

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

STUDENTS FROM UK ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

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INTRODUCTION

For the 2023 cycle, 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 is the third Snapshot in **the series** and focuses on applicants who shared that their parent(s) had served in the UK Armed Forces (UKAF) in the 2023 cycle.



OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

599,930

UK applicants

482,895

UK accepted
applicants

35.8%

UK 18 year old
acceptance
rate

APPLICANTS FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

20,075

UK applicants

16,010

UK accepted
applicants

3.3%

Of UK accepted
applicants

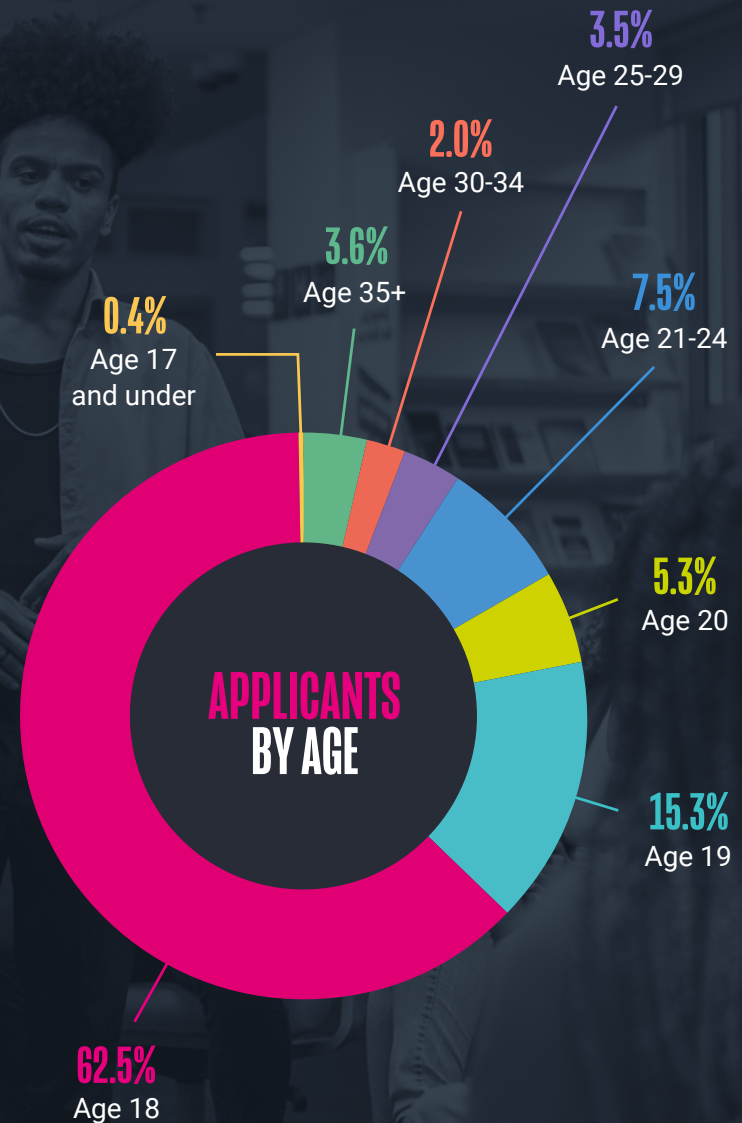


BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

From a UKAF family	Applicants	Accepted applicants
England	16,375	13,180
Northern Ireland	610	415
Scotland	2,000	1,520
Wales	1,095	895

Two thirds of applicants sharing that they are from a UKAF family are aged 18. While 91% are aged under 25, a significant number (1,815) are older, and UCAS' next stage of this data journey is to understand whether there is support for older applicants from these backgrounds in HE.

Although we acknowledge the lifelong impact of coming from a military family, we are mindful of not setting unrealistic expectations around available support, so we will work with the sector to understand whether we need to further refine this question.

