

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER**

**Contextual Data Task and Finish Group Recommendations**

**SPONSOR**: Prof April McMahon

**AUTHORS:** Prof Steven Jones, Stephanie Lee and Mandy Crow

**SUMMARY:** This paper sets out the aims and principles agreed by the Contextual Data Task and Finish group (CDTF) Group and a recommendation for the indicators and the application and nature of the contextual offer from E2022.

**SUMMARY OF KEY DATES AND CIRCULATION FOR APPROVAL PROCESS:**

* 8 Feb 2021: Access and Participation Strategy Group
* 25 Feb 2020: Intake Management Group
* 17 March: TLG
* 30 March: SLT
* 13 April 2021: PRC

**ACTION:** Members of PRC are asked to approve the recommendations set out in this paper.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

* This report and its recommendations comes at a time when the sector is being consulted on potential reforms to the admissions processes through the introduction of post-qualification admissions (PQA)[[1]](#footnote-2). This follows a UUK report published in November 2020 that recommended a consistent approach to the way in which contextual data is used across institutions. The aims and principles set out in this report would stand regardless of any PQA reforms and it is therefore recommended that the University continues to press ahead and make progress on its contextual admissions practices.
* The report recommends the following:
	+ Adopting a revised set of principles to underpin the use of contextual data which are guided by a moral imperative to do the right thing rather than being number and target-driven;
	+ In the main, maintaining the current set of WP indicators used to identify students for a contextual offer;
	+ Targeting contextual offers in a focused and strategic way at applicants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who have faced the greatest barriers and educational disruption (refugee status, care-leavers etc.) and making a 2-grade lower offer to this small group of students;
	+ Giving greater flexibility around level 2 qualifications, particularly for our most selective courses where high GCSE requirements can sometimes be a barrier to students progressing through the selection process;
	+ Ensuring our processes do not disadvantaged some groups of WP students, particularly those who have already undertaken additional work through an access initiative. This recommendation would mean that a small group of students could be awarded a 3-grade reduction.

These recommendations have been presented to the University’s Access and Participation Strategy Group (APSG), Intake Management Group (IMG), Teaching and Learning Group (TLG) and SLT where there was broad support.

**1. Background and context**

1.1 The Contextual Data Task and Finish Group (CDTFG) was established in September 2021 chaired by Prof Steven Jones to review the University’s current use of contextual data in admissions and to make recommendations to further strengthen the process and its impact. The Terms of Reference for the Group and its membership are provided in appendix 1.

1.2 The use of contextual data has been mandatory at the University for all young[[2]](#footnote-3), UK applicants since 2011[[3]](#footnote-4). From 2019 the University approved the use of contextual data to make lower offers to students on the basis of widening participation indicators. This led to an increase in the number of contextually-flagged students receiving an offer and has contributed to the progress the University is making to improve access to students from under-represented groups (appendix 2).

1.3 In our Access and Participation Plan (APP) with the Office for Students (OfS) we committed to undertake a review of our contextual admissions process and this was also a recommendation from the recent UNIAC APP Audit. It is also timely to undertake this review given the recent publication of UUK’s Fair Admissions Review[[4]](#footnote-5) which recommends greater ambition from universities to ensure that admissions practices address inequalities in access and participation, including greater transparency in the use of contextual admissions. The Review also recommends improvements in the level of transparency of information and guidance for applicants to support aspiration-raising through the publication of historic, actual entry grade alongside advertised grades recognising that students will be admitted with lower grades post exam results.

1.4 The UUK Fair Admissions Review also highlighted that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants are significantly less likely to describe the current admissions process as fair compared with white applicants (62% vs 73%). The Group discussed the use of ethnicity data as a contextual data indicator, however, there are a number of complex issues related to this, not least that this information is not available to universities at the point of admissions decision-making. Ethnicity has been introduced as a priority criteria for the University’s Manchester Access Programme and is based on under-representation of specific ethnic groups at The University of Manchester and higher tariff institutions[[5]](#footnote-6).

1.5 The Group also considered the impact of a post-qualification admissions system (PQA), where offers or applications are made once students have their grades, on the use of contextual data. It was agreed that the implications of PQA on contextual admissions (the use of contextual data as well as the University’s access programmes) needs to be considered as part of an institutional response to the upcoming sector-wide PQA consultation.

