

Our ref: FOI/2223/168

Name: Eddy Zou
By email to: request-914874-96a55619@whatdotheyknow.com

5 December 2022

Freedom of Information Team

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Dear Eddy,

Your request for information received on 8 November 2022 has now been considered. A response is provided below.

I would like to ask for the following information: (year refers to entry year, for example: 2010-2011 entry year refers to students applying in 2010, entering in 2011)

The first year when the university started using contextual data for admissions (in any form), and, if the university has stopped doing this, the last year of this practice

The use of Contextual Data in admissions was initially considered in response to political drivers to widen participation. In order to address under-representation from certain groups, a range of externally available data sources were examined to try to identify how data could be used to identify disadvantage in university applications processes.

At the University of Liverpool, contextual data in admissions was initially piloted in 2013 for all except the departments we classify within the University as 'Clinical'. The clinical departments are Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences. A pilot for these clinical departments ran in 2014. This resulted in all departments using contextual data to consider flagged¹ applicants during confirmation and clearing from 2014. Clinical also use contextual data in their selection for interview process.

In 2020 we piloted in-cycle contextual admissions meaning we communicated a reduced offer of up to two grades below book offer to two groups of applicants (those from POLAR 4 Quintile 1 postcode areas² and those with any form of social care experience). All subject areas in all departments except for two of the three clinical departments, (Medicine and Dentistry) were included in this 2020 pilot. All applicants with any other WP indicators including those from the clinical areas were still given additional consideration during confirmation and clearing in that year.

From 2021 the use of in cycle contextual admissions moved into practice for all subjects in all departments including Dentistry but excluding Medicine. However, Medicine applicants are still considered using contextual data during interview selection and in confirmation and clearing and for entry 2023 medicine now has a new policy in relation to making reduced offers to a number of Polar 4 quintile 1 and care experienced applicants which differs slightly from the institutional position. Details can be accessed at <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/medicine/study-with-us/undergraduate/admissions-information/>

¹ For more detail on 'flagging' see the response to Question 4.

² POLAR postcode look-up: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/>

For each year where the university uses contextual admissions, the subjects or departments or schools that practice contextual admissions

In 2013 all subjects in all departments except clinical (Medicine, Dentistry and Vets) were included in the contextual data in admissions pilot. In 2014 the pilot for this group ended and all piloted departments moved to use contextual data in admissions in normal practice.

In 2014 the clinical areas (Medicine, Dentistry and Vets) were piloted and they moved to using contextual data in their interview selection processes and also to give additional consideration during confirmation and clearing in practice from 2015.

For each year where the university uses contextual admissions, the list of indicators used. I would like this information on a per-application year basis (as the university may have changed the indicators). I would like to ask for detailed description of the indicators, example descriptions include: if students' postcode was in bottom 2 quintile of Polar 3 index, if students have been in care for more than 3 months

Between the years 2013 and 2018 the following indicators were used:

- **Socio-economic status (POLAR3 Quintiles 1 and 2 / ACORN Quintiles 4 and 5)**
- **School Context (DfE)**
- **School Type (DfE)**
- **Individual Achievement (UCAS)**
- **Disability³ (UCAS)**
- **Social Care for a period of three months or more (UCAS)**

Using national averages for GCSE and A level performance etc detailed below, from the DfE website as a measure we also looked at the following:

- **Pupils Achieving 5+ A*-C at GCSE, including English and Maths in the last 3 years**
- **Average GCSE Points Score Per Pupil (Best 8)**
- **Average A Level point score per full time equivalent academic student**

In order to be eligible for additional consideration during confirmation and clearing, applicants had to meet two or more of the above criteria. Meeting two or more of the above criteria gave applicants a 'Yes' flag meaning they were part of the WP cohort. See answer to Question 4 for more detail on the flagging system.

When new GDPR regulations were introduced in May 2018, the DfE data on school and individual performance became restricted so we altered the contextual admissions system to omit this requirement. It is also useful to note that POLAR 3 was replaced by POLAR 4 in October 2017 and our system was updated to reflect that change.

From 2018 the indicators were:

- **Socio-economic status (POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2 / ACORN Quintiles 4 and 5)**
- **MEM**
- **Disability (UCAS)**
- **Social Care for a period of three months or more (UCAS)**
- **Disrupted Studies**

³ It is important to note that Medicine admissions have never used the disability flag for special consideration because of reasonable adjustments/additional time being available to disabled individuals in medicine admissions tests, examinations and at interview. It was felt that it would be unfair to also apply additional special consideration on top of what was already available.

Since 2020, and the introduction of contextual admissions the indicators from 2018 are still used for additional consideration during confirmation and clearing however, only two groups were identified as being eligible for in-cycle contextual admissions, these are:

- POLAR 4 Quintile 1
- Care Experienced – for any period including pre-adoption

For each year where the university uses contextual admissions, what the data are used for: flagging applicants, guaranteed interviews, contextual offers

Where applicants provide contextual information, additional consideration is given to their application during the confirmation and clearing period. Programmes that interview or use a portfolio will also provide additional consideration for those who are flagged as widening participation.

Those who are POLAR 1 and/or care experienced will receive a reduced offer.

Those who attend the National Access Programme Realising Opportunities and the University's Access programme. Scholars will also receive additional consideration and a reduced offer of up to two grades.

For each year where the university uses contextual admissions, how many applications were flagged, how many applicants were given a contextual offer, and how many accepted them

Academic Year	Flagged apps	Contextual offers	Offers Accepted
201516	495	450	341
201617	569	537	381
201718	2719	2618	1985
201819	352	332	208
201920	1068	47	47
202021	1068	42	31
202122	1742	914	538
202223	1727	954	557

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request for information, you have a right under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act to ask the University to review it; however, you must do so within 40 working days of the date of this response. Your request should include our reference number and explain the reason for requesting a review. Email foi@liverpool.ac.uk or write to the Freedom of Information Reviewer, Legal & Governance, University of Liverpool, Foundation Building, 765 Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L69 7ZX. We will respond to your request for an internal review within 20 working days of receipt.

Following an internal review, if you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF. Telephone: 0303 123 1113 www.ico.org.uk. There is no charge for making an appeal.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Rothwell

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Freedom of Information Officer / Data Protection Co-ordinator
Legal & Governance