

# UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS POLICY

## **1. SCOPE**

1.1 This Undergraduate Admissions Policy applies to the admission of undergraduate students to Durham University. It takes effect from October 2021 and replaces Durham University's previous Undergraduate Admissions Policy. Please note, this policy is subject to approval.

## **2. PRINCIPLES**

2.1 Durham University is committed to recruiting high-quality students by identifying merit and potential and ensuring that its admissions process is fair and transparent to all regardless of background.

2.2 Durham University's Admissions Policy is aligned with the University's Strategic Plan and all relevant legal and regulatory requirements along with recognised good practice in fair admissions to Higher Education.

## **3. GOVERNANCE**

3.1 Senate is "the supreme governing body of the University in all academic matters" and has the specific responsibility to regulate "the admission of persons to courses of study".

3.2 Policy in respect of admissions is monitored and developed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) through the University Executive Committee (UEC) and Senate.

3.3 Education Committee is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). Education Committee, through its Access and Admissions Sub-Committee, is responsible for monitoring admissions and recruitment policies and outcomes at University, Faculty and departmental levels.

3.4 Boards of Studies of individual Departments are responsible for:

- a) the setting of entry standards and selection criteria, in the context of policy set by UEC and Senate.
- b) in partnership with Recruitment and Admissions, recruiting applicants to programmes of study within the Board's jurisdiction;
- c) upon confirmation of their place, the admission of undergraduate students, in cooperation with the Colleges, to programmes of study within the Board's jurisdiction;
- d) implementing University admissions policy within the particular context of each department.
- e) developing its portfolio of courses mindful of the availability of prospective undergraduates for the specific programmes on offer and the need to ensure that, wherever possible, courses should appeal to a diverse range of applicants;
- f) monitoring admissions data and identifying any areas of concern and action required in consultation with Recruitment & Admissions;
- g) ensuring that any departmental developments or constraints that affect recruitment and admissions to programmes of study are identified and communicated effectively to Recruitment & Admissions and other departments of the University as applicable.

3.5 Recruitment & Admissions are responsible for:

- a) applying the entry criteria and selection criteria as set by the Boards of Studies and/or Senate in considering applications for admission to undergraduate programmes;

- b) making decisions on undergraduate applications for admission and, on an exceptional basis, referring applications requiring further academic judgement to admissions leads within departments;
- c) identifying trends in recruitment and admissions and providing timely information to admissions leads and/or Boards of Studies within departments so that appropriate action can be identified and agreed;
- d) monitoring admissions and recruitment activity and providing accurate and timely statistical and management information to the University;
- e) handling enquiries relating to undergraduate programmes and applying to the University and providing expert information, advice and guidance, in writing and verbally that promotes the University, its departments and individual programmes of study;
- f) undertaking schools liaison work and planning and delivering, in partnership with academic departments, colleges and professional services, open and visit day activity.

3.6 The Colleges and Student Experience Office is responsible for the college allocation process.

#### **4. MANAGEMENT OF PROCESS**

4.1 Students applying to Durham University complete a two stage process:

- a) First, they apply to an academic programme of study. All undergraduate applications are considered by Admissions Administrators for the appropriate Academic Departments against criteria that have been set by departmental admissions leads. Applicants for foundation programmes will be considered by the admissions selectors for those programmes. The University will decide at this point whether or not to make an offer of a place to study.
- b) Second, applicants may choose to nominate a College of preference, but this is not a requirement. Once a decision has been made to offer a place to study, the Office of the PVC (Colleges & Student Experience) will allocate students to a college. This allocation normally begins in February and continues throughout the remainder of the admissions cycle. Not all students will be offered a place in their preferred College. In such cases a place at an alternative College will be offered. The College allocation process<sup>1</sup> is separate from, and does not influence, whether to offer a place to study at Durham University.

