

Higher Education Admissions Policy (The Open University) 2025-26

19th August 2025



Senior Leadership Responsibility	Adam Fahey
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Roles Responsible for Reviewing	Executive Director Quality, Teaching and Learning
Issue date of current version	24-25 – V1 25-26 – V2
Date to be reviewed	August 26

Significant changes following review of strategy

Page Number or Heading Name	Details of significant change	Changes made by
3	Definitions paragraph added	Nicola de Bedic Perks
9.1	Added process for non-UK qualifications equivalency check	Nicola de Bedic Perks
14.1	Added contextual definition of “exceptional circumstances”	Nicola de Bedic Perks
20.2	Added information for determination of fee status	Nicola de Bedic Perks
25	Paragraph added to clarify Unconditional Offer status	Nicola de Bedic Perks
28.1	Included link to The Open University complaints policy	Nicola de Bedic Perks

POLICY AVAILABILITY NOTICE This policy is available in alternative formats upon request to accommodate different needs including word. To request an alternative format, please contact HE Admissions at HEAdmissions@southessex.ac.uk

Equality Impact Assessment

The aim of an equality impact assessment (EIA) is to consider the equality implications of any new or amended policy, procedure, practice, project, function on different groups of staff, students and visitors to the college. This EIA tool provides a simple framework that helps evaluate whether the change may inadvertently disadvantage protected characteristics and identify ways to proactively advance and promote equality.

You will need to consider each of the equations and provide information as to consideration and any changes made in relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion.

Date EIA completed.	19-08-25
Name of person responsible for completing the EIA	Matthew Twitchett
Role of person responsible for completing the EIA	Executive Director of Quality, Teaching and Learning
Who is affected by the policy / decision / change	Students and Staff employed
What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc.	This is a yearly review and update required by awarding organisations

You will need to consider whether it's possible that the proposed new policy / change in policy / procedure/practice etc could discriminate or unfairly discriminate or disadvantage people. You should consider:

Who gets to participate	Who does not, or who now does not due to the changes proposed / made.
Who is at an advantage	Who is at a disadvantage, and again has this changed?
Who will benefit	Who will not benefit (or who did and now doesn't due to the changes proposed in policy)
Who can access the policy	Who cannot, or now cannot.

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
Age	1	None identified		
Disability	2	Some students may need support in understanding the policy. This will be provided by the student support teams in the College.	Students with an identified disability can seek support from a Carer/Parent or Guardian and the College in support of their application.	As and when required
Gender (Sex)	1	None identified		
Gender Reassignment	1	None identified		
Marriage or Civil Partnership	1	None identified		
Pregnancy / Maternity	1	None identified		
Race	1	None identified		
Religion or Religious Belief	1	None identified		
Sexual Orientation	1	None identified		
Any other element that needs to be considered.	1	None identified		

Note:

1. The terms stated under protected characteristics are the terminology used in the Equality Act 2010.
2. As part of the policy approval process Executive Board will consider the EIA assessment and any potential barriers which we may not be able to overcome and whether the action proposed will mitigate sufficiently within legislation or whether we decide to not implement the new policy if the risk are significant. If the policy is approved the EIA is also approved.

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SOUTH ESSEX COLLEGES GROUP - HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR THE OPEN UNIVERSITY AWARDED QUALIFICATIONS

1. Scope of policy

1.1 This policy applies to all admissions to The Open University (The OU) programmes at any of the College's campuses. It covers all stages of an applicant's interaction with the College from initial enquiry through application, receipt of the College's selection decision and the transition to first enrolment and induction for successful applicants.

2. Principles governing higher education admissions

2.1 The College recognises the value of diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity. It aims to provide an environment in which applicants are treated with dignity and respect and solely on the basis of their abilities, merits and potential.

2.2 The College is committed to fair access and encourages applications from all students who are able to demonstrate the potential to meet the entry criteria for the relevant course and to benefit from study at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Individual applicants are considered on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential, regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs and affiliations or other irrelevant distinction. The College's admissions policies and procedures are designed to ensure that all applications are considered fairly and consistently and in accordance with professional standards.

2.3 Against this background, this policy is intended to provide a policy and procedural framework within which admissions decision-making is characterised by transparency, fairness and consistency.

