

Analysis of UCAS acceptances for 2012/2013 admissions

April 2013

■ INDEPENDENT
■ COMMISSION
■ ON FEES

Executive Summary

- Total acceptances by UK-resident students to UK universities in the 2012 University admissions cycle fell by 5.5%, compared with 2011, and 4.5% compared with 2010. Total UK acceptances were the lowest since 2008.
- Overall, the fall in acceptances did not have any disproportionate impact on less privileged areas of the country; however this masks a decline in male acceptances from these areas, offset by a small increase in female acceptances. This correlates with concerns expressed elsewhere about the educational under-performance of 'working-class boys'. The gender differential is also marked across most other areas
- There is some evidence that the differential fee regimes in place across the four home countries are having an impact. Acceptances from Scotland and Northern Ireland to study in the rest of the UK fell in 2012, reflecting the financial incentives for these students to avoid the English fee regime.
- The most selective universities (Sutton Trust 13) recorded an increase in acceptances. However, this increase appears to have been drawn disproportionately from the more privileged areas of the country.
- The immediate impact on school leavers of the changes in tuition fees will become clearer in the current cycle. Although applications have bounced back from the depressed levels of a year ago, they are still well below 2010 levels, and it is unclear whether this will provide sufficient demand for the universities to maintain historical trends in student numbers.
- The most marked fall in acceptances is for older students, and this should be seen in the context of the very steep falls in part-time student numbers reported elsewhere.

1 This includes 13 top universities as defined in the Sutton Trust Report here <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/elite-schools-dominate-admissions-to-top-universities/> - Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, UCL, Warwick and York.

The Independent Commission on Fees (ICOF) has been established to produce an independent and considered analysis of the impact of the biggest higher education (HE) reforms in a generation.

This report builds on analysis undertaken by the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in the End of Cycle Report, 2012, and follows on from the Commission's report on applications to higher education in 2012, published in August 2012. Our aim is to analyse UCAS data, but the interpretation and analysis in this report is our own and independent of UCAS or any other organisation.

Our 2012 applications report raised a number of concerns based on the significant fall in application numbers for the 2012/13 academic year. In particular, we noticed a marked differential between application for study from English applicants, who would be a full part of the new fee regime, and those from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, who were either not affected at all, or to a lesser extent. We also noted that looking at 18 year olds' applications alone as an indicator of application trends might well understate the potential problems with demand for Higher Education.

This report finds some encouraging signs that school leavers overall (i.e. 18 and 19 year olds) are not being put off a university education. But acceptances from older students (aged 20 and over) are declining, and that trend becomes more significant when we also look at what is happening in part-time education.

Our main agenda is to monitor any changed patterns for younger students from low and middle income backgrounds, but a decline in older student numbers remains an important consideration, as does the steep decline in the actual number of students starting their studies this year. This has been partly caused by students accelerating the start of their studies to avoid the new fee regime (i.e. starting their studies in 2011 not 2012), a factor which should work its way out of the system in due course; but, as with many impacts of the new system, it is hard to judge the long term effects.

In looking at younger students we have done further analysis based on geographical areas of advantage, and noted two possible emerging issues:

i. Gender

Boys from less advantaged areas seem to be becoming increasingly less likely to go to university relative to their female counterparts. This is despite the fact that, overall, acceptances from less advantaged areas have risen, albeit from a very low base.

ii. Selective Universities

The most selective universities increased their acceptances in 2012, despite the overall decline. But it appears that least privileged areas have been under-represented in this increase, suggesting a widening gap.

In summary, we find a number of mixed signals emerging from the data. Some impacts of the new fee regime are clear, and would have been expected. Some are harder to determine and will only become clearer over time.

Background

The Independent Commission on Fees was set up to monitor the impact of increased university fees in the UK. It will produce a series of reports assessing the impact of the increase in fees on application and admissions trends in universities. The Commission will consider in particular the effect on young people from non-privileged backgrounds.

From 2012, universities in England have been able to charge up to £9,000 per year for undergraduate courses, raising the cap from its 2011/12 level of £3,375. Universities wanting to charge more than £6,000 have to agree to put in place access measures, which are assessed and monitored by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

Students in Scotland attending Scottish universities do not pay fees. In 2011/12, students from elsewhere in the UK had to pay £1,820 per year to study at a Scottish university but, from 2012, these universities will be able to charge up to £9,000 for students from elsewhere in the UK.

Welsh universities can charge fees of up to £9,000, as in England, but the Welsh Assembly will pay fee costs above £3,465 a year for Welsh students studying at any UK university. At universities in Northern Ireland, tuition fees for students from Northern Ireland in 2012 will be capped at £3,465, and will rise in line with inflation for the next four years. Fees for other UK students will not be capped but the Northern Ireland Executive has said that fees are not expected to exceed £9,000.

The Data

There are a number of different measures which can help to give us a picture of changing behaviour and outcomes in HE Admissions. These include:

1. Applicants

The number of individuals applying for a place on a Higher Education course.

2. Applications

The total number of applications made by individual applicants; most make more than one application either to different institutions or different courses within the same institution.

3. Acceptances

The number of places accepted to HE courses in a given year. This will include deferred acceptances.

4. Admissions/final student numbers

The number of students starting a HE course in a given year at a particular cut-off point during the year.

