



## BRIEFING PAPER

Number 7857, 13 March 2020

# Higher education student numbers

By Paul Bolton

### Contents:

1. Scope of this briefing
2. Snapshot 2018/19
3. Full-time undergraduates applying through UCAS
4. Appendix -Higher Education Funding Council for England analysis



# Contents

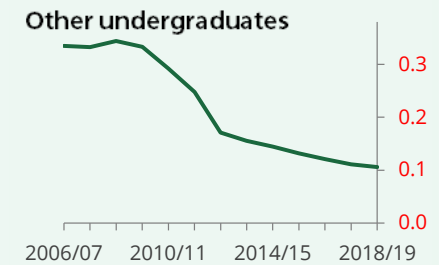
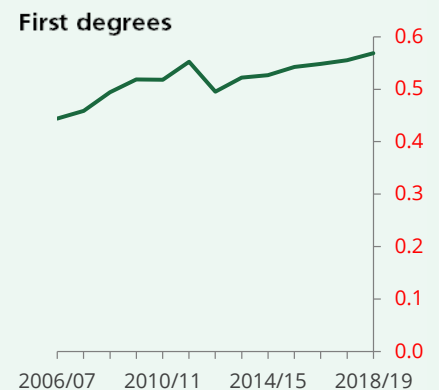
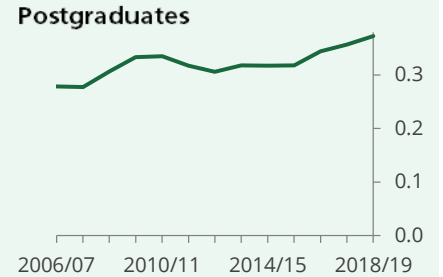
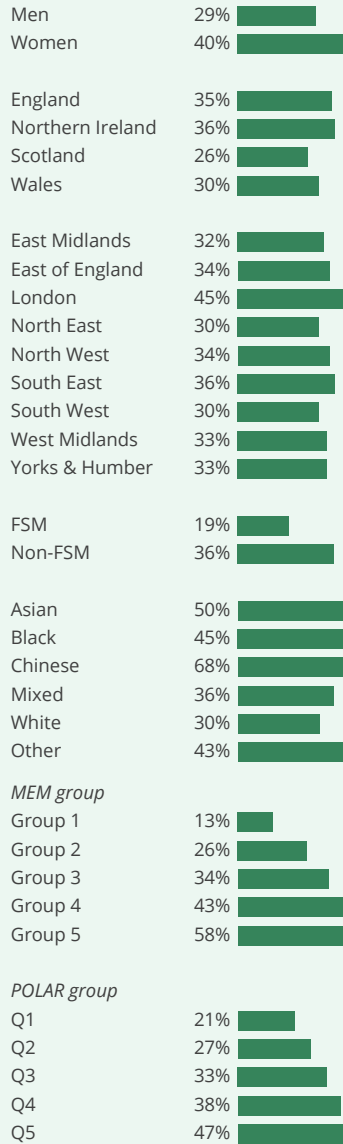
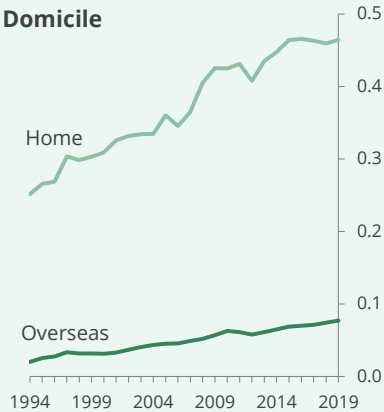
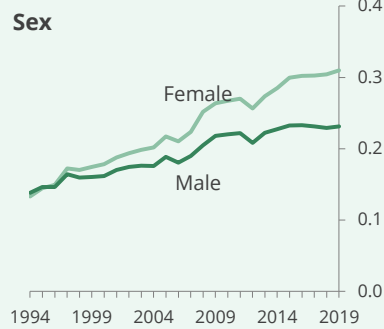
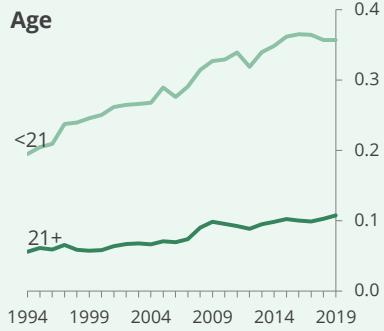
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Scope of this briefing</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Snapshot 2018/19</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Full-time undergraduates applying through UCAS</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 All applicants and entrants	7
3.2 Breakdown by student characteristics	9
3.3 Applications for the 2020 cycle	9
3.4 Application and entry <i>rates</i>	10
3.5 Non-UCAS data on entry rates	12
3.6 Office for Students TUNDRA measure	13
3.7 Higher Education Statistics Agency data for the UK	14
All students	14
Types of courses and students	15
Overseas students	16
<b>4. Appendix -Higher Education Funding Council for England analysis</b>	<b>17</b>
Undergraduates	17
Postgraduates	18

# SUMMARY

## ACCEPTED APPLICANTS THROUGH UCAS (millions)

## 18 YEAR OLD ENTRY RATES THROUGH UCAS (2019)

## 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR STUDENTS IN THE UK (millions)



## 4 Higher education student numbers

Headline student numbers have increased to new record levels in recent years following a short dip related to the 2012 reforms in the sector. There have been continued increases in entry rates for different groups of students, including those from disadvantaged areas/backgrounds where rates have also hit new record levels.

However, headline numbers tend to focus on full-time undergraduates and there are ongoing concerns about student numbers outside this group where trends have not been so positive. This includes part-time undergraduates, particularly those not studying first degrees, some postgraduate students, overseas students from some countries, especially Nigeria and Malaysia, mature students and some disadvantaged groups.

There is also uncertainty about the impact of Brexit on EU student numbers.

