

# Equity in Admissions: Understanding Contextual Offers

Presented by

University of Bristol and University of Sheffield



# What are contextual offers?

A range of widening participation strategies:

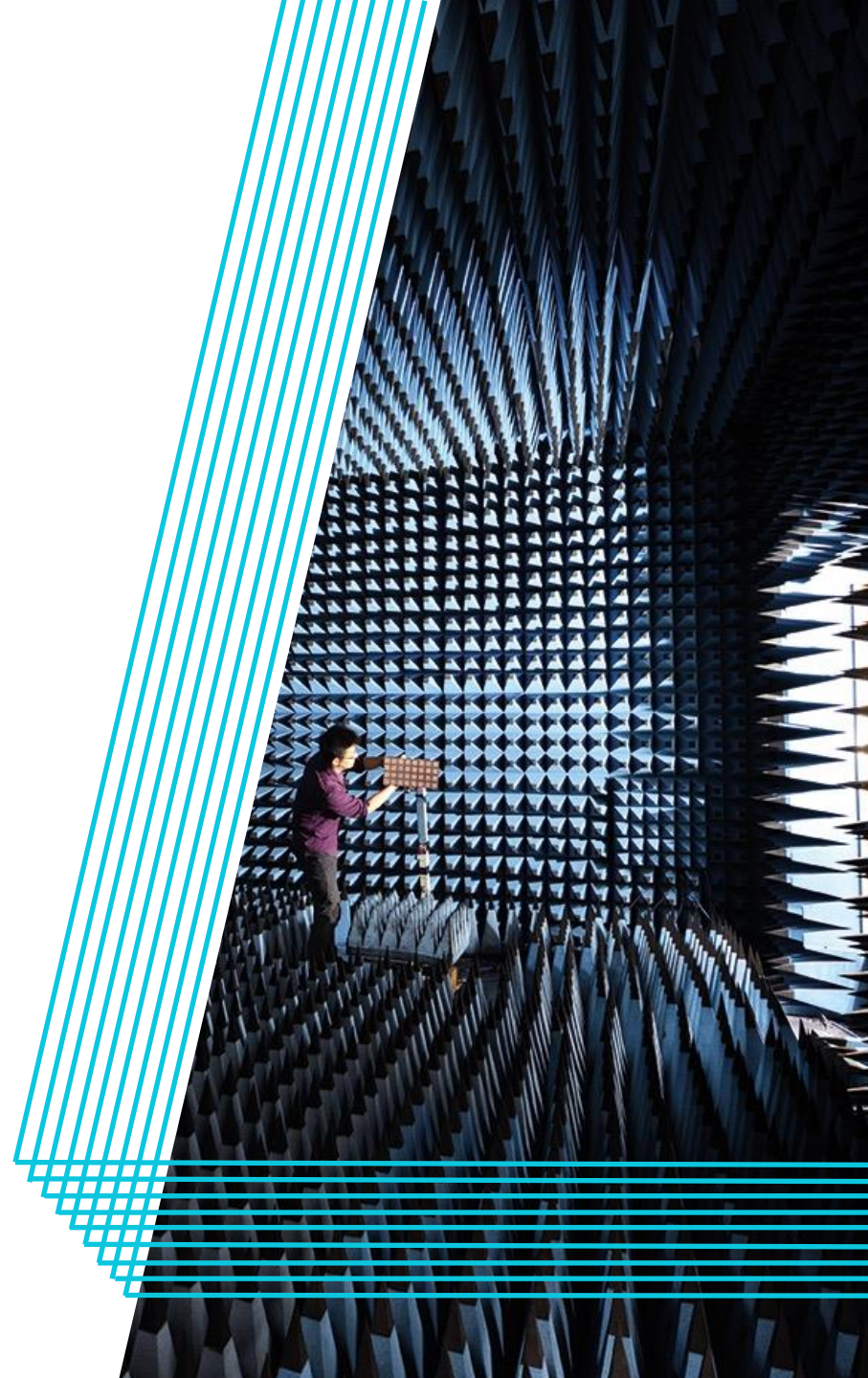
- Special consideration of an application
- An offer on a place on a foundation year
- A course with additional support
- A guaranteed offer or interview
- A lower offer (typically one or two grades lower)



# Why do contextual offers exist?

Groups of students qualifying are less likely to:

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



# How do students in receipt of contextual offers go on to perform?

- 90.9% contextual offers students received a 2:1 or 1st
- 91.1% of standard offer recipients
  
- 94.7% of contextual offer students continue their studies
- 95.4% of standard offer holders



# How to know if your students qualify?

- Different universities will use different targeting criteria, depending on the context of their institution. These are usually outlined within Access webpages.
- However, criteria will still be limited to a selection of circumstances which apply to the student groups who are most underrepresented in higher education.

These are commonly students who:

- Live in low participation neighbourhoods
- Live in high deprivation neighbourhoods
- Have a low household income
- Are care experienced
- Are carers
- Are estranged from their parents
- Are eligible for free school meals
- Have parenting responsibilities
- Are forced migrants
- Are service children
- Are mature students
- Are the first in their family to attend HE
- Attend a school where academic performance is lower than the national average
- Have a disability or mental health condition
- Have participated in a widening access programme

# Targeting Criteria at Sheffield for Contextual Admissions Policies

- Students participating in our post-16 widening access programmes
- Students eligible for our Access+ support:
  - Low participation neighbourhoods
  - Care experienced
  - Care leavers
  - Carers
  - Estranged
  - Free School Meals (FSM)
  - Parenting responsibilities
  - Forced migrants
- Students eligible for additional consideration:
  - Mature
  - Disrupted studies
- Students taking additional qualifications



# Bristol contextual offer criteria:

- Attending an Aspiring State School or College
- Living in an area of low participation\*
- Having completed a UoB outreach programme
- Having spent time in care
- Receiving or (having received) Free School Meals

\*quintiles 1 and 2 in POLAR4



## 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





# What support are students eligible for at Sheffield?

Students eligible for Access+ can benefit from:

- Contextual Offer
- Online help and guidance sessions
- Transition mentoring
- Access+ travel bursary
- Dedicated support team
- IT and equipment bursary
- Transition to current student support services

Encourage your students to explore university webpages to compare the support that different universities offer.



# Bristol additional support:

- Outreach programmes pre-application
  - Access to Bristol – for local students
  - Next Step Bristol – for Black and Asian students
  - Summer schools
- Contextual of Guaranteed offers
- Funding support
- Accommodation support
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Peer mentors



# How do universities make decisions?

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



# Changes to targeting criteria

- Universities are currently transitioning to a new Access and Participation Plan (APP) period
- APPs are written by all universities to explain how they intend to support students who are underrepresented in higher education
- Plans also highlight the main target groups that are underrepresented at each institution and as a result, which groups will be prioritised for support

- As universities move into their new plan period in 2024/2025 or 2025/2026, we may see slight changes to priority target groups
- APPs must be published on university webpages for transparency so you can explore the main target groups each institution wishes to prioritise
- Any changes are likely to be gradual with lower priority groups phased out over the coming years

# Any questions?

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