

Contextual Admissions: Key updates for supporting your students

Presented by University of Sheffield and University of Liverpool



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ACCESS / From the
RUSSELL
GROUP

Overview

Part One: What is Contextual Admissions

- APPs and EORR
- Why do they exist
- The different measures

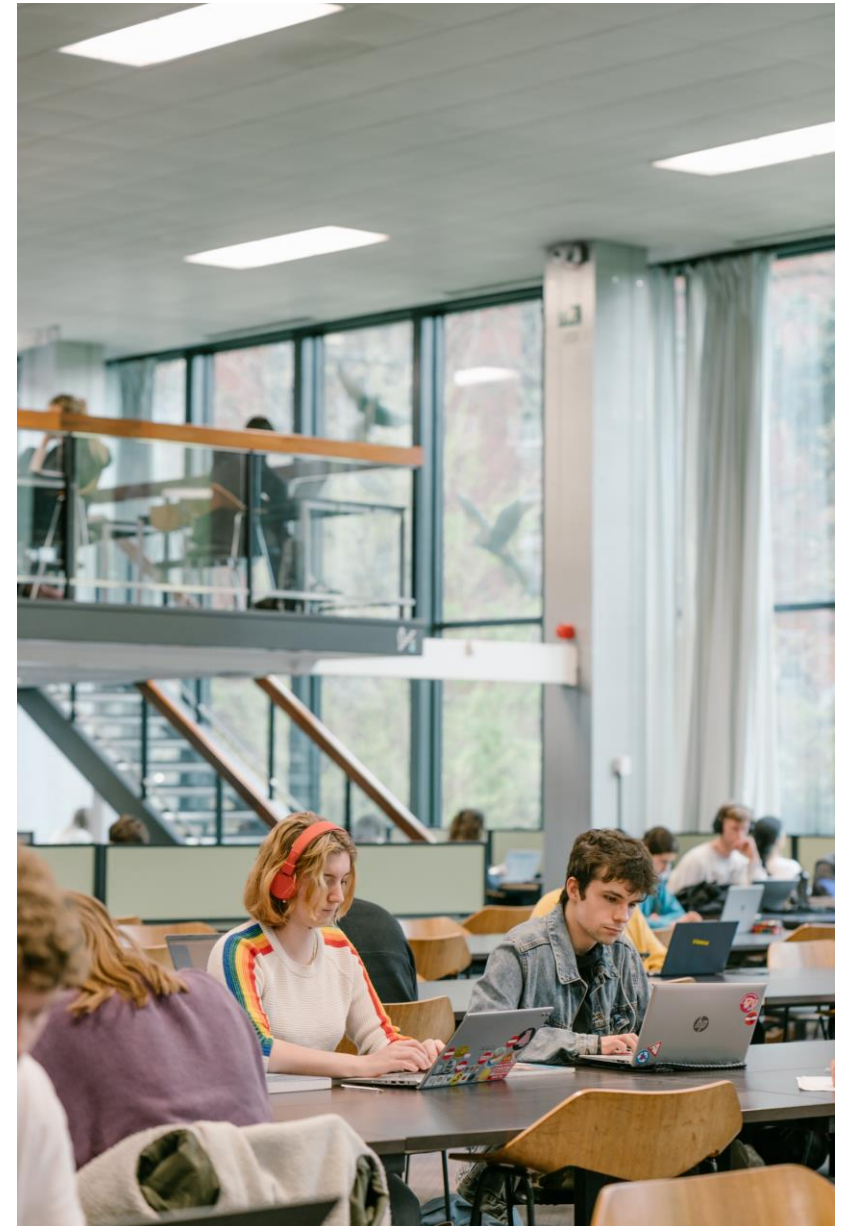
Part Two: How Russell Group Universities use contextual offers

- What criteria is used
- What support could students qualify for
- Examples from Sheffield and Liverpool

Part Three: Student Outcomes: Impact of contextual offers

- Real student's perspective
- Graduate success and outcomes

Part Four: How can you support your students?



Part One

What is Contextual Admissions?



Access and Participation Plans (APPs)

What is the Office for Students' approach to equality of opportunity?

Distribution of DfE funding, setting of national targets and sign off and monitoring of plans and impact.

