

## Fraudulent Applications Policy

University statement of policy on fraudulent applications

### 1. General principles:

The University of Bristol is not prepared to admit applicants 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.

The University also reserves the right to:

- request additional information to verify an application;
- put the application process on hold whilst investigating the 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)

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. For example, this could comprise false information given on an application regarding qualifications or experience, or the provision of a fake certificate or reference to support an application, or the deliberate omission of relevant information, e.g. the non-inclusion of information regarding previous qualifications, or some other act of deception.

#### 2.2 Definition of plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged inclusion of material derived from the published or unpublished work of another person (such as from the internet or from another applicant), whether this is intentional or unintentional.

### **3. Scope:**

This policy statement primarily applies to the admission of students to undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. However, these procedures could also be applied to the case of a current student if the University has grounds to believe that he/she obtained his/her place based on fraudulent information.

The University already has procedures in place for registered current students. The Exam Regulations already cover [plagiarism in examinations](#) and assessed coursework and students are given advice on how to avoid [plagiarism in coursework](#)

### **4. Implementation/enforcement:**

The approach to implementation will need to vary to reflect the differing nature of the application process for undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. In each case, standard operating procedures are being developed to underpin this policy. 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 will be investigated and any decision to cancel an application reached. Any decision to cancel an application must, as a minimum, involve representation from the appropriate admissions office, the Secretary's Office and the admitting School;
- Details of measures to be 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. Complaints Procedure**

Any applicant whose application is cancelled or rejected within the scope of this policy may seek a review of the decision using the University's [Applicant Complaints Procedures](#).

## **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 law and may be shared with UCAS or other bodies for the purposes of verifying the identity/qualifications/references of the applicant.

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

### **7.1 Plagiarised personal statements**

UCAS now check all personal statements using a similarity detection system, Copyscatch. Each incoming personal statement is compared against a library of personal statements already 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', i.e. if 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. Institutions are then notified on a daily basis of any cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect plagiarism. At the same time, an applicant is also notified that the personal statement has been identified as potentially plagiarised. The decision about what action, if any, to take regarding notified cases rests with the individual institutions.

### **7.2 Process once notified of UCAS plagiarism alert:**

- Admissions Compliance Officer or Senior Admissions representative notes on applicant's record and saves a copy of the alleged plagiarism on the shared drive. Selector to consider application using normal criteria and make reject or provisional offer decision.
- If provisional offer decision, the personal statement and applicant's explanation (if received) is considered by the Selector, in consultation with Senior Admissions representative and Admissions Tutor if necessary, 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, which may amount to lack of originality rather than actual plagiarism.
- If there is no case to be answered, then this will be communicated to the applicant and he/she will receive confirmation of the offer.
- If it is decided that there is a case to be answered, then more extensive investigation into the plagiarism allegation will need to be undertaken. If an explanation has not already been received, the applicant will be sent an email asking for extra or corroborating information, and stating that a final decision on his/her application cannot be taken without the separate consideration of the suspected plagiarism. A set period of time, usually 14 days, will be given for the applicant to provide the additional information requested. If the applicant does not provide the information within that period, then the application will be automatically unsuccessful.

- Once the additional information has been received, the case should be referred to a Group to decide whether the nature of the allegation means that the applicant should not be offered a place. This Group will need to see evidence of the efforts that have been made to elicit extra information from the applicant, and should also see the application materials. The Group would also be asked to take into account the comments of the relevant admissions tutor.

The Group will consist of the following (or their nominees):

- The Deputy Head of Admissions (Undergraduate or Postgraduate) or nominee (Chair);
- A representative from the Secretary's Office;
- The admissions selector for the programme;
- The admissions tutor from the School or partner organisation or nominee;
- The relevant Faculty Admissions Officer or nominee.

The aim would be for the Group to consider several cases per meeting, so that decisions are consistent and for efficiency of process. It will not be possible for the Head of Admissions to be on the Group, in order not to compromise the objectivity of Applicant Complaints Procedures.

In making the decision, the following factors should be taken into account:

- 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.

All the above factors must be balanced against the rights of the applicant not to be discriminated against.

The Group should aim for consensus, or reach a majority decision, with the Chair having a casting vote. If there is no case to be answered, then this will be communicated to the applicant who will receive confirmation of the offer. If an offer is not to be made, an email to this effect will be drafted in consultation with the Secretary's Office and the applicant will be informed of the Complaints Procedures.

### **7.3 Notification from UCAS Verification Unit**

UCAS Hunter fraud detection database holds records of all applicants previously referred for investigation, and compares with all new applications. The database flags up if any new application matches, and further investigation is then undertaken as necessary. UCAS copies the University in to any correspondence with our applicants. If UCAS subsequently decides to

suspend or cancel the application, then the University will also be informed, and it is also flagged when a decision on that applicant is entered onto the student information record. At any point in the application cycle, if a member of staff suspects that an undergraduate applicant has provided false information, then 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 decide not to cancel the application, but it is felt that there are still some outstanding issues, then the University will ask the applicant to provide further information and a Group will be convened, as above.

