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**Employment  
and Learning**  
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# Research report

Northern Ireland domiciled Higher Education applicants:  
An analysis of UCAS data - 2008/09 academic year





Department for  
**Employment  
and Learning**  
[www.delni.gov.uk](http://www.delni.gov.uk)

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## 1. Introduction

This research report utilises data provided by Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to analyse the characteristics and choices of NI domiciled applicants who applied through UCAS for a full-time undergraduate Higher Education (HE) course at a UK institution in the 2008/09 academic year. It examines both applicants accepted for a HE place, and those applicants who applied through UCAS for a place but were not accepted.

The analysis cannot take into consideration those applicants who were not accepted for a HE place through the UCAS process but who may have subsequently obtained a place outside of the process (e.g. at an institution in the Republic of Ireland, or through direct application to a particular institution, such as St. Mary's University College Belfast). In this analysis, these applicants are categorised as "not accepted applicants".

Similar analysis was carried out by the Department for Employment and Learning for 2002/03 and 2003/04 UCAS data<sup>1</sup>. Readers should be aware of the following differences between analyses for 2008/09 and these previous years;

1. Applicants who apply to St. Mary's University College only are not included in the 2008/09 analysis as St. Mary's University College has not been part of the UCAS system since 2006/07.
2. Data for the College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are included in the 2008/09 analysis (86 applicants in 2008/09), but not in previous years' analyses.
3. The question asked of UCAS applicants regarding Socio Economic Classification (SEC) changed in the 2008/09 academic year to take account of changing age legislation and therefore analysis of SEC will not be directly comparable to previous years. See Appendix 1 for further detail on the change.

## 2. Context

In 1994/95, 39% of NI domiciled full-time first year undergraduate students enrolling on Higher Education courses at UK Higher Education institutions (HEIs) migrated from NI for their HE experience. Fifteen years later in 2008/09, the percentage had declined to 31%<sup>2</sup>. Of those students that leave NI to undertake a HE course at a GB HEI, a high proportion do not return after their graduation. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Destinations of Leavers from HE survey 2008/09, which surveyed students six months after graduation, showed that of those NI domiciled students who graduated from full-time undergraduate courses at GB institutions and whose destination was known, 40% returned to NI after graduation (30% in 1994/95). This is in contrast to those who graduated from a NI HE institution, where 92% remained in NI. This report compares the characteristics and choices of NI domiciled applicants accepted to GB institutions with those NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI institutions. It also compares those accepted onto a HE course against those not accepted.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous reports can be found at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/research.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

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### 3. Executive Summary

The key points arising from the analysis of the 2008/09 UCAS data in respect of NI domiciled applicants are:

#### **Characteristics of NI domiciled applicants**

- 67% of accepted applicants obtained a HE place at a NI institution and 33%<sup>3</sup> at a GB institution (section 4.1)
- 22% of all applicants were *not accepted* for a HE place (section 4.1)
- 85% of accepted applicants were aged under 21 while 73% of *not accepted* applicants were in this age group (section 4.2.1)
- 57% of accepted applicants were female. 63% of *not accepted* applicants were female (section 4.2.2)
- The average tariff score<sup>4</sup> of NI domiciled accepted applicants to UK institutions was 312, with those accepted at NI and GB institutions having average scores of 310 and 317 respectively (section 4.3.1)
- The average tariff score of NI domiciled applicants *not accepted* for a HE place was 249 (section 4.3.1)
- Those applicants *not accepted* for a HE place had consistently lower entrance tariff scores than those accepted across all 7-SEC groups (section 4.5.2)
- Male accepted applicants held lower average tariff scores than female accepted applicants (section 4.3.1)
- 58% of NI domiciled accepted applicants came from a grammar school background compared to 38% of *not accepted* applicants (section 4.3.3)
- Business studies and subjects allied to medicine had the highest number

of NI domiciled accepted applicants at both NI and GB institutions (section 4.4.1)

- 12% of those NI domiciled applicants who applied for STEM related courses<sup>5</sup> at NI institutions were *not accepted*. The percentage was the same for those who applied to GB institutions (section 4.4.4)
- 23% of applicants accepted to GB institutions were from the lower SEC<sup>6</sup> groups while 30% of those accepted to NI institutions and 33% of *not accepted* applicants were from this group (section 4.5.1)

#### **Locational choices of NI domiciled accepted applicants**

- Of those NI domiciled applicants whose firm choice was a NI institution in 2008/09, 98% were accepted at a NI institution (section 5.2)
- Of those NI domiciled applicants whose firm choice was a GB institution, 96% were accepted at a GB institution (section 5.2)
- The proportion of NI domiciled applicants who obtained their preferred choice of region, whether it be at a NI and GB institution, has remained similar since 2003/04 (section 5.3)
- Of those applicants that were accepted at a GB institution, 5% had a revealed preference to study at a NI institution but accepted a place in GB (section 5.3)
- Accepted applicants who obtained their preferred choice of region tended to hold higher entrance tariff scores than those who obtained their reserve choice of region (section 5.6)
- Accepted applicants from the lower SEC groups were less likely to leave NI to study HE (section 5.7)

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<sup>3</sup> This differs to the 31% quoted on page 3 as HESA and UCAS have different data coverage – see appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> The UCAS tariff was first introduced for the 2002/03 entry cohort. The tariff establishes agreed equivalences between different types of qualifications and reports achievement for entry to Higher Education in a numerical format. This allows comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement.

For example, the A-level tariff allocation is: A= 120, B=100, C=80, D=60, E=40.

The use of average tariff score as a measurement conceals the actual distribution of tariff scores obtained by applicants in a region or at an institution.

Those applicants recorded as having zero tariff points are excluded from the calculation of average tariff scores.

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<sup>5</sup> STEM related courses include courses in the following subject areas: Medicine & Dentistry, Subjects allied to Medicine, Biological Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture & related subjects, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering & Technology and Architecture, Building & Planning.

<sup>6</sup> The question asked of UCAS applicants regarding Socio Economic Classification (SEC) changed in the 2008/09 academic year to take account of changing age legislation and therefore analysis of SEC will not be directly comparable to previous years. Those applicants declared as unknown in the SEC have been excluded from any analysis. Lower SEC groups are, in this instance, defined as SEC groups 5, 6 and 7.

#### 4. Characteristics of NI domiciled UCAS applicants<sup>7</sup>

The following section uses data supplied by UCAS to provide a descriptive analysis of the key characteristics of **NI domiciled applicants** who were accepted for **full-time undergraduate** courses at NI and GB institutions in 2008/09. It also compares the findings with a similar analysis carried out on the 2003/04 UCAS data and examines those applicants who applied through UCAS for a HE place in 2008/09 but were not accepted<sup>8</sup>.

When considering this analysis, it should be noted that not all students enrolled on HE courses in the UK are included in UCAS data. For example, those students studying at HE level in NI FE colleges are not included in this analysis. Furthermore, not all HEIs used the UCAS system in 2008/09 e.g. St. Mary's University College. Appendix 2 provides more details on this.

*The following descriptors are used throughout this report:*

**Applicants:** those **applying** for a HE place through the UCAS process.

**Accepted applicants:** those **applying and accepted** for a HE place through the UCAS process.

**Not accepted applicants:** those **applying** through the UCAS process for a HE place **but who either are not accepted or do not accept a place through UCAS.**

##### 4.1 Overview

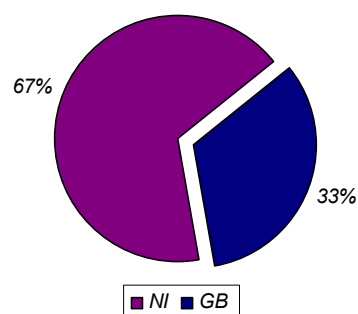
In the 2008/09 academic year, 13,430 NI domiciled applicants were accepted through UCAS to full-time undergraduate courses in UK institutions. This represents an 8% increase<sup>9</sup> from the 2003/04 year when 12,429 were accepted for a place.

An analysis of accepted applicants in 2008/09 (*figure 1*) shows that:

- 9,010 (67%) were accepted to NI institutions; and
- 4,420 (33%) were accepted to GB institutions.

*These proportions were broadly the same in 2003/04.*

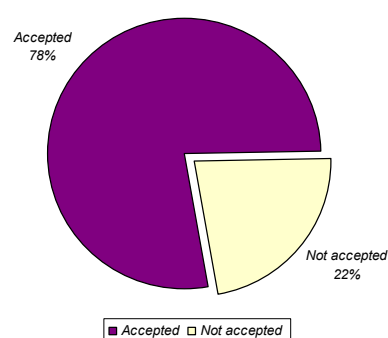
**Figure 1: Proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI and GB institutions**



In 2008/09, 3,686 NI domiciled applicants (22% of all applicants) applied through UCAS for a HE place but were *not* accepted (*figure 2*).

*This is the same proportion as in 2003/04.*

**Figure 2: Proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted and not accepted for a HE place at a UK institution**



<sup>7</sup> UCAS coverage relates to participating HE institutions in NI and GB and some FE institutions in GB.

<sup>8</sup> The analysis cannot take into consideration applicants who were not accepted for a HE place through the UCAS process but who subsequently obtained a place outside of the process. In this analysis, these applicants are categorised as not accepted applicants.

<sup>9</sup> The increase in the number of applicants using UCAS may be due to either more applicants applying for HE courses or more courses requiring applicants to apply through UCAS for a place or a combination of both.

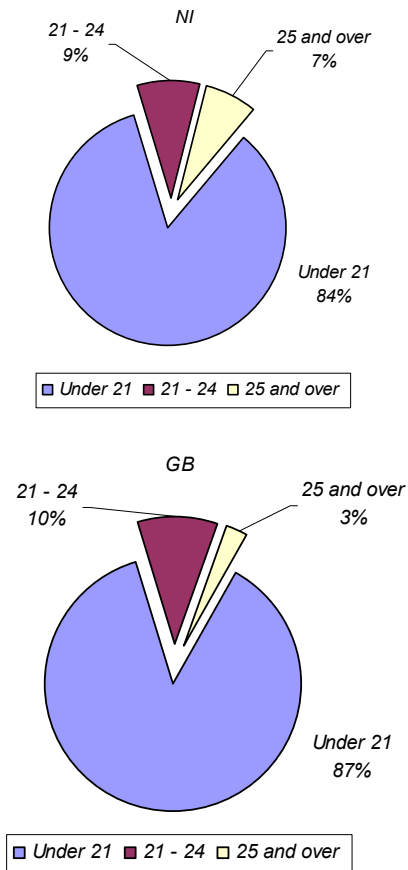
## 4.2 Demographic profile

### 4.2.1 Region of study and age

An analysis of the age of NI domiciled accepted applicants and region of study (figure 3) shows that:

- 85% of accepted applicants to UK institutions were aged under 21, with similar proportions accepted to GB (87%) and NI institutions (84%).
- Of the NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI institutions in 2008/09, 7% were aged 25 and over, with only 3% of applicants accepted to GB institutions being aged 25 and over.

**Figure 3: Proportion of NI domiciled accepted applicants to NI and GB institutions by age**

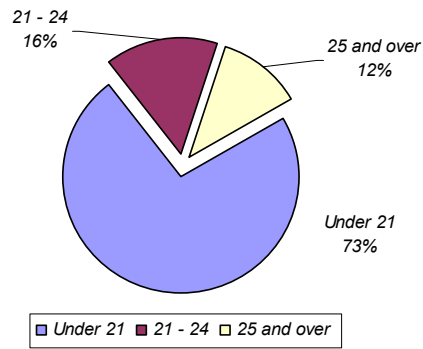


These proportions were broadly the same in 2003/04.

In terms of the age of NI domiciled applicants *not accepted* for a HE place (figure 4):

- 73% were aged under 21; and
- 12% were aged 25 and over.

**Figure 4: Proportion of NI domiciled applicants not accepted for a HE place by age**



Corresponding proportions in 2003/04 were; 80% under 21, 12% 21-24 and 8% 25 and over.

### 4.2.2 Region of study and gender

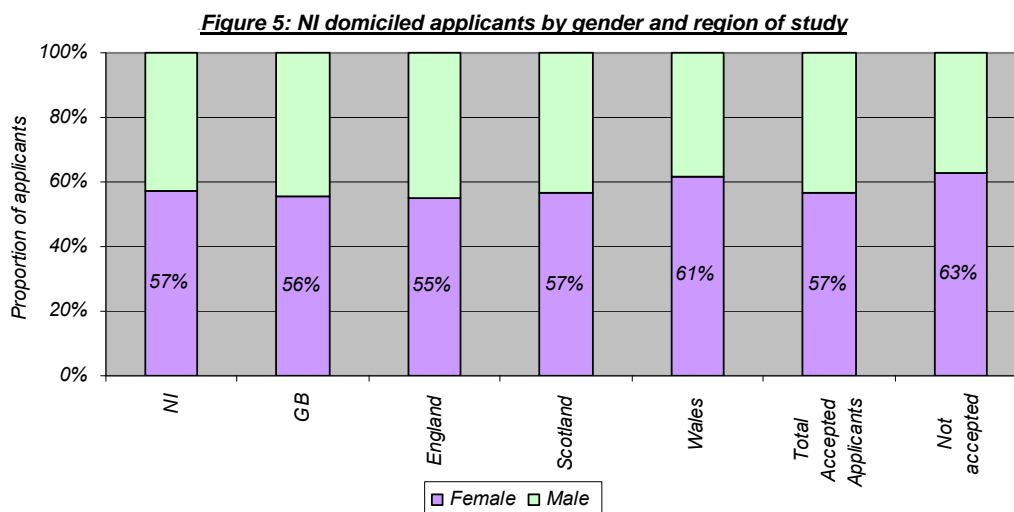
An analysis of the gender of NI domiciled accepted applicants and region of study (figure 5) shows that:

- females accounted for 57% of applicants accepted to UK institutions, with similar proportions of females accepted to NI (57%) and GB (56%) institutions.

These proportions were broadly the same in 2003/04.

With regards to *not accepted* applicants, females represented 63% of that category (61% in 2003/04).





### 4.3 Previous attainment

#### 4.3.1 Region of study and average tariff score<sup>10</sup>

An analysis of the average tariff score of NI domiciled applicants (*figure 6*) shows that:

- the average tariff score of all NI domiciled accepted applicants at UK institutions was 312, with those at NI and GB institutions holding average scores of 310 and 317 respectively;
- the average tariff score for males accepted at UK institutions was 307. The equivalent score for females was 316;
- males were accepted at institutions in NI and GB with average tariff scores of 304 and 312 respectively; and
- females were accepted at institutions in NI and GB with average tariff scores of 314 and 321 respectively.

Applicants *not accepted* for a HE place (*table 1 and figure 6*), irrespective of

gender, held the lowest average tariff scores by a significant margin.

A comparison of the average tariff scores of NI domiciled applicants in 2003/04 and 2008/09 (*table 1*) shows that the average tariff score held by both genders has increased for all NI domiciled accepted applicants irrespective of the region of study.

*Table 1* also shows that the average tariff score held by those applicants who were not accepted has also increased between 2003/04 and 2008/09. This suggests that applicants are getting better qualified over time, making entry to HE an increasingly competitive process.

**Table 1: Proportion of NI domiciled applicants by average tariff score, gender and region of study 2003/04 and 2008/09**

	Gender	2003/04	2008/09
NI institutions	Female	292	314
	Male	279	304
<b>Total NI institutions</b>		<b>286</b>	<b>310</b>
GB institutions	Female	302	321
	Male	284	312
<b>Total GB institutions</b>		<b>294</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>Total UK (excl. not accepted)</b>		<b>289</b>	<b>312</b>
Not accepted	Female	223	255
	Male	209	239
<b>Total not accepted</b>		<b>218</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>Total UK (incl. not accepted)</b>		<b>275</b>	<b>301</b>

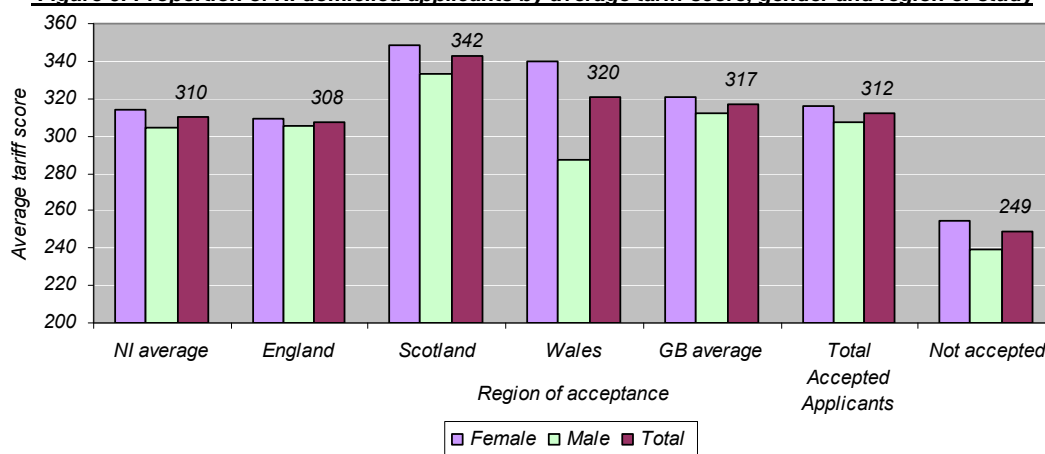
<sup>10</sup> The UCAS tariff was first introduced for the 2002/03 entry cohort. The tariff establishes agreed equivalences between different types of qualifications and reports achievement for entry to Higher Education in a numerical format. This allows comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement.