- In 2018/19 there were 2.4 million students at UK higher education institutions.
- Most full-time students are studying first degrees. There are proportionately more overseas students studying postgraduate courses.
- Over the past decade the number of entrants to 'other undergraduate' courses has fallen by over two-thirds. The large majority on these courses are part-time UK students.
- Total part-time entrants have fallen by 49% since 2008/10, 72% in 'other undergraduate' courses, 27% first degrees, 16% taught postgraduate and 10% postgraduate research courses.
- There were just over 700,000 applications for full-time undergraduate places through UCAS in 2019 and 541,000 were accepted.
- Applicant numbers fell in 2012 with larger falls among those who faced fees of up to £9,000. The total was 7.6% down.
- Applicant numbers bounced back in 2013. A record number were accepted in 2013 and new records were set for acceptances in each of the three following years.
- Applicants for 2020 at the 'equal consideration' deadline of 15 January were up by 1.2% the first increase for three years. Applications of those outside the EU were up by 15%. There was a 2% fall in applicants from the EU and a small fall in home applicants.

## 1. Scope of this briefing

This paper looks at trends in the size of the student population, changes in the number of entrants overall and for different types of students/courses and entry rates for different groups and areas.

This paper replaces [Entrants to higher education](#) and [HE in England from 2012: Student numbers](#) which looked in detail at policy around student number control and focussed on annual changes in student numbers, especially in the period leading up to and just after the 2012 higher education funding reforms. Those papers will no longer be updated. The data in this paper will be regularly updated and its coverage expanded over time.

The paper [Education: Historical Statistics](#) includes much longer term trends in student numbers. Readers may also be interested in the following briefing papers:

- [Part-time undergraduate students in England](#)
- [International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs](#)
- [Mature higher education students in England](#)
- [Support for students with mental health issues in higher education in England](#)
- [Higher education finance statistics](#)
- [Higher education funding in England](#)
- [Student loan statistics](#)
- [Tuition fee statistics](#)
- [The value of student maintenance support](#)
- [Support for postgraduate students in England](#)

## 2. Snapshot 2018/19

In academic year 2017/18 there were almost 2.4 million students at UK higher education institutions. This covers all years, modes, levels and domiciles. A full-breakdown is given below and a summary by broad category is shown opposite.

Key points are:

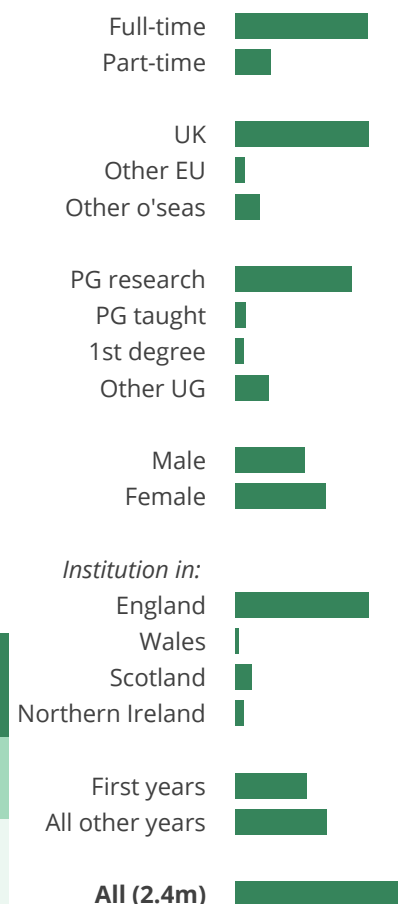
- Most full-time students are studying first degrees.
- Home students on full-time first degrees made up just over half of the total student population.
- There are proportionately more overseas students studying postgraduate courses
- Overseas students are much more likely to be full-time
- EU students are more likely than other overseas students to be studying at undergraduate level
- The large majority of 'other undergraduate' courses are taken part-time by home students.

### Snapshot of students at UK universities

2018/19, thousands

	UK	EU	Other overseas	Total
<i>Full-time</i>				
First degree	1,234	93	154	<b>1,481</b>
Other undergraduate	38	1	6	<b>45</b>
Postgraduate research	44	12	30	<b>86</b>
Postgraduate taught	118	23	130	<b>271</b>
<b>Total full-time</b>	<b>1,434</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>1,883</b>
<i>Part-time</i>				
First degree	167	2	3	<b>172</b>
Other undergraduate	91	3	7	<b>100</b>
Postgraduate research	23	2	3	<b>27</b>
Postgraduate taught	184	7	11	<b>202</b>
<b>Total part-time</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>501</b>
<i>All modes</i>				
First degree	1,401	95	157	<b>1,653</b>
Other undergraduate	129	4	13	<b>146</b>
Postgraduate research	66	14	32	<b>113</b>
Postgraduate taught	302	30	141	<b>473</b>
<b>Total all modes</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>2,384</b>

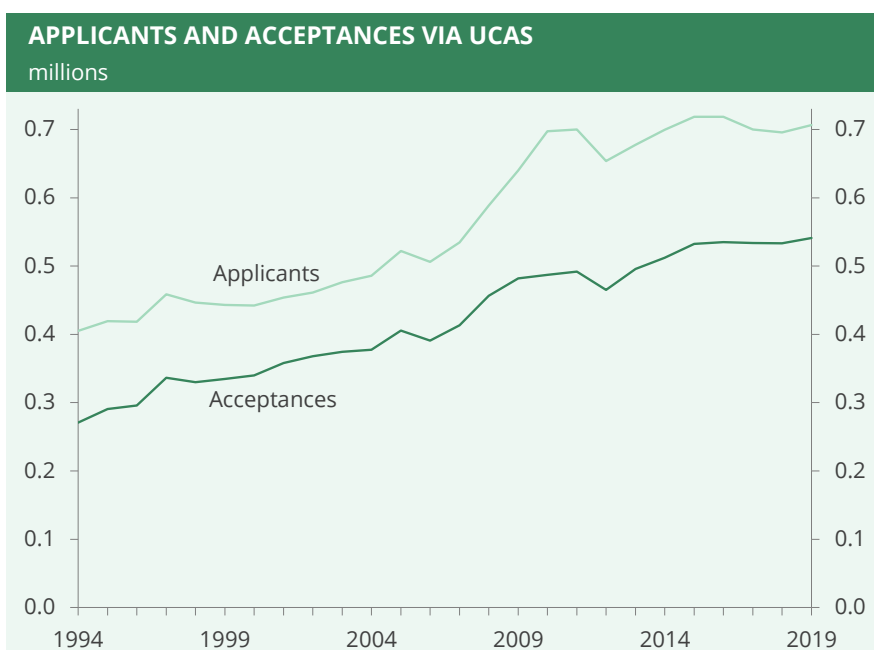
Source: [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19](#), HESA



## 3. Full-time undergraduates applying through UCAS

### 3.1 All applicants and entrants

There were just over 700,000 applicants for full-time undergraduate places through UCAS in 2019, 541,000 of whom were accepted. The table opposite summarises trends since UCAS was created following the reform of the sector in the early 1990s. The same data is illustrated in the chart below. These are annual numbers of applicants and entrants so show changes in the *flow* of students, not the overall population.



