Analysis of trends in higher education applications, admissions, and enrolments

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INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON FEES

Contents

Executive Summary

- Application rates for 18 year olds in England have continued to recover from their depressed level in 2012, with rates in 2014 1.9 percentage points above their 2010 levels.
- The proportion of the 18 year old population taking up places at university has also recovered in all countries of the UK. Entry rates for English 18 year olds were 2.9 percentage points higher at 30.3% in 2013 than their 2010 levels. The increases in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, were 0.2pp, 1.8pp, and 2.5pp, respectively.
- Numbers of applications and acceptances by mature students have also recovered slightly but remain substantially lower than their pre-2012 levels, particularly in England. In 2014, numbers of English residents aged 20-24 and 25+ applying to university were 8% and 11% below their 2010 levels, respectively. Mature student numbers also remain substantially depressed in terms of the take up of university places. 18% fewer people aged 25+ took up places in 2013 than did in 2010.
- Enrolment figures for the 2012/13 academic year (relating to the 2012 applications cycle) show that the year of the fee changes saw particularly large reductions in the number of mature students entering part-time courses. Over 100,000 fewer students over the age of 25 started part-time higher education courses in 2012/13 than did in 2009/10 – a reduction of 43%.
- This was part of a more general decline in part-time higher education, with 41% fewer part-time enrolments overall in 2012/13 than in 2009/10. Provisional figures highlighted by Universities UK suggest that this decline has continued in the most recent academic year.
- The gender gap in applications and acceptances has continued to increase. In 2013, 21% more female than male 18 year olds entered university. This gap is largest among disadvantaged applicants, meaning disadvantaged boys are particularly under-represented.
- The gap in application and entry rates between advantaged and disadvantaged students has narrowed slightly, but remains unacceptably large – particularly for the most selective universities:
    - In 2010, English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged backgrounds were 3.2 times more likely to enter higher education than were those from the most disadvantaged. In 2013 this ratio was 2.8.
    - In 2010, the number of English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged backgrounds entering the 30 most selective universities in the UK (the Sutton Trust 30) was 7.3 times higher than the number entering from the most disadvantaged areas. In 2013 this ratio had narrowed to 6.8.
    - However, for the 13 most prestigious UK universities (the Sutton Trust 13) the ratio was 9.8 and remained at 9.5 in 2013.
- Polling by Ipsos MORI for the Sutton Trust shows that a majority of the public supports reduced fees for students from lower income homes, with this support being largely consistent across demographic groups (including majority support among both parents and non-parents).

1. Introduction

This report follows on from the Commission's previous report on applications and acceptances to higher education in the UK. Our previous reports, based on data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), highlighted a number of concerns about the possible impact of the 2012/13 changes to university fees:

- A negative impact on demand, evidenced by the relatively steep decline in the overall numbers of applications to university in 2012/13 from English applicants
- An increased gender gap in those taking up places at university
- A steep decline in the numbers of mature students both applying for and taking up places
- A large gap between the most and least privileged students in the uptake of places at the most selective universities

Our most recent report, published in September 2013, extended our analysis of applications to the 2013/14 cycle (those applying by March 2013 for places at university beginning in September). We found encouraging signs that demand among school-leavers (18-19 year olds) had not declined, with the proportion of this group applying to university remaining relatively constant. However, we found that the decline in applications among those aged 20 and over had continued.

This report extends our previous analysis by examining applications in the 2014 cycle and by adding an analysis of acceptances and entry rates in the 2013 cycle. We further include an analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) on students actually enrolled on UK higher education courses (including those who have not applied through the UCAS route), though this is limited to examining changes in 2012/13 academic year (related to the 2012 applications cycle).

This report is consistent with our earlier findings in showing that, although absolute numbers of applicants remain below historic levels, the proportion school-leavers[1] applying to university has largely recovered to its pre-2012 level. It further shows that this pattern is also reflected in actual take-up of university places. However, we show that, while there has been a slight recovery in the numbers of over 19 year olds applying to and entering university, numbers remain well below their pre-2012 levels.

HESA data on enrolments further highlight the scale of the 2012 decline, particularly in the number of students pursuing part time courses (which are overwhelmingly pursued by mature students). To the extent that these declines represent a genuine reduction in the numbers of people choosing to return to higher education, this is an area of strong concern. Many mature and part-time students will have missed out on higher education as school-leavers and have returned as 'second chance' applicants in order to improve their career prospects. This is a vital route to social mobility, and also to re-skilling for the changing economy. It is therefore crucial that these potential students are not discouraged from higher education by a perceived excessive financial burden.

[1] In this report we make greater use of publicly available data published by UCAS, which focuses on 18 year olds, whereas in the previous report we focused on 18-19 year olds

The report also notes that, for school-leavers in England:

- The gender gap in applications is increasing, and is also reflected in the take up of university places. Disadvantaged boys appear to be particularly under-represented
- The gap in application and entry rates between the most and least privileged students has not narrowed substantially, and remains unacceptably wide. This is particularly true for the most selective institutions, with almost 10 times more privileged than disadvantaged students entering the 13 most selective institutions (the Sutton Trust 13).

Background

The Independent Commission on Fees was established in response to the 2012/13 increase in university fees, with the objective of monitoring the potential impact of this fee increase over a three year period. It has already produced a series of reports assessing the early impact of the increase in fees on university application and admissions trends. This work has been primarily based on UCAS data and the Commission is extremely grateful for their ongoing cooperation in providing datasets to support its work.

Student fees in the UK from 2012/13

Prior to the 2012/13 academic year, universities in England could charge a maximum fee of £3,375. From the 2012/13 this cap was raised to £9,000. Universities charging more than £6,000 were required to institute access measures to ensure that they did not exclude disadvantaged students. These access measures are assessed and monitored by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). Contrary to the government's hopes that universities would compete on price, the vast majority of universities and courses charge the £9,000 maximum, with the current average fee being £8,507.[2]

Students in Scotland attending Scottish universities do not pay any fees. However, students from elsewhere in the UK attending Scottish universities are required to pay fees. In 2011/12 these fees were £1,820 per year, but in 2012/13 the cap was raised to £9,000 in line with English universities.

Welsh universities can also charge fees of up to £9,000, but the Welsh Assembly pays any fee costs above £3,465 for Welsh students studying at any UK university.

At universities in Northern Ireland fees were capped at £3,465 and will rise in line with inflation for the next four years. Fees for other UK students are not capped and can therefore be any amount. However, the Northern Ireland Executive has said that fees are not expected to exceed £9,000.

[2] http://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/offa-announces-decisions-on-2013-14-access-agreements/

The data

In this report we present three primary types of figures:

- **UCAS Applications** – these figures refer to applications to full-time undergraduate Higher Education (HE)[3] courses in the UK made through the UCAS system.[4] UCAS administer the majority of all applications to full-time undergraduate HE courses in the UK, and the overwhelming majority of those made by school-leavers. Unless otherwise specified, the application figures presented in this report are derived from publicly available data provided on the UCAS website for applications made prior to the March applications deadline in each year. These figures therefore do not include all applications made in a given cycle, but they allow us to make year on year comparisons including applications made in the 2014 cycle. Unless otherwise specified, the figures reported here cover all UK domiciled applicants and all course types.

- **UCAS Acceptances** – these figures refer to accepted places on full-time HE courses at UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for applications made through the UCAS system. Unless otherwise specified, these draw on publicly available data provided in the UCAS end of cycle reports. These reports are published annually and include figures for all applications and acceptances made in a given cycle, including places accepted through Clearing. Unless otherwise specified, the figures reported here cover all UK domiciled applicants and all course types. As the 2014 UCAS cycle is ongoing, we present figures from the 2010 to 2013 cycles.

- **HE Enrolments** – these figures refer to enrolments at UK HEIs recorded by the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA). These draw on publicly available data on enrolments provided on the HESA website. Unless otherwise specified, the figures reported here cover all first year enrolments by students studying for first degrees or other undergraduate HE courses (including Foundation Degrees, HNDs, HNCs, etc.). Enrolment figures differ from UCAS acceptances in two main ways. First, they include students who did not apply through the UCAS route. Second, they do not include individuals who accept an offered place at university, but for some reason do not attend, or drop-out within the first two weeks. HESA enrolment figures are a year behind UCAS acceptance figures and we are therefore only able to examine changes to the 2012/13 academic year (they relate to the 2012 applications cycle).

Most of the trend comparisons in this report examine changes relative to 2010. We use 2010 as the pre fee increase baseline year because, although the fee increase did not come into effect until 2012, the changes were announced in 2011, potentially complicating the results for that year.

[3] Higher education includes post Further Education course, including honours degrees but also including other course types such as Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), and Higher National Certificates (HNCs)

[4] UCAS administers applications for full-time undergraduate higher education provision at its member institutions. A list of UCAS members can be found here: http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/data-resources/data-tables/acceptances-institution-domicile-group-and-entry-year

Applications

Table 1. Number of applicants to March deadline, by country of domicile[5]

Domicile	2010	2011	2011 v 2010	2012	2012 v 2010	2013	2013 v 2010	2014	2014 v 2010
England	444,610	449,590	1.1%	405,110	-8.9%	413,810	-6.9%	428,260	-3.7%
Scotland	40,980	41,790	2.0%	40,980	0.0%	41,310	0.8%	42,460	3.6%
Wales	22,200	22,670	2.1%	22,140	-0.3%	21,450	-3.4%	22,060	-0.6%
Northern Ireland	18,940	19,640	3.7%	18,800	-0.7%	19,960	5.4%	19,930	5.2%
UK total	**526,730**	**533,690**	**1.3%**	**487,030**	**-7.5%**	**496,530**	**-5.7%**	**512,710**	**-2.7%**

Overall, the number of UK domiciled people applying to university increased by 3.3% from 2013 to 2014. However, the number of applicants remains 2.7% below the level of 2010, which was the last year unaffected by the new fees regime. This decline is largely driven by declines in the number of English applicants, with numbers of Scottish and Northern Irish applicants above their 2010 levels.

These figures show a sharp decline in 2012 (the year of the fees increase), particularly among English applicants, followed by a more gradual recovery, with numbers not yet recovering to their 2010 levels. However, these figures are strongly affected by overall declines in the population of people aged 18 in England, who account for the majority of university applicants. Table 2 and Figure 1, below, show the application rates of 18 year olds in England (the number applying as a percentage of the overall 18 year old population).

