

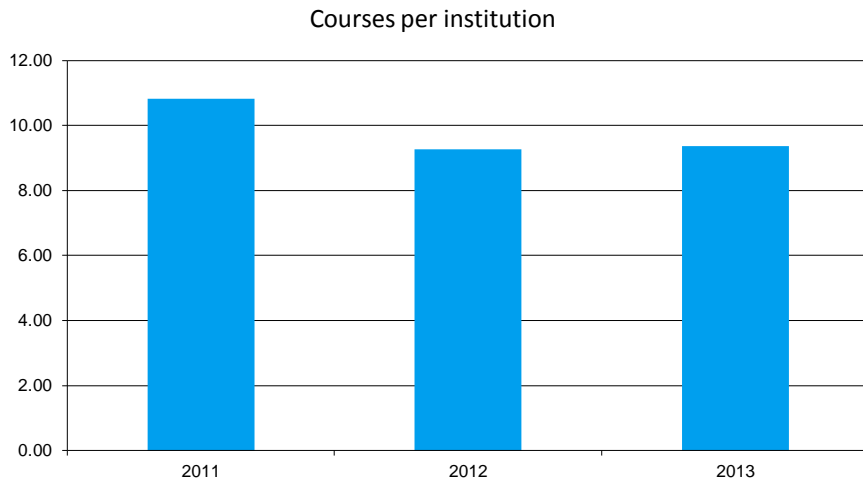
## *Politics: Popularity Persists*

*By Jacqui Briggs*

Applications to study politics and international relations at undergraduate level were examined in last year's article *UCAS applications data for Pol & IR: Followers of fashion or bucking the trend?* During another exciting period in politics, with the local and European elections having recently taken place and the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2015 General Election approaching, is this fuelling the interests of potential students? This further analysis of UCAS data suggests so by revealing several striking trends illustrating an increasing number of applicants, applications, offers and acceptances to study Politics and International Relations. Again, it is interesting to assess whether these trends align with comments within the national media – for example, a recent article in the *Guardian* noting the disadvantages experienced by those from traditionally lower participation backgrounds and ethnic minority students within higher education (Adams, 2014).

This year's UCAS data reveals an upward turn in the level of applications and acceptances to Politics and to International Relations degrees. The number of institutions offering politics degrees has reduced by one with the number of courses offered remaining relatively static at 833, a reduction of one from last year's figure, in comparison to a reduction of 142 courses equating to 14.46 per cent decline in 2012.

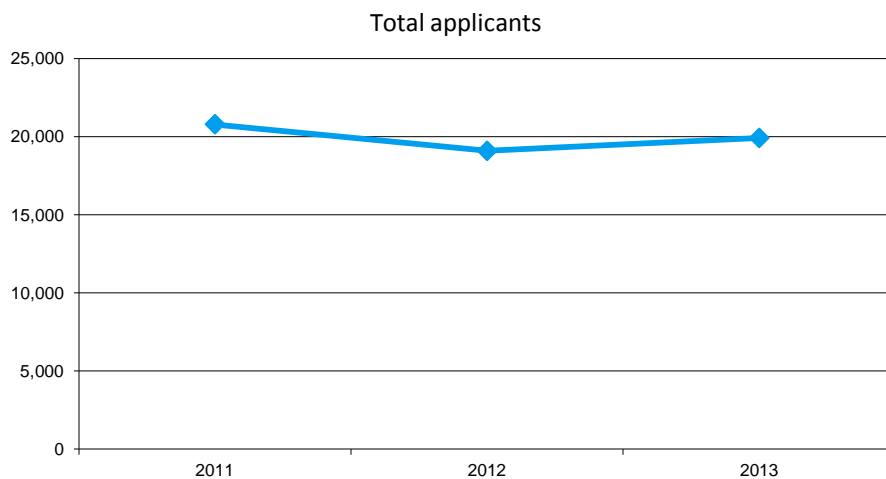
*Table One:* The number of courses per Institution between 2011-13.