There have been underlying increases in applicants and acceptances (averaging 2.2% and 2.8% a year respectively) since the mid-1990s. The total number of home applicants via UCAS rose in each year between 1999 and 2005. There was a 4.1% drop in 2006, the first year of 'variable' fees. The drop in 2006 was greater than that seen in 1998 -the previous change to tuition fees. Both were preceded by relatively large increases in applications.

There was a return to the upward trend in 2007; applicant and acceptance numbers reached new records which were exceeded in 2008, 2009 and 2011.

Applicant numbers fell in 2012 with larger falls among those who faced fees of up to £9,000. The total was 7.6% down; accepted applicants were down by 5.5%.

Applicant numbers bounced back somewhat in 2013. They rose again in 2014 but did not beat their 2011 peak until 2015. This is still the record high for *applicants*.

UCAS handles the very large majority of applications to full-time undergraduate courses at UK universities. The main 'gap' is in Scotland where around one-third of such courses are in further education colleges which are not covered by UCAS.

### APPLICANTS THROUGH UCAS

Thousands

	Applicants	Accepted applicants
1994	405	271
1995	419	291
1996	418	296
1997	459	336
1998	446	330
1999	443	335
2000	442	340
2001	454	358
2002	461	368
2003	476	374
2004	486	378
2005	522	405
2006	506	391
2007	534	413
2008	589	457
2009	640	482
2010	697	487
2011	700	492
2012	654	465
2013	677	496
2014	700	512
2015	718	532
2016	718	535
2017	700	534
2018	696	533
2019	706	541

Note: Figures not adjusted for the changes in the courses covered by UCAS

Sources: UCAS annual datasets; End of cycle data resources, UCAS

## 8 Higher education student numbers

A record 496,000 applicants were accepted in 2013. New records were set for acceptances in each year to 2016 and the 2019 total was another record high.

Much more detail on annual changes in these numbers for the period 2008 to 2014 and analysis of the impact of the 2012 funding changes is included in the papers [Entrants to higher education](#) and [HE in England from 2012: Student numbers](#).

The coverage of UCAS figures has increased over time as more courses have come under their remit. In general the impact is quite small, but some changes in coverages, such as the inclusion of ex-Nursing Midwifery Admission Service courses in 2008 had a much greater effect. These data are not adjusted in any way for these changes.

UCAS figures are published more frequently than others in this paper and are more up-to-date. Their figures can be found at: [www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis](http://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis) along with a timetable of when new figures are published.



### 3.2 Breakdown by student characteristics

The reference table at the end of this paper gives a breakdown of applicants and acceptances by broad group. These are also illustrated in summary form below and opposite.

RECENT GROWTH IN UCAS APPLICANTS DRIVEN BY OVERSEAS STUDENTS							
	Thousands					Change	
	1994	2000	2010	2018	2019	1994-2019	2010-2019
<b>Applicants</b>							
Home	365	389	587	562	565	+55%	-4%
EU	19	24	47	53	53	+186%	+12%
Other overseas	21	29	63	81	88	+313%	+39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>+74%</b>	<b>+1%</b>
<b>Acceptances</b>							
Female	133	178	267	304	310	+133%	+16%
Male	138	161	220	229	231	+68%	+5%
<i>Age (home accepted applicants only)</i>							
Under 21	195	251	329	357	357	+83%	+8%
21+	56	58	96	103	107	+91%	+12%
<i>Domicile</i>							
Home	251	309	425	459	464	+85%	+9%
EU	8	14	26	32	32	+285%	+24%
Other overseas	11	17	37	42	45	+298%	+22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>+100%</b>	<b>+11%</b>

Source: [UCAS end of cycle reports](#)

Key points to note are:

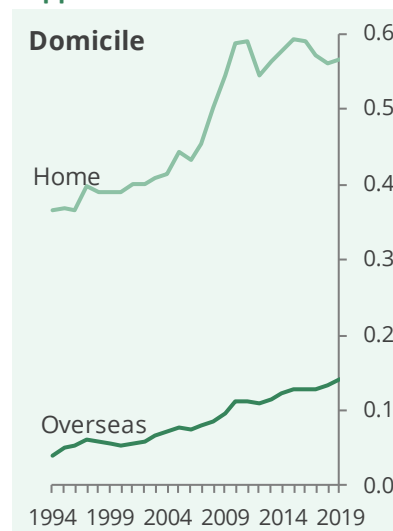
- The number of (all) overseas applicants has increased at a faster rate than those from the UK across the whole period.
- The drop in overseas applicants in 2012 was much smaller and more short-lived than among potential UK students
- There were more women accepted through UCAS than men for the first time in 1996. Since then the gap has grown to around 75,000 students or 33% more women than men.
- Overall the number of acceptances among young (<21) students has grown at a faster rate than for older applicants.
- The numbers of young people accepted resumed its earlier upward trend after 2012, while there has been a smaller increase among those aged 21+.
- The largest percentage increases in 2015 and 2016 acceptances were among EU students at 11% and 7% respectively. This could, in part, be connected to lifting the cap on student numbers.

### 3.3 Applications for the 2020 cycle

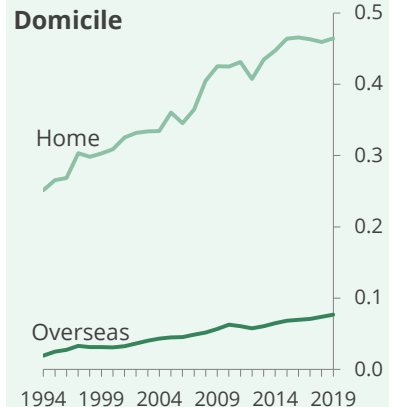
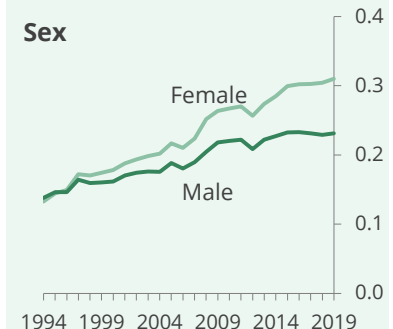
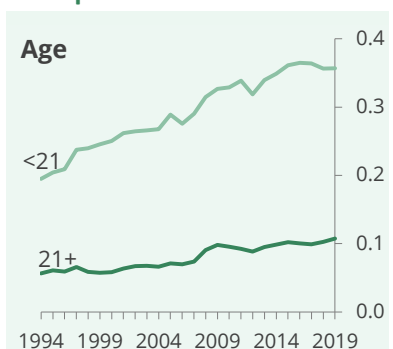
Analysis of applications by the main 'equal consideration' deadline of 15 January was [published on 6 February 2020](#).

