# Insight

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Office for Students — **OfS**

# Contextual admissions
## Promoting fairness and rethinking merit

### Introduction

This Insight brief is concerned with students' access to higher education, which can be affected by a range of circumstances. **Contextual admissions** are used by universities and colleges, including many of the most selective, to take account of these.[1] This allows admissions teams to identify applicants with the greatest potential to succeed in higher education, rather than relying on the highest-ranked exam results alone.[2]

As one admissions officer put it, 'No university that claims to be serious about widening participation can ignore contextualised admissions'.[3] The debate is now about how contextual admissions can be developed to make more radical progress towards narrowing the gaps between the most and least represented groups in higher education.

In parts of the sector, good progress has been made in recruiting disadvantaged students.[4] Overall, however, analysis shows that contextual admissions have not yet had a significant impact on fair access to higher education. At present, for example, the most educationally advantaged students are 5.7 times more likely to attend a higher-tariff provider than the most disadvantaged.[5]

The Office for Students (OfS) is committed to helping universities and colleges eliminate these gaps in the next 20 years, with the expectation of significant improvement over the next five years. We are reforming our regulation of access and participation to provide the time and flexibility universities need to make a major change in progress. We have also published a set of key performance measures for gauging progress, including one

> The Office for Students is challenging universities and colleges to be ambitious and innovative in reducing persistent inequalities in access and participation. Contextual admissions are one way of doing this, but a more radical approach is needed if we are to achieve fair access. What might 'ambitious and innovative' look like in this area and how far do we need to go to achieve fair access?

which reflects our aim to reduce the gap at higher-tariff providers between the most and least disadvantaged groups.[6] We want to see ambition and innovation from providers, with demonstrable impact by 2024-25.

The Office for Students is the independent regulator of higher education in England. We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. We regulate to promote quality, choice, competition and value for money in higher education, with a particular remit to ensure access, success and progression for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups of students.

## Key points

- University admissions will need to change to achieve fair access. While there has been some progress as a result of the increased use of contextual offers, gaps in equality of access between the most and least advantaged groups remain wide.

- Universities will therefore need to rethink how they are judging merit, rather than focusing narrowly on school exam success alone. A more radical use of contextual admissions is one way to achieve this conceptual shift.

- Through reforming access and participation plans the OfS will instigate more honest self-assessment, more ambitious targets, more evidence-based measures and better evaluation.[7]

- We will work with the government and UCAS to ensure that universities have access to the most robust data.

Universities and colleges are responsible for their own admissions criteria and processes, but students and the public need to be able to have confidence in the fairness, integrity and transparency of admissions systems. The OfS has an important role in assuring this.

This Insight brief considers how contextual admissions, and more diverse entry routes, could be deployed to achieve fair access, drawing on practice in English universities and colleges, and looking at what we might learn from other countries' higher education systems. It examines current examples of contextual offers and other routes into higher education such as foundation years.

## Background

The 2004 Schwartz Review of university admissions concluded that 'it is fair and appropriate to consider contextual factors as well as formal educational achievement, given the variation in learners' opportunities and circumstances.' The review went on to recommend that applicants 'must be assessed as individuals' based on 'holistic assessment'.[8]

Since then, universities and the government have invested significantly in measures to encourage students from disadvantaged groups to apply to university. These measures have had an impact. In 2018, 19.7 per cent of 18-year-olds from the most educationally disadvantaged areas entered university, compared with 11.3 per cent in 2007. However, the disparity in entry rates between the most advantaged and the least advantaged has stayed stubbornly high: in 2018, 18-year-olds from the most advantaged areas were 2.4 times more likely to enter higher education and 5.7 times more likely to enter higher-tariff providers than those from the least advantaged areas.[9] While there has, therefore, been an improvement in the overall opportunity to access higher education during the last decade, there has been little progress in reducing equality gaps, particularly in the highest-tariff universities.