### *Applications and Acceptances*

The data indicates that, with regards to applications to study politics, there has been a linked upward trend in applicants, applications, offers and acceptance from the noted trend of declining figures in 2011. A reduction of 1,705 in applicants was observed from 2011-12; however, 2012-13 saw an increase of 828 applicants equalling a percentage increase of 4.34 per cent. See *Table Two*:

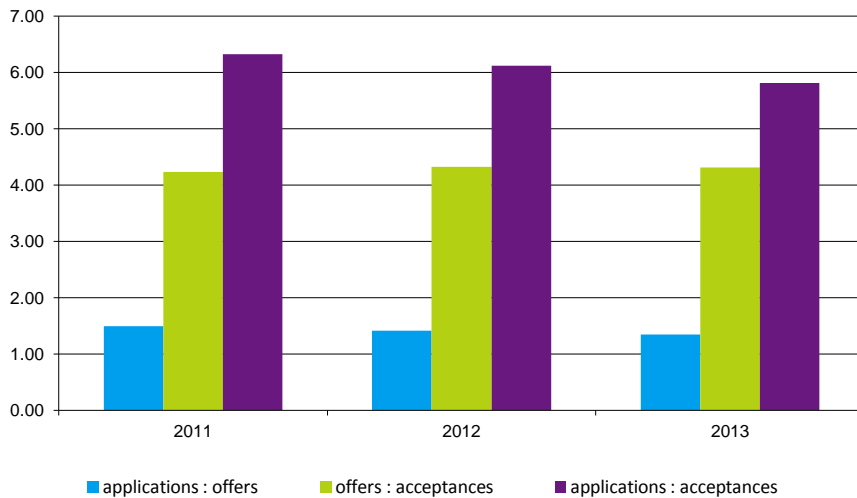
*Table Two*: Number of applicants to study politics.



In line with the number of applicants, applications have increased by 1,533 from 2012-2013 in comparison to a decrease of 4,788 applications the previous year. This paints a positive picture regarding applications with a shift from the 8.5 per cent decrease of 2011-12 to an increase of 3

per cent with applications up to 52,964 in 2013. This particularly positive trend has resulted in an increase of offers and acceptances for politics degrees with offers increased by 2,906 in comparison to a reduction of offers made from 2011-12 by 1,274. During the period from 2011-2013, therefore, the highest rate of offers were made with an increase of 4.3 per cent despite applications continuing to be fewer than the peak of 2011. The trend continues with an increase of 218 in acceptances, equating to an increase of 8.3 per cent students selecting to study politics. *Table Three* illustrates the ratio trend between applicants, offers and acceptances, whereas *Tables Four and Five* outline the trends in offers and acceptances.

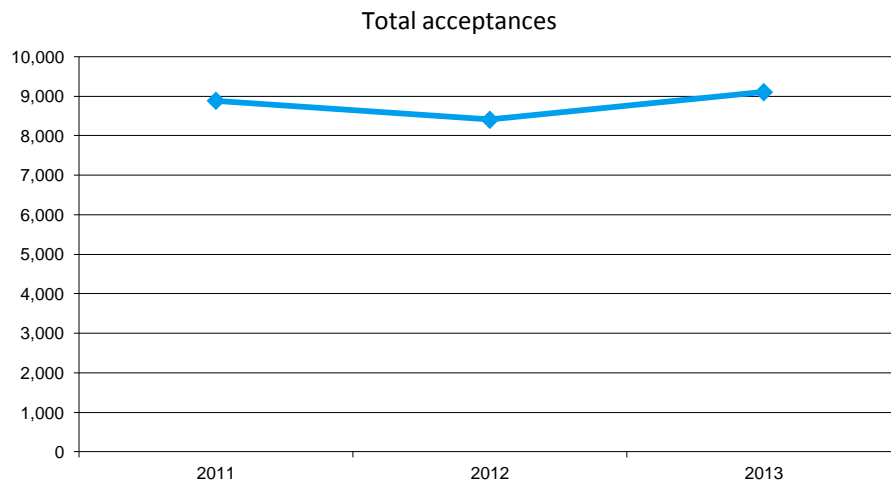
*Table Three: Applications, offers and acceptances.*



