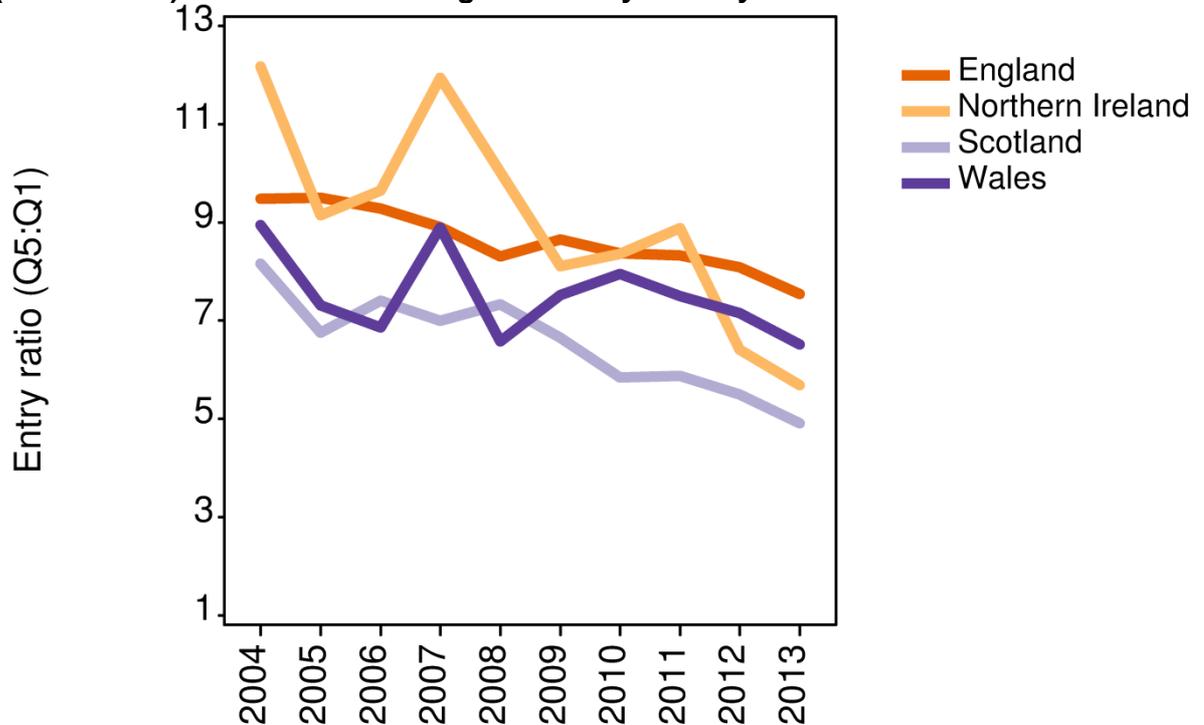
Graph 7: English 18 years olds entry rates to higher tariff institutions by POLAR2 groups
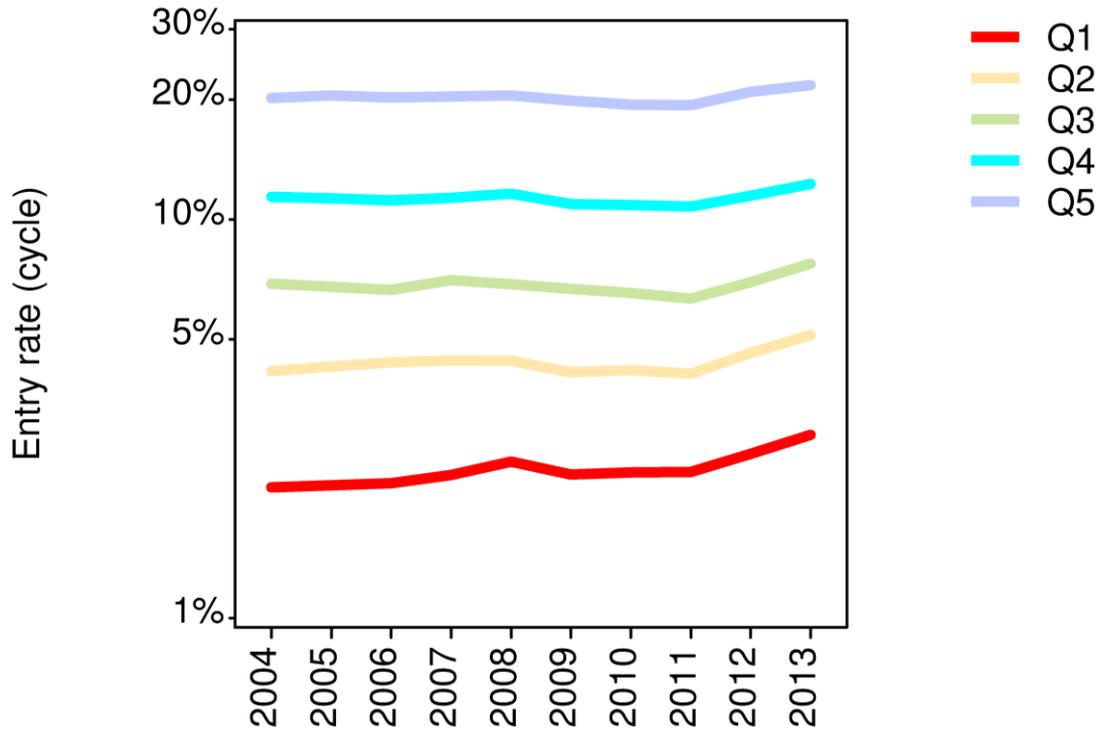
Graph 8: English 18 year olds entry rates to medium tariff institutions by POLAR2 groups
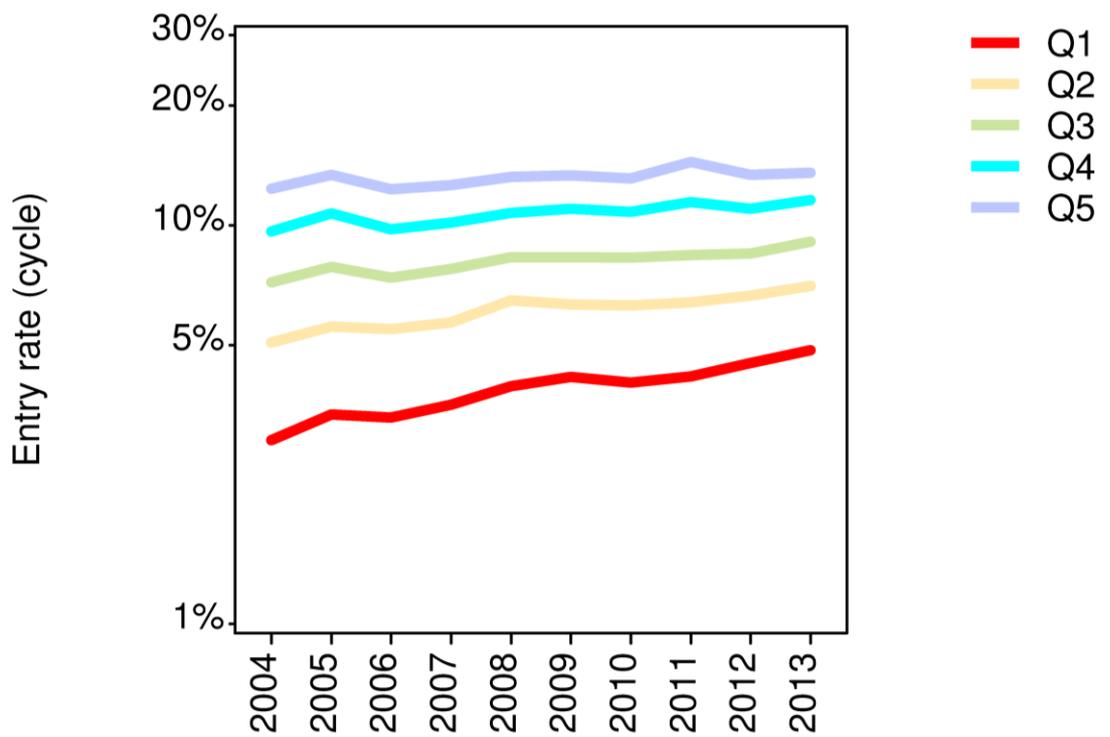