The total number of applicants at this point for the 2020 cycle was 568,330, up by around 6,900 or 1.2% on the same point in the 2019 cycle. The increase in 2019 followed a smaller one in 2018, but the total was still below equivalent numbers from 2014, 2015 and 2016. There was a drop in

Applicants in millions



Acceptances in millions



home applicants (0.4%) and those from the EU (2.0%). While overseas applicants from outside the EU increased by 15.

The number of 18 year olds from England applying increased by 2.2% despite a fall in the 18 year old population of 1.5%. This saw the application rate for 18 year olds from England increase to a new record of 40.2%. Rates were higher in Northern Ireland at 47.9% and lower in Scotland<sup>1</sup> (31.9%) and Wales (32.7%).

Home applicant numbers were down for both men and women by 1.9% and 0.5% respectively. While the number of home applicants aged 18 was up there were falls in those age 19 of 7.3% and smaller falls among those in the 20s. Increases in applicants to study nursing resulted in an overall increase in applicants aged 30+.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.4 Application and entry rates

While total student/entrants numbers tell us about the overall size of the student population they tell us less about the level of demand from different groups of potential students or how successful they are at getting into university. Rates based on the size of these different groups help us to do this and are particularly important when comparing groups of different sizes or changes over time in a group that has increased or decreased in size.

#### Box 1: UCAS definitions of disadvantaged students

UCAS uses a number of different classifications of disadvantage among 18 year olds for its entry rates. These include where people live (POLAR4 classification of levels of young HE participation) and proxy measures for family income - whether the student was eligible for free school meals (FSM) or their family received a means-tested benefit while they were at school. According to UCAS:

This is important because there is a wide variation in entry rates across combinations of these groups... Entry rates are used in these calculations because they directly measure the level of representation of different groups in HE, allowing the identification of those who are 'disadvantaged' in terms of their entry rate to university.

Recently UCAS has started combining different measures of disadvantage/equality for students from England into a single measure:

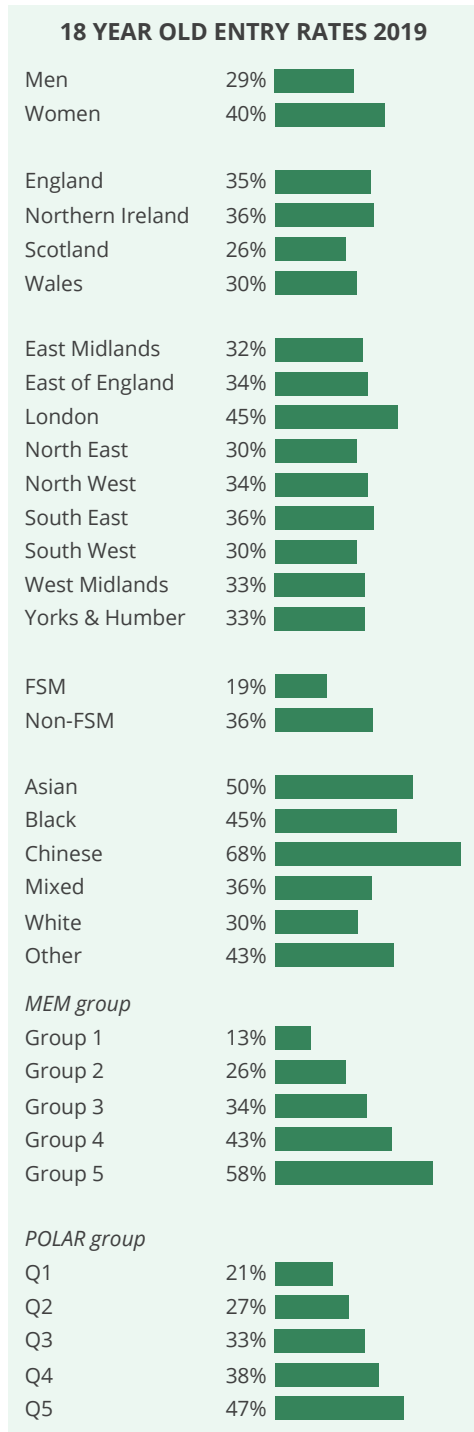
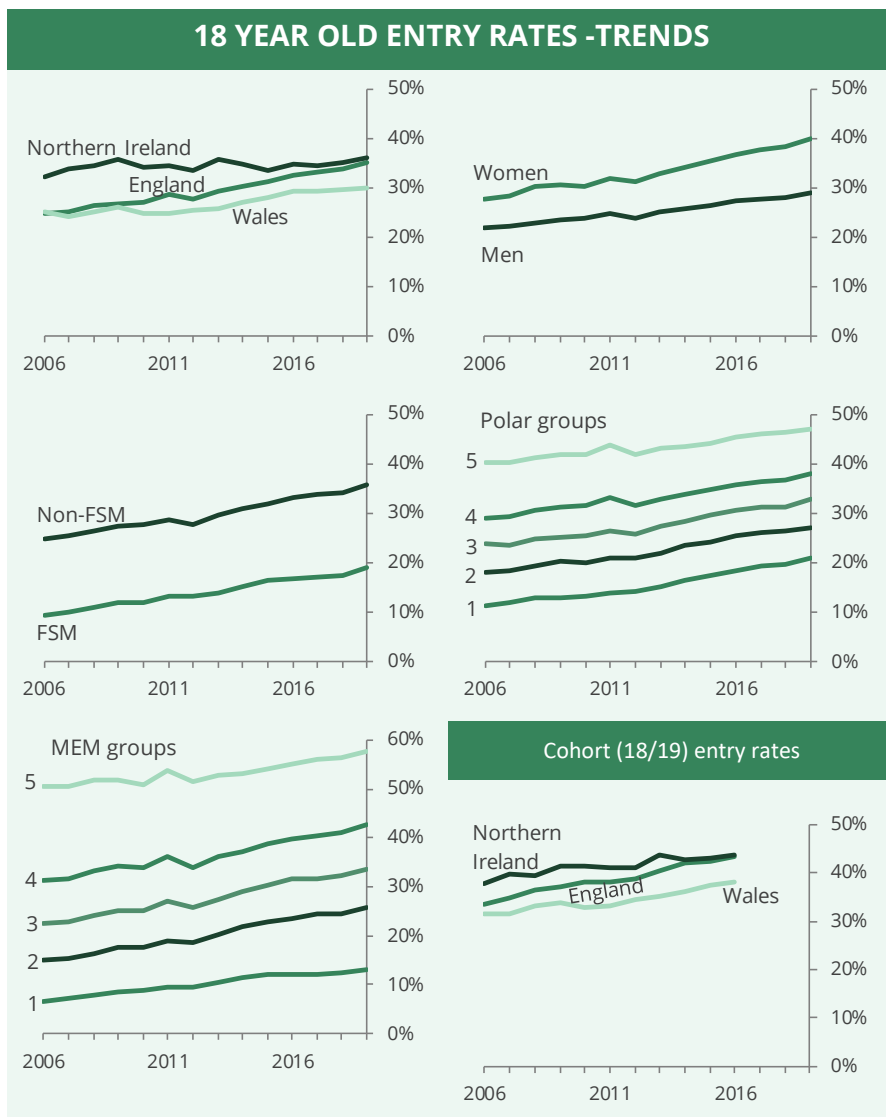
...a range of equality dimensions (sex, ethnic group, POLAR3, secondary education sector type, and FSM status) are combined to create an equality measure, which can then be estimated for pupils who were aged 18 in later years.

