

ADVANCING  
ACCESS

24 leading universities  
working together with  
schools and colleges

# Introducing Advancing Access



# Coming up...

- What is Advancing Access?
- Our web resources
- Virtual conferences
- Video case studies
- Further advice – blogs, bursaries, contextual admissions



# What is Advancing Access?

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- Advancing Access focuses on teacher CPD. Our target audience is teachers and careers advisors, not young people
- As a result of our interventions, we hope that teachers and advisors will be in a stronger position to better support the progression of their students to leading universities
- We began as a mainly online project, and as such we are able to transcend geographical boundaries. Many schools are not located near a Russell Group university, and may not be able to access their outreach work easily
- Increasingly however we do more work 'on the ground' in schools and colleges
- We are funded by university "Widening Participation" teams and have a WP focus



# The Russell Group

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**University of Birmingham**  
**University of Bristol**  
**University of Cambridge**  
**Cardiff University**  
**Durham University**  
**University of Edinburgh**  
**University of Exeter**  
**University of Glasgow**  
**Imperial College London**  
**King's College London**  
**University of Leeds**  
**University of Liverpool**

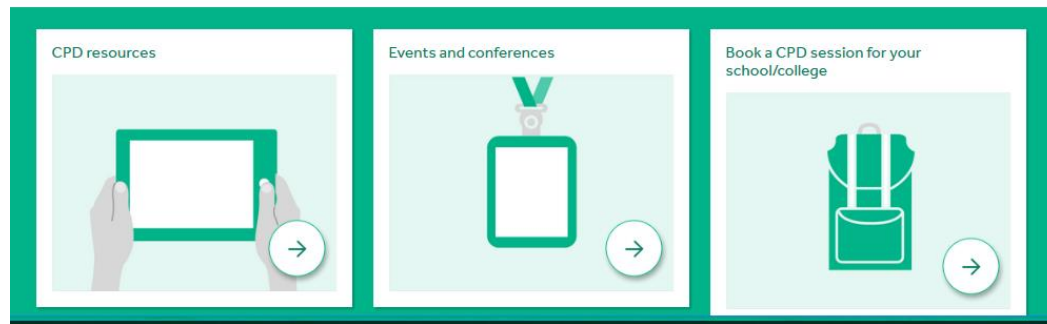
**University of Manchester**  
**Newcastle University**  
**University of Nottingham**  
**University of Oxford**  
**Queen's University Belfast**  
**University of Sheffield**  
**University of Southampton**  
**University College London**  
**University of Warwick**  
**University of York**  
**London School of Economics**  
**Queen Mary University of London**

# The Advancing Access website

Since 2016 we've been continually improving our free website to support teachers and careers advisers.



Advancing Access provides a variety of [CPD resources](#), [online events](#) and [offline conferences](#) for teachers and advisers to help them support students' progression to leading universities. We can deliver [free CPD sessions in your school or college](#). Our information, advice and guidance - developed by our [partnership of 24 leading universities](#) - will help you to support young people making their key stage 4, key stage 5 and university choices.



# Strands of CPD

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- How do I help my students choose a university and course?
- How do I help my students apply to university?
- How do admissions processes work?
- How do I help my students make the right choices for post-16 study?



## Each strand contains...

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- A presentation for peer to peer CPD
- An interactive guidebook
- Quick reference sheets
- Worksheets for staff reflection and evaluation
- Activities for use with learners
- Video case studies





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### A 'gathered field' approach

Many courses operate a gathered field approach in order to consider all applicants together. This means that admissions staff wait until the closing date to start assessing applications for a course, which can lead to a long wait for students who apply early.

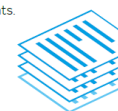
Other courses may assess applications as they arrive and begin making admissions decisions earlier in the process.

Regardless of the approach taken to assess applications, all students applying by the deadline will be given equal consideration and assessed against the same criteria as all other applicants.

Leading universities often receive many more applications than the number of places available.

As a result, many highly selective universities are unable to make offers to all those who are predicted to achieve (or have already achieved) the basic entry requirements. It takes time to consider the additional information, including:

- additional achievements
- information within the personal statement and academic reference
- contextual information
- results from tests or interviews.



Admissions processes vary across leading universities and between courses.

The processes have been designed to ensure that:

- all applicants are considered equally and fairly
- there is an assessment of each applicant's talent, potential and ability to succeed on the course
- they admit the best students from the many thousands who apply.