For example, the A-level tariff allocation is: A= 120, B=100, C=80, D=60, E=40.

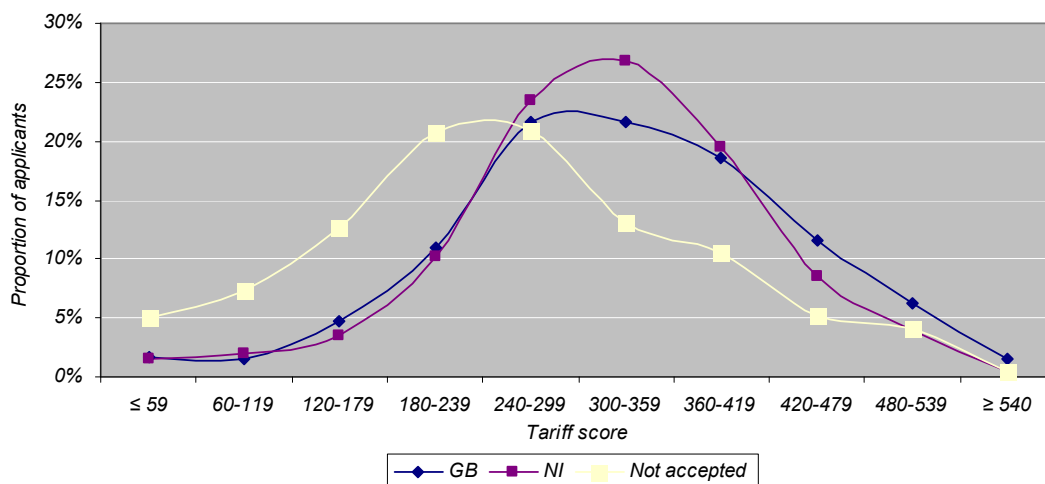
The use of average tariff score as a measurement conceals the actual distribution of tariff scores obtained by applicants in a region or at an institution.

Those applicants recorded as having zero tariff points are excluded from the calculation of average tariff scores.

**Figure 6: Proportion of NI domiciled applicants by average tariff score, gender and region of study**



**Figure 7: NI domiciled applicants by tariff score and region of study**



**4.3.2 Region of study and tariff score: frequency analysis**

An analysis of the tariff scores of NI domiciled applicants by region of study (figure 7) shows that:

- a greater proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted to GB institutions held “higher”<sup>11</sup> range tariff scores (38% compared to 33%) while a higher proportion accepted to NI institutions held “mid range” scores (60% compared to 54%);
- Similar proportions of accepted applicants held “lower”<sup>12</sup> range tariff scores; 8% (15% in 2003/04) of NI domiciled applicants accepted to GB institutions compared with 7% (9% in 2003/04) of those accepted to a NI

institution. There has been a notable decline to GB institutions since 2003/04;

- 25% of NI domiciled applicants that were not accepted to a UK institution through UCAS held “lower” range tariff scores (36% in 2003/04).

<sup>11</sup> “Higher” range tariff scores, in this instance, are defined as 360 or more tariff points.

<sup>12</sup> “Lower” range tariff scores, in this instance, are defined as 179 or less tariff points.

### 4.3.3 Region of study, previous educational establishment<sup>13, 14</sup> attended and average tariff score

An analysis of the educational establishment attended by NI domiciled applicants, prior to them applying for a HE place (table 2), shows that;

- the majority (58%) of accepted applicants' previous educational establishment was a grammar school, with a slightly higher proportion accepted to GB than to NI institutions coming from this sector;
- just under one fifth of applicants' previous educational establishment was a Further/Higher Education institution<sup>15</sup>; and
- 38% of applicants *not accepted* for a place had previously attended a grammar school, while 30% had previously attended a FE/HE institution.

**Table 2: Previous educational establishment attended by NI domiciled applicants**

Previous educational establishment attended	Accepted at a NI institution	Accepted at a GB institution	All accepted applicants	Not accepted
Grammar school	57%	61%	58%	38%
Other schools/establishments	25%	21%	23%	33%
Further/Higher Education	19%	18%	19%	30%
All establishments	100%	100%	100%	100%

An analysis of the previous educational establishment attended and the average tariff score held by applicants (table 3) shows that;

- those applicants whose previous educational establishment was a grammar school held the highest average tariff scores.

**Table 3: Previous educational establishment attended by NI domiciled applicants by average tariff score<sup>16</sup>**

Previous educational establishment attended	Accepted at a NI institution	Accepted at a GB institution	All accepted applicants	Not accepted
Grammar school	335	342	338	304
Other schools/establishments	271	257	267	204
Further/Higher Education	182	181	182	146
All establishments	310	317	313	249

## 4.4 HE subject choices

### 4.4.1 Region of study and subject area

An analysis of the region of study and subject studied of accepted applicants (figure 8) shows that:

- business and administrative studies and subjects allied to medicine had the highest number of accepted applicants (excluding combined subject areas) at both NI and GB institutions in 2008/09; and
- technologies and veterinary sciences, agriculture & related studies had the lowest number of accepted applicants.

The pattern of accepted applicants by subject area in 2008/09 was broadly the same in 2003/04 with the exception of combined subjects at NI institutions (falling from 18% in 2003/04 to 8% in 2008/09).

### 4.4.2 Region of study, subject area and accepted applicant differences

There are some notable differences between the proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI institutions and the proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted to GB institutions by subject area.

Figure 9 shows the percentage point difference between the proportion of NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI institutions and the proportion accepted to GB institutions in 2008/09 by subject area. To the left of the chart are those subject areas which were more heavily represented in NI than GB, while to the right of the chart are the subject areas which were more heavily represented in GB than in NI.

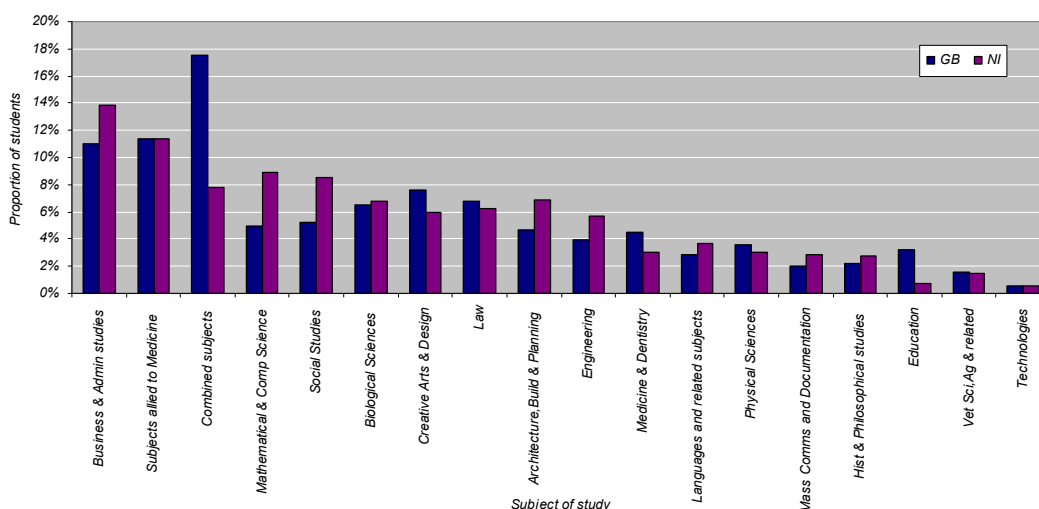
<sup>13</sup> The classification of previous educational establishment attended is based on the English categorisation system.

<sup>14</sup> Other schools/establishments includes: comprehensive, special, independent, sixth form colleges and other establishments.

