



Postgraduate Admissions Policy

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Postgraduate Admissions Policy

Scope of policy

This policy applies to all admissions to full-time, part-time and distance learning postgraduate¹ taught (PGT) courses and research degrees (PGR) at the University's campuses in Colchester, Loughton and Southend. It covers all stages of an applicant's interaction with the University from initial enquiry through to application, receipt of the University's selection decision, and the transition to first registration and induction for successful applicants.

Responsibility for policy

The Postgraduate Admissions Policy is approved by the Senate. Implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the Director of Admissions, Communications & External Relations.

Review of policy

Monitoring and review of the Postgraduate Admissions Policy is undertaken annually by the Senate and its sub-committees.

Principles governing Postgraduate Admissions

The University recognises the value of diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity. It aims to provide an environment in which applicants are treated with dignity and respect.

The University is committed to fair access and encourages applications from all students who are able to demonstrate the potential to meet the entry criteria for the relevant course and to benefit from study at postgraduate level. Individual applicants are considered on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential, regardless of their race, ethnic origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs and affiliations or other irrelevant distinction. The University's admissions policies and procedures are designed to ensure that all applications are considered fairly and consistently and in accordance with professional standards.

¹ This includes Graduate Certificate and Diploma courses, which are graduate in time, but not in level. Use of the term 'postgraduate' in this document is intended to be inclusive of provision at graduate as well as postgraduate level. Graduate level study is defined as equivalent to Honours level (6) by the Quality Assurance Agency in its National Qualifications Framework; for further details, see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications>

The University acknowledges the guiding principles and precepts governing good admissions practice set out in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Admissions, recruitment and widening access (November 2018). The University welcomes the recognition by the QAA of the autonomy enjoyed by higher education institutions in making admissions decisions and of the need to exercise judgement in making such decisions. Against this background, the University of Essex Postgraduate Admissions Policy is intended to provide a policy and procedural framework within which admissions decision-making is characterised by transparency, fairness and consistency.

The University strives to observe the rules and procedures set down by the Office for Students (OfS) and other good practice guidance provided by the sector (for example by Universities UK), and to comply with all relevant legislation in relation to its postgraduate admissions activity.

Section 1 – Marketing and Student Recruitment

The University is committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and consistent messaging in its marketing and recruitment information, and to the management of activity which leads to the admission of students to the University in ways that are fair, clear, explicit and implemented consistently.

Ensuring consistency is important especially in relation to the very wide range of different countries, in which the University undertakes marketing and recruitment activities.

The University's marketing and recruitment messages are delivered through promotional materials and activities which we aim to ensure are accurate, relevant, current, and accessible in order to provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options.

Marketing and Student Recruitment activities include:

- participation at education exhibitions around the world
- collaboration with potential and existing partner institutions
- communicating with enquirers and applicants
- working with agents who represent us around the world
- on-campus and online Open Days and Applicant Days
- working with schools and colleges around the world

Marketing and Student Recruitment information is communicated via a number of different channels and includes:

- printed prospectuses
- the University website which includes specific pages for international students
- email campaigns to enquirers and applicants
- social and new media
- print and digital advertising campaigns

Marketing and Student Recruitment also ensure that communications with applicants and enquirers adheres to CMA (Competition and Markets Authority), GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) and PECR (Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations) legislation.

Marketing and Student Recruitment and admissions staff maintain a strong working relationship in order to ensure a holistic approach that is informed by the principles set out in the Postgraduate Admissions Policy.

Section 2 - Admissions

The University operates a centralised postgraduate admissions function for all direct applications, which are processed by a team of Senior Admissions Advisers who act as the principal contact for applicants throughout the admissions process.

The selection of students for admission is the responsibility of the Dean of Postgraduate Research & Education (PGR) and Heads of Department² (PGT). The Dean delegates the selection of research students to Heads of Department and in practice selection is further delegated to Admissions Selectors, who may be members of academic staff or members of the central Postgraduate Admissions team. The exact arrangements vary according to the organisational structure of the department and the variety of provision within the subject. Members of academic staff in a selecting role are supported by a Graduate Administrator, who will liaise with the relevant Senior Admissions Adviser to ensure that selection decisions are made and reported in a timely manner and with access to appropriate resources and reference materials.