## Consideration of contextual information

### Leading universities are likely to consider contextual data.

They want to identify candidates with the most talent, ability and potential to excel on their courses, whatever their social or educational background. Although qualifications and predicted grades are a key source of information about academic ability, universities take a range of other factors into account in order to understand the applicant's achievements in context.

In the past, this focused on health issues or particular family circumstances that may have affected an applicant's ability to fully demonstrate their potential. For over a decade, this has been extended by many leading universities to include the social and educational background of applicants, recognising that this too can impact on their ability to demonstrate aptitude for study.



The use of contextual information is informed by the latest research and guidance showing the impact of socio-economic factors on a student's academic success. This is provided by UCAS<sup>®</sup>, the Higher Education Funding Council for England<sup>®</sup>, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions<sup>®</sup>, the Sutton Trust<sup>®</sup> and institutional evaluations. A recent overview of this research is available in a Supporting Professionalism in Admissions<sup>®</sup> report, Contextual admissions: Examining the evidence (2013)<sup>®</sup>. This report highlights research showing that students from state schools and colleges get better degree classifications than those from independent schools with equivalent entry qualifications. It also highlights that students admitted using contextual data succeed when in higher education, overall, achieving as well as other students. The Russell Group's report, Opening Doors<sup>®</sup>, explores the root causes of under-representation of students from poorer backgrounds at leading universities.





## Academic references

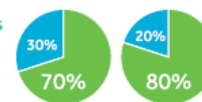
### Top tips for writing an academic reference


- The reference should be honest and provide admissions staff with a fair and accurate picture of the applicant.
- It should include an explanation if the student's past exam results do not reflect current performance and predicted achievement at A-level (or equivalent).
- It should include an explanation if any special or mitigating circumstances (such as caring responsibilities, difficult family circumstances or illness) have affected actual or predicted grades and how the student has overcome any difficulties.
- If it is your school policy not to offer AS-subjects, include this information in any reference.
- It should place the student's performance in context, not just about saying whether an applicant is good, but also providing information about your school and its context.
- It should include evidence that the candidate has researched the area, and is well-suited to the subject.
- It should build a picture of the student, including their attitude and approach to study.
- It should include details of any widening participation initiatives the student has been involved in.
- It should include any information about the student's performance at the school.
- You should keep a copy of the reference for your records and monitoring success.


## Developing your students' skills and knowledge prior to application

To make a strong application your students need to develop their subject knowledge, interests and relevant experience. The balance between subject knowledge, skills and experience will depend on which universities and courses they are applying for.

In general, around 70% to 80% of a personal statement should relate directly to the courses applied for and focus on academic interests, knowledge and ability.



Knowledge of the subject 

Transferrable skills 

Work experience 

### Knowledge of the subject

## Frequently used tests

Universities	Tests				
	BMAT	LNAT	STEP	TSA	UKCAT
University of Birmingham					✓
University of Bristol		✓	*		✓
University of Cambridge	✓		✓	✓	
Cardiff University					✓
Durham University		✓			✓
University of Edinburgh					✓
University of Exeter					✓
University of Glasgow		✓			✓
Imperial College London	✓		*		
King's College London		✓	*		✓
University of Leeds	✓				
University of Liverpool					✓
London School of Economics and Political Science					
University of Manchester					✓
Newcastle University					✓
University of Nottingham		✓	*		✓
University of Oxford	✓	✓		✓	
Queen Mary University of London					✓

Knowledge of the subject and become further interested in that subject. They should be able to express their views and opinions in that subject.

Resources to help build your students' knowledge. Here are our top sources:



Keep up to date with the latest developments and thinking in your subject on different topic areas (for example, science) on

Read certain publications that are then made available to students to share their views on these latest developments.

Go right into the subject. For example, psychology and those interested in science could read New Scientist, a good website, so a subscription is not always

Check out reading lists for some first-year courses. This material is available at university level.

Check out what provide subject resources. Future Learn has a list of resources with articles and revision guides for most subjects. Developed online learning programmes that are available about particular subjects. Future Learn has a list

4. **Step one** – Under 'Courses I am considering', write down the courses that you are thinking of applying for.  
**Step two** – Under 'Decision-making criteria', list the decision-making criteria you have marked as important or very important in question 3.  
**Step three** – Give each university and course a mark out of five, awarding the highest score (5) to those that fully meet your criteria and the lowest score (1) to those that don't (example below).  
**Step four** – Add up the marks for each university and course.