2 http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2012/2012endofcycle

3 http://www.independentcommissionfees.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=47

5. Application and acceptance rates

Applications and acceptances viewed in relation to the total population of a relevant age.

This report focuses on acceptance data for the 2012 cycle. The data used in this report has been provided by UCAS, for which the Commission is extremely grateful.

The UCAS analysis of this data, published in their End of Cycle report, showed that 53,900 fewer students started their studies in 2012, compared with 2011 (as defined in point 4 above), a decline of 11%. This includes changes in population, changes in application behaviour and changes in acceptance and deferral behaviour. Total acceptances (as in 3 above) declined by the smaller amount of 27,100, or 5.5% compared to the prior year. Our analysis will focus on the slightly smaller subset of UK domiciled acceptances which fell by 23,844 (also a fall of 5.5%).

UCAS also included an analysis of acceptances by 'cohort'. This shows the proportion of a young cohort, referenced by the year it would be aged 18, that is accepted for entry and would start their course aged either 18 or 19. This measure is useful because changes in entry year, for example by deferral, can make the interpretation of whether young people are becoming more or less likely to enter higher education difficult.

Interpreting acceptance data is linked to, but does not necessarily follow, the same patterns as the applications data analysed earlier in the admissions cycle. Acceptances in any cycle are driven by the demands of universities and colleges, alongside the demands of applicants. As noted above, the 2012 application cycle saw the implementation of increased tuition fees for most students and there were a number of other policies introduced concurrently with this. In particular, some restrictions on student recruitment were relaxed in this cycle, and will be relaxed further in the 2013 cycle. This will have affected how institutions made offers to applicants, so we need to be careful in any interpretation of this data. This will also have had an effect which is visible when looking at data by the different nations in the UK, as different proportions of institutions in each will have taken advantage of this relaxation to different extents.

In the most part we will be showing 2012 acceptance data with those from 2009-2011. Many of the comparisons in our analysis examine changes relative to 2010 and 2011. We have done this to ensure we are comparing with both the most recent data cycle and the most recent cycle which could not have been influenced by the changes to tuition fee arrangements. Applicants in the 2011 cycle were aware that changes to tuition fees would apply for those starting courses in 2012.

For different sections of our report we have concentrated on different groups of applicants. For example, we have sometimes focused on applicants aged up to 19, "young applicants", where we are relating them to a measure that is useful only for comparing to young cohorts.

Overall Trends (all UK domiciled applicants)

This section looks at the overall trends in acceptances from 2009 to 2012, the years for which we have been given data by UCAS.

In 2012 there were 463,000 applicants from the UK and 407,400 acceptances through the UCAS system.

This report only looks at acceptances for students living in the UK.

Table 1: The number of acceptances by year and by country: all UK domiciled applicants

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 v 2010	2012 v 2011
England	360,236	360,208	368,316	343,902	(-4.5%)	(-6.6%)
N Ireland	13,601	13,507	13,792	13,283	(-1.7%)	(-3.7%)
Scotland	31,030	32,248	30,800	30,899	(-4.2%)	(0.3%)
Wales	20,196	18,671	18,327	19,307	(3.4%)	(5.3%)
Total	425,063	424,634	431,235	407,391	(-4.1%)	(-5.5%)

The table above and figures below show the number of acceptances by students living in each of the four nations of the UK.

The biggest drop in acceptances, when compared to 2010 or 2011, has been in England, both for males and females. Scotland and Northern Ireland have also seen a decrease, but to a lesser extent, with acceptances in Scotland down 4.2 per cent on 2010 and Northern Ireland down 1.7 per cent. Acceptances from Welsh students showed an increase of 3.4 per cent this year.

This pattern is perhaps surprising given the drops in applications recorded in our last report. Table 2 below summarises the total drop in applications and compares it to the drop in acceptances. As can be seen there is no obvious correlation across the different countries, and, overall, the drop in acceptances was about half the recorded drop in applications. Of course, as previously noted, a number of other factors come into play before applications are turned into acceptances, and historically there have been quite significant changes in the proportion of applicants who are accepted for places.

Table 2: The percentage difference between the number of applications in 2010 and 2012 and the percentage difference between the number of acceptances in 2010 and 2012, by country

	Applications 2012 vs 2010	Acceptances 2012 vs 2010
England	-8.8%	-4.5%
Wales	0.3%	3.4%
Scotland	1.0%	-4.2%
N Ireland	-0.8%	-1.7%
Total	-7.4%	-4.1%

The bulk of the fall in acceptances was accounted for by English students, who represent 84% of the fall, and who received 4.5% fewer acceptances when compared to 2010. However, it is worth noting that all the home nations saw fewer acceptances,

with the smallest fall in Northern Ireland (1.7% compared with 2010), a 3.4% fall for Welsh students, and 4.2% for Scotland.

