

Admissions principles and procedures for Postgraduate Research Programmes

1 Aims

1.1 The University of Bristol aims to:

- Maintain the high academic standards for which it is known;
- Create a student body that is balanced and diverse in terms of background and experience, with all the educational and cultural benefits that this brings;
- Recruit students who will engage with and contribute to the intellectual and cultural vitality of the University community.

1.2 The University will achieve these aims by:

- Encouraging applications from all those with the motivation and academic ability to thrive at Bristol, whatever their background;
- Assessing each application carefully and fairly;
- Offering places to suitably qualified applicants who have the potential to succeed at Bristol.

1.3 To ensure consistency and fairness, the general principles and procedures set out in this document will be followed by all those involved in the admissions process.

1.4 The University is committed to creating a diverse learning environment where all students are valued for their individual differences and contribution, with equal opportunities for all irrespective of age, disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, sexual orientation. All applicants are considered on an equal basis in line with the University's Equality and Diversity Policy.

1.5 The University will review its Principles and Procedures annually in the light of experience, research, relevant legislation and best practice (e.g. the Quality Assurance Agency, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions).

2 Responsibilities and Quality Assurance

2.1 All University staff involved in the admissions process must act in a way that is consistent with the University's admissions aims (see section 1) and must follow the principles and procedures set out in this document.

2.2 The University ensures that appropriate support and training materials are provided for all staff undertaking or overseeing admissions activity, as well as update sessions on policy, legislation, processes and procedures and other related matters.

2.3 The University ensures consistent implementation of approved selection criteria via liaison between Faculty and School based admissions staff and the central admissions team.

2.4 Admissions decisions are subject to strict quality assurance procedures, which will include the following:

- regular consultation with admissions colleagues to ensure compliance with selection criteria;
- routine spot checks to ensure assessment consistency and compliance with legal and policy requirements; regular review of selection criteria and outcomes;
- monitoring of turnaround times to ensure that applications are assessed within a reasonable timeframe.

3 Admissions Statements

3.1 The University will detail in Admissions Statements the proposed method by which it will admit students for each programme, in line with the principles and procedures set out in this document.

3.2 Admissions Statements will include:

- The method by which the University will support the principles and implement the procedures set out in this document;
- The process by which the applicant is expected to make an initial application (either through a formal application, or informal enquiry to the School) and respond to any offer of a place of study;
- Minimum entry criteria against which the University will assess applicants;
- Criteria used to select applicants for offer of admission over and above the minimum entry requirements (if applicable);
- An indication of whether criteria will be weighted differently in the assessment of applicants;
- The process for considering applications and assessing candidates;
- Whether an interview or any other selection procedures (e.g. oral presentation) are likely to be required;
- Whether external assessors are used in the selection process.

4 Application Process

4.1 Applications for all research programmes should be made using the University's standard online application form in accordance with the procedure described in the online prospectus.

4.2 All data requested and held by the University through the application process will be processed in line with the University's Student Fair Processing Notice, and in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

4.3 The University will only correspond about an application or decision with the applicant, unless the applicant has given express consent to the University to correspond with a nominated contact (family member, agent, representative).

4.4 Approved programme-specific closing dates for applications are published on the University website. In some cases, it may be necessary for programmes to close to new applications before the original application deadline is reached, or to extend the deadline further. In such cases, the University will ensure that the new application deadline is made known to applicants with at least two weeks' notice.

4.5 The University reserves the right not to consider incomplete applications, to withdraw these or to reject applicants whose application is incomplete where enough information is provided to confirm that minimum entry requirements are not/will not be met. Submission of incomplete applications can lead to delays in processing. The Admissions Statement will make clear what documents are required with the application to constitute a complete application.

4.6 Where a programme is offered via distance learning, additional information will be sought from the applicant and additional checks will be made by the University to ascertain the viability of this mode of study for the University and the applicant. Further details are contained in the University's Policy for Research Degrees by Distance Learning.