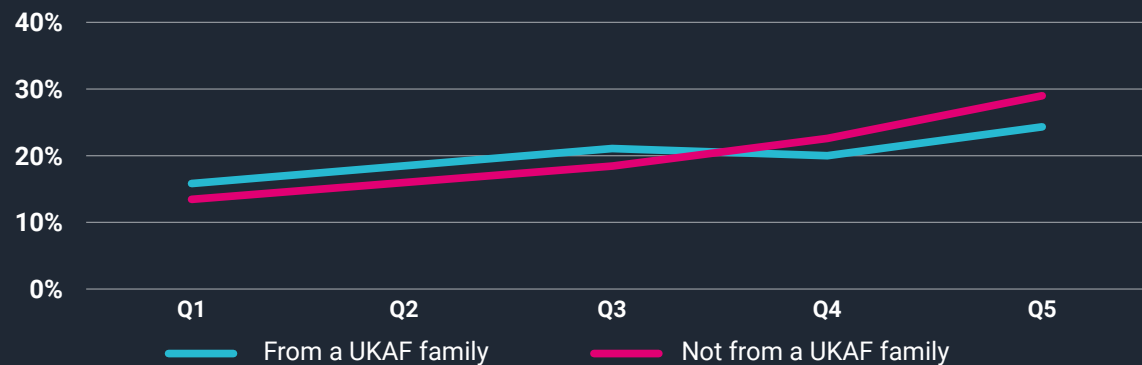


INTERSECTIONALITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

While a greater number of applicants from a UKAF family are from the most advantaged areas (POLAR4 Q4-Q5) there is a higher proportion from the least advantaged areas (Q1-Q3) when compared to applicants not sharing a UKAF background.

While this may suggest that applicants from UKAF families are more likely to apply to HE, POLAR4 data may be unreliable for this group due to its reliance on home postcode data that does not take into account the mobility of UKAF families, and the location of military bases, for example. Further research is needed to understand this data.

Percentage of applicants in each POLAR4 quintile group



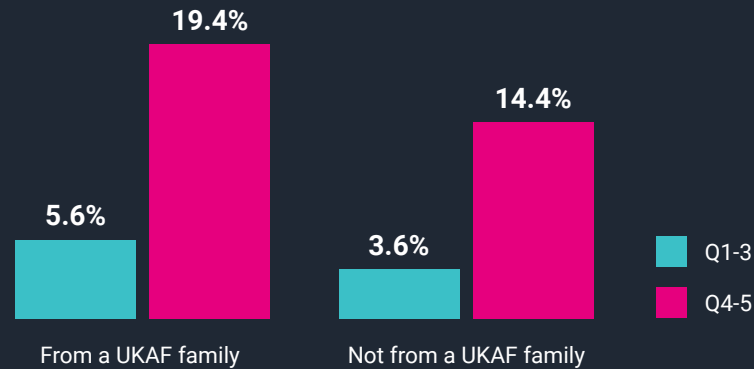
ⁱPOLAR is a measurement which classifies areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of 18 year old participation in HE. Each group represents around 20% of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest participation rates, considered the most disadvantaged) to quintile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



INTERSECTIONALITY: SCHOOL TYPE

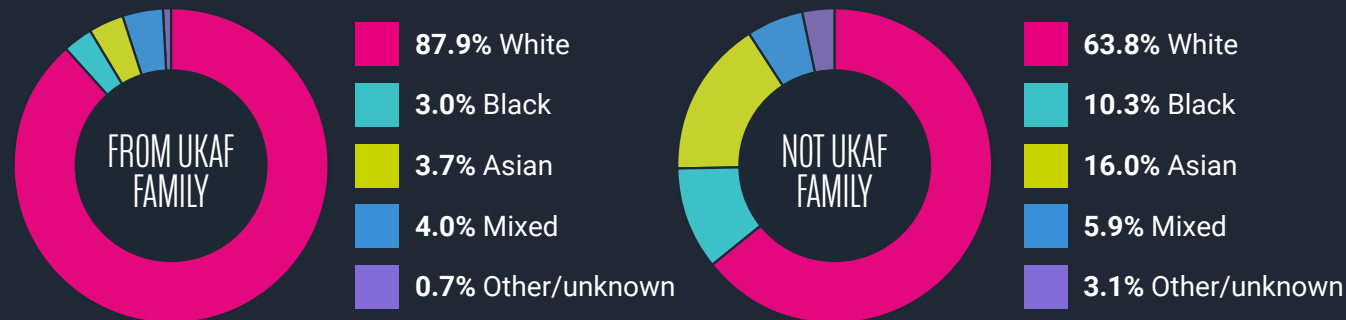
As UKAF families are highly mobile, parents and carers may be more inclined to place their children in boarding school to avoid educational disruption – the MOD helps parents fund this through the **Continuity of Education Allowance**. Indeed, UCAS data indicates this group is more likely to apply from an independent school than those not sharing a UKAF family background, and this holds true across all POLAR4 quintiles.

