

# CONTEXTUAL DATA AND THE UCAS CONTEXTUAL DATA SERVICE (CDS)

UCAS offers a contextual data service, which provides data about an applicant's school or college and local area. This can be used for contextualised admissions – to help assess an applicant's prior attainment, and potential to succeed in light of their circumstances.

The aim is to help providers form a more complete picture of an individual applicant's characteristics.

## Where does contextual data come from?

There are multiple sources of contextual data, such as:

- > the UCAS contextual data service
- > commercial sources
- > other sources (e.g. direct from government departments/agencies)
- > universities' and colleges' own data and research

## What data is available?

The contextual data service supplies historic data (going back to 2008) about an applicant's school or college.

It also provides local area data in the form of POLAR 2, POLAR3, POLAR4 (new for this cycle), and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

The following 2018 data is available for use in the 2020 admissions cycle:

Measure	England	Wales	Scotland	NI
Average attainment 8 score per student	YES*			
Average Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) points per A level entry (or equivalent)	YES	YES		
Average QCA points per A level student (or equivalent)		YES		
Average QCA points score for best eight GCSEs		YES		
% of students achieving five A* – C GCSEs, including English/Welsh and maths (or equivalent)		YES		YES
% of students entitled to free school meals (FSM)	YES	YES		YES
% of students entitled to Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)		YES		YES
Average UCAS points for Highers per student			YES*	
Average UCAS points score for Highers per entry			YES*	
% of students registered for FSM			YES	
% of students receiving EMA			YES	

\* Only available in web-link.

For more information about the service, please contact [hep\\_team@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:hep_team@ucas.ac.uk)

## When is the data available?

This data, which refers to the previous year's school cohort, is published by UK education departments in January, and collected and processed by UCAS in spring. This is then made available to providers in early September, ahead of the following admissions cycle. This means that 2018 school performance data is currently available for use in the 2020 admissions cycle.

## How do I access the data?

You need to register to use this **free service**. For more information and to register, please contact [hep\\_team@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:hep_team@ucas.ac.uk).

The data is available through all of the UCAS link products, with the exception of the following measures, which are only available in web-link:

**Scotland:** Average UCAS points for Highers per student, and average UCAS point score for Highers per entry, as fields labelled 2014+.

**England:** Average attainment 8 score per student.

### Accessing contextual data through odbc-link and xml-link

#### UCAS Undergraduate

Contextual data is available through odbc-link (`cvRefSchoolContextualData`), xml-link (`getUCASApplicantContextualData`), and the reference information in web-link.

#### UCAS Conservatoires

Contextual data is available through odbc-link (`cvRefSchoolContextualData`), xml-link (`getCUKASApplicantContextualData`), and the reference information in web-link.

We've created a step-by-step guide on how to access contextual data through web-link – this is available on the widening participation page on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com). More information on how to access contextual data through the link products is available in the system guides on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com).

## What can I use the CDS for?

The CDS facilitates fair and equitable admissions processes, with the objective of widening participating in higher education. However, providers use contextual data differently, and must be transparent about their reasons for doing so.

[View additional resources.](#)

## What about changes to school

### performance measures?

In response to qualification reform and policy changes, school performance measures – which form a significant part of this service – are undergoing change in England and Wales. Similarly, Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland has resulted in changes to the way the data is reported.

This means that care must be taken when making comparisons with past years of data. For example, for attainment 8, the Department for Education (DfE) in England transitioned to a new points system different to 2016, due to the introduction of the new 9 – 1 graded GCSEs. You can read more in Annex A of the DfE's '[Secondary accountability measures](#)' guide.

## What about the modernised contextual

### data service?

For the 2018 admissions cycle, UCAS worked with a small number of universities to test the feasibility of using a new way of contextualising admissions. This used the principles behind our multiple equality measure (MEM) to provide applicant level data into their individual circumstances. Following its success, for the 2019 cycle, all providers were invited to opt in to this service, known as the modernised contextual data service. In total, 25 providers signed-up to the service, which provides data on an applicant's MEM group (1 – 5) and grade profiles adjusted for an individual applicant's equality context. This service will continue for the 2020 cycle – for more information, please contact [mcads@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:mcads@ucas.ac.uk).

In the future, UCAS will integrate both services so as to create one streamlined experience for providers looking to access contextual data and information.