Graph 9: English 18 year olds entry rates (cycle based) to lower tariff institutions by POLAR2 groups
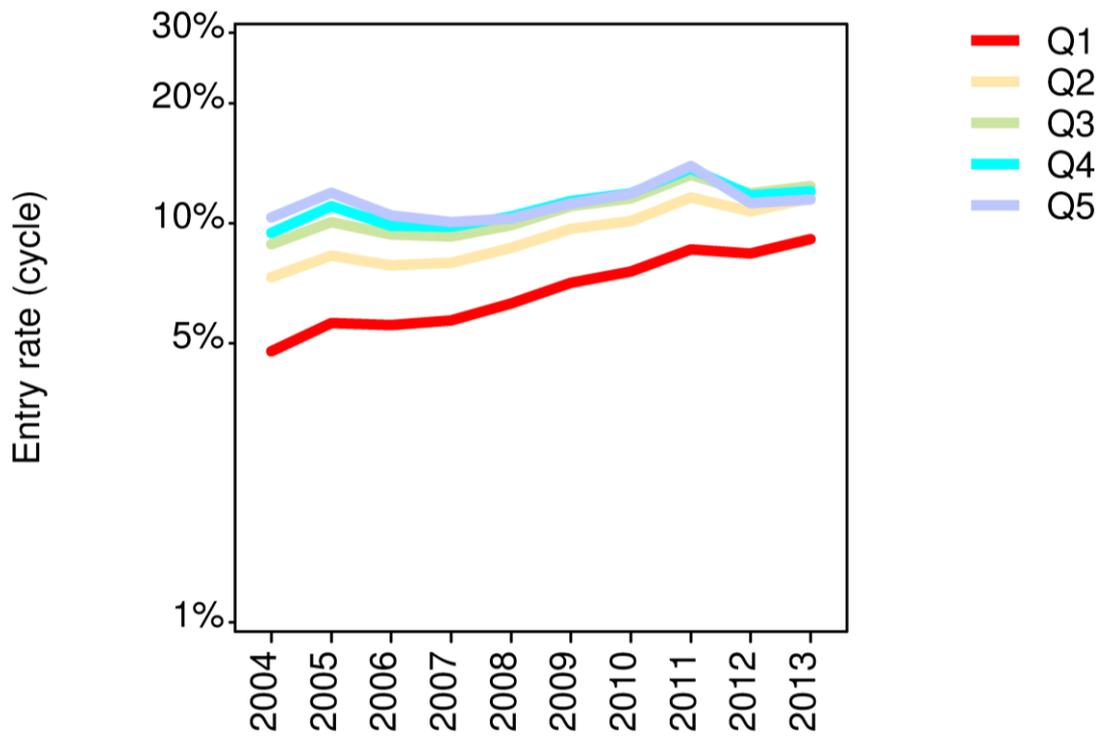
Graph 10: Entry rates for English 18 year old state school pupils by free school meal (FSM) status at age 15

