

## **Contextual Admissions Framework**

### **Introduction**

NCCA's Framework for Contextual Admissions is designed to create and support a greater and collective strength in our provision from recruitment through to graduation.

'Contextual admissions' is broadly understood in the higher education sector to be the practice of taking the social background of an applicant into account in the application process and admissions process for admission to a programme of higher education. The application of a 'contextual admissions' approach often includes reduced academic entry requirements, prioritising applicants or informing 'borderline' admissions decisions. The principles behind this general understanding speak to the increased emphasis in the sector on widening access and participation, and according published institutional Access and Participation Plans.

All of the students we admit onto a course of higher education with NCCA are accepted for a place because we believe they have talent and potential to succeed in the Circus profession. We understand that not everyone will have had the same opportunities or experiences in their route to auditioning with us, often due to cultural, geographical and financial reasons, and it is for this reason that we adopt a wider definition of 'contextual admissions' than that commonly used in the sector. In this way, our Contextual Admissions Framework is not only designed to support applicants who may fall into one or more categories of our Access and Participation Plan. It is also designed to provide a more holistic approach that helps us ensure not only if a candidate is right for the School, but importantly, whether the School is right for the candidate.

Accordingly, NCCA's definition of 'contextual' not only takes account of an applicant's/student's background and social context, but also acknowledges where there may be gaps in understanding and the underpinning reasons for such gaps. From the application stage right through to graduation, the Framework is designed to:

- support and promote the creation of a **partnership of understanding** between students and the School;
- embody a set of **Values** that our School will apply;

Key to our approach is that the values and principles applied during the recruitment process should also be embedded in course design and delivery, to establish a holistic thread running through the full life cycle of a student's degree with a view to maximising student potential achievement and success. We will therefore seek to incorporate these values and principles into our future planning of course design and delivery, and anticipate that the Contextual Admissions Framework may well evolve as we do so.

The **Values** of the Contextual Admissions Framework are underpinned by a set of **Principles**. Broad guidance/resources accompanying the Framework will be developed to support the implementation of those principles. The aim is to for the Framework to create and facilitate mechanisms for us to review and strengthen existing admissions structures and practices in

a strategic way, with a subsequent aim of aligning principles of course design and development.

The Values and Principles enshrined in the NCCA Contextual Admissions Framework are set out in this document.

## VALUES

The values in the box below underpin the Framework:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>UNDERSTANDING:</b></li> </ul>	Create a partnership of understanding between the School and our applicants from the outset of the recruitment process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FAIRNESS:</b></li> </ul>	Have a holistic multi-faceted approach to entry requirements that place student potential at the heart of decision-making
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>COMMUNITY</b></li> </ul>	Be clear about who we are, how we treat each other, and what we expect of our whole School community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EQUALITY:</b></li> </ul>	Identify barriers to entry and success, and work to mitigate these
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SPECIALISM-INFORMED:</b></li> </ul>	Ensure developments within the subject specialism explicitly inform the whole course, from recruitment through to graduation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>INDIVIDUALITY:</b></li> </ul>	Admissions selections are based on both the suitability of an applicant for the School AND the suitability of the School for the applicant

## PRINCIPLES

<p><b>1) An industry-informed approach to recruitment, balancing industry needs and art form development:</b></p>	The School will keep up to date with industry trends, norms and developments to maximise employability but also develop the art form and NCCA graduate skills and knowledge. Contextual admissions look to industry as the starting point, not the end game.
<p><b>2) Successful outcomes for the sector and wider society:</b></p>	Admissions decisions take into account an applicant's holistic potential to contribute to the industry sector and wider society. Courses prepare graduates to make positive contributions to society through and beyond their artistic discipline.

<p><b>3) Entry requirements, selection and recruitment:</b></p>	<p>The approach to this area of admissions will be multifaceted, cohesive, holistic, demystified and ‘non-traditional’. Ways in which this might be achieved might, for example, be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Auditions are complemented by a variety of additional methods of information-gathering about applicants to help reach an admissions decision, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showreels</li> <li>- interviews with ‘targeted questions’</li> <li>- personal statements that are asked to respond to ‘targeted questions’;</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ guidance for applicants issued in advance on understanding the format and purpose of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the audition</li> <li>- the interview</li> <li>- the personal statement</li> </ul> as relevant to the application process;</li> <li>○ opportunities for remote/online video auditions and interviews;</li> <li>○ entry requirements that are deliberately designed to remove barriers and encourage applicants from all backgrounds;</li> <li>○ regular reviews of course entry requirements to identify and remove potential barriers</li> </ul>
<p><b>4) A ‘partnership of understanding’</b></p>	<p>Understanding what the applicant understands is crucial in making the right choices and determining if it is right for both parties. Getting the admissions decision-makers/auditions panels to understand what the applicant understands leads to fairer decision-making. Ways in which this might be achieved might, for example, be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensuring staff making admissions decisions are fully conversant with the values and principles of the contextual admissions framework;</li> <li>○ Initial and regular review of published information for applicants and other stakeholders (parents, guardians, teachers, schools, FE Colleges/sixth forms, social workers etc) in consultation with students and other stakeholders, to ensure maximum accessibility;</li> <li>○ Working with Primary and Secondary Schools to widen awareness and understanding of specialist training and accessibility to this;</li> <li>○ Understanding the way in which an applicant has come to apply to the School and considering their application process within that context.</li> </ul>