

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

STUDENTS WITH PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

UCAS



INTRODUCTION

In 2023, UCAS introduced seven new questions into the application enabling students to flag a wider range of circumstances and support needs, including: students estranged from their parents, those with parenting or caring responsibilities, students from UK Armed Forces families, UK Armed Forces Service leavers and veterans, refugees and asylum seekers, and students in receipt of free school meals. This new data not only helps higher education (HE) providers connect students to the right support, but also provides the sector with valuable insight into groups of students about whom we have previously had minimal information.

These Fair Access Snapshots offer an at-a-glance overview of this new data. This second Snapshot **in the series** focuses on applicants who shared they had a parenting responsibility in the 2023 cycle.



OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

599,930

UK applicants

482,895

UK accepted
applicants

35.8%

UK entry rate

APPLICANTS WITH PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

33,855

UK applicants

21,690

UK accepted
applicants

4.5%

Proportion of
UK accepted
applicants

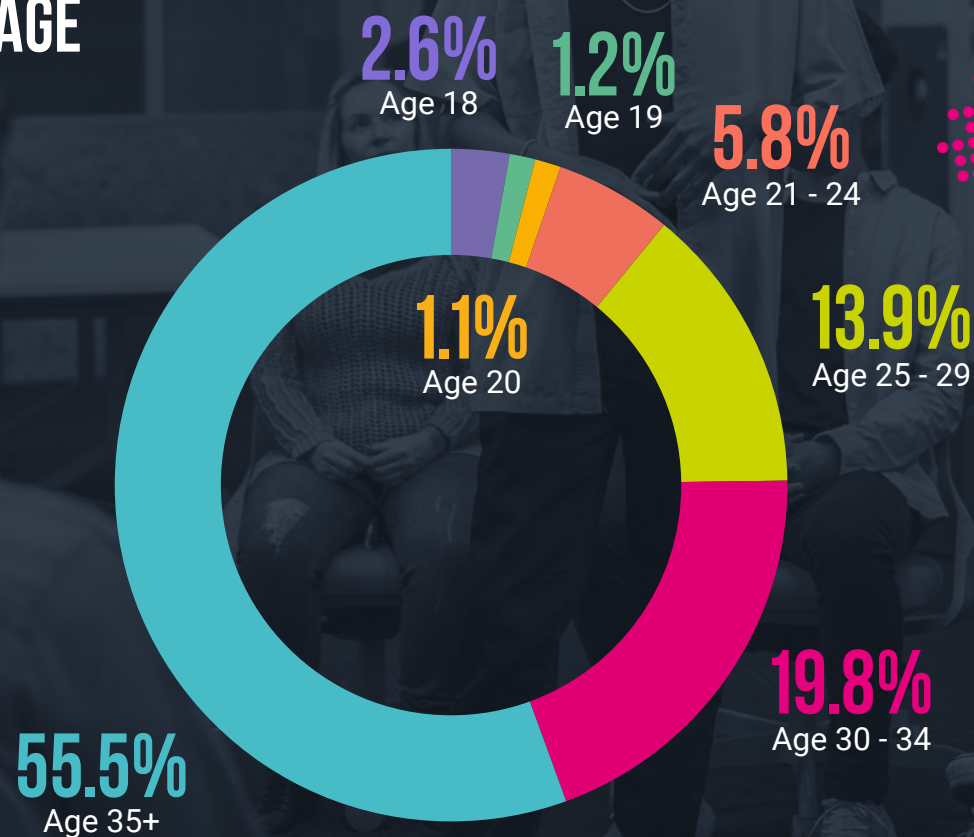


BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

Students with parenting responsibilities	Applicants	Accepted applicants
England	27,080	17,300
Northern Ireland	760	435
Scotland	4,360	2,860
Wales	1,655	1,095
Overall	33,855	21,690