4.2 Recruitment and Admissions, located within the Education Division, is responsible for:

- a) the implementation and daily management of undergraduate admissions within the University;
- b) making decisions on applications on behalf of the Boards of Studies in line with departmental entry and selection criteria, including which applications will receive offers to study at the University;
- c) all communication to and from UCAS, including the communication of decisions on applications;
- d) providing expert advice and guidance to applicants, prospective applicants and their advisors;
- e) Conversion and recruitment activities, including mailings via the CRM system and open/visit day planning;
- f) all monitoring and reporting on undergraduate admissions to Senate, UEC, Education Committee and academic departments and colleges;
- g) advising departments on qualification equivalency in conjunction with, where appropriate, the International Office;

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<sup>1</sup> see [Your College - Undergraduate](#)

- h) advice, guidance and interpretation of regulations and procedures;
- i) fee status assessment;
- j) investigating applicants who declare a criminal conviction as part of the DBS process.

4.3 Boards of Studies are responsible for setting the entry and selection criteria for programmes, subject to agreement, as required, by UEC and/or Senate. Admissions leads, reporting to the Board of Studies, will also be responsible for delivering recruitment and conversion activity related to their programmes, including delivering content for communications and knowledge base articles, operating individual departmental visits and delivering open and visit day activity.

4.4 The Colleges and Student Wellbeing Office are responsible for all aspects of the college allocation process and considering any declared unspent criminal convictions outside of the DBS process.

## **5. COMMUNICATION**

5.1 The University will send all direct communications via email. It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that their contact details, including their email address, are up-to-date and relevant. If details change from those submitted on the application at any point during the admissions process (including during gap years if applicable) the applicant must notify the University immediately. The University will not be liable for non-receipt of email or other correspondence sent in good faith to the address or addresses provided.

## **6. STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

6.1 The University supports Principle 5 of the Schwartz report that states 'A fair admissions system should be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes'.

6.2 All staff involved in making admissions decisions are required to complete a compulsory training programme and yearly refresher training, organised by Recruitment and Admissions.

## **7. INFORMATION**

7.1 The main sources of information on undergraduate admissions are:

- a) The University Undergraduate Prospectus, issued on a yearly basis 18 months ahead of the entry it is describing and containing general information on the University;
- b) The University web-site, which displays regularly updated information on admissions, course information and the University in general;
- c) UCAS. This information includes typical offers, subject-specific entry criteria, course information and information about how applications are considered;
- d) The University also provides opportunities to visit the University and discover further information through open days, visit days and other visit opportunities.

## **8. POLICY ON DEFERRED ENTRY**

8.1 The University generally welcomes applications from students who intend to defer their entry for a year, although there are limits to the number of deferred places on offer and some departments do not consider applications for deferred entry. Applicants should check the policy of the Department that delivers the programme that they are interested in studying before submitting an application.

## **9. SELECTION**

9.1 Durham University is interested in recruiting students able to develop both academically and personally within an environment that is attractive to and supportive of an increasingly diverse and international student population. We therefore also value the non-academic attributes of applicants, recognising the importance of merit and potential in these areas as important contributors to University and College life.

9.2 All applicants are judged on the basis of merit and potential, including their motivation to benefit from the range of academic opportunities available within the University and the contribution that a student can make to and benefit from University life including the College community and wider student experience. Course-specific interpretations of merit and potential are published in the University undergraduate prospectus, on the University website and at UCAS or can be discussed with Recruitment & Admissions, Durham University.

The University interprets “merit” as the positive attributes of an applicant seeking to study at Durham, which is based on the evidence of prior achievement. Taking account of the context of prior achievement, the University judges “potential” as the scope for a student to benefit from what Durham has to offer, and the promise for future achievement and contribution to the University.

9.3 For the majority of applicants the primary means of assessment is the information provided in the application. This information is collected and provided in a standard format and enables students to be assessed in a fair and transparent manner.

