

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

UK ARMED FORCES VETERANS AND SERVICE LEAVERS

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 fourth Snapshot **in the series** focuses on applicants who shared they were UK Armed Forces veterans or Service leavers in the 2023 cycle.



OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

599,930

UK applicants

482,895

UK accepted
applicants

35.8%

of UK 18 year
olds accepted

APPLICANTS WHO HAVE SERVED IN THE UK ARMED FORCES

1,540

UK applicants

1,030

UK accepted
applicants

0.2%

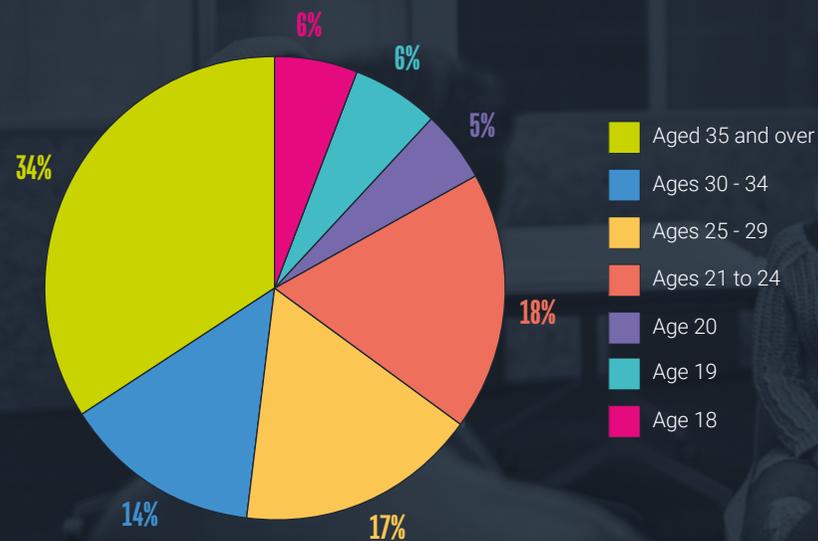
of UK accepted
applicants



BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

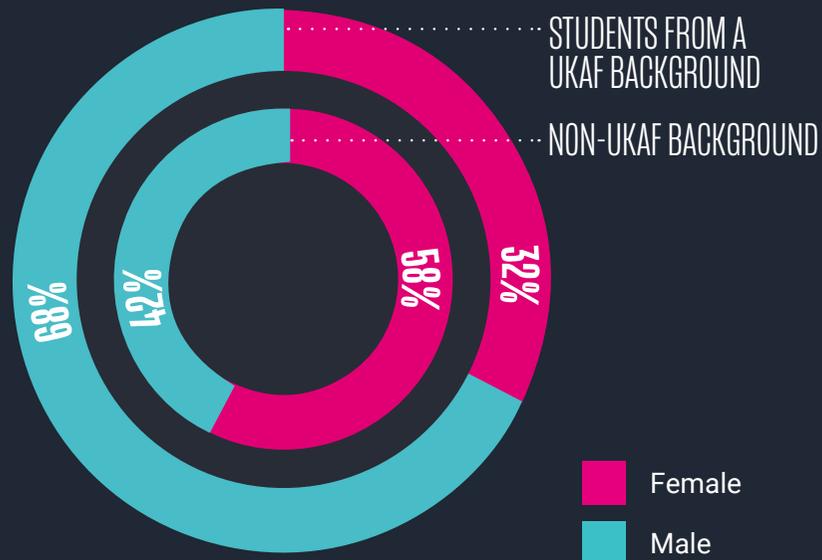
UKAF background shared	Applicants	Accepted applicants
England	1,205	810
Northern Ireland	30	15
Scotland	200	130
Wales	110	70

INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE



Two thirds of applicants sharing they have been in the UK Armed Forces (UKAF) are aged 25 and over and therefore behaviours are likely to be reflective of mature applicants generally. We were surprised by the number of younger applicants in this group, although [data from the Ministry of Defence \(MOD\)](#) indicates that younger Service leavers are more likely to report going into education, training or volunteering (68% of those aged under 25). Further data and research is needed to understand if UCAS data aligns with that trend, and we will be seeking feedback from HE providers to check whether this self-declared data is accurate.