	Courses I am considering				
Decision-making criteria	Mathematics at University A	Mathematics and Statistics at University B	Mathematics at University C	Mathematics at University D	Mathematics at University E
Location	5	1	3	5	3

	Courses I am considering				
Decision-making criteria					
Score					

After using the decision-making framework you will have a clearer idea of what you want to do. Use our action plan to help put your decision into practice. When drawing up an action plan, it is important to set yourself realistic and measurable targets. A commonly used technique for action planning is to ask yourself if your objectives are **SMART**.

- S** Be **Specific** about what you want to achieve. Do not be ambiguous and communicate clearly.
- M** Ensure your result is **Measurable**. Have a clearly defined outcome and ensure this is measurable.
- A** Make sure it is **Appropriate**. Is it an **Achievable** outcome?
- R** Check that it's **Realistic**. It must be possible when taking account of time, ability and money.
- T** Make sure it is **Time-restricted**. Set yourself an achievable timeframe, deadlines and milestones to check your progress.

An example of a **SMART** action plan is:

Objective	Tasks	Help needed	Potential barriers to completing the task	Evidence of achieving the task	Completion or review date
I want to study a joint honours degree in French and politics but do not know where to study it	Research the universities that offer French and politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the UCAS website and its course finder</li> <li>• Look at individual university websites</li> <li>• Review subject league tables</li> <li>• Use Unistats to compare courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough time to do this research at the same time as studying for my A-levels</li> <li>• I do not know where to start</li> </ul>	A list of universities that offer French and Politics	3 June
I want to study a joint honours degree in French and politics but do not know where to study it	Find out which universities I would like to go to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend open days</li> <li>• Speak to current students</li> <li>• Look at the university websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No open days available in the time period</li> <li>• Do not know any current students at the university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of five universities I would like to attend</li> <li>• A list of decision-making criteria that is important to me when choosing a university</li> </ul>	15 September

For more information on **SMART** planning see the [University of Leeds' website](#) 

## A guide to leading universities' use of contextual information

Contextual information is the additional data, such as school performance data and socio-economic markers, universities use to provide context for a student's university application and achievements. Universities also use this information when selecting students for contextual admissions schemes that provide a range of activities to help students prepare for their transition to university study.

Each of our university partners has provided a statement on how they currently use contextual information below.

### University of Birmingham

Students from state schools and colleges in the West Midlands applying to the Access to

## Results day – new decisions

For those with new decisions to make, there are four situations:

- Adjustment
- Near miss
- Alternative offer
- Clearing.



Supporting students through the applications process / 11

## Admissions glossary

### Access agreement

An access agreement is a document setting out how a university or college charging higher fees intends to safeguard and promote fair access to higher education through its outreach work, access initiatives and financial support. It also includes targets and milestones set by the university or college itself.

### Adjustment

Adjustment provides an opportunity for those who meet and exceed the conditions of their firm choice to reconsider where and what to study. Students can look for a course at a different provider while still holding their confirmed place.

### 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

### 1. Session overview

This presentation will help teachers and advisers who support the UCAS applications process in their school or college. It has been designed to support the professional development of teachers and advisers and should form part of peer-to-peer training sessions.

In addition to providing essential information, the presentation contains a series of optional activities to encourage your colleagues to engage in discussion and share their ideas and experiences of best practice.

#### Learning outcomes

By the end of this session, colleagues will have:

- a deeper understanding of the decisions students need to make after universities have responded to their applications
- identified ways to support students' decision-making processes
- considered ways to improve the support they provide on results day.

### 2. Session plan

This session plan should be used alongside the PowerPoint presentation.

**Supporting students through the application process** and Advancing Access guidebook, **How do admissions processes work?** .

Indicative timings are provided as a guide only.

### 3. Resources

# Virtual conferences

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We host at least one virtual conference per year for teachers and careers advisers. Our events feature:

- Interactive webinars
- A virtual stall for all 24 Russell Group universities
- Staff room chat

Keep an eye on our website for details of our events

If you sign up for an account on the website we'll email you to let you know when events are taking place.





Lobby ▶ Webinar Hall ▶ **Exhibition Hall** ▼ Staff Room ▶ Help ▶

## Welcome to the Exhibition Hall

Each of the 24 universities in the Russell Group has a virtual stand staffed by one or two representatives. This means you have access to staff from all 24 universities right now. Visit the individual stands and ask your questions using the text-based chat boxes. More than 30 members of staff are waiting to answer your questions.

There is also a range of materials to download on topics such as entry requirements, summer schools, outreach programmes, scholarships and bursaries. If the resource you're looking for is not available, use the text-based chat box to ask the university representative for more information.