Fig 1: Total number of acceptances for England, all age groups, 2009-2012

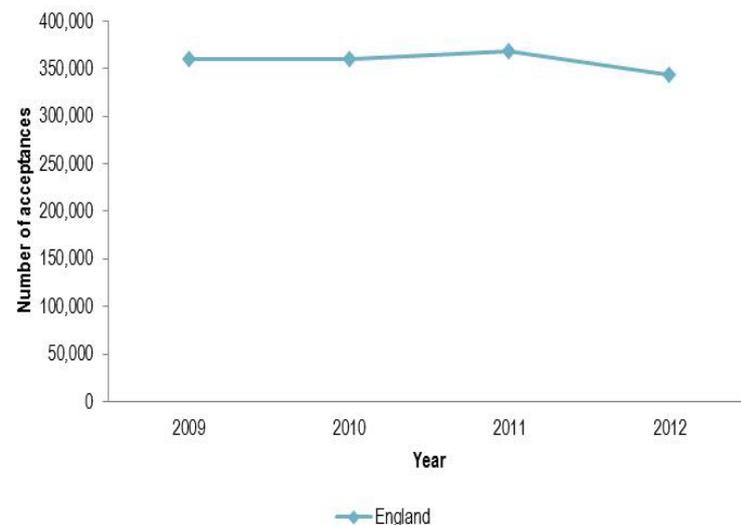
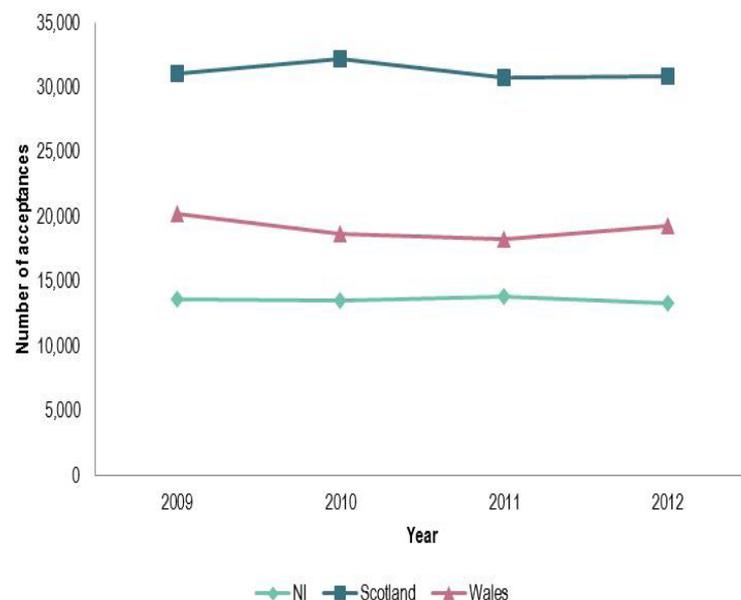


Fig 2: Total number of acceptances for Wales, Scotland and N Ireland, for all age groups, 2009-2012



Overall, female students from the UK accepted 9,152 fewer places to study for a degree in 2012 than in 2010, with males accepting 8,091 fewer. This is analysed for 'young' applicants from England in more detail in section 5 (Gender) below.

Mature applicants aged 20 or over

In our analysis we have separated applicants aged up to 19, who can be considered as entering Higher Education as school leavers, from those aged 20 and over. Older age groups make up around 25% of annual full-time acceptances, and form an important sector in their own right. There are also particular circumstances which will affect those aged 20 and over in different ways to how it affects 'young' applicants, for example the economic climate may have a stronger effect on them than younger applicants.

We can see from figure 3 below that in England there have been 7.6% fewer acceptances when compared to 2010 for students aged 20 and over, compared to 3.3% fewer for those aged up to 19. In Figure 4 we see Scotland had 5% fewer, in Northern Ireland we see only a 0.1% fall and in Wales we actually see an increase of 8.4%.

Fig 3: Total number of acceptances, English applicants, for age 20 and over, 2009-2012

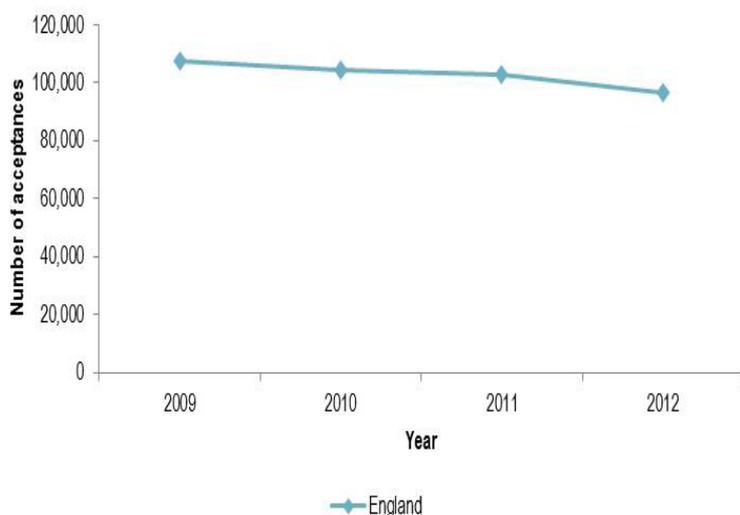
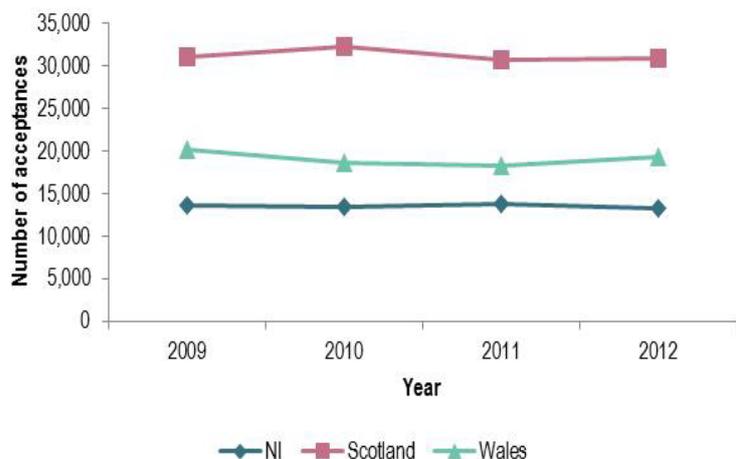