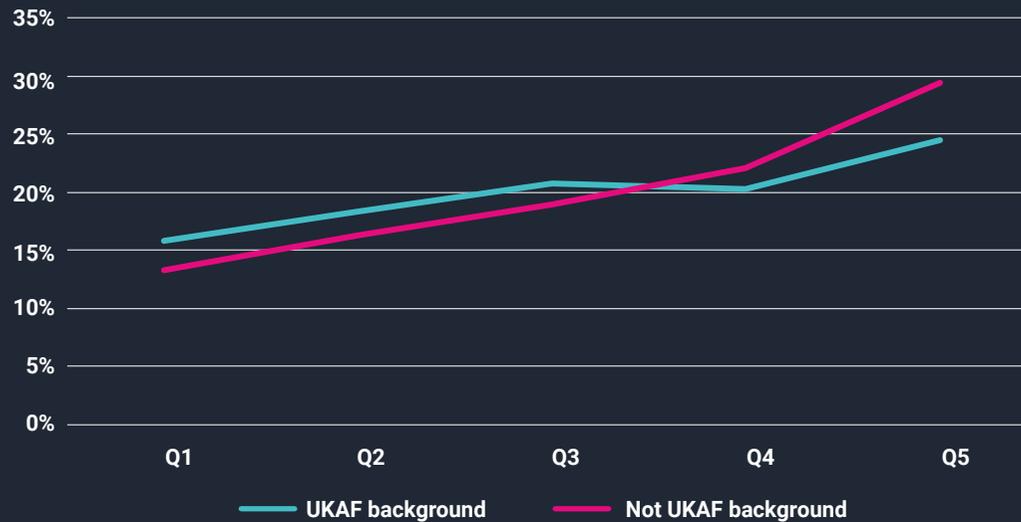
INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER



Two thirds of applicants in this group are male, inverting the bias towards female applicants overall. However, female veterans and Service leavers may actually be over-represented in HE despite being in the minority overall; in 2023, [MOD data](#) shows women comprised just 11.7% of the Regular Forces and 15.9% of Reservists.



INTERSECTIONALITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE



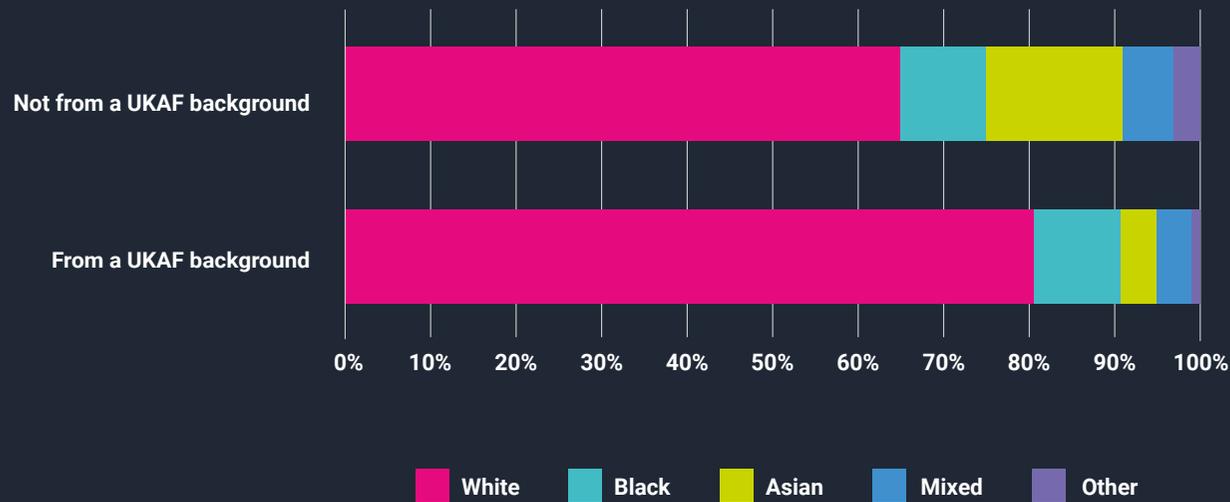
When looking at POLAR4¹ data, applicants who have served in the UKAF are more likely to come from the least advantaged areas (quintiles 1-3) than those who have not served. This may indicate that more advantaged applicants attended university before joining the UK Armed Forces – more research is needed to understand if this is the case, and how this may affect the choices they make.