School qualifications are not achieved under equal conditions. Educational gaps are evident from the age of five, and by age 15 students from disadvantaged backgrounds are on average nearly three school years behind their more advantaged peers.[10] Research has shown that family background, with its impact on school qualifications, remains the strongest marker of whether a student will go to university or not.[11]

The grades achieved by a top student in a state school in a deprived community will usually be lower than those of an average performer in a selective or fee-paying school, but they can be considered at least as great an achievement. Indeed, studies have shown that such students have greater potential to succeed in and beyond higher education.[12] The lived experience of students from disadvantaged groups also contributes to a diverse and vibrant cohort of students who learn from one another.

Achieving equality of opportunity in relation to higher education access will require a new approach to determining merit and fairness in admissions. Given the educational inequalities evident from primary school onwards, finding ways of judging students' achievement and potential that go beyond public exam results will be central to this. Universities' ability to set their own admissions criteria provides them with the scope to do so.

## Definitions

- **Contextual data:** Statistical data or individual characteristics that can be used as a basis for placing an applicant's achievements in context.

- **Contextual flag:** A marker that 'flags' to an admissions officer that a student is from an underrepresented group.

- **Contextual admission:** An offer made on the basis of contextual data or participation in an outreach event. This might be an offer based on advertised grades, an offer at a grade or more lower than advertised, an unconditional offer or an offer linked to a foundation year.

- **Contextual offers:** An offer of entry at one or more grades lower than the standard offer for that course.

- **Minimum threshold:** An offer which reflects the minimum academic level needed to complete a university course, rather than being increased to take account of, for instance, oversubscription or marketing.

## Current contextual practices in England

There is wide variation in how contextual admissions are used by individual higher education providers. Contextual data can be used in a variety of ways:

- to target widening participation and fair access activities

- to establish who to interview

- to inform decision-making on a specific application

- to decide whether to make a reduced offer

- to identify applicants who may need additional support or advice during application, transition or progress through higher education

- for monitoring and reporting.

There is patchy information on how frequently and effectively contextual admissions are employed. Studies have suggested that higher-tariff universities are 'too conservative' when making contextual offers and only reduce their grades for students from low-participation neighbourhoods by, on average, half an A-level grade – little different from the average reduced offers made to other students.[13]

In these and other universities, greater ambition to ensure equality of opportunity may be constrained by the culture of pursuing students with the highest grades to demonstrate global and national standing. For example, league tables use average entry tariffs as a metric of prestige, meaning that fair access measures can have a detrimental impact on league table performance. The government has signalled that it intends to engage with league table compilers to address this issue, and the OfS will advise on alternative approaches.[14]

### Putting achievement in context

One of the barriers to progress is the lack of agreement over the measures that should be used to measure socioeconomic and educational disadvantage. Universities do not have access to data on household income, such as tax records, or receipt of government benefits such as free school meals. They use at least one, and often multiples, of the following markers when deciding whether to make a contextual offer:

**Individual indicators:** These might include whether the applicant is a care leaver, a refugee or disabled, or if neither of their parents went to university.

**Area data:** This may include the Participation of Local Areas measure (POLAR), Index of Multiple Deprivation or the ACORN demographic classification.

**School data:** This may cover whether the applicant attended a school with relatively low average attainment at Key Stage 4, or in a deprived area.

**Intersectional data:** Data which takes into account more than one measure of deprivation, such as UCAS's multiple equality measure (MEM).

