

## Admissions principles and procedures for postgraduate taught 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 or country of origin;
- Assessing each application carefully and fairly;
- Offering places to suitably qualified applicants who have the potential to succeed at Bristol.

1.3. The Admissions Principles and Procedures through which the University assesses applications and offers places are designed to be:

- Easily understood by candidates
- Transparent
- Fair
- Appropriate to the needs of the discipline
- Based on principles that are consistently applied across the University.

1.4. The University will review its admissions principles and procedures annually in the light of experience, research and best practice.

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### 2. Monitoring of Admissions

2.1. Under Statute 21 of the University, Senate regulates the admission of students, subject to the Charter, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations.

2.2. The Student Recruitment Committee (SRC) is tasked with ensuring that key policies and procedures relating to the recruitment and admission of all students are consistent with each other. The Group is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International and Student Recruitment) and includes representative members of academic staff engaged in undergraduate and postgraduate admissions and spread across different faculties, the Director of Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions, and a Sabbatical Officer of the Students' Union.

2.3. In relation to postgraduate study the Student Recruitment Committee (SRC) is responsible for:

- Overseeing the development and implementation of the University's strategy for the recruitment and admission of students;
- Reviewing the Admissions Principles and Procedures on an annual basis, to ensure they enable the University to achieve its aims and are consistent with its policies;
- Ensuring that the Admissions Principles and Procedures are implemented;
- Approving school practice to ensure it is in line with Admissions Principles and Procedures and consistent across the University;
- Ensuring that University policies and strategies remain consistent with each other and enable the University to achieve its strategic objectives for the recruitment and admission of students;
- Assessing the impact of external trends and internal developments including university student funding matters on student recruitment (including widening participation) and admissions;
- Spreading good practice and encouraging consistency;
- Advising schools on how best to achieve the University's Admissions Aims.

2.4. SRC reports to the Education Committee and makes an annual report to Senate. In order to respond to rapidly changing circumstances, the Chair is empowered to act on behalf of the Committee between meetings.

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### **3. Consistency**

3.1. All those involved in the admissions process must act in a way consistent with the University's Admissions Aims (see section 1.2) and must follow the principles and procedures set out in this document.

3.2. The Student Recruitment Committee (SRC) will require an Admissions Statement for each programme or group of programmes admitting postgraduate taught students, providing details of the entry requirements and local procedures which will be followed for all programmes of study, in line with the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures.

3.3. Each Faculty or School (as appropriate) will detail in its Admissions Statement(s) the proposed method by which they will admit students. The Admissions Office will then approve all Admissions Statements. For monitoring purposes, the Student Recruitment Committee (SRC) will consider a sample of approved statements on an annual basis.

3.4. 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;
- Criteria against which the University will assess applicants;
- 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 is likely to be required;
- Whether there are any other selection procedures (e.g. oral presentation);
- Whether external assessors are used in the selection process.

3.5. Admissions Statements will be accessible on the University's website.

3.6. The Admissions Office will develop web-based support materials for those engaged in admission to postgraduate taught programmes. The office will also keep an up to date list of School Postgraduate Admissions and Recruitment Officers/Programme Directors for communications purposes, and provide training and access to up-to-date information on changes in legislation, qualifications and other contextual information as well as University policy and practice by means of admissions meetings, forums or update events. The aim will be to ensure that any training is relevant to the needs of those admitting to postgraduate taught programmes and focused on helping them to do their job effectively. Training providers will include staff with professional expertise in the relevant areas of legislation and policy as well as experienced admissions staff.

#### **4. Responsibilities**

4.1. Faculties are ultimately responsible to the University for the admission of their postgraduate taught students, and must ensure that processes are in place to handle enquiries and applications and to admit students, in accordance with the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures.

4.2 It is the responsibility of the Dean of each faculty to appoint a Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officer to have oversight of recruitment and admissions to both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and to ensure that they understand and support the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures and are given sufficient time and the necessary resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

4.3 The Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officer will provide academic input into the recruitment and admissions processes for their faculty, and act as the first point of contact with Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions for any postgraduate taught admissions policy or procedural issue within the faculty.