We should also be mindful, when looking at postcode measures of disadvantage, that applicants who have served in the UKAF will have been mobile during their Service which may have impacted on their geographical location – as such, POLAR4 and similar measures may not accurately represent this group.

¹ 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).

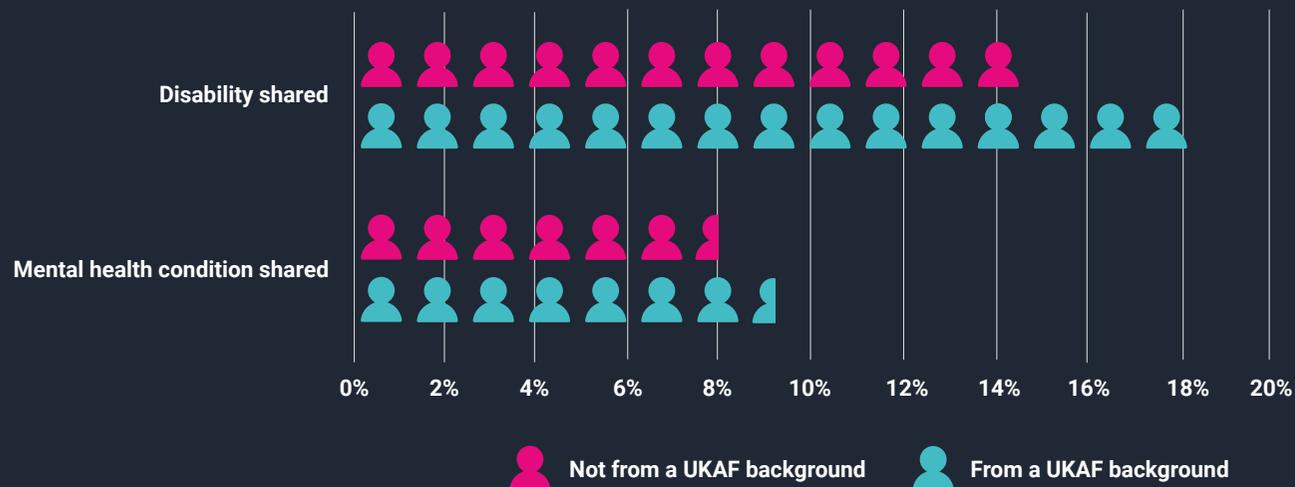


INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY



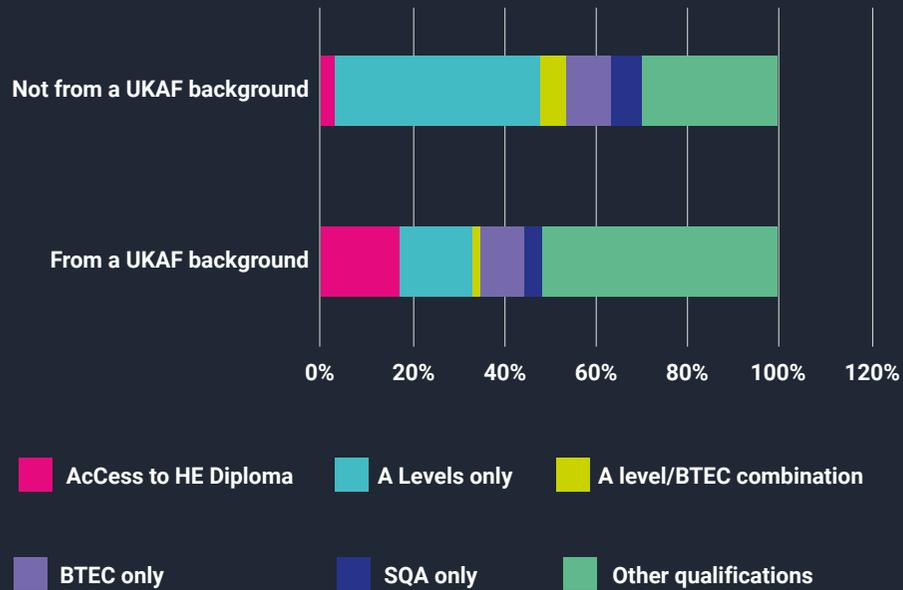
The ethnic composition of UKAF veterans and Service leavers is broadly reflective of UK applicants overall. However, while White applicants make up almost two thirds of this group, Service leavers and veterans from other ethnic groups may be over-represented in HE: according to [MOD statistics](#), ethnic minorities comprised approximately 10.1% of UKAF personnel in 2023. While the data cannot be directly compared due to differences in definitions, it indicates a potential area for further exploration.

INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH



Applicants with a UKAF background are more likely to share a disability and/or mental health condition in their UCAS application. While we are unable to say for certain that this is related to their UKAF Service, it is certainly something we need to be mindful of when advising applicants to ensure they can access the right support. Signposting expert charities and support agencies is critical.

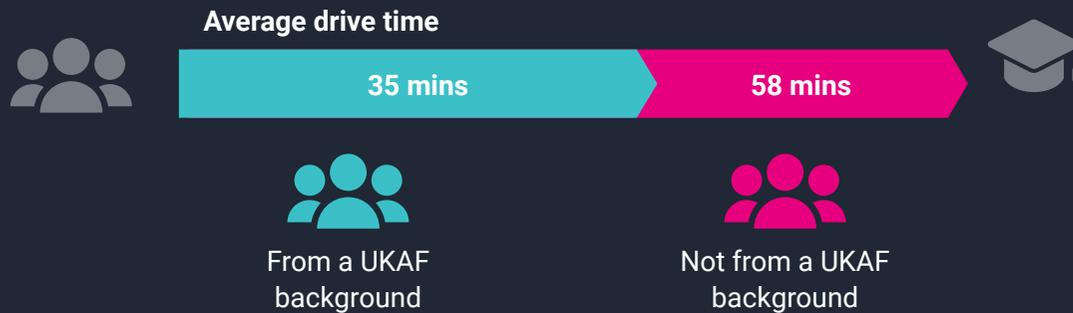
ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS



As for many mature applicants, the Access to HE Diploma features strongly as an entry qualification for those from a UKAF background. They are far less likely to apply with A levels than applicants overall. UCAS does not hold the data for applicants accepted with accreditation/recognition of prior attainment (APL/RPL), and it is likely that the qualifications, training and experience gained while in the UK Armed Forces will feature strongly in their entry qualification profiles – represented here in the 'Other' category.



UKAF VETERANS AND SERVICE LEAVERS TEND TO STUDY CLOSER TO HOME



On average, applicants who have served in the UK Armed Forces travel 23 minutes less to their place of study. This is likely due to the predominantly mature age profile of this group: older applicants are significantly more likely to live at home while studying.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES



Allied Health



Celtic Studies



Nursing & Midwifery

Previous UCAS research indicates that mature applicants' motivations for applying to HE are primarily related to their career, so it is unsurprising to see two health-related courses coming out more strongly among those from a UKAF background. We were surprised to see Celtic Studies here as this bucks the vocational trend, but the numbers in this dataset are small so variations are more likely to be seen. We will continue to monitor these choices.



CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

In this first cycle, over 1,500 applicants shared that they had served in the UK Armed Forces on their 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.