**Participation in outreach activities or programmes:** Some applicants will have taken part in activities or programmes such as mentoring programmes

## Figure 1: The ratio between entry rates to higher, medium and lower tariff providers for MEM group 5 and MEM group 1 England-domiciled 18-year-olds
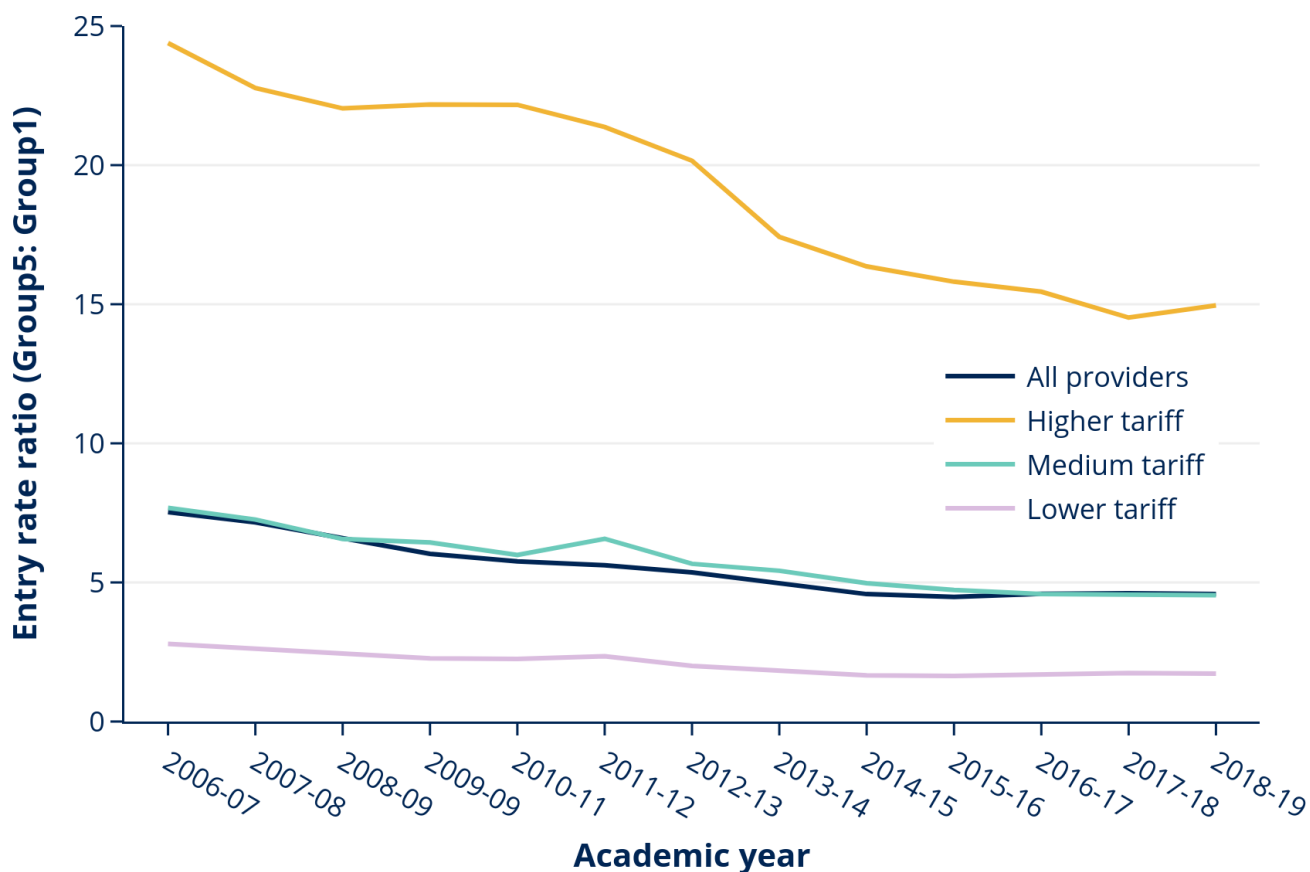


with schools and young people, summer schools, campus visits, taster days and masterclasses. These activities can include assessed work that supplements public exam results.