**2. Aims and principles of a contextual admissions process**

2.1 In reviewing the University’s current approach to the use of contextual data the Group has proposed the following aims which anchor our use of contextual data in the values of the University’s strategic plan, our widening participation and EDI strategies and the principles of a fair admissions system. In using contextual data as part of our admissions process we aim:

1. To break down barriers to higher education and boundaries to learning which is one of the University’s ambitions laid out in its strategic plan ‘Our Future’;
2. To bring greater diversity to The University of Manchester and support the University’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Offer-making should aim to ensure that sufficiently able applicants from disadvantaged/underrepresented groups are represented at levels proportionate to their membership in the UK applicant pool or society generally. This will in turn enable the University to make progress against its Access and Participation targets with the Office for Students.
3. To make offers to the students with the potential to benefit from and succeed within the University’s teaching, learning and students experience and to do so in a way that promotes fairness and equality;
4. To mitigate the disadvantages and challenges faced by specific groups of learners, as listed by our indicators, prior to application to university and particularly those who have experienced educational disadvantage where potential might be obscured;
5. To provide admissions decision-makers with the tools to make contextual offers empowering them to make the right decisions in relation to lower offers in appropriate circumstances;

2.2 The Group also reviewed the current principles that underpin our use of contextual data and have made some revisions so that these principles align with above aims. It is intended that the following principles are applied equally across the institution so that contextual data is:

1. used to **ensure equality of opportunity** so that the greater the educational disadvantage applicants experience, the less directly their prior attainment is taken as an indicator of ability;
2. **evidence-based** and relevant to the admissions decision making process. There is a clear evaluation framework in place to demonstrate the impact of the process and its contribution to institutional objectives;
3. **applied on the basis of need**, so there is no limit to the number of students who can benefit from a contextual offer;
4. used **to complement and enhance existing selection mechanisms** (actual and/or predicted performance; minimum requirements or specified performance in a particular subject at GCSE, A-level or other examination; results from additional tests (e.g. UCAT); evidence of ability and potential from the personal statement or reference; performance at interview etc.);
5. **valid/verifiable and reliable** – the information used to inform our contextual admissions processes is reliable and verifiable through internal processes;
6. used to provide fairness and **equality of opportunity** to *all* applicants applying to a course by ensuring that adequate steps are taken to address differences applicants may experience in their educational opportunities;
7. **professionally applied** – all admissions staff using contextual data in decision making have been fully briefed and made aware of the issues surrounding contextual data;
8. **rigorously monitored** and subject to audit trails.
9. **transparent** to applicants and their advisors in terms of
* *what* contextual data is used
* *how* it will be used
* *when* it is used
* communicated to applicants in a clear and timely manner

**Recommendation:** Approve the above aims and principles which will underpin the University’s contextual admissions processes.

**3. Indicators and Measures**

3.1 Choosing which data to use in contextual admissions is a balance of pragmatic considerations (e.g. availability at the point of admissions decision-making process) and issues of data quality (e.g. accuracy, reliability, validity and completeness). Consideration also needs to be given to the outcome, for example where of contextual data as ‘Low Stakes’ (e.g. for monitoring) or ‘High Stakes’ (e.g. positive action – such as lower offer) activity. High stakes activity should therefore be determined by a robust and evidenced set of criteria.

3.2 The CDTF Group considered a range of measures across individual experiences (e.g. care experienced, estranged from parents/carers), individual characteristics (e.g. refugee status, ethnicity), family characteristics (e.g. parental experience of HE); school characteristics (e.g. school type, school performance) and neighbourhood characteristics (e.g. POLAR) and recommended the following indicators for the contextual data process from E2022:

Table 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Indicator** | **Rationale** |
| Neighbourhood | POLAR 4 (a measure of participation in higher education in a given area)Home postcode of applicant is in POLAR 4 Q1 | The University has agreed challenging targets with the OfS to reduce the gap between POLAR 4 Q5:Q1.This indicator is currently used in the University’s contextual data process. |
| Neighbourhood | UK ACORN (a measure of socio-economic disadvantage in a given area.)Home postcode of applicant is in Category 4 described as 'financially stretched' or Category 5 described as 'urban adversity.'  | Having two complementary postcode indicators will provide greater robustness and transparency. This data are currently used the University’s contextual data process. ACORN data are also used by a number of universities in contextual admissions including University of Oxford, University of Liverpool and King’s College London. |
| Education | Average school performance Where the performance of the applicant’s school or college at GCSE (or KS4 equivalent level) is below the national averageWhere the performance of the applicant’s school or college at A-level (or KS5 equivalent level) is below the national average | For all students who are UK domiciled when they apply and who have been in the UK education system.These indicators are currently used in the University’s contextual data process.  |
| Individual | An applicant’s individual circumstances:* Care experienced (for more than 3 months)
* Refugee status
 | If an applicant has been in the care system for three months or more, this is an indicator that they have faced very high levels of disruption to their education. Care experienced is currently used in the University’s contextual data process.Refugees and asylum seekers are likely to have faced hardship, trauma and extreme personal circumstances. They may experience restricted access to education in their home country, have to learn English on arrival, and may present with lower qualifications and may have difficulties in providing evidence of achieved qualifications. |

3.3 There are a number of other indicators relating to individual characteristics/experiences the CDTFG would recommend including which include groups that are significantly under-represented in higher education, however reliable data are not currently available at the point of application. The Group suggests the University petition UCAS and the government to make available data to identify applicants who:

* are young carers;
* are estranged from their parents;
* have received FSM at secondary school;
* are seeking asylum;
* are from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller ethnic group[[6]](#footnote-7)

**Recommendation:** Approve the recommended indicators outlined in 3.2 for 2022 entry and that the University should review the indicators relating to individual characteristics/experiences as and when further data becomes available.