The Postgraduate Admissions Office is responsible for making the offer and determining whether there should be any conditions. A formal offer letter and the University's Terms and Conditions (and other documents that form part of the 'student contract') are communicated to applicants at the initial offer stage.

Admissions process: applicant's responsibilities

Applicants are expected to:

- provide complete and honest information in applications submitted to the University
- respond in a timely manner to requests for further information from the University
- communicate any changes to the information originally supplied in their application as soon as possible
- be courteous and respectful in their communications with University staff involved in admissions.

² The term department is used generically in this document and includes academic Schools and Centres of the University.

Entry requirements

1. Academic requirements

Applicants for postgraduate study must meet the admissions criteria as set out in University Regulations and any course-specific entry requirements, which are published annually in the Postgraduate prospectus and on the University website. Entry requirements are reviewed annually and may include achievement in specific subjects and/or the submission of specific items with the general application.

2. English language competence

Applicants whose first language is not English are required to achieve a minimum level of English to be admitted to a postgraduate taught course or research degree. The University accepts a range of English language qualifications and degrees taught in English.

The English language qualifications and tests which are acceptable for entry to the University and the levels required are listed on our [website](#).

The required score for English language tests varies according to subject area.

Applicants who do not meet the English language requirement for their course or research degree may be referred to the University of Essex International College for a pre-sessional English course as a route to achieving this.

3. Publication of entry requirements

Entry requirements are normally determined up to eighteen months before the proposed point of admission e.g. by January 2022 for October 2023 entry and are published in the postgraduate prospectus and on the University website. The University reserves the right to amend its entry requirements up to 12 months before the proposed point of admission. Amended entry requirements will be published on the University website. Applicants already holding offers at the time of the change will be admitted in accordance with the terms of the existing offer unless the new requirements are in favour of the applicant, in which case a revised offer will be issued automatically.

4. Acceptable qualifications

The University accepts Bachelors and Masters degrees from UK, and international institutions where the status of the institution and its degree awarding powers can be verified. The equivalence of other qualifications, including professional qualifications and non-UK qualifications, to level 6 of the [UK](#)

[qualifications framework](#) (an Honours degree)³ and the equivalence of non-UK grading systems to the UK classification system will be evaluated in accordance with independent national guidance provided by UK ENIC and other recognised sources.

The Head of Admissions (Postgraduate) has overall responsibility for undertaking such evaluations in consultation with Admissions Selectors and recruitment staff, and for maintaining the University's Postgraduate qualifications guidance for use by Admissions Selectors and the Admissions team.

5. Verification of qualifications

Applicants are required to submit evidence of their academic achievement to date at the point of application. Evidence of the award of a Bachelors or higher degree must be provided at the confirmation stage, if not already verified during the admissions process, and before the applicant's place is confirmed. Information and guidance on qualification verification is made available to applicants at both the initial offer and at the confirmation stage of the admissions cycle.

6. Student visa requirements

Where an applicant requires a Student visa to study in the UK, an offer of a place will be subject to compliance with relevant aspects of the [Home Office's Student visa sponsor guidance](#) and University guidance relating to the admission of Student visa applicants.

Selection

7. Assessment of applications and initial checks

All applications are subject to an initial check on receipt by admissions. The initial check will identify applications which require specific attention (see section on *Consideration of Additional Data in Selection and Offer-Making*, paragraphs 21 to 27 below), in order to ensure that they are dealt with in accordance with relevant procedures. The initial check will also verify that the applicant's existing academic achievements are from institutions which can be verified as acceptable in accordance with paragraph 5 above. The Senior Admissions Advisers will request further evidence or clarification from the applicant if there is insufficient information for the application to be considered or for a selection decision to be made. On completion of the initial checks an Admissions Selector will make the selection decision.