Table 2. Application rate (to March deadline) of 18 year olds domiciled in England[6]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	31.3%	32.3%	30.8%	31.9%	33.2%

[5] From UCAS 2014 applicant figures – March Deadline 2014 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2014/2014-cycle-applicant-figures-march-deadline-2014)
[6] From UCAS Analysis Note 2014/1 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/analysis-notes)

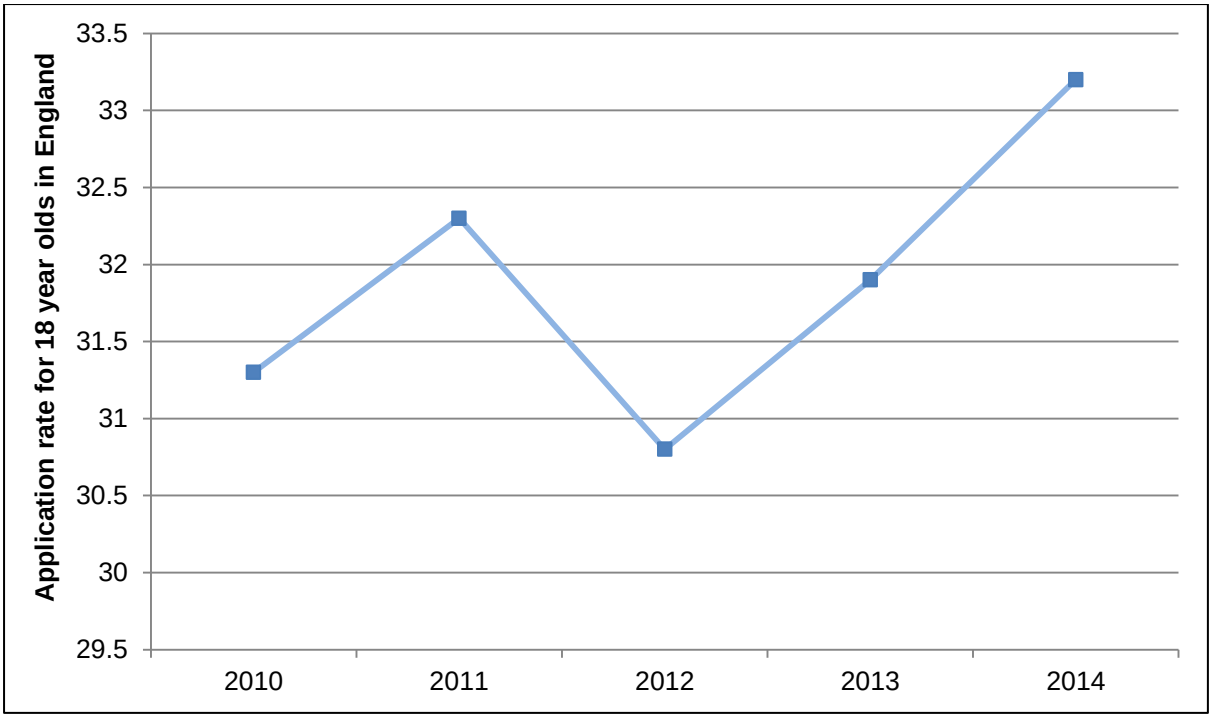

Figure 1. Application rate (to March deadline) of 18 year olds domiciled in England

These figures show an increase in the application rate from 2010 to 2011, followed by a decline in 2012, coinciding with the increase in fees. However, since 2012 the rate has recovered, and in 2014 the application rate of English 18 year olds was higher than that in 2010 or 2011.

Acceptances

Table 3. Number of acceptances and entry rates of 18 year olds to end of cycle, by country of domicile[7]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013 v 2010
England					
Acceptances	359,005	367,150	342,755	367,900	2.48%
18yo entry rate	27.4%	29.4%	28.7%	30.3%	
Scotland					
Acceptances	32,250	30,800	30,900	31,495	-2.34%
18yo entry rate	24%	22.9%	23.8%	24.2%	
Wales					
Acceptances	18,670	18,325	19,305	19,665	5.33%
18yo entry rate	24.8%	24.9%	26.2%	26.6%	
Northern Ireland					
Acceptances	13,505	13,790	13,285	14,555	7.77%
18yo entry rate	33.7%	34.1%	33.7%	36.2%	

Table 3 shows the number of students accepted onto university places by the end of each cycle for each country, along with the entry rate of 18 year olds (the number of 18 year olds being accepted

[7] From UCAS 2014 end of cycle report (available at: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf)

onto places at university as a percentage of the number of 18 year olds in each country). As with the application rate, these figures show a decline in the numbers of acceptances of English (and Northern Irish, though not Scottish or Welsh) applicants. However, unlike applications, numbers of English acceptances have recovered to above their 2010 level. Entry rates for English 18 year olds mirror this pattern, with a dip in 2012 followed by recovery to above 2010 levels. Figure 2 illustrates shows these rates graphically for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

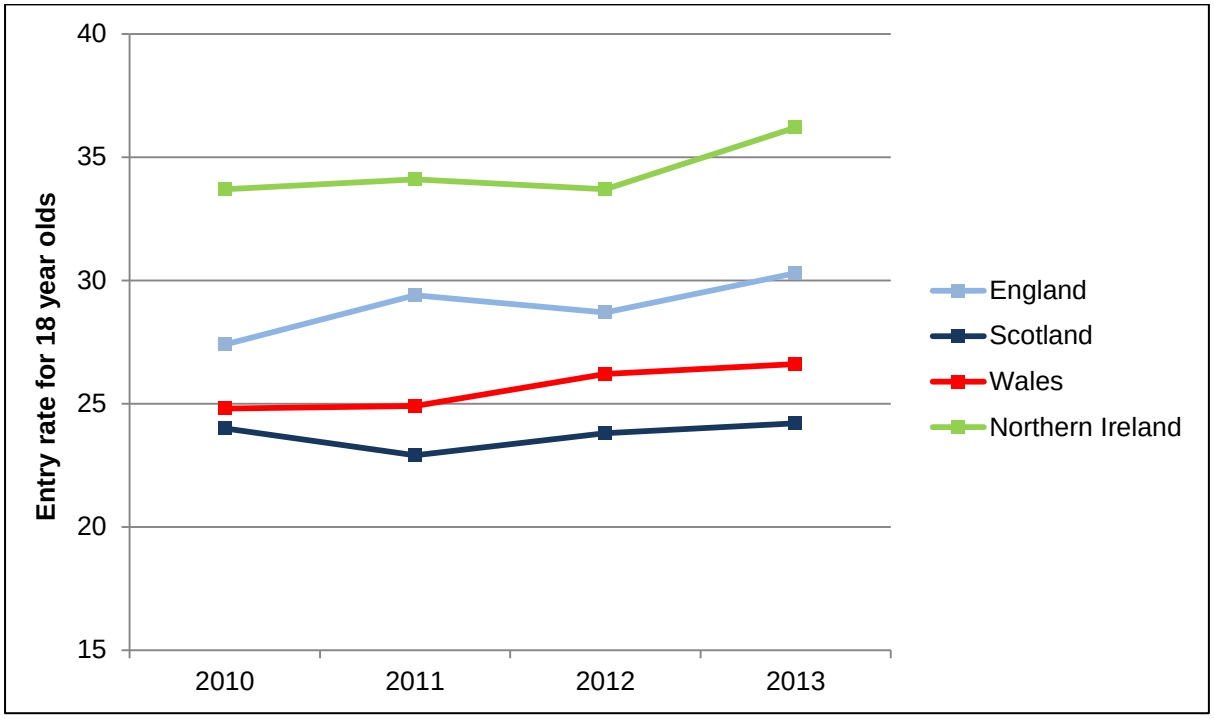

Figure 2. Entry rates for 18 year olds to end of cycle, by country of domicile

Enrolments

Table 4 show the numbers of first year students from each country enrolled on HE courses in the UK in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 academic years. These figures show a substantial decline in enrolments in the 2012/13 academic year in England, coinciding with the increase in fees. This decline is more substantial than that that observed between 2011 and 2012 in UCAS applications or acceptances. The figures provided by HESA are a year behind the acceptance figures given by HESA and we are therefore unable to determine the extent to which these numbers have recovered in the 2013/14 academic year.

Table 4. Number of first year undergraduates enrolled on HE courses (including part-time and full-time courses), by country of domicile[8]

	2011/12	2012/13	% change
England	577,265	452,255	-21.7%
Scotland	53,760	53,685	-0.1%
Wales	39,750	39,575	-0.4%
Northern Ireland	21,690	20,930	-3.5%

It is important to note that a large part of this reduction is likely to have been driven by a reduction in enrolments on undergraduate courses other than first degrees (such as Foundation Degrees and

[8] From HESA Free Statistics – General Student Numbers (available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/free-statistics)

HNDs). A recent report published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) showed that two thirds of the reduction in full-time entrants and 94% of the reduction in part-time entrants to HE courses at English universities and colleges from 2008/09 to 2012/13 was explained by reductions in the number of entrants to courses other than first degrees.[9] These figures are not comparable to the figures presented here in a number of ways: they refer to UK applicants to English institutions specifically, they include FE colleges providing HE courses as well as universities, and they focus on reductions relative to the 2008/09 academic year. However, they indicate that a large fraction of the 2012/13 reduction in first year enrolments in is likely to have been driven by undergraduate courses other than first degrees. Unfortunately HESA do not provide first year enrolment numbers broken down by country and course type, so we are unable to examine the exact proportion.

Country flows

Table 5. Percentage of applications made to universities in the applicant's country of domicile[10]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
England	95.2%	95.7%	95.7%	95.3%	95.3%
Scotland	92.3%	92.9%	94.1%	94.3%	94.5%
Wales	49.1%	48.4%	46.2%	44.7%	42.4%
Northern Ireland	57.2%	54.9%	59.8%	59.3%	60.5%

Table 5 shows the percentage of each country's applications that are made to its institutions. This shows that the proportion of English applications made to English institutions has been stable. However, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of Scottish and Northern Irish applications made within country. This may be a consequence of these countries' more generous fee arrangements for resident student studying at home institutions. By contrast, there has been a decline in the number of Welsh institutions applying in to Welsh institutions. This may be partly due to the Welsh Assembly's policy of paying the difference in fees for Welsh students studying anywhere in the UK.