The methods used seek to predict whether an individual enters higher education or not when aged 18, using only the equality characteristics and their interactions with each other. The resulting predicted entry probability, termed the multiple equality measure (abbreviated to MEM), is based on 2006 to 2010 data, and is used to aggregate pupils into groups, where group 1 contains those least likely to enter higher education ('most disadvantaged' in this context), and group 5 contains those most likely to enter higher education ('most advantaged' in this context). Entry rates can then be calculated for each group and the trend assessed between groups across time.

<sup>1</sup> UCAS figures cover around two-thirds of higher education students in Scotland

<sup>2</sup> [15 January deadline analysis](#), UCAS

UCAS has estimated entry rates for many different groups of students and their figures go back to 2006. Some trends are illustrated below<sup>3</sup> and a snapshot of a wider range of groups is shown opposite.



Many entry rates have reached new record levels after 2012 and set new ones each year after. These include the national 18 year old rate, the cohort entry rate (18 and 19 year olds), those for both men and women, students formerly eligible for FSM and other disadvantaged groups.

The size of the gap between FSM and non-FSM students has fallen in relative but not absolute terms over the past decade. The relative gap itself increased slightly in 2016 and 2017. It fell slightly in 2018, but is still higher than in 2015. The entry rate gap between students from the areas with the highest and lowest levels of historical participation (POLAR groups 5 and 1) has fallen in both relative and absolute terms over time. This was also the case for the most advantaged and disadvantaged MEM groups. However, the gaps between the most and least disadvantaged groups still remained

<sup>3</sup> Data for FSM, MEM groups and POLAR groups are all for England only

## 12 Higher education student numbers

substantial in 2019 and the overall MEM gaps increased in absolute and relative terms in 2016 and 2017.

UCAS breaks down some of its group entry rates by the 'tariff' level of different universities. There are three tariff groups; high, medium and low and these refer to average grades of students admitted. High tariff institutions where entrants have higher grades are generally considered more prestigious and harder to get into. This type of analysis therefore can shed light on a different aspect of widening participation.

In 2019 only 3.1% of 18 year olds from England who were eligible for FSM at school got into one of these high tariff universities. The rate has increased over time from less than 1.5% in the period 2006 to 2010, but was still well below the 10.4% for the non-FSM group. The size of the relative gap has fallen over time; in 2006 the non-FSM group were almost six times as likely to go to a high tariff university and this fell to below four times as likely in 2015 onwards. However, the absolute gap has increased in recent years from six percentage points in 2012 to more than seven points from 2016 onwards.

UCAS has also produced interactive data 'explorers' for its data on constituencies (2016) and disadvantaged groups (2017):

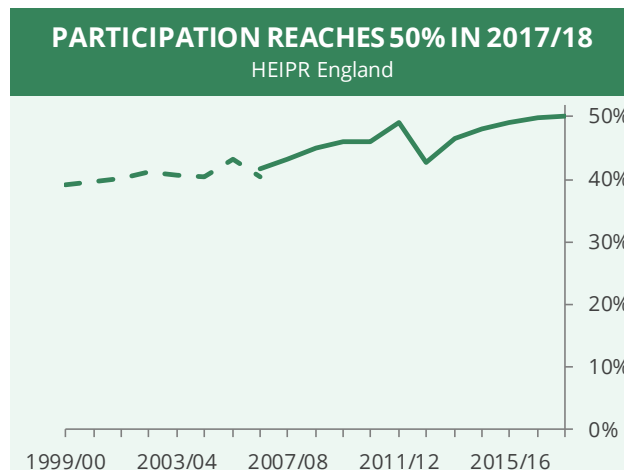
[Entry rate data explorer for parliamentary constituencies](#)  
[Equality and entry rates data explorer](#)

There are separate data explorers for the final 2019 cycle figures covering different types of [applicants](#) and [universities](#).

Disadvantaged young people are much less likely to get into the most 'prestigious' universities. Entry rates among those eligible for free meals were around a quarter of the levels for those not eligible. This gap has increased slightly in recent years.

### 3.5 Non-UCAS data on entry rates

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes annual participation rates for England. The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate<sup>4</sup> (HEIPR) was first produced to measure progress against the last Labour Government's 50% higher education aspiration. Trends in the HEIPR are illustrated opposite. A new methodology was introduced in 2006/07. The overall level peaked initially at 49.1% (of those aged under 30) in 2011/12. It fell to just under 43% in 2012 and has risen subsequently to new highs in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. The latest level was 50.2%, the level of the Labour Government's original aspiration.