Applications from individuals who do not meet the University's General Entrance Requirements and who do not demonstrate compensating professional experience may be rejected at the initial assessment stage. Applications where there is uncertainty about the level of existing academic

³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications>

achievement will be referred to the relevant Postgraduate Admissions manager who will determine whether the application should be forwarded for selection.

8. Selection decision

Applicants who have the potential to achieve the course entry requirements, but do not meet the University's General Entrance Requirements will be referred to the relevant Postgraduate Admissions Selector who will determine the outcome (whether to make an offer or to reject). If the Admissions Selector recommends that an offer should still be made, the application will be approved by a member of the Postgraduate Admissions team on behalf of the relevant Faculty Dean; in some cases it will be forwarded to the relevant Faculty Dean who will be responsible for determining whether the General Entrance Requirements may be waived.

In accordance with the University's commitment to fair admissions, each application that is referred to an Admissions Selector is considered individually to determine whether an offer should be made on the basis of academic achievements to date, future academic achievement and other evidence of the applicant's ability and potential to complete the course for which they have applied. This includes evidence of the applicant's motivation, skills, experience and attitude, as expressed in any personal statements and supporting documents. The Admissions Selector may take into account any extenuating circumstances which have affected an individual applicant when deciding whether an offer should be made.

9. Interviews, auditions and other evidence

Interviews are not part of the standard admissions procedure for the majority of postgraduate taught courses, but exceptions apply, and applicants are notified accordingly during the admissions process where attendance at interview or any other evidence is required. Application processes and requirements are set out in the University's Postgraduate prospectus and the University website.

Applicants that will be required to attend an interview include:

- Applicants to some health-related courses, for example MA Social Work, MSc Physiotherapy, MSc Occupational Therapy and MSc Speech and Language Therapy, are required to attend a compulsory interview and may be required to complete specific tests before an offer can be made.
- Applicants to a research degree who are being considered for an offer will be invited to interview to provide an opportunity for further conversation between applicants and the department. This does not always include the Admissions Selector but will where appropriate. A formal offer will be dependent on a satisfactory performance at interview.
- Applicants to East 15 Acting School are required to undertake an audition, interview or workshop as part of the selection process.

This list is not exhaustive, and applicants to specific courses may also be required to provide a sample of academic work. Interviews may be offered via video link.

The University reserves the right to reject applications from applicants who are invited to attend an interview and who do not respond to an invitation or who accept an invitation but then fail to attend the interview.

Offer-making

10. Communication of offer

Where the University decides to make the applicant an offer, this is communicated to applicants via email and via the *myEssex* applicant portal. Applicants will receive an offer letter, '*Important information about your offer*' booklet and information on the University's Terms and Conditions via the *myEssex* applicant portal.

11. Conditional offers

A conditional offer will be issued to an applicant who has not provided evidence of an academic or English language entrance requirement, or who is still to complete an academic or English language qualification, or where other additional documentation is required, (for example a reference or an ATAS certificate).

The offer letter will set out the specific conditions that the applicant has been asked to achieve in order for their place to be confirmed. The offer will specify the minimum level of achievement and the level, subject area and awarding institution of the award which needs to be completed. Where appropriate the offer will include the English language requirement that the applicant must achieve in order for their place to be confirmed and/or other necessary conditions.

The University has standardised conditions for each course, which are set in advance by the relevant department/school, and approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. However, Admissions Selectors may make a different offer in individual cases, in accordance with the admissions criteria for the department or course applied for.

12. Unconditional offers

An offer of a place to an applicant who has already demonstrated achievement of both the academic and any English language entrance requirements, and has fulfilled all other requirements, will be unconditional. The applicant is not required to demonstrate any further achievement for their place to be confirmed at the University.

13. Research degree offers

Departments are responsible for determining that the following three aspects of research study are appropriate before proposing an offer for a research degree:

- Supervisory capacity
- Field of research
- Applicant's capacity to undertake the proposed research

The University aims where possible to provide the name of the prospective primary supervisor in the offer letter.