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
24	<p>Each university has a representative who will be able to answer your questions</p>  						09
23							10
22							11
21							12
20							13
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	

Information stands

**Advancing Access**

# 24 universities in one place at one time

# Example Exhibition Hall stand

Lobby

Webinar Hall

Exhibition Hall

Staff Room

Help



The ability to think in an agile way is at the heart of our approach to teaching and learning. Our community of curiosity provides the intellectual space for your students to ask the questions that will help tackle the 21st century's biggest challenges. Your students will also have the freedom to answer those questions by searching beyond the subject they choose to study.

We want your students to be proud of what they achieve while enjoying the experience along the way. A warm and welcoming campus with a

[Read more](#)



Ask a question

Ask a question

SEND

Here to answer your questions

**Emily Cannon**

Widening Participation Officer  
University of Warwick



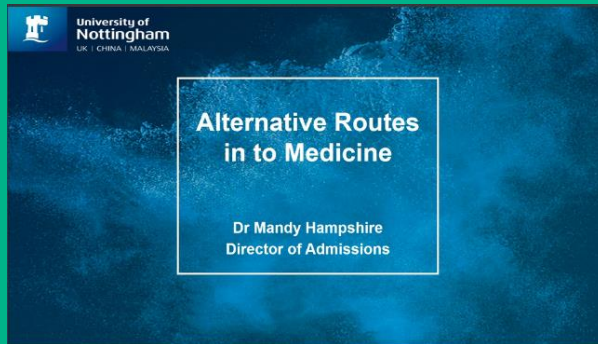
# Alternative routes in to Russell Group universities

16:20 &gt; 16:45

Speakers

MH

PW



## Description

Delivered collaboratively by two members of staff from the University of Nottingham. The first part of the session will look at alternative routes in to competitive Medicine courses such as foundation years, graduate entry and UCAS adjustment and clearing.

[Expand](#)

## Participants

### Participants



## Links

- > [UCAS Adjustment](#)
- > [UCAS Clearing](#)

Ask a question

## Here to answer your questions

**Mandy Hampshire**

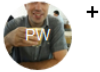
Director of Medicine Admissions  
University of Nottingham



+

**Peter Watts**

Director of Foundation Arts  
University of Nottingham



+

Ask a question

SEND

Though Sheffield is only one example!



Definitions of 'mature students' vary, but this will typically be 21+ as a minimum. You could explore the University of Sheffield's foundation year pages if you have students who might be interested in this kind of return to education route. Even where we are looking for level 3 qualifications (as we do for our Foundation Year courses at UoN) we consider a wide range of alternative qualifications.



Hi Sonya At Nottingham we do not have a target or quota for A100 /A10L Medicine. We have 27 places on our A108 Foundation Medicine course and 15 places on our A18L Foundation Medicine course at Lincoln for 2020 entry.



# Webinar in action...

## Welcome to the Staff Room

The staff room is open throughout the whole event from 3.30pm to 6.00pm. Come in, put your feet up and grab a coffee! ☕☕



### Ask a question

The staff room is visible to all of our staff members and all delegates. If there is a question you would like to direct at all of our university representatives, please raise it here and we will do our best to respond!

You can also use the staff room to network with other teachers and advisers.

SEND

IF any delegates have questions they would still like answering but haven't had chance please send these to [enquiries@advancingaccess.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@advancingaccess.ac.uk)

Thanks to everyone who has taken part - we hope you have enjoyed the event!

Wow time has just flown - thanks for all the great questions, delegates and please do keep in touch if you have any further queries relating to The University of Sheffield

