

ADMISSIONS POLICY COVERING POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

1 General Statement

1.1 The University Senate is responsible for the admission of students to the University on advice from the University Board for Teaching and Learning, the University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee and other relevant committees. In consultation with these groups and academic schools, the University sets its admissions targets for the forthcoming academic year, and adopts policies to ensure that the strategic aims of the University are met.

1.2 This document represents the University's overarching policy on the admission of students to the postgraduate research programmes of the University, including students at the University of Reading Malaysia, regardless of mode of attendance, for internally and externally delivered programmes.ⁱ The principles contained within this policy are consistent with the precepts of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Code of Practiceⁱⁱ, the Schwartz principles of fair Admissions and accepted good practice across the Higher Education sector. This policy additionally complies with all current legislation affecting the recruitment and admission of students in England and Wales, in addition to the requirements of relevant accrediting professional bodies, where appropriate.

1.3 This policy has been drawn up to offer comprehensive guidance to applicants on the University's admissions practice in respect of postgraduate research students studying on all modes of study including full-time, part-time and by distance.

1.4 This policy and any associated policies will be reviewed annually by the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies, the University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee and the Head of Admissions. This policy will also be reviewed following national or international developments affecting University Admissions. Responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with the Head of Admissions.

1.5 The University is committed to the principles of fair admissions and fair access through the recruitment of students with the greatest academic ability and potential, irrespective of their social, cultural or economic background.

1.6 The University is committed to providing a high quality experience to all applicants through transparency and consistency of decision making in the application process, as well as the provision of timely decisions and responses.

1.7 In recognising that a diverse student community is of benefit to all, the University is committed to widening access to, and participation in, Higher Education, by seeking to raise awareness, expectations, and achievement in the pre and current University community so that all those who can benefit from the provision are able to access it.

1.8 The University, in accordance with the specific provisions and general intention of its Charter, confirms its commitment to a comprehensive policy of equal opportunities in which individuals are selected,

developed and otherwise treated on the basis of his or her relevant merits and abilities and are given equal opportunities within the University. The object of this policy is to ensure:

That no applicant shall be treated more or less favourably than any other on account of his or her sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital status, civil partnership status, family responsibilities, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, citizenship, religion, political belief, membership (or non-membership) of a Trades Union (or other representative association of employees or students), disability, age or socio-economic background.ⁱⁱⁱ

1.9 The University has developed a range of studentships and other bursaries to support postgraduate research student applicants with funding their studies. Further information on currently available schemes can be found on the Graduate School pages of the university website.^{iv}

1.10 To give applicants opportunity to find out more about the University, its programmes and requirements for entry, the University will attend a number of recruitment events both within and outside the UK. The University will also run a number of open days each year, which applicants are encouraged to attend. These open days will be publicised in a variety of places including the university website. It is important to note that participation, or otherwise, in any of these events by an applicant does not form any part of our selection criteria.

2 Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Admissions decisions will be made on behalf of the University by designated administrative staff within the Admissions Office. These decisions will be based on the recommendation of the School Directors of Postgraduate Research Studies according to entry requirements and criteria agreed in consultation between academic colleagues and the Head of Admissions (or his/her nominee). Upon occasion the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies may be involved in making the final decision on an application.

2.2 The University seeks to ensure that all academic staff and designated administrative staff concerned with admissions are informed of changes and updates to policies and procedures throughout Higher Education relating to admissions, by way of dissemination of information and training of staff as and when appropriate.

2.3 Academic staff and designated Admissions staff will communicate only with the applicant unless he or she has given consent for the University to discuss his or her application with another person (e.g. a parent or guardian). In the case of official University-appointed Agents representing international applicants, the University will normally include these Agents in any communication with an applicant.

2.4 The University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee and the Head of Admissions will monitor processes and practices to ensure consistency of practice and encourage the sharing of good practice.

3 Selection

3.1 In deciding whether to offer a place to an applicant, the University will treat each application on its individual merits. It will take a range of information supplied in the submitted application into account when identifying an applicant's suitability for, and likely ability to meet the demands of, the programme for which he or she has applied. The University, at its discretion, may also take into account existing knowledge of an applicant or information provided in addition to that found on the application form. Where this information has a negative impact on the decision the applicant will be given appropriate feedback. The University will consider whether an applicant meets both the general academic entry requirements (see section six), as well as any applicable subject-specific requirements. Past and expected performance in academic qualifications will be used as one of the main indicators for this judgement.

3.2 In making a decision on an applicant, the University will consider not only the academic and research ability of the candidate, but also the feasibility of any research project proposal, in terms of the following:

- The academic standard of the research proposal
- The clarity of the aims and objectives of the research
- Any equipment / special facilities that may be required and any associated additional cost
- The availability of one or more potential supervisors with relevant skills and experience
- The length of time that the research may take (in the light of the minimum and maximum lengths of registration for research degrees)
- The fit of any proposed research project with the overall research direction of the School or Department

3.3 In order to embed an ethos of equality of opportunity in the Admissions process, staff directly involved in assessing applications for admission to the University will be required to undertake training in the avoidance of unconscious bias.