Access and Participation Plan's (Full life cycle)

- Interventions to challenge risks to equality of opportunity
- Measure and evaluate impact across student life-cycle
- 4-year mandatory plan + monitoring = register as HEI + charge fees (submitted to the Office for Students)
- Local and institutional context (Universities prioritise their target groups) - **This is subject to change during each APP period**
- Universities follow these plans to ensure that underrepresented students are appropriately supported

Current APP period is 2025 – 2029

APPs must be published on university webpages for transparency so you can explore the main target groups each institution wishes to prioritise

Equality of Opportunity Risks register (EORR)

- Lower application and offer rates
- Lack of sufficient personal support and quality IAG
- Lack of immediate network and sense of belonging
- Lower levels of academic confidence and attainment
- Lack of sufficient, quality, academic support
- Financial Pressures

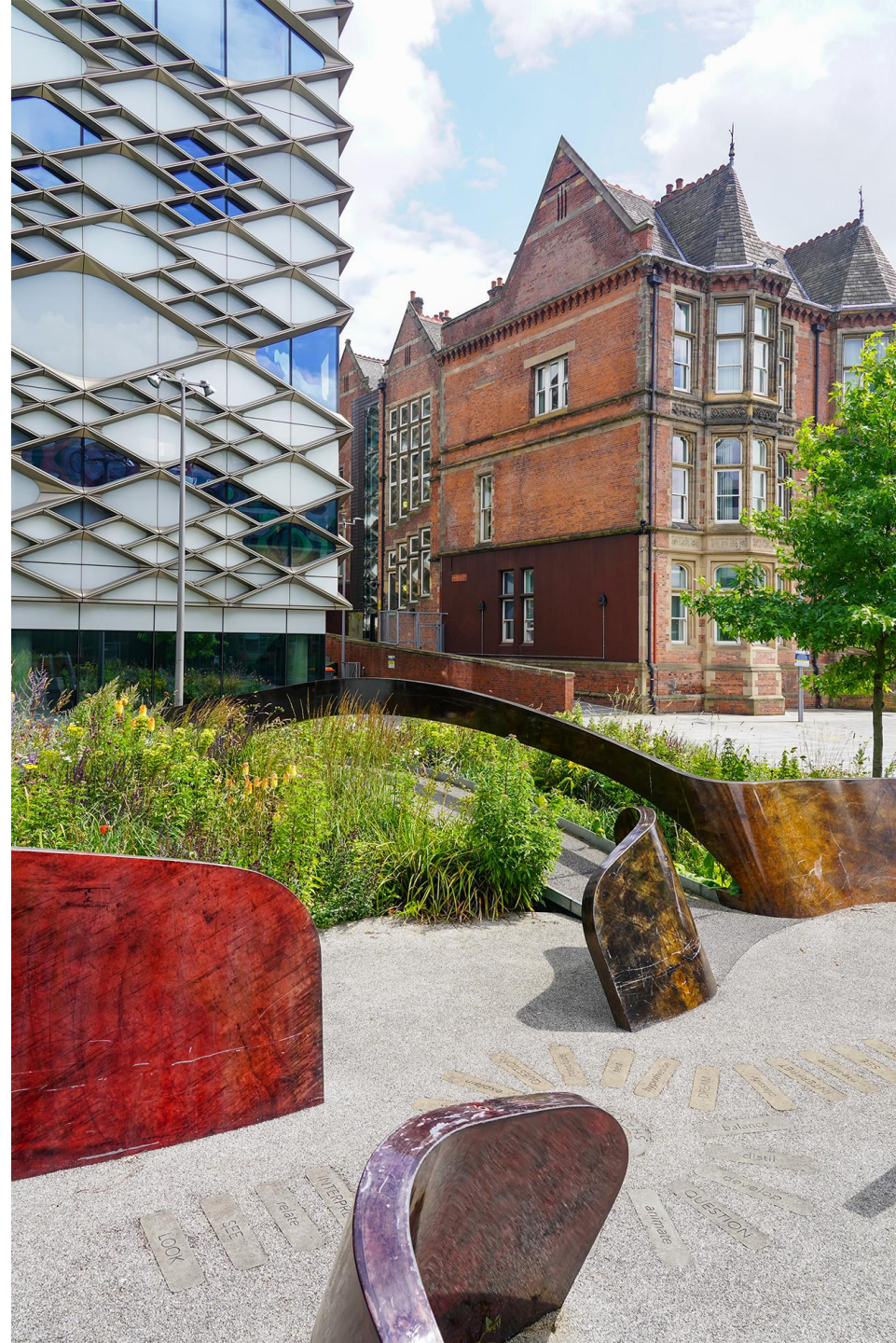
Why do contextual offers exist?