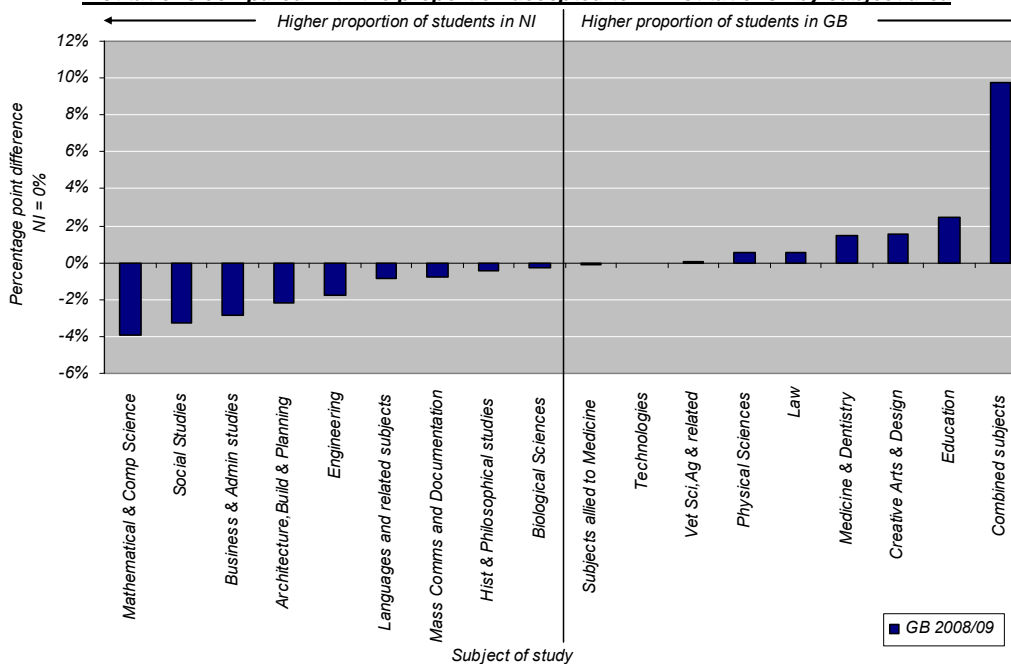
<sup>15</sup> The vast majority of these applicants previously attended further education colleges.

<sup>16</sup> Average tariff scores differ from previous tables because those applicants whose previous educational establishment was unknown have been excluded.

**Figure 8: NI domiciled applicants accepted to NI and GB institutions by subject area**



**Figure 9: Difference in the proportion of applicants accepted to GB institutions compared with the proportion accepted to NI institutions— by subject area**



#### 4.4.3 Region of study, subject area and average tariff score

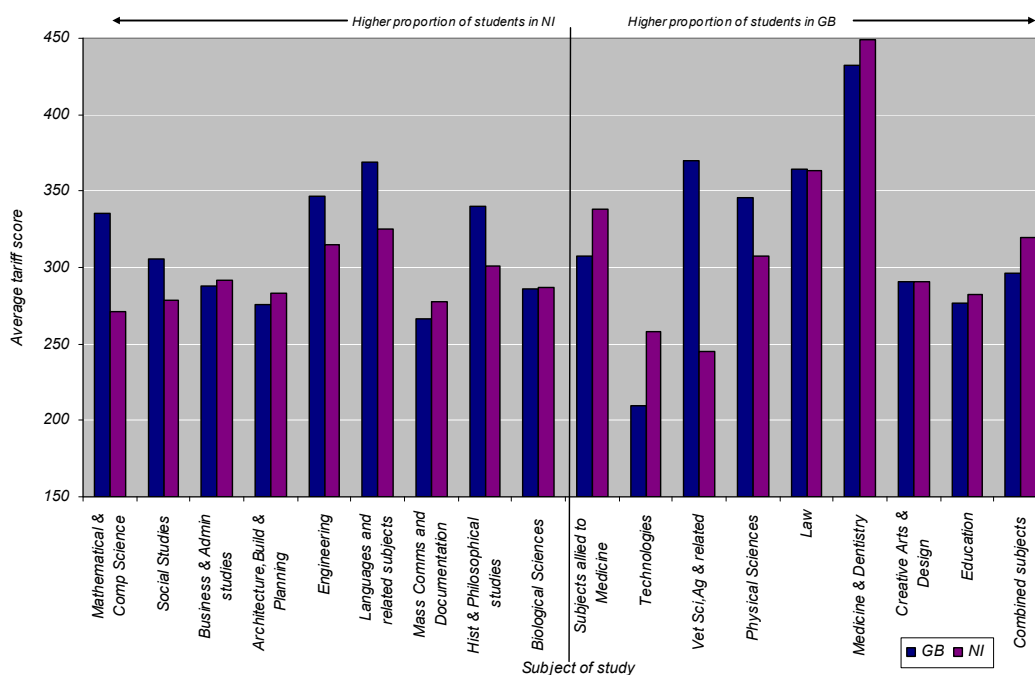
Maintaining the subject areas in the same order as *figure 9*, an analysis of the average tariff score of NI domiciled accepted applicants (*figure 10*) shows that:

- in the subject areas which were more heavily represented in NI (i.e. those to the left of the chart), the average tariff score of applicants accepted to NI institutions was slightly higher than for those accepted to GB institutions in

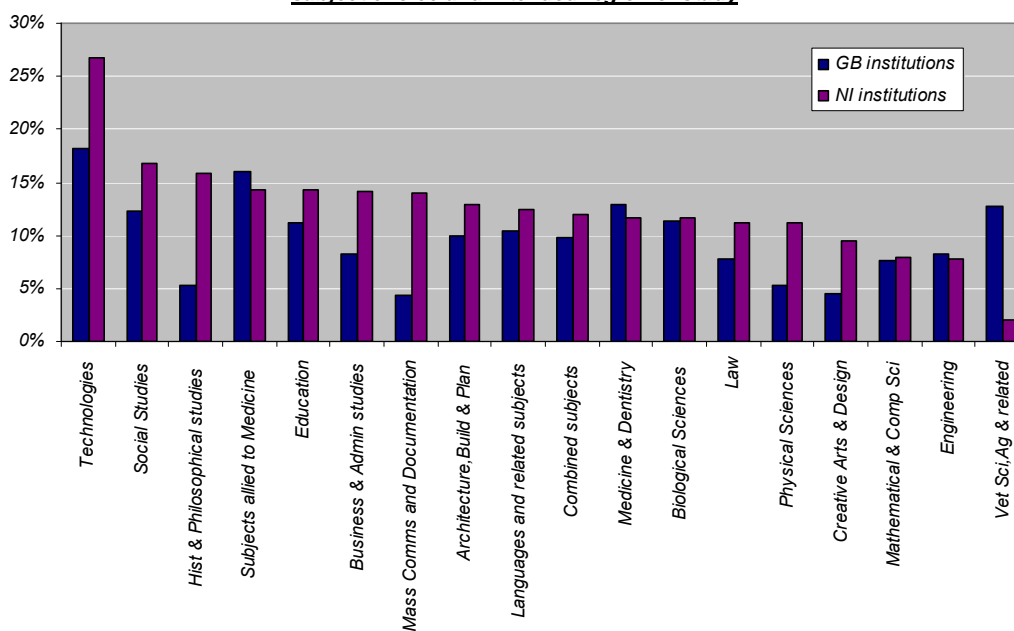
business and administration studies, architecture, building & planning, mass communications & documentation and biological sciences.

- in the subject areas which were more heavily represented in GB (i.e. those to the right of the chart), only in the veterinary science & agriculture related subjects and physical sciences was the average tariff score of applicants accepted to NI institutions significantly lower than those accepted to GB institutions.

**Figure 10: Average tariff score of NI domiciled accepted applicants by subject area and region of study**



**Figure 11 - Not accepted NI domiciled applicants as a percentage of all NI domiciled applicants by firm subject choice and intended region of study**



**4.4.4 Region of study and subject area of applicants not accepted for a HE place**

An analysis (figure 11) of the firm subject choice<sup>17</sup> of not accepted applicants shows that:

- 27% of those NI domiciled applicants who applied for technology courses at NI institutions were not accepted for a

place compared to 18% of those who applied to GB institutions;

- 16% of those who applied for historical & philosophical studies courses at NI institutions were not accepted for a place compared to 5% of those who applied to GB institutions;
- 14% of those applicants who applied for mass communication & documentation courses at NI institutions were not accepted for a

<sup>17</sup> The firm subject choice could be considered to be a good representation of the preferred subject of study.