4.4 It is the responsibility of the Head of School to appoint a Postgraduate Recruitment and Admissions Officer with oversight of recruitment and admissions at a school level. Heads of School are expected to ensure that School Recruitment and Admissions Officers understand and support both the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures and the skills and qualities that are appropriate to the School's courses. They are also expected to ensure that they are given sufficient time and the necessary resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

4.5 All School Recruitment and Admissions Officers report to their Head of School but will also be responsible (in terms of admissions activity) to the Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officer, who in turn will be responsible to the Dean.

4.6. Control over entry to any programme remains with faculties, acting on the advice of schools/departments in the evaluation and acceptance of student transfers and accreditation of prior learning. Control over entry to a particular unit and programme transfers within a school or department remains with the relevant school/department.

4.7. The University deadline for postgraduate applications is 1 August preceding the commencement of the programme. Schools/departments may, subject to faculty approval, specify a programme-specific closing date for applications but may only do so if this is published in the prospectus and on the University website.

4.8 Key staff who are responsible for admissions are listed below:

- Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officers take an overview of postgraduate taught admissions at faculty level, either approving any offer made outside normal entry requirements (e.g. Recognised Prior Learning applications) or, in some faculties, signing admissions letters and approving offers. They may choose to delegate some aspects of their remit but retain overall responsibility for its delivery. In most cases, Faculty Offices oversee the processing of postgraduate applications. They are responsible for issuing formal decisions to applicants and processing applicant decisions, monitoring admissions and sending out registration information. In two faculties, some of this responsibility is devolved to specific large schools or to a Graduate School and in a small number of cases postgraduate application processing and selection has been delegated to the central admissions team, working within parameters agreed with the relevant Faculty and School Recruitment and Admissions Officers.
- The Head of Department or School is normally responsible for the integrity of the admissions processes in his/her department or school. He/she will ensure that the appropriate academic staff have time to take advantage of admissions training opportunities, and have sufficient resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively
- School Recruitment and Admissions Officers for taught programmes normally report to their head of department or school, and are expected to work closely with relevant university and faculty admissions staff. There should be an annual review of admissions criteria and associated processes by the relevant academic staff in each school/Department.
- The Admissions Office is responsible for co-ordinating and sharing good practice in the admission of postgraduate taught students. For programmes with centralised application processing, the Admissions Office processes postgraduate applications and is responsible for issuing formal decisions to applicants, processing applicant decisions, monitoring admissions and sending out registration information. Where a centralised decision making process is used, this will be made clear in the relevant Admissions Statement. Where appropriate, the Admissions Office provides support to postgraduate taught admissions practitioners in their work. The Admissions office also sets the equivalences required for international qualifications in consultation with the International Office, and works with relevant committees to develop the policy framework within which postgraduate admissions takes place.

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## 5. Application Process

5.1. With the exception of PGCE applications and applications for the MSc in Social Work (which can be made through UCAS), applications for all programmes should be made using the University's standard online application form in accordance with the procedure described in the prospectus and on the website.

5.2 Competition for funding for postgraduate study is fierce, 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 must be explained in the Admissions Statement.

5.3 The University reserves the right not to consider incomplete applications. Submission of incomplete applications can lead to delays in processing. The Admissions Statement should make clear what documents are required with the application to constitute a complete application.

5.4. While there is no University-wide charge to applicants for consideration of their applications, individual schools may, if they wish, introduce their own charge. In such cases, schools are expected to ensure that details of the amount payable and mechanism for payment are published in their Admissions Statement, in the prospectus and on the University website. These charges will be approved by the Admissions Office.

5.5. Self-funded international students applying for taught programmes are required to pay a minimum compulsory deposit of £1,000 but may optionally pay up to the full cost of the tuition fee for the first year. Students whose fees are being paid by an external organisation or sponsor (e.g. a government department or recognised charity) are not required to pay a deposit. The deposit can be paid online. The deposit is non-transferable and non-refundable except under the circumstances outlined in the [International deposits refund policy](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/international-office/refunds/) (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/international-office/refunds/>)

5.6. Some programmes may require an additional programme-specific deposit by way of acceptance of an offer. Where this is the case, schools must make this, and the mechanism for making payments, clear in their Admissions Statement, in the prospectus and on the university website. These charges will be approved by the University.