9.4 Admissions staff will look carefully for evidence of merit and potential in the application, including:

- a) prior and (where known) predicted exam performance;
- b) the personal statement;
- c) the reference;
- d) development of study skills;
- e) motivation for the degree programme applied for;
- f) independence of thought and working;
- g) skills derived from non-academic extra-curricular activity such as engagement in sport, the arts, voluntary or community work and/or paid employment.
- h) contextual evidence of merit and potential

9.5 Durham University uses contextual data and information relating to applicants to assist in the admissions process. This data and information can be used on a case-by-case basis to assess an applicant’s merit and potential, in the context of their individual circumstances. Contextual data includes educational, geodemographic and socio-economic background data, such as data about an applicant’s home postcode. Contextual information relates to individual applicant circumstances, such as if they have been in care, or involved in widening participation activities offered by the University. The aim of contextual data and information is to form a more complete picture of the applicant.

9.6 Durham University does not use interviews as a means for selection except in the following circumstances:

- a) where external bodies determine that interviewing is compulsory (applicants to Initial Teacher Training);
- b) applicants to the Foundation Centre;
- c) applicants who do not in their application show adequate evidence of recent and relevant knowledge or who have experienced a break in their study prior to

application. This will be determined by the University on an individual basis, having considered all the information provided in the application;

There may arise exceptional circumstances, other than those listed above, when an interview is considered necessary. Such cases should be referred to the Head of Admissions Services for consideration.

Applicants who are resident outside of the UK will not normally be invited to attend an interview in Durham but may be invited to an interview in their home country or remotely (via Skype, for example).

Applicants may be invited to Durham to meet Departmental / College staff once an offer has been made in order to discuss the details of specific degree programmes and find out further information regarding the Department, Colleges and the wider student experience.

9.7 The University may also use admissions tests for programmes where it considers that these assist in the identification of essential abilities for successful study in individual programmes that cannot be evidenced through information in the UCAS application. Admissions tests are currently used for Mathematical Sciences (TMUA, MAT and Step) and Law (LNAT).

9.8 Durham University supports the 'equal consideration' of all applications received at UCAS by the 'equal consideration' deadline (late January for most applicants). In line with UCAS procedures, any applications received at UCAS after this date will not be eligible for equal consideration at Durham University and will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis if, and only if, places remain on the course after consideration of all on-time (January deadline) applications.

9.9 We seek to ensure that all of our assessment methods are reliable and valid. Our admission assessment methods are developed and approved by University Education Committee, which reports to Senate, with support provided by Recruitment and Admissions. Any change in assessment method requires approval from Education Committee and Senate. Admissions Staff will make decisions in accordance with University admissions policy.

9.10 Applicants can prepare for assessment by referring to programme-specific information provided in the Courses Information system ([www.durham.ac.uk/courses](http://www.durham.ac.uk/courses)).

9.11 Durham University aims to provide decisions as quickly as possible but it will be necessary to hold some decisions in order to comply with equal consideration requirements. Except in cases where information or other requirements, such as interviews, remain, the University commits to making decisions on applications received at UCAS by the relevant UCAS deadline.

## **10. DIVERSITY**

10.1 We are committed to increasing the diversity of the student body and welcome and encourage applications from students from all backgrounds. Our admissions process is designed to take a holistic approach that considers the individual academic journey of each applicant. Recruitment and Admissions provide targeted advice and guidance to support prospective applicants from under-represented groups to progress to the University specifically and higher education generally.

10.2 We monitor closely the diversity of our student body and our admissions process more generally to ensure that barriers do not exist for applicants of any type regardless of social,

cultural, ethnic, educational or economic background. At any one stage in the assessment process, all applicants will be given an equal opportunity to demonstrate their merit and potential.

10.3 Durham University is committed to admitting high quality students. This is typically evidenced by maintaining high entry standards but we recognise other evidence of merit and potential that can and does contribute to our decision to admit.

10.4 As a global institution and an international scholarly community, we welcome and encourage applications from non-UK students. Therefore, we allocate a proportion of our places annually to students from outside of the UK and work with agents and other providers to fill these places.