4.7 Where a studentship position is advertised, the advert should clearly state the requirements for candidates, the details of the funding available, and the deadline for applications. Applicants responding to a studentship advert or other advertised postgraduate research position should be asked to state this clearly on their application, using the appropriate part of the application form.

4.8 In some faculties, students aiming for a Doctoral degree are registered for a Masters-level degree in the first instance, e.g. a Masters degree by research, and are eligible for transfer to the PhD degree, subject to satisfying the progression requirements as set by their faculty and/or school. The timing of the transfer process varies depending on the programme of study, but is normally between

one and two years (for full time students). Transfer to Doctoral registration, and continuation of registration for a doctorate, will be subject to satisfactory progress.

4.9 For applications to research degrees, part of the application process involves the assessment of a research proposal. Applicants can contact the relevant School to check that both a suitable supervisor and appropriate academic facilities are available before applying.

4.10 Contact details for admissions teams can be found on the online prospectus and on each Admissions Statement.

4.11 While there is no University-wide charge to applicants for consideration of their applications, individual schools may charge application fees. In these cases, details of the amount payable and mechanism for payment are published in the Admissions Statement and in the online prospectus.

4.12 Some research degree programmes will specify a fee in addition to the University tuition fee to cover programme-specific expenses, referred to as a “bench fee”. If such a fee exists, this will be clearly specified in the programme information and the Admissions Statement. **5 Entry requirements**

5.1 Applicants to postgraduate programmes are normally expected to have good higher education qualifications. Entry requirements are specified at programme level.

5.2 Where entry requirements are stated, these will be phrased in terms of UK degree qualifications. Where an applicant is applying with non-UK qualifications, they may refer to the relevant country page for guidance as to how the University would assess an overseas qualification. The University requires all applicants with non-UK qualifications to be at the same level as their UK counterparts.

5.3 Minimum entry criteria for each programme are provided in the University Postgraduate Prospectus and programme-specific Admissions Statements published on the University website.

5.4 Meeting the minimum academic entry criteria does not automatically mean an applicant will receive an offer. Admissions academic decisions will take into account the academic history of the applicant alongside relevance of degree, degree content, and performance in key modules. The University may ask for additional information about the qualifications that have been taken, such as full degree curriculum. Each applicant is considered both holistically on their own merit and in competition with the rest of the applicant cohort during that academic cycle

5.5 Applicants whose first language is not English are also required to satisfy programme-specific English language entry requirements, as described in the Admissions Statement for each programme. Applicants do not need to have reached the required level of English language before submitting an application. If necessary, English language will be included as a condition of offer.

5.6 Professional programmes which lead to a recognised professional qualification may require a specific professional qualification and a number of years of relevant professional experience prior to admission, e.g. “an Education degree plus one year of post-professional experience”; “a qualified medical degree and, in addition, two to three years’ experience and evidence of interest in Continuing Professional Development in the subject”.

6 Selection

6.1 The University ensures that all programmes have explicit criteria by which applications are judged, which support the University’s Admissions Aims, are in accordance with the principles in this document and are articulated in programme-specific Admissions Statements.

6.2 The University may choose to interview candidates, request examples of candidates’ written work, and/or set written tasks in order to further assess their suitability for the programme to which they have applied. In the case of applicants for research degrees, interviews may also be used to discuss in detail the applicant’s suitability for their chosen research project. Details of such selection methods will be provided in the Admissions Statement for each programme.

6.3 Applications are normally considered by two members of academic staff, who will assess the academic potential of individual candidates and the School’s capacity to provide appropriate

supervision. Admissions decisions will take into account the completed application form and other required documentation (including references) as stated in the Admissions Statement and the intended research topic or proposal (where required).

6.4 A candidate's suitability is based primarily on academic criteria. Availability of funding may also be taken into consideration in admissions decisions in certain circumstances. This may include an applicant's eligibility for funding, as well as the opportunity to provide a funded place.

6.5 A suitable supervisor and appropriate academic facilities are an additional consideration in assessing applications to postgraduate research degrees.

6.6 Where an offer of admission cannot be made for a chosen programme, in some cases applicants may be offered a place on an alternative, related programme. Where alternative programme offers are made the decision will be clearly communicated to the applicant and the reasons explained.

7 Responding to individual applicants' situations

7.1 Applicants who submit multiple applications, either within a cycle or across admissions cycles, will have each application considered separately.

7.2 Admissions Statements will make clear if deferred entry can be considered for the programme and will make clear how deferred entry can be requested. If a deferred place is agreed, the offer holder will be notified by email, and revised offer of admission will be issued at the start of the new admissions cycle as soon as this information is available to be published.

7.3 In the case of applicants seeking recognition of prior learning or achievement, the University will consider the applicant's preparedness and potential to complete the programme when considering whether to grant exemption from some parts of an applicant's chosen programme of study. Experience and/or Qualifications received via an online or distance learning course such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will be considered on an individual basis and at the discretion of the University.

7.4 Allowances may be made for applicants with exceptional circumstances or who have faced difficult challenges (e.g. illness, death of a parent, poverty, disrupted education, refugee status). Such circumstances must be made known to the University following the extenuating circumstances process. The University may decide to offer a place to an applicant whose academic performance appears to have been affected by such circumstances and who might otherwise have been expected to perform better.

7.5 The University welcomes applications from disabled students. Such applications will be considered against the same academic criteria that are applied to all applicants. Applicants are encouraged to disclose any disability that may require adjustments to our admissions process; this will not affect your chances of receiving an offer from the University. Disability Services can provide further advice as necessary. In the unlikely event that the University decides that adjustments required to support an applicant during their education cannot reasonably be made, the University will contact the applicant directly to confirm this decision.

7.6 Applicants who will be under the age of 18 on registering as a student of the University, will be required to complete a form signed by a parent/ guardian as a condition of registration. This provides confirmation that the parent/ guardian understands the University's responsibilities and gives details of an emergency contact in the UK. The University has a risk assessment for applicants who will be under the age of 18 on registration (or under the age of 18 at the beginning of any academic year), which considers steps that need to be taken to admit and support these applicants and fulfil our safeguarding duties.

7.7 The University will disregard any criminal convictions that are spent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, unless the programme of study is likely to bring the student into contact with children or vulnerable adults. Where this is the case, a disclosure will be sought through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Where an applicant has an unspent (or spent in relevant

cases) conviction, a decision on whether to offer a place will be made in accordance with the University guidelines for the recruitment of students with a criminal conviction.

7.8 International applicants should indicate whether they require the University to act as a sponsor for the purposes of a visa application. When considering an application, the University of Bristol will take into account whether or not a student is able to meet the necessary UK visa requirements for the full duration of their programme. The University reserves the right to reject an application, in circumstances where these requirements cannot be met. Further information may be requested from applicants to enable the University to consider such as situation.

7.9 ATAS (Academic Technology Approval Scheme) is one of the government's measures to prevent the spread of knowledge and skills used to develop weapons of mass destruction and associated technology. Non-EEA/Swiss nationals applying to specific programmes may require ATAS clearance prior to registering at the University. For more information on ATAS please visit the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website.

7.10 All offer holders may be required to provide original copies and translations of academic qualifications for verification either electronically during the application process, or in person at registration. The University of Bristol is not prepared to admit applications on the strength of information believed to be either fraudulent or plagiarised and reserves the right to reject or cancel an application under these circumstances, as outlined in the University statement of policy on fraudulent applications.

7.11 The University reserves the right to exclude a candidate who is considered to be unsuitable for a place on a particular programme or for attendance at the University, in accordance with the University's Diversity policy, Acceptable Behaviour policy, or any other relevant policy of the University.

8 Offers

8.1 Applicants to postgraduate research programmes will normally receive acknowledgement within five calendar days of their initial formal application being received, to inform them of the process to be followed and the expected time frame within which they will receive a decision. A final decision may take longer during University closure periods or if further information is required from the applicant.

8.2 Offers may be made with or without conditions attached. The levels of conditional offers made must normally be in line with published entry requirements and may not vary substantially from these. Offer conditions will be stated on the offer of admission.

8.3 Offers of admission are not offers of funding. If funding is to be awarded, this will be confirmed via a separate communication.

8.4 There is strong competition for funding for postgraduate study, and funding is often tied to a sponsor's conditions. In some cases, this may impact on the decision to accept an application. Where there is a possibility of this occurring, this will be explained in the Admissions Statement.

8.5 In some areas, offers of admission will be conditional on a clear Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) criminal records check, fitness to practice certification, immunisations or other non-academic and non-language requirements. Where this is the case, this will be clearly stated on the offer of admission and within the Admissions Statement.

8.6 Where any fees have still to be confirmed (for example, where tuition fee levels are dependent on external bodies setting stipends, or where an offer is deferred and fee levels are not yet set for the proposed year of entry) this will be made clear in the offer of admission or confirmation of the deferral. For students wishing to start mid-year, pro-rata fees will be quoted on the offer of admission.

8.7 The University will make reasonable efforts to deliver each programme of study as described in the relevant specification for the appropriate academic year. Where it is necessary for changes to be made to a programme, such as a change in timetabling, location, type of class, assessment or

syllabus, the University will inform applicants as soon as possible, providing details of the nature of the change and any options that may be available to applicants.

8.8 The University has two main tuition fee levels: a 'home' fee and an 'overseas' fee. For most applicants, this tuition fee status is determined through assessment of information provided in the application form. Tuition fee status is assessed in line with The Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations 2007; and The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) (England) Regulations 2007, and based on guidance provided by UKCISA, the UK Council for International Student Affairs.

8.9 Where a fee status cannot be determined from the information made available in the application form, the University may request specific information from an applicant, via a fee status questionnaire, usually before an offer is made. Applicants have the right to request that their fee status be reviewed once after the decision has been made, but this must be requested within four weeks of the offer being made, and no later than 31 July in the year of registration. For any offers made after 31 July, any review must be submitted within seven days of the offer.

8.10 The University has the right to review a fee status if it considers that any information in the application to be inaccurate. A change in fee status may result in the offer of a place on a course being reconsidered.

9 Acceptance and Confirmation

9.1 The date by which an applicant is expected to confirm their acceptance of an offer will be stated on the offer of admission. The University does not guarantee to hold open places for offer-holders who have not confirmed their acceptance.

9.2 Where a conditional offer is made applicants are expected to provide the University with evidence that any offer conditions have been met. The Admissions Statement will make clear the timeframe in which applicants are expected to confirm acceptance of an offer or provide evidence that conditions have been met.

9.3 Applicants who accept an offer from the University but do not meet the terms of their offer in full may still have their place confirmed. In such cases, decisions will be made with consideration of the individual application and results, and the availability of places on the programme. Decisions will be made in line with the principles outlined in this document.

9.4 The University has contingency plans in place to enable it to cope with failure of these processes (for example, localised computer systems failure) or in the event of candidates being unable to satisfy their offer conditions because the outcomes of previous qualifications have been delayed by strike action, by natural disasters or similar unforeseen circumstances beyond the applicant's control. However, depending on the timescale, the amount of information available and availability of places, it might be necessary to offer a place for the following academic year (i.e. deferred entry).

10 Applicants to whom an offer is not made

10.1 All applicants will be informed of their decision online.

10.2 Due to the high level of competition for places, there will inevitably be occasions when an applicant disagrees with a selection decision. Providing that the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with the published selection criteria, appeals will not be accepted and the original decision will not be overturned. Grounds upon which an appeal can be made are outlined in the Applicants feedback, appeals and complaints policy.

10.3 Where there is concern that the Admissions Principles and Procedures outlined in this document have not been correctly implemented, the case may be investigated under the feedback, appeals and complaints policy. The University has processes in place to capture and progress corrective actions where policy and procedures have not been implemented correctly. Due to the volume of applications received by the University, we regret that it is not possible for us to enter into correspondence with unsuccessful applicants outside of the provisions of this process.

University of Bristol, July 2019