The OfS uses POLAR to measure underrepresentation in higher education. POLAR estimates how likely young people are to participate in higher education according to where they live,[15] but we advise that it should not be used in isolation to decide whether to offer a place to an individual student. For example, geographical data can mask pockets of rural poverty and isolation, while in cities deprived neighbourhoods often border wealthy ones.[16] Similarly, data which only covers school leavers cannot contextualise groups such as mature students. While such area-based measures are effective for targeting outreach programmes

and measuring universities' performance, they should only be used alongside other individual indicators for admissions decisions.

Using different measures of disadvantage can show markedly different outcomes. For 2018 entry, if POLAR3 is used, the most advantaged students appear 2.3 times more likely to enter university than the least advantaged.[17] Using the more comprehensive MEM (which includes whether a child has received free school meals, their race and gender alongside POLAR), this difference rises to 4.7.[18] MEM also suggests that attempts to widen participation have plateaued since 2015 (see Figure 1). At higher-tariff providers, the gap seen using MEM has widened for the first time in 2018, with those from the most advantaged combinations of background characteristics 15 times more likely to enter than

those with the least.

The choice of data that admissions teams use for context can thus result in divergent outcomes. Recent research has argued that the most robust measure of disadvantage is whether or not a child receives free school meals for a sustained period of time.[19] This information is not currently available to universities.

Further work is needed to establish individual measures that can be used alongside area-based measures for contextual admissions decisions.

### Contextual offers
There is currently no clearly understood approach to making contextual offers. The guidance universities offer to prospective students varies widely. Despite the widespread use of such offers, the majority of English universities make no reference in their admissions information to

how they use contextual data or whether they make contextual offers.

Greater transparency is needed across the sector to ensure that students understand this aspect of the admissions process and how it works for them.

A recent search finds that, for 2019 entry in England, 14 high-tariff providers and 10 other universities and colleges indicate on their websites that they may offer entry grades between one and five grades lower to **contextually flagged** applicants.

All 24 providers describe when an applicant is flagged, although the eligibility criteria vary, as do the processes an applicant must follow to receive a contextual offer. Several universities inform the prospective student that all they need to do is submit their UCAS form: the admissions team will do the rest. However, most require the student to fill in additional forms, make the university their firm choice, undertake a preliminary course, or sit an exam.[20]

These additional requirements risk placing extra strain on candidates, at a time when they are already under pressure from their school assessments. By asking students to make a university their firm choice before they receive a contextual offer, universities may be limiting students' choices.

In many cases, even a hard limit of one or two grades' reduction to the standard offer will not be enough to close the access gap. If they were more dynamic in their use of contextual admissions, universities could more actively recognise an individual's circumstances and potential. Researchers have argued that students can be admitted to high-tariff universities with A-level grades of BCC and have an 80 per cent probability of graduating with a degree, and a 46 per cent chance of gaining a first or upper second. This study suggests that there is

## An evolving approach
### The University of Bristol

The University of Bristol has made contextual offers since 2009. Accepted students are automatically offered a lower grade if they attend a state school in the bottom 40 per cent for attainment, live in POLAR3 quintiles 1 or 2, have completed a University of Bristol outreach event, or have spent time in care.[21] In 2016, the university admitted 1,000 students on such offers.

Although the students are not offered any additional targeted support once admitted, research has shown that students admitted to Bristol with one grade lower than the entry requirements do just as well as, if not better than, those admitted on the standard offer.[22]

A recent initiative, the Bristol Scholars programme, targets local students with the potential to succeed at university. Of the 43 students on the pilot year, 40 per cent had received free school meals. Students on the programme receive offers of up to four grades lower than the standard offer, and are given support before and after application.[23]

potential for students with lower A-levels to succeed at degree level.[24]

It is crucial that a shift in offer-making of this kind is accompanied by effective student support. The OfS encourages universities and colleges to take a 'whole institution' approach to access and participation,[25] through which a range of interventions are made by different parts of the organisation to give students the support they need from application through to graduation. This includes sustained engagement in school, support with applications, financial support, engagement through transition to university, targeted support during the course, and careers advice.

The OfS is supporting universities and colleges to achieve this through a new 'what works' centre, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education,[26] which will share and support the take-up of evidence on the impact of different approaches taken across the sector.

**Alternative routes into higher education**

In addition to changing the requirements for students entering through traditional routes, universities can improve access by diversifying the ways students can gain admission.

**Access to Higher Education** diplomas have been an alternative route to university since the 1970s. They can be taken over a year full-time or part-time over several years. A pass with distinction is considered by universities to be equivalent to three A-levels. Alongside academic work, the courses aim to develop the broader skills students require to succeed at university.[27]

In 2016, some 23 per cent of diploma students accepted onto university courses were from POLAR3 quintile 1, compared with 12 per cent with other equivalent qualifications. Most, however, do not go on to higher-tariff universities. Of the 48 English universities that accepted more than 180 students with Access diplomas in 2016, only three were high-tariff providers.[28]

If universities want to recruit a more diverse student body, working with the colleges and awarding bodies delivering these diplomas to expand provision and progression could be a successful approach.

**Foundation years** can be undertaken by students who did not meet their A-level offer, those with non-traditional or no qualifications, or those who did not take the requisite A-levels (such as those without maths A-level wishing to study engineering). Successful completion of a foundation year normally means automatic progression onto the first year of the degree. They are a valuable pathway to university for groups such as mature students. As one academic argues of foundation years: 'their recruitment practices, by definition, target non-traditional students'.[30]

More recently, foundation years have raised the numbers of students in England's most selective universities and courses. Medical schools have long run foundation years to support students with lower A-levels and thereby increase diversity among doctors.

Students undertaking foundation years sometimes report feeling isolated from the student body and lacking access to university facilities.[31] To guard against this possibility, universities need to ensure foundation year students are integrated into the wider student body. Overall, however, foundation year courses offer a different route into higher education with excellent continuation rates.

**Degree apprenticeships** are providing an increasingly important alternative route into higher education, integrating study with work. The second OfS Insight brief set out the potential for this route to improve access and outcomes for school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as mature learners already in the workplace,[32] together with the actions needed to achieve it.

## Discussion

### Affirmative action and holistic admissions abroad

Radical affirmative action in higher education has a long history. In the 1960s, affirmative action in US education grew out of the wider civil rights movement. As a result, between 1962 and 1999 the percentage of African-Americans completing four years of college increased from 4 per cent to 15.5 per cent and research has demonstrated the benefits to society arising from this.[33]  In the years after apartheid, South African universities were expected to accept more black applicants. The number of black students increased from 191,000 in 1993 to 404,000 10 years later.[34] Since independence, the Dalit castes in India have had a certain percentage of places at universities reserved for them. This figure rose to 50 per cent in the 2000s.[35]

These shifts in policy all arose from wider political upheaval and social justice movements. They demonstrate that radical measures can have a marked effect in a short period of time. They take a definition of merit based on social justice and use education to help right historical wrongs.

Many selective universities in the USA make use of 'holistic admissions'. Examining a candidate holistically means considering their socioeconomic background and identity alongside their exam results and academic references.[36] This process ensures that selective universities can recruit a diverse and balanced student cohort which not only possesses excellent academic credentials but also reflects wider American society.[37]

Studies have shown that this holistic approach is more likely to see the admittance of applicants from underrepresented socioeconomic groups.[38] At Princeton University, whose president has championed a new approach to judging merit, the number of students who receive federal subsidies ('Pell Grants') rose from 12 per cent in 2012 to 21 percent in 2018.[40] Other

US universities achieve high proportions of such students without affecting their global standing: 31.4 per cent of the students at the University of California at Berkeley qualify for a Pell Grant.[41] Under the banner of the American Talent Initiative,[42] many of the most selective US universities are setting ambitious targets for change during the next five years.

