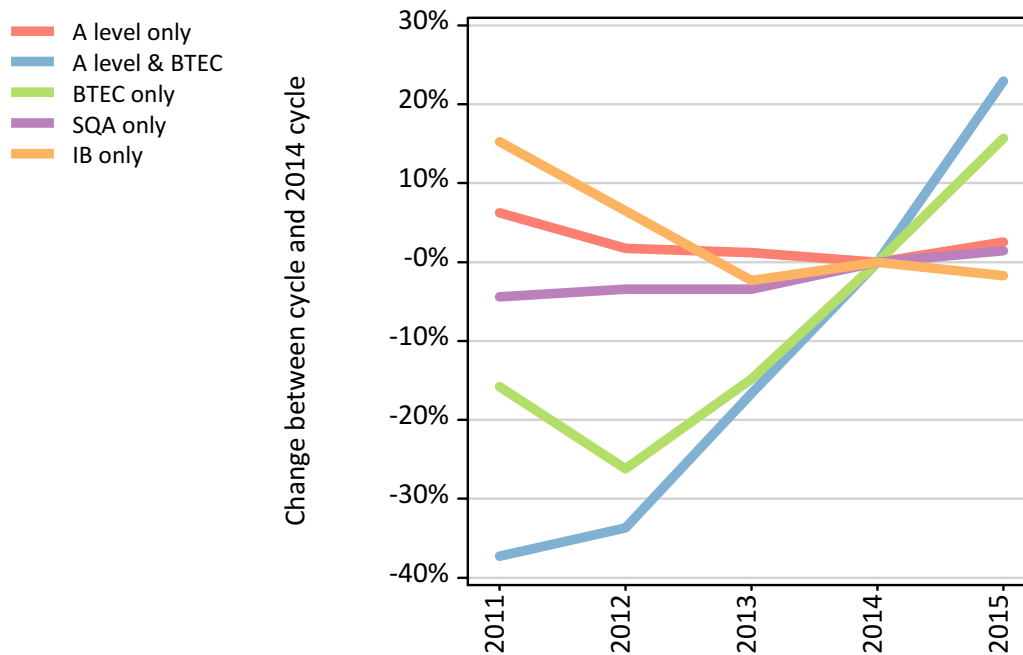




Young BTEC applicants up by 18 per cent to 42,000 in 2015

A growing number of UK 18 year olds who apply to undergraduate higher education courses through UCAS, apply while pursuing BTEC qualifications. In 2015, there were 42,130 applying with BTECs, with three-quarters of these applying with BTECs only. The number of applicants with BTECs has been increasing in recent cycles, by 6,300 (18 per cent proportionally) from 2014, and by 13,970 (50 per cent proportionally) since 2011.

Figure 1: Percentage difference in applicant numbers to UK higher education between cycle and 2014 cycle for UK domiciled 18 year old applicants at the March deadline by qualification group



Most UK 18 year olds who apply to higher education through UCAS are studying for A level qualifications. At the March deadline for 2015 entry, there were 173,420 applicants studying for three or more A levels, 63 per cent of all UK 18 year old applicants. There were 42,130 applicants who were studying for a BTEC qualification (see technical note 2), 11,520 of those applicants were also studying for A levels, and 30,610 applicants were studying for BTECs alone. Scottish Higher or Advanced Higher qualifications were being studied by 17,240 applicants. There were 2,530 applicants studying for the International Baccalaureate.

In 2015, applicants studying for BTECs (either on their own or in combination with A levels) accounted for 15 per cent of all UK 18 year old applicants, up from 11 per cent in 2011. Most of these applicants are studying only for BTEC qualifications – this group has increased in number by 37 per cent (+8,330 applicants) since 2011, with nearly half of this increase in 2015 (16 per cent, +4,150 applicants).

Across the time period there are generally a smaller number of UCAS applicants studying BTECs alongside A levels, but their numbers show larger proportional increases. These applicants have almost doubled in number since 2011, with a 23 per cent (+2,150 applicants) increase in 2015.

There are 6,230 fewer 18 year old UK applicants studying at least three A levels (without BTECs) in 2015 compared to 2011, a 3 per cent fall. Those applicants studying Scottish qualifications are up by 6 per cent over this period, and the number of applicants studying the International Baccalaureate has fallen by 15 per cent.

Technical notes

1. Level 3 qualifications are typically taken by 16-18 year olds and are usually studied whilst they apply to undergraduate higher education. Some of the most common Level 3 qualifications are A levels, certain BTECs and the International Baccalaureate. In Scotland, Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers (SQAs) are the main qualifications studied by applicants, equivalent to Level 3.
2. The Level 3 BTECs covered in this analysis include the Extended Diploma, considered approximately the size of three A levels, the Diploma (two A levels), the Subsidiary Diploma (one A level), and the 90-credit Diploma (one and a half A levels). The majority of BTECs are awarded to applicants from England.
3. Applicants studying for at least three A levels with no BTECs, SQAs or IBs fall into the 'A level only' group. Applicants taking Level 3 BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) with no A levels, SQAs or IBs fall into the 'BTEC only' group. Applicants taking at least three Scottish Highers or Scottish Advanced Highers with none of the others fall into the 'SQA only' group. Applicants taking the International Baccalaureate and none of the others fall into the 'IB only' group. Applicants taking a combination of A levels and BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) with no SQAs or IBs are in the 'A level & BTEC' group. All other applicants are in the 'Other' group, including those with a combination of the above four qualifications not already mentioned, those with too few of a single type of qualification and those with missing qualifications data.
4. The March deadline applies to some art and design courses and acts as a reference point. Almost all 18 year old UCAS applicants have applied by this point.
5. A data file for the data points shown in Figure 1 is available with this analysis note at www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/analysis-notes.

Table 1: Percentage difference in applicant numbers to UK higher education between cycle and 2014 cycle for UK domiciled 18 year old applicants at the March deadline by qualification group (each percentage shows the relative difference between the numbers in that year and the reference year of 2014).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A level only	6%	2%	1%	0%	3%
A level & BTEC	-37%	-34%	-17%	0%	23%
BTEC only	-16%	-26%	-15%	0%	16%
SQA only	-4%	-3%	-3%	0%	1%
IB only	15%	6%	-2%	0%	-2%
Other	-2%	-2%	-7%	0%	-2%
All	1%	-3%	-3%	0%	4%

Table 2: Numbers of UK domiciled 18 year old applicants to UK higher education at the March deadline by qualification group.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A level only	179,650	172,070	171,140	169,100	173,420
A level & BTEC	5,880	6,220	7,820	9,370	11,520
BTEC only	22,280	19,530	22,540	26,460	30,610
SQA only	16,250	16,420	16,420	17,000	17,240
IB only	2,960	2,740	2,510	2,570	2,530
Other	38,110	38,330	36,450	39,060	38,080
All	265,130	255,300	256,870	263,560	273,400