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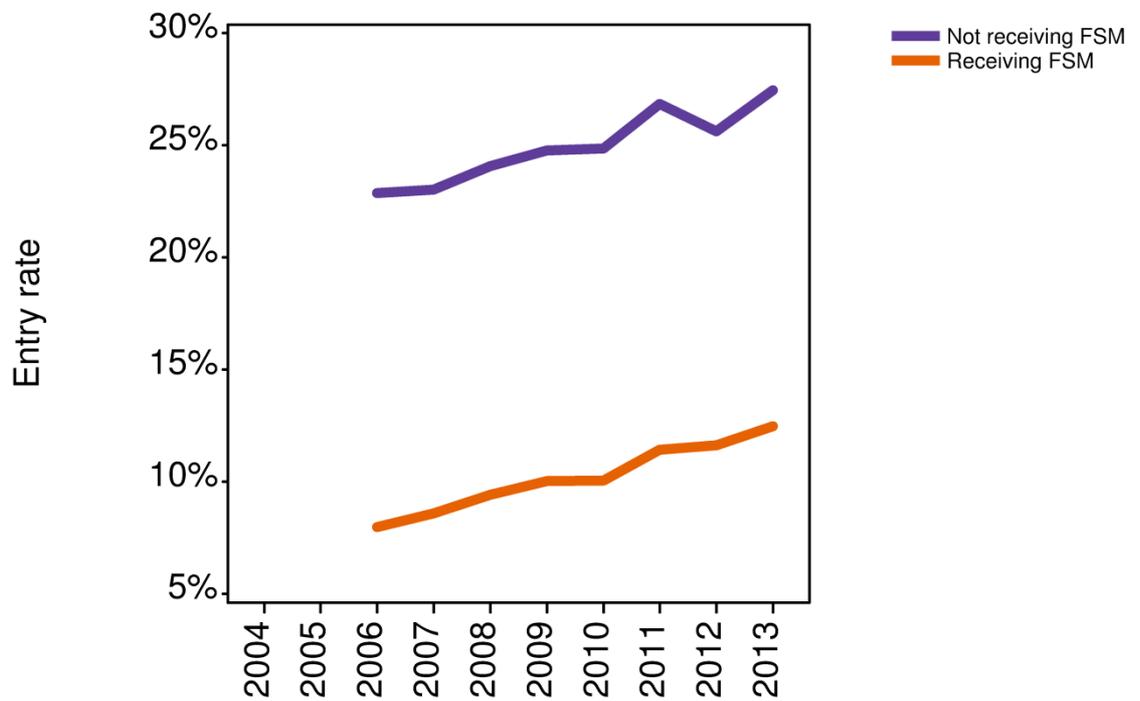
Graph 11: Entry rates for English 18 year old state school pupils by free school meal (FSM) status age 15 and institution Tariff group

Legend:
- Not FSM – Higher tariff
- Not FSM – Medium tariff
- Not FSM – Lower tariff
- FSM – Higher tariff