Proportion of 18-19 year olds applying from an independent school, by POLAR4 quintile grouping



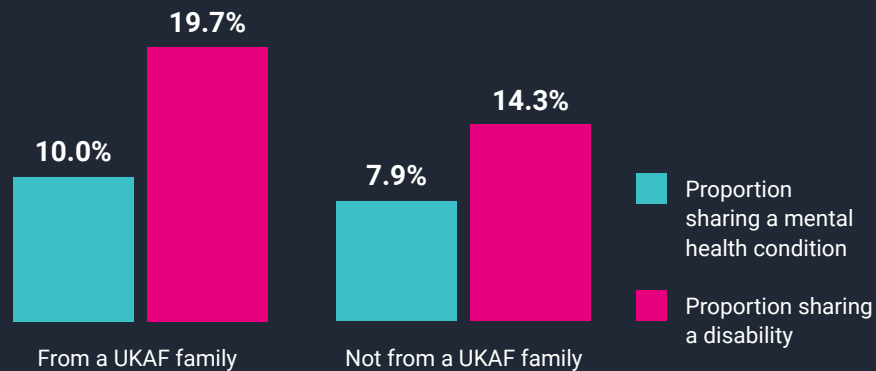
INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY

White students are over-represented in this group, while applicants from the Black or Asian ethnic groups are far less likely to share a UKAF family background.



INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Applicants from UKAF families are more likely to also share a disability and/or have a mental health condition. It is important this intersectionality is taken into consideration when advising these applicants about their next steps to ensure they can access the full range of support they may need.



SUBJECTS AND COURSES

The subject areas chosen by this group of applicants are more diverse than we've seen in other under-represented groups.



**Agriculture,
food and related
studies**



**Sport and
exercise
science**



**Veterinary
sciences**



APPLICANTS FROM UK ARMED FORCES FAMILIES TRAVEL FURTHER TO UNIVERSITY

On average, applicants from UKAF families travel 20 minutes further to their chosen provider. With many military bases located in rural areas, students from UKAF families often need to travel further to university or college.

This can create additional challenges – particularly financial – not only for those studying and travelling between home and university, but also for those wanting to attend open days, interviews and other events.

In some cases, these applicants may have a more mobile mindset when making their decisions – perhaps because they feel less personally connected to their ‘home’ location.

However, we should bear in mind that the ‘starting point’ for this data (i.e. their UK home address) will not be directly comparable if applicants are living overseas. We are aware students from UKAF families occasionally face complications related to location when stationed overseas, so UCAS is working with expert organisations to understand how to support them.

Average travel time



57 mins

77 mins



Applicants not from a UKAF family



Applicants from a UKAF family



A COMMENT FROM SCIP ALLIANCE

I am delighted to see UCAS contributing to our understanding of the lives and choices of the children of serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel. This first ever Fair Access Snapshot is a welcome step in large-scale data analysis for this remarkable group of students, who bring a wealth of unique experiences and considerable assets to their higher education studies and institutions.

We are still in the early days of research and allied support for Service children, but there are some helpful indicators here for universities looking to help them thrive. The greater likelihood for Service children to identify a mental health condition or disability echoes prior research, so providers – and the wider Armed Forces support community – would do well to take note. However, a defining feature of the cohort is the diversity of their experiences resulting from the complex inter-play of highly individual patterns of school mobility, separation from parents and transition from military to civilian life.

For this reason, the exploration of intersectionality in this Snapshot is not only important, it is a necessary part of getting under the skin of cohort-level insights. For Service children especially, it will be important to investigate multiple intersectional characteristics to effectively target support at this big data level and to engage at an individual level to deploy solutions that are meaningful to each student's personal circumstances.

The most effective student support will reflect this personalisation. It will ensure that Service children feel able to access and inform the help on offer, that they belong in the university community, and that while their Armed Forces family background does not define them, it is respected and their unique experiences are both valued and understood.

PHIL DENT, DIRECTOR
SERVICE CHILDREN PROGRESSION (SCIP) ALLIANCE
JULY 2024



CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

We are pleased to see over 20,000 applicants feeling comfortable to share that their parent(s) are, or were, serving in the UK Armed Forces in this first cycle. It is 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, on their course, and beyond.

When compared to the other Fair Access Snapshots in this series, it is evident that the behaviour of applicants from a UK Armed Forces family is very different to that of applicants from other under-represented groups. This is a very diverse group with challenges and considerations that are very specific to their individual family circumstances.

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.

At this early stage, we can see that the geographical location of applicants in this group is an issue that may warrant further investigation for the HE sector: not only the impact of mobility, but also the challenge of using postcode measures of disadvantage, and the potential for students' proximity to HE providers to create challenges and barriers.

As we gather and share more data and insights across the sector for Service children, we hope to better understand the drivers behind their motivations and choices, and the unique factors affecting their journey to HE.

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 Outreach Connection Service now.



UCAS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS FROM UKAF FAMILIES

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

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students from a UKAF family.
- ▶ **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 from UKAF families, 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 from UKAF families following the introduction of the new UCAS question.

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