

STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

ADMISSIONS POLICY (Adopted by Governing Body 29th November 2007)

1. Scope

This policy applies to all admissions to Stranmillis University College – undergraduate and postgraduate, full-time and part-time. It replaces the Admissions Policy of 2004 and relates to entry in the academic year 2008/09. The policy will be reviewed annually.

2. Context

The admissions policy complies with relevant legislation affecting the admission of students and is consistent with the QAA Code of Practice on Recruitment and Admissions (2006). It is also guided by the principles outlined in the Report of Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group 2004 (the Schwartz Report).

The University College's mission statement, as stated in its Strategic Development Plan 2006-2009 is to 'sustain a critical community of educational excellence in teaching and research in a shared learning environment where diversity is welcomed, in order to help meet the professional needs of society in Northern Ireland and beyond'.

In particular, Strategic Objective Six – 'to recruit, sustain and support students from the widest possible range of educational, social and cultural backgrounds - is at the centre of this Admissions Policy. Stranmillis is a professionally oriented University College, with core undergraduate, postgraduate and research business in the areas of teacher education, early childhood education and health and leisure studies.

3. Priorities

- Recruitment and selection of an appropriately qualified, and professionally motivated student body which has the potential to excel in a challenging and rewarding environment, to contribute to the quality of the student experience and ultimately to graduate with the knowledge and skills which have high currency in an increasingly competitive marketplace.
- Within the context of the Widening Participation Strategy (2006-2009), the University College is committed to build on current developments and to reach the milestones articulated in the Access Agreement, to increase the number of mature students, students with disabilities and students from lower socio-economic groups. The University College has also set targets to increase the number of males entering initial teacher education – in particular the BEd Primary pathway.

To achieve these aims the University College:

- encourages applications from suitably qualified applicants, regardless of their background and
- promotes equality of opportunity for all applicants regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, marital status or whether or not they have dependents.

The Principles and Procedures through which the University College assesses applicants and offers places is designed to be:

- easily understood;
- transparent;
- fair;
- based on principles that are applied consistently across the University College.

4. Monitoring

The Senior Management Group has overall responsibility for strategic policy in relation to admissions. The University College Selection Committee is chaired by the Vice Principal (Registrar) and includes the Head of each academic Department (or nominee), the Widening Participation Officer and the President of the Students' Union. The Committee regularly reviews the admission and selection process and receives an annual report on selection which is then presented by the Vice Principal (Registrar) to the Governing Body.

The Widening Access Group is responsible for:

- negotiating milestones with the Office of Fair Access on behalf of the University College;
- monitoring performance against milestones.

5. Intake Numbers

The number of full-time undergraduate students which the University College can admit is currently controlled by government imposed overall limits. In the case of initial teacher education intake quotas are controlled by the Department of Education, whilst for the non-ITE courses, controls are imposed by the MASN (maximum student number) cap. There are no limits imposed on the number of part-time students admitted since these are recruited on a 'fees only' basis and with no government funding.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Heads of Academic Departments (or their nominees) are responsible for working with the Vice Principal (Registrar) in the selection of students. The following duties are undertaken jointly:

- Setting entrance requirements and asking grades for programmes within the Department and deciding on selection procedures including interviews, presentation, etc;
- Liaising with the Vice Principal (Registrar) in relation to the contextual factors of individual applications;
- Arranging for staff in the Department to participate in selection interviews;
- Arranging for staff to contribute to Open Days, Careers events, talks to targeted groups, etc.

7. Academic Registry

The Admissions Function is part of the responsibility of Academic Registry. The University operates a centralised admissions service for all programmes. The responsibilities within the Admissions Function include:

- Managing the undergraduate UCAS admissions service, including all University College communications with UCAS;
- Managing all non-UCAS admission services for undergraduate, postgraduate, full-time and part-time programmes;
- Liaising with Academic Departments to review and update entry criteria annually;
- Making decisions on applications in line with agreed criteria;
- Working closely with Academic Departments in the decision-making process including consultation and provision of advice on non-routine cases;
- Providing acknowledgment letters/emails to all applicants and distributing June information and Welcome packs;
- Providing advice and guidance in response to specific admissions enquiries from prospective students, parents, schools, colleges and the careers service of the Department of Employment and Learning;
- Providing statistical information and reports to senior management;
- Ensuring admissions policy and procedures are applied fairly and consistently across the University College;
- Monitoring, review and updating admissions processes regularly;
- Taking the lead role in advising on and developing the University College's response/policy on new qualifications, changes in the 14-19 curriculum and to the application system.

8. Information for Prospective Students and Other Stakeholders

The University College aims to provide comprehensive, accurate, user-friendly and accessible information and advice to applicants and other stakeholders in the admissions process. This is to enable an informed choice of programmes(s) to be made appropriate to their needs, interests, academic qualifications and potential.

Detailed information on entrance qualifications, asking grades and other entrance criteria for individual programmes is provided.