- FSM – Medium tariff
- FSM – Lower tariff
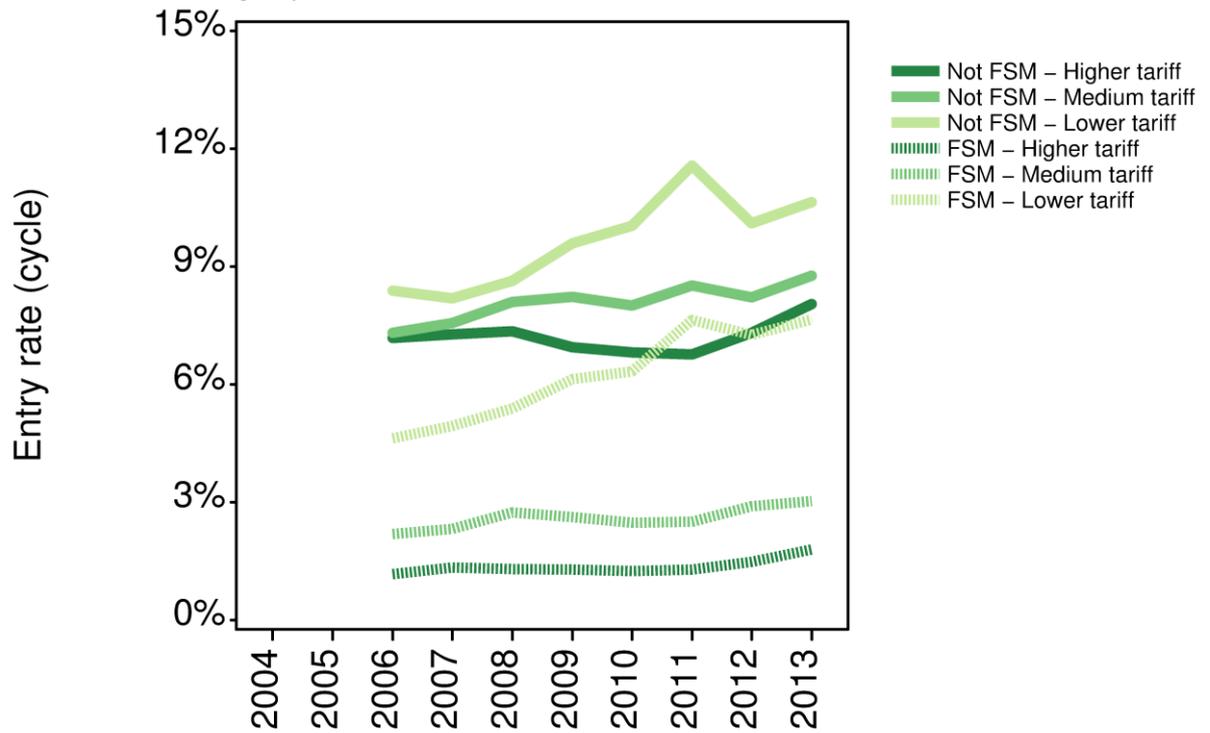
Source: Figure 68 from 'UCAS End of Cycle Report 2013', www.ucas.com

Graph 12: Acceptance rate for English 18 year olds by type of qualification held

Legend:
- A levels
- BTEC
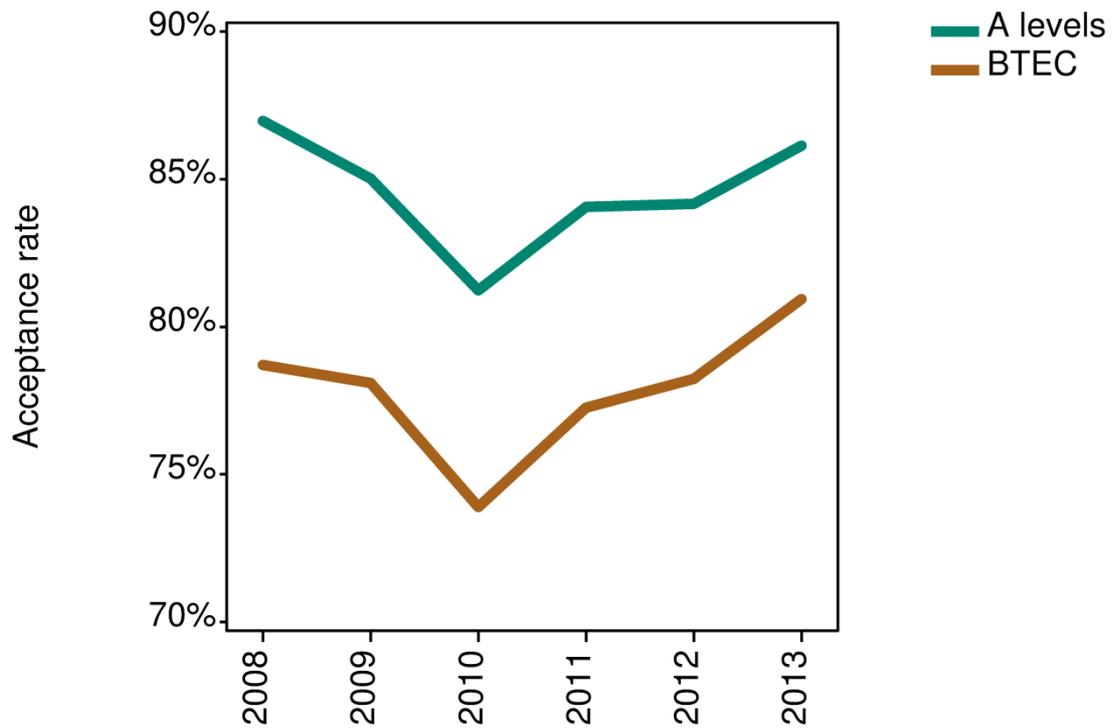