Disadvantaged students

In this section we present results comparing disadvantaged and advantaged applicants. We focus on English 18 year olds, as this is the group most likely to be affected by the fee changes.

For the majority of our analysis of disadvantaged students we rely on the POLAR2 (Participation of Local Areas) measure of disadvantage. This measure classifies applicants on the basis of the university participation rate of their home area. The areas (census sub-wards) are classified into quintiles, with the lowest quintile being the most disadvantaged (i.e. lowest participation). However, application rates for 2014 based on POLAR2 background are not yet available. We therefore present figures based on eligibility for free school meals (FSM), a commonly used measure of disadvantage in primary and secondary education statistics.

[9] HEFCE (2014). Undergraduate courses other than first degrees: An analysis of recent trends (available at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2014/201408c/HEFCE2014_08c.pdf)
[10] From UCAS 2014 applicant figures – March Deadline 2014 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2014/2014-cycle-applicant-figures-march-deadline-2014)

Table 6. Application rates for English 18 year olds to March deadline, by Free School Meal (FSM) status[11]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Non-FSM	35.2%	36.4%	34.7%	35.9%	37.1%
FSM	14.8%	16.2%	16.0%	16.6%	17.9%
Percentage point gap	*20.4*	*20.2*	*18.7*	*19.3*	*19.2*
FSM: non-FSM ratio	*2.38*	*2.25*	*2.17*	*2.16*	*2.07*

Table 6 shows that application rates for both students eligible and ineligible for free school meals has been on a generally upward trend (though both took a slight dip in 2012). The application rate for FSM pupils has increased slightly faster than that for other students, leading to a slight narrowing of the gap by just over one percentage point. However, based on these March deadline figures, non-FSM pupils remain more than twice as likely to apply for university as FSM pupils. Figure 3 gives these figures graphically.

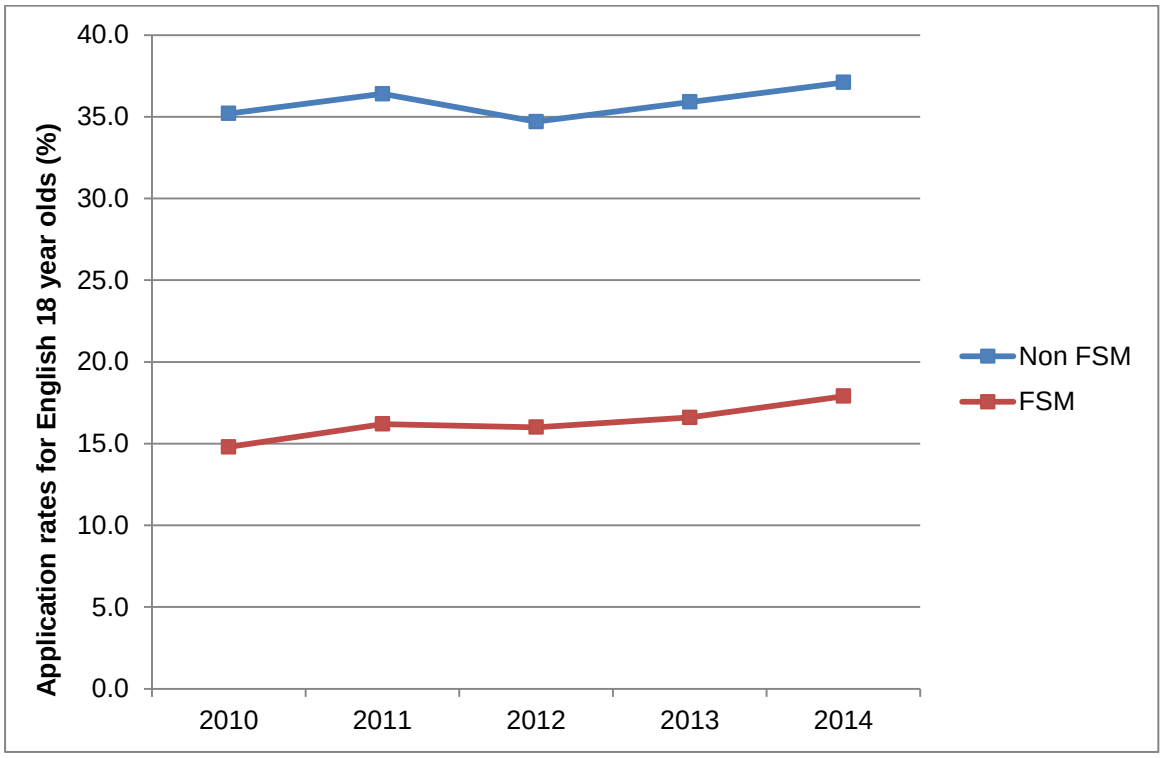

Figure 3. Application rates for English 18 year olds to March deadline by FSM status

Table 7 shows the entry rates for English 18 year olds in the top and bottom POLAR2 quintiles. Figure 4 shows this graphically.

[11] From UCAS Analysis Note 2014/2 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/analysis-notes)

Table 7. Entry rates of English 18 year olds to end of cycle for those in the higher and lowest POLAR2 quintiles[12]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Highest participation (Q5)	44.4%	47.7%	45.5%	46.7%
Lowest participation (Q1)	13.9%	15.1%	15.5%	16.9%
Q5:Q1 Ratio	*3.2*	*3.2*	*2.9*	*2.8*

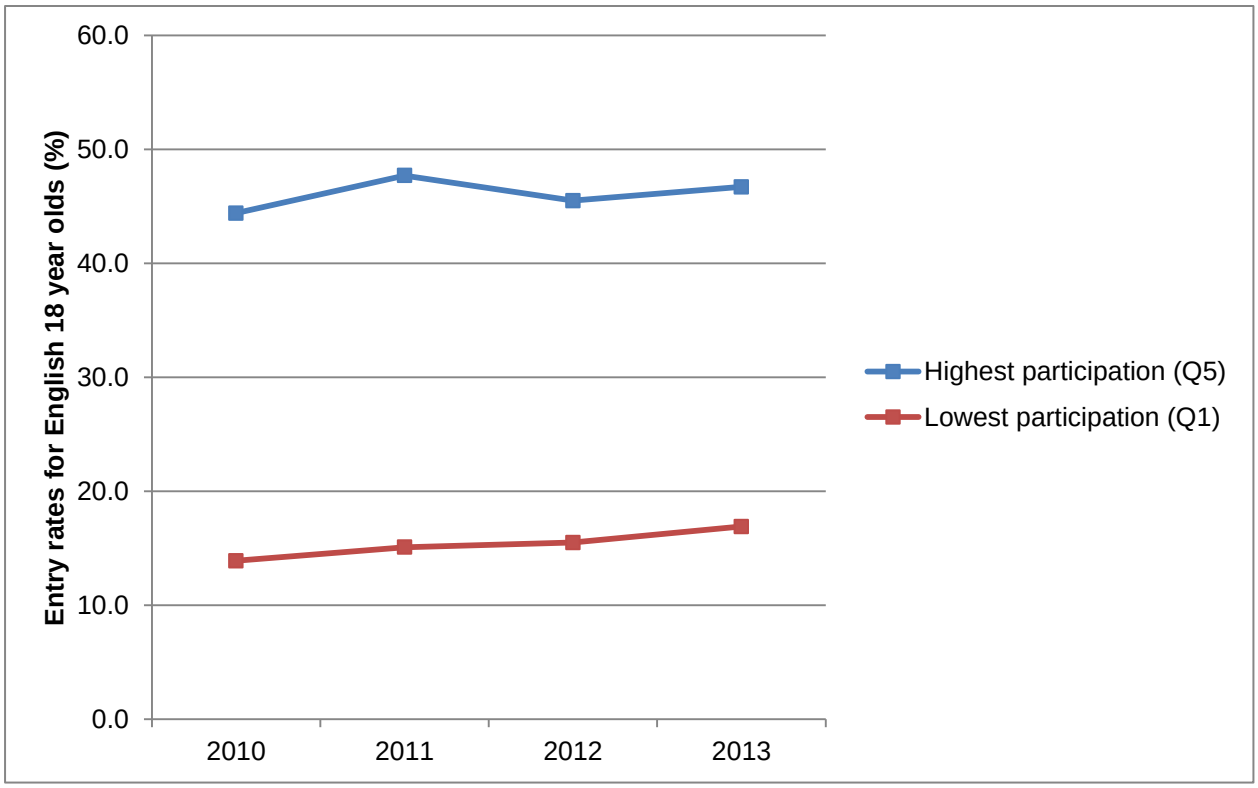

Figure 4. Entry rates of English 18 year olds to end of cycle for those in the higher and lowest POLAR2 quintiles

As with applications, these figures show an upward trend in entry rates for both disadvantaged and advantaged young people. They also show a small narrowing of the gap between 2010 and 2014. In 2010, English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged POLAR2 quintile were 3.2 times more likely to enter higher education than were those from the most disadvantaged quintile. In 2011 this ratio had fallen to 2.8, continuing a trend towards widening participation from the previous decade.

Table 8 gives figures from HESA showing the percentage of young (18-20), UK domiciled, first year students enrolled on full-time undergraduate courses who are from low POLAR3 (an update of POLAR2 based on new data) areas. Note that these figures are drawn from HESA annual performance indicators and refer to first degree courses only (not including other undergraduate courses such as HNDs). This table again shows an upward trend in the proportion of students coming from low POLAR2 backgrounds. However, despite representing around 20% of UK young people, those from low POLAR2 areas represent only 11% of the enrolled first year, first degree population.

[12] From UCAS 2014 end of cycle report (available at: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf)

Table 8. Percentage of young first year students enrolled on full-time first degree undergraduate courses that are from a low POLAR2 area[13]

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
% from POLAR2 Q1	9.6%	10%	10.2%	10.9%

[13] From HESA annual performance indicators (available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/09/10/urg)

Our previous reports have highlighted the large gender gap in both applications to university and take-up of university places. Women apply for and take up university places at higher rates than men, and our previous reports indicated that this gap may be increasing.

Table 9 shows the number of applications made by the March deadline by men and women from 2010 to 2014 in each UK country.

Table 9. Number of applications by men and women to March deadline, by country of domicile[14]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014 v 2010
England						
Women	254,280	256,260	233,360	237,960	246,760	-3.0%
Men	190,330	193,320	171,750	175,860	181,490	-4.6%
Scotland						
Women	24,220	24,550	23,990	23,930	25,150	3.8%
Men	16,770	17,250	17,000	17,390	17,310	3.2%
Wales						
Women	13,030	13,420	13,230	12,800	13,150	0.9%
Men	9,160	9,240	8,900	8,650	8,900	-2.8%
Northern Ireland						
Women	10,730	11,060	10,670	11,250	11,220	4.6%
Men	8,200	8,570	8,120	8,700	8,690	6.0%

This shows that the decrease in the number of applications from 2010 to 2014 in England has been most pronounced among men. Examination of the gender gap in England shows that while it narrowed slightly between 2010 and 2011, it has increased from 33.6% in 2010 to 36% in 2014. The gender gap has also increased in Scotland and Wales, but not Northern Ireland.

Table 10 gives the number of acceptances by UK domiciled men and women by the end of each cycle, along with 18 year old men and women's entry rates. Unfortunately, entry rates by gender to the end of the 2013 cycle were not available for comparison.

Table 10. Number of acceptances and entry rates of UK domiciled 18 year olds to end of cycle, by gender[15]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Women				
Acceptances	267,244	270,154	256,623	273,530
18yo Entry rate	42.1%	42.%6	43.9%	-
Men				
Acceptances	220,085	221,876	208,287	222,070
18yo Entry rate	33.4%	33.8%	34.5%	-

[14] From UCAS 2014 applicant figures – March Deadline 2014 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2014/2014-cycle-applicant-figures-march-deadline-2014)
[15] From UCAS 2014 end of cycle report (available at: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf)

These figures show that the increase in numbers of women entering higher education in the UK is not solely due to larger numbers of women in the relevant age groups. Women also have a substantially higher entry rate than men. This gap in entry rates has not closed, but in fact widened slightly from 2010 to 2012 (from 8.7 percentage points to 9.4).

There has been particular concern about the under-representation of working class boys at university. Table 11 gives university application rates for English 18 year olds by gender and FSM status (again we use FSM as our measure of disadvantage for applications figures as POLAR2 figures are not yet available for the 2014 cycle).

Table 11. Application rates by English 18 year olds to March deadline, by gender and FSM status[16]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Non-FSM Women	39.8%	41.2%	39.7%	40.9%	42.4%
Non-FSM Men	30.8%	31.9%	30.0%	31.1%	32.2%
FSM Women	17.8%	19.5%	19.2%	20.0%	21.5%
FSM Men	11.8%	13.0%	12.9%	13.2%	14.3%

These figures show that the relative gender gap is larger for disadvantaged applicants (those eligible for FSM). In 2014, disadvantaged women were 1.5 times more likely than disadvantaged men to apply to university, whereas the difference between non-disadvantaged men and women was 1.32 times. These ratios have been relatively stable over the 2010-2014 cycles.

The figures also show that the FSM/non-FSM gap is larger among men. In 2014, non-disadvantaged women were 1.97 times more likely than disadvantaged women to apply for university, whereas non-disadvantaged men were 2.25 times more likely than disadvantaged men to apply. These ratios have declined for men and women at roughly similar rates from 2010-2014.

Table 12 shows entry rates for English 18 year olds in the highest and lowest POLAR2 quintiles.

Table 12. Entry rates for English 18 year olds in the highest and lowest POLAR2 quintiles to end of cycle, by gender[17]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Women POLAR2 Q5	48.2%	51.5%	49.9%	50.8%
Men POLAR2 Q5	40.7%	44.0%	41.2%	42.8%
Women POLAR2 Q1	16.6%	17.9%	18.6%	20.0%
Men POLAR2 Q1	11.4%	12.4%	12.5%	13.9%

As with FSM applications, Table 12 shows that the relative gender gap is larger for those in the most disadvantaged quintiles. In 2013, the most disadvantaged women (those in Q1) were 1.44 times more likely to take up a place at university than were the most disadvantaged men; whereas in the most advantaged quintile (Q5), women were only 1.19 times more likely to take up a place than men. Again, these ratios have remained relatively stable from 2010 to 2013.

Similarly, the Q1/Q5 ratio was larger for men (3.08 in 2013) than for women (2.54 in 2013). Again, this ratio has declined at similar rates for men and women over this period.

[16] From UCAS Analysis Note 2014/1 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/analysis-notes)
[17] From UCAS 2014 end of cycle report (available at: http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf)

4. Mature students

Our previous report highlighted reduced numbers of older university applicants using figures UCAS figures from the January deadline in 2010 to 2013. In this section we update these applications figures to the March deadline and add figures for 2014. We also examine acceptance figures to 2013 and enrolment figures to 2012/13.

Table 13. Numbers of applications to March deadline, by country of domicile and age group[18]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014 v 2010
England	444,610	449,590	405,110	413,810	428,260	-3.7%
Up to 19	310,740	314,480	287,670	298,420	306,570	-1.3%
20-24	76,880	78,400	67,360	67,190	70,700	-8.0%
25+	56,990	56,710	50,080	48,200	50,990	-10.5%
Scotland	40,980	41,790	40,980	41,310	42,460	3.6%
Up to 19	25,780	25,670	25,390	25,060	25,360	-1.6%
20-24	8,680	9,480	9,420	10,100	10,290	18.5%
25+	6,520	6,640	6,170	6,150	6,810	4.4%
Wales	22,200	22,670	22,140	21,450	22,060	-0.6%
Up to 19	15,730	15,700	15,340	14,990	15,510	-1.4%
20-24	3,730	4,020	3,980	3,760	3,780	1.3%
25+	2,740	2,950	2,820	2,700	2,770	1.1%
Northern Ireland	18,940	19,640	18,800	19,960	19,930	5.2%
Up to 19	14,610	15,010	14,410	14,680	14,550	-0.4%
20-24	2,960	3,220	3,120	3,660	3,750	26.7%
25+	1,370	1,410	1,270	1,620	1,630	19.0%

Table 13 shows that numbers of older (20+) English (but not Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish) applicants have started to recover in 2014, but remain substantially lower in 2014 than they were in 2010. Numbers of older applicants in England were around 5% higher in 2014 than in 2012, but they remained (9%) down on 2010.

These falls in the numbers of older applicants seem not to have arisen from a decline in the population aged 21-24 or 25+ (numbers in these age groups in England have actually increased). However, the proportion of this age group who already have degrees is rising, so some decrease in older applications might be expected. Nevertheless the figures show a sharp decline at the time higher fees were introduced, followed by an incomplete recovery. This, alongside the fact that the reduction in application numbers is largely confined to English residents, suggests that the fee changes may have contributed to suppressing demand for university places among older English applicants specifically.

Table 14 gives the numbers of acceptances in each age group for each country by the end of each UCAS cycle. It should be noted that these figures are derived from separate data provided to the Commission by UCAS. These figures reflect all acceptances by the end of a given cycle for applications made through the main UCAS scheme by the March 24th deadline. Therefore, unlike the previous acceptances figures provided in this report they do not include places obtained through Extra or Adjustment applications or through the Clearing process.

[18] From UCAS 2014 applicant figures – March Deadline 2014 (available at: http://www.ucas.com/news-events/news/2014/2014-cycle-applicant-figures-march-deadline-2014)

Table 14. Numbers of acceptances to end of cycle (of Main Scheme applications made to March deadline), by country of domicile and age group[19]

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013 v 2010
England	291,641	294,294	266,397	284,525	-2.4%
Up to 19	219,524	223,264	205,086	221,286	0.8%
20-24	44,175	44,746	38,105	40,240	-8.9%
25+	27,942	26,284	23,206	22,999	-17.7%
Scotland	26,110	25,966	26,075	26,508	1.5%
Up to 19	17,418	17,033	17,229	17,122	-1.7%
20-24	5,039	5,328	5,497	6,029	19.6%
25+	3,653	3,605	3,349	3,357	-8.1%
Wales	15,015	14,790	15,062	15,295	1.9%
Up to 19	11,550	11,219	11,420	11,603	0.5%
20-24	2,151	2,224	2,340	2,335	8.6%
25+	1,314	1,347	1,302	1,357	3.3%
Northern Ireland	12,060	12,382	11,739	12,931	7.2%
Up to 19	9,651	9,866	9,321	10,033	4.0%
20-24	1,699	1,804	1,792	2,173	27.9%
25+	710	712	626	725	2.1%

As with the application figures there has been a decline in the number of older English applicants gaining places at university. This decline has been particularly marked for those aged 25 and over, with around 18% fewer of this age group taking up places. Again, this decline is largely due to a marked drop in 2012 and is largely confined to English residents.

Table 15 gives HESA figures on the number of UK domiciled first year students enrolled on undergraduate courses by age group and mode (full-time or part-time).

[19] UCAS data provided to the Commission

Table 15. Numbers of UK domiciled first year students enrolled on undergraduate courses, by age group and mode[20]

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2012/13 v 2009/10
Full-time	436,125	422,950	433,375	382,485	-12.3%
Up to 19	309,649	304,524	315,930	275,389	-11.1%
20-24	80,247	75,285	73,674	66,552	-17.1%
25+	46,229	43,141	43,771	40,161	-13.1%
Part-time	314,770	282,440	260,515	185,240	-41.2%
Up to 19	14,165	14,687	15,370	9,262	-34.6%
20-24	60,121	55,641	50,800	39,456	-34.4%
25+	240,484	212,112	194,605	136,522	-43.2%
Total	750,895	705,390	693,890	567,725	-24.4%
Up to 19	455,793	435,226	431,600	354,828	-22.2%
20-24	138,916	127,676	121,431	102,191	-26.4%
25+	155,435	142,489	140,860	110,706	-28.8%

HESA captures a much larger group of mature students than UCAS, because many older students apply directly to universities, and UCAS figures do not include part-timers. Table 15 shows that, similar to the UCAS applications and acceptance figures, there was a pronounced decline in the number of mature students enrolled in the 2012/13 academic year (equivalent to the 2012 application and acceptance cycle). This decline was particularly sharp for part-time students, with around 43% fewer mature part-time students entering in 2012/13 than did in 2009/10. This was part of a more general decline in part-time student numbers in the 2012/13 academic year. HESA figures for the 2013/14 academic year will be required to determine whether there has been any recovery in these numbers. However, as highlighted by a recent Universities UK report, provisional figures from the 2013/14 Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES) suggest that the overall decline on part-time entries has continued.[21]

Other undergraduate courses, such as Foundation Degrees and HNDs are more commonly pursued part-time than are first degrees. As shown by Universities UK, a large fraction of this decline in part-time numbers is therefore driven by reduction in enrolments on these types of courses[22].