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place compared to 4% of those who applied to GB institutions; and

- 2% of those applicants who applied for veterinary science and agriculture courses at NI institutions were *not accepted* for a place compared to 13% of those who applied to GB institutions.
- 12% of those NI domiciled applicants who applied for STEM related courses<sup>18</sup> at NI institutions were not accepted for a place. The percentage was the same for those who applied to GB institutions.

#### 4.5 SEC<sup>19</sup> background

##### 4.5.1 Region of study and Socio-Economic Classification (SEC)

An analysis of the SEC of accepted applicants and region of study in 2008/09 (*table 4 and figure 12*) shows that:

- 27% of NI domiciled accepted applicants to UK institutions were from the lower SEC groups while 30% of those accepted at NI institutions and 23% accepted to GB institutions were from these groups.

*Although not directly comparable, this represents an increase from 2003/04 when 26% of all NI domiciled accepted applicants were from the lower SEC groups, with 28% and 21% accepted to NI and GB institutions respectively.*

However, 33% of *not accepted applicants* were from the lower SEC groups.

*Table 4 and figure 12* provide more detail on the SEC group of NI domiciled applicants by region of study.

##### 4.5.2 Region of study, SEC and average tariff score

An analysis of SEC, average tariff score and region of study (*figure 13*) shows that:

- the average tariff score of NI domiciled accepted applicants from the upper three SEC groups was higher for those accepted to GB than NI institutions, while in the remaining SEC groups the average tariff score was higher for those accepted to NI institutions; and
- those NI domiciled applicants *not accepted* for a HE place had consistently lower tariff scores than those accepted, across all 7 SEC groups.

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<sup>18</sup> STEM related courses include courses in the following subject areas; Medicine & Dentistry, Subjects allied to Medicine, Biological Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture & related subjects, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering & Technology and Architecture, Building & Planning.

<sup>19</sup> The question asked of UCAS applicants regarding Socio Economic Classification (SEC) changed in the 2008/09 academic year to take account of changing age legislation and therefore analysis of SEC will not be directly comparable to previous years.

Those applicants declared as unknown in the SEC have been excluded from any analysis.

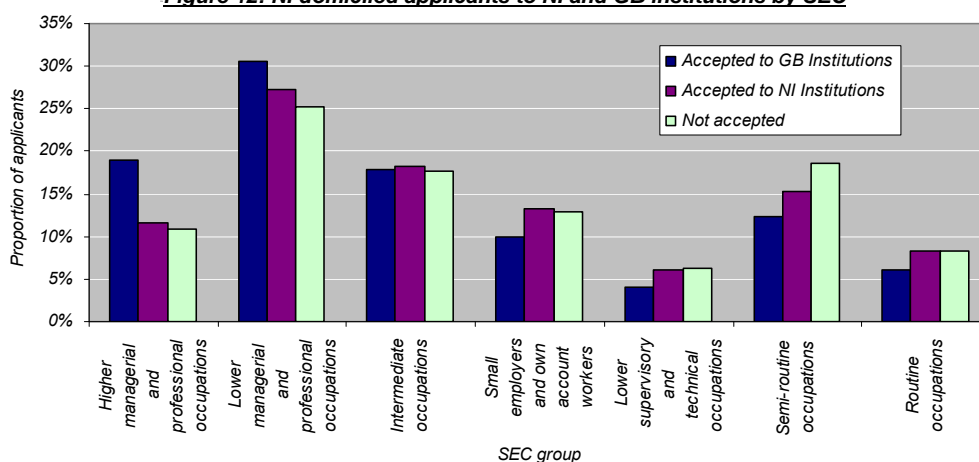
To assist with analysis, the SEC groups have been split, in some cases, into three categories: Upper, middle and lower. This approach can be assumed to involve some type of hierarchy, which cannot be assumed with the 7 category approach.

Lower SEC groups are, in this instance, defined as SEC groups 5, 6 and 7.

**Table 4: Number/proportion of NI domiciled applicants to NI and GB institutions by SEC**

SEC		Region of study		Total accepted students	Not accepted	Not accepted as %age of all applicants by SEC group
		NI	GB			
Higher managerial and professional occupations	Nos. %age	871 12%	711 19%	1,582 11%	318 11%	17%
Lower managerial and professional occupations	Nos. %age	2,038 27%	1,144 31%	3,182 28%	740 25%	19%
Upper SEC Group	Nos. %age	2,909 39%	1,855 50%	4,764 43%	1,058 36%	18%
Intermediate occupations	Nos. %age	1,356 18%	670 18%	2,026 18%	516 18%	20%
Small employers and own account workers	Nos. %age	994 13%	368 10%	1,362 12%	379 13%	22%
Middle SEC Group	Nos. %age	2,350 31%	1,038 28%	3,388 30%	895 31%	21%
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Nos. %age	453 6%	150 4%	603 5%	183 6%	23%
Semi-routine occupations	Nos. %age	1,136 15%	464 12%	1,600 14%	544 19%	25%
Routine occupations	Nos. %age	619 8%	226 6%	845 8%	244 8%	22%
Lower SEC Group	Nos. %age	2,208 30%	840 23%	3,048 27%	971 33%	24%
GRAND TOTAL	Nos. %age	7,467 100%	3,733 100%	11,200 100%	2,924 100%	21%

**Figure 12: NI domiciled applicants to NI and GB institutions by SEC**

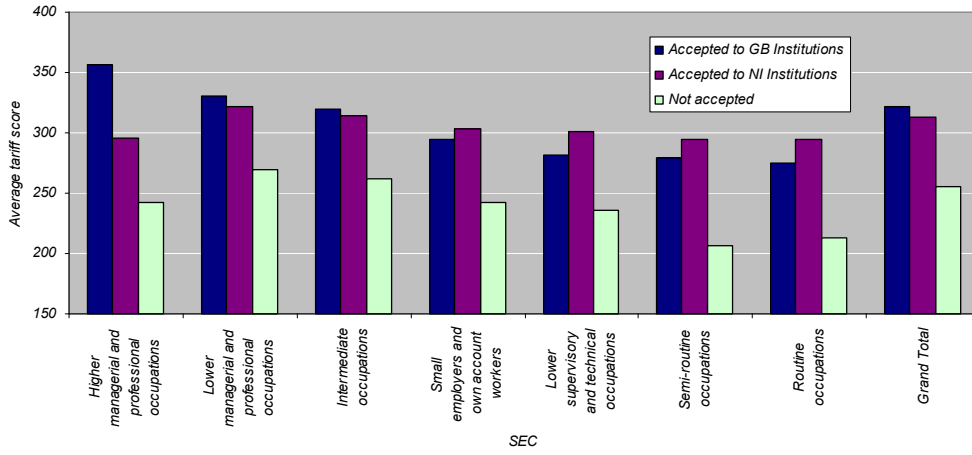


An analysis of the tariff scores and SEC groups of NI domiciled accepted applicants (*figure 14*) shows that a larger proportionate share of applicants from the lower and middle SEC groups held 359 or less tariff points.

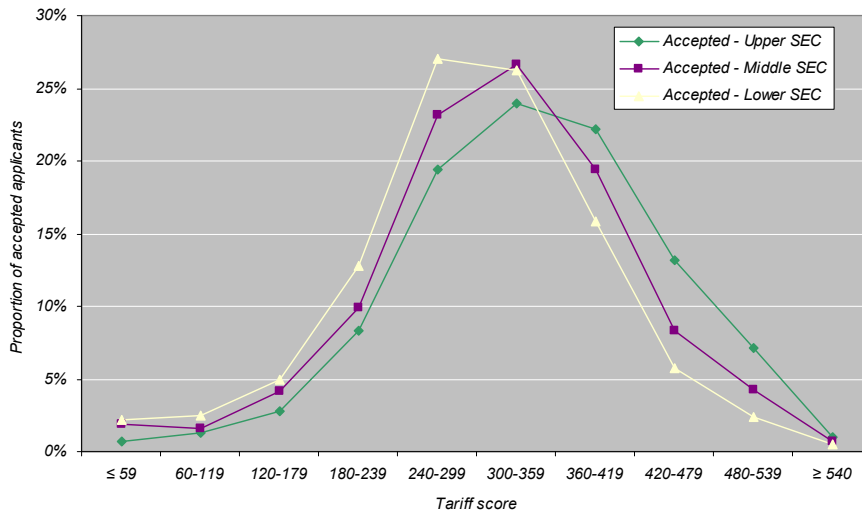
Conversely, a larger proportionate share of applicants from the upper SEC group held 360 or more points.

*Figure 15* provides a similar analysis for those UCAS applicants *not accepted* for a HE place. It shows that those from the upper SEC groups who were not accepted for a place were better qualified than those not accepted from the middle and lower SEC groups.

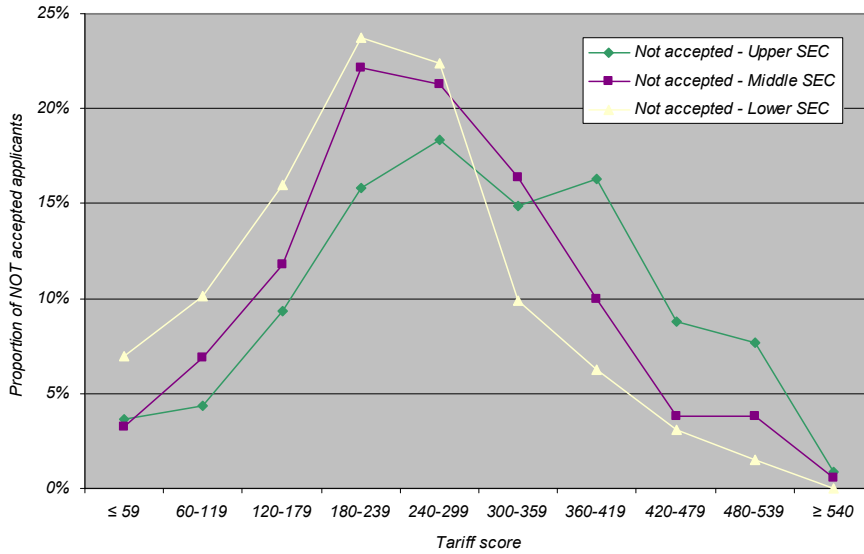
**Figure 13: Average tariff score of NI domiciled applicants by SEC and region of study**



**Figure 14: NI domiciled accepted applicants by SEC and tariff score**



**Figure 15: NI domiciled HE not accepted applicants by SEC and tariff score**





## 5. Locational choices of NI domiciled accepted applicants

### 5.1 Introduction

Using data about accepted applicants' firm, insurance, extra and clearing choices, this section considers applicants' choices and examines whether applicants were accepted for a HE place in their "preferred region" or "reserve region". These terms are used throughout the rest of this paper and are defined as:

**Revealed preferred region** – an applicant successful in attaining a HE place in their 1<sup>st</sup> (firm) choice region of study (whether that be in NI or GB)

**Revealed reserve region** – an applicant whose accepted region of study was different from their 1<sup>st</sup> (firm) choice region of study

The terms preferred or reserve should not be interpreted as necessarily meaning that an applicant did or did not wish to study in a particular region as there are influences and factors that affect applicants' decisions which could not be incorporated into the analysis.

The methodology adopted for assigning whether an applicant obtained their preferred or reserve choice of region is set out in Appendix 3, with Appendix 4 providing a brief overview of the UCAS application process.

The limitations associated with the methodology adopted for categorising applicants in this way are set out in Appendix 5 and the analysis undertaken in this section should be viewed in the context of these limitations.

### Analysis of revealed regional preference<sup>20</sup>

#### 5.2 Applicant choices and region of study

In the 2008/09 academic year, there were 13,430 NI domiciled accepted applicants to HE courses in the UK, of which:

<sup>20</sup> Revealed regional preference is the term used to describe whether an applicant obtained their preferred or reserve choice of region in which to study, as revealed through their firm and insurance choices (see Appendix 3).

- 82% had their firm choice accepted (76% in 2003/04);
- 8% had their insurance choice accepted (13% in 2003/04);
- 1% had their extra<sup>21</sup> choice accepted; and
- 9% found a place through clearing (11% in 2003/04)

**Table 5: Applicants accepted choices by region of study (2008/09)**

	GB	%age	NI	%age	Grand Total	%age
Firm	3,624	82%	7,349	82%	10,973	82%
Insurance	317	7%	776	9%	1,093	8%
Extra	74	2%	75	1%	149	1%
Clearing	405	9%	810	9%	1,215	9%
Grand Total	4,420	100%	9,010	100%	13,430	100%

Excludes 3,686 applicants who were not accepted through the UCAS process

Table 6 examines the extent to which there is a match between an applicants' firm (i.e. preferred) choice of region and the region where they were subsequently accepted. It shows that:

- of the 8,580 accepted applicants whose firm choice was NI in 2008/09, **98%** were accepted at a NI institution (96% in 2003/04); and
- of the 4,138 accepted applicants whose firm choice was a GB institution in 2008/09, **96%** were accepted at a GB institution (96% in 2003/04).

**Table 6: Region of firm choice by region of accepted choice**

		Firm choice of region		
		NI	GB	Grand Total
Accepted region	NI	8,370	173	8,543
	%age	98%	4%	67%
	GB	210	3,965	4,175
	%age	2%	96%	33%
Total	8,580	4,138	12,718	
%age	100%	100%	100%	

Excludes 3,686 students who were not accepted to a higher education institution as well as 712 students who did not make a firm choice

<sup>21</sup> If an applicant applies in main scheme (i.e. before June 30th) then they can make up to 5 choices on their application form. If all of these choices are unsuccessful (e.g. either they have had no offers or declined all the offers they have received) then they can keep making extra choices until clearing starts, one choice at a time. If they then get accepted on this new choice then it gets counted as 'Extra' in the acceptance flag.

### 5.3 Categorisation of applicants

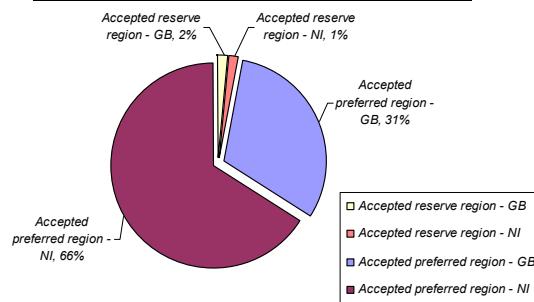
On the basis of the categorisation used in section 5.1, of the 13,430 NI domiciled applicants accepted to UK institutions in 2008/09, whose revealed preference could be determined (figure 16):

- 97% obtained their preferred region (66% in NI and 31% in GB); and
- 3% obtained their reserve region (1% in NI and 2% in GB).

This analysis suggests that of those who obtained their reserve choice of region, 2% had a revealed preference to study in NI but accepted a place at a GB institution instead. On the other hand, 1% of accepted applicants had a revealed preference to study in GB but accepted a place at a NI institution.

These proportions were broadly the same in 2003/04.

**Figure 16: Proportion of NI domiciled accepted applicants by revealed regional preference**



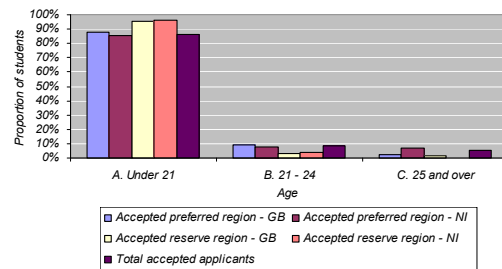
Of those accepted applicants who left NI in 2008/09 to study in GB, 5% were assessed to have taken up a place in their reserve choice of region.

### 5.4 Revealed regional preference and age

NI domiciled accepted applicants aged under 21 accounted for 86% of all NI domiciled accepted applicants, but they accounted for 95% and 97% of NI domiciled applicants who accepted their reserve choice of region in GB and NI respectively (figure 17). In other words, those accepted applicants aged under 21 accounted for a proportionately higher share of applicants who took a place in their reserve region than those who took a place in their preferred region.

Those aged 21 to 24 accounted for a proportionately higher share of those whose preferred region was GB and those aged 25 and over accounted for a proportionately higher share of those whose preferred region was NI.