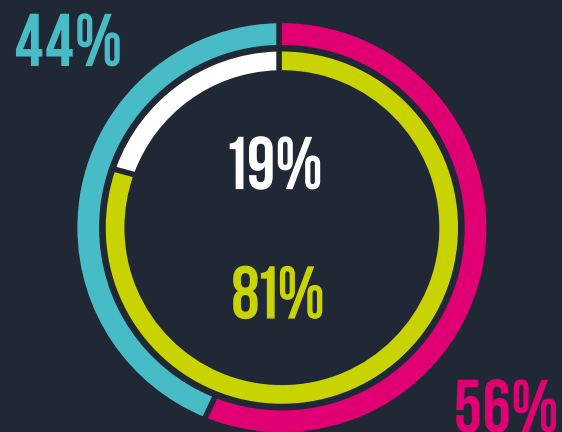
INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE

The number of applicants sharing a parenting responsibility rises sharply for those aged 35 and over – and parents represent over 40% of all UK applicants in this age category. As such, overall behaviours for this group are likely to be influenced by the high proportion of mature applicants, so we have divided applicants into two age groups for the purposes of this Snapshot: 25 and under (4,395 shared parenting responsibilities) and 26 and over (29,460). This allows us to better identify where age may influence differences in behaviours for this group.

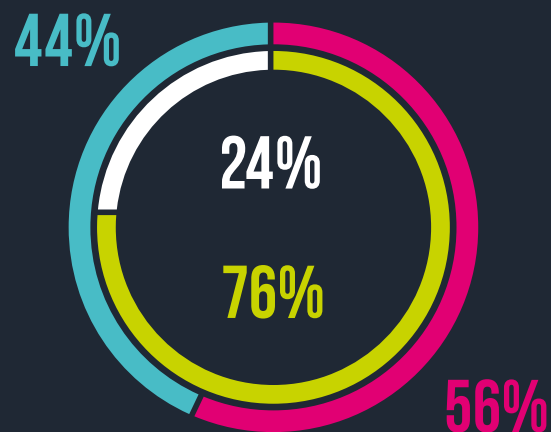


INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER

APPLICANTS AGED 26 AND OVER



APPLICANTS AGED 25 AND UNDER



NON PARENT Female Male PARENT Female Male

The gender imbalance for UK applicants overall is strongly amplified for those with parenting responsibilities. This is true across both age groups but it is slightly more pronounced for the older age category. More research is needed to understand this, but it is likely that mothers remain (or are perceived as) the primary caregivers.

Other possibilities may be that fathers do not tend to share their parenting responsibilities in the UCAS application because they do not require support (potentially because care is primarily managed by the mother), or single parenthood, with women more likely to be parenting solo, may be a factor.

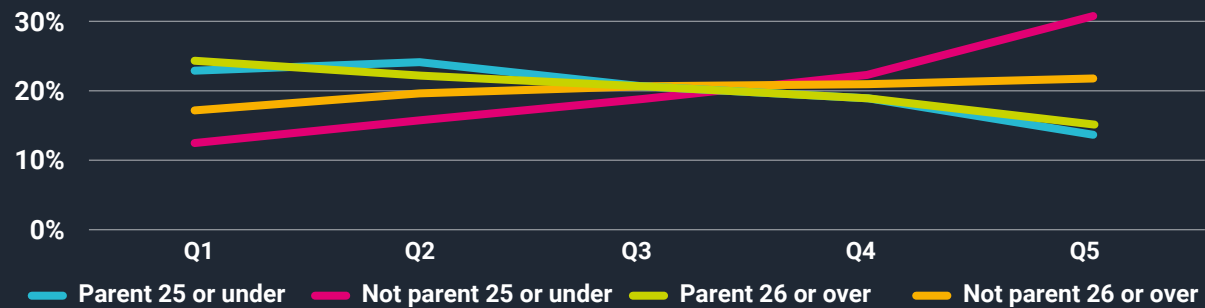


INTERSECTIONALITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

The less advantaged an applicant's background, the more likely they are to share a parenting responsibility – and vice versa. When we split this data by age, there is a similar spread across the quintile groups for applicants with parenting responsibilities, whereas those without show a clear difference in behaviours.