We have previously described mature undergraduates as ‘second chance’ students. Many will have missed out on higher education when they first left school, but are now returning to in order to improve their career prospects. This is particularly true of part-time students, many of whom will be juggling work and childcare responsibilities. If, as suggested by a 2013 Universities UK report,[23] this decline in part-time student numbers reflects a genuine reduction in the number of people choosing to return to education, then this is a serious area of concern.

As we have already noted, some reduction in the numbers of mature and part-time students might be expected from the increasing numbers of the mature student age group who have already completed

[20] Authors’ calculation based on numbers of first year UK domiciled students undergraduate students by mode (HESA Free Statistics – General Student Numbers) and percentage of first year UK domiciled undergraduate students by age group and mode (HESA students summaries – age of students)
[21] Universities UK (2014). The funding environment for universities 2014: Trends in undergraduate recruitment, Figure 11, page 22 (available at: http://tinyurl.com/nxk8h7v)
[22], *Ibid,* Figure 10, page 20
[23] Universities UK (2013). The Power of part-time: Review of part-time and mature higher education (available at: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/PowerOfPartTime.pdf)

higher education courses. However, the Universities UK report suggests that this does not completely explain the decline. Having solicited evidence from universities, colleges, students, employers, and other bodies, they found that finance was one of the most important reported obstacles to participation. Much of the evidence they received from organisations of all types highlighted the 2012 fees increase as a major factor influencing people's choice to pursue part-time education. Universities UK's subsequent report noted that many universities have attempted to address reductions in part-time student numbers by reducing fees for these students, specifically noting mature students' increased debt-aversion and "apparent greater price sensitivity of mature students to increased fees".[24] Alongside increased fees, Universities UK noted the restriction of fee loans to only those studying for a higher qualification than they already possessed as a particular driver of the reduction in part-time student numbers.[25]

Declines in the number of mature students may be of particular concern if those students are also disadvantaged. If the numbers of disadvantaged mature students are declining particularly quickly, this would suggest that this second chance path to career advancement was being blocked for this group. Table 16 shows the proportion of first year young (up to 20) and mature (21+) students enrolled on full-time, first degree (again, not including other undergraduates, e.g. those on HNDs) courses who are from a low POLAR3 background (from HESA data). This table suggests that, in line with increasing representation of young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, the proportion of mature students from disadvantaged backgrounds is also increasing, albeit very slowly.

Table 16. Percentage of first-year, UK domiciled, first degree students enrolled on full-time courses who are from low POLAR3 backgrounds[26]

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Young students	9.6%	10.0%	10.2%	10.9%
Mature students	10.4%	10.9%	10.9%	11.6%

[24] Universities UK (2014). The funding environment for universities 2014: Trends in undergraduate recruitment, page 45 (available at: http://tinyurl.com/nxk8h7v)
[25] *Ibid*
[26] From HESA annual performance indicators (available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/09/10/urg)

5. Selective universities

This section examines trends in applications, acceptances, and enrolments at the most selective universities. We use the Sutton Trust 13[27] and 30[28] classifications of selective institutions.

Table 17 gives the proportion of March deadline applications made to ST13, ST30, and other institutions by 18 year olds from each country in each year. Please note that here 'applications' refer to UCAS choices rather than individual applicants. Individual applicants typically make five choices.

Table 17. Percentage of March deadline applications made by 18 year olds to ST13, ST30, and other institutions, by country of domicile[29]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
England				
Other	62.4%	65.3%	64.1%	62.9%
ST30	37.6%	34.7%	35.9%	37.1%
ST13	16.2%	14.7%	15.4%	15.3%
Scotland				
Other	55.5%	59.8%	60.9%	59.2%
ST30	44.5%	40.2%	39.1%	40.8%
ST13	16.3%	14.8%	15.1%	15.8%
Wales				
Other	66.2%	67.6%	67.0%	65.7%
ST30	33.8%	32.4%	33.0%	34.3%
ST13	10.8%	10.3%	10.9%	10.5%
Northern Ireland				
Other	82.2%	82.9%	85.9%	85.4%
ST30	17.8%	17.1%	14.1%	14.6%
ST13	6.5%	5.7%	5.2%	5.3%
Total				
Other	63.0%	65.8%	65.0%	63.8%
ST30	37.0%	34.2%	35.0%	36.2%
ST13	15.5%	14.1%	14.7%	14.7%

These figures show that the proportion of applications made by 18 year olds to the most selective universities has declined slightly from 2010 to 2013, though the overall picture is one of relative stability.

Table 18 gives the percentages of students from each country taking up places at ST13, ST30, and other universities by the end of each cycle. As with Table 14, these figures reflect acceptances by the end of cycle for those applying before the March deadline only and therefore do not include places obtained through Clearing. Very few places at the most selective universities are gained through the Clearing process, so it is likely that Table 23 overestimates the proportions entering ST13 and ST30

[27] Comprising the Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, Warwick, and York, plus Imperial College London, LSE, and UCL
[28] Comprising the ST13 plus the Universities of Bath, Cardiff, Exeter, Glasgow, Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton, Strathclyde, and Surrey, plus King's College London and Royal Holloway College
[29] UCAS data provided to the Commission

universities. However, the over-time trends in these proportions are unlikely to be significantly affected.

Table 18. Percentage of 18 year olds accepted to ST13, ST30, and other institutions to end of cycle (for Main Scheme applications made to March deadline), by country[30]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
England				
Other	65.1%	66.4%	64.0%	63.4%
ST30	34.9%	33.6%	36.0%	36.6%
ST13	15.1%	14.5%	16.5%	15.8%
Scotland				
Other	58.0%	59.8%	59.8%	55.3%
ST30	42.0%	40.2%	40.2%	44.7%
ST13	13.4%	15.2%	14.3%	16.6%
Wales				
Other	70.2%	70.0%	68.3%	67.3%
ST30	29.8%	30.0%	31.7%	32.7%
ST13	8.1%	7.8%	8.3%	7.6%
Northern Ireland				
Other	86.6%	86.4%	88.5%	88.4%
ST30	13.4%	13.6%	11.5%	11.6%
ST13	4.4%	4.6%	4.4%	4.3%
Total				
Other	65.7%	66.9%	64.9%	64.0%
ST30	34.3%	33.1%	35.1%	36.0%
ST13	14.2%	13.8%	15.4%	15.0%

These figures show that there has actually been a slight increase in the proportion of English and Scottish 18 year olds accepted into the most selective institutions from 2010 to 2013. This is likely to be partially accounted for by the loosening of limits on the number of students these universities are able to recruit.

Examination of the proportion of young, first year, full-time undergraduates enrolled on first degree courses at each university type shows a similar pattern of small increases in the proportion enrolled at the most selective universities (Table 19).

Table 19. Percentage of UK domiciled young, first year, full-time undergraduates enrolled at ST13, ST30, and other universities (excluding Scottish domiciled students and Scottish institutions)[31]

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Other	77.8%	77.3%	78.1%	78.0%
ST30	22.2%	22.7%	21.9%	22.0%
ST13	8.7%	9.3%	9.1%	9.5%

[30] UCAS data provided to the Commission
[31] From HESA annual performance indicators (available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/09/10/urg)

Disadvantaged students

Table 20 shows the number of applications (choices) made by English 18 year olds from each POLAR2 quintile to ST13, ST30, and other institutions, and the percentage of each quintile's applications going to each institution type.

Table 20. Number of applications made by English 18 year olds to ST13, ST30, and other institutions to March deadline, by POLAR2 quintile[32]

	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	#	*%*	*#*	*%*	*#*	*%*	*#*	*%*
POLAR2 Q1	110,748		114,351		109,909		113,076	
Other	84,266	76.1%	89,435	78.2%	85,828	78.1%	86,823	76.8%
ST30	26,482	23.9%	24,916	21.8%	24,081	21.9%	26,253	23.2%
ST13	9,813	8.9%	9,076	7.9%	8,855	8.1%	9,130	8.1%
POLAR2 Q2	161,482		164,667		158,234		161,147	
Other	116,254	72.0%	123,053	74.7%	116,954	73.9%	117,438	72.9%
ST30	45,228	28.0%	41,614	25.3%	41,280	26.1%	43,709	27.1%
ST13	17,642	10.9%	16,120	9.8%	16,000	10.1%	16,479	10.2%
POLAR2 Q3	200,735		203,838		194,845		199,171	
Other	136,150	67.8%	143,909	70.6%	135,192	69.4%	136,085	68.3%
ST30	64,585	32.2%	59,929	29.4%	59,653	30.6%	63,086	31.7%
ST13	26,355	13.1%	23,906	11.7%	24,328	12.5%	24,595	12.3%
POLAR2 Q4	249,556		250,079		238,068		238,129	
Other	151,807	60.8%	159,623	63.8%	148,672	62.4%	145,724	61.2%
ST30	97,749	39.2%	90,456	36.2%	89,396	37.6%	92,405	38.8%
ST13	41,646	16.7%	37,908	15.2%	37,881	15.9%	37,577	15.8%
POLAR2 Q5	313,302		316,363		301,830		297,565	
Other	158,333	50.5%	169,012	53.4%	156,222	51.8%	149,104	50.1%
ST30	154,969	49.5%	147,351	46.6%	145,608	48.2%	148,461	49.9%
ST13	72,422	23.1%	67,300	21.3%	67,529	22.4%	66,667	22.4%
Q1:Q5 ratio								
Other	*1.9*		*1.9*		*1.8*		*1.7*	
ST30	*5.9*		*5.9*		*6.0*		*5.7*	
ST13	*7.4*		*7.4*		*7.6*		*7.3*	

These figures show that the gap between the least and most disadvantaged 18 year olds in applications to more selective universities has declined slightly from 2010 to 2013. However, this gap remains extremely large. In 2010, 5.9 times more applications were made to ST30 universities by applicants from the least disadvantaged areas than were made by applicants from the most disadvantaged areas. In 2013 this ratio was 5.7. For ST13 universities, the ratio of applications between the most and least disadvantaged areas was 7.4 in 2010 and 7.3 in 2013.

