

Admissions glossary

Access and Participation Plan (or APP)

An access and participation plan is a document produced by a university which sets out how the university plans on improving equality of opportunity for groups of students who are underrepresented. The document should explain how students are being supported to access university, succeed whilst at university and progress to an appropriate destination afterwards.

Alternative offer

If admissions staff are unable to offer a place on the course the student has applied for, they may make an alternative offer for a different course often related closely to the course they applied for. The alternative offer may also include a foundation year.

Clearing

Clearing is how universities and colleges fill any places they still have on their courses. Students might use Clearing if they have missed the conditions of their firm and insurance offers, have changed their mind about a university or course or even because they have achieved higher exam grades than expected and are looking to 'trade up'.

Conditional offer

The offer of a place is conditional on the student's achievement in a set of qualifications.

Confirmed place

If a student has met the conditions of their offer, their place will be confirmed and made unconditional (meaning they have a place on the course).

Contextual admissions policy

Contextual admissions policies are used by universities to consider applicants in a more holistic way. Universities which use these policies may take a wider range of different factors into consideration when making admissions decisions. Factors considered may include the rate of higher education participation in the area in which the applicant resides, the performance and socio-economic circumstances of the applicant's school or college and whether the applicant has been in care. Admissions selectors may also consider whether an applicant has participated in a university outreach programme. Applicants who are "flagged" as contextual may be made a lower A level (or equivalent) grade offer than would otherwise be made for their course. They might benefit from certain other adjustments, such as a prioritisation for interview or the entitlement to apply for certain foundation year courses.

Deferred entry

Applicants who apply for deferred entry are requesting a one year postponement in their start date. For example, a deferred application submitted in autumn 2022 would be considered for entry in 2024.

Firm choice

The firm choice is the offer the student accepts as their first choice.

Gathered field

A gathered field is when all applications for a course are considered together. This means that admissions staff wait until the closing date to start assessing applications.

Insurance choice

This is an offer a student accepts as their second choice – just in case they do not meet the conditions of their firm offer.

Outreach

Outreach activity by universities and colleges helps to raise awareness, aspirations and attainment among groups of students who may be underrepresented at universities. For example, summer schools that give a taste of university life, homework clubs, mentoring programmes and subject taster sessions.

POLAR4

POLAR (Participation of Local Areas), published by the Office for Students, is a classification showing the participation of young people in higher education. POLAR4 is the most recent classification available. It classifies areas in the UK into quintiles according to the proportion of young people who participate in higher education. It is used to inform targeting of widening participation activities and contextual admissions policies.

UCAS Extra

UCAS Extra lets students who are not holding any offers apply for other courses until the end of June.

Unconditional offer

An unconditional offer means the student is guaranteed a place and does not require any further examination results.

Unsuccessful application

An unsuccessful application means the university has decided not to offer the student a place on the course.

Widening participation

Widening participation aims to broaden the range of students who attend university so that they are representative of the wider population. It includes a range of initiatives designed to remove the barriers to higher education, including financial barriers, that students from lower income and other under-represented backgrounds face.

Withdrawn application

A withdrawn application means either the student or the university has withdrawn a course choice. For example, the university may withdraw if a student has not attended a required interview.