

Fraudulent Applications Policy

1. General principles

The University of Bristol does not admit students whose applications are believed to be fraudulent or plagiarised and reserves the right to reject or cancel an application on these grounds.

The University also reserves the right to:

- Request additional information to verify an application (including verification of results with third parties such as other universities, test providers, schools and other *external parties assisting with admissions*);
- Request to see original academic transcripts or certificates provided in the admissions application;
- suspend the application process while investigating an alleged fraudulent application and/or plagiarism;
- withdraw the application/registration/place if it is proven, or if the University has reasonable belief, that the information provided is false, or if the applicant/student refuses to provide the requested information;
- terminate a student's registration if he/she is found at a later stage to have submitted a fraudulent application to the University.

2. Definitions

2.1 Definition of fraud (based on the definition adopted by UCAS)

Fraud is deemed to have been committed when a person or persons conspire to deceive another person or group of persons into believing that a claim made by that person or group is genuine when in fact it is false. This could comprise giving false information in an application regarding qualifications or experience, providing a fake certificate or reference to support an application, or deliberately omitting relevant information, such as information relating to previous qualifications, or committing some other act of deception.

2.2 Definition of plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion in an application of material derived from the published or unpublished work of another person (for example, from the internet or from another applicant), whether intentional or unintentional.

3. Scope

This policy applies primarily to the admission of students to undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. However, it may also be applied alongside the Student Agreement regulations in the case of a current student whose place at the University is believed to have been obtained on the basis of fraudulent, false or misleading information.

The University has additional procedures for current students covering plagiarism in examinations and assessed coursework and provides advice on how to avoid plagiarism in coursework.

4. Implementation/enforcement

Implementation of this policy varies because of the differing nature of the application process for undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. Standard operating guidelines are being developed to underpin the policy in all three areas. Each set of implementation guidelines should include:

- a clear statement of responsibilities for checking applications for signs of fraud/plagiarism and for investigating and resolving suspected cases of fraud/plagiarism;
- provision for handling suspected fraud detected during the application process and at the point of registration;
- a detailed outline of the process by which suspected cases of fraud/plagiarism are investigated and any decision to cancel an application reached. Any decision to cancel an application must involve representation from the appropriate admissions office, the Secretary's Office and the admitting school;
- details of the measures taken to ensure that those admissions staff who are responsible for implementing the University's policy on fraudulent applications are adequately trained to do so;
- procedures for monitoring and reporting to the Student Recruitment Committee the levels of fraudulent activity investigated and associated outcomes.

5. Right of appeal

Any applicant whose application is cancelled or rejected within the scope of this policy may seek a review of the decision through the applicant appeals, complaints and feedback policy.

6. Data protection

It is a condition of acceptance of a place at the University that information obtained by the University for the purposes of the assessment of an application will be retained and used in accordance with the University's Fair Processing Notice and with reference to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and Data Protection Act 2018.

7. Undergraduate applications: procedures for dealing with suspected fraud and plagiarism

7.1 Plagiarised personal statements

UCAS checks all personal statements using a similarity detection system. Each incoming personal statement is compared against a library of personal statements in the UCAS system and a library of sample statements collected from a variety of websites and other sources, including paper publications (but filters out any instances of 'own plagiarism', that is where an applicant uses the same statement in two admissions cycles). Any statements showing significant levels of similarity are reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service. UCAS notifies institutions of any cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect plagiarism at the same time as notifying the applicants in question that their personal statement has been identified as potentially plagiarised. The decision about what subsequent action, if any, to take rests with the individual institutions.

7.2 Process following a UCAS plagiarism alert

- The Admissions Compliance Officer or Senior Admissions representative annotates the applicant's record and saves a copy of the alleged plagiarism. The selector considers the application using the normal admissions criteria and rejects the application or recommends a provisional offer.
- In cases of provisional offer decisions, the selector, in consultation with a senior admissions representative and admissions tutor if necessary, considers the personal statement and any explanation provided by the applicant to determine whether there is a case to be answered. For example, the alleged plagiarism could merely consist of a number of unfortunate stock phrases that may amount to lack of originality rather than actual plagiarism.
- If there is no case to be answered, the applicant is notified and receives confirmation of the offer.
- If there is a case to be answered, the University undertakes a more extensive investigation into the plagiarism allegation. If an explanation has not already been received, the University emails the applicant requesting further information, and stating that a final decision on the application cannot be taken without consideration of the suspected plagiarism. The applicant must provide the additional information within a set time period, usually 14 days. If the

applicant does not provide the information within that period, the application is automatically unsuccessful.

- On receipt of the additional information, the case is referred to a panel to decide whether the nature of the allegation means that the application should be rejected. The panel requires evidence of the efforts that have been made to elicit extra information from the applicant. It should also consult the application materials and take into account the comments of the relevant admissions tutor.

The panel comprises the following members (or their nominees):

- the Head of Undergraduate Admissions or Head of Postgraduate Admissions, as appropriate (chair);
- a representative from the Secretary's Office;
- the admissions selector for the programme;
- the admissions tutor from the school or partner organisation;
- the relevant Faculty Admissions and Recruitment Officer.

The panel aims to consider multiple cases per meeting, so that decisions are consistent and for efficiency of process. To preserve the objectivity of any subsequent applicant complaints procedures, the Director of Admissions is not invited to sit on the panel.

In making its decision, the panel considers the following factors:

- the extent and significance of the plagiarism allegation;
- the nature of the course applied for, including fitness to practice issues if relevant;
- the views of the relevant faculty;
- consistency and fairness of decision-making across different courses and different years of entry with regard to plagiarism.