Figure 5, below, gives these figures graphically. This shows that the large gap in numbers of applications to the most selective institutions has declined from 2010 to 2013, but only by a small amount.

[32] UCAS data provided to the Commission

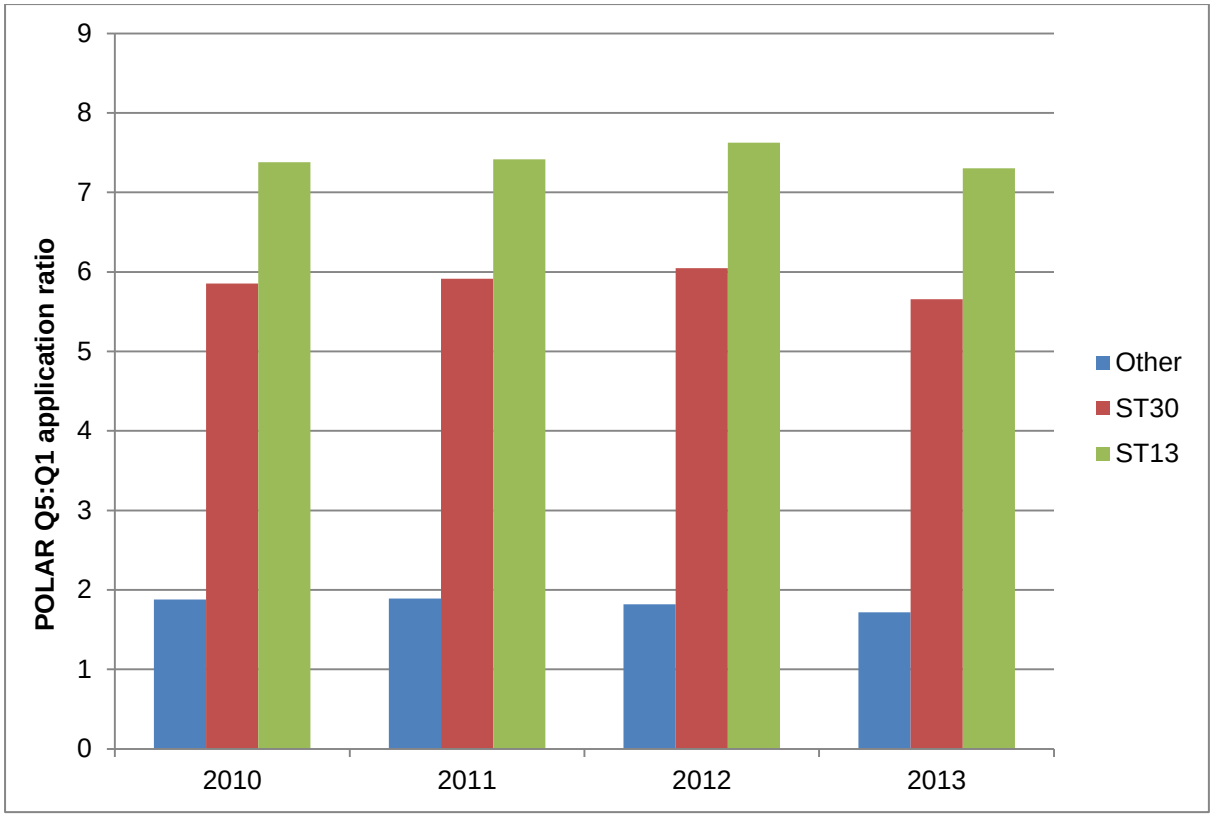

Figure 5. Ratio of numbers of applications to ST13, ST30, and other institutions by English 18 year olds from the highest and lowest POLAR2 quintiles

Table 21 replicates these figures for acceptances (again for English domiciled 18 year olds). As with Tables 14 and 18, these figures are for end of cycle acceptances for those applying before the March deadline. These figures show a marginal increase in the numbers of applicants from the most disadvantaged areas accepted into the most selective universities. However, the gap remains extremely large. In 2010, the number of English school-leavers from the least disadvantaged backgrounds entering ST30 universities was 7.3 times higher than the number entering from the most disadvantaged areas. In 2011 this ratio had narrowed to 6.8. For ST13 universities the ratio in 2010 was 9.8 and in 2013 it was 9.5.

Figure 6 gives these figures graphically. This shows that although the access gap has narrowed slightly there remains a roughly ten-fold difference in the number of applicants from advantaged and disadvantaged background entering ST13 institutions.

Table 21. Number of English 18 year olds (applying through the Main Scheme before the March deadline) accepted into ST13, ST30, and other institutions to end of cycle, by POLAR2 quintile [33]

	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
POLAR2 Q1	16,679		16,870		16,703		17,914	
Other	13,495	80.9%	13,767	81.6%	13,487	80.7%	14,322	79.9%
ST30	3,184	19.1%	3,103	18.4%	3,216	19.3%	3,592	20.1%
ST13	1,131	6.8%	1,118	6.6%	1,135	6.8%	1,232	6.9%
POLAR2 Q2	24,076		24,186		23,627		25,243	
Other	18,338	76.2%	18,711	77.4%	17,807	75.4%	18,919	74.9%
ST30	5,738	23.8%	5,475	22.6%	5,820	24.6%	6,324	25.1%
ST13	2,169	9.0%	2,058	8.5%	2,306	9.8%	2,433	9.6%
POLAR2 Q3	30,075		30,352		29,203		31,089	
Other	21,441	71.3%	22,043	72.6%	20,528	70.3%	21,595	69.5%
ST30	8,634	28.7%	8,309	27.4%	8,675	29.7%	9,494	30.5%
ST13	3,388	11.3%	3,267	10.8%	3,673	12.6%	3,769	12.1%
POLAR2 Q4	38,225		38,357		36,776		38,066	
Other	24,198	63.3%	24,865	64.8%	22,872	62.2%	23,248	61.1%
ST30	14,027	36.7%	13,492	35.2%	13,904	37.8%	14,818	38.9%
ST13	5,883	15.4%	5,689	14.8%	6,248	17.0%	6,172	16.2%
POLAR2 Q5	47,707		48,575		46,564		47,455	
Other	24,530	51.4%	25,699	52.9%	23,079	49.6%	23,159	48.8%
ST30	23,177	48.6%	22,876	47.1%	23,485	50.4%	24,296	51.2%
ST13	11,050	23.2%	10,813	22.3%	11,834	25.4%	11,695	24.6%
Q1:Q5 ratio								
Other	*1.8*		*1.9*		*1.7*		*1.6*	
ST30	*7.3*		*7.4*		*7.3*		*6.8*	
ST13	*9.8*		*9.7*		*10.4*		*9.5*	

[33] *Ibid*

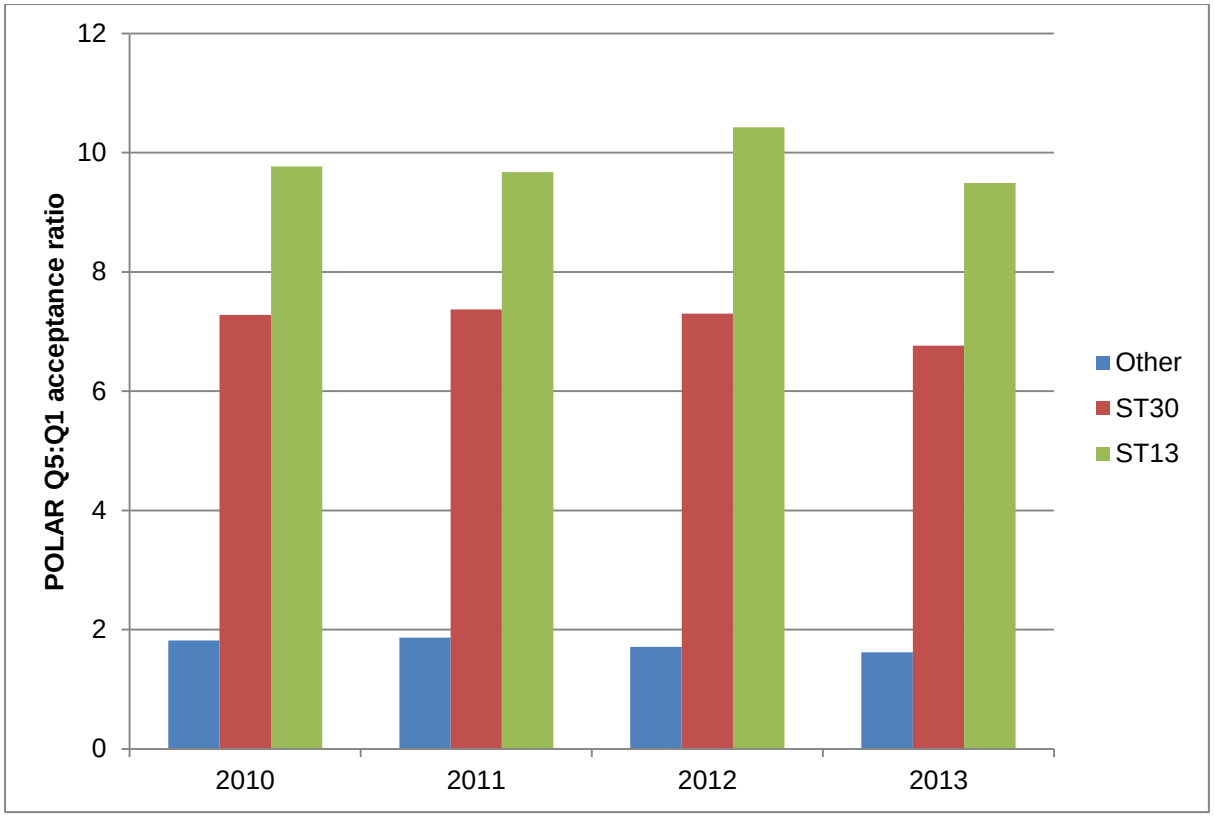

Figure 6. Ratio of numbers of English 18 year old students from the highest and lowest POLAR2 quintiles accepted into ST13, ST30, and other institutions

Finally, Table 26 gives the percentage of young, first year enrolments on full-time first degree courses at ST13, ST30, and other institutions that are from low POLAR3 backgrounds. These figures show that the proportion of students at the more selective universities who are from low POLAR2 backgrounds has increased slightly from 2009/10 to 2012/13. However, these students are still highly under-represented at these universities, representing only around 5% of students at the most selective (ST13) universities.