**4. Application and Nature of Contextual Offer**

4.1 The current process for the application and outcome of the contextual data process are summarised in Appendix 3. From E2022, the CDTFG recommends combining the indicators in a similar ‘stepped process’ where indicators based on individual characteristics/experiences are applied first followed by the educational indicators (school performance) and finally the postcode indicators (POLAR 4 Q1 and ACORN). This flagging process would:

* better align with the aims and principles outlined above (i.e. to mitigate the disadvantages and challenges faced by specific groups of learners, particularly those who have experienced educational disadvantage where potential might be obscured);
* provide flexibly for Academic Schools (i.e. to address specific challenges in access e.g. aspirational offer making, confirmation considerations).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Flag** | **Indicators** | **Admissions Stage** |
| **Offer Making** | **Confirmation** | **Clearing**  |
| WP++ | Care experienced;Refugee status; | Contextual offer, two grades lower than the standard offer | All courses to consider lower entry requirements | All courses to provide at least a 2 grade lower clearing offer |
| WP+ | Educational indicators (where average school/college performance at KS4/5 is below national average | Contextual offer, one grade lower than the standard offer  | All courses to consider lower entry requirements | All courses to offer a lower entry requirement |
| WP | POLAR 4 Q1 **Or** Area based indicator | Additional Consideration e.g.-Interview-Aspirational Offer |

4.2 This would require the creation of a third flag (in addition to the existing ‘WP’ and ‘WP+’ statuses) to enable admissions staff to determine which level of consideration is appropriate. For the purpose of this paper we have called this ‘WP++’. To give context to the size of the cohort of students who would be eligible for the WP++ flag, for 2020 entry, 43 students who were accepted identified as being care-experienced and 16 as having refugee status. It should also be noted that not all students who are made a lower offer will need this and many will meet or exceed the standard entry requirements.

4.3 It is also proposed to have a more consistent approach to aspirational offer-making in order to encourage more applications from WP students and retain students who would otherwise be rejected at the offer making stage and subsequently achieve the lower requirements offered during Clearing. This would also help to address the problem of ‘undermatch’, where students from less well-off backgrounds are in general more likely to attend les selective universities and courses than their exam results would qualify them for as highlighted in the Sutton Trust Report[[7]](#footnote-8). At APSG and IMG concerns were raised about specifying when aspirational offers would be made (e.g. to students whose predicted grades are within 2 grades for the entry requirements), in part due to the pressure this would create for conversion activities such as offer-holder days and interviews. There was support for giving Academic Schools the flexibility to use aspirational offers as part of their WP access strategies.

4.4 As is current practice, the contextual offer entry requirements will be published for each course. For information, an overview of the contextual data processes in place at other Russell Group institutions is provided in appendix 4.

4.5 The Task and Finish Group proposed that in order to be clear and transparent to students, the contextual offer should be applied to the bottom of any grade range. At both APSG and IMG there was no consensus on this proposal. Further work will take place with relevant programmes to ensure that the communication and application of a contextual offer is clear and transparent to students.

4.6 Students participating in our Access Manchester initiatives[[8]](#footnote-9) complete additional work or demonstrate additional commitment to receive their lower offer. For example, for students on MAP this includes (appendix 5):

* attending workshops to develop their academic skills (e.g. research, referencing);
* attending a ‘University Life Conference’, based around student-centred study using enquiry based learning (EBL);
* completing a 1,500 word academic assignment under the one to one guidance of an academic tutor, an academic member of staff or PhD researcher at the University.

Whilst undertaking these schemes further develop their preparedness for HE and students are supported in their transition into the University, it may appear ‘unfair’ that they are also completing additional work for their lower offer. In addition non-WP students applying to the University may also be eligible for a lower offer if, for example, they are undertaking an EPQ.

Currently MAP students for example are limited to a maximum two grade lower offer, so those eligible for a contextual offer are not able to receive this benefit. Based on analysis of our current MAP cohorts, around 40% (based on previous cohorts this would typically mean 70-80 students) would be eligible for a step 2 consideration thus taking their offer to 3 grades lower than the standard offer (MAP offer + contextual offer) and this would be the maximum grade reduction that an individual student could receive. Furthermore not all these students will need to make use of the lower offer to be accepted onto a course at Manchester (based on previous cohorts typically a third of MAP students need their 2-grade lower offer) and many will meet or exceed the University’s standard entry requirements. Analysis of MAP application trends shows that students can be clustered in specific subject areas.

4.7 The CDTFG also considered the setting of a minimum grade threshold for contextual offer making. When contextual lower offers were first introduced for 2019 entry, the issue of the impact on tariff was raised, however, the analysis undertaken showed this impact was minimal as the number of students entering the University with a lower offer was a relatively small proportion of the overall cohort. At TLG there was support for a consistent minimum threshold for contextual offers and a recommendation that this should be BBC i.e. a student would not receive a contextual offer below this threshold. It was also recognised that this would only apply to a small number of programmes given the high tariff starting point of most UoM entry requirements.