Source: Figure 48 from 'UCAS End of Cycle Report 2013', www.ucas.com

Graph 13: English 18 year old entry rate by type of qualification held
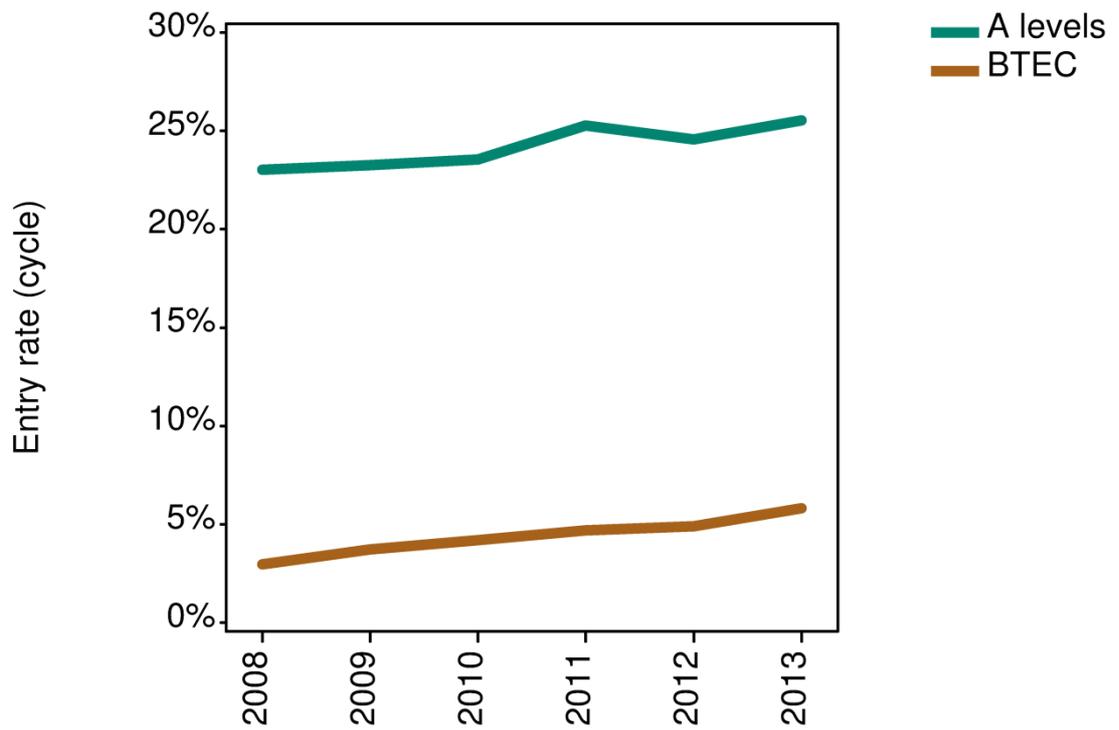
Graph 14: English 18 year old entry rates by POLAR2 group (accepted applicants holding A levels)