For overseas students being made an offer for a relevant programme, the Postgraduate Admissions Office will include a summary of the research area of approximately 200 words in the offer letter in order that applicants can apply for "Academic Technology Approval Scheme" (ATAS) clearance from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

A research degree to be completed by distance learning, on either a part-time or full-time basis, may also be offered to applicants who are resident outside the UK; this is subject to confirmation that supervision can be provided in this mode, and that an applicant will have access to the relevant resources required to undertake their research.

14. Alternative course or research degree offers

The Admissions Selector may determine that the applicant's academic objectives will be best met by taking a course or research degree which is different from that stated in the application. In such cases, the applicant will be notified that their application has been unsuccessful and directly offered a place on an alternative course or research degree.

15. Tuition fees

The tuition fee for the first academic year of the course is included in the offer letter. (For an applicant starting their research degrees in April or January this means the tuition fees included will be for the first one or two term(s) only respectively.) Further information on tuition fees is provided in the documentation issued with the offer letter.

The University may require research degree applicants to pay an additional fee, such as a 'bench fee' to cover the costs of materials and technology required to undertake their research. Where 'bench fees' are applicable, this fee will be included in the applicant's formal offer letter.

16. Request to defer an offer

The University will not automatically grant a request to defer an offer to a subsequent date of entry. Requests from applicants to defer an offer will be considered by the Admissions Selector, and are subject to the availability of programmes and academic staff in the future.

The Postgraduate Admissions Office will approve all deferred offers and will check that the status and text of the offer remain appropriate, amending them if necessary, as well checking that applicants meet any credibility requirements. In addition, applicants who currently require a Student visa to study in the

UK will need to meet the rules and requirements in force at the point of entry, including any changes to the immigration rules that may have been introduced since the initial application.

17. Unsuccessful applications and feedback

Where the University decides that an offer cannot be made, this is communicated to applicants by email. The University aims to provide feedback, if requested, in accordance with its [feedback policy](#).

18. Discontinuation, suspension or change of title of courses

The University reserves the right to discontinue or suspend a course for which offers have already been issued but undertakes to do this in exceptional circumstances only. Where a course is discontinued or suspended, applicants holding offers are informed as soon as possible, and where possible and appropriate, are offered a place on an alternative course by the University. Where the title or content of a course is changed, applicants holding offers are informed as soon as possible of the change and given options for how they would like to proceed. Further information about changes or possible closures of courses is provided to applicants at the initial offer stage, in the University's Terms and Conditions.

Consideration of additional data in selection and offer-making

19. Access to Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS)

The University's Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service offers a confidential specialist advice service which takes place independently of the academic selection process. The selection process is based entirely on academic merit and takes place in accordance with standard policy.

Students can use the SWIS drop-in service for an initial appointment or make an appointment with their caseworker, if one has been allocated.

Applicants who declare a disability in their application are advised to contact SWIS as soon as possible, for further information, advice and guidance. Where appropriate, SWIS can make recommendations about the applicant's reasonable adjustment needs and what arrangements may be necessary to facilitate their access to learning, within the course objectives and requirements. In individual cases, SWIS may invite applicants for a meeting and further discussion to support their understanding of the applicant's requirements.

Applicants who declare they are Care Leavers or Estranged from their family can also contact SWIS for information, advice and guidance.

20. Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning

Applicants seeking recognition for prior or experiential learning are handled in accordance with the University's Procedure on AP(E)L. If the AP(E)L request is approved, the offer will note the volume of credit which has been accredited and the changes to the applicant's planned course structure and tuition fee which result from the approval.

21. Applicants requesting readmission

Applicants who have previously withdrawn, or been withdrawn, from study at the University, and who wish to be readmitted, will be considered in accordance with the University's policy and procedure on the readmission of students.

22. Applicants admitted under specific link agreements

The University may admit applicants to specific degree courses under link agreements with overseas institutions. Link agreements may include specification of the academic and English language entry requirements for admission to the relevant year of the relevant degree course.

23. Assessment of applicant fee status

The Senior Admissions Adviser checks information in the application relating to fee status, including the nationality, country of residence, address, and personal statement and reference of each applicant. If an applicant's fee status is unclear from the information provided on the application form, a fee status assessment will be undertaken.