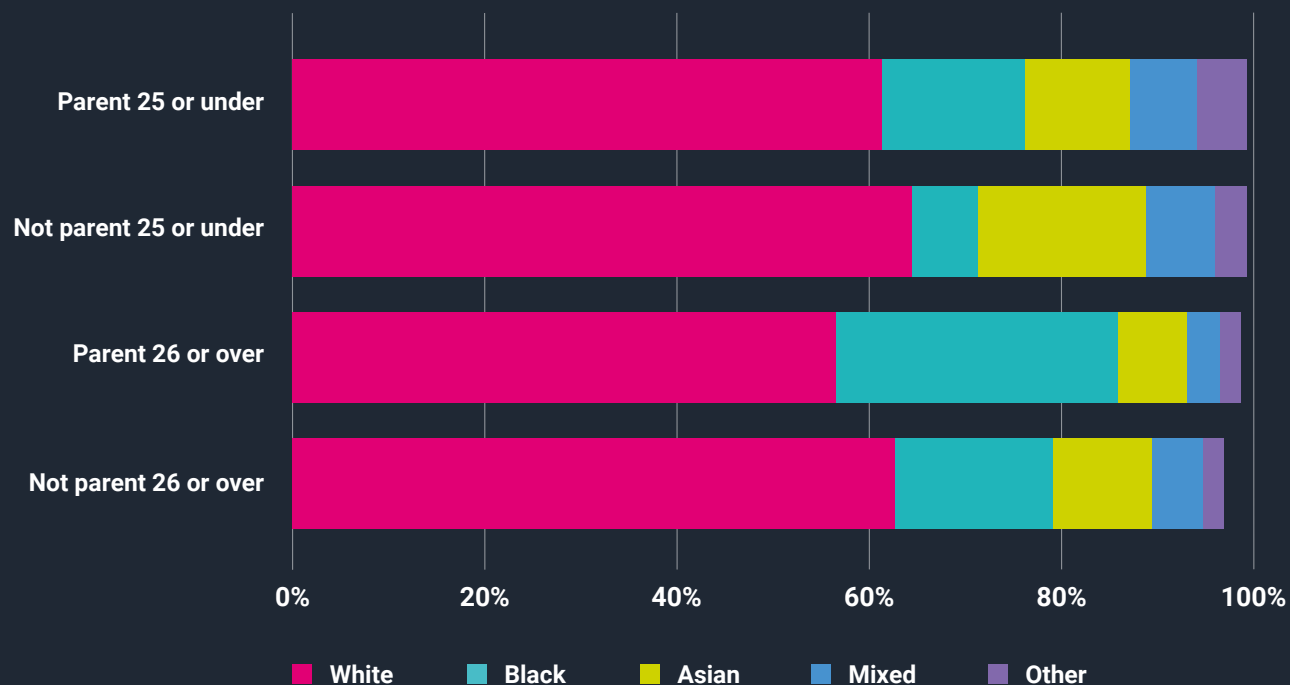
Applicants from less advantaged backgrounds may encounter more barriers to accessing HE with parenting responsibilities than those from more advantaged areas who may have more resource to do so.

Applicants sharing parenting responsibilities by POLAR4 quintile and age group



INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY

While the majority of applicants sharing a parenting responsibility are in the White ethnic group (reflecting the higher number of White applicants overall), Black applicants are strongly over-represented in the parenting group – indeed, the data suggests that older applicants are more likely to apply to HE after they have taken on a parenting role. This may be driven by mature applicant trends, in which we see the number of Black applicants applying to HE increase with age group, as covered in our [2018 mature student research](#).