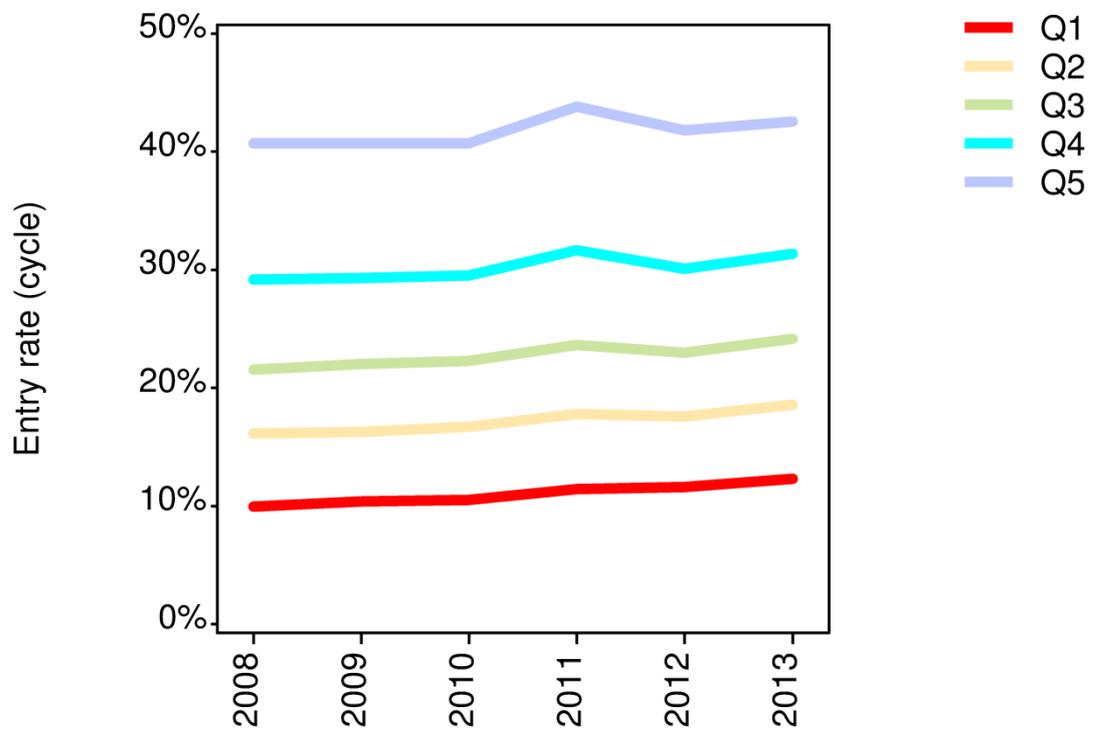
Graph 15: English 18 year old entry rates by POLAR2 group (accepted applicants holding BTECs)
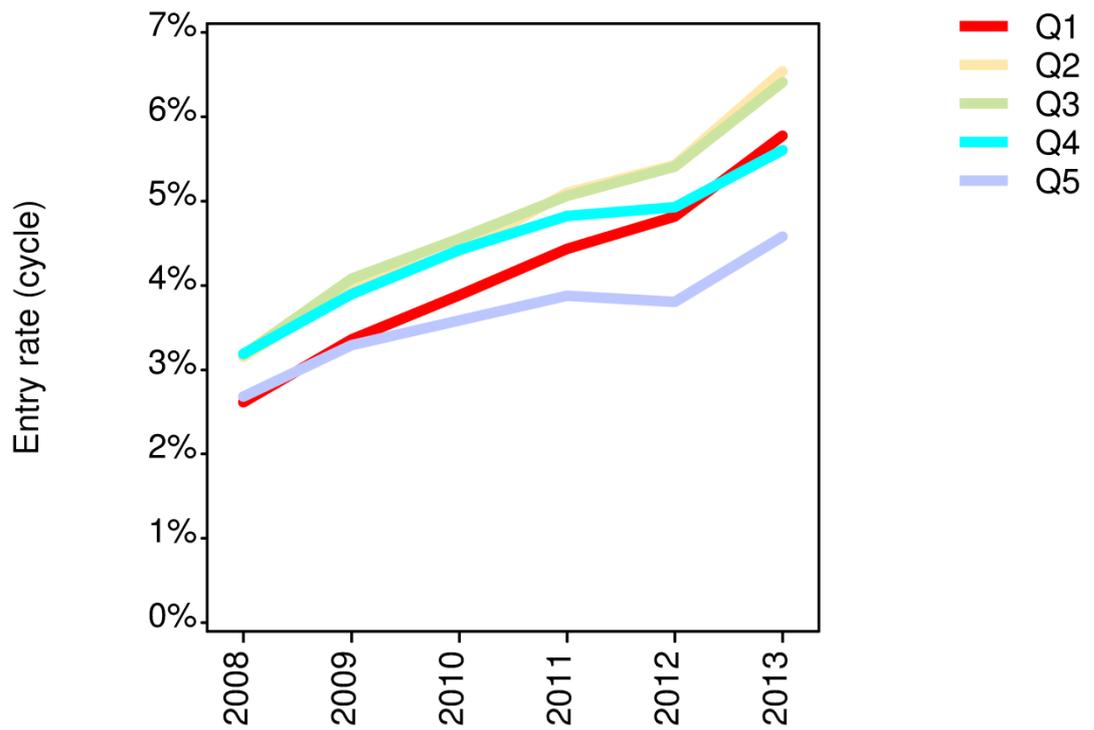
Graph 16: English 18 year old ratio of acceptances holding BTECs to acceptances holding A levels