**Recommendation:** Approve the following changes to the application and nature of the contextual offer:

* The introduction of a third flag to identify students who have experienced significant barriers and reducing their offers by two grades;
* Ensure students who receive a lower offer through the successful completion of the Manchester Access Programme are also able to benefit from a contextual offer where they are eligible for this as outlined in 4.6.
* Having a consistent minimum grade threshold of BBC i.e. a contextual offer would not be made below this threshold.

**5. Other considerations**

5.1 The CDTFG identified a number of other aspects to consider in relation to the use of contextual data in admissions which are outlined in the points below.

5.2 At both APSG and IMG colleagues raised the importance of ensuring appropriate support is in place for students entering through the University’s access initiatives. It was acknowledged that for many WP students, these support needs will be similar to the support that all students making the transition to HE will benefit from and particularly over the next few years given the education disruption students will have experienced. It was also recognised that the support needs of students from underrepresented backgrounds can be complex due to intersectional disadvantage. This is a focus of the Institute of Teaching and Learning and the work taking place to address the degree awarding gap. In 2020/21 a targeted Peer Support Network was established to support students entering the University through its access initiatives[[9]](#footnote-10) which has been positively received by students. The Student Experience Programme (SEP) emerging models for Teaching Learning and Student Experience and Campus Life include a focus on the student success aspects of the University’s widening participation strategy.

5.3 In discussing grade flexibility at level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) there was support for looking at this from subject areas with the highest requirements, in particular Medicine and Dentistry as currently the requirements can be a barrier to some students, for example those who have been in care, progressing to the next stage of the selection process.

5.4 Universities which have extended their contextual offer consideration to students who have participated in a range of outreach programmes are more likely to have a centralised admissions system where staff can look for this information within the UCAS personal statement of reference. At IMG colleagues agreed that unless there was a robust and automatic way to identify such students, it would not be possible to extend the contextual data eligibility to these students. Also, students who have participated in such programmes from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be identified through our contextual data processes.

**Members of PRC are asked to approve the recommendations set out in this paper:**

* Adopting a revised set of principles to underpin the use of contextual data which are guided by a moral imperative to do the right thing rather than being number and target-driven;
* Use of the indicators outlined in 3.2 for 2022 entry with a review of the indicators relating to individual characteristics/experiences as and when further data becomes available;
* Targeting contextual offers in a focused and strategic way at applicants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who have faced the greatest barriers and educational disruption (refugee status, care-leavers etc.) and making a 2-grade lower offer to this small group of students;
* Ensuring our processes do not disadvantaged some groups of WP students, particularly those who have already undertaken additional work through an access initiative. This recommendation would mean that a small group of students could be awarded a 3-grade reduction.
* Setting a threshold of BBC i.e. a contextual offer would not be lower than BBC and the maximum grade reduction an individual student could receive is 3 grades.
* Flexibility for Academic Schools to make contextual considerations in relation to level 2 qualifications, particularly for our most selective courses where high GCSE requirements can sometimes be a barrier to students progressing through the selection process.

**Appendix 1**

**Contextual Data Task and Finish Group**

**Terms of Reference**

**(July 2020)**

1. **Background**

The University has been using contextual data and information in its undergraduate admissions process since 2011 as part of the holistic assessment of an applicant’s prior attainment and potential in the context of their individual circumstances. Since 2018/19 (E2019), the contextual WP Plus Flag has been used to highlight students who could be made a differential offer. Contextual data differential offers are usually one grade lower than the standard offer.

The proposed changes to the UCAS application form including the introduction of new supplementary questions (e.g. estranged students, young carers), the availability of new datasets (e.g. UCAS’ multiple equality measure (MEM)), the potential for a change to a post-qualification admissions system and the increasing diversity of qualifications across the UK provides an opportunity for the University review the data and indicators available.

It is proposed that the Group puts forward recommendations to be implemented for 2021-2022 admissions cycle (i.e. entry in 2022). There are more universities using contextual, particularly higher tariff institutions as a way of meeting their access targets with the OfS. The following research was undertaken by the University of Exeter and provides a useful summary of practice across several institutions. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/543e665de4b0fbb2b140b291/t/5b4457fb70a6ade52de65f16/1531205646268/Research+into+the+use+of+contextualised+admissions\_University+of+Exeter+report.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/543e665de4b0fbb2b140b291/t/5b4457fb70a6ade52de65f16/1531205646268/Research%2Binto%2Bthe%2Buse%2Bof%2Bcontextualised%2Badmissions_University%2Bof%2BExeter%2Breport.pdf)

1. **Terms of Reference**

The Group will produce a report outlining the rationale and purpose of contextual admissions with recommendations for the development of the University’s contextual admissions processes. In order to do this the Group will:

1. Review the rationale and purpose of contextualisation in the admissions process and the nature of disadvantage seeking to address (i.e. likelihood of HE progression; life experiences and opportunities; educational);
2. Consider the evaluation and impact of existing contextual admissions processes on increasing access to HE and UoM specifically and the outcomes of students once in HE;
3. Consider the range of data and indicators available, and their benefits and limitations:
* individual-level information
* school level information
* area level information
1. Have an overview of the data and indicators used across the sector, particularly within comparator institutions and drawing on international practice as relevant;
2. Review the flagging process used within the University’s contextual data process;
3. Consider the potential impact of any changes to the contextual indicators or flagging process on the number and proportion of applicants who would receive the lower contextual offer;
4. Consider the potential impact of any changes to the contextual indicators or flagging process on the University’s ability to meet its commitment to reduce the gap between POLAR4 Q5:Q1 entrants with the Office for Students (OfS);
5. Consider the implications of any changes to UK admissions such as the introduction of a post-qualification admission system on the use of contextual data;
6. Propose options for the contextual data indicators and flagging methodology, to be considered by the Access and Participation Strategy Group (APSG) and Intake Management Group (IMG) before seeking approval from the University’s Planning and Resource Committee (PRC).

**3. Frequency of meetings**

The Group will meet 3 – 4 times.

**4. Members**

The Group is chaired by Prof Steven Jones, Director of the Manchester Institute of Education. Core membership is listed below. Additional colleagues may be invited to attend meetings to support specific agenda items.

1. Jessica Carroll, Student Representative
2. Mandy Crow, Student Recruitment and Widening Participation Manager
3. Adam Danquah, Division of Psychology & Mental Health (FBMH)
4. Fiona Eccles, Student Admissions Manager (SAABI, DSE)
5. Lorena Fernandez sanchez, Recruitment And Admissions Manager (SEED, HUMS)
6. Ben Goldblum, Admissions Manager (FMBH)
7. Louise Hussain, Student Admissions Officer (SAABI, DSE)
8. Stephanie Lee, Head of Widening Participation
9. Nasser Latif, Teaching and Learning Manager (TLSD, DSE)
10. Fiona Lynch, Teaching, Learning and Student Support Office (Student Life) (FSE)
11. Liam Shields, Senior Lecture, Politics (SoSS HUMS)

**Appendix 2**

**Appendix 3**

Current process for the application of contextual indicators for E2021:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Current Process** | **Indicators** | **Admissions Stage** |
| **Offer Making** | **Confirmation** | **Clearing**  |
| Step 1:**WP Flag** | POLAR 4 Q1 **Or** ACORN (categories 4 or 5) | Additional Consideration e.g.-Personal statement-Interview-Aspirational Offer[[10]](#footnote-11) | WP flagged students are prioritised during the confirmation process. | Some courses offer a one grade lower Clearing offer where students meet the WP flag. |
| Step 2**WP Plus Flag** | WP Flag and educational indicator**Or**Care experienced | Contextual offer, one grade lower than the standard offer[[11]](#footnote-12) |

**Appendix 4**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **University** | **Contextual Admissions (Based on 2018 entry information)**  | **2020 entry changes**  | **2021 entry changes/additions**  |
| [Birmingham](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/requirements/contextual-offer.aspx) | Uses contextual data to make an alternative offer, (typically **one grade lower**) alongside a standard offer. Students may be eligible for a contextual offer where:* They have spent time in local authority care OR
* Live and study in England in a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR quintile 1) and attend a school with below average attainment.
 | Criteria has been updated to:* You’ve spent time in local authority care
* Your home postcode is in a low progression to higher education neighbourhood.
 | Criteria same as previous year +Up to 20% of interview places for Medicine (five-year MBChB) are available to applicants who are allocated to a contextual category. Have introduce an ‘[Attainment Offer](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/requirements/your-birmingham-offer.aspx)’ which is not WP focused: You may receive an Attainment Offer in recognition of your previous academic attainment, your strong academic trajectory, and the overall quality of your application to Birmingham. An Attainment Offer is subject to achieving no less than a grade C in any of your three A level subjects. Attainment Offers will only apply if you select the University of Birmingham as your firm choice, and we fully expect students in receipt of an Attainment Offer to continue to work towards achieving the best possible grades they can. |
| [Bristol](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/entry-requirements-qualifications/contextual-offers/) | Considers students for a contextual offer if they meet one or more of the following: * Attended an aspiring school or college (In England, aspiring state schools and colleges are defined as those which fall in the bottom 40 per cent for either progression to higher education, or average attainment)
* Live in an area with low progression to HE
* Completed a University of Bristol outreach programme
* Spent time in care