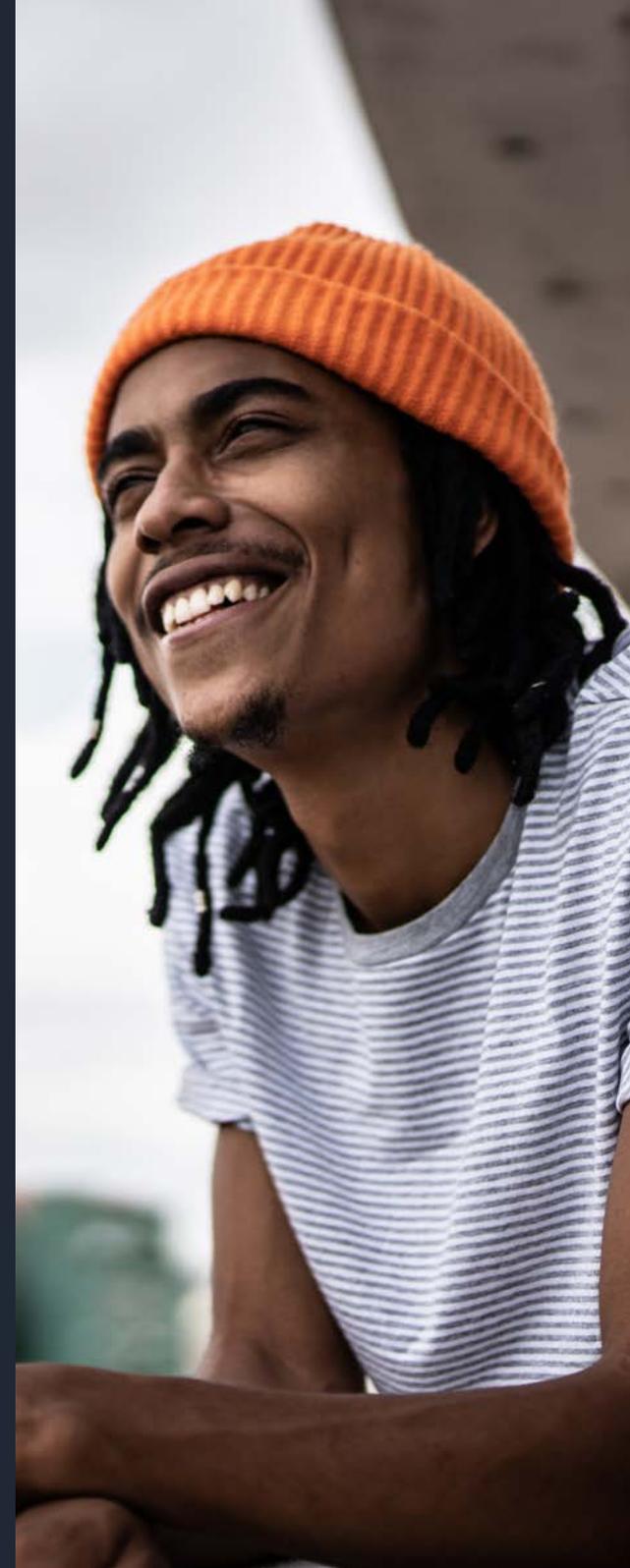
We are pleased to be able to connect applicants with the support they need to make a smooth transition to HE, and to succeed in their onward studies. The data we gather from the application means we can learn more about their behaviours and preferences, leading to a better understanding of how they can be supported in the future.

Service leavers and veterans is a small group so we are likely to see greater variance in composition and behaviours from year-to-year. As such, UCAS is keen to understand more about their journey to HE, the drivers behind their applicant behaviours, and how we can work with expert organisations to share knowledge to develop deeper insights.

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.

We recently launched the Outreach Connection Service which will help link students 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 UKAF VETERANS AND SERVICE LEAVERS

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

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students who are UK Armed Forces veterans or Service leavers. This page includes information about supporting organisations, sharing your circumstances via the UCAS application, and case studies
- ▶ **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 who have served in the UK Armed Forces, from research through to the start of study.
- ▶ **All teacher and adviser toolkits** – for supporting under-represented students from a variety of backgrounds
- ▶ **Good practice briefing for HE providers** – implementing support for UKAF veterans and Service leavers following the introduction of the new question