3.4 Applicants will normally be asked to attend an interview. Performance at interview will be used in conjunction with the submitted application, when making a decision. The University will try to give at least two weeks' notice of the date of any interview to applicants. Where travel to the university is impractical, for instance where an applicant lives overseas, wherever possible, alternative arrangements will be made. All interviews are conducted in line with the principles of equality of opportunity and mitigation against unconscious bias as contained within this policy.

3.5 The University does not normally employ Admissions Tests as part of its selection methods. However, should a test be required this will be made known to potential applicants as part of the interview invitation.

3.6 An applicant who meets the general or standard entry requirements as indicated in section seven, in our printed materials and on the website is not guaranteed an offer of a place. The University's aim is to select those applicants who are likely to succeed and gain from the provision available.

3.7 As part of the selection process, an applicant's fee status will be determined by the University's Admissions Office in accordance with the regulations set out by the Government^v. Owing to any restrictions placed on the University regarding the recruitment of some groups of 'home/EU' fee-paying students, the fee status of an individual may, upon occasion, affect whether the University is able to make an offer of a place.

4 Communication of a decision

4.1 An applicant will receive notification of the University's decision on his or her application electronically or by emailed letter from the University. If he or she is to be made an offer of a place, the offer will specify any conditions of entry that he or she is expected to meet and the date by which these conditions must be met in order to take up that place. The University aims to make clear, easy to understand offers and the conditions of entry may include, but are not limited to, academic; non-academic e.g. completion of a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check; financial and English language proficiency, ATAS clearance. The offer notification will also detail the tuition fee and any additional research expense costs or supervisory visit fees, details of proposed supervisor(s), the date of registration, details of periods of time to be spent working away from the university and the minimum and maximum lengths of registration.

4.2 The University aims to consider applications and make decisions as quickly as possible and normally with 6 weeks. However, the timeframe may be longer if the proposed research area involves complex supervisory arrangements or discussions regarding facility and equipment requirements.

4.3 An applicant will be expected to respond to an offer directly to the University. Any deadline for reply and the method for responding will be indicated by the University.

4.4 An applicant who also applies for university studentship or funding competitions will be notified of the outcome of these competitions in a separate written communication from the Graduate School or academic school.

5 Start dates and deferred entry

5.1 In most schools there are no set start dates and applicants can start their research throughout the year, subject to agreement from the school and potential supervisor. Exceptions to this may be where attendance is required at taught modules as part of the research programme.

5.2 The University understands that an applicant's personal circumstances may necessitate a request to change the intended start date and such requests should be made in writing (by email or letter) to the Admissions Office.

5.3 The University will normally only defer an offer of a place for one year. Applicants wishing to defer a place for a second year will be required to submit a new application.

5.4 Deferred entry may result in some changes to the advertised programme specification. The University will notify applicants in a timely fashion where changes are made and, where appropriate, will provide guidance on contractual remedies available to applicants due to the change.

6 Provision of Information & guidance (including publication of entry requirements)

6.1 The University aims to provide clear, accurate, transparent and up-to-date information and guidance to applicants and advisors about all aspects of recruitment, selection and admission to its programmes including entry requirements, that are appropriate to the needs of prospective applicants, in both internal and external publications regardless of the medium (i.e. printed, audiovisual, world wide web, etc) enabling them to make choices in an informed manner.

6.2 Such literature will include information on admissions criteria, research groups within schools, training programmes and any studentships or scholarships that are available.

6.3 The main sources of information on programme specific entry requirements are:

- The University Postgraduate Prospectus and Doctoral Guide (both in printed and on-line format)
- School and departmental literature
- The University website (particularly the Graduate School pages)
- The University Graduate School literature
- The University Open Days

6.4 The University regularly reviews entry requirements with any changes made to entry requirements or standard offers since the publication of printed materials being communicated as soon as possible via the University website. This source should therefore be considered the most up-to-date and applicable.

6.5 Contact details for requests for further information about the University's programmes of study, as well as all enquiries regarding student recruitment and admissions are available on the University's website.

7 General entrance requirements

7.1 The University welcomes applications from students holding a broad range of qualifications. The University will use independently published guidelines and rankings recognised within the United Kingdom higher education sector, such as UK NARIC^{vi} when considering the equivalence of qualifications.

7.2 Where transcripts or other documents submitted in support of an application are in a language other than English, the University requires that applicants submit a copy of both the original document, as well as a certified translation, and should be submitted at the point of application where possible.

7.3 The University welcomes applications for postgraduate research programmes from appropriately qualified applicants, having normally achieved at least an upper second class honours degree in their undergraduate studies, or an equivalent qualification. The admission of graduates holding a lower second class honours degree or non-standard qualifications may be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies on behalf of (and where appropriate in consultation with) the School Director of Research Studies.

7.4 Applicants who are unsuccessful may apply again for a subsequent entry point. Applications will be considered against the standard entry criteria for the programme applied to for that year of entry. The University may draw upon all information from previous applications or any previous registrations at the University as a student when assessing suitability for the course. Where this information has a negative impact on the decision the applicant will be given appropriate feedback.

7.5 The University has adopted a range of collaborative and progression agreements which enable students from our partner institutions to study for and receive a University of Reading degree. Further information on our collaborative and progression agreements can be found on our website.^{vii}

8 English Language Qualifications

8.1 Applicants must be competent in the English Language. Applicants from outside the United Kingdom or other countries where English is an official language will normally be required to achieve one of a number of English Language qualifications intended for academic purposes approved by the University. The level required will be dependent on the programme of study to be undertaken, and will be published in the University Prospectus or on the University website.

8.2 English Language certificates must be verifiable through an online service (as for IELTS, Pearson and TOEFL) or else must be provided as an original certificate. English Language certificates will not be accepted if they are more than two years old^{viii}.

9 Applicants with Disabilities and additional support needs

9.1 The University welcomes applications from students with disabilities. Applications from students with disabilities are assessed following the standard procedures contained in this document and consideration of support requirements will remain entirely separate. If an offer is made, an assessment of needs is carried out to ensure that the University can provide the required support.

10 Admission of Under 18s

10.1 The policy on admission of under 18s to university programmes is available separately^{ix}.

11 Applicants with Criminal Convictions

11. The policy on admission of applicants with a criminal conviction is available separately.

12 Admission to research programmes with Recognition of Prior (Experiential) Learning (RPL/RPEL)^x

12.1 Any exemptions shall be at the discretion of the School and the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies. This exemption may apply to either registration or taught elements of a postgraduate research programme. The University welcomes applications made to research programmes to candidates requesting recognition of prior (experiential) learning.

12.3 Applicants wishing to seek exemption should liaise with the appropriate School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and final approval will be sought from the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies.

13 Applicants requiring a visa to study in the United Kingdom

13.1 The University is licensed by the Home Office as a Tier 4 Sponsor and aims to provide a Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) in good time for an applicant to make a visa application but in doing so relies upon the applicant taking responsibility for:

- a) Making a timely application for admission including complete details of all previous study and periods of study in the UK
- b) Responding fully and in good time to accept the offer
- c) Responding fully to requests for any further information, such as passport details

13.2 In order to comply with UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) regulations, the University reserves the right to refuse admission should an applicant be found not to be in a position to meet all UK visa requirements for the anticipated full duration of his/ her programme of study.

13.3 The University is required to notify UKVI, where relevant, of any non-arrival, or late arrival, of an applicant and of any subsequent changes to a student's enrolment status.

13.4 All applicants requiring a visa to study in the United Kingdom must not currently be, nor have ever previously been, in the United Kingdom for any purpose without valid immigration permissions. If, either during the process of admitting a student or subsequent to that student enrolling upon their programme of study, the University is informed that the applicant/student is (or has previously been) in the United Kingdom without such valid permissions, it may be required to inform UKVI and/or withdraw the offer of a place and/or withdraw its sponsorship of the individual's visa.

13.5 The University may need to review this policy in the light of changes to Home Office Tier 4 policy in order to remain compliant with its duties as a sponsor. This may result in changes to matters such as the evidence required for English language proficiency at short notice. Where changes are necessary the University will endeavour to contact all relevant applicants promptly.

14 ATAS Clearance

14.1 Some applicants who need entry clearance to study in the United Kingdom and who are applying to certain research programme will need to obtain an ATAS clearance certificate. Further details of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's ATAS scheme are available online.¹ Applicants will be advised if ATAS clearance is required in their offer notification from the university.

14.2 Further instructions and the information required for making an ATAS application will be communicated to the applicant in a separate notification at the same time as, or shortly after, the offer notification.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academic-technology-approval-scheme>

14.3 The university will not be able to issue a Confirmation of Acceptance to Study (CAS) or register applicants on to the programme until they have clearance. Further details are available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website.^{xi}

15 Feedback

15.1 The University strives to treat all applicants fairly and without unconscious bias or prejudice. As the University is not able to offer a place to all applicants, Admissions staff will normally record the reason(s) for rejection on an applicant's file. The reason for rejection will normally be communicated to the applicant, electronically or by letter from the University. Should an applicant ask for more in-depth feedback the University will, wherever possible, facilitate the request. Requests for feedback should be made by the applicant and directed, in the first instance, to the Admissions Office who will aim to deliver more in-depth feedback within 10 working days of receipt of the request.