**Contextual offers are usually two grades lower** than the typical offer.  |  | Added to the criteria for 2021 entry:[You attend a Venturers Trust secondary school](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/entry-requirements-qualifications/contextual-offers/#dropdown-heading0-4) - In honour of our commitment to being co-sponsors of the Venturers Multi-Academy Trust in Bristol |
| [Exeter](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/applications/policy/#context) | Consider 3 main elements of contextual data from the UCAS application form. This information will be used together with publicly available datasets to provide the following information:• home address assessed using the HEFCE POLAR3 LPN data• looked after or in care during schooling• performance of the school or college where the applicant takes A-levels or equivalent qualifications.Where there is clear evidence that contextual factors have affected performance and achievement, and where the applicant is able to demonstrate motivation and potential to achieve, the University will consider this as part of its holistic assessment of the application and take it into account when deciding whether to make an offer and the level of offer to be made.  | Postcode indicator has been updated to POLAR4.  | Criteria updated:* All applicants from state schools who live in an area with low participation rates in higher education (POLAR 4 LPN Q1/2). Pupils can check eligibility using the postcode checker available on the [Office for Students website](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/)
* All applicants from state schools with more than 60% or at least 450 pupils who live in areas of deprivation (IMD Q1/Q2). [View a list of Eligible schools](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/entryrequirements/contextual/).
* Applicants we define as either a Care Leaver, a young person who has been looked after by the local authority for more than 13 weeks since they were 14, including some time at age 16 or 17, or Care Experienced any student who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life
* Applicants engaged on specific progression programmes run or managed by the University of Exeter
* Applicants seeking asylum, have limited leave to remain, are under ‘humanitarian protection’ or have refugee status
 |
| [King's College London](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/policies-and-guidance) | King’s may use contextual data to holistically assess an applicant’s future potential to succeed. Contextual data includes: the ACORN index, school performance data and if the applicant is defined as a ‘care leaver’. Certain programmes may use contextual data to highlight if the application requires further consideration by an Admissions Manager or to assess if the applicant should receive a differential offer. Contextual data may also be used in order to differentiate between similar highly qualified candidates in order to assess which has the greatest academic potential for the course. <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/assets/PDF/admissions/Undergraduate-Admissions-Policy.pdf> |  | Contextual offers are made to those applicants whose personal circumstances may have impeded their academic progress. Contextual offers are **two A level grades\* (or equivalent) lower** than the entry requirements found on the [course pages](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/search/courses). Applicants must meet at least one of the following criteria outlined below in order to be considered for a contextual offer. Have participated in one of King’s College London’s widening participation programmes: * Discover Chemistry Summer School
* KCL Sutton Trust Summer School
* KPlus
* Realising Opportunities

Live in one of the following postcodes: * [ACORN](https://acorn.caci.co.uk/): the applicant lives in an area which has a higher classification (quintiles 4 and 5)
* [IMD](http://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/imd/2019): the applicant lives in an area which has a higher level of deprivation (decile 1 – 4 or quintiles 1-2)
* [POLAR](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/): the applicant lives in an area where the proportion of young people progressing to higher education is low (quintile 1 and 2)

Have the following experience: * [Care-Experienced](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/widening-participation/care-leavers/index)
 |
| [Leeds](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/homepage/82/access_to_leeds) | The University of Leeds uses contextual information to identify applicants for an Access to Leeds offer. An Access to Leeds offer is typically **two A-level** **grades (or equivalent) below the standard offer**. Students must place Leeds as their firm choice and complete the Access to Leeds scheme which consists of a launch event on campus and the Access to Leeds module (consisting of a study skills and academic element.) The University of Leeds has a target to admit 820 students through the Access to Leeds scheme for 2018 entry. Students needs to meet two of the following criteria:* from a household with an annual income of £25,000 or below **OR** in receipt of 16-19 Bursary Fund or Discretionary Learner Support with an income threshold of £25,000 **OR** in receipt of free school meals during your GCSE studies
* parents did not go to university
* attend a school achieving below the national average at GCSE (Attainment 8 score)
* studies have been disrupted by circumstances in your personal, social or domestic life
* live in an area with low progression to higher education
* live or grew up in public care

Students who don’t meet the criteria for Access to Leeds but live in an area of low participation may still be given priority.  | The University aims to admit 900 students through its Access to Leeds programme.  | Contextual offers are made via Access to Leeds In addition, if you don't meet the criteria for Access to Leeds, but you live in a neighbourhood where there is low participation in higher education, we may be able to give priority to your application. This means our admissions staff will take this into account when considering whether to make you an offer. You don't need to apply: if you are from a Low Participation Neighbourhood we will automatically give your application additional consideration. |
| [Newcastle](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/applications-offers/decisions) |  | If you are eligible, the Admissions Team may use this information in the following ways:* to make you a contextual offer, which will  be **two grades lower** **than the typical offer** for the Programme to which you have applied;
* when considering applicants who have not quite met the entry criteria stated in their offer at Confirmation.