Further breakdowns of the HEIPR by age and mode can be found in the DfE publication [Participation Rates in Higher Education: 2006 to 2018](#).

The DfE also publishes higher education entry rates by free school meal (FSM) eligibility. This covers young people who were in the state sector in England only. In 2017/18 26.3% of those eligible for FSM aged 15

<sup>4</sup> This measure covers 17-30 year old English domiciled first-time participants in HE at UK HE Institutions, and at English, Welsh and Scottish Further Education Colleges. The HEIPR is a sum of the participation rates for each age from 17 to 30 inclusive. or each age from 17 to 30, the initial participation rate is calculated as the fraction of the academic year population that are initial entrants. These rates are added to create the total HEIPR.

(in 2013/14) had entered HE at ages 18 or 19. This was up from 14% in 2005/06, slightly higher than in 2016/17 making it the highest level recorded. The rate among the non-FSM group was 44.9% in 2017/18, also a new record level. The absolute gap between these rates decreased over time from 19 percentage points in 2005/06 to below 17 points in 2013/14. It has increased since then and reached 18.6 points in 2017/18, the highest for more than a decade.<sup>5</sup>

When the FSM entry rate data are broken down by gender and ethnicity they show:

- 13% of White British boys eligible for FSM (so-called 'white working class' boys) had started HE by age 19. The lowest rate of any major group.
- The gender gap was largest among Black Caribbean students; 27% (boys) v 42% (girls) among FSM eligible pupils and 39% v 61% non-FSM eligible pupils.
- Almost 60% of girls from Black ethnic backgrounds eligible for FSM started HE by age 19, the highest rate among girls from any broad ethnic group.
- More than half of all Black and Asian pupils eligible for FSM had started by HE age 19 compared to less than 20% of White FSM eligible pupils

The rate among the FSM group varied considerably across local authorities from 10% or below in Bracknell Forest and Swindon to more than 50% in the London boroughs of Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, Tower Hamlets, Brent, Haringey Ealing and Redbridge. In general FSM entry rates were much higher in London and above average in some other large urban areas. The FSM/non-FSM gap was as high as 35 percentage points in Reading and Buckinghamshire and below 10 points in much of inner London.

Full details of these rates and other indicators for disadvantaged groups can be found in the DfE publication [Widening participation in higher education: 2019](#).

### 3.6 Office for Students TUNDRA measure

In September 2019 the Office for Students introduced a new experimental measure of young participation in higher education: TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area). This uses a broadly similar approach to the POLAR<sup>6</sup> measure produced by the earlier funding council. They both look at local data on participation among young people over several years. This is aggregated to a single measure across the relevant years and assigned to one of five bands or quintiles. Both look at very small geographies -middle-layer super output areas (MSOAs) and equivalent. There are a few key differences:

- TUNDRA covers England only, POLAR is for the UK

In 2018 the overall HEIPR was just over 50%; 57% for women and 44% for men. The rate among those aged under 21 was 44% and if extended to all entrants aged 60 or less it was 55%

<sup>5</sup> [Widening participation in higher education: 2019](#), DfE

<sup>6</sup> Participation of local areas

- TUNDRA only looks at maintained pupils, POLAR covered all young people regardless of what type of school they attended
- TUNDRA links individual records for pupils aged 16 to higher education records. POLAR compared data on entrants (by area of residence) to estimates of the relevant age group in the local area.

The TUNDRA results are based on pupils who completed their GCSEs between 2010 and 2014 and looks at how many (in each year) started higher education aged 18 or 19 between 2012/13 and 2017/18. Rates for individual MSOAs varied from 7.5% to 85%. The quintile boundaries are given opposite. More detail can be found at [Young participation by area](#)

Quintile	Boundary
1	7.5%
2	29.0%
3	36.3%
4	43.2%
5	51.0%
	85.0%

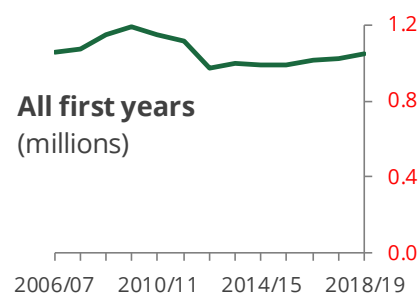
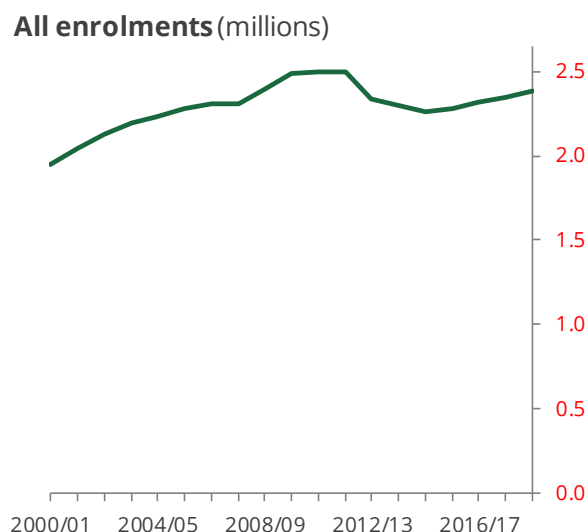
An analysis by region found that the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber had the higher proportion of areas in the lowest quintile (Q1). Both had more than 25% in this band while London had only just over 1% in Q1. At the other end of the participation spectrum the South West had 11% of areas in the highest participation band at 11% compared with almost 45% of areas in London.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.7 Higher Education Statistics Agency data for the UK

#### All students

In 2018/19 there were 2.38 million students at UK higher education institutions. This was slightly higher than in the previous five years but below levels in 2008 to 2012. The recent high was 2.50 million in 2010/11. Trends over the past decade are summarised in the table below and illustrated opposite.

Changes in the *stock* of students reflect any underlying shifts in the duration of courses taken and hence the full-time/part-time split rather than just a measure of demand for, and supply of, places. The number of first year students (entrants) is not affected by this. There were 1.05 million first years in 2018/19, slightly above the number in recent years, but again below the peak which was 1.19 million in 2009/10. Trends are also illustrated opposite.



