national centre
for circus arts

Contextual Admissions Framework

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

1. Overview

Contextual admissions are 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.

2. Purpose

The National Centre for Circus Arts understands 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.

3. Scope

This framework applies to contextual admissions for those applying to the undergraduate programme at the National Centre for Circus Arts. This Contextual Admissions policy is considered to be in-line with the School's Admissions Policy and the Terms and Conditions.

4. Criteria

4.1 All the students we admit onto a course of higher education with National Centre for Circus Arts are accepted for a place because we believe they have talent and potential to succeed in the Circus profession which is observed and recognized through the audition and interview process.

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4.2 While audition/practical workshop and interview performances are important, we will also consider the following contextual factors:

- Ethnic Background (applicants who are Global Majority)
- Socioeconomic background (low household income)
- Educational background (type of school attended – state/independent, gaps in education)
- Personal circumstances (care responsibilities, disability, refugee status)
- Age (Applicants who are over 25)
- Geographic location (live in an area with higher levels of deprivation – IMD 1 and 2)

5. General Process

5.1. All applicants are offered an audition and/or interview regardless of their academic background.

5.2. Auditions are complemented by a variety of additional methods of information-gathering about applicants to help reach an admissions decision, such as:

- Application forms
- Showreels
- interviews with 'targeted questions'
- Personal statements that are asked to respond to 'targeted questions'

5.3 Possible Contextual Admission applicants will be flagged by the registry and admissions team prior to the audition.

5.4 During the audition, the panel will be made aware of contextual admissions while avoiding giving specific personal details of the applicant.

5.5 Contextual Admissions criteria will then be formally applied to successful applicants. The Registry and Admissions team will meet with the head of course to evaluate final applications, considering academic and artistic potential as well as contextual factors listed in section 4.

6. Support for Applicants

6.1 Our approach to supporting Applicants who are applicable for Contextual Admissions is directly influenced by our Access and Participation plan and policy and includes a whole school approach. This is driven by our values (see Appendix C) and the principles (see Appendix B) both of which fully inform our approach to access, particularly concerning Contextual Admission of students.

6.2 While studying at the National Centre for Circus Arts, direct academic and study support is given through our Student Support Manager. Any successful Contextual Admissions applicants will have a meeting with the Student Support Manager to assess whether a Student Learning Plan needs to be put in place to give focused or specialised support to the student's study.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The Contextual Admissions Framework is monitored annually to ensure that the process and requirements meet the needs of our Access and Participation plan and reflects our values (Appendix C) and principles (Appendix B). Feedback from staff, students, and applicants is considered within this review.

7.2 We will also monitor the academic progress of Contextual Admissions students to ensure that the support given meets the need, values (Appendix C) and principles (Appendix B) outlined in this framework.

8. Further information and Contact

For further information on the Contextual Admissions framework, our Access and Participation Plan, or if you would like to be considered for Contextual Admissions please contact: lrad@nationalcircus.org.uk

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Appendix A:

Criteria	Definition	Evidence
Ethnic Background	Applicants are from Global Majority background as defined by OfS.	Self-Certifying
Socioeconomic background	Applicants from low household income, or socio-economic backgrounds	Self-Certifying with evidence of household income, pupil premium or free school meals.
Educational background	Applicants should have attended a state funded school/college between the ages of 5-18. Applicants have experienced a gap in their schooling.	Self-Certifying with evidence of state school attendance/evidence of breaks in education.
Personal circumstances: Care Leavers	Applicants will be considered care experienced if they are currently, or have previously been: • Living with foster carers. • Living in a residential children's home. • Being looked after at home under supervision order. • Living with friends or relatives in kinship care – either through a formal arrangement (e.g. a Special Guardianship order) or an informal arrangement without local authority support.	Self-Certifying with evidence of care arrangements.

Personal Circumstances: Disability	Applicants must have a formal diagnosis of a physical or mental impairment.	Self-certifying with evidence of a disability diagnosis (letter from GP or psychologist)
Personal Circumstances: Refugee/Asylum Seekers	A refugee is someone whose claim for asylum has been recognised and has been granted official 'refugee' status. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for refugee status and is waiting for confirmation of their status.	Applicants are required to provide evidence of either their UKVI letter confirming refugee status, a resident permit card, or confirmation of their current pending application for refugee status
Age	Students must be over 25.	Self-certifying with evidence of age verification.
Geographic location	Students must live in a 1 or 2 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) area (quintile 1). They must be in an area that is classified in the bottom 20% of the country in terms of perceived deprivation.	Verified by the Registry and Admissions Team

Appendix B: Principles

1) **An industry-informed approach to recruitment, balancing industry needs and art form development:**	The School will keep up to date with industry trends, norms and developments to maximise employability but also develop the art form and graduate skills and knowledge. Contextual admissions look to industry as the starting point, not the end game.
2) Successful outcomes for the sector and wider society:	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.
3) **Entry requirements, selection and recruitment:**	We aim for our admission process to be as accessible as possible through each of its stages. This includes multiple routes of application all of which will have clear requirements which allow us to make a fair judgement on your applicability for the course: ○ Auditions are complemented by a variety of additional methods of information-gathering about applicants to help reach an admissions decision, such as: – Showreels – interviews with 'targeted questions' – personal statements that are asked to respond to 'targeted questions'; ○ guidance for applicants issued in advance on understanding the format and purpose of: – the audition – the interview – the personal statement as relevant to the application process; ○ opportunities for remote/online video auditions and interviews; ○ entry requirements that are deliberately designed to remove barriers and encourage applicants from all backgrounds; ○ regular reviews of course entry requirements to identify and remove potential barriers

4) **A 'partnership of understanding'**	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: ○ Ensuring staff making admissions decisions are fully conversant with the values and principles of the contextual admissions framework; ○ 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; ○ Working with Primary and Secondary Schools to widen awareness and understanding of specialist training and accessibility to this; ○ Understanding the way in which an applicant has come to apply to the School and considering their application process within that context.

Appendix C: Values

The values in the box below underpin the Framework:

UNDERSTANDING:	Create a partnership of understanding between the School and our applicants from the outset of the recruitment process
FAIRNESS:	Have an accessible, clear and adaptable approach to entry requirements that place student potential at the heart of decision-making
COMMUNITY	Be clear about who we are, how we treat each other, and what we expect of our whole School community
EQUALITY:	Identify barriers to entry and success, and work to mitigate these
SPECIALISM-INFORMED:	Ensure developments within the subject specialism explicitly inform the whole course, from recruitment through to graduation
INDIVIDUALITY:	Admissions selections are based on both the suitability of an applicant for the School AND the suitability of the School for the applicant