

## 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 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.

2.5. The University Graduate Studies Committee (UGSC) is a subcommittee of the Education Committee chaired by the Academic Director of Graduate Studies. Membership includes the Graduate Education Director from each faculty. The role of the UGSC is:

- To advise the Education Committee on the development of postgraduate education policy across the University;
- To take delegated responsibility for strategy, policy, good practice and code of practice development at postgraduate research level;
- To ensure alignment of the University's postgraduate research policies and procedures with UK-wide frameworks including codes of practice and to monitor and oversee the implementation of internal postgraduate research codes of practice;
- To consider and advise on issues and implications in relation to the international agenda, in respect of postgraduate research education.

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### **3. Consistency**

3.1. All Faculties and Schools 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 research students, providing details of the entry requirements and local admissions procedures which will be followed for all programmes, in line with the University's Admissions Principles and Procedures.

3.3. Each faculty or school (as appropriate) will use its statement(s) to seek approval for the proposed method by which they will admit students. The Admissions Office will approve individual 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 faculty or school 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;
- the process for application in response to an advertised studentship
- the awards available, and expectations in terms of transferring to higher awards (e.g. from MPhil to PhD);
- criteria against which the University will assess applicants
- an indication of whether criteria will be weighted differently in the assessment of applications;
- 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 research programmes. The office will also keep an up-to-date list of postgraduate admissions staff 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 and update events. The aim will be to ensure that any training is relevant to the needs of those admitting students to postgraduate research 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.

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## 4. Responsibilities

4.1. Faculties are ultimately responsible to the University for the admission of their postgraduate research 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. Control over entry to any programme remains with faculties, acting on the advice of schools 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 remains with the relevant school.

4.3. Key staff who are responsible for admissions are listed below:

- **Graduate Education Directors** take an overview of postgraduate research 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 where this is not delegated to the Faculty Education Managers.

- **Faculty Offices / Faculty Graduate Schools** oversee the processing of postgraduate research applications. They are responsible for issuing formal decisions to applicants and processing applicant decisions, monitoring admissions and sending out registration information. Some of this responsibility may be devolved to specific large schools or to a Graduate School.
  - **The Head of School, or alternative where appropriate**, is normally responsible for the integrity of the admissions processes in his/her 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.
  - **Admissions selectors** for research programmes normally report to their Head of School.
  - **The Admissions Office** is responsible for co-ordinating and sharing good practice in the recruitment and admission of postgraduate research students. Where appropriate, it provides support to postgraduate 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 research admissions takes place.
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## 5. Application Process

5.1. Applications for postgraduate research 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 affect the decision about the application. Where there is a possibility of this occurring, this should be stated in the Admissions Statement.

5.3. 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.

5.4. 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.

5.5. 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.

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.

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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. General admissions requirements for entry to research degree programmes are outlined in the University's [Postgraduate prospectus](#), and described in detail in school literature and web pages relating to specific research degree programmes.

6.2. In some faculties, students aiming for a Doctoral degree are registered for a Master's degree by research in the first instance and are eligible for transfer to registration for the PhD degree subject to satisfying the requirements 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, is in all cases subject to satisfactory progress.

6.3. The University's minimum requirements for entry to postgraduate research programmes are a first degree, normally at a level equivalent to UK Honours 2.1 level, OR a relevant Master's qualification, OR evidence of prior learning or achievement that enables the University to assess the candidate's potential to succeed in the programme applied for. Applicants whose first language is not English are required to satisfy the University's [Language entry requirements policy](#). Faculties and schools should enable and encourage students to attend language courses as appropriate, either before their programme begins (if the IELTS score is lower than required before admission), and/or during the programme, as required by the school/faculty.

### 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. Postgraduate Research Admissions staff 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, 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 school, where required.
- The school's ability to provide a study place and appropriate research supervision.

6.8. 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.

6.9. The school's strategic research priorities should also be taken into account in any admissions decisions.

6.10. Decisions are taken by two or more members of academic staff.

6.11. The University upholds the principles of equality and diversity, respect and dignity. Candidates are not discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion or belief, disability, health or age. Selectors 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.

6.12. In the case of entrants seeking recognition of prior learning or achievement, criteria must be in place to enable a potential student's preparedness and potential to complete the programme to be evaluated. Evidence that the criteria have been applied will be provided to the relevant faculty office by those involved in decision-making.

6.13. Admissions decisions will take into account the completed application form, two academic references, the verified degree transcript, the English language qualification (where required) and the intended research topic or proposal (where required). The admissions statement should make clear where any additional supporting information is required for application. The reasons for an admission decision will be recorded.

6.14. Schools may require applicants to provide supplementary material for admission, 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).

6.15. Admissions staff will be aware of University admissions guidance such as the Admissions Principles and Procedures for postgraduate research programmes and Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning. 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.

6.16. Admissions staff will assess the academic potential of individual candidates and the School's capacity to offer appropriate supervision, 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.

6.17. 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.

6.19. 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.

6.20. 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.

6.21. 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.

6.22. 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.

6.23. 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.

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## **7. Formal interviews**

7.1. Schools may formally interview candidates, subject to following University-approved procedures, and being able to explain, if required, how the interview will be used in assessing the candidates.

7.2. These are:

- All candidates must be treated on an equal and fair basis.
  - Formal interviews intended to select students must normally be conducted by at least two people, including at least one member of staff who has undergone University-provided training on fair and effective recruitment techniques.
  - 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.
  - Criteria for measuring a candidate's performance must be specified in the Admissions Statement.
  - A note of the interview, including the reasons for the decision, must be taken and submitted to the appropriate Admissions Selector (e.g. Head of School, Head of Subject).
  - Where appropriate, interviews may be conducted by telephone, video conferencing or other appropriate technologies.
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## **8. Offers**

8.1. Normally, applicants to postgraduate research programmes will 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.

8.2. Faculty Offices (or graduate schools or schools as approved by the faculty) normally make formal offers on behalf of the University. Offers may be made with or without conditions attached. The levels of conditional offers made should normally be in line with published entry requirements and may not vary substantially from these.

8.3. 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.

8.4. In determining the number of offers to be made, School Recruitment and Admissions Officers must take account of the student number targets agreed by the University Planning and Resources Committee on an annual basis.

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## **9. Acceptance and Confirmation**

9.1. 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.

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 should make clear the timeframe in which applicants are expected to confirm acceptance of an offer or provide evidence that conditions have been met. Again, the University does not guarantee to hold open places for offer-holders who have not confirmed their acceptance

9.3. 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.

9.4. International applicants should indicate at the point of application whether they require immigration sponsorship by the University of Bristol.

9.5. 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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## **10. Applicants to whom an offer is not made**

10.1. 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.

10.2. The University will only communicate about a decision with the candidate, unless the candidate grants 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](#).