- Widen access to University
- Encourage students that would not necessarily consider University as an option

Groups of students qualifying are less likely to:

- Be made an offer
- Continue their studies
- Attain a top result

However, Universities acknowledge the potential these students have!



What does it all mean...?



POLAR – Participation of Local Areas

- How likely young people (18-19 year olds) are to participate in Higher Education in the UK
- Based on students' postcodes
- Five Groups (Quintiles)
 - Quintile 1 – lowest participation
 - Quintile 5 – highest participation

No longer updated – universities may no longer use POLAR



What does it all mean...?



IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation

- Broad themes including income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment
- Based on small, standardised geographical areas
- Rank 1 has the highest deprivation and therefore likely to have the most disadvantaged students



What does it all mean...?

Other measures

- **SIMD** – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
- **UCAS MEM** – Multiple Equality Measure
- **FSM** – Free School Meals for children from low-income households (income below 60% of median net disposable income of UK population)
- **Care Experienced** – been in care system before 18th birthday



Part Two

How Russell Group Universities use contextual offers



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

Geographic Disadvantage

Focus on areas with low progression into Higher Education, and socio-economic disadvantage



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

Care Experience

Emphasis on supporting care leavers and those with care experience



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

School Performance

Consideration of the performance and characteristics of the applicant's school or college



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

Free School Meals (FSM)

A recurring criterion across Russell Group universities



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

Special Circumstances

Recognition of various personal and socio-economic challenges, such as refugee status, estrangement and caring responsibilities



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Criteria

Outreach programme participation

Value placed on participation in recognized outreach and progression programmes



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Offer

Grade Reductions

- Between 1-3 grades below standard offer
- Some courses may not offer grade reductions



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Offer

Additional Consideration of application

Could be at interview or during personal statement review. Could also be across application, especially if university doesn't make reduced offers



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Offer

Guaranteed interviews

Might be combined with, or replace, other contextual offers (i.e. guaranteed interview and/or grade reduction)



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Offer

Support programmes

Universities may provide study modules, events, support and additional consideration for scholarships (e.g. Access to Leeds)



How do contextual offers work across the Russell Group?

Offer

Adjusted Entry

Some specific courses could change their entry requirements, at different levels too (i.e. A-Level changes, GCSE changes)



Examples



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Liverpool Contextual Offers:

- POLAR4 Quintile 1 (E.2025 + 2026) or IMD deciles 1-2 (E.2026+)
- Care Experienced
- Liverpool Scholars Programme for Merseyside students
- Up to two-grade reduction from standard offer
- Additional consideration and prioritisation if narrowly missed terms of offer
- Prioritised for admission to Foundation Programme if made a changed course offer



Liverpool Contextual Offers – Clinical Areas:

Medicine

- Lower GCSE requirements
- Possible flexibility on UCAT and MMI performance

Veterinary

- Extra consideration and possible reduced offers

Dentistry

- Extra consideration during selection for, and after, interviews



Targeting Criteria at Sheffield for Contextual Admissions Policies

Who is eligible for Access+?

If you're applying to Sheffield University you may be eligible for support if:

- You live in a neighbourhood with a low rate of participation in higher education
- You are care experienced
- You are a **care leaver***
- You are **estranged* from your family**
- You are a **carer***
- You have parenting responsibilities
- You're entitled to free school meals
- You're a forced migrant

* **Enhanced bursaries** (*non-repayable funds for each year of study*)



What support are students eligible for at Sheffield?

Visiting Sheffield University

- Access+ Travel Bursary - we'll reimburse you if you visit us for open days

Contextual Offers

- Typically, up to two grades below the standard A Level entry requirements for your course and you will need to have made Sheffield your Firm choice with UCAS

Transition Support for Access+ students

- Access Live sessions - expert online help and guidance sessions to support students on their journey to higher education
- Opportunity to apply for an Access+ Mentor (Summer)
- Introduction to SEDI (Student Experience, Diversity and Inclusion) Team

A dedicated team on hand to answer questions (access@sheffield.ac.uk)

Access to Sheffield (Sustained Programmes)

