UCAS Verification Service Report 2020

Introduction

UCAS supports around 700,000 applications every year from domestic, EU, and international applicants to higher education in the UK. The role of the verification service is to help check that applications include true, complete and accurate information, and to support applicants in providing this. Verification activities also help prevent anyone from gaining an unfair advantage or securing a place by deception. UCAS' activities complement those undertaken by universities and colleges, and other service providers, such as the Student Loans Company.

Applications submitted to UCAS are subject to automated checks using fraud detection software, and personal statements are screened using similarity detection software. Universities and colleges may also identify issues with applications. If information is incorrect, missing or an issue is raised, the application will be flagged, and applicants or their referees will be asked to provide additional information or clarification. If, ultimately, the issues cannot be resolved, the application may be cancelled. Applicants may appeal cancellation decisions.

As part of our commitment to transparency, we publish an annual report and statistics on the performance of the verification service for the undergraduate admissions service, including numbers of applications that were flagged and cancelled, and an analysis of the characteristics of these applicants.

Statistical reporting on the 2020 cycle (UK domiciled applicants only)

In the 2020 cycle, 890 applications from UK domiciled applicants were flagged for further consideration, equating to 0.15% of the total UK applicant population. Of these flagged applications, 60 applicants had their applications cancelled (0.01%) and 60 applicants had their applications suspended (0.01%). Table 1 shows that these results follow trends of fewer applications being cancelled.

In comparison to the 2019 cycle, 51% fewer applications from UK domiciled applicants were flagged, the same number of applications from UK domiciled applicants were cancelled, and 37% fewer applications from UK domiciled applicants were suspended.

Table 1: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled for each cycle.

Cycle	Applicant baseline	Flagged	Reinstated	Cancelled	Suspended
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
2016	591,355	1,185	0	370	0
2017	573,020	1,020	0	370	0
2018	562,260	1,815	0	240	0
2019	565,810	1,825	40	60	95
2020	577,575	890	20	60	60
All	2,870,020	6,730	60	1,095	155

UK domiciled applicants by ethnic group

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of flagged and cancelled applications by ethnic group.

In the 2020 cycle, 38% of flagged applicants were classified as black in comparison to 26% in the 2019 cycle. There has been a 13% increase in cancelled applications in the black ethnic group from the 2019 cycle to the 2020 cycle. However, there has been a 17% decrease in suspended applications in the black ethnic group from 53% in the 2019 cycle to 36% in the 2020 cycle. The proportion of flagged applications in the Asian ethnic group has remained consistent at 15%. There has been a 5% decrease in cancelled applications in the Asian ethnic group from the 2019 cycle to the 2020 cycle.

Table 2: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each ethnic group comprises (2020 cycle)

Ethnic group	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Asian	75,770	13	130	15	15	23
Black	52,550	9	340	38	30	46
Mixed	28,200	5	35	4	0	3
Other	13,280	2	55	6	5	10
Unknown or Prefer Not To Say	9,670	2	25	3	0	2
White	398,105	69	305	34	10	16
All	577,575	100	890	100	30	100

UK domiciled applicants by age

Mature applicants are defined as those aged 21 and over, and typically account for a quarter of UK domiciled applicants. Our figures show members of this group, who commonly apply without the support of a school or college, are more likely to find their applications flagged. In the 2020 cycle, this accounted for 72% of flagged applicants. The proportion of flagged applicants aged 18 has reduced from 28% in the 2019 cycle to 11% in the 2020 cycle.

Table 3: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each age band comprises (2020 cycle)

Age band	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
17 or under	2,200	0	0	0	0	2
18	289,470	50	100	11	0	2
19	91,720	16	150	17	10	15
20	38,525	7	80	9	0	3
21+	155,665	27	555	63	50	79
All	577,575	100	890	100	60	100

UK domiciled applicants by Apply centre (i.e. with the support of a school or college)

Independent applicants are defined as those who apply without the support of a UCAS-registered centre (typically a school or college). In the 2020 cycle, 32% of individuals applying to higher education were classified as independent applicants. Our figures show these applicants are more likely to have their applications flagged. In the 2020 cycle, 72% of flagged applications were classified as independent applicants.

Table 4: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each apply centre comprises (2020 cycle)

Apply centre	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Apply Centre	389,920	68	250	28	5	8
Independent	187,655	32	640	72	55	92
All	577,575	100	890	100	60	100

UK domiciled applicants by region

Our data shows that applicants living in London are more likely to have their applications flagged than those living in other parts of the UK. In the 2020 cycle, this accounted for 35% of flagged applications.

Table 5: UK domiciled undergraduate applicants, total flagged and cancelled and relative proportion each region comprises (2020 cycle)

Region	Applicant baseline		Flagged		Cancelled	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	5,695	1	10	1	0	0
East Midlands	35,240	6	55	6	5	5
East of England	47,350	8	70	8	0	2
London	104,550	18	315	35	20	36
North East	19,430	3	15	2	0	0
North West	62,355	11	95	10	5	10
Northern Ireland	18,540	3	5	1	0	0
Scotland	50,665	9	35	4	0	3
South East	74,490	13	90	10	5	11
South West	41,330	7	45	5	0	2
Wales	23,450	4	20	2	0	3
West Midlands	51,495	9	75	9	10	18
Yorkshire and The Humber	42,985	7	55	6	5	10
All	577,575	100	890	100	60	100