*Table Four: Total number of offers*



*Table Five: Total number of acceptances*

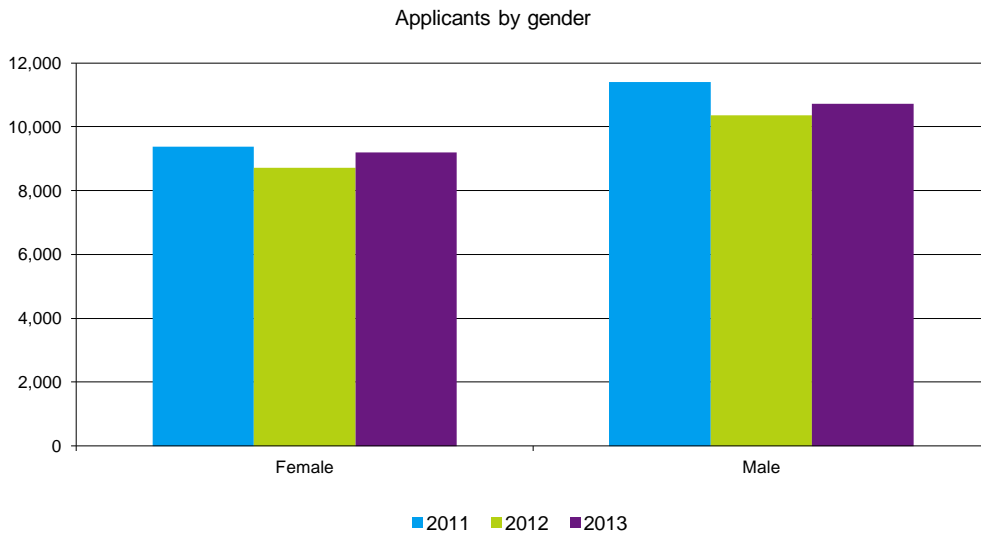


*Gender Trends:*

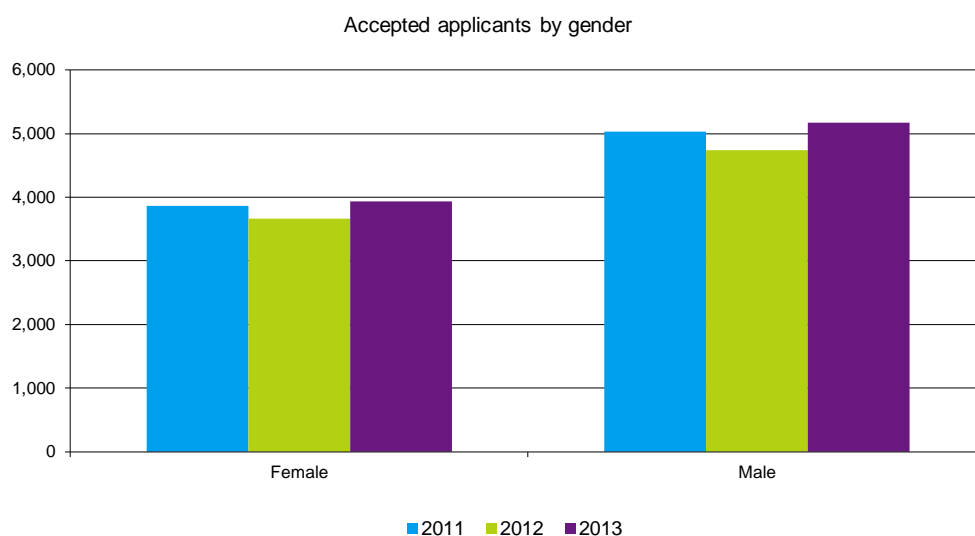
In terms of gender, politics continues the trend of attracting more males than females, with a continual increase in the level of males accepted onto politics degrees in comparison to females.

The gender demographics illustrate an increase of 476 females and 352 males in 2013, a percentage increase of 5.45 per cent for females and 3.4 for males. Therefore, the ‘gender gap’ is closing with a higher percentage increase of female applicants edging nearer to the level of applicants in 2011 in comparison to males. Tables Six and Seven depict these trends in terms of applications and acceptances on the basis of gender.