The main sources of information are as follows:

- Printed undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses;
- Online prospectuses;
- Individual programme brochures and leaflets;
- University College website;
- National publications, eg UCAS website.

Preliminary work has been undertaken in relation to the development of Entry Profiles for individual programmes and staff development has been undertaken by Academic Registry staff to enable them to complete this work by January 2008. These will be published on the UCAS website and will considerably enhance the information available to prospective students.

9. Selection Principles/Assessment of Applications

All applications are considered individually on their merits and the full information on the application form, including the personal statement and reference, is considered.

In the interests of consistency and transparency, it is essential that the University College's selection criteria are objective. For undergraduate courses, academic qualifications are a key criterion and previous academic background (including, for example, performance at GCSE or in the first year of a BTEC National Diploma or Access Course) may be taken into account in deciding whether or not to make a conditional offer. Since the demand for full-time undergraduate places greatly outweighs the supply, particularly for the Primary BEd and Early Childhood Studies entry is competitive.

10. Additional Methods of Selection

Actual and/or predicted performance in public examinations is a key indicator of academic potential for degree-level study. Departments will recognise that a level of performance which is exceptional in its context may indicate outstanding ability, motivation and potential, and will take this into account in assessing the varying performance of candidates.

The Personal Statement and Reference provide important supplementary indications of ability, motivation and potential, as well as information about personal circumstances and social and cultural context. They are read carefully and taken into account in reaching a decision. Criteria for assessing the Personal Statement may include, for example:

- Demonstrated interest in and commitment to the subject;
- Evidence of clear thinking and understanding;
- Appropriateness of the Stranmillis course in relation to the candidate's declared interests and aspirations;
- Non-academic achievement and/or experience, or extra-curricular interests, that indicate the likely contribution a candidate will make to the life of the University;

- Other relevant skills – eg foreign languages.

Allowance will be made for any candidate (from whatever educational sector) with verified exceptional circumstances or who has faced difficult challenges in a positive way, where these are made known to the University College (eg illness, death of a parent, poverty, disrupted education, refugee status). An offer of a place may be made to a candidate whose academic performance appears to have been affected by such circumstances and who might otherwise have been expected to do better.

All the undergraduate programmes offered by the University College are professionally oriented with distinctive career opportunities. Both initial teacher education and early childhood studies require graduates who possess aptitudes, qualities and skills for working with children and young people. For this reason an interview/presentation also contributes to the selection process. Those candidates who remain in the process following initial screening of applications in terms of qualifications, reference and personal statement, are called for interview. The interview is designed to assess professional and personal qualities in terms of suitability for the course. It is not designed to assess academic potential. The integrity, validity and reliability of the interview process is ensured in the following manner:

- Each candidate is interviewed by two people who have been trained for the purpose of interviewing prospective students;
- The panel will normally comprise a University College lecturer and a representative of the relevant profession;
- Interviewers are trained and interview questions/presentation topics are reviewed annually;
- Interviews/presentations are scored against criteria which has been agreed by Heads of Departments in consultation with the professions.

The interview and consequent decision-making will be consistent with the University College's policy on Equal Opportunities.

A standard format interview report is produced for each candidate who has been interviewed and submitted to the Admissions Office.

Decisions are made on the basis of all criteria, ie academic qualifications, interview score, personal statement and reference.

Offers are conditional upon the applicant consenting to a POCVA (Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) check to be carried out on them. In the event that the results of the POCVA check are unsatisfactory, the offer may be withdrawn.

11. Applicants with Disability/special Needs or Medical Conditions

The University College is committed to achieving equal opportunities for all of its students and actively encourages potential students who may be disabled or have additional needs/support requirements. Applications are considered on the same academic grounds as all other candidates. Any applicant who states on their application form that they have a disability or additional support needs will be invited to complete a questionnaire by the Student Support Officer. A decision may need to take into account any overriding health and safety concerns, barriers relating to professional requirements, or the University's ability to make any reasonable adjustments.

The University College Disability Policy provides further information on support mechanisms.

12. Applicants Returning to Education

The University College welcomes applications from students who have interrupted their studies for several years or did not have the opportunity to enter higher education at the normal time. Applications are considered on an individual basis but evidence of successful recent academic study at a suitably high level is normally required. Modified entrance targets may be set but these would not normally apply to applicants who have studied A-level or equivalent qualifications continuously since leaving school.

In general, the University College does not require candidates to undertake further tests. However, it may be appropriate to set a test (eg in English or Mathematics) for candidates who are returning to study and who present non-standard qualifications.

13. Applicants with a Criminal Record

The University College acknowledges the key role which education plays in the rehabilitative process and a criminal record will not automatically preclude an applicant from being offered a place at the University College. However, as part of its duty of care to its staff, its students, and taking into account the needs of the relevant professions, the University College will seek further information about any relevant disclosures which result from a POCVA check. The University College Policy on Criminal Records provides detailed information in relation to procedures for dealing with such applicants.

14. Acceptability of Qualifications/Entrance Requirements

Applicants are required to fulfil the QUB General Entrance Requirements and also course requirements. The latter are expressed in terms of both grades and (where applicable) subjects and UCAS Tariff points. Further details regarding the range of qualifications which are normally acceptable can be found in the undergraduate prospectus and on the University College website or directly from Academic Registry.

15. APEL/APCL

APL includes experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. APEL (Accredited for prior experiential learning) is a process by which a student's learning through experience is assessed, and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

APCL (Accreditation of prior certificated learning) is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

The University College has encouraged APEL/APCL applicants since the introduction of its non-teacher education degrees. It is applied in both Early Childhood Studies and Health and Leisure Studies for module exemption or advanced entry to a programme, eg an applicant holding an HND in Early Years may gain entry to year 2 of the degree programme.

The use of APEL, in the context of admissions, is applied mainly to the part-time degree. For example, such applicants may present lower level qualifications but have extensive, appropriate work experience from which significant learning has taken place. Statements of experience must be provided by the applicants and the presentation/interview is used to determine potential for the degree.

16. Admissions Process

All applications for the full-time undergraduate courses at the University College must be submitted through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Applications for part-time courses, both undergraduate and postgraduate must be made directly to the University College.

All applications received by the normal closing date will be given equal consideration. Late applications may be considered depending on competition for places on individual programmes.

International (non EU) applicants for courses may apply up to the 30 June of year of entry.

If additional details are required about any of the information on an application form, the Admissions Office may contact the applicant or her/his referee. This may have an impact on the time taken for a decision to be made.

Admissions decisions will be made efficiently for the majority of degree programmes, where it is necessary to receive all applications, conduct interviews, etc. before decisions are made (in order to consider the gathered field). Every effort is made, however, to keep delays to a minimum.

Conditional offers are made in terms of a combination of grades and tariff points. The level of offers reflects the competition for places available and the achievement which it is considered is required to complete the course successfully. Offers are generally made in terms of three A-levels plus any other

academic requirement which is needed to fulfil matriculation or course requirements. Where candidates present academic/professional qualifications which are equivalent to A-levels, conditional offers will be made in accordance with the structure and grading of these qualifications.

Applicants who are unsuccessful in gaining admission to their original choice may be considered for alternative courses.

Applications for deferral are welcomed for the non-teacher education degrees. They will be considered under the conditions which apply in their year of application and applicants must satisfy the conditions for entry by the 31 August of that year.

Changes to any of the University College's courses involving significant restructuring or discontinuation will be communicated to applicants affected by such changes by the Admissions Office. This will be done at the earliest opportunity.

17. Feedback, Complaints and Appeals

Students who are not offered a place on a course, may, upon request, receive feedback on their performance. Such feedback is provided by staff in the Admissions Office who are trained in the provision of constructive feedback to students. Most feedback is provided on the telephone or by face to face meeting. However, in some cases emails and letters are provided.

A formal Appeals Procedure (Appendix I) exists which may be used if a student continues to be dissatisfied with the informal feedback.

18. Data Protection

By signing the UCAS form, applicants give permission to the University College to process their personal data for the purposes of managing the University College's selection and admission procedures and for maintaining its student records. The information will also be used to make statutory returns to bodies such as the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA).

19. Fraudulent Statements/Omissions

Offers of a place are based on the information provided by the applicant and are made in good faith by the University College. It is the student's responsibility to provide all necessary and relevant information. False statements or omissions of relevant information may lead to the withdrawal of an offer or a place. If appropriate, UCAS will be notified in such cases.

20. Verification of Qualifications

For the majority of UCAS applicants, results are provided directly to the University College. Other applicants will be required to produce original certificates of their qualifications prior to registration.

21. Review

Policies and procedures relating to admissions are reviewed annually by the University College Selection Committee in the light of analysis of the annual Selection Report against the mission and strategic objectives of the University College and changes to qualifications frameworks. Membership of the Selection Committee is made up of Programme Leaders, representatives from the Careers departments of schools and colleges and the Careers Service. Outside the Selection Committee, ongoing consultation takes place with Programme Leaders, Principals of schools/colleges and careers teachers, the Department for Employment and Learning, EGSA and representatives of government and the relevant professions.

22. Staff Training

A high degree of professionalism is needed by admissions staff who are required to offer advice and guidance to potential students, careers teachers and parents. Given the diversity of backgrounds from which applications are received, ongoing training 'on-the-job' takes place with periods set aside during which the Admissions Officer briefs staff on changes to qualifications and procedures. Opportunities are taken for staff to attend conferences organised by CCEA, UCAS, etc. Opportunities are also provided for Admissions staff to attend in-house training sessions which are held for academic staff of the University College and for teachers and others who participate on selection interview panels. Whilst Admissions staff do not participate in selection interviews, they are familiar with the procedures and type of issue which may arise. Admission Staff are also provided with in-house training in relation to the provision of constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants and in general the whole area of customer care.

September 2007