

NEWS RELEASE

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18,000 FEWER MATURE STUDENTS APPLY TO UNIVERSITY SINCE FEES INCREASE

Mature student applications in England have fallen by more than 18,000 (a 14% decline) since the introduction of the new £9,000 fees regime, a new analysis of UCAS data by the Independent Commission on Fees shows today.

Overall full-time applicant numbers were 31,000 lower in 2013 than in 2010.

The numbers of English university applicants aged 20 or older, for full-time courses, has fallen from 134,000 to 116,000, a reduction of 18,500, or 13.8% since 2010. The fall has been greater among those aged 25 and over, where there has been a drop of 15.4% in applications.

Returning to university as a mature student has traditionally been an important route to social mobility for people from low and middle income backgrounds who missed out on university after they left school.

UCAS holds application data on those who apply to full-time study. Many older applicants mix work and part-time study and apply directly to universities. The Higher Education Funding Council for England reported last year that there had been a substantial 40% drop in the number of part time undergraduate students starting in 2012-13, compared to 2010-11. Figures for 2013-14 part-time applicants are not yet available.

This report finds encouraging signs that school leavers overall (18 and 19 year olds) are not being put off a university education, and that the proportion of this group applying to university seems to be remaining constant, although the growth in this measure has stalled and is below trend.

The Commission's analysis shows that there were 12,450 fewer 18 and 19 year-old English applicants in 2013 than in 2010, a drop of 4%. Some of this change is demographic – there are fewer 18 and 19 year-olds in the population. However, the study concludes that, in England, 2,600 (or 1%) fewer of those aged 18 in 2012 applied to university in 2012 or 2013 than would have done so had the trend in applications from previous years continued.

Among mature students, there were significant increases in the number of those aged over 20 applying for full-time courses from Northern Ireland and Scotland, and there was little change in Wales between 2010 and 2013. The £9,000 fee maximum was only introduced in England.

Today's report also confirms earlier evidence of a gender divide in university applications, with the decline in the overall number of male students being faster – at 7.6% – than the decline in female students, which was 6.4%. In 2013, 58% of applicants were female and 42% male, suggesting that women are a third more likely to apply to university than men.

The report shows that while there has been some growth in applicants from the least advantaged neighbourhoods to university generally, this growth has not been reflected in applications to the most selective universities.

Will Hutton, chair of the Independent Commission on Fees, said today:

“Today's report gives us a clearer picture of what has happened to university applications after the turbulence surrounding the introduction of fees up to £9000 a year has started to settle down.

“It shows that the fees hike is having a serious and damaging impact on second chance students, those who didn't go to university after school but have seen the prospect of mature studies as an opportunity to improve their education and career prospects some years later.

“Last year's evidence from HEFCE showed a big fall-off in part-time students, despite new loans provided by the Government. Today's report confirms this worrying downward trend among those applying for full-time courses.

“If we are truly concerned about widening participation, it is vital that universities and ministers look behind these figures and identify the extent to which the higher fees are acting as a deterrent for mature students. There is a real economic and social imperative to do so.”

For further information or to arrange an interview with Will Hutton, please contact Ellie Decamp on 0207 802 1660.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Independent Commission on Fees was set up in January and is committed to monitoring the impact of increased university fees in England between 2012 and 2014.
2. The five members of the panel are: Will Hutton (Chair), Principal of Hertford College, Oxford University, and Chair of the Big Innovation Centre; Tanith Dodge, HR director at Marks & Spencer; Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation; Stephen Machin, Professor of Economics at University College London and Research Director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics; and Libby Purves, writer, radio broadcaster and *Times* chief theatre critic.
3. The Commission is producing a series of independent reports assessing the impact of the increase in fees on application and admissions trends in universities, considering in particular the effect on those from low and middle income backgrounds. The secretariat and analytical support is provided by the Sutton Trust.

4. Table: Number of applicants by age group and by country of domicile.

Country	Age	2010	2011	2011 v 2010	2012	2012 v 2010	2013	2013 v 2010
England	Up to 19	312035	315761	1.2%	288889	-7.4%	299585	-4.0%
	20 - 24	77068	78569	1.9%	67506	-12.4%	67354	-12.6%
	25 and over	57074	56784	-0.5%	50153	-12.1%	48269	-15.4%
Northern Ireland	Up to 19	14598	15007	2.8%	14413	-1.3%	14676	0.5%
	20 - 24	2963	3217	8.6%	3122	5.4%	3657	23.4%
	25 and over	1368	1412	3.2%	1260	-7.9%	1624	18.7%
Scotland	Up to 19	25795	25671	-0.5%	25397	-1.5%	25064	-2.8%
	20 - 24	8689	9487	9.2%	9417	8.4%	10104	16.3%
	25 and over	6534	6649	1.8%	6170	-5.6%	6155	-5.8%
Wales	Up to 19	15720	15695	-0.2%	15335	-2.4%	14988	-4.7%
	20 - 24	3727	4023	7.9%	3983	6.9%	3760	0.9%
	25 and over	2741	2950	7.6%	2813	2.6%	2700	-1.5%
UK TOTAL	Up to 19	368,148	372,134	1.1%	344,034	-6.6%	354,313	-3.8%
	20 - 24	92,447	95,296	3.1%	84,028	-9.1%	84,875	-8.2%
	25 and over	67,717	67,795	0.1%	60,396	-10.8%	58,748	-13.2%
	TOTAL	528312	535225	1.3%	488458	-7.5%	497936	-5.7%

Excludes a small number of applicants with missing data

5. The Commission is extremely grateful to the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for their cooperation in helping with the Commission's work. This report builds on analysis undertaken by UCAS, and follows on from the Commission's report on applications to higher education, published earlier in 2013. Our aim is to analyse the UCAS data, but the interpretation and analysis in this report is our own and independent of UCAS or any other organisation. *UK application rates by country, sex, age and background (2013 cycle, January*

deadline) and *Demand for full-time undergraduate higher education* (2013 cycle, March deadline). UCAS' reports and supporting data files can be found at www.ucas.com/data-analysis/key-analysis .

6. HEFCE's analysis of part-time students can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/about/intro/abouthighereducationinengland/impact/>
7. There are several reasons why we have come to different conclusions from UCAS on selective universities: the Sutton Trust 13 is a much smaller group of selective institutions than the UCAS sample; we are also looking at applicants aged up to 19, whereas UCAS looked at 18 year olds only.