*Table Six: Applications by Gender*



*Table Seven: Acceptances by Gender*

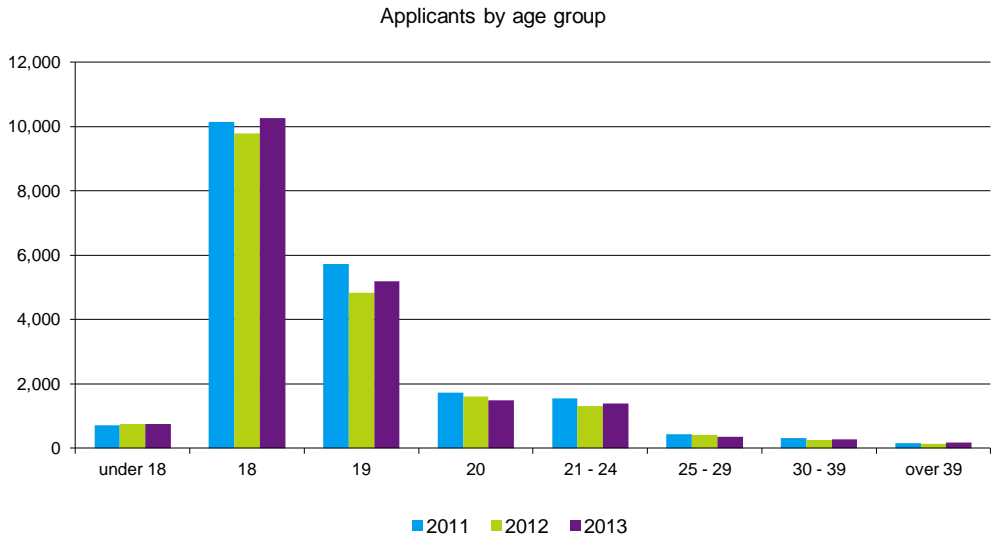


*Age trends:*

In terms of applications by age to study politics, there is a ‘mixed’ picture emerging with increase and a decrease of applicants within particular age cohorts. There has been a steady increase in the under 18s, 18 and 19 years old age categories and an increase in the 30 and over age groups. Despite increases in the opposite age range on the continuum, however, there is a reduction in applicants aged 20 years old and 25-29 years, with the exception of an increase of 76 applicants between the ages of 21-24 years old (see *table* below).

Age	2011	2012	2013	Change
under 18	713	745	761	Increase of 48 applicants from 2011-13.
18	10,140	9,780	10,268	Increase of 128 applicants from 2011-13.
19	5,732	4,825	5,197	Decrease of 535 from 2011-2013, but an increase of 372 from 2011.
20	1,726	1,602	1,484	Figures here demonstrate a consistent reduction in 2012 and 2013- overall reduction of 242 from 2011-13.
21 - 24	1,549	1,312	1,388	Reduction of 161 from 2011-13.
25 - 29	441	410	363	Reduction of 78 from 2011-13.
30 - 39	320	261	270	Reduction of 50 from 2011-13.
over	159	140	172	Increase of 13 from 2011-13.

Table Eight outlines the trends:



*Ethnicity trends:*

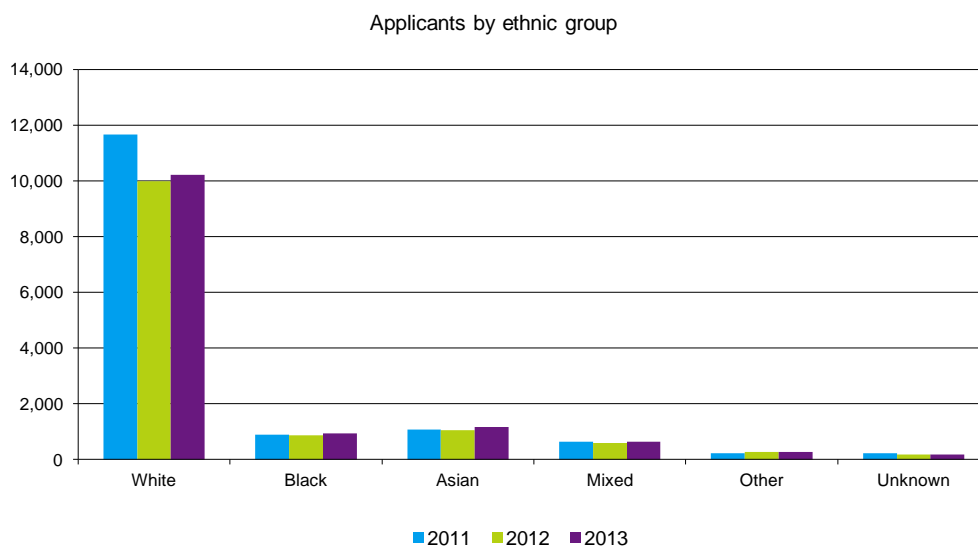
With reference to ethnicity the majority of politics applicants are white with an increase of 225 in white applicants in 2013 however; there remains a decrease of -12.4% in white politics students between 2011 and 2013. In comparison there is an increase of Black applicants equating in a change of plus 57 applicants between 2011 and 2013, an increase of 6.4%. Following this trend, there is also an increase of 8.3% in Asian applicants during the same period. Therefore, as illustrated by the *table* below, despite politics lacking a general diverse mix of applicants, this trend appears to be changing with an increase of politics applicants from various ethnic groups.