The challenge in instigating such holistic measures in England is that the information available to admissions officers is currently more limited. Most English students are admitted on predicted rather than actual grades. Applications do not, as a rule, include essays or standardised tests like SATs. Some individual indicators like race are not given to admissions officers by UCAS, to safeguard against bias.[43] There is also a financial cost associated with these admissions practices.[44]

Nor are such systems immune from admissions fraud. The recent admissions scandals in America, including faked transcripts and invented athletic prowess, show how applicants and their parents can take advantage of a holistic system.[45] Legacy admissions, whereby an applicant is favoured if their parents or grandparents attended the university, are antithetical to fair access.

Nevertheless, the American model highlights the promise of contextual admissions in a system that sees diversity as an educational benefit.

### Contextual offers in Scotland

At the beginning of the decade, Scotland had the worst university entry rates for the poorest students among the four nations of the UK. In 2011, for example, only 13 Scottish students from the lowest 20 per cent of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20) took up a place at the University of St Andrews.[46] There remains some debate on the suitability of SIMD as a measure of disadvantage, with one study showing that 60 per cent of disadvantaged pupils

did not live in SIMD20.[47] However, others see it as the best single measure currently available in Scotland.[48]

In 2016, the Scottish Government set challenging targets for universities to admit 16 per cent of students from SIMD20 by 2021 and 20 per cent by 2030.[49] Universities, including the most selective, have responded by publishing two tariffs: one for the standard offer and a second for students who are contextually flagged, of up to three grades lower in the Scottish Higher exams. This minimum threshold reflects the grades required to meet the academic standards of the course, and should therefore mitigate against a fall in degree performance.[50]

This shift has helped universities make impressive gains quickly. For example, the University of Edinburgh saw places accepted by students from SIMD20 jump from 7.3 per cent in 2016-17 to 11 per cent in 2018-19.[51] From a lower base, St Andrews increased fivefold the absolute number of disadvantaged students it admitted to 73 (10.3 per cent of its Scottish intake) in 2018.[52]

### Towards a radical new approach

These examples demonstrate the benefit of an integrated, university-wide, student-centred approach. Access programmes and activities are integrated with and complement recruitment and outreach practices. The early results from Scotland show that using minimum threshold grades and being transparent in how contextual admissions are employed can quickly make an impact on the recruitment of disadvantaged students. Recruiting substantial numbers of students through contextual routes requires universities to support them throughout their university career to ensure that they have the best possible opportunities to succeed.

A number of employers now use contextual measures when undertaking graduate recruitment. Where many firms

## Extended medical programme
### King's College London

King's College London's 'extended medical programme' offers students greater support and spreads the first year of the standard medical degree over two years. A review of the programme concluded that, with additional support, students admitted with A-level grades of CCC could thrive on medical degrees.[53] This medical course and others like it recognise the wider need for courses and curricula to evolve to accommodate the needs of contextually admitted students.

previously set hard A-level entry criteria, now organisations such as Rare Contextual Recruitment supply companies with data to highlight disadvantaged candidates who might otherwise be overlooked.[54] In 2015, Deloitte committed to using contextualised data to offer 1,500 graduate positions.[55] These developments mean that disadvantaged students can be supported through the university lifecycle and into employment afterwards.

There has been minimal research on students' views of contextual offers. Anecdotally, a number of reports suggest that disadvantaged candidates are concerned about being treated differently,[56] while more advantaged students fear they will be displaced.[57] It is important to communicate to all students the barriers which prevent some students from getting into the right course and university for them, and that contextual offers can redress educational and social inequalities. Including students in diversifying the university increases the chances that they will be invested in its success.

## Conclusion

Contextual admissions alone are not a panacea for fair access to higher education in England. A broad-spectrum approach is needed whereby providers work with schools to shift expectations and improve attainment, establish sophisticated admissions systems that use different ways to identify potential, and develop more flexible and varied routes into higher education.

