**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER**

**Planning Office**

**Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment**

**AUTHORS:** Andy Peet, Mandy Crow and Stephanie Lee

**SUMMARY:** The following report looks at the impact on performance of students being awarded places at the University of Manchester by way of a lower contextual offer in 2019. There is currently no Contextual Offer flag in the student records system and therefore it is a manual process to identify students in receipt of a lower offer.

It was proposed to look at a test course in the first instance as a proof of concept to assess the impact the lower contextual offer may potentially have on a student’s attainment and to assess any difficulties in obtaining the data before further work would be carried out. LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws was proposed due to the relatively large size of the course and the high numbers of enrolled WP, WP Plus, and MAP students. For 2019 entry, applicants with BTEC qualifications were also considered.

**Student Profile & Contextual Offer Eligibility**

There were 239 entrants in 2019 to the LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws undergraduate degree programme based on 1st December census dataset. Of these, 148 are UK nationals. This report will focus on UK nationals as a comparator set.

Of the 148 UK nationals registered on the course in 2019, nine were registered MAP students and 36 had a WP Plus flag. The remaining 103 students had neither a MAP flag nor WP Plus Flag.

The standard entry offer for LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws is 144 points, equivalent to AAA at A Level. MAP students are eligible for an offer equivalent to ABB (128 tariff points) and WP plus students (exc. MAP) may be made an offer equivalent to AAB (136 tariff points). There is also a route on to the course via Pathways to Law. Students completing the Pathways to Law programme are eligible for a one grade reduction on their entry offer, up to a total of a two grade reduction on the standard entry requirements.

Eighteen students, including six WP Plus students, had either missing or insufficient data to allow a determination of a contextual lower offer. Thirteen of the students had nothing entered in the Marvin String or Entry Offer Grade fields to allow the determination of a contextual offer. Five students had an incomplete offer profile. For students with missing or incomplete data, it was assumed a lower contextual offer equivalent to one grade for students with a WP Plus flag had been made. For students without a MAP or WP Plus flag, a standard offer was assumed. All MAP and WP Plus students on LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws with an identifiable offer had been made a lower contextual offer. This data was checked directly with the SoSS admissions team to confirm validity.

There are ten Pathways to Law students in the 2019 dataset. Three had a MAP flag; five were also WP Plus students and eligible for a two grade reduction and were therefore included in the MAP/WP Plus & P2L group. Two students were not MAP or WP Plus and were not eligible for any additional grade reduction. The breakdown of students on the LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 UK entrant profile

Figure 2: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 UK National entrant profile

**Entry Tariffs**

The entry tariffs for the 2019 LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws students are shown in table 1. In order to compare like-for-like entry tariffs, only the top three grades for each student are recorded below. Seven students in the dataset had more than three entry qualifications listed and would therefore have a higher entry tariff than shown. Six of these students are in the Standard Entrants group. One was in the P2L or WP Plus group, having four BTEC distinctions.

Table 1: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 entry tariff The standard entry offer for LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws is 144 points, equivalent to AAA at A Level. AAB is equivalent to 136 tariff points and ABB to 128 tariff points.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Entry Tariff** | **MAP/ WP Plus & P2L**  | **WP Plus or P2L** | **Standard Entrant** | **Total** |
| **<128** | 1 |   | 3 | **4** |
| **128 - 135** | 6 | 2 | 2 | **10** |
| **136 - 143** | 5 | 14 | 23 | **42** |
| **144 - 152** | 2 | 14 | 51 | **67** |
| **153 - 160** |   | 1 | 17 | **18** |
| **161 - 168** |   | 2 | 4 | **6** |
| **Unknown** |   |   | 1 | **1** |
| **Total** | **14** | **33** | **101** | **148** |

Based on the top three entry qualifications, the majority of MAP/ WP Plus & P2L students are in the 128 – 135 and 136 - 143 point tariff bands. The average entry tariff for MAP/ WP Plus & P2L students on LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws in 2019 is 133.1.

WP Plus or P2L students are mostly grouped in the 136 – 143 and 144 -152 tariff bands. The average entry tariff for this group is 142.8.