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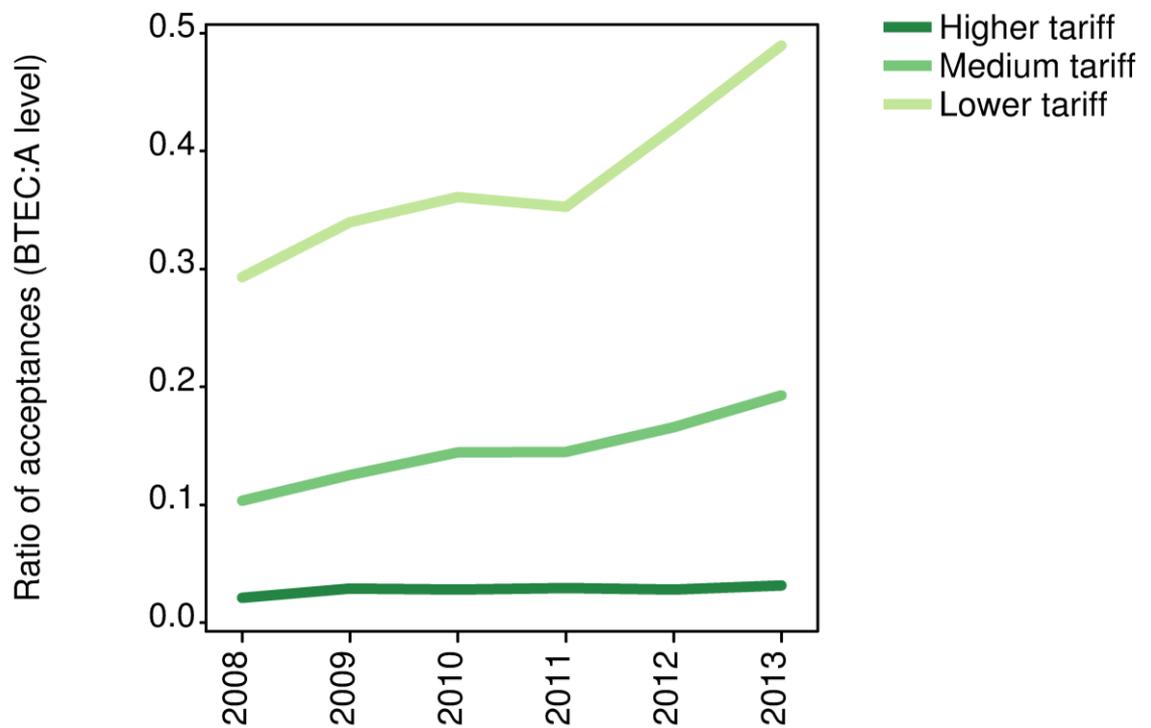
Graph 17: January deadline application rates for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas POLAR2 quintile 1)
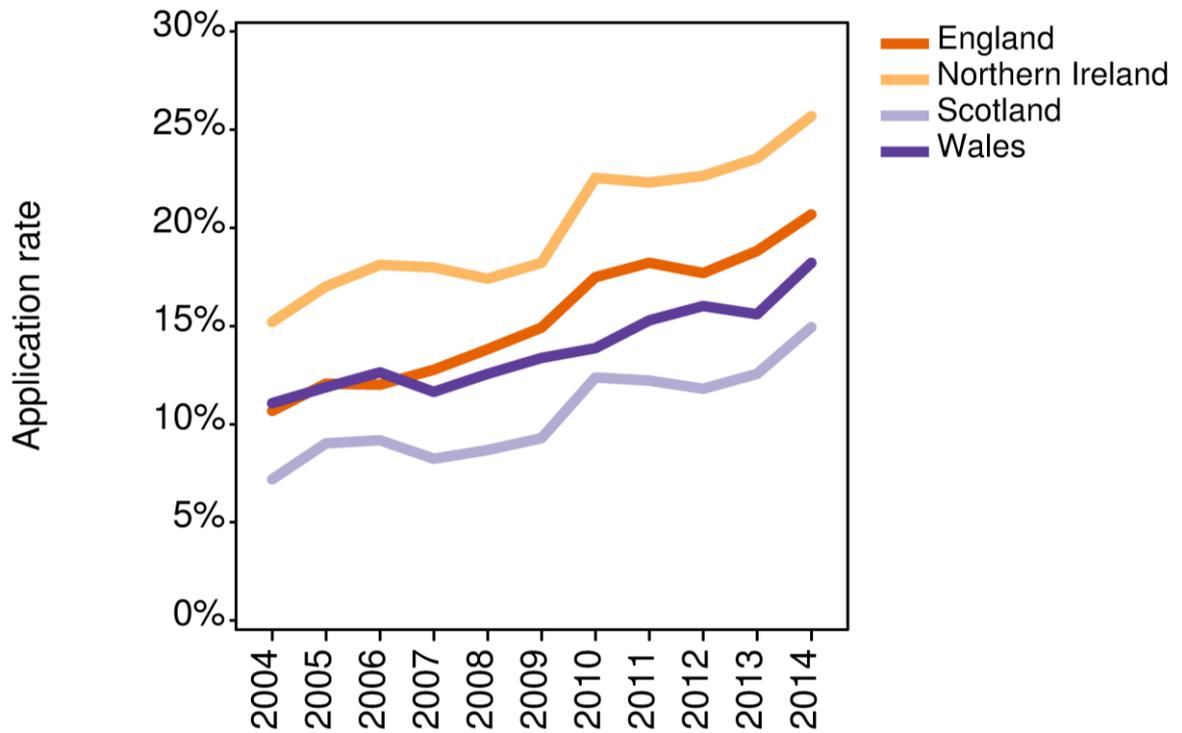
Graph 18: January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas POLAR 2 quintile 1) by sex