There is a case for rethinking how merit is judged in admissions. Because social background affects school attainment, focusing only on the top A-levels means that the potential of disadvantaged students is being overlooked. As it stands, the implementation of contextual admissions does not go far enough. Research has shown that lowering advertised grades at high-tariff providers to BCC, for example, would broaden the pool of available applicants without a marked fall in academic standards.[58] Admissions processes could also be made less obstructive and more transparent for disadvantaged students.

The OfS will support this on a number of fronts:

- Alongside the government, we will continue to work to persuade league table providers to use measures that do not penalise contextual admissions.

- We will continue to work with the government and UCAS to explore ways for providers to consider at the point of application individualised data such as free school meals.

- We will encourage providers to evaluate their approaches rigorously and to share widely their approaches to admissions, including through the new 'what works' centre, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education and our A to Z guidance on effective practice.

- Through an admissions review later this year, we will work with universities to identify how to remove barriers to disadvantaged applicants, and to promote transparency and clarity about admissions and offer-making processes.

- Through our reform of access and participation plans we will instigate more honest self-assessment, more ambitious targets, more evidence measures and better evaluation. Each university will need to demonstrate how it will make progress to reduce its access gaps, including where appropriate the use of contextual admissions.

- The OfS Challenge Fund supports the development of new and imaginative approaches to priority areas affecting students. We will explore ways of using the fund to develop innovative approaches to diversifying routes into higher education, such as access and bridging courses.

The OfS has high expectations of universities and colleges to reduce equality gaps in relation to access and participation. Through our reforms to regulating access and participation, we are giving them the time and flexibility to be more ambitious and to innovate. Universities can capitalise on this, and on their independence in admissions, by taking the positive action needed to secure fair access within a generation. A more radical approach to contextual admissions, allied with more diverse routes into university and integrated support for students, can achieve this.

# Notes

1  In this brief, for the sake of readability, we have used 'universities and colleges', or sometimes simply 'universities', to refer to what our Regulatory framework and other more formal documents call 'higher education providers'.

2  Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, 'Use of contextualised admissions survey report', 2015, p3 (available at https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/spas-work-contextualised-admissions).

3  Sundorph, Emilie, Danail Vasilev and Louis Coiffait, 'Joining the elite: How top universities can enhance social mobility', p24 (available at https://reform.uk/research/joining-elite-how-top-universities-can-enhance-social-mobility-0).

4  In this brief, 'disadvantaged' is used synonymously with 'underrepresented' to refer to those statistically less likely to participate in higher education because of one or more contextual characteristics.

5  UCAS, 'End of cycle report 2018: Patterns by applicant characteristics, report and data' (available at https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report).Universities (excluding specialist providers) are grouped into higher, medium and lower tariffs when ranked by average tariff score of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants, defined using Higher Education Statistics Agency data from academic years 2012-13 to 2014-15.

6  'Official statistic: Key performance measure 1' (www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/).

7  Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. For more on access and participation plans and the OfS's reforms to them, see 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance' (available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/).

8  'Fair admissions to higher education: Recommendations for good practice', 2004, p6 (available at https://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/schwartz-report).

9  UCAS, 'End of cycle report 2018: Patterns by applicant characteristics, report and data'. (available at https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report).

10  Hutchison, Jo, and John Dunford, 'Divergent pathways: The disadvantage gap, accountability and the pupil premium', 2016 (available at https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/divergent-pathways-disadvantage-gap-accountability-pupil-premium/).

11  Crawford, Claire, Lorraine Dearden, John Micklewright and Anna Vignoles, Family background and university success: Differences in higher education access and outcomes in England, 2016, pp1-24.

12  Kirkup, Catherine, Rebecca Wheater, Jo Morrison, Ben Durbin and Marco Pomati, 'Use of an aptitude test in university entrance: A validity study', 2010, p28 (available at https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/use-aptitude-test-university-entrance-validity-study-final-report/).