The Standard Entrants on the course are mostly grouped in the 144 – 152 tariff band. However, there are students distributed across the various tariff bands. The average entry tariff for Standard Entrants is 146.38 points.

The data in table 1 also shows that seven of the fourteen MAP/ WP Plus & P2L students (50%) required the reduction of two grades in order to be accepted on to the course. Three would have required at least one grade drop, and 1 student in 2019 would have met the standard entry tariff of 144 points. One student entered with 120 tariff points; they had previously completed a foundation course in addition to A Levels.

For the WP Plus or P2L students, fourteen (42.4%) required the one grade reduction in order to be accepted on the course. Two students required a reduction equivalent to two grades. The remaining seventeen WP Plus or P2L students met or exceeded the standard AAA offer and therefore did not require the grade reduction.

A summary of the number of students meeting their offer conditions is shown in table 2. This is based on the total tariff available (e.g. all published grades) compared to the required entry tariff for each student.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Entrant Type** | **Met Offer Conditions** | **Did Not Meet Offer Conditions** | **Unknown** | **% Met Offer (Exc. Unk)** |
| **MAP/WP Plus & P2L** | 13 | 1 |   | 92.9% |
| **WP Plus/P2L** | 31 | 2 |   | 93.9% |
| **Standard Entrant** | 73 | 27 | 1 | 73.0% |
| **Grand Total** | **116** | **31** | **1** | **78.9%** |

Table 2: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 students meeting entry requirements

The data shows 73 (73.0%) of the standard entrant students met or exceeded their entry requirements. However, the data also shows that 27 students (27.0%) were accepted onto the course with tariff scores below the standard entry requirements. This compares to 92.9% of MAP/WP Plus & P2L and WP Plus/P2L (93.9%) students who met or exceeded their offer conditions. It’s possible that some of these students may have received additional tariff points from supplementary qualifications and activities which were not visible in the data.

**1st Year Attainment**

Although it’s too early to assess the final degree attainment of the 2019 cohort, it is possible to look at the students’ attainment at the end of their first year. The first year marks for the 2019 LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws students are shown in the form of a box and whisker plot in Figure 2.

 

Figure 2: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 1st Year attainment

The data presented in Figure 2 suggests that there is a significant amount of overlap in attainment between the three populations. MAP/WP Plus & P2L students had a lower average attainment (63.46%) than the Standard Entrant students (65.70%). The WP Plus or P2L entrants had the lowest average 1st year marks of the three groups (61.24%). All three groups demonstrated a significant spread across the attainment marks. One WP Plus or P2L student and five Standard Entrants had either zero attainment data or hadn’t completed the first year so were removed from this section of the report.

Eleven of fourteen MAP/WP Plus & P2L students (78.5%) achieved at least 60% in their first year. This compares to 22 of 32 WP Plus students (68.8%) and 78 of 96 Standard Entrants (81.25%).

Since 2019, Law has accepted BTEC qualifications for entry on to the course. Whilst the majority of the 2019 entrants on LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws had previously studied A Levels (73.6%), there was a significant number of students who had previously studied BTEC or a combination of BTEC and A Level. The majority of these students are in the WP Plus/P2L group. In order to compare the effect of the lower contextual offer on a like-for-like basis, Figure 3 shows the 1st attainment profile for A Level entrants only.



Figure 3: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 1st Year attainment for A Level entrants only

When the effect of different entry qualification types is removed, a more distinct pattern is evident with Standard Entrant students (n=73) displaying the highest levels of attainment at the end of their first year with an average attainment of 66.4%. WP Plus or P2L students (n=18) had the second highest levels of attainment with an average of 65.4%, and MAP/WP Plus & P2L (n=13) had an average attainment of 63.8%.

There is a significant amount of overlap in attainment across the three groups, with almost all students achieving at least 60% and meeting the academic requirements for the course in their first year. However the data does suggest a relationship between grades/tariff on entry and attainment.