Fig 4: Total number of acceptances, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish applicants, for age 20 and over, 2009-2012



It is interesting to note that when we split by gender we see that for all countries which have seen a fall in acceptances compared to 2010 for those in this age group, the fall has been greater for men than women. In Northern Ireland, for example, acceptances from females increased 3.1% but for males fell 3.1%. However, in Wales, where we saw an increase in

acceptances, there has been a bigger increase in acceptances for women than for men (11.4% compared to 4.7%).

The steeper fall in acceptances for older students compared to their younger counterparts reflects a similar pattern in the application profile, analysed in our previous report. There is a concern that older age groups, who are more likely to have other financial commitments, are more likely to be worried about the implications of assuming a higher level of student debt.

The overall patterns of behaviour for older students will be very strongly driven by the patterns of part-time study, which are not covered in this report, and which do not form part of the UCAS data set. However part-time students make up the majority of the overall mature student market. The recent HEFCE report on the impact of the 2012 reforms, reports a fall in part time students for undergraduate courses of 40% compared to 2010. This is a very startling movement, and equates to some 105,000 lost places. As HEFCE notes, decreases in the part-time student population, which includes larger numbers of non-traditional students, are likely to have implications for equality and diversity.

The remainder of this report focuses largely on younger students, but we consider the indicators in the mature sector to be of concern and we will be looking at ways of further analysing aggregated data covering both full and part-time students.

Trends in acceptances by geography and gender (“young” applicants only)

In this section we have analysed acceptances for 18 and 19 year olds in relation to gender and also the neighbourhoods in which the accepted applicants live, using a measure called POLAR2.

The POLAR2 data measure sorts the population into quintiles, depending on whether the neighbourhood they live in has historically seen relatively high or low numbers of young people progress into higher education. Specifically, it looks at those who were aged 18 between 2000 and 2004 and entered a course in a UK higher education institution or GB further education college, aged 18 or 19, between academic years 2000/01 and 2005/06 .

The POLAR2 classification is formed by ranking 2001 Census Area Statistics wards by their young participation rates for the combined 2000 to 2004 cohorts. This gives five types of area ordered from ‘1’ (those wards with the lowest participation) to ‘5’ (those wards with the highest participation), each representing 20 per cent of UK young cohort.

Students have been allocated to the neighbourhoods on the

basis of their postcode. Those students whose postcode falls within wards with the lowest participation (quintile 1) are denoted as being from a low participation neighbourhood.

So far, overall there is no indication that low participation neighbourhoods have been adversely affected in 2012 (Table 3 below). However, although their acceptances have fallen by more than other quintiles, it is still the case that someone from a high participation neighbourhood is three times more likely to go to university than someone from a low participation neighbourhood, as noted in the HEFCE report on Higher Education in England.

Further, as noted in the UCAS End of Cycle report, it is possible that different deferral patterns from the 2010/11 cycle are disguising the real patterns of admissions to HE in the wake of the fees reforms. For example, if a large number of young people from advantaged backgrounds accepted places in 2010/11, and would normally have deferred them to start their studies in 2012 but in this case did not, we would see a greater decline in the number of advantaged students accepting places this year than we would normally expect.

Table 3: The number of acceptances by year, gender and QYPR: all English domiciled applicants.

QYPR	Gender	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2012	2012 V 2011
1 (low participation)	F	15,797	16,007	16,818	16,424	(2.6%)	(-2.3%)
	M	11,688	12,263	12,697	12,221	(-0.3%)	(-3.7%)
2	F	22,508	22,590	23,593	22,502	(-0.4%)	(-4.6%)
	M	17,270	17,971	18,810	17,586	(-2.1%)	(-6.5%)
3	F	27,575	27,728	28,565	26,635	(-3.9%)	(-6.8%)
	M	21,904	22,462	23,324	21,928	(-2.4%)	(-6.0%)
4	F	32,075	32,197	33,303	30,775	(-4.4%)	(-7.6%)
	M	27,432	27,937	28,835	26,132	(-6.5%)	(-9.4%)
5 (high participation)	F	39,281	39,460	40,584	37,539	(-4.9%)	(-7.5%)
	M	35,219	35,510	37,087	33,411	(-5.9%)	(-9.9%)

Note: This table omits a small number of students with missing data

We can see clearly that for all quintiles females have consistently accepted more places than males, and this pattern has continued in 2012. Young women are now a third more likely to enter higher education than men.

Males from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods are less likely to go to university than their female counterparts, but the gap between the sexes is much smaller in the most advantaged areas. Since the mid-nineties, there have been more girls than boys going to university, and the gap seems to have widened in the first year of the new fees regime. Overall, 135,100 young females from England accepted a place in 2012, compared to 112,300 males.

Including data missing from the chart above, this means that overall, female students from England accepted 3,784 fewer places to study for a degree in 2012 than in 2010, with males accepting 4,628 fewer. This represents an average decline of 2.7% in girls and 4.0% in boys, and a further widening of the gender gap.