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## 6. Selection and Admission

### Entry requirements

6.1. Applicants to postgraduate programmes are normally expected to have good higher education qualifications, and entry requirements are specified at programme level.

6.2. The University's minimum requirements for entry to taught postgraduate programmes are a first degree, normally at UK Honours Upper Second (2:1) level or equivalent, OR evidence of prior learning, relevant professional work experience, or academic achievement that enables the University to assess the candidate's potential to succeed in the programme applied for. Applicants with a lower Second level (2:2) Honours degree may only be admitted to specific programmes (detailed in the Prospectus) where there is clear evidence of academic potential at taught postgraduate level. Applicants whose first language is not English are also required to satisfy the University's [English language entry requirements policy](#). Faculties, schools and departments should encourage students to attend English language courses as appropriate, either before their programme begins (if the IELTS score is lower than required before admission), or at the start of the programme.

6.3 Acceptance of Recognised Prior (Experiential/Certified) Learning (RP (E/C) L) credit will be in line with the [University's guidance](#).

Experience and/or Qualifications received via an online or distance learning programme such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will be considered on an individual basis and at the discretion of the school in consultation with the Dean of Graduate Studies. Advice should be sought from the Academic Director of Technology Enhanced learning.

All cases will require prior approval by the Programme Director and Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officer in consultation with the Graduate Education Director. The maximum credit for which Recognised Prior Learning can be accepted is one third of a programme, i.e. 60 credit points RPL for a 180 credit point Masters programme.

6.4. 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”.

## **Selection**

6.5. The University recognises the diversity of educational backgrounds from which its future students come. There are many ways of demonstrating the academic promise and ability to benefit from study and it is recognised that educational systems and choices vary extensively worldwide.

6.6. Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Officers must ensure that their programmes have explicit criteria by which applications are judged, which support the University’s Admissions Aims and are in accordance with the principles in this document.

6.7. These criteria could be articulated at programme, department, school or faculty level, to meet local preferences and needs. Criteria should include elements that allow the following judgments to be made:

- The academic preparedness and potential of the applicant;
- The applicant’s ability to benefit from study at the University of Bristol, including any professional judgments or restrictions, or any fitness to practise issues;
- The applicant’s ability to contribute effectively to other activities of the Department, where required;
- The Department’s ability to provide a study place or suitable supervision.

6.8. The University upholds the principles of equality and diversity, respect and dignity. Applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion or belief, disability, health or age. University, faculty and school admissions staff must ensure that all admissions decisions take account of the University’s statutory responsibilities in respect of equal opportunities and any related University policies and must be based on fair and justifiable criteria. Selectors should encourage applicants to disclose disabilities in order that appropriate support can be put in place.

6.10. All applications are considered by at least two members of the appropriate admissions team, and in the majority of cases one will be an academic member of staff.

6.11. Admissions decisions will take into account the completed application form, two academic references, and the verified degree transcript. Admissions staff will be aware of University admissions guidance such as the Admissions Principles and Procedures for Postgraduate Taught Programmes and Guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning. The reasons for an admission decision will be recorded for all applications.

6.12. Admissions staff will assess the academic potential of individual candidates and take into consideration the University’s Admissions Principles and Procedures and programme entry requirements. Selectors must ensure that all admissions decisions take account of equality and diversity policy and are based on fair and justifiable criteria.

6.13. Consideration of applications from students who declare a disability is based on the same criteria and principles as for other candidates. The University is seeking to reduce any barriers that might confront a student with a disability seeking to study at Bristol. A decision may need to take into account any overriding health and safety concerns, barriers relating to professional requirements, or the University's ability or inability to make any necessary reasonable adjustments. Such cases will be addressed on an individual basis. Implementation of the Admissions Principles and Procedures will be sensitive to the different experiences of disabled applicants, and will take into account their response to the opportunities and challenges they have encountered, on the understanding that these may be individual to the applicant. Applicants with a disability

are encouraged to disclose this to the University, to enable any necessary reasonable adjustments to be planned in support of their education. Failure to do so may impact on the ability to make any necessary reasonable adjustments.