It does have to be noted that this is only looking at a first year attainment for a single cohort for one year in one subject discipline. The students in this dataset will also likely have been subject to a significant amount of disruption linked to Covid19 and the University closure in March 2020. The implementation of the ‘no detriment’ policy may also serve to skew some of the data. Also, the University’s recent Access and Participation Plan: Review of Performance[[1]](#footnote-1) highlighted that the inter-relationship between student characteristics and outcomes needs further analysis – and WP student attainment data should also be considered in the context of the attainment/degree awarding gap between different student groups at the University.

**Attainment by Tariff Band**

The first year attainment of the 2019 LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws by tariff bands (Top three grades) is shown in table 3.



Table 3: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 1st year attainment by entry tariff

Table 3: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 average 1st year attainment by entry tariff

The data shows a very mixed picture in terms of average attainment levels across the different tariff bands with a broad correlation between attainment and entry tariff, particularly amongst the standard entrants. Overall, the Standard Entrant students achieve the highest average performance across each of the tariff bands.

This data may suggest that MAP and WP Plus students have slightly lower overall average attainment when compared to Standard Entrant students. However, the level of difference wasn’t sufficient to stop them achieving the required academic standards for the course at the end of the first year.

**Continuation**

The number and proportion of students continuing on to the second year of study is shown in Table 4. The continuation rate is calculated according to the number of 2019 entrant students registered in their second year of the of LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws on Dec 1st 2020.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Registered** | **Continued** | **Continuation Rate** |
| **MAP/WP Plus & P2L** | 14 | 14 | 100.0% |
| **WP Plus/P2L** | 33 | 31 | 93.9% |
| **Standard Entrants** | 101 | 95 | 94.1% |
| **Total** | **148** | **140** | **94.6%** |

Table 4: LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws 2019/20 Yr1 – Yr2 continuation rates

The overall continuation rate of UK national students on to the second year of LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws was 94.6%. The data shows 100% of MAP/WP Plus & P2L students (14) continued on to the second year of their course. This compares to 93.9% of WP Plus/P2L students and 94.1% of Standard Entrants. Again, the impact of the disruption linked to Covid19 may affect the data.

**Conclusion**

In the case of the MAP and WP Plus students on 2019 LLB (Hons) Bachelor of Laws, a high proportion of the students required a reduced offer of at least one grade in order to be accepted on to the course and as such, the lower contextual offer was instrumental to them being able to study Law at UoM.

However, despite these students having a lower entry tariff than the standard entrants, their first year attainment suggests they are able to meet the academic requirements of the course. A number of the students in the MAP and WP Plus groups outperformed students in the Standard Entrant group. In addition, the MAP/WP Plus & P2L students had a higher continuation rate than the standard entrants, with 100% progressing to their second year.

**Recommendation**

The extrapolation of this type of analysis currently poses a number of challenges. Even though this report only looks at the attainment of UK nationals entrants on one course in one year, it still took a number of days to compile the dataset. Determining a student’s entry tariff and whether they were made a contextually lower offer was a manual process and in some cases, very difficult to determine. Detailed knowledge of the entry requirements of each course and the different pathways to entry was required to conclude if a contextual offer had been made and whether the student had met their entry requirements. In order to effectively scale up this work, a flag or indicator would allow quick identification of students accepted onto a course via the lower contextual offer. This would also enable better tracking and evaluation of outcomes across the student journey, i.e. from first year attainment, continuation, final degree award, and graduate outcomes. This data is due to be fed in to an overall view of a student’s journey through the University via the Student 360 project. Having a contextual offers flag will allow quick identification of students with lower entry requirements at various points and allow comparison to their peers. This would allow a fuller understanding of whether a lower contextual offer caused some students to be disadvantaged.

If a contextual offer flag could be developed, it would be possible to expand the analysis to look at the impact of the lower offer over a range of disciplines and faculties and analyse a student’s attainment across multiple years and levels as the data becomes available. With the expansion of the data set, it would be possible to conduct a more in-depth statistical analysis of the data using regression analysis and use a range of variables to ensure that firm conclusions can be drawn.

**Discussion**

Do members of TLG have any feedback on the data or recommendation for a flag/indicator to enable identification and evaluation of outcomes for students who have been accepted on to a course with lower entry requirements.

1. Planning and Resources Committee (PRC), June 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)