2.4 The College strives to observe the good practice guidance provided by UCAS [Admissions Good Practice](#) and to comply with all relevant legislation in relation to the College's undergraduate and graduate admissions activity.

3. Definitions

Higher Education - the level of education after completing secondary education (usually after A-levels or equivalent qualifications), typically delivered by universities, colleges, and other higher education institutions.

Applicant - someone who formally requests admission to a college or university in order to study on a Higher Education programme.

Entry requirements – specified criteria and/or qualifications that a person must meet to be considered for admission onto a Higher Education programme.

Standard Conditional Offer - an offer of admission to a university or college that is dependent on the applicant meeting the conditions of entry for a specific programme

Conditional Firm Offer - a provisional offer of admission to a university or college that is dependent on the applicant meeting the stated conditions before the offer becomes final.

Unconditional Firm Offer - an offer of admission that is not subject to any further academic or other conditions, meaning the applicant has already met all the entry requirements, and their place is fully secured.

Mature Student - someone who is aged 21 or over at the start of their Higher Education course.

4. Marketing

4.1 The College is committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and consistent messages in its marketing information, and to the management of activity which leads to the admission of students to the College in ways that are fair, clear and explicit and implemented consistently.

4.2 Ensuring consistency is important especially in relation to the very wide range of different countries, in the EU and beyond, in which the College undertakes marketing activities.

4.3 The College's marketing messages are promulgated through promotional materials and activities which we aim to ensure are accurate, relevant, current, and accessible in order to provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options.

Marketing activities include:

- participation at education exhibitions
- collaboration with partner institutions
- on-campus Open and visit days
- regular communications with applicants during the admissions process

Marketing information is communicated via a number of different media and includes:

- Printed prospectus
- Our website [South Essex Colleges Group](#)
- Social and new media
- Pre-enrolment webpages
- Documentation sent to applicants throughout the process

4.4 Marketing and admissions staff maintain a strong working relationship in order to ensure a holistic approach that is informed by the principles set out in this policy.

5. Education outreach

5.1 The College fosters an inclusive and diverse environment for study, providing opportunities

for study to individuals who are able to demonstrate the greatest potential to benefit from the type of education delivered at undergraduate and postgraduate level, regardless of their background.

5.2 The Student Services & Marketing teams are engaged in a range of activities targeted at students from groups that are under-represented in higher education, which aims to raise awareness, increase attainment and suitably prepare students for entering and undertaking study in higher education. Our pre-education outreach activity includes:

- information and advice in schools and colleges
- campus visits for students in primary and secondary education
- taster days
- summer schools
- individual mentoring
- Specific targeting of selected groups of potential students

5.3 The College aims to deliver a cohesive approach to widening participation and fair access, which is expressed in its [Access and Participation plan 2021-25](#).

5.4 Marketing, Student Services and Admissions staff maintain a strong working relationship with appropriate representation from Higher Education (HE) Committee to ensure that the admissions policy and access and widening participation and HE Strategy are mutually informed and to maintain a holistic approach to access.

5.5 Outreach activity is informed in part by the targets and commitments set out in the [Access and Participation Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26 which has been approved by the Office for Students.pdf](#)

6. Admissions

6.1 The College operates a centralised undergraduate admissions function for all applications received via the college [website](#) (full time & part time applications). Applications are processed by a specialised HE Admissions team who act as the principal contact for applicants throughout the admissions process. However, selection decisions are made by the members of the academic staff who teach on the programme, in most cases this will be the Programme Leader .

7. Responsibility of applicants in the admissions process

7.1 Applicants are expected to:

- provide complete and honest information in applications submitted to the College
- respond in a timely manner to requests for further information from the College
- communicate any changes to the information originally supplied in their application as soon as possible
- be courteous and respectful in their communications with College staff involved in

admissions

- put in a request for recognition of prior learning. Please refer to The OU Accreditation of Prior Learning policy 2025-26 under The Open University section in [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads](#).

8. Entry requirements - Academic requirements

8.1 All Higher Education applicants are required to meet the College's published entry requirements. Course-specific entry requirements are published annually in the Higher Education prospectus and on the College website. Entry requirements are reviewed annually and are determined by departments responsible for The OU provision following consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive - Curriculum and Quality.

8.2 Applicants whose native language is not English and who have not been educated in an English-speaking environment (country and/or institution) are required to achieve a minimum overall score of International English Testing Systems (IELTS) 7.0 in each band or equivalent.