13  Boliver, Vikki, Claire Crawford, Mandy Powell and Will Craige, 'Admissions in context: The use of contextual information by leading universities', 2017, p26 (available at https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/admissions-in-context-access-gap/).

14  'Universities must do more to tackle ethnic disparity' (available at https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universities-must-do-more-to-tackle-ethnic-disparity); Institute for Public Policy Research Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 'A critical path: Securing the future of higher education in England', 2013, p11 (available at https://www.ippr.org/publications/a-critical-path-securing-the-future-of-higher-education-in-england).

15  For more on POLAR, see 'POLAR – Participation of Local Areas', (www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polarparticipation-of-local-areas/).

16  Harrison, Neil and Colin McCaig, 'An ecological fallacy in higher education policy: The use, overuse and misuse of "low-participation neighbourhoods"', Journal of Further and Higher Education, 2014, pp793-817.

17  POLAR3 has been recently superseded by the updated POLAR4, but the former is the version that would have been available to admissions teams during the period in question.

18  UCAS, 'End of cycle report 2018: Patterns of equality in England, report and data', (available at https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report).

19  Gorard, Stephen, Vikki Boliver, Nadia Siddiqui and Pallavi Banerjee, 'Which are the most suitable contextual indicators for use in widening participation to HE?', Research Papers in Education, 2019, pp99-129; Fisher, Esther and Jo Begbie, 'Using individual-level contextual indicators to identify disadvantaged applicants to university: Evidence from the Foundation Year at Lady Margaret Hall, a college of Oxford University', 2019, p6 (forthcoming at https://www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/).

20  For example, 'Access to Leeds' (https://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/128005/applying/33/alternative_admissions/3); 'The K+ variable offer', (http://kplus.london/); 'Access UCL scheme' (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/undergraduate/application/entry-requirements/access-ucl-contextual-offers/access-ucl-scheme).

21  'Contextual offers', (http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/entry-requirements-qualifications/contextual-offers/).

22  Boliver et al, 'Admissions in context: The use of contextual information by leading universities', 2017, p15; Hoare, Anthony and Ron Johnston, 'Widening participation through admissions policy: A British case study of school and university performance', Studies in Higher Education, 2010, p19.

23  'New insights on WP: Bristol scholars' (https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/08/22/new-insights-wp-bristol-scholars/).

24  Boliver, Vikki, Stephen Gorard, Nadia Siddiqui, 'Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: A guide to the evidence base', Durham University Evidence Centre for Education, Research Briefing No. 1, 2019, p3.

25  OfS, 'Regulatory advice 6: How to prepare your access and participation plan – effective practice advice' (OfS 2019.06, available at www.officeforstudents. org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-6-how-to-prepare-your-access-and-participation-plan-effective-practice-advice/); Thomas, Liz, 'Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation' (available at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov. uk/20180511112311/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/whole-institution-approach/).

26  'Transforming access and student outcomes in higher education' (www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/ evaluation-and-effective-practice/evidence-and-impact-exchange/).

27  Busher, Hugh, Nalita James and Anna Piela, 'On reflection: Mature students' views of teaching and learning on Access to Higher Education courses', International Studies in Sociology of Education, 2015, pp304-5.

28  'Access to Higher Education: Students in higher education 2017-18', 2018, pp5-6 (available at https:// www.accesstohe.ac.uk/AboutUs/Publications/Pages/ Students-in-Higher-Education-2017-18.aspx).

29  'Opportunity and excellence offer scheme', (https:// www.yorksj.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/how-to-apply/ opportunity-and-excellence-offer-scheme/).

30  Sanders, Lalage D, Annette P Daly and Katherine Fitzgerald, 'Predicting retention, understanding attrition: A prospective study of foundation year students', Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 2016, pp50-83.

31  Marshall, Catherine, 'Review of Lady Margaret Hall Foundation Year', 2018, p15.

32  OfS, 'Degree apprenticeships: A viable alternative?' (www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/degree-apprenticeships-a-viable-alternative/).

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