Table 22. Percentage of young, first-year, full-time, undergraduate enrolees at ST13, ST30, and other institutions who are from low POLAR3 backgrounds[34]

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Other	10.8%	10.9%	10.9%	11.7%
ST30	5.3%	5.9%	5.9%	7.3%
ST13	4.2%	5.1%	5.0%	5.5%

[34] From HESA annual performance indicators (available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/09/10/urg)

6. Living at home

In this section we briefly examine the proportion of students who are choosing to live at home during their course. Table 23 gives the proportion of English 18-year old university entrants in each POLAR2 quintile who are recorded as planning to live at home. This shows that the proportion of those living at home has declined somewhat across all POLAR2 quintiles. This trend may be driven by the general reduction in the numbers of students pursuing courses other than first degrees.

Table 23. Percentages of accepted English domiciled 18-year old applicants (of those applying before the March deadline) planning to live at home, by POLAR2 quintile[35]

	2010	2011	2012	2013
POLAR2 Q1	33.4%	33.4%	32.6%	30.8%
POLAR2 Q2	28.7%	29.1%	27.9%	27.5%
POLAR2 Q3	23.8%	23.5%	22.8%	22.0%
POLAR2 Q4	16.2%	16.3%	15.9%	15.0%
POLAR2 Q5	11.4%	11.3%	10.7%	10.5%

[35] UCAS data provided to the Commission

7. Survey results

To complement the figures compiled in this report, we commission Ipsos MORI to survey a representative sample of the adults aged 16-75 in England on their attitudes toward university fees. Specifically, we asked respondents whether they would support lower fees for students from lower income families.[36] Respondents were asked the following question:

> "At present, all English university students on the same course at the same university will pay the same tuition fees, regardless of how well-off their families are. They then repay the fee after graduation, starting only after they reach a minimum income level. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose students from lower income families being charged a lower tuition fee than other students?"

Overall, a majority (53%) of those surveyed supported[37] the idea of students from lower income families paying lower fees, 25% opposed, and 17% had no views either way; 6% did not know. There were no significant differences in levels of support between men and women, with 52% of men and 54% of women supporting lower fees for students from lower income backgrounds. Nor did significant differences appear according to working status, with 52% of those working and 54% of those not working supporting the idea.

However, there were some differences when analysed by age, social grade, and education. These results are given in Figures 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 below.

Figure 8 shows that respondents aged 16-24 were somewhat less likely to support (46%) progressive fees than were other age groups. Respondents aged 16-24 were significantly less likely to support the idea than were those aged 35-44 (59%) or 55-75 (53%).

Figure 9 show that respondents in social grades A and B were less likely to support progressive fees (45%) than were adults in other social grades. The difference in support between grades A and B and all other social grades was statistically significant. Just over one in three respondents (35%) in social grades AB opposed progressive fees, a significantly higher level of opposition than in all other social grades.

Figure 10 shows that respondents educated to degree level or higher were somewhat more likely (56% support) than those at with other levels of education to support progressive fees. The differences between degree educated respondents and those educated to A-level or equivalent (53% support), and between degree-holders and those with no formal qualifications (51% support) were not statistically significant. However, the difference between degree-holders and those educated to GCSE level or equivalent (49% support) was statistically significant.

Figure 11 shows consistent majority support across parents and non-parents. Parents of children between the ages of 17-19 were slightly more likely to support progressive fees than non-parents or parents of children 0-19 in general. However, those with children in this age group represent a relatively small group within the sample (less than 100 people) and the differences are not statistically significant.

[36] Ipsos MORI surveyed a total of 1,728 adults aged 16-75 in England from 13th – 17th June 2014 via its Online iOmnibus Survey. The survey data were weighted by age, gender, region, social grade, working status and main shopper to the known profile of the English population aged 16-75. Of the respondents, 889 were male and 839 were female, 1,009 were working and 719 were not working. All other sub-group numbers are provided in footnotes to the relevant figures

[37] Here, and in figures 7,8,9, and 10, the "Support" category contains those answering "Strongly support" or "Tend to support", while the "Oppose" category contains those answering "Strongly Oppose" or "Tend to Oppose"

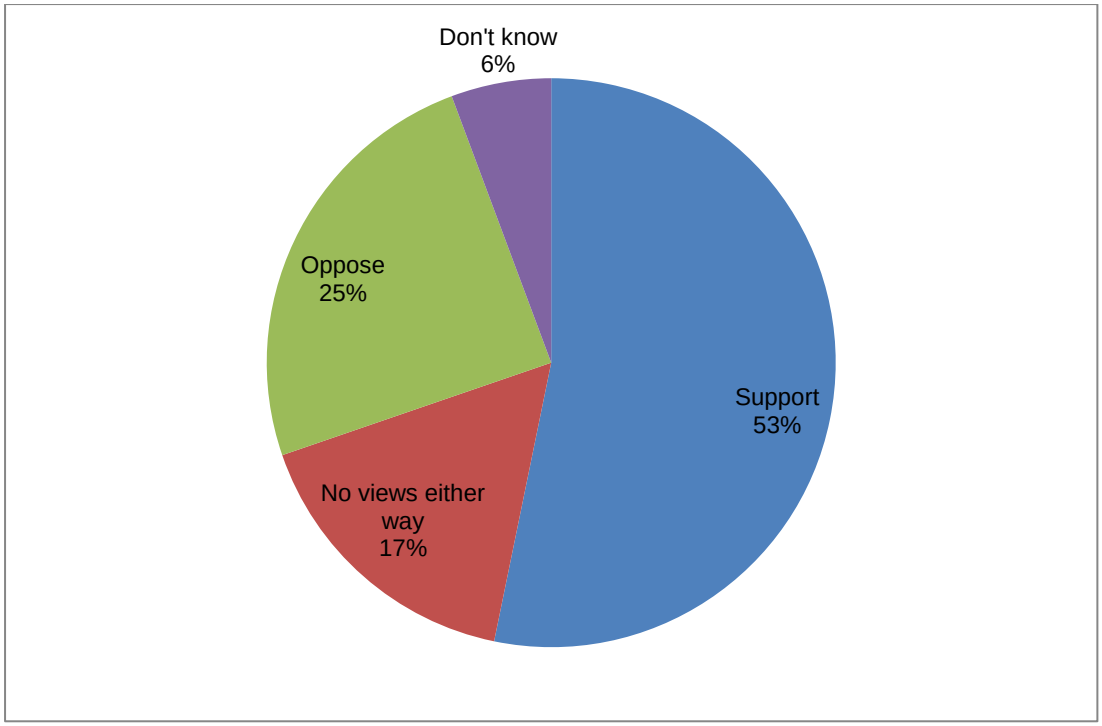

Figure 7. Support for lower university fees for those from lower income backgrounds

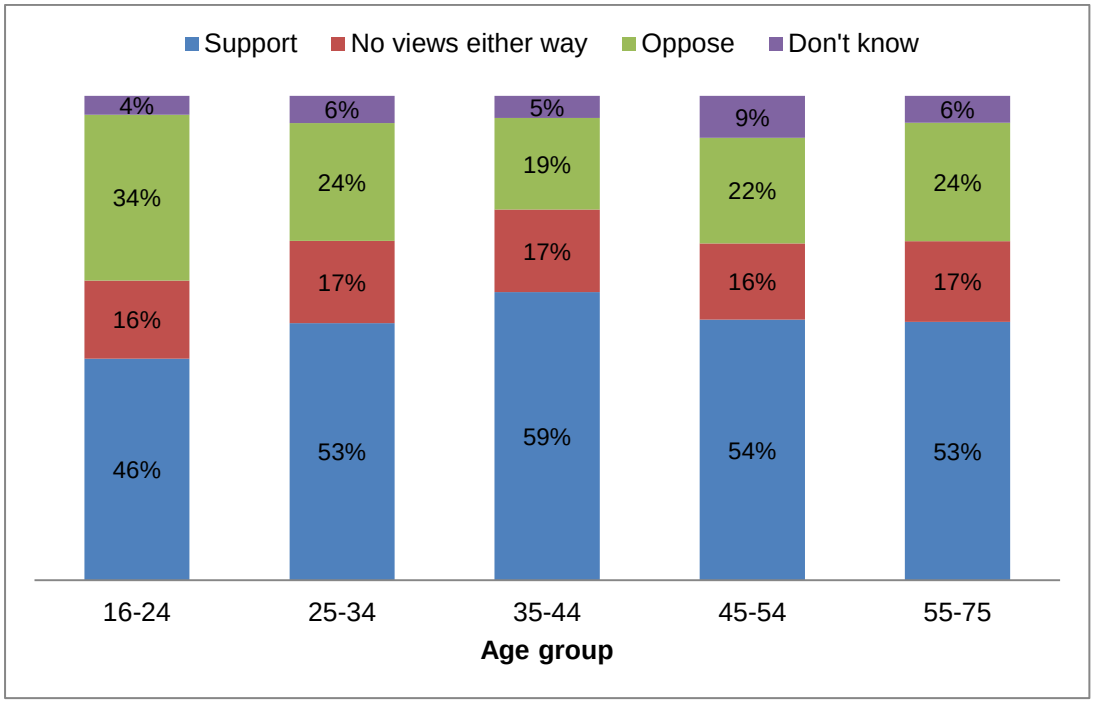

Figure 8. Support for lower university fees for those from lower income backgrounds, by age group[38]