<sup>7</sup> [TUNDRA methodology](#), OfS

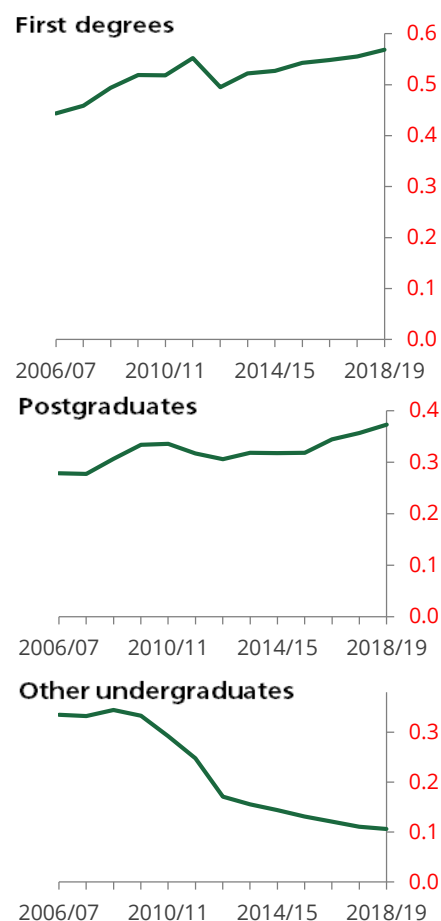
## Types of courses and students

The decline in entrants has been solely due to the fall in 'other undergraduates'. Their numbers fell by almost 240,000 (69%) over the decade while there were increases in those on first degree courses of almost 75,000 (15%), postgraduate research of around 7,000 (22%) and postgraduate taught programmes of almost 60,000 (21%).

Other undergraduate courses are generally taken part-time and students on these courses make up a large proportion of total part-time numbers. This means that total part-time entrants have fallen steeply as well from 470,000 in 2009/10 to just over 240,000 in 2018/19; a drop of 48% compared to an increase of 12% in full-time numbers. There were falls in each type of part-time course over this period; 72% in part-time 'other' undergraduates, 27% in first degrees (despite an increase in 2017/18 and 2018/19), 16% taught postgraduate and 10% postgraduate research courses. Most of the decline in part-time postgraduate taught courses was to 2012/13 and numbers have stabilised or increased slightly since then.

Students at UK higher education institutions			
	2007/08	2011/12	2018/19
<b>All years</b>	<b>2.31</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.38</b>
<i>First years</i>			
First degree	0.46	0.55	0.57
Other undergraduate	0.33	0.25	0.11
Postgraduates	0.28	0.32	0.37
Full-time	0.62	0.73	0.81
Part-time	0.45	0.39	0.24
UK	0.88	0.88	0.78
Overseas	0.18	0.24	0.27
<b>All first years</b>	<b>1.07</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>1.05</b>

**First years by type of course**  
(millions)



Source: [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19](#), and earlier, HESA



### Overseas students

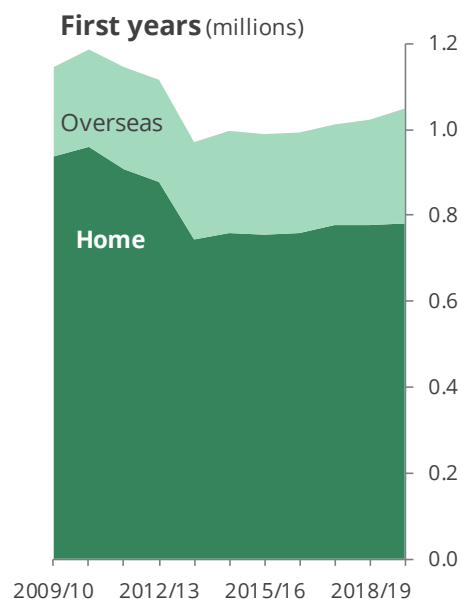
Home students make up the large majority of part-timers and as such their numbers have fallen since the end of the last decade (see opposite). Overseas student numbers increased to 2010/11 and dipped in 2012/13. There was some recovery up to 2016/17 larger increases in 2017/18 and 2018/19, taking entrants to a new record level.

The table below/opposite gives the latest data on where these students come from. China clearly dominates with more entrants in the UK than the rest of the top ten combined. Some of the key recent trends were:

- Chinese student numbers are up by 62% since 2011/12. They increased by more than 20,000 in 2018/19 alone. Numbers from the US have increased more steadily over the same period
- Indian student numbers fell by 44% between 2011/12 and 2015/16. They have increased since then and are now above their 2011/12 number. There has been a more recent decline in numbers from Malaysia and particularly Nigeria.
- There has been a general drop in entrants from the major EU countries since 2011/12; Ireland down by 37%, Cyprus 37%, Greece 21%, Germany 18% and France 14%. Italy was the exception with numbers up by almost half.
- Overall first year EU student numbers are down by 4% since 2011/12, but all this cut happened in 2012/13 and numbers have increased in each subsequent year, with a particularly large increase in 2016/17.

In 2015/16 56% of Chinese students were studying at postgraduate level (mainly taught courses), a very similar rate to those from the US (57%) and slightly below the proportion of Indian postgraduates (64%). The majority of EU students were undergraduates (63%).<sup>8</sup>

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data covers higher education institutions across the whole of the UK. It includes data on students at all levels, modes and years. It also includes figures on further education courses at higher education institutions, but these are not covered here. Some of their data is freely available online and can be found at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students>



TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN	
First years 2018/19	
China	86,485
India	17,760
United States	12,085
Germany	7,115
Hong Kong	6,925
France	6,645
Malaysia	5,940
Italy	5,930
Greece	4,770

Source: [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

<sup>8</sup> Students in higher education institutions 2015/16, HESA



## 4. Appendix -Higher Education Funding Council for England analysis

The (former) Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) published regular statistics and analysis of student numbers at English institutions. Their main focus is on home and EU students –those their funding/remit is linked with to some extent. This analysis is therefore especially relevant on the impact of changes in policy, specifically the impact of the 2012 reforms in England.