These factors are balanced against the rights of the applicant not to be discriminated against.

The panel aims to reach a consensus or a majority decision, with the Chair having a casting vote. If there is no case to be answered, the applicant is notified and receives confirmation of the offer. If plagiarism is established, an email to this effect will be drafted in consultation with the Secretary's Office and the applicant is informed of their right to contest the decision under the applicant appeals, complaints and feedback policy.

7.3 Notification from UCAS Verification Unit

UCAS compares all new applications against records of applicants previously referred for investigation for fraud or plagiarism. Any new application matches are investigated as necessary. UCAS copies the University in to any correspondence with applicants. If UCAS subsequently suspends or cancels an application, it also informs the University. Any decision relating to the applicant is entered onto the student information record. If a member of staff suspects that an undergraduate applicant has provided false information at any point in the application cycle, that application is referred to UCAS for investigation.

In such cases, UCAS undertakes all the investigation and makes the decision on whether to cancel the application on the University's behalf. If UCAS decides not to cancel the application, but considers that there are outstanding issues, the University will request further information from the applicant and convene a panel to consider the case.

7.4 Anti-fraud checks for accepted applicants before registration

It is the responsibility of the Undergraduate Admissions Office to ensure that all undergraduate students admitted to the University have verified qualifications.

Process

- Most qualifications are verified by UCAS, and references from third parties are usually submitted direct to UCAS rather than being submitted by the applicant.
- If the level 3+ qualifications are not verified and/or there is concern that the applicant has supplied a fraudulent reference, the Undergraduate Admissions Office contacts the applicant to request verification of his/her qualifications and/or writes to the referee to request confirmation of the reference sent by the applicant before allowing the applicant to register.

7.5 Current students suspected of obtaining a place based on fraudulent information

The Secretary's Office is informed of cases where a current student is suspected of fraud and agrees a course of action with the relevant academic school and Admissions Office. Students who have already registered at the University are subject to the Student Agreement. In cases of fraud, this agreement may be terminated under section 11, Termination of Agreement, or the student may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Regulations.

8. Training

- The responsibility for identification of fraud rests mainly with UCAS, but Admissions Office staff must be trained to identify fraudulent qualifications and implement the University's procedures.
- Training is organised by the Admissions Office in consultation with UCAS. In addition, Admissions Tutors are briefed annually on current procedures, which are also available on the internal admissions website.

9. Reporting and monitoring

The Admissions Office monitors levels of fraudulent activity and associated outcomes and reports to Student Recruitment Committee on an annual basis.

10. Further information and advice

Further information and advice on implementing these procedures can be obtained from the Admissions Compliance Officer or Head of Undergraduate/ Postgraduate Admissions.

11. Postgraduate applications: procedures for dealing with suspected fraud in the application process

Individual faculties are responsible for the admission of postgraduate students, and cases of suspected fraud are undertaken by the relevant faculty office. Faculties should inform the Postgraduate Admissions Office of any cases of suspected fraud, and investigate such cases promptly to maintain the integrity of the admissions process.

The University will not enter into any further correspondence with an applicant suspected of fraud other than through the relevant faculty office or admissions team until the investigation is complete. The admissions process is suspended pending investigation of the application, and no offer is made to the student, or visa sponsorship information provided, until the investigation is complete.

11.1 Process for handling suspected fraud in postgraduate admissions

All cases of suspected fraud should be referred to the Faculty Office, who are responsible for undertaking further investigation.

The process of investigation varies depending on the nature of the suspected fraud, but may include the following:

- requesting further information from the student to verify their application;
- requesting certified copies of supporting documents not already provided
- verifying language certificates with the awarding body (for example, IELTS, TOEFL);
- seeking confirmation of qualifications from a third party (for example, contacting an awarding institution to confirm the applicant's grades or attendance);
- contacting referees to confirm or check authenticity of information provided.

If any part of the application cannot be verified, the faculty office contacts the applicant to request further supporting information. The applicant has 7 days to respond to this request.

If no response is received by the end of the 21-day period, the application is automatically considered unsuccessful, or any previous offer withdrawn, and the faculty office notifies the applicant of the decision in writing.

If a response is received within 7 days, the faculty office refers the case to the Postgraduate Admissions Office, along with the original application and any relevant correspondence or documentation, for an independent assessment. A course of action is agreed in conjunction with the faculty office.

If there is no case to be answered, the faculty office will notify the applicant and consider the application against the normal admissions criteria.

If there is evidence to suggest that the application contains fraudulent information, and the student has not yet been made an offer, the application will automatically be unsuccessful. If at the time that the fraud is detected a student has already received an offer of a place for postgraduate study, the offer will be withdrawn. In both cases, the Faculty Office will inform the applicant of the outcome in writing.

If the student has already registered at the University, the faculty office will agree a course of action with the Postgraduate Admissions Office and the Secretary's Office. Students who have already registered at the University are subject to the Student Agreement. In cases of fraud, this agreement may be terminated under section 11, Termination of Agreement, or the student may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Regulations.

12. Future applications

Applicants who have previously submitted fraudulent applications will not be allowed to submit additional applications during the same academic cycle.

13. Reporting and monitoring

The Postgraduate Admissions Office records all cases of suspected fraud, and the outcome of any investigation. Admissions teams in faculties (and schools, where appropriate) log cases of suspected fraud and reports to the Student Recruitment Committee, the International Office (where appropriate) and the Secretary's Office on an annual basis.

14. Further information and advice

Further information and advice on implementing these procedures can be obtained from the Admissions Compliance Officer or Head of Undergraduate/ Postgraduate Admissions.