16 Confirmation and enrolment

16.1 The University will confirm an applicant's place on a programme when he or she meets all the conditions set out in his or her offer within the timescale stated in the offer.

16.2 The University will send all successful applicants confirmation of his or her place on the programme, as well as enrolment information providing details concerning induction, enrolment and activities to help them settle in during the first few weeks of term. This information may be sent in hard copy or by electronic means. The information will also be made available via the University website.

17 Responsibility of the applicant

17.1 The University expects that an applicant will provide full and accurate information in order to be considered for admission. The University reserves the right to withdraw an offer of a place if fraud or misrepresentation is discovered following an applicant receiving an offer. In the case of international applicants, details may also be passed to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

18 Changes to Programmes and Supervisory Arrangements

18.1 If there is a significant change to a programme of study between the publication of the Prospectus and the start of the programme to which an applicant has applied the University will notify applicants as soon as possible in writing indicating the options available to them, in addition to providing support to secure a place on an alternate programme or making suitable alternative supervisory arrangements. Significant changes may include:

- Closure of a school or department
- Changes regarding the status of the programme (e.g. validation by a professional or statutory body)
- Expected academic supervisor of an applicant leaves the employment of the University following the applicant's acceptance of a place and before enrolment. In such cases every effort will be made to offer suitable alternative supervisory arrangements.

18.2 Other changes may include, but are not limited to: making updates to reflect best practice and academic developments for the benefit of students; improving the programme and student experience; meeting the requirements of external or accrediting bodies; the result of staff changes within the University; changes to the law.

18.3 Changes will be communicated to applicants in writing as far in advance of any change as reasonably possible and the University will take all reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impact on applicants as a result of these changes

19 Appeals and Complaints

19.1 Should an applicant wish to lodge a complaint concerning the application process or an appeal against an admissions decision, he or she should write in the first instance to the Head of Admissions and the matter will be considered in accordance with the Admissions Appeals and Complaints policy and procedures^{xii}. The University will not normally alter an unsuccessful decision should an applicant's actual performance be greater than was predicted at the time of his or her application.

20 Interaction with an applicant

20.1 The University is committed to ensuring that any interaction with an applicant is conducted in a professional, courteous and respectful manner and it expects that any communication from an applicant or his or her representative is conducted in the same way.

20.2 Applicants, and their representatives, should note that the University will not tolerate inappropriate behaviour towards its employees. Hostile, aggressive or otherwise inappropriate behaviour will be viewed seriously and may prejudice the consideration of an application, appeal or complaint.

20.3 The University will usually warn an applicant or representative that his or her behaviour is felt to be inappropriate, and that action may be taken but it is not required to do so and where the behaviour is particularly inappropriate no warning may be given.

21 Data Protection

21.1 The University collects and retains certain types of data, in various formats, about its applicants, current and past students in order that it can fulfil its functions as an education provider.

The University is required by legislation to comply with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (2016) and all applicable Data Protection laws. All applicant information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to family, friends or any third party without the applicant's explicit consent, unless disclosure is permitted under the law. Details of the University's Data Protection policy and its Student Privacy Notice are published on our website.^{xiii}

Version control

VERSION	KEEPER	REVIEWED	APPROVED BY	APPROVAL DATE
1.0	Head of Admissions	Annually	Senate	July 2018

FOOTERS

ⁱ This includes all PhD, Professional Doctorate and Research Masters programmes (such as MRes and MPhil).

ⁱⁱ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2012), UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education.

ⁱⁱⁱ The full policy can be found at www.reading.ac.uk/equality/humres-policies.aspx

^{iv} Details of funding opportunities can be found at www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/prospectivestudents/qsfunding-opportunities.aspx

^v The Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations

^{vi} Information on UK NARIC can be found at www.ecctis.co.uk/naric

^{vii} The University's collaborative partnership register can be found at

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/QualityAssurance/CollaborationWithOtherInstitutions/cqsd-register.aspx>

Details of progression agreements can be found at

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/QualityAssurance/CollaborationWithOtherInstitutions/cqsd-othercollab.aspx>

^{viii} The two years' duration is counted from the date of the test on the certificate to the date on which the proposed course of study is due to commence.

^{ix} The policy on admission of under 18s is available at
www.reading.ac.uk/admissions-policies.aspx

^x The full University policy can be found at

www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/qualitysupport/apelpolicy.pdf

^{xi} Information on ATAS clearance can be found at www.gov.uk/academic-technology-approval-scheme

^{xiii} Full details of the Admissions Appeals and Complaints policy and procedures can be found at

www.reading.ac.uk/admissions-policies.aspx

^{xiv} Full details of the University's Data Protection policy can be found at
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/imps/Data-Protection-Policy-CURRENT.pdf>