8.3 The College accepts a range of English language qualifications as being equivalent to IELTS. Please contact the HE admissions team for more information.

8.4 Entry requirements are published in the College prospectus and on the Website. The College reserves the right to amend its entry requirements (subject to approval by its validating institution) up to 12 months before the proposed point of admission. Amended entry requirements will be published on the College website.

9. Acceptable qualifications

9.1 The College accepts United Kingdom qualifications which are clearly stated in the College prospectus. In addition a variety of recognised international qualifications are also accepted. If you are an overseas student, living within the EU, and are not sure how the qualifications you possess from your home country equate to UK qualifications, please contact HEAdmissions@southessex.ac.uk stating which programme it is you are interested in and providing details of your qualifications and experience. The equivalence of such qualifications will be evaluated in accordance with independent national guidance provided by UK ENIC, UCAS and other recognised sources. The HE Admissions Team (Higher Education) is responsible for undertaking such evaluations in consultation with Admissions Selectors.

9.2 The College will normally verify the result of any qualification through the Awarding Bodies Linkage (ABL). Applicants will be required to submit evidence of results before they are permitted to enrol at the College.

10. Student visa requirements

10.1 Where an applicant requires a Student Visa to study in the UK, an offer of a place will be subject to compliance relevant aspects of the UK's student visa policy:
Student visa : Overview - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk/student-visa)

11. Initial checks

11.1 All applications are subject to an initial check on receipt by the HE Admissions team. The initial check will identify applications which require specific attention (see section on Consideration of Additional Data in Selection and Offer-Making, paragraphs 16 to 26 below), in order to ensure that they are dealt with in accordance with relevant procedures. On completion of the initial checks most applications will be submitted to the Admissions Selector, who will make the selection decision. Where information is incomplete, the HE Admissions team will liaise with the applicant to complete the application before it is sent to the academic team. Applicants who do not engage with us will either be withdrawn or left as application not complete until after enrolment and then withdrawn.

12. Selection decision

12.1 In accordance with the College's commitment to fair admissions, each application is considered individually by the programme leader, who will determine whether an offer should be made on the basis of academic achievements to date, predicted academic achievement and other evidence of the applicant's ability and potential to complete the course for which they have applied. This includes evidence of the applicant's motivation, skills, experience and attitude, as expressed in his/her personal statement and the academic reference.

12.2 Interviews can be held by telephone, Teams or face to face depending on applicant's preference.

12.3 Admission decisions are based on the following points:

- The applicant will be able to produce evidence of the entry requirements by the date of enrolment
- Where the entry requirements are not fully met, the applicant's individual circumstances will be discussed at interview to see if the required academic standards are evident through other means
- Has access to a suitable placement in which they can lead the learning (where an applicant is struggling to find a placement, advice and guidance will be given at interview)
- Does not demonstrate any safeguarding concern

Where there is a concern around the DBS check or there has been a criminal convictions disclosure, the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) team will liaise with the college HR department and the applicant's disclosure will be considered on an individual basis. The same protocol will be applied as used for a college employee and no offer would be made without guidance from the HR department.

12.4 All decisions (including those to reject an applicant) are checked by staff in the central Admissions team to ensure the interviewer (in most instances the programme leader) is treating all applicants fairly. The central admissions team will monitor the outcomes to ensure the interviewer is adhering to the requirements of admission set out in section 8.

12.5 Where an applicant cannot be made an offer, the applicant will be redirected by the interviewer based on the information shared. This may range from direction to further study to

meet the entry requirements, direction to a different form of teacher training (i.e. where the applicant wishes to work with younger children) or advice on gaining employment as a teacher (i.e. where the applicant is already qualified).

12.6 Interviews, auditions and other evidence

The English, Maths and Education department will invite all applicants who are based in the UK to attend an interview (skype or in person), which provides an opportunity for applicants to meet one or more members of academic staff in order to provide a mutually beneficial assessment of their suitability for the course. However, the College reserves the right to reject applications from applicants who are invited to attend an interview and who do not respond to one, or exceptionally two, specific invitations to attend.

13. Offer-making

13.1 Where the College decides to make the applicant an offer, this is communicated to applicants via email. The offer letter will set out any conditions that the applