

STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Admissions Appeals/Complaints Procedure

1 Introduction

All admissions decisions are made strictly in line with the University College Admissions Policy. Admissions criteria – both academic and professional – are determined by Heads of Departments in consultation with the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar) for the purposes of implementing the University College’s strategic plan, within the overall constraints placed on student numbers by government and the market place.

All admissions decisions are based on transparent academic and professional criteria, ie qualifications, experience and potential as demonstrated by personal statement, interview, presentation, etc. The University College Prospectuses and website (<http://www.stran.ac.uk>) contains a detailed description of the various entrance qualifications and grades required for particular courses, but published grades are indicative only and an offer made to an applicant may vary from the published criteria. Some degree courses require additional evidence of a candidate’s suitability – e.g. evidence of motivation and commitment. Interviews are used for some courses to identify whether candidates have the desired attributes but in all such cases clearly stated selection criteria are applied.

The staff of Academic Registry are able to satisfy most queries about admissions decisions on a daily basis, and the vast majority of applicants are satisfied with the explanation given. The following procedure has been drawn up to cover cases where unsuccessful candidates do not accept the explanation offered.

2. Scope of the Procedure

This procedure covers all applicants to University College credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses.

The procedure covers the following types of appeal/complaint:

- Complaints about the University College’s handling of a query or an application for admission;
- Complaints about admissions criteria;
- Allegations that admissions criteria were not applied correctly or even-handedly.

The procedure does not cover strategic decisions relating to the overall size and shape of academic programmes, or to caps on student numbers in particular courses whether imposed by the University College, government or professional bodies. Any correspondence on these matters should be directed to the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar), who has overall responsibility for admissions.

In cases of collaborative provision, i.e. where a University College programme is taught jointly with another institution, responsibility for admissions decisions may

vary according to the terms of the collaborative arrangement, and enquiries should be directed in the first instance to Academic Registry at Stranmillis University College. Where the admissions query relates to a programme designed as an entry route to Stranmillis University College (e.g. an Access course), enquires should, in the first instance be directed to the institution offering the entrance qualification (e.g. a college or institute of further and higher education, in the case of Access students). All potential entrants who are undertaking an Access qualification are also encouraged to discuss the suitability of their course with the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar) at an early stage, as indicated in the Prospectus.

3. Submission and Investigation of Enquires/Complaints/Appeals

3.1 First Stage: Informal Resolution

Enquires about admissions decisions should normally be made by the applicant in question and should be directed to Academic Registry in the first instance (phone 028 90384263, email registry@stran.ac.uk or write to Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar), Stranmillis University College, Belfast BT9 5DY). A written response will be made to every written enquiry (i.e. by letter or email), normally within 10 working days, and this written response will mark the completion of the informal stage.

3.2 Second Stage: Formal Letter to The Principal, Stranmillis University College

An applicant who is dissatisfied with the written explanation should put his/her concerns in writing to the Principal, Stranmillis University College, within 10 working days of the date of Academic Registry's letter (3.1 above). The formal letter to the Principal should set out the grounds for dissatisfaction with the response from Academic Registry and include any previous correspondence.

The Principal shall then consult with Academic Registry and other staff as necessary, and shall undertake such further enquiries as are deemed necessary before providing a written response normally within 15 working days of the receipt of the complaint. When a complaint is made about specific members of staff, those staff shall have the right to see copies of relevant documentation, to present evidence to the Principal or his/her nominee, and to be informed of the outcome of the complaint /appeal.

3.3 Third Stage: Appeal

- (i) Any student still dissatisfied after the second stage may request an Appeal within 10 working days of receiving the Principal's decision. A letter should be sent to the Principal requesting an appeal. A Review Panel shall then be convened, to meet normally within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal letter. However, there is no appeal against an admissions decision which, in the judgement of the Principal, results from the correct and impartial application of written criteria.

- (ii) Where a Review Panel is deemed necessary, the Panel shall normally comprise:
- a member of the Governing Body (in the chair);
 - a member of SMT or Head of Department, other than the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar)
 - the President or other sabbatical officer from the Students' Union.

Panel members shall not have had any prior involvement in the case. The Panel membership shall be chosen as far as possible to reflect the diversity of the Northern Ireland Community.

- (iii) The appellant should forward copies of previous correspondence and any supporting documentation to the Panel, and shall have the right to appear before the Panel, accompanied by a member of the teaching staff from the appellant's present or former school or college. No legal representation shall be permitted at any stage during the procedure.
- (iv) The Panel may seek written evidence from any witness or person who in the Panel's judgement may have relevant information to contribute. Any such person shall have the right to see relevant documentation to be considered by the Panel, in advance of the hearing, and shall have the right to appear in front of the Panel if (s)he wishes, accompanied by a student or staff member of the University College. However, neither the appellant nor any witness shall be required to appear in front of the Panel if they do not wish to appear.
- (v) Should the appellant fail to appear before the Panel at an appointed time and without valid reason, the Panel shall have the right to reach a decision in the appellant's absence.
- (vi) The Panel's findings and recommendations shall be communicated to the appellant normally within 10 working days of the Panel's meeting. The Panel shall also send a report normally within 10 working days to the Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar) and the Principal, summarising the Panel's conclusions and recommendations.

4. Deadlines

The deadlines set out in this procedure relate to investigations carried out in term-time only, and may not prove possible to meet at particularly busy periods for Academic Registry (e.g. August-September). The University College will at all times strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as circumstances allow.

5. Confidentiality and Enquiries from Third Parties

All parties to a complaint are expected to maintain strict confidentiality, both during and after any enquiry/appeal/complaint. Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made by the applicant in question. When an admissions decision is queried by a third party (e.g. a school enquiring on behalf of a former pupil), Academic Registry may supply a generalised answer on admissions policy but is precluded from discussing individual cases by the terms of the Data Protection Act. However, a more detailed response may be given when the applicant expressly states that the third party is acting on his/her behalf.

6. Central Monitoring of Admissions Complaints/Appeals

The Director of Community Engagement and External Affairs (Registrar) shall prepare an anonymised annual summary of the nature and outcome of any formal admissions appeals/complaints for the University College Selection Committee each year.