APPLICANTS WITH PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO APPLY CLOSER TO HOME



Applicants
with parenting
responsibilities

Age 25 and under

23 mins

63 mins



Applicants
without parenting
responsibilities

Age 26+

21 mins

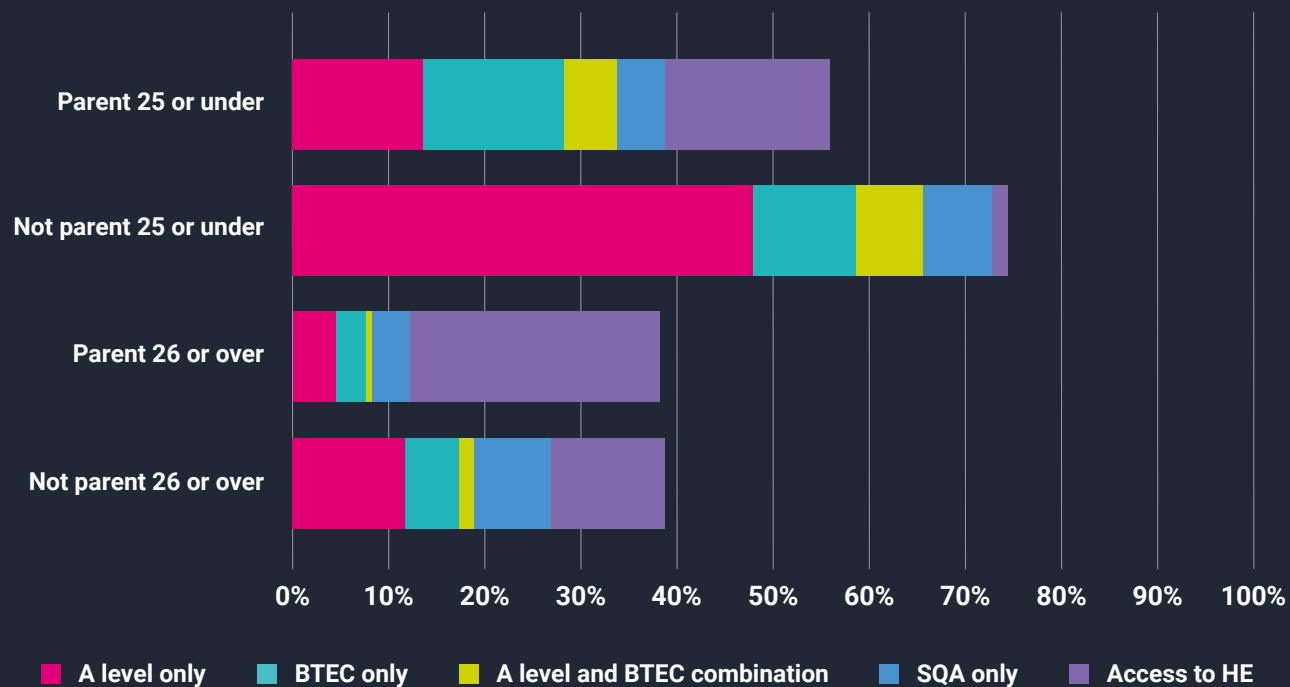
28 mins



This behaviour holds true across age groups, possibly because students are more likely to have established support networks, accommodation and childcare arrangements in their local area. However, we should be aware that their choices may be more restricted as a consequence



ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS



The Access to HE Diploma features strongly as an entry qualification for applicants with parenting responsibilities – and this is true for both young and mature groups. They are also far less likely to apply with A levels, and this difference is particularly stark for young parents. This data reinforces the critical role of adult education and qualifications that enable them to access HE later. We will be taking a deeper dive into this data in a future data blog with Andy Todd at the University of Chester.



SUBJECTS AND COURSES



**Health &
Social Care**



**Nursing &
Midwifery**



Allied Health
(Applicants aged 26+)



**Sociology,
Social Policy,
Anthropology**
(Applicants aged
25 and under)

Previous UCAS research indicates mature applicants' motivations for applying to HE to be largely career-related, so it is unsurprising that the top three courses entered by parents aged 26 and over are vocational – but there are similar patterns for young parents.