The decline in acceptances for boys from all neighbourhoods is notable, with a percentage fall of 6.2% for those from the most advantaged areas (quintiles 4 and 5) compared to 2010 and a fall of 1.4% in the most disadvantaged (quintiles 1 and 2). It is worth noting that although the percentage decline is larger for those in the most advantaged areas, there are still over 20,000 more males from these areas going to university every year than from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

5 <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/ourresearch/polar/>

6 <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/about/introduction/abouttheinengland/impactreport/Impact-report.pdf>

7 http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2012/2012endofcycle

Trends in acceptances by national flows

The different tuition fee arrangements for students in different nations are a good way to illustrate the impact of tuition fees. Effectively students from different nations in the UK are being encouraged to make different decisions, based on the tuition fee arrangements in place for them, which are described earlier in this report.

To look at the effect this might be having on of students in each of those nations we will consider how trends of student flow between them have changed this year compared to previous years.

Fig 5: Percentage change in acceptances by home country and location of university, aged up to 19, 2010 to 2012 (small groups omitted)

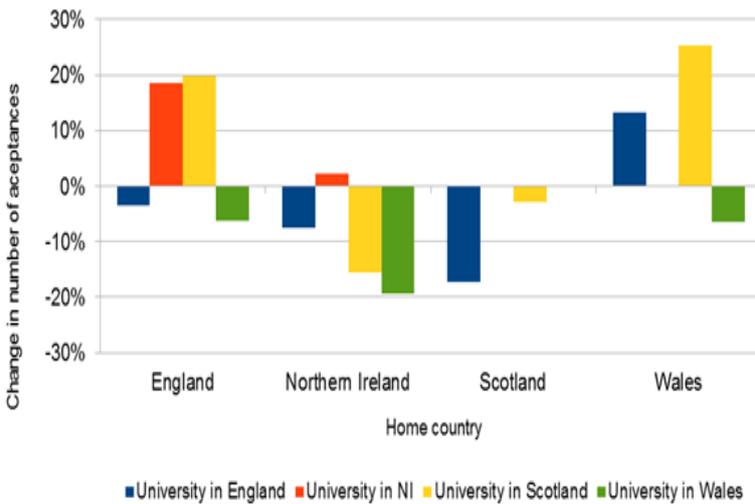


Table 4: Percentage change on 2010 acceptances by students aged up to 19

Country of domicile	University in England	University in NI	University in Scotland	University in Wales
England	-3%	19%	20%	-6%
NI	-8%	2%	-16%	-19%
Scotland	-17%	n/a	-3%	n/a
Wales	13%	n/a	25%	-6%

Note: Very few students from NI are accepted at universities in Scotland or Wales, and very few students from Wales are accepted at NI universities.

We can see from Fig 8, above, that both Scottish and Northern Irish students have become less likely to study in England in 2012, where they face a financial penalty for doing so, whereas Welsh applicants (who do not face any such penalty) have increased their number of acceptances from English institutions by 13% compared to 2010.

Trends in acceptances to selective universities

We have asked UCAS to provide data on acceptances to different university types, to see whether any patterns emerge when looking at students from different UK nations after the changes to tuition fees in 2012.

In the UCAS End of Cycle report they have undertaken an analysis of their own grouping of institutions – split by average UCAS tariff score for entrants. The measures in this report are split down into unevenly sized groups, and two consist of institutions that the Sutton Trust regard as the most selective in the UK.

The institutions are split into four groups:

1. The Sutton Trust 13 (ST13)⁸
2. The Sutton Trust 30 (ST30)⁹
3. Those of the remainder whose average offer is for greater than or equal to 316 UCAS points
4. Those of the remainder whose average offer is for less than 316 UCAS points

For this section we will focus exclusively on students aged up to 19, as the number of students accepting places at highly selective universities aged 20 and over are so small as to be misleading.

We are particularly interested to note if students from particular nations are now less likely to go to certain types of universities, or if there are any emerging trends based on socio-economic markers.

Table 5: Acceptances by selectivity of institution and by year

Country	Type of institution	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2010	2012 V 2011
England	A Less than 316 points	143,128	147,561	159,779	141,284	(-4.3%)	(-11.6%)
	B Greater or equal to 316	36,093	35,820	35,651	34,298	(-4.2%)	(-3.8%)
	ST13	30,536	29,574	28,942	30,962	(4.7%)	(7.0%)
	ST30	73,436	72,434	70,090	71,518	(-1.3%)	(-1.4%)

ST30 includes ST13

Country	Type of institution	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2010	2012 V 2011
NI	A Less than 316 points	5,588	5,341	5,571	5,280	(4.3%)	(-1.1%)
	B Greater or equal to 316	4,191	4,012	3,949	4,052	(-1.6%)	(1.0%)
	ST13	422	389	416	394	(6.9%)	(1.3%)
	ST30	1,231	1,265	1,312	1,063	(3.7%)	(-16.0%)

ST30 includes ST13

8 Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, UCL, Warwick and York

9 The universities in Sutton Trust 13 plus Bath, Cardiff, Exeter, Glasgow, King's College, Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, Royal Holloway College, Sheffield, Southampton, Strathclyde and Surrey