**Figure 17: NI domiciled accepted applicants by revealed regional preference and age**

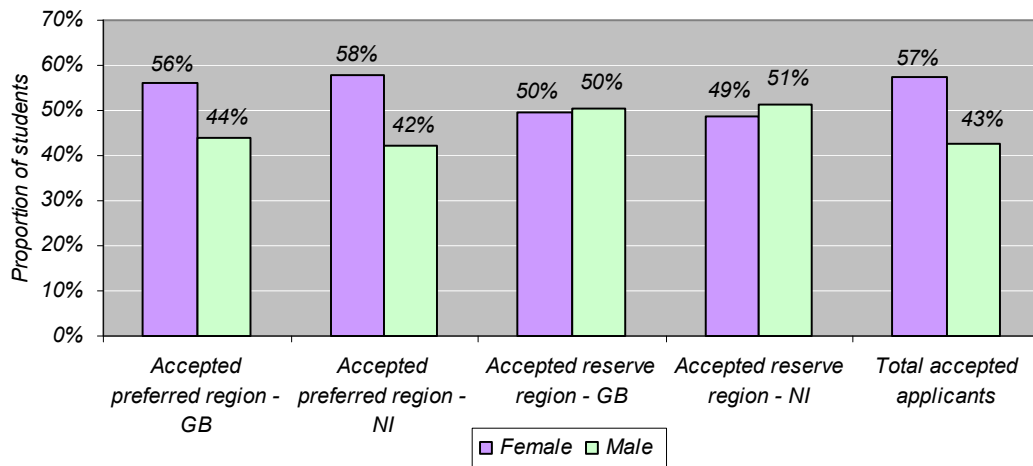


### 5.5 Revealed regional preference and gender

57% of NI domiciled accepted applicants were female. However, females accounted for a proportionately greater share of those that obtained their preferred choice of region in NI (58%).

Males accounted for 43% of all NI domiciled applicants, but they accounted for a proportionately higher share of those that obtained their reserve choice of region in NI (51%) and their reserve choice of region in GB (50%) (figure 18).

**Figure 18: NI domiciled HE accepted applicants by gender and revealed regional preference**



**5.6 Revealed regional preference, average tariff score and gender**

In terms of average entrance tariff scores, those NI domiciled applicants accepted to GB institutions on the basis of their preferred choice were the best qualified, irrespective of gender (figure 19).

Conversely, those accepted applicants who obtained their reserve choice of region in GB (i.e. their revealed preference was to stay in NI) had the lowest average entrance tariff score by some margin.

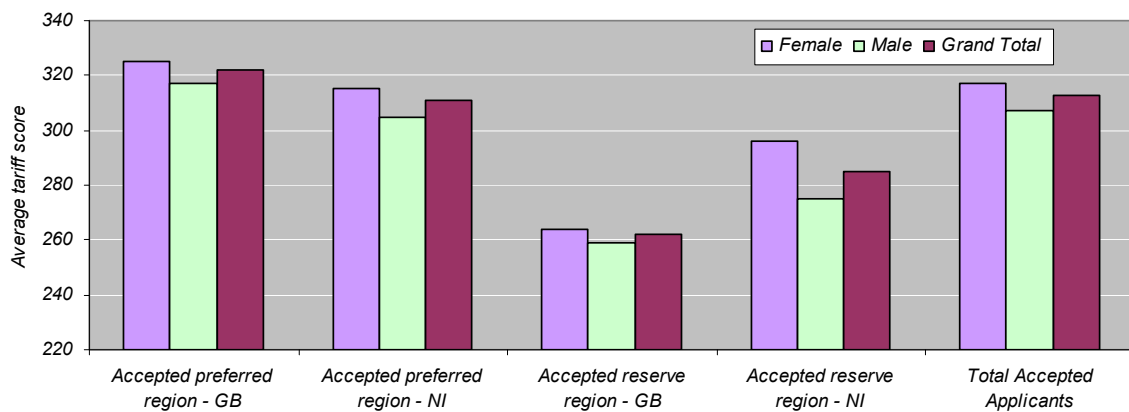
Overall, female accepted applicants possessed higher average entrance tariff scores than males, across all revealed preferences.

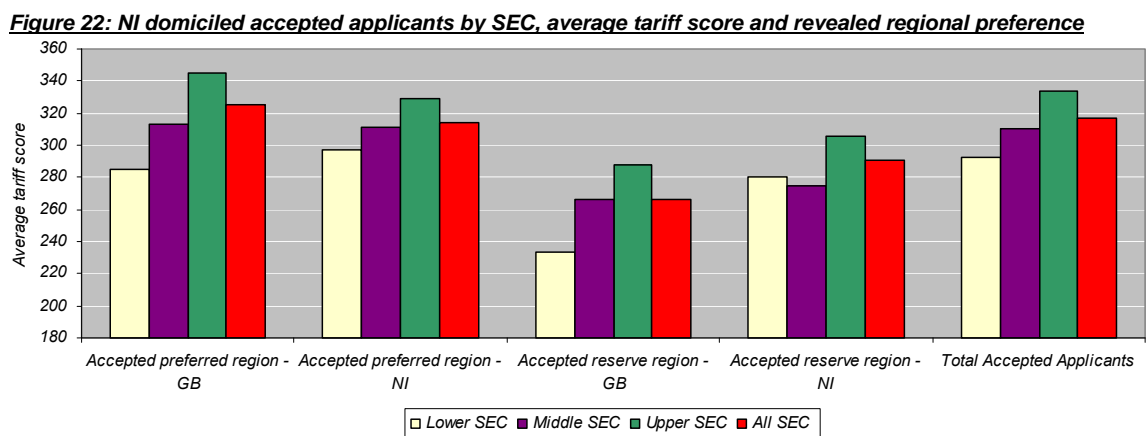
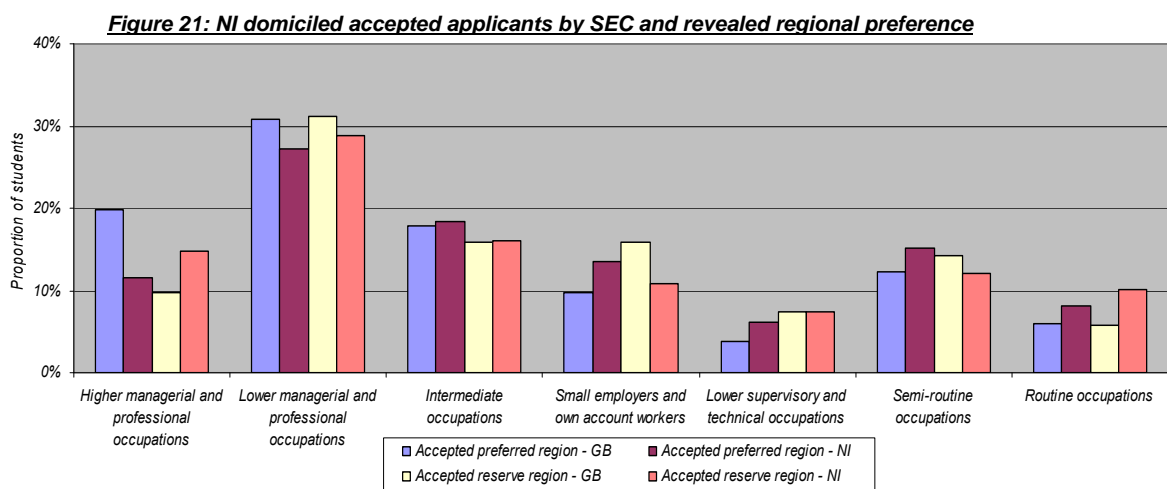
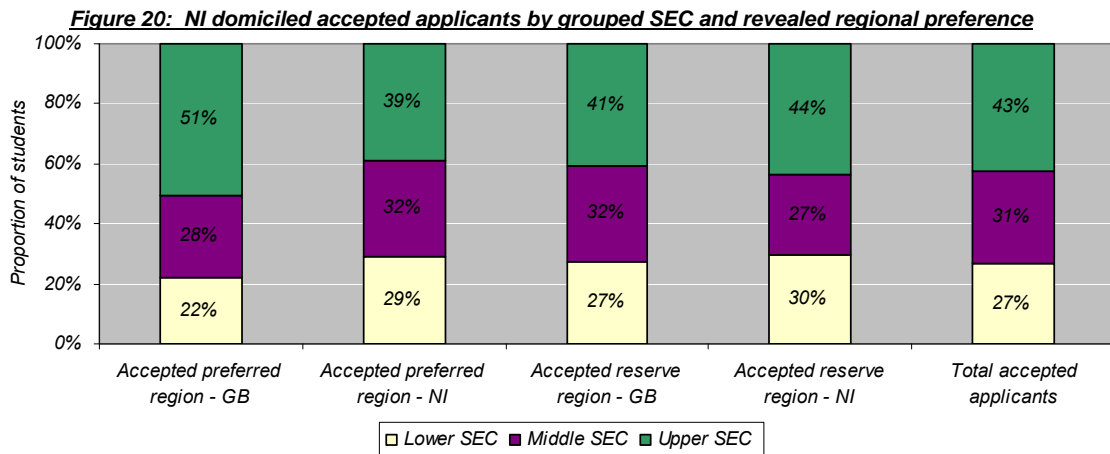
**5.7 Revealed regional preference and Socio-Economic Classification (SEC)**

An analysis of the SEC groups (figure 20) shows that 27% of all NI domiciled accepted applicants were from the lower SEC group. However, this group accounted for 29% of those applicants accepted for a place in NI on the basis of their preferred choice of region (i.e. their revealed preference was to study at a NI institution). Conversely, a lower proportionate share of NI domiciled accepted applicants from the lower SEC group accepted a place in GB irrespective of whether it was on the basis of their preferred (22%) or reserve (27%) choice of region. 30% from this group accepted a place in NI on the basis of their reserve choice.