The intersectionality of age, gender and ethnicity also closely aligns with **UCAS nursing research**, which found an over-representation of mature applicants (60% are aged 21+), women (9.1 times more likely to choose nursing than men), and Black students (25% of UK nursing applicants). Furthermore, nursing applicants are more likely to enter HE with vocational and technical qualifications (74% of nursing applicants compared to 38% of all applicants).



EXPERT REFLECTION

This snapshot provides a rich and valuable insight into the first cycle of student-parent application data. Many of the insights highlighted accord with small-scale research findings relating to issues such as student-parents' motivations in undertaking university study, proximity to home and course choice.

Research shows that for every one student-parent feeling positive about starting university, there are two feeling negative about the transition. Universities holding data on which of their incoming students have shared parental responsibility represents a huge step forward, allowing them to put in place appropriate support mechanisms from the point at which student-parents accept their university place. I would urge universities to share this valuable data as early as possible with the teams responsible for putting support in place (e.g. central student support teams and departments, including personal tutors and academic advisers) to ensure a smooth transition and onward study.

This snapshot presents the start of an exciting journey. We will have the opportunity to track student-parent application and acceptance data over time, and there is the opportunity for further research, for this cycle and beyond, looking into the patterns in, and relationships between, student-parent entry qualifications, course and provider choice. I look forward to taking this conversation forward in conjunction with UCAS's Fair Access Team.

ANDREA TODD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER
JULY 2024



CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

In this first cycle, almost 34,000 applicants felt comfortable to share their parenting responsibilities on the UCAS application – a strong indication that the messages around sharing individual needs are reaching students as we continue to work towards a culture of positive disclosure. We want all applicants to holistically research the right options for them, understand the benefits of sharing their individual circumstances, and feel confident they will get the support they need to succeed in their application and on their course – and beyond.

Intersectional data is vital when understanding this group. Age clearly plays an important role, but more research is needed to understand if or how the university experience differs for young parents compared to older groups. Certainly, we see a clear interplay between mature applicants, ethnicity, entry qualifications and course choice – something we will be exploring more closely with Andrea Todd at the University of Chester later this year.

THE UCAS FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME

The Fair Access Programme aims to add further value to the sector's efforts to widen access and participation. UCAS' data and insights are central to our understanding of how different under-represented and disadvantaged groups progress to HE – and the barriers and challenges they face along the way. This new data will help us to extend our understanding of these groups, identify hidden challenges, and work with the sector to improve their experiences and outcomes.

This year, we launched the Outreach Connection Service helping to link students more effectively to the diversity of outreach opportunities offered by HE providers and third-sector organisations. Initially, this will be available via the Adviser Hub where teachers can filter the opportunities to find what is best for their students. However, we are already working on making the service available directly to students for a future cycle. Outreach providers can **register their interest** in the OCS now.



UCAS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Find targeted information and advice for under-represented students on ucas.com:

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students with parenting responsibilities, including information about finance and funding, other support in HE, and making a UCAS application. Here you will also find links to resources created by Andrea Todd at the University of Chester to help student parents navigate university and open days.
- ▶ **Applying to HE with individual needs** – information and advice for a range of circumstances and support needs
- ▶ **Mental health and wellbeing support** – information and advice for all students
- ▶ **Teacher and adviser toolkit** – how to support students with parenting responsibilities, from research through to transition
- ▶ **All teacher and adviser toolkits** – for supporting under-represented students from a variety of backgrounds
- ▶ **Good practice briefing for HE providers** – implementing support for students with parenting responsibilities following the introduction of the new question

ⁱ POLAR is a measurement which classifies areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of 18 year old participation in HE. Each group represents around 20% of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest participation rates, considered the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest participation rates, most advantaged).