Country	Type of institution	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2010	2012 V 2011
Scotland	A Less than 316 points	2,983	4,294	3,351	3,444	(-22.0%)	(-19.8%)
	B Greater or equal to 316	8,717	8,716	8,725	9,076	(0.1%)	(4.1%)
	ST13	2,643	2,248	2,431	2,364	(8.1%)	(5.2%)
	ST30	8,168	7,097	6,677	6,842	(-5.9%)	(-3.6%)

ST30 includes ST13

Country	Type of institution	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2010	2012 V 2011
Wales	A Less than 316 points	7,786	7,850	7,691	7,668	(-2.0%)	(-2.3%)
	B Greater or equal to 316	2,819	2,249	2,168	2,262	(-3.6%)	(0.6%)
	ST13	795	844	796	861	(-5.7%)	(2.0%)
	ST30	3,474	3,279	3,219	3,625	(-1.8%)	(10.6%)

ST30 includes ST13

From table 5 above, we can see that acceptances to ST13 universities have increased overall, and from each of the nations. For example, among English students, we see a 4.7 per cent increase on 2010 acceptances. Acceptances to all other types of institution have decreased from English applicants.

Acceptances to ST30 universities have increased significantly from Welsh students, albeit from a relatively low base, but have decreased from the other three nations. This could be explained by considering the differential fee arrangements for students from Wales, in that they will not have to pay anything over the £3,465 cap regardless of where the institution is they go on to study at. The biggest drop has been from Northern Irish applicants, who are effectively being encouraged to study in Northern Ireland due to the fee arrangements there. This may explain why there has been such a steep drop (16 per cent compared to 2010) in the number of Northern Irish students accepting places at ST30 universities, none of which are in Northern Ireland.

When breaking this down further by QYPR group for English applicants, we can see different trends across the different participation quintiles

Table 6: Change in number of acceptances by university type and QYPR: 2010 to 2012: England, aged up to 19

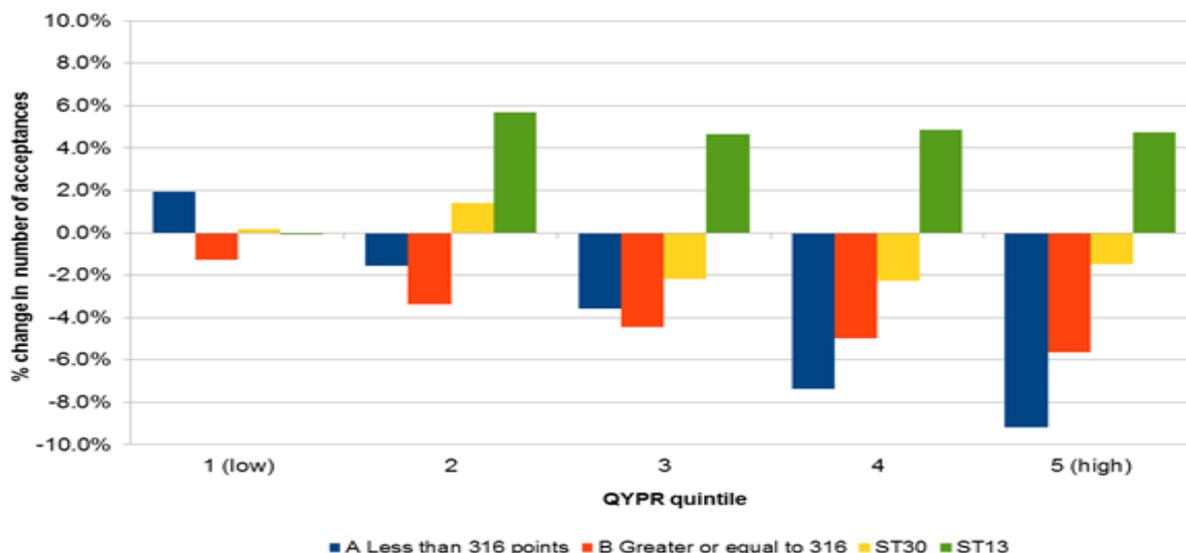
	QYPR				
	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
A Less than 316 points	1.6%	-1.7%	-4.2%	-7.3%	-8.8%
B Greater or equal to 316	-0.6%	-2.5%	-2.0%	-3.5%	-2.2%
ST30	1.0%	2.7%	-2.0%	-2.5%	-2.1%
ST13	1.1%	6.9%	3.4%	3.8%	5.2%

In the first year of the higher fees, there was a 4.7% increase in the proportion of young people from England's most advantaged neighbourhoods going to the 13 most selective universities in the UK and a 0.1 per cent decline in the numbers from the poorest neighbourhoods accepting places at those universities. Every quintile group apart from the very lowest showed an increase in acceptances to ST13 universities in 2012 compared to 2010. The gap in the number of acceptances between those students from the highest participation areas and the lowest has only increased very slightly in 2012 compared to 2010, by about 0.1%. Those from the most advantaged backgrounds (Q5) make up almost half of those accepting places from ST13 universities in both 2010 and 2012, and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Q1) make up around 5%.

For the least selective group of universities in the analysis, we see the opposite pattern emerging. Those from the most advantaged areas have seen a drop in acceptances of 9.2% to these universities, whereas those from the least advantaged areas have seen an increase in acceptances of 1.9%.