10.5 We have a commitment to Fair Access that is an integral part of the University Strategy. This commitment includes an aim to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups. To effect this change, we make available guaranteed and reduced offers to applicants who meet our fair access criteria. Further information is available on our website.

10.6 Durham University Disability Support provides advice and practical support to all applicants to the University who have stated a disability. Further information can be found at [Disability Support](#). Any disability that an applicant declares will not affect the academic assessment of their application. Applicants are encouraged to declare any disabilities which may require reasonable adjustment on the application or during the admissions process so that Disability Support may begin to explore what adjustments may be required to facilitate progression to Durham and to ensure any identified support can be in place when students arrive to commence their studies.

## **11. UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS**

11.1 Durham University operates scholarship schemes designed to help recruit students with exceptional merit and potential in their academic studies, in music, the arts and sport. Particular arrangements exist for these schemes. Further information is available on our website at [www.durham.ac.uk/study/scholarships](http://www.durham.ac.uk/study/scholarships).

## **12. FEEDBACK**

12.1 Admissions staff are required to record the reasons for admissions decisions together with supporting information. The reasons for decision will be provided on UCAS Hub alongside each unsuccessful decision. If unsuccessful applicants receive an offer for an alternative course to the one they originally applied for, feedback will be provided directly via email.

## **13. COMPLAINTS & APPEALS**

13.1 The University publishes a complaints policy for applicants<sup>2</sup>. Complaints should be submitted in writing. A complaint is defined as a specific concern related to a procedural error, irregularity or mal-administration in the admissions procedures or policies. Complaints on any other grounds or dealing with processes or decisions not linked to an application or admission to the University will not be accepted under this policy.

13.2 Requests by an unsuccessful applicant for a formal review of the outcome of an admissions decision, with an aim of overturning or changing that decision, will not be considered.

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<sup>2</sup> [Admissions Complaints](#)

13.3 Applicants will not be discriminated against in any further application should they request feedback or make a complaint under the University's policies and procedures.

#### **14. FRAUDULENT STATEMENTS/OMISSIONS AND PLAGIARISM**

14.1 Applicants suspected of providing, or found to have provided, false information will be referred to UCAS if their application was made via UCAS. The same is true for applicants who are suspected of omitting, or found to have omitted, information that they are required to disclose according to UCAS regulations or which may have had a material effect on the outcome of their application.

14.2 Applications identified by UCAS's Similarity Detection software to contain plagiarised material will be considered on an individual basis by Admissions Staff, taking into account the nature, relevance and importance of the plagiarism.

14.3 The University has the power to withdraw an offer or acceptance prior to matriculation and registration and to require a matriculated and/or registered student to withdraw, immediately, upon written notice, where the University becomes:

- a) of the reasonable opinion that the applicant, or someone making the application in their name, or the matriculated or registered student failed to supply relevant information, or supplied false or misleading information, relating to their application, matriculation or registration;
- b) aware of previously unknown information relating to the application, matriculation or registration (including, but not restricted to, criminal convictions, subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and other conduct) which, in the University's reasonable opinion, makes it inappropriate for the applicant, matriculated or registered student to study on the programme.

#### **15. OTHER RELEVANT POLICIES**

15.1 The Undergraduate Admissions Policy is supported by a number of policies, processes and sources of information, advice and guidance designed to minimise barriers to potential applicants that include:

- [Notification of Academic and Personal details for Admission, Matriculation and Registration purposes](#)
- [Regulations for Undergraduate Matriculation](#)
- [Data Protection and Student Privacy Notice](#)
- Durham University Diversity and Equality Policy
- Applicants who have a stated disability
- Applicants who will be under 18 at entry
- Mature applicants
- Applicants who disclose a criminal conviction
- Advice on qualifications and their equivalency
- [English Language proficiency](#)
- [Credit transfer arrangements](#)
- Child Protection Policy
- Student Protection Plan

*Date of Senate agreement of this Policy: Subject to approval*