

The Impact of Contextual Offers on the Student Cohort

1. Challenge

Ensuring everyone has access to higher education is not only a moral right, but also crucial for universities to meet their recruitment targets.

If we reduce entrance grades for university applicants, **how will contextual offers affect the student cohort**, and the experience of those students when they arrive?

Our research and evaluation explores the **effectiveness of contextual offer making** as an intervention, and whether it increases the diversity of the student pool from LPN 1 and 2 backgrounds.

2. Methodology

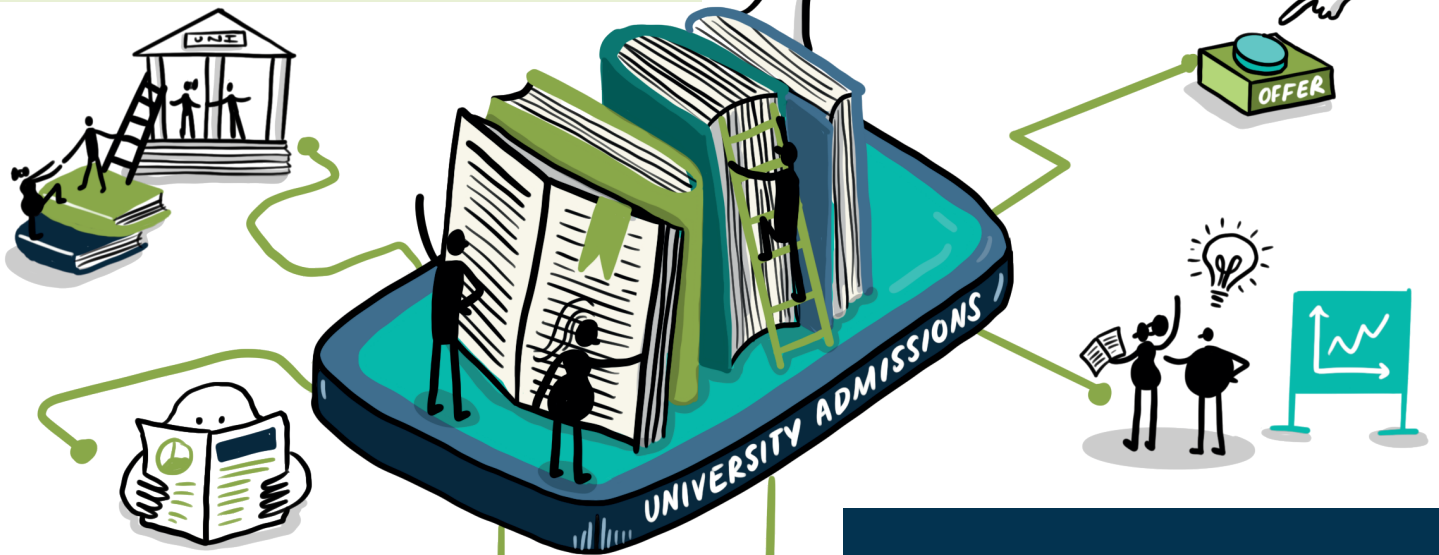
We interviewed staff, ran workshops with students and carried out statistical analysis of contextual offers. **We examined applicant cohort data to understand which students:**

are more likely to be **made** an offer;

are more likely to **accept** an offer;

are more likely to **enrol**;

continue to **progress** academically at university.



3. Key Findings

Lots of applicants and staff know of contextual admissions but don't know how they work or how they are used.

From student data between 2018/19 - 2021/22, when compared to students with a standard offer, **those who received a contextual offer were 9.4% less likely to receive an offer and 1.6% less likely to accept if they received an offer.**

From the workshops, we found that **students felt that contextual offers helped reduce the pressure to achieve high grades** but still felt committed to doing the best they possibly could in their exams.

From staff interviews, we uncovered that most admission decisions were made centrally, and there was **some tension in faculties that central decision making lacked an awareness of non-traditional and valid routes onto particular courses.**

4. Recommendations

Make potential students aware of contextual offers, the offer making process, and key factors that are taken into consideration for their own applications.

Start to track the results of contextual offer making - do they increase the POLAR quintile distribution of the student cohort, and how does this compare across courses?

Thorough pilots and evaluation of offer making interventions must be carried out before widespread rollout.