The UCAS End of Cycle report found, on university groupings they had used and acceptance rates (as opposed to number), slightly higher proportional increases in the number of acceptances for those from the most disadvantaged areas for English 18 year olds' than those from other areas.¹⁰ It is also worth noting that this is based on larger groups of universities than the Sutton Trust groupings, and the Sutton Trust focusses on the most selective universities.

Fig 10: Change in number of acceptances by university type and QYPR: 2010-2012: England, aged up to 19



Trends in acceptances by students living at home

Perhaps surprisingly, table 6 below shows that fewer 18 and 19 year-old students are living at home than was the case in 2010 and 2011. However, mature students in England are now more likely to live at home, a pattern not repeated among mature students in other parts of the UK.

The measure for 'living at home' only includes those who applicants who stated at application that they intended to live at home.

Table 7: The number of acceptances by year, country of domicile and living at home

Country	Living at home	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 V 2010	2012 V 2011
England	N	194,648	197,832	204,955	190,499	(-3.7%)	(-7.1%)
	Y	58,111	58,030	60,593	56,951	(-1.9%)	(-6.0%)
	Total	252,759	255,862	265,548	247,450	(-3.3%)	(-6.8%)
NI	N	8,413	8,143	8,476	8,067	(-0.9%)	(-4.8%)
	Y	2,597	2,475	2,357	2,331	(-5.8%)	(-1.1%)
	Total	11,010	10,618	10,833	10,398	(-2.1%)	(-4.0%)
Scotland	N	11,757	11,610	10,776	11,314	(-2.5%)	(5.0%)
	Y	8,113	8,497	7,977	8,050	(-5.3%)	(0.9%)
	Total	19,870	20,107	18,753	19,364	(-3.7%)	(3.3%)
Wales	N	11,071	10,566	10,429	11016	(4.3%)	(5.6%)
	Y	3,012	2,815	2,653	2554	(-9.3%)	(-3.7%)
	Total	14,083	13,381	13,082	13570	(1.4%)	(3.7%)
Overall Total		297,772	299,968	308,216	290,782	(-3.1%)	(-5.7%)

There are drops for all QYPR quintiles for living at home. There are slightly larger drops for those in higher quintiles, in general.

Young cohort acceptance rates

As noted in our previous report, the total application figures are affected by the current declining trend in the total population of school leavers in the UK, and this also affects acceptances. In this section we discuss the young cohort acceptance rate - the proportion of the age cohort entering HE at either age 18 or age 19. Those entering at 19 have typically taken a gap year, but will also include those re-applying and some first-time applicants. Those entering at 18 or 19 normally make up around 75% of the total acceptances.

In reviewing the overall trends, which might indicate whether the likelihood of young people going to university is rising or falling, we consider that the best single indicator is the measure of the young entry rate by cohort. That is to say, we should look at the entire population who are aged 18 in a given year, and then we should look at the overall percentage of those who go to university whether at 18 or 19. This allows for gap year deferments and is a better measure of the post-school application rate than simply focusing on 18 year-olds.

This measure is also used by HEFCE, and is defined as a central measure by UCAS in their End of Cycle 2012 report.

However, it is not without its problems. The main difficulty with this measure is that we do not have access at this stage to the figures for the full 2012 cohort, since we will be missing those who were aged 18 in 2012 but who are applying as 19 year olds in the 2013 cycle.

Nevertheless, we do now have an overview of applications for the January 2013 deadline for this group of students and we can make an educated guess as to the likely parameters of the uptakes of places at age 19.

The chart below shows the total number of 18 year old and 19 year old acceptances over the last three years, grouped by cohort. That is to say that it groups the acceptances by birth year, and compares them to the overall cohort born in the same year. 19 year old acceptances for the 2012 cohort will only be known in the current cycle (2013) and are marked N/A.

Table 8¹¹: Number of acceptances by cohort by country

Number of acceptances 2009 cohort						
	At age	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total Result
2009	18	180113	9279	15062	10580	215034
2010	19	74927	1840	4097	3420	84284
	Total	255040	11119	19159	14000	299318
Acceptance Rate						37.6%

Number of acceptances 2010 cohort						
	At age	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total Result
2010	18	179928	8737	15368	9923	213956
2011	19	78622	2207	3958	3497	88284
	Total	258550	10944	19326	13420	302240
Acceptance Rate						38.5%

¹¹ Note to table: The data available to us allowed calculation of cohort acceptance rates as opposed to cohort entry rates. The differences between the results of the two measures are not significant.

Other factors

Number of acceptances 2011 cohort						
	At age	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total Result
2011	18	186057	8589	14248	9545	218439
2012	19	66524	1940	4335	3677	76476
	Total	252581	10529	18583	13222	294915
Acceptance Rate						39.0%

Number of acceptances 2011 cohort						
	At age	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total Result
2011	18	186057	8589	14248	9545	218439
2012	19	66524	1940	4335	3677	76476
	Total	252581	10529	18583	13222	294915
Acceptance Rate						39.0%

Number of acceptances 2012 cohort						
	At age	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total Result
2012	18	180194	8416	14454	9864	212928
32012	19	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Approximation of the number of 19 year old acceptances required to maintain 2011 cohort entry rate						79100

We see that the overall cohort acceptance rate has been increasing to reach 39% for the 2011 cohort (i.e. those who were 18 in 2011). Not surprisingly the 2011 cohort was relatively more likely to have been accepted at age 18 than at 19. For the 2012 cohort we would expect to see this pattern unwind, and currently this is borne out by the drop in the absolute and relative number of 18 year old acceptances in 2012. Clearly in order for the overall acceptance rate for the complete cohort to stay at historical levels, we will need to see a marked increase in those from this cohort who are accepted into HE aged 19 in 2013.