You may be eligible to receive a contextual offer if the following applies to you:* The postcode that you have provided as your home address is defined as a neighbourhood where the proportion of students going into higher education is low (determined by POLAR4 data, specifically quintiles 1 and 2).
* You have been looked after or in care for more than three months
 |  |
| [Nottingham](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/applying/ourpolicies.aspx) | The University of Nottingham recognises that educational and personal circumstances can affect achievement. These may include:• being from a less advantaged area or family environment in terms of income, education and experience• being from a school or college where high academic achievement is not the norm• having day-to-day family or work responsibilities• being a care leaver, refugee or from a travelling community.Where admissions staff judge an applicant’s circumstances to have adversely affected achievement, they will give preference where possible. For some courses, **this may mean making an offer one grade lower than the standard offer**.  | We make contextual offers to students whose personal circumstances may have restricted achievement at school or college. These offers are usually **one grade lower than the entry requirements** on our course pages.To qualify for a contextual offer, you must have Home/UK fee status and have attended a state school.One of the following must also apply:* You live in an area where people are less likely to go to university.
* You have taken part in a summer school with Sutton Trust, UNIQ, Realising Opportunities or Nottingham Potential
* You have refugee status from the Home Office
* You have spent more than three months in care – in this situation, you do not need to have attended a state school
 |  |
| [Queen Mary](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/entry/contextualised-admissions/index.html) | Admissions selectors may consider the following information when making a selection decision:• evidence that the applicant has been in care for at least 13 weeks during the period of their secondary education. • information about the proportion of young people from the applicant’s neighbourhood who normally progress to HE. • information about the performance of the applicant’s school and/or college In taking contextual data and information into account, the admissions selector may make one of the following decisions:• to make a standard offer where the academic profile might otherwise have fallen marginally short of the threshold;• to make a lower offer, which would typically be no more than **one grade lower than the standard offe**r;• to take this information into account at results confirmation. |  | Criteria updated to include:* Participation in specific activities in preparation for your application will be considered. Currently these include the Bridge the Gap scheme for admission to Medicine and Dentistry, the Sutton Trust Pathways to Law scheme for admission to Law, the Stepping Stones scheme for admission to Geography and the Realising Opportunities (RO) scheme for all programmes.

Specific to Medicine and Dentistry:If you are applying to the School of Medicine and Dentistry, the following information will be considered when determining whether you should be invited for interview:* documentary evidence that you have been in care for at least 13 weeks during your secondary schooling; and/or
* participation in the Bridge the Gap scheme.
 |
| [Southampton](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/studentadmin/admissions/admissions-policies/contextual-admissions.page) | The following contextual information will be taken into consideration and a student will be flagged if they:• have been in care or looked after for three months or more• have a home postcode in a LPN area• have attended a lower-performing school/collegeDepending on the course the student wishes to apply for, they could be:• given additional consideration and will not be rejected solely on the basis of their predicted (or actual) grades;• guaranteed an interview (or similar additional opportunity dependent upon the discipline);• **made an offer which is lower than the typical offer for that programme**. | Has extended the eligibility criteria to include:Participation in a recognised outreach or widening participation programme. These are University of Southampton programmes and activities that have:* been targeted at students/schools meeting our widening participation criteria
* required an application to attend/participate
* involved either sustained involvement over an extended period or a shorter, but more intense period of contact.
 | Criteria updated to:The following contextual information will be taken into consideration and a student will be flagged if they meet one of the following (two for Medicine):a. You have been in care or looked after for three months or moreb. Your home postcode is in a Low Participation Neighbourhoodc. First generation to Higher Education and you attended a lower-performing school/colleg**e**If you are the first generation in your family to enter Higher Education and you attended a lower-performing school/college. A lower-performing school/college is where their performance places it in quintile 1 for average QCA points per A level student (or equivalent) (in England, Wales or Northern Ireland) as identified by the Department for Education dataset and provided to the University via UCAS.**d. Participation in a recognised outreach or widening participation programme**These are University of Southampton programmes and activities that have:* been targeted at students/schools meeting our widening participation criteria
* required an application to attend/participate
* involved either sustained involvement over an extended period or a shorter, but more intense period of contact

**e. Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), deciles 1 and 2**If you live in a postcode assigned to decile 1 or 2 according to The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s’ English Index of Deprivation. The Government [website](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019-mapping-resources) (.gov.uk) provides more information about the Index of Multiple Deprivation including an easy-to-use [postcode mapper](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019-mapping-resources%22%20%5Cl%20%22indices-of-deprivation-2019-explorer-postcode-mapper).**f. UCAT Bursary (Medicine only)**Eligible for the UCAT Bursary. |
| [Warwick](https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/contextualoffers/) | Students who meet two of the following criteria will be made an offer one or two grades below the standard university offer (to a minimum of BBB):• attended a school where average performance of students achieving 5 A\*-C GCSE including English and Mathematics was below the national average – and/or attended a school/college with below the national average performance at Key Stage 5• has spent time in local authority care• attended a school with above the national average entitlement/eligibility to Free School Meals• lives in a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR 3, quintile 1) or an area which has a high level of deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 0-20%). | Performance of KS5 institution is defined as: The applicant completed their Key Stage 5 qualifications at a school/college where performance at Key Stage 5 falls within the bottom 40%The applicant completed their Key Stage 4 qualifications at a school with above the national average entitlement/eligibility to Free School Meals (national average is 14.1%).Students eligible for a contextual offer will be made a conditional offer with reduced academic conditions.Foundation years are not included as part of the contextual admissions process. Students who have completed Realising Opportunities, Pathways to Law, Pathways to Banking and Finance will get an offer up to 2 A level grades below standard offer.  | Students who meet two of the following criteria will be made an offer **one or two grades below the standard university offer (to a minimum of BBB).****a)** The applicant completed their Key Stage 4 qualifications at a school where average performance of students at Key Stage 4 Level was below the national average**and/or**The applicant completed their Key Stage 5 qualifications at a school/college where performance at Key Stage 5 falls within the bottom 40%.**b)** The applicant completed their Key Stage 4 qualifications at a school with above the national average entitlement/eligibility to Free School Meals (national average is **15.9%**).**c)** The applicant lives in a neighbourhood where the proportion of students going into higher education is low (POLAR 4, quintile 1) or an area which has a high level of deprivation ([Index of Multiple Deprivation](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015) [IMD], 0-20%). |
| York |  | Contextual offers are a **reduced offer of one or two grades** below our typical entry requirements for UK undergraduate students. You could be eligible if any of the following applies to you:* you’ve spent time in local authority care (such as foster or residential care)
* you've taken part in a York outreach programme (Next Step York; Realising Opportunities; Pathways to Medicine; Pathways to STEM; Accents, attitudes and identity (free online course); Exploring everyday chemistry (free online course)
* you live in a UK area with low progression to university.