Fee status assessments are carried out by trained members of admissions staff in accordance with UK fees and awards legislation and guidance provided by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). The University does not exercise discretion when determining applicants' fee status, and an assessment of eligibility for home fees by the University does not guarantee funding from the Student Loans Company/Student Finance England.

Confirmation of the applicant's fee status is included in the offer letter issued to the applicant, however, the University reserves the right to amend an applicant's fee status after the formal offer has been issued.

24. Fraudulent applications and credibility checks

The validity of the documentation submitted by applicants at the initial offer, confirmation and CAS-issue stage are checked by trained staff in the Postgraduate Admissions Office. Where possible and appropriate the validity of a document submitted will be checked with the issuing authority. English language test results will be verified with the qualification awarding body (e.g. IELTS), where possible.

Where there is evidence that fraudulent or incorrect information, including evidence of plagiarised personal statements or research proposals, has been included in the application, the University reserves the right not to proceed with the application. Where there is satisfactory or sufficient evidence that fraudulent documents or incorrect information have been used to at any point of the admissions process, the University reserves the right to withdraw an offer or CAS with immediate effect.

The University reserves the right to carry out further checks at any stage of the admissions process to determine that an applicant is genuine and credible.

25. Declaration of criminal offences

For courses that require an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or Occupational Health check, applicants may not be able to register and/or undertake the relevant course placement, pending successful outcome of these checks.

Applicants for courses that are subject to a mandatory DBS check⁴ are required by the University to declare all criminal offences that are deemed to be unspent and spent in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013 and 2020. Applicants are also required to declare any offences that would appear on an overseas criminal record certificate. If the Admissions Selector recommends that an offer be made, such applications will be referred for consideration in accordance with the University's Student Membership and Disclosure and Barring Service Checks Policy. Formal offers of admission will only be made following consideration of the offence and application in accordance with the policy. Application of the policy takes place independently of the academic selection process, which is based entirely on academic merit and takes place in accordance with standard admissions policy.

Applicants who are convicted of a criminal offence or receive a police caution after submitting an application for a course where a DBS check is mandatory must inform the University. Disclosures can be made in writing to the Head of Admissions (Postgraduate).

Applicants who accept a place for study on a course where a DBS check is not mandatory are not required to disclose their criminal record prior to admission, but applicants under supervision or currently on licence are encouraged to make us aware of any conditions or requirements which may prevent them from fully engaging with their course and the broader University community. Where possible, the University will undertake to make reasonable adjustments, but if it becomes apparent that the applicant is unable to meet the course learning outcomes, they may be required to withdraw their application or transfer to an alternative course.

⁴ A list of the courses that require a mandatory DBS check is published on the University's DBS webpages. Courses that require a mandatory DBS check involve regulated activity as defined by the University's Policy on Safeguarding Adults and Children at Risk. An overseas criminal record check is required in addition to a DBS check where the applicant has lived outside of the UK for 6 months or more in the last 5 years.

In all cases, where applicants choose to share information about a criminal offence with the University, they will be offered support and guidance through the University's specialist support services.

Students studying a non-mandatory course may be required to disclose their criminal record at a later date after registering for the course where they engage in regulated activity that requires a DBS check, for example, through selecting a particular research topic or an optional module.

26. Credit accumulation and modular study:

Applicants may also be admitted to any programme or individual module that leads to the award of credit and modular study (where individual modules are studied over a period of time and the credits are accumulated towards an award of the University).

Acceptance of offers

27. Applicant contract and 14 day right to cancel

Applicants are able to accept an offer of admission from the University via their myEssex portal. A contract is made between the applicant and University at the point an offer of a place is accepted via their myEssex portal. If an applicant changes their mind after accepting their offer, they have the right to cancel the contract within 14 days. The cancellation period ends 14 days after the day on which the offer was accepted, but it is still possible to cancel after the 14 day period.

Further information about the contract and the 14 day right to cancel is sent to applicants at the initial offer stage, in the University's Terms and Conditions.