Possible indications for the likelihood of this can be taken from the 2013 applications submitted by the January deadline. These show a strong bounce back in 19 year old applications when compared to the depressed level of the previous year, with a rise of 10.5%. We have calculated that we only need 19 year old acceptances to rise by 3.5% to achieve the same acceptance rate as for the previous cohort, so current indications would certainly make this plausible. However it should be noted that a range of other factors will affect these outcomes, and that historically the levels of applications have not necessarily been a reliable indicator of overall acceptances. Indeed UCAS have reported that the application rate for 18 year olds in 2011 showed no increase from trend levels, which is surprising given the clear upturn in the acceptance rate for the same period, and the financial logic for entering HE earlier rather than later for this cohort. On the other hand 19 year old applications for the same cohort did show a significant decline. We will therefore await with interest the acceptance figures for the current cycle.

This report concentrates on a relatively small number of the many factors considered in the extensive UCAS end of cycle report.

Arguably the most significant impact (at this stage) of all the consequences of the changed tuition fee regime has been the large drop in actual student numbers commencing their studies in 2012/13. This fall of some 54,000 students has been much larger than many institutions will have expected, and, given an uneven spread across institutions, is likely to have some significant consequences. This has been caused by a combination of lower overall acceptances for this academic year and a steep reduction in deferred acceptances from the previous year; that it to say that, not surprisingly, relatively few students accepted a place in 2011 but then chose to defer entry until 2012/13 (when the new fee regime commenced). At the same time, there was a drop in the number of acceptances from students who were aged 18 in 2011 and who did not submit an application until 2012. The combination of these logical reactions to increased fees, together with declining numbers of school leavers, and some institutional factors, has driven a very steep fall in overall student numbers. Since it is outside our main remit to consider these institutional factors, we will not comment further in this report, but it is clear that it has the potential to affect the overall student experience in a number of ways.

A related issue was the very high number of acceptances through the UCAS clearing system in 2012, the highest ever recorded, although the number for 'young applicants' fell.¹² We also note that Institutions made fewer offers in this cycle and they were concentrated on a smaller number of students. It may be that approaches to offer making will change as a result of the impact of their strategy in 2012.

A further change to the system in 2012 was the introduction of the AAB+ scheme to expand the number of places offered by universities providing applicants achieved at least these grades. A further expansion is envisaged for 2013, but with a lower hurdle of ABB. We note from the UCAS End of Cycle report that the increase in the acceptance rate for students from less privileged areas of the country was driven by those below the AAB hurdle. This could be a cause for concern in future cycles if it impacts the chances of those from less privileged backgrounds of going to more selective universities. It is an area we will continue to monitor.

We also note that attainment relative to predicted grades has continued to weaken in 2012. This again raises the issue of whether a move to post qualification admission procedures would be desirable.

Conclusions

The reforms to Higher Education funding are still very recent and no strong conclusions can be drawn from the data at this stage. Indeed it may take many years for the impact to be fully felt and for the consequences of greatly increased levels of personal debt to become apparent. However there are some noticeable trends emerging, and some areas of concern.

The areas which we have looked at in this report may be summarised as follows:

1. Overall acceptances for UK students declined in 2012 by 5.5%, but the fall was less steep than might have been expected given the weakness in applications. At the same time universities have dealt with significantly lower student numbers, caused by changes in deferral patterns, gap year behaviour, and other factors
2. Except in Wales, acceptances fell noticeably more for students aged 20 and over compared with school leavers. This is a cause for concern, especially given the very steep falls in part-time student numbers reported elsewhere.
3. Overall the analysis of acceptances by geographical areas of advantage shows that the fall in acceptances has been steeper in more privileged areas than in less privileged areas.
4. The gender differential remains a potential area for concern, and this differential is more marked in less privileged areas, where the number of boys accepted to university fell in the two years after 2010 while the number of girls rose.
5. Flows between the different countries of the UK appear to be affected by rational reactions to the differential fee arrangements
6. Acceptances at the UK's most selective universities increased rather than declined, but the increase seems to have been drawn disproportionately from more privileged areas – student from the most privileged fifth of neighbourhoods are ten times more likely to go to the Sutton Trust 13 universities than those from the least privileged fifth.
7. Acceptance trends for younger students appear stable at this stage, and there is no reason to expect the 2012 school leavers cohort (including those applying in 2013 as 19 year olds) to show any relative decline.

As noted before it is also difficult to disentangle the impact of the new fee regime from the many other variables affecting the sector. However we are at least encouraged that there is a broad awareness of the issues and that an increasing amount of high quality analysis has been produced, noticeably the much extended UCAS End of Cycle report and the recent HEFCE report. We are grateful in particular to UCAS for the provision of the main data sets on which this report is based.

Application data published by UCAS¹³ for the 2013 cycle at the January deadline shows increases from the 2012 cycle, but still a marked drop from 2011. It is unclear whether this will generate sufficient demand for the universities to maintain historic trends in student numbers. Overall the patterns remain mixed, and we will carefully monitor the data for the coming year as it emerges.

¹³ http://www.ucas.co.uk/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2013/20130130c