### Here to answer your questions

**Karl Devincenzi**

Recruitment and Schools Relationship Manager  
University of Exeter



+

**Simon Bright**

Education Outreach Lead Officer  
University of Leeds



+

**Rhys Phillips**

UK Student Recruitment and Outreach Officer  
University of Southampton



+

**Alice Parrott**

Student Recruitment Officer  
University of Oxford



+

**Huw Peters**



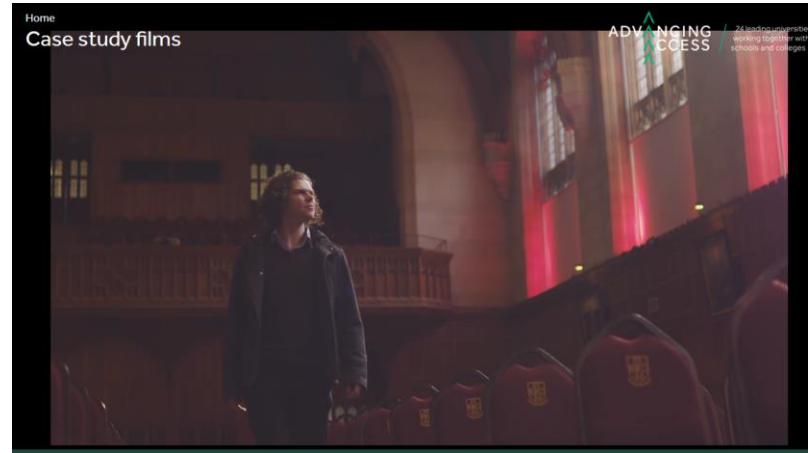
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# Share ideas, ask questions, debate!



# Case study videos

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We have over 60 short case study films featuring current students and recent graduates talking through their journey to and experiences at university. They're great for sparking a conversation with your students about their future.

[Click to watch an example.](#)

# Advancing Access blog



Degree Apprenticeships at leading universities

Alternative routes

Degree apprenticeships

Published on 14 May, 2019

⌚ 8 minutes



What does academic research tell us about personal statements?



Personal statements



UKCAT is now called UCAT – has anything else changed?



Medicine

Additional admissions tests

# Contextual admissions tool

My favourites **4**



## A guide to leading universities' use of contextual information

### Content type

Contextual admissions policies

### Audience

Teacher training resource

Rate this resource



Save to your favourites



### Description

This page provides a summary of the contextual admissions policy at each of the 24 Russell Group universities.

Please note that universities change their policies from time to time, so we recommend that you use this page alongside the websites of the universities themselves. If you require clarification about a particular university's policy, please contact the university directly.

## Guidebook



How do admissions processes work?



## Information sheets



Admissions processes - myth-busting



Admissions glossary



Top tips for supporting students who do not have a confirmed place



## Presentations



Presentation slides - supporting students through the application process



Presentation notes - Supporting students through the application process



## Contextual admissions policies



University of Birmingham



University of Bristol



University of Cambridge



Cardiff University



Durham University



University of Edinburgh



# Advancing Access Bursary Directory

## Russell Group bursary guide

### Content type

Contextual admissions policies

### Audience

Resource for teachers and their learners

Rate this resource



Save to your favourites



### Description

This guide contains links to some of the bursaries and scholarships which may be currently on offer at the Russell Group universities. We have focussed on support for UK applicants for undergraduate courses in this guide.

**Be sure to click the links so that you can find the latest information directly from the University's website. Some bursaries might be available to all students who meet certain criteria, in other cases it is a competitive process and not all students who apply for the bursary or scholarship will be successful.**

We aim to keep this information as up to date as possible but with the ever changing availability of funding, some of this information could be out of date when you are viewing it so we recommend always checking the university's website for the bursary you are researching to ensure you are accessing the most accurate information.

If you have any questions about any of the bursaries, please get in contact with the universities directly.

University of Birmingham



University of Bristol



University of Cambridge



Cardiff University



Durham University



Contextual admissions policies



Russell Group bursary guide



Comment on this resource



Create Comment

Your comments

# Request Advancing Access CPD

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[www.advancingaccess.ac.uk/request-cpd](http://www.advancingaccess.ac.uk/request-cpd)

We may be able to deliver a free CPD session in your school or college. Possible sessions include:

- Writing effective UCAS references
- Supporting students with personal statements
- Post-16 and post-18 choices
- Helping students with interviews and additional admissions tests
- Understanding contextual admissions policies

## Talk to us!

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Advancing Access is a dialogue between universities and teachers and advisers. Please let us know..

- If there are new resources you'd like which we don't currently offer
- If you'd be interested in writing a blog post for us
- If you'd like to contribute to a webinar at a Virtual Conference
- If you'd like us to do a talk or session at a networking group which you're a member of

# Questions?

enquiries@advancingaccess.ac.uk



@AdvancingAccess



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working together with  
schools and colleges

University of Birmingham / University of Bristol / University of Cambridge / Cardiff University  
Durham University / University of Edinburgh / University of Exeter / University of Glasgow / Imperial College London  
King's College London / University of Leeds / University of Liverpool  
London School of Economics and Political Science / University of Manchester / Newcastle University  
University of Nottingham / University of Oxford / Queen Mary University of London / Queen's University Belfast  
University of Sheffield / University of Southampton / University College London / University of Warwick / University of York