Figure 21 breaks the analysis down further and presents data at the SEC 7-classification level.

**Figure 19: NI domiciled accepted applicants by gender, average tariff score and revealed regional preference**





**5.8 Revealed regional preference, average tariff score and SEC**

An analysis of the SEC of NI domiciled accepted applicants by average tariff score (figure 22) shows that those from the lower SEC groups tend to possess lower average tariff scores than those from the middle and upper SEC groups and this

holds for all revealed regional preference groups except where the accepted reserve region is NI.

The average tariff score of those NI domiciled applicants whose revealed preference was to study in NI but instead accepted a place in GB was lower than any other revealed preference group.

**Change to Socio Economic Classification (SEC) question in 2008/09**

Caution needs to be exercised when examining data on Socio Economic Classification (SEC) as the question asked of UCAS applicants regarding SEC changed in the 2008/09 academic year to take account of changing age legislation. Therefore analysis of SEC data for the 2008/09 academic year will not be directly comparable to previous years.

The 2007/08 and 2008/09 questions were as follows: -

**2008/09 question:** If you are in full-time education, please state the occupation of the highest-earning family member of the household in which you live. If he or she is retired or unemployed, give their most recent occupation. If you are not in full-time education, please state just your own occupation

**2007/08 question:** If you are under 21, please give the occupation of your parent, step-parent or guardian who earns the most. If he or she is retired or unemployed, give their most recent occupation. If you are 21 or over, please give your own occupation

**UCAS data coverage 2008/09**

**UCAS data relates to applicants who were;**

- new entrants;
- applying for a full-time undergraduate course;
- applying to Higher Education institutions in NI and GB and some FE institutions in GB<sup>22</sup>; and
- those using UCAS to apply for a HE course (According to data from HESA<sup>23</sup>, these accounted for approximately 88% of NI domiciled full-time undergraduate first year students at HE institutions in the UK in 2008/09).

**UCAS data does not include:**

- full-time undergraduate students who have progressed beyond first year;
- applicants to part-time undergraduate courses;
- applicants to postgraduate courses;
- applicants to HE courses at a NI FE college;
- applicants to HE courses at institutions outside of the UK, including the Republic of Ireland;
- applicants to St. Mary's University College Belfast; and
- the 12%<sup>24</sup> of full-time undergraduate students who bypass the UCAS process and enrol directly on a HE course at a UK HE institution.

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<sup>22</sup> HE courses at NI FE colleges are not part of the UCAS process.

<sup>23</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency.

<sup>24</sup> An analysis of the 12% of students not using the UCAS process to enrol shows that a large number of these students were required by an institute to enrol on courses directly. Of those students not using UCAS and not enrolling directly at the institution's request, an analysis shows that no common student characteristics could be found.

**Methodology<sup>25</sup> adopted for determining whether an applicant was accepted for their preferred or reserve choice of region**

For this analysis, a firm choice is assumed to be the best representation of where an applicant wants to study. Where a applicant is accepted on the basis of their insurance choice, it is assumed that this is their second choice, having not satisfied the requirements of their firm choice option. Comparing the firm and insurance choices of applicants with their accepted choice, it can be determined whether an applicant accepted their preferred or reserve choice of region in which to study.

Accepted choice	Firm choice	Insurance choice	Preference of region of study
NI	NI	NI	Accepted preferred Region - NI
NI	NI	GB	Accepted preferred Region - NI
NI	NI	No insurance choice	Accepted preferred Region - NI
GB	GB	GB	Accepted preferred Region - GB
GB	GB	NI	Accepted preferred Region - GB
GB	GB	No insurance choice	Accepted preferred Region - GB
NI	GB	NI	Accepted reserve Region - NI
GB	NI	GB	Accepted reserve Region - GB
GB	NI	No insurance choice	Accepted reserve Region - GB
NI	GB	No insurance choice	Accepted reserve Region - NI
NI	No firm choice	No insurance choice	Not known
GB	No firm choice	No insurance choice	Not known
NI	GB	GB	Accepted reserve Region - NI
GB	NI	NI	Accepted reserve Region - GB

*Revealed preferred region - an applicant successful in attaining a HE place in their 1<sup>st</sup> choice region of study (in either NI or GB).*

*Revealed reserve region - an applicant whose accepted region of study was different from their preferred region of study.*

<sup>25</sup> This matrix is intended to provide an overview of the approach adopted for determining an applicant's preferred and reserved choice. A more detailed methodology was adopted in the actual analysis.

**Overview of UCAS application process**

1. An applicant can normally make up to 5 choices for university courses (6 prior to 2007/08).
2. These choices are submitted to UCAS in the academic year prior to study, which forwards them to the institutions concerned.
3. The institutions may then make offers.
4. From the offers received by an applicant, the applicant must choose a firm and if desired an insurance choice – the firm choice being their 1<sup>st</sup> choice and insurance choice being their 2<sup>nd</sup> choice.
5. If an applicant applies in main scheme (i.e. before June 30th) then they can make up to 5 choices on their application form. If all of these choices are unsuccessful (e.g. either they have had no offers or declined all the offers they have received) then they can keep making extra choices until clearing starts, one choice at a time. If they then get accepted on this new choice then it gets counted as 'Extra' in the acceptance flag.
6. If no offers are made or if an applicant, for whatever reason, does not take up the firm or insurance choice, the applicant can apply via clearing. Clearing is the mechanism through which those places that have not been taken by firm and insurance choices are made available.



### ***Limitations of methodology adopted for classifying applicant choices based on revealed regional preference.***

There are a number of limitations associated with the methodology adopted.

1. In some cases applicant choices were so unrelated/diverse that it was not possible to determine an applicant's revealed preference. These applicants, which account for around 5% of all applicants, have been excluded from the detailed analysis in section 5.
2. There is a limitation arising from the possibility that applicants might not secure any offers from HE institutions in the region they want to study. During the UCAS application process, an applicant can normally make up to five choices for university courses (six prior to 2007/08) but subsequently can choose only one firm and one insurance offer. In the case where an applicant particularly wished to remain in NI to study, that applicant might, for example, make three applications to NI institutions and a further two to GB institutions. However, if only the GB institutions made offers, the applicant might have little choice but to pick those as their firm and insurance choices. If either of these offers is subsequently accepted, this analysis would categorise the applicant as obtaining their preferred region of study in GB, when in fact they would have preferred to have remained in NI.
3. It is also not possible to take into consideration influences upon applicants prior to them choosing where and what to study. Examples of these include finance, attitude to NI, peer pressure, family traditions, perception that it is easier to get accepted on a course in GB or that the perceived prestige of some HE institutions in GB is higher. By way of illustration, an

applicant may wish to leave NI to study at a GB institution but may feel that they could not afford financially to do so and, as a result, may apply only to NI institutions. In this analysis, if that applicant was accepted on a course at a NI institution, they would be categorised as obtaining their preferred region of study, when in fact NI was their reserve region. Alternatively, an applicant who would prefer to stay in NI but felt that they are unlikely to attain the entrance tariff grades required by a NI institution, may only apply to GB institutions. If they were subsequently accepted at a GB institution, the analysis here would categorise them as obtaining their preferred region, when in fact they obtained their reserve region.

***Unfortunately, the UCAS data cannot be used to determine the level of error that unrevealed or hidden preferences could introduce to the analysis. This places a limitation on the robustness of the results.***

However, a research report published in 2008 examined the factors which are important to pupils when deciding about applying for HE. The research showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents believed that they would be able to match their preferred location with where they believed they would end up. The researchers therefore concluded that there was little evidence that respondents believed they would be forced to go to an institution or location they would have preferred not to go to. The suggestion of the report is that the evidence points towards the majority of those who now leave NI are those who want to leave – they are, for a range of reasons, *determined* leavers and that the provision of additional undergraduate level places in NI has facilitated the reduction of the *reluctant* leaver. The full report can be accessed at [www.delni.gov.uk/afterschool](http://www.delni.gov.uk/afterschool)