#### **7.4 Anti-fraud checks for accepted applicants before registration:**

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

##### **Process:**

1. Most qualifications are verified by UCAS, and references are usually submitted direct to UCAS rather than being submitted by the applicant.
2. 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 will write to the applicant to request verification of his/her qualifications and/or write to the referee to request confirmation of the reference sent by the applicant before the applicant is allowed to register.

#### **7.5 A current student who is suspected of having obtained their place based on fraudulent information**

If the student has already registered at the University, the Secretary's Office should be informed of the suspected fraud. The academic School, Undergraduate Admissions Office, and Secretary's Office will agree a course of action to be taken. Students who have already registered at the University are subject to the [Student Agreement](#), and may have this agreement terminated under section 11, Termination of Agreement, or may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Regulations.

#### **8. Training:**

- The responsibility for identification of fraud mainly rests with UCAS, but Admissions Office staff will also need to be appropriately trained both in the implementation of procedures and also to spot fraudulent qualifications.

- Any necessary training will be organised by the Admissions Office in consultation with UCAS. In addition, Admissions Tutors will be briefed of current procedures in the annual Admissions Tutors Update and on the [internal admissions website](#).

## **9. Reporting and monitoring:**

The Admissions Office will monitor levels of fraudulent activity and associated outcomes and will report 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 Deputy Head of Admissions (Undergraduate or Postgraduate).

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

The statement of policy on Fraudulent Applications states that the University of Bristol is not prepared to admit applicants 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. This document sets out the process for handling suspected fraud in the postgraduate application process.

Applications for postgraduate programmes are made directly to academic schools, in most cases via faculty offices, with the exception of the School of Economics, Finance and Management, the Graduate School of Education, and the School of Law, who deal directly with their own applications. Faculties are ultimately responsible to the University for the admission of their students, and must ensure that processes are in place to handle enquiries and applications and to admit students.

The Admissions Office should be informed of all cases of suspected fraud. Advice can be sought from the Admissions Office about the investigation of fraud at any stage in the process, by any member of staff. It is essential that any case of suspected fraud is investigated promptly to maintain the integrity of the admissions process.

While a case of suspected fraud is being investigated no further correspondence should be entered into with the applicant other than through the Faculty Office until the investigation is completed. The admissions process should be suspended pending investigation of the

application, and no offer should be made to the student, or visa sponsorship information provided, until the investigation is completed.

### **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 will vary depending on the nature of the suspected fraud, however it may include:

- Asking the student for further information to verify their application;
- Requesting certified copies of supporting documents if not already received (it is advised that applicants are not asked to provide original documents. Overseas applicants will be required to produce original documents at their visa interview in their country of origin. Instead, it is advised that submission of original documentation should be made a condition of registration);
- Verifying language certificates with the awarding body (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL);
- Seeking confirmation from a third party (e.g. contacting an awarding institution to confirm the applicant's grades or attendance);
- Contacting referees to confirm information provided or check authenticity.

Following the investigation by the Faculty Office, if parts of the application cannot be verified the applicant should be informed in writing and given the opportunity to provide further supporting information. The applicant should be given 21 days to respond to this request.

If no response is received by the end of the 21 day period the application will be automatically unsuccessful, or any offer made will be withdrawn, and the applicant will be informed in writing by the Faculty Office.

If a response is received within 21 days the Faculty Office should refer the case to the Admissions Office to provide an independent assessment (providing the application and any relevant correspondence or documents). A course of action will be agreed in discussion with the Faculty Office.

If the decision is that there is no case to be answered this will be communicated to the applicant by the Faculty Office, and the application will be considered against the normal admissions criteria.

If there is evidence to suggest the application contains fraudulent information, the Secretary's Office should be consulted. If the student has not yet been made an offer, their application will be automatically 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 student will be informed in writing by the Faculty Office.

If the student has already registered at the University, the Secretary's Office should be informed of the suspected fraud. The Faculty Office, Admissions Office and the Secretary's Office will agree a course of action to be taken. Students who have already registered at the University are subject to the Student Agreement, and may have this agreement terminated under section 11, Termination of Agreement, or may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Regulations.

## **12. Reporting and monitoring**

The Admissions Office will record all cases of suspected fraud that are referred to them for consideration, and the outcome of any investigation. Admissions teams in faculties (and schools, where appropriate) are asked to log cases of suspected fraud to enable the Admissions Office to report levels of fraudulent activity in postgraduate admissions to Student Recruitment Committee on an annual basis, as well as to the International Office (where appropriate) and the Secretary's Office.

## **13. Further information and advice**

Further information and advice on implementing these procedures can be obtained from the Admissions Compliance Officer or Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate or postgraduate).