As the large majority of UK students study in England English the HEFCE data tended to show very similar trends to the HESA data set out above. This paper therefore just summarises some of their more recent analysis and commentary around these trends. It is taken from the following:

- [Higher education in England: Impact of the 2012 reforms \(March 2013\)](#)
- [Higher education in England 2014 Analysis of latest shifts and trends \(April 2014\)](#)
- [Pressure from all sides: Economic and policy influences on part-time higher education \(April 2014\)](#)
- [Higher Education in England 2015 \(July 2015\)](#)
- [Higher education in England: The population of undergraduates \(March 2017\)](#)
- [Higher education in England: The population of postgraduates \(March 2017\)](#)

The briefing paper [HE in England from 2012: Student numbers](#) looked in much more detail at their data and analysis from this period.

### Undergraduates

The fall in full-time undergraduate entrants between 2010/11 and 2012/13 was concentrated in courses other than first degrees. Entrants to these courses fell by 35%. Just over half of the fall was due to changes in nursing qualifications, which shifted from diplomas to degrees. Among other courses taught at higher education institutions the largest absolute fall was almost 8,000 in foundation degrees.<sup>9</sup>

These trends have continued and in 2014 they said that “Higher education institutions appear to be existing the market for study below degree level and focussing their undergraduate provision around degree courses.” There has been an increase to these courses at further education colleges.

The 2012 reforms cut the funding for part-time as well as full-time undergraduate courses, but part-time students had access to tuition fee loans for the first time in 2012. The largest fall in entrants in 2012 across all broad modes and levels was in part-time undergraduates. Their number fell by 78,000 or 34% in 2012/13. There were further falls of 20,000 in 2013/14, 18,000 in 2014/15, 5,000 in 2015/16 and 10,000 in 2016/17. These took numbers to 63% below their 2008 level. HEFCE suggestions of the different contributory factors behind the scale of the drop in part-time undergraduates included:

- Cuts in funding for equivalent and lower qualifications from 2008/09

HEFCE has linked the sharp decline in part-time students to the impact of the recession on Government spending, company training budgets, the 2012 funding reforms and some earlier policy changes

<sup>9</sup> The funding council removed additional support for these courses from 2010/11.

- Phasing out of the programme to promote employer co-sponsored courses after 2011/12
- The 2012 funding reforms, specifically the loss of most direct funding for teaching, the impact on fees, possible confusion around the operation of loans, reluctance among mature students to take out loans and the fact that loans are not available for courses with an intensity of less than 25%
- The impact of the recession and continued 'challenging' economic conditions on individuals to fund their own part-time courses and employers to directly fund courses for their employees.

HEFCE said in 2014 that the overall decline in part-time entrants may "...have a detrimental impact on widening access overall". This is because part-time higher education tends to have a higher share of students with characteristics linked to lower levels of participation - more mature students and those from 'non-traditional backgrounds' including disadvantaged, students with low prior qualifications or caring responsibilities.

### Postgraduates

Full-time postgraduate entrants increased from 2007 to 2011. They remained broadly stable up to 2015/16 before increasing by 22% (taught courses) in 2016/17. This jump is thought to be due to the introduction of loans for these courses. There was a smaller increase in part-time taught postgraduate courses of 9%. Full-time postgraduates are now in the majority (55% among home and EU students) after being the minority of entrants before 2011.

Much of the decline in part-time taught postgraduate entrants was in the subject area of education.<sup>10</sup> Without this subject the decline in part-time postgraduate courses has been much more modest. While postgraduate fees have increased HEFCE said that the main policy impact on part-time postgraduate entrants have been changes leading to lower support from employers for such courses in education. They also link the wider reduction in part-time postgraduate study to austerity measures introduced by the (then) current Government which have reduced public sector employment<sup>11</sup> and cuts in training and development budgets.

HEFCE have raised the possibility that 2012 undergraduate entrants could be less likely to go on to postgraduate study because of their higher debts and limited access to finance. It is suggested that these effects will vary between different socio-economic groups and could result in a wider gap in postgraduate entry rates between these different groups. In their 2014 assessment they said "There is evidence to suggest that it is increasingly the better off who engage in study for a taught masters or doctorate."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Almost 19,000 out of a total fall of 25,000. The share was even larger (84%) if only higher education institutions are included.

<sup>11</sup> And hence in potential part-time study particularly in education and subjects allied to medicine

<sup>12</sup> [Higher education in England 2014 Analysis of latest shifts and trends](#), HEFCE p.37

## SUMMARY OF APPLICANTS AND ACCEPTED APPLICANTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION VIA UCAS

Thousands

	1994	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 1994-2019
<b>Applicants -Domicile</b>														
Home	365	389	445	587	589	545	563	578	592	591	572	562	565	+55%
EU	19	24	29	47	49	43	45	47	51	54	51	53	53	+186%
Other overseas	21	29	49	63	62	66	69	75	76	74	76	81	88	+313%
<b>Total</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>+74%</b>
<b>Acceptances</b>														
<i>Age (home accepted applicants only)</i>														
Under 21	195	251	289	329	339	319	340	349	362	365	364	357	357	+83%
21+	56	58	71	96	92	89	95	99	102	100	99	103	107	+91%
<i>Sex</i>														
Female	133	178	217	267	270	257	274	285	300	302	302	304	310	+133%
Male	138	161	188	220	222	208	222	227	233	233	231	229	231	+68%
<i>Ethnicity (home applicants)</i>														
White	213	240	279	330	332	307	328	333	341	340	334	325	319	+50%
Asian	19	30	34	41	43	43	46	48	52	54	55	56	60	+216%
Black	7	10	16	27	30	31	32	36	37	38	38	39	42	+516%
Mixed	na	na	9	14	15	15	16	18	19	20	20	21	22	..
Other	3	6	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	8	9	9	10	+227%
Unknown	9	23	19	7	5	5	5	5	6	6	7	9	10	+11%
<i>Domicile</i>														
Home	251	309	360	425	431	407	435	447	464	465	463	459	464	+85%
England	211	256	302	359	367	343	368	383	394	394	391	388	395	+87%
Scotland	20	27	28	32	31	31	31	30	35	36	37	37	36	+82%
Wales	13	15	17	19	18	19	20	20	21	21	21	20	20	+56%
Northern Ireland	8	11	14	14	14	13	15	14	15	15	14	12	14	+67%
EU	8	14	17	26	27	23	25	26	29	31	31	32	32	+285%
Other overseas	11	17	28	37	34	34	36	39	39	38	40	42	45	+298%
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>+100%</b>

### About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

### Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).