<https://www.york.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/entry/contextual-offers/> | In additional the university has the York Access Scheme <https://www.york.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/how-to-apply/york-access-scheme/> which uses information not provided on the UCAS application form. Students can receive an offer up to two grades lower. To be eligible to apply for the York Access Scheme, you must:* be a Home applicant to an undergraduate programme at the University of York
* have attended a UK state-funded school at KS4 (secondary) and KS5 (sixth form or college).

You must also meet at least one of the following criteria:* Attended a school that performed below the national average\*
* Was entitled to Free School Meals, Pupil Premium funding or discretionary school/college payments related to financial hardship
* Have a disability or long-term health condition and are in receipt of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
* From a background underrepresented in higher education, as follows:
* British Black background (such as Black or Black British - Caribbean, Black or Black British - African or Other Black background)
* Asian or Asian British background (such as Asian or Asian British - Indian, Asian or Asian British - Pakistani, Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi)
* Mixed or multiple ethnicity background (such as White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian)
* Gypsy or Traveller background
 |

**Appendix 5**

**Manchester Access Programme: Programme Summary and Content**

The aim of MAP is to support entry to The University of Manchester, or another research-intensive university, through the completion of a portfolio of work demonstrating specific knowledge and skills.

The main element of the programme is the academic assignment, a 1500 word essay that is between A-level and first year undergraduate standard. It is a compulsory part of MAP and is intended to develop a student’s ability to research, understand, apply and analyse information: key skills required to be successful at a leading research intensive university. It also gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their potential and show that they have the skills and talent to be successful university students.

The assignment is assessed against seven learning outcomes and actions:

* Knowledge – the extent to which the student has demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the topic;
* Academic Style - the use of appropriate academic style and academic vocabulary;
* Structure – the presentation of information in a logical way (introduction, main body and conclusion) with appropriate transitions to new ideas;
* Research - the ability to research the assignment topic using a range of appropriate resources;
* Referencing – the extent to which the assignment is accurately cited and referenced;
* Presentation – the use of appropriate headings and subheadings, tables/figures/diagrams. Font and sizes are consistent throughout the assignment;
* Conclusion – the extent to which the student has summarised relevant information with concluding comments and original ideas and reflections.

Students are supported by an Academic Tutor, an academic member of staff or a postgraduate student at the University. Students have two 45 minute discussions with their Academic Tutor during the programme. The first discussion is to develop a title for the academic assignment and to set goals; the second discussion is to receive feedback on a draft assignment, review progress and to discuss how to improve the assignment before the final submission.

The MAP academic assignment process is overseen by the MAP Academic Board, with membership including an experienced MAP academic tutor from each of the three University Faculties.

1. The government launched a consultation on introducing a post-qualification admissions system in January 2021. The University is currently preparing a response to this consultation. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/post-qualification-admissions-in-higher-education-proposed-changes> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. under the age of 21 on 1st September of the year of entry [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. There was acknowledgement at the Access and Participation Strategy Group that international students also faced disadvantage, but that this was beyond the remit of the Contextual Data Task and Finish Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2020/uuk-fair-admissions-review.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/contextual-admissions/map/eligibility/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Data show that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils have the lowest attainment in compulsory schooling of all ethnic groups, which in turn impacts their access to higher education <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Reforming-University-Admissions-PQA.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <http://www.access.manchester.ac.uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://medium.com/library-peer-network/library-peer-network-eff884fddd17> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. For E2021, Academic Schools are encouraged to make aspirational offers to WP flagged students whose predicted grades are one grade below the standard offer (if they do not meet the WP+ criteria and therefore are not eligible for a lower offer) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. a one-grade lower offer to WP+ flagged students applying to courses with a ABB minimum entry requirement. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)