

Media release

Embargoed until 00:01 on Monday 5 February 2018

Rise in rate of 18 year olds applying for UK higher education

The demand for higher education from 18 year olds across the UK remains strong, according to figures published today, Monday 5 February 2018, by UCAS.

The figures are recognised as the first reliable indicators of changes in demand for higher education in the UK. They come from analysis of the numbers of undergraduate applications processed by UCAS ahead of the 15 January deadline, which guarantees applicants 'equal consideration' by their chosen universities and colleges.

These figures will all be published on Monday 5 February as a series of reports at www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/2018-cycle-applicant-figures-january-deadline.

Key findings

A record high for England

Application rates from English 18 year olds have reached a record high, increasing by 0.4 percentage points to 37.4 per cent.

The application rate for 18 year olds in Wales also increased by 0.3 percentage points to 32 per cent, while rates in Northern Ireland were stable at 47.5 per cent.

In Scotland, the same rate fell by 0.2 percentage points to 32.5 per cent. However, in Scotland, around one third of admissions are not processed through UCAS, so this provides only part of the picture of entry to higher education (see note at the end of this release).

These patterns mean that, across the UK as a whole, 18 year olds are more likely than ever before to apply to higher education by the January deadline, 1 per cent more likely than in 2017.

Overall application rate

Overall, by 15 January, there was a 0.9 per cent reduction in the **total** number of people applying to higher education, to 559,000, compared to the same figure in 2017. This figure reflects a 2.5 per cent fall in the 18 year old population in the UK, and falling demand from 19 year olds and the 25+ age groups.

EU and international applications rise

The number of applicants from the EU increased by 3.4 per cent to 43,510, and the number of international applicants increased to its highest ever number, by 11 per cent to 58,450.

Nursing figures

This year, the applications from all age groups to nursing courses in England has fallen by 13%. UCAS started reporting on these figures following a switch from NHS bursaries to tuition fees for nursing subjects at English universities and colleges in 2017.

The 18 year old picture

18 year olds from the UK form the core group of people applying to higher education through UCAS. Every year they make up almost half of all applicants by the 15 January deadline. Here are some key findings on them.

Women and men

In England, both 18 year old women and men were more likely to apply than ever before. However, differences in application rates between 18 year old men and women in 2018 remain high across the UK, with young women more likely to apply than young men. In England, young women are 36 per cent more likely than young men to apply to higher education, a small increase from last year.

In Scotland, an increase in the rate of young men applying, and a decrease in the rate of young women applying, means that young Scottish women are now 56 per cent more likely to apply than Scottish men, a reduction compared to 2017.

In Wales, the difference in application rates in 2018 increased, with women being 48 per cent more likely to apply.

In Northern Ireland, women are 40 per cent more likely to apply than men, a slight increase compared to 2017.

Highest levels on record for English and Northern Irish applicants from disadvantaged areas

By 15 January 2018, application rates for 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas (measured through the POLAR3 classification) in England increased to the highest levels recorded (22.6 per cent). The rate also increased in Northern Ireland (24.5 per cent), and remained constant in Wales (19.7 per cent).

The ratio of application rates between the most and least advantaged decreased, with advantaged UK 18 year olds being 2.3 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged UK 18 year olds, compared to figures at the same point in 2017.

Application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in Scotland, defined using the latest 2016 version of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, decreased in 2018, to 16.7 per cent. This was the first decrease since 2008. The application rate for applicants living in the most advantaged areas in Scotland increased by 1.9 per cent, widening the gap between the most and least advantaged applicants.

UCAS' Chief Executive, Clare Marchant, said: 'Today's figures show that UK higher education continues to be a highly popular choice for 18 year olds, and draws students of all ages from around the world to the UK. However, the application data also highlights continuing falls in demand from older students and to nursing courses in England. These are challenges for everyone involved in higher education to work on together. We must continually seek to evaluate what works well, and what doesn't.

'It's also important to remember that most universities and colleges are still open for applications, and students can still make application choices via UCAS until 30 June. We will be publishing a comprehensive picture of the full 2018 admissions cycle in December 2018.'

For further information, please contact Felicity Cowie, Head of Media and Corporate Communications, on 01242 545 469, or at f.cowie@ucas.ac.uk.

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Notes to editors

How to access the data under embargo

On Monday 5 February, UCAS will publish the numbers of undergraduate applications received by UCAS ahead of the 15 January deadline, which guarantees all applicants 'equal consideration' by their chosen universities and colleges.

These will be published at <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/2018-cycle-applicant-figures-january-deadline>.

However, until they are published, you can download a zip file which includes all the data here https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/a5a740c69063488ba02f88bb2780ba15/rNzNnKkDmrH8eJtA/Jan15_embargo.zip

To understand the data in the zip file, please refer to the 2017 release at www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/2017-cycle-applicant-figures-%E2%80%93-january-deadline.

To help you access the correct data behind the key findings in this release we have created this guide:

A record high for England – view the Analysis report

Overall application rate – view the Summary Statistics of Applicants

EU and international applications rise – view Analysis of Applicants by Domicile

Nursing figures – view these 4 reports

- Summary statistics of nursing applicants
- Analysis of nursing applicants by sex and age
- UK 18 year old application rates to nursing – 2018
- CSVs of all the nursing reports – 2018

The 18 year old picture – view the Analysis report

About the 15 January deadline

The 15 January deadline is an equal consideration deadline. Applicants who apply on or before this date are guaranteed an equal opportunity to be considered against the other applicants who have applied in that period. This ensures offers are not made on first-come, first-served basis. Applicants can still apply after the 15 January deadline, and many universities and colleges are keen to continue receiving applications.

About data and analysis related to Scotland

In Scotland, there is a substantial section of provision not included in UCAS' figures. This is mostly full-time higher education provided in further education colleges, which represents around one third of young, full-time undergraduate study in Scotland. This proportion varies by geography and background.

About POLAR3, POLAR4, and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

POLAR 3 and 4 classifies small areas across the UK into five groups, according to their level of young participation in higher education. Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent 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).

Although POLAR covers Scotland, an additional measure is used for reporting in Scotland called the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). SIMD ranks small geographical areas in Scotland by their relative level of deprivation across a range of measures, which are used to form five groups – or quintiles – with equal population sizes. The first quintile indicates the most deprived group, and the fifth the least.

About UCAS

UCAS is a charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education. We manage applications from around 700,000 applicants each year for full-time undergraduate courses, at over 395 universities and colleges across the UK.