- 5 x pathways covering different subject content (**Law, Arts Humanities & Social Sciences, STEM, Medicine and Dentistry**)
- 18 x months during Y12 and Y13
- Welcome event, Introduction/team building day, degree level subject taster sessions, a residential summer school, study support, UCAS and personal statement support and student finance information sessions
- Find out what it is really like to study these subjects
- Meet our current undergraduates and try out student life
- Commitment to the programmes can result in the opportunity to qualify for an adjusted offer of up to 3 grades lower than standard requirement - contextual offer



Access to Sheffield & Sutton Trust: National Summer Schools

- Residential Summer School - 4 x days, 3 x nights
- Open to students from all across the UK - all costs covered by UoS
- Staying in our Halls of Residence at the University of Sheffield
- Students have to meet GCSEs and access criteria to be eligible
- Experience a range of academic and social activities
- Develop valuable transferable skills for university life and employment
- Increase your confidence in preparation for uni
- Work with our current undergraduate students & find out about university life
- Students are eligible for contextual offer
- Additional support throughout Year 13

Access to Sheffield Summer School: Study skills based
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/schools/programmes/summer-school>

Sutton Trust Summer School: Subject strands - Engineering, Biosciences, Architecture and English & History
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/schools/partnerships/sutton-trust>



Part Three

Student Outcomes: Impact of contextual offers



Contextual admissions (performance data) for Sheffield

Continuation Statistics

Full-Time First Degree Entrants

HE Entry Year	Count
2020	75
2019	50
2018	60
Total	190

Full-Time First Degree Entrants by Continuation Status

HE Entry Year	% Continuing at HE provider	% Dormant or writing-up	% Gained intended award or higher	% Gained other award	% Left with no award
2020	93.5	2.6			3.9
2019	94.0	2.0			4.0
2018	93.4	3.3			3.3
Total	93.6	2.7			3.7

Latest National Continuation Rate: 89.3% (Entered HE in 2020)
 Latest National Continuation Rate for TUNDRA Q1 students: 89.6% (Entered in 2020)



Degree Attainment

Full-Time First Degree Entrants

Qualification Year	Count
2021	40
2020	40
2019	30
Total	110

Full-Time First Degree Entrants by Degree Classification

Qualification Year	% 1st Class Honours	% 2:1 Class Honours	% 2:2 Class Honours	% 3rd Class Honours
2019	35.5	51.6	12.9	0.0
2020	44.7	50.0	5.3	0.0
2021	33.3	64.1	2.6	0.0
Total	38.0	55.6	6.5	0.0

Latest national rate of students achieving a 1st or 2:1: 78.1% (Qualification Year 2021)
 Latest national rate of TUNDRA Q1 students achieving a 1st or 2:1: 75.3% (Qualification Year 2021)

Rachel

Medicine; Former Liverpool Scholar

*“I’ve always dreamed of being a doctor. I always came into school early and stayed late, working hard towards my goal, whilst also working 2 jobs and volunteering at a local hospital. **Despite my efforts, without my reduced offer from the Scholar’s programme, I wouldn’t be the student doctor that I am today.**”*

My chemistry exam paper was leaked, and although I had always been an A student, I ended up with a B. I felt as though all my hard work was for nothing. **Without my reduced offer, my journey would have ended here. Even though I was always confident in my grades and thought I wouldn’t need the reduced offer, unexpected things happen and can change everything.**”*

*That September I became a medical student, and I owe everything I have achieved since then to my reduced offer. **Being from a deprived area, the reduced offer acknowledged that I didn’t have the same time, funds, or resources as other students across the country, and that I still deserved to go to medical school just as much as them.** I am now a 3rd year student doctor at the University of Liverpool, and I have achieved so much since starting university, some things I would never have even dreamed of. **My reduced offer gave me a chance to prove myself, which was all I needed.**”*



Part Four

How you can support your students



How do universities make decisions? (Sheffield-specific example)

1. Programme participants shared with central admissions team
2. UCAS applications received by central admissions team (now featuring Access declaration questions)
3. Students tagged based on their contextual criteria

4. Decisions processed by admissions teams, applying contextual policies
5. Students issued with their offer
6. Access+ transition support
7. Additional consideration during confirmation process



How you can help us to help your students

Help students understand the benefits of declaring their circumstances

- Students may need reassurance on how and why their data will be used
- Students may not always be aware of the range of support they may be eligible for – encourage them to visit university webpages to explore this further

Support students with self-identification

- Students don't always identify themselves as "underrepresented" and may need help understanding their circumstances
- Being aware of the commonly used targeting criteria can help you support students who are likely to be eligible
- Universities understand students have different lived experiences (consider disrupted studies form)

