

# Contextual Data Policy

June 2025

## Contextual Data

The RVC is committed to undertaking a holistic approach to the assessment of our applicants to enable us to identify those with the potential to succeed. Contextual information provides us with information relating to an applicant's educational and socio-economic circumstances, allowing us to take into account challenges they have faced during their education and the potential impact of these on their performance.

As such, contextual data may be considered in relation to all UK domiciled, home (UK) students who are applying for undergraduate programmes. EU and/or international students who trigger any contextual data indicators will be considered on an individual basis and outside the scope of this policy.

The following principles and statements of intent apply to the use of contextual data in the admissions process:

- There are no quotas for recruiting students from any particular background. Whilst the RVC, like all Higher Education providers, does have agreed milestones with the Office for Students (OfS) for the recruitment, retention and performance of students from a range of backgrounds, these are not employed as quotas in the admissions process.
- Contextual data is used only to complement and enhance existing selection mechanisms, including the consideration of academic qualifications, and does not replace these methods.
- Contextual data is used as part of the overall consideration of an applicant and not in isolation; a combination of various items of contextual data are used, in addition to various factors from the application, in order to arrive at a holistic assessment of the applicant's potential for the course for which they have applied.
- Contextual data informs but does not over-rule the process of professional judgement which ultimately decides whether an invitation to interview is made and whether subsequently an offer of a place is made.
- Contextual data may be used to inform prioritisation for interview and the potential to make a contextual (reduced) offer, where applicants meet specific widening participation criteria.
- The meeting of any of the RVC's contextual data triggers does not offer any guarantee of an invitation to interview or offer of a place on the course.
- All admissions staff using contextual data in decision making are briefed fully and made aware of the issues surrounding contextual data to ensure that they understand and can interpret and use the data appropriately.
- Contextual data may be used, for all courses, as a part of the process of determining whether to accept an applicant who has not met the terms of their offer, in the summer, once results are known and subject to vacancies on the course.
- The RVC will keep its policy for the use of contextual data under review and up-date this policy statement when changes are agreed. In doing so, we will refer to relevant internal and external reference points.
- RVC's contextual indicators and thresholds are reviewed annually and published on our website in the June before each admissions cycle.

### Use of contextual data

All applicants will be screened at the point of assessment to see whether, based on the information provided on their UCAS form, any of the contextual indicators are applicable to them. If an applicant has failed to declare any information on their UCAS form that is used to determine whether they meet a contextual data trigger, this cannot be considered unless their UCAS form is subsequently amended or further, official, evidence is provided directly to the RVC. Until this point, the applicant will be considered as not meeting that trigger. Where possible we will reassess an applicant who subsequently declares information that may

trigger a contextual data indicator, however this is subject to timing (for example, we will not be able to consider an applicant if the interviews for the course have already concluded) and vacancies remaining on the course in question.

The following contextual data indicators are currently in use as a part of our assessment process:

- Contextual School
- POLAR score
- IMD score
- TUNDRA MSOA score
- Parental income
- Care-experienced status
- Parental HE attendance
- Free school meals eligibility

Whilst the above list represents all indicators currently in use, they may not all be in use for all courses. Information will be published on our website to indicate whether a course is using such indicators and, if so, which indicators are in use.

Applicants attending academically selective schools will not normally be eligible for a contextual offer or considered for the Gateway programme on the basis of school or socio-economic indicators.

Applicants to our Veterinary Gateway course will be required to complete a Gateway Supplementary form in addition to their UCAS application form, to enable a full assessment of their application to be undertaken.

For applicants to other courses who meet contextual criteria, contextual data may be used to inform initial scoring during assessment, prioritisation for interview, and the potential to make a contextual offer.

All contextual data is considered alongside academic and non-academic achievement as part of a holistic review. The presence of contextual indicators is not a guarantee of interview or offer but enables the admissions process to recognise potential that may not be fully reflected in qualifications alone.

