

University of Reading Postgraduate Research Programmes Admissions Policy

1 General Statement

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

1.2 This document has been adopted by the University Senate, and encapsulates the University's policy on the admission of students to postgraduate research programmes of the University¹. Many of the principles contained within this policy reflect the precepts of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education, and accepted good practice across the sector.

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. Key facets of policy are also summarised within the University's Code of Practice on Research Students.

1.4 The policy will be reviewed annually by the University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee, assisted by other relevant committees and the University Admissions Manager. Such reviews will take into account national or international developments affecting University admissions.

1.5 The University believes that a diverse student community is of benefit to all. The University is committed to widening access to, and participation in, Higher Education, at all levels.

1.6 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 identification, 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 background².

1.7 The University has developed a range of studentships and other bursaries to support postgraduate research student applicants with funding their studies. Further information on

¹ The policy is applicable to postgraduate research students only; the University has in place separate policies applicable to undergraduate and postgraduate taught admissions.

² The full policy can be found at http://www.reading.ac.uk/Personnel/rdg-only/equal_opportunities.htm

currently available schemes can be found at:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/prospectivestudents/gs-funding-opportunities.aspx>

1.8 To allow applicants to find out more about the University, its programmes and requirements for entry, the University will attend a number of recruitment events both in and outside of the UK. The University, and its constituent Schools, will also run a number of open Days each year, to which applicants are encouraged to attend. These open days are publicised in a variety of ways including on the University website. It is important to note that participation, or otherwise, in any such 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 on the advice and recommendations of the School Directors of Postgraduate Research Studies.

2.2 The University seeks to ensure that all administrative and academic 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 The University Postgraduate Research Studies Committee and the University Admissions Manager 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 applicant on his or her merits. It will take a range of information supplied on the application form into account when judging an applicant's suitability for, and likely ability to meet the demands of, the postgraduate research 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 (such as that provided by nominated academic referees). The University will consider whether an applicant meets both the general academic requirements (see section 6), in addition to any subject-specific requirements. Past and predicted 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 academic standard of the research proposed
- The clarity of the aims and objectives
- 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 Applicants resident in the UK will normally be asked to attend for an interview. In cases where this is not possible, an alternative procedure will be put in place which allows an adequate assessment of the suitability of applicants. In some instances, applicants will be expected to attend an interview before a decision as to their suitability is made. The University will try to give at least two weeks' notice of the day of any interview to applicants.

3.4 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.

3.5 The University will make a decision on an applicant's fee status at the point of application according to the definitions given in the Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations 2007. The onus is on individual students to satisfy the institution that they meet the criteria to be classified as home status for the purpose of fees. Should there be any restrictions placed in the University regarding the recruitment of students eligible to pay 'Home / EU' fees, 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 letter from the University. If he or she is made an offer of a place, the offer will specify any conditions of entry that he or she is expected to meet in order to take up that place. The conditions of entry may include, but are not limited to, academic, non-academic (e.g. completion of a CRB check), financial and English Language. The offer will also detail the first year tuition fee as well as an indication of living expenses³.

4.2 Notification of acceptance to a PhD or MPhil programme will also normally include

- The title and brief description of the research topic to be undertaken
- The name/s of the proposed supervisor/s
- The date of registration and any periods of time to be spent away from Reading
- The minimum and maximum lengths of registration
- Details of any research expense costs or supervisory visit fees
- Details of any studentships or scholarships that have been awarded to the applicant (unless these have been supplied in a separate letter)

4.3 An applicant will be expected to respond to the offer by returning the completed reply slip by email or post. Any deadline for reply will be indicated by the University when making the offer.

4.4 Where an expected academic supervisor of an applicant leaves the employment of the University following the applicant's acceptance of a place and before enrolment, every effort will be made to offer suitable alternative supervisory arrangements.

³ Applicants will be asked to sign a Financial Acceptance form confirming that they are able to meet the costs for the duration of their course.

5 Publication of entry requirements

5.1 The University aims to provide clear, accurate and transparent information about its programmes, that is appropriate to the needs of prospective applicants, in both internal and external publications regardless of the medium (e.g. printed, electronic), enabling them to make choices in an informed manner.

5.2 Such literature should include information on:

- Admissions criteria
- Research groups within the School
- Training programmes
- Studentships or scholarships that might be available

5.3 The main sources of entry requirements for postgraduate research programmes are:

- The University website (particularly the web pages of the University Graduate School)
- The Postgraduate Prospectus
- University Graduate School literature
- School and Department literature
- University Open Days

5.4 Any changes made to entry requirements shown in printed materials will be communicated as soon as possible via the University website. This source should therefore be considered the most up-to-date and applicable.

6 General entry requirements

6.1 Applicants for entry to a research degree should normally possess at least a first degree (normally of an Upper Second Class honours standard or above) or equivalent. The admission of students with lower or non-standard qualifications may be approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies, on behalf of (and where appropriate, in consultation with) the Dean / Faculty Director of Research of the appropriate Faculty.

7 International qualifications

7.1 The University welcomes applications from students holding international qualifications. The University will use independently published guidelines, recognised within the UK higher education sector, when considering the equivalence of overseas qualifications.

8 English Language qualifications

8.1 Applicants whose first language is not English will normally be required to achieve one of a number of English Language qualifications approved by the University⁴. The level required for the programme will be published in the University Postgraduate Prospectus and on the University website. The normal entry standard for research programmes is a score of 7 on the IELTS (International Language Testing System) Test, although some Departments may accept a score of 6.5.

8.2 Originals of English Language certificates will be required except where there are online verification facilities e.g. IELTS and TOEFL. English Language certificates will not be accepted if they are more than two years old.

9 Applicants with criminal convictions

9.1 Applicants applying for research programmes in some subject areas will be required to obtain a disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau.

9.2 Possessing a criminal conviction will not automatically exclude anybody from studying at the University. However, mindful of its duty of care to all members of the University community, the University will take into consideration relevant criminal convictions⁵ in reaching a decision on whether to offer an applicant a place.

10 Feedback

10.1 The University strives to treat all applicants fairly and without 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.

⁴ A list can be found at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/Study/admissions/admissions-englishquals.aspx>

⁵ Full details can be found in the Procedures for dealing with applicants who have declared a criminal conviction

11 Confirmation and enrolment

11.1 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.

11.2 The University will send all successful applicants confirmation of his or her place on the programme, along with enrolment information providing details concerning enrolment and induction. The information may be sent in hard copy or by electronic means. It will also be made available via the University website.

12 Responsibility of the applicant

12.1 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 is discovered following an applicant receiving an offer. In the case of international applicants, information about any such fraud may be passed to the United Kingdom Border Agency.

13 Appeals and complaints

13.1 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 University Admissions Manager. Should the University not have adhered to its own policies and procedures, or have broken the law, or there is evidence of bias or prejudice, the Admissions Appeals and Complaints policy and procedures⁶ will be implemented. The University will not normally alter a rejection should an applicant's actual performance be greater than was predicted at the time of his or her application.

14 Interaction between applicants and the University

14.1 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 is conducted in the same way.

14.2 Applicants 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.

14.3 The University will normally warn an applicant that his or her behaviour is felt to be inappropriate and that action may be taken, but where the behaviour is particularly inappropriate no warning may be given.

This policy was agreed by the University Senate at its meeting on 16 March 2011, on the recommendation of the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

⁶ Full details can be found in the Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedures