**Learning and Teaching Committee**

**Subject:** Use of Contextual Data in the Admissions Process

**Origin:** Neil Raven, Student Outreach and Recruitment Manager

 Veronica Hammond, Access Administrator

 Chris Carpenter, Undergraduate Admissions Manager

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**Executive Summary:** The University’s Access Agreement states an intention to use contextual data in the admissions process. This paper summarises the rationale behind this intention and the type of data to be used, before outlining how this process will be implemented and evaluated.

**Action Required:**  For information only. No action is required.

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**General**

Loughborough University’s Access Agreement for 2012 – 2013 states that the University will use contextual data within the admissions process to inform decisions made on individual applications. The use of contextual data in this process ensures that:

* A more holistic assessment of applicants is made by setting their application in context
* Particular groups of applicants are not disadvantaged during the application process
* To meet the commitment stipulated in the Access Agreements, including working towards stated milestones and targets
* The opportunity to identify candidates with the potential to develop at Loughborough and achieve high class degrees.

**Type of Contextual Data to be used**

Although contextual data can take a number of forms, Loughborough’s Access Agreement states the intention to ‘focus the core of our outreach and fair access initiatives around applicants from low HE participation neighbourhoods’ (currently based on POLAR 2). The targets and milestones set out in the Access Agreement are based upon applications from and offers made to students from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs), as well as to degree entrants from the same backgrounds.

Using LPN as an indicator of under-representation in HE enables relevant applications to be identified from their postcodes and flagged up upon submission; it is also a widely recognised measure of socio-economic disadvantage across the sector.

**Implementing the use of contextual data in the current admission process**

The current paper-based system involves Admissions identifying those from LPNs via LUSI, and marking paper application forms accordingly before they are sent on to decision makers. We are now working with departments to reach agreement about how this information will be employed in the decision making process, with the aim of ensuring open and consistent use of the data. Where departments have centralised decision making the criteria to apply will be agreed in advance with schools.

From 2014, we will move to a full electronic application system where relevant applications will be automatically flagged up for admissions decision makers. Their decisions will be recorded electronically and other types of contextual data, in addition to LPNs, can be incorporated into the process.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Any decision informed by the consideration of contextual data will be indicated on the application form enabling the use of LPN data to be carefully monitored throughout the admissions process. All findings will be reported back to admissions tutors and other key contacts. This evaluation will also assist in the development of IT systems for the 2014 electronic applications cycle.