Confirmation

28. Firm acceptance of places

The University requires each applicant to firmly accept an offer if they wish to take up a place. An applicant may only firmly accept one offer for a given start date. To firmly accept, an applicant must provide evidence that they have met any conditions stated in the offer.

29. Sponsored applicants

Applicants with full or part financial sponsorship must provide documentary evidence of the sponsorship. Postgraduate Admissions will then record details of the sponsorship so that the tuition fee will be charged, in full or in part, to the sponsoring organisation.

30. Applicants requiring a Student visa

Where an applicant requires a Student visa to study in the UK, confirmation of their place and the issue of a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) will be subject to compliance with relevant aspects of Home Office's Student visa sponsor guidance and University guidance relating to the admission of Student visa applicants.

31. Payment of deposits

Applicants who require a Student visa to study in the UK must pay a deposit prior to receiving their CAS. This is in line with the University's policy on Tuition Fee Deposits (which also includes information about applicants who are exempt from paying a deposit). The policy can be found at:

Applicants that have paid a deposit (if applicable) and have met any conditions stated in the offer are categorised as "Firm Accepts" and are regarded as "expected applicants".

Complaints

The Postgraduate Admissions Office strives to provide a high quality experience for all applicants throughout the admissions cycle. In the event that an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the University's admissions process, procedure or policy, they may submit a complaint to the Head of Admissions (Postgraduate) or to the Director of Communications and External Relations, in line with the 'Complaints policy for applicants'.

Training of staff involved in Admissions

The Postgraduate Admissions team (including all Senior Admissions Advisers), academic Admissions Selectors and those involved in processing PGT and PGR applications are required to undertake training. Training is the responsibility of the Head of Admissions (Postgraduate). Regular briefings for both the Postgraduate Admissions team and academic Admissions Selectors take place during the admissions cycle, with a particular focus on identifying and sharing good practice, and updates relating to postgraduate qualifications, offer making and confirmation. Specific training delivered by Compliance staff in Admissions is also undertaken by staff involved in the processing and decision-making of international applications when a Student visa is required.

Data protection, including communication with third parties

The Postgraduate Admissions Office operates in compliance with data protection legislation and good records management practice. Applicant data is treated as confidential by all staff involved in the admissions process and is not divulged unnecessarily or inappropriately. In accordance with University policy, staff involved in admissions communicate only with applicants themselves, unless the applicant

has given express permission for a third party to communicate on their behalf. Third parties may be advisers or agents acting on behalf of applicants.

The University's [Privacy Hub](#) explains how the University processes your data, your data subject rights and the contact details of the Data Protection Officer and includes a link to the [Student Privacy Notice](#).

Section 3 – Registration and induction

General Induction

As part of its Welcome and academic induction process, the University aims to provide a comprehensive programme in order to support the transition of applicants to registered students at the end of the admissions process.

Prior to the start of the online registration process, students are prompted to activate their University of Essex email and IT account. This email and IT account is used to access online registration and the online Welcome programme. This account also provides access to a range of resources once students are registered and throughout their studies at Essex, whilst also enabling free internet access on campus.

Before commencing their studies, all University applicants are prompted to complete online University registration (including payment of fees where required), followed by a central Welcome programme as well as their departmental induction.

These arrangements will as standard include registration to the University which permits the commencement of studies, a central Welcome programme and academic induction to a student's home department or school supporting transition to University life. Together these items will provide: introduction to the University and Students' Union; introduction to starting studies, including learning and study resources; support for settling in and signposting to student opportunities; such as arts, sports, volunteering and societies; as well as where to get help and support; and specific information for international students. Additionally, the welcome and induction activities aim to help create a sense of belonging for students to the learning community within their Department or School.

Postgraduate Taught students - As part of this process, applicants will be provided with information about optional modules that are available to them and will be invited to select optional modules online in advance of commencement of studies at the University.

Induction for Research Students

The University provides Doctoral Welcome events in October, January and April for new and continuing students. The Doctoral Welcome events are designed to help research students to feel part of a cohort within their department or school, and of a broader research student community. They also provide some initial skills development to assist students with planning their work and managing their relationships with their supervisors.

Document Control Panel

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