Ethnic Group	2011	2012	2013	Change
White	11,671	9,997	10,222	Reduction of 1,449 in ‘white’ applicants from 2011-13, however- there is an uplift from last year.
Black	884	857	941	Increase in black applicants from figures in 2011 and 2012- change of 57 from 2011-13.
Asian	1,071	1,058	1,159	Increase of 88 from 2011-13.
Mixed	629	594	626	No significant change.

Other	229	264	271	Increase of 42 from 2011-13. Reduction in 'unknown' category by 37 2011-13.
Unknown	222	170	185	

Table Nine provides a picture of the ethnic mix of politics applicants.

*Table Nine: Applications and ethnicity*



*Disability:*

In terms of disability, there is general upward trend of applicants and accepted applicants with a range of learning or health needs. Most notably is the increase in interest from applicants and accepted applicants on the autistic spectrum.

*International Relations:*

The number of Institutions offering International Relations is the same as Politics at 69, a reduction of one from last year. However, the trend in courses offered paints a different picture to that of Politics courses. Between 2011 and 2012, there was a reduction of 91 courses offered, on a positive note, in 2013, an additional 21 courses were delivered, increasing the number of International Relations courses to 470. This ‘upward’ trend continues with an increase of 6.6 per cent of applicants, 9.4 per cent in applications, 10.7 per cent in offers made and 9.9 per cent in acceptances. The historical gender trend continues with a higher number of females to males select to study International Relations, with an increase in applicants across all age groups and



the majority of students within the 18-19 years old age bracket. Similarly to Politics, the majority of International Relations students are white, however, again; there has been an increase in both black and Asian students.

### *Conclusion*

The UCAS data illustrates an absorbing picture of trends allied to politics applicants. The trend illustrates a positive picture of an increase in applications across the board, but central to this is the increased diverse mix of applicants, not only from females, but also from diverse ethnic groups. During a period of the media reporting on the inequalities within higher education (Adams, 2014), it appears that the evolving trends in Politics and International Relations illustrate a growing diverse applicant base attracted to this discipline. Politics and International Relations remain popular disciplines, buoyed up by contemporary events and phenomena; such as the 2011 Arab Spring, a lack of trust in our elected representatives, and the global economic downturn. The data confirms that enthusiasm for a university education has been only mildly diminished by the 2012 rise in tuition fees to £9,000. The total of 580,000 – a figure which included all UK, EU and international applicants – remains slightly below the peak of 583,000 applicants seen in 2011, when students rushed to beat the fee hike (Adams and Page, 2014). ‘Applications to UK universities were at their highest in 2011 but dropped by 6.6% last year when the government increased tuition fees to up to £9,000 a year’ (Burns, 2013). ‘In 2012 the number of applicants fell by around 47,000 (6.6%) and the number of acceptances by around 27,000 (5.5%). There were larger percentage falls among students who will be liable for higher fees; and the largest drop among older applicants (who could avoid higher fees by starting earlier) and students from the EU (who could avoid higher fees by studying elsewhere). The numbers of applicants and acceptances in 2012 were also lower than in 2010, but well above 2009 levels. Applications up to the end of June 2013 were 3.1% higher than in 2012. Acceptances to mid-September were 9% up’ (Bolton, 2013, p.1). The political studies community should not become complacent about the study of politics and the challenges that it brings. This data does, however, provide grounds for cautious optimism about the future of our discipline.

### *References*

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