[38] 16-24 age group N=285; 25-34 N=313; 35-44 N=312, 45-54 N=311, 55-75 N=507

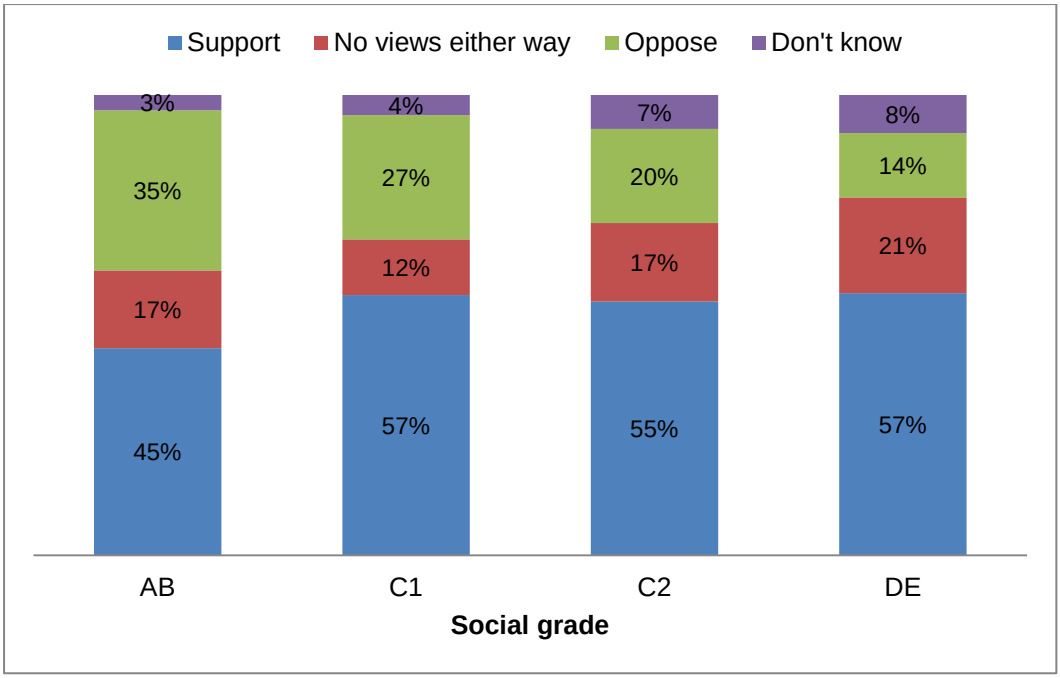

Figure 9. Support for lower university fees for those from lower income backgrounds, by social grade[39]

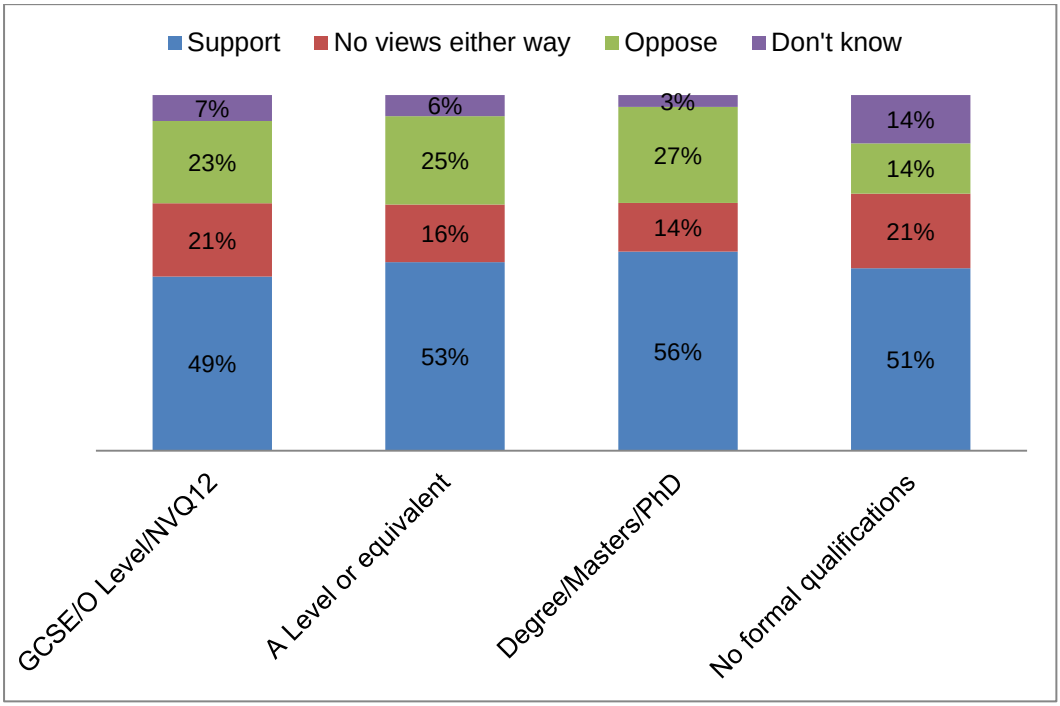

Figure 10. Support for lower university fees for those from lower income backgrounds, by education[40]

[39] Social grade AB N=453; C1 N=471; C2 N=383; DE N=421
[40] Degree/Masters/PhD N=763; GCSE or equivalent N=422; A-level or equivalent N=417, no qualifications N=126

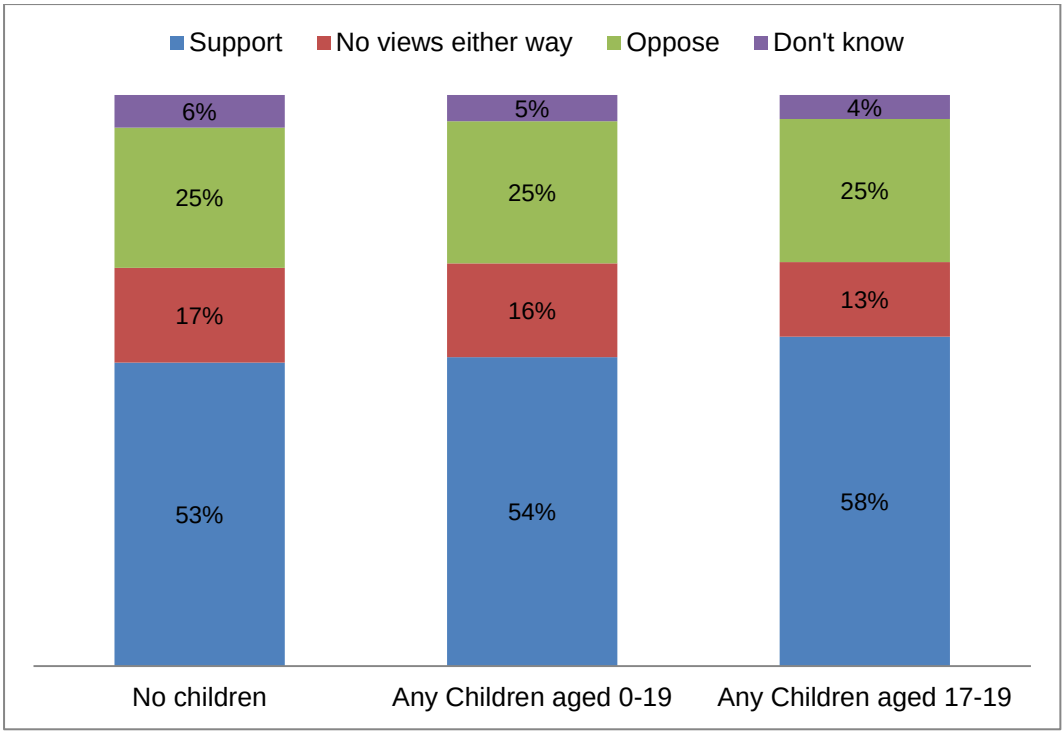

Figure 11. Support for lower university fees for those from lower income backgrounds, by parental status[41]

[41] No children N=1,255; Any children 0-19 N=455; Any children aged 17-19 N=93

8. Summary and conclusions

This report represents an update and extension of the Commission's previous report, published in September 2013. Since that time, the Sutton Trust has published a report, based on research conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), investigating the impact of increased fees on levels of graduate debt and lifetime repayments.[42] This report showed that, while the lowest earning graduate would actually repay less over the course of their lives under the new system, the average graduate would repay substantially more. The report also showed that average graduates would continue to be indebted for far longer under the new system, with many repaying into their late 40s and early 50s.

As we noted in our previous report, it may take many years for the impacts of higher education funding reforms, particularly of these large changes to personal debt, to become fully apparent. However, in the short-term, application rates among 18 year olds in England, having taken a dip in 2012, appear to have recovered to beyond their pre-2012 peak. This suggests that school-leavers have not been strongly discouraged from applying to and attending university by the increased fees.

However this report has highlighted several remaining areas of concern:

1. The gap in application and entry rates between advantaged and disadvantaged students has narrowed only slightly and remains unacceptably large, particularly for the most selective institutions. Students who are not eligible for Free School Meals remain more than twice as likely as those eligible to apply for university. Students from the least disadvantaged areas are also around 3 times more likely to enter university than those from the most disadvantaged areas.

2. This gap is particularly large for the most selective universities and has not substantially narrowed. In England in 2010, ten times more advantaged students than disadvantaged students took up places at the 13 most selective universities (the Sutton Trust 13). In 2013 this ratio remains 9.5 times.

3. The gender gap in applications to university highlighted in our previous report has continued to increase and appears to be matched by a widening gap in university entry rates. The gender gap in applications and acceptances is particularly large for disadvantaged students, indicating that disadvantaged boys are particularly under-represented.

4. As highlighted in our previous report, of particular concern are the sharp declines in the numbers of mature students applying to and entering higher education. The figures presented in this report show a slight recovery in the number of English mature students applying to university in 2014. However, the numbers of applicants aged 20-24 and 25+ applying to university remain 8% (6,180) and 11% (6,000) below their 2010 levels, respectively. This report also extends our previous analysis by showing that the decline in mature student applications was also reflected in take-up of university places. Take-up for applicants aged 20-24 and 25+ was down 9% and 18% in 2013 (relative to 2010).

5. HESA figures show a particularly severe decline in the numbers of mature students starting part-time courses in the 2012/13 academic year (the year of fees increase. 43% fewer mature students started part-time courses in this year than did in 2009/10. This was part of 41% decline in overall part-time enrolments over this period.

[42] The Sutton Trust (2014). Payback Time? Student debt and loan repayments: What will the 2012 reforms mean for graduates?

6. Polling by Ipsos MORI for the Sutton Trust shows that a majority of the public supports reduced fees for students from lower income homes, with this idea finding majority support among both parents and non-parents. Support was also largely consistent across all demographic groups.