## Contextual Data Definitions

### RVC Contextual Schools

RVC contextual schools at level 2 will be determined based upon the Attainment 8 score for each school plus data that provides a comparable measure in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Schools will be listed as a contextual school if they score below the national average in this measure.

RVC contextual schools at level 3 will be determined based on the average point score per academic entry, plus equivalent data in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Schools will be listed as a contextual school if they score below the national average in this measure.

RVC contextual schools at both level 2 and level 3 will be compiled utilising the last three years of performance data available for each level to minimise the impact of any fluctuations in data. The 'average' performance will be determined from the average percentage score in the most recent year of available data. Where insufficient data is available to enable a three-year average, the available data will be considered to see if there is sufficient consistency to make a decision. If a decision is not possible, the school will not be considered a contextual

school. In such cases our decision may be reconsidered if the school is able to provide further information relating to the anomalies.

A list of contextual schools will be published on the RVC website each year and will be available from the May prior to the application cycle opening (normally September 12 months before the start of the course). This list will be relevant to applicants who are applying in that application cycle having completed their GCSE and A-levels (or equivalent) in the years immediately prior to application. Where an applicant has sat their qualifications in a non-standard duration, they will be considered against the data most appropriate to the year in which they completed their qualifications and should contact the Admissions Office for further guidance. For the purpose of definition, the RVC expects that GCSE and A-level study (or equivalent) will be two years each in duration. To be considered under the contextual flag, an applicant should have studied for a full two years at the school and at the relevant qualification level. Where an applicant does not fulfil this criterion but has completed the two years of study solely at schools that have the contextual flag, this will be deemed acceptable.

### POLAR Score

An applicant's POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) score will be determined using the most up-to-date POLAR information (currently POLAR4) from the OfS, based on the home address provided on their UCAS application. For further information see:

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

### IMD Score

An applicant's IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) score will be determined using the most up to date IMD information (currently IMD2019) from UK Government, based on the home address provided on their UCAS application. For assessment purposes the RVC will consider the data based on quintiles. For further information see:

England: <http://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/imd/2019>

Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation>

Scotland: <https://simd.scot/>

Northern Ireland: <https://deprivation.nisra.gov.uk>

### TUNDRA MSOA Score

An applicant's TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) score will be determined using the TUNDRA MSOA score from the OfS, based on the home address provided on their UCAS application. This measure is only available for applicants who are resident in England.

For further information see: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/>

### Low Income

Applicants will only be considered as meeting these criteria if they are able to produce a government completed assessment of the household income that demonstrates that they are in receipt of a means tested benefit. P60s and wage slips cannot be accepted as evidence of household income as they do not confirm that this is the total income for everyone living in the household.

For an applicant's income to be assessed in lieu of their parental income they must meet the Student Finance England definition of an independent student and be eligible for assessment by Student Finance as an independent student. Further information can be obtained at

<https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/loans-and-grants>

### Care Leaver

The RVC is committed to the Buttle Trust definition of a care leaver. We therefore deem a care leaver to be an applicant who has been looked after (in care) for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14.

### RVC Sutton Trust Summer School Attendee

The applicant has attended the RVC Sutton Trust Summer School.

### Parental Higher Education attendance

Applicants whose biological parents and/or step-parents and/or guardians have no higher education qualifications, such as a degree, diploma or certificate of higher education, and this has been declared on their UCAS application. Where there has been long-term estrangement from a second parent, step-parent or guardian who has a higher education qualification, the RVC will consider individuals on a case-by-case basis.

### Free School Meals Eligibility

Applicants will only be considered as meeting this criterion if they indicate that they have been in receipt of free school meals on their UCAS application and the RVC is able to verify this. For applicants resident in England, the RVC will be able to verify this automatically with data received from the Department for Education (via UCAS). For applicants resident in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, the applicant will be required to provide additional evidence to confirm this (this will be requested by the RVC if applicable).