6.14. Admissions staff 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 by a group convened by the Academic Registrar according to the procedure set out in our [procedures for the recruitment of students who are ex-offenders](#).

6.15. 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.

6.16. In order to avoid the proliferation of potentially dangerous technologies in unstable or unfriendly regimes, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) runs an [Academic Technology Approval Scheme](#). This scheme is compulsory for overseas applicants from outside the EU and approval by the FCO under the terms of the scheme is a requirement for entry to a number of programmes.

6.17. 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](#).

6.18. The University reserves the right to exclude a candidate who is considered on justifiable grounds to be unsuitable for a place on a particular course or for attendance at the University.

## **Interviews**

6.19. In general, the University does not require candidates to be interviewed. Schools/departments may interview candidates, subject to clearly explaining why and how the interview will be used in assessing the candidates, and to following University-approved procedures. These are:

- i. All candidates must be treated on an equal and fair basis.
- ii. Interviews intended to select students must normally be conducted by at least two people, including a member of staff who has undergone University-provided training on fair and effective recruitment techniques.
- iii. The interview and consequent decision-making will be consistent with the University's policy on equal opportunities. Questions related to the race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion or age of the applicant must not be raised either at the interview or in subsequent discussion. However, staff should encourage applicants to disclose any disability to the University, to help ensure that any necessary adjustments can be planned to support their education.
- iv. Criteria for measuring a candidate's performance must be specified in the Admissions Statement.
- v. A standard format note of the interview must be taken and submitted to the faculty, school or university admissions team handling the application.
- vi. Where appropriate, interviews may be conducted by telephone, video conferencing or other appropriate technologies.

## **Additional material**

6.20. The University does not normally require applicants to provide supplementary written work for admission. However, departments may ask applicants for an example of their work, or set them a written task, subject to explaining clearly why and how this will be used in assessing the candidate. For example, applicants may be asked to provide a creative piece of work or a critical essay on a specific topic where additional professional or other vocational selection criteria exist.

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## **7. Offers**

7.1 Wherever possible, applicants to postgraduate taught programmes will receive a decision within 21 calendar days of submitting a complete application.

7.2. Faculty Offices normally make formal offers on behalf of the University. In a small number of cases, this task is undertaken by a School office or for those programmes where selection has been centralised) by the central admissions team. 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.

7.3. Applicants will receive a decision online, and can accept or decline their offer online. All offers, including unconditional offers are made in good faith, and the University reserves the right to withdraw an offer on justifiable grounds.

7.4. In determining the number of offers to be made, School Recruitment and Admissions Officers, or the Admissions Office (in cases where a centralised decision making process is in use,) must take account of the student number targets agreed by the University Planning and Resources Committee on an annual basis.

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## **8. Acceptance and Confirmation**

8.1. Normally an applicant is expected to confirm their acceptance of an offer within 40 days of the date of the offer being made. Faculties (or schools) may establish their own deadline for applicants to respond to an offer if 40 days is deemed to be inappropriate in their circumstances. The University does not guarantee to hold open places for offer-holders who have not confirmed their acceptance

8.2 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 should make clear the timeframe in which applicants are expected to confirm acceptance of an offer or provide evidence that conditions have been met. The Admissions Statement should also make clear if it is possible for candidates to apply for deferred entry to a programme.

8.3. International applicants should indicate whether they require the University to act as a sponsor for the purposes of a visa application.

8.5. 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).



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## **9. Applicants to whom an offer is not made**

9.1. A decision must be recorded for all applications (including a reason, where a rejection is recorded). All applicants will be informed of their decision online.

9.2. The University will correspond about a decision only with the candidate, unless the candidate provides written permission for the University to discuss it with another person. There is no right of appeal and the decision will not be reviewed. However, concerns that the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures have been incorrectly implemented may be investigated under the [Applicant feedback and complaints procedures](#). 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.