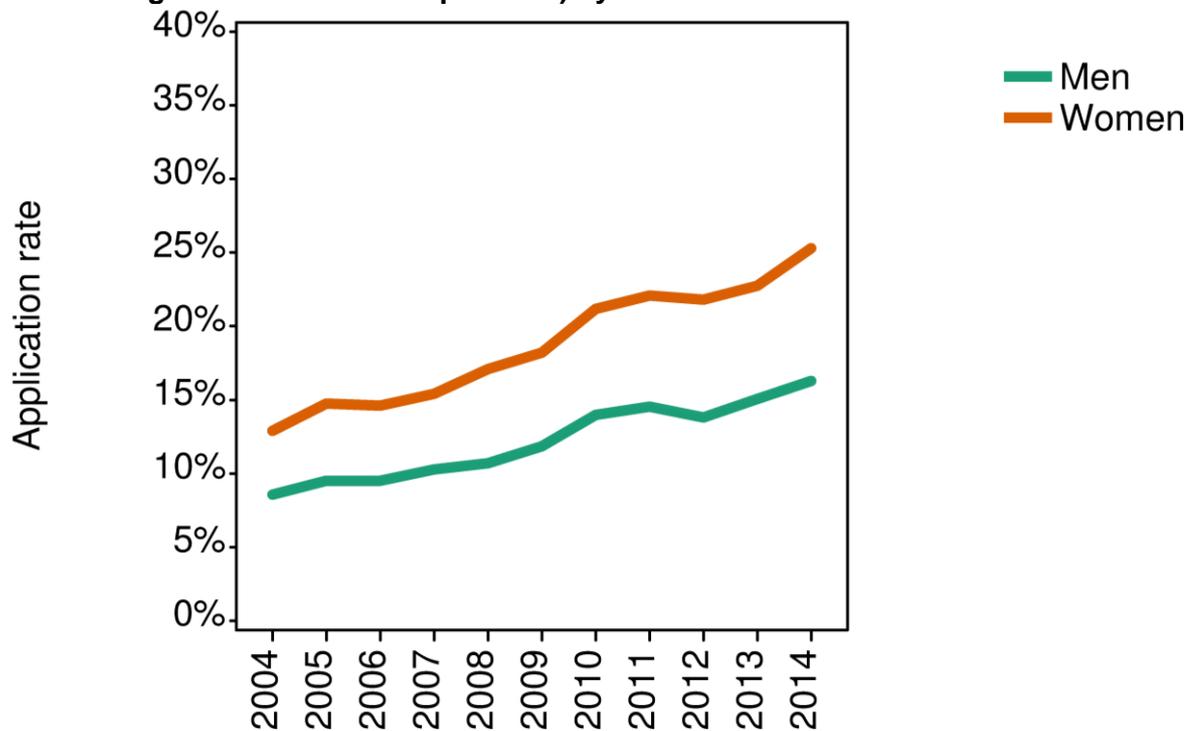
Graph 19: 18 year olds entry rates to higher tariff institutions for advantaged areas (POLAR2 Q5) by country
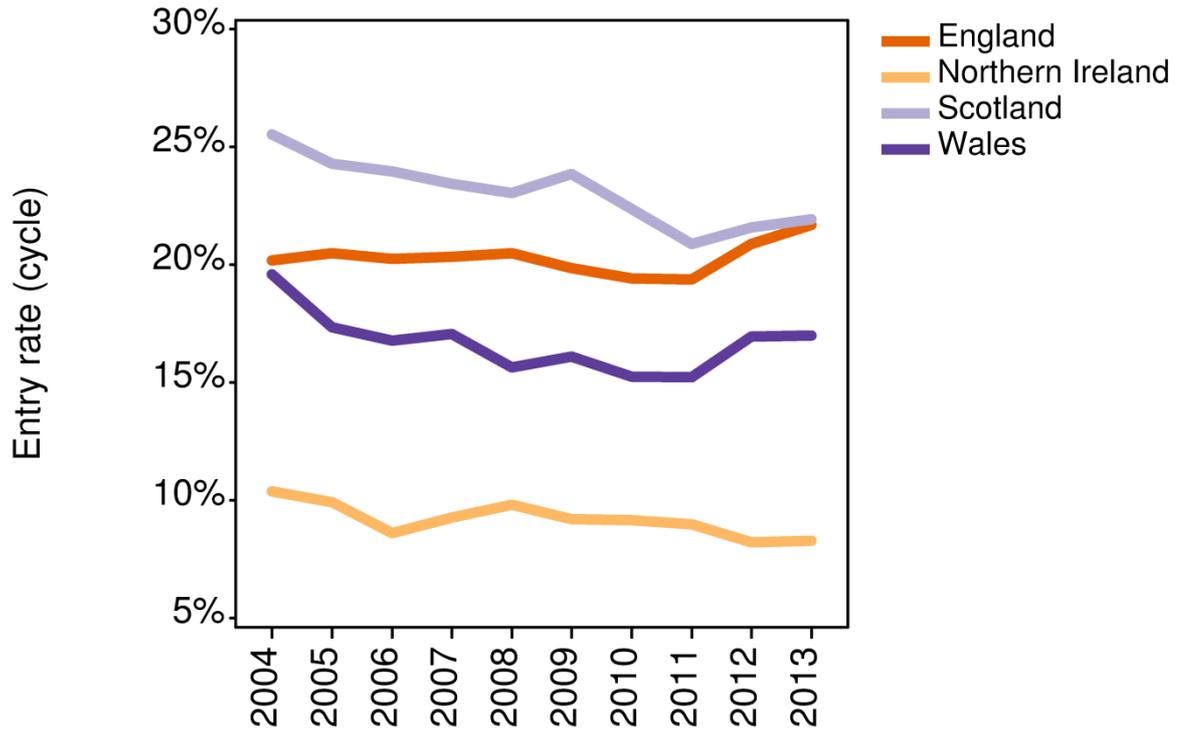
Source: Figure 60 from 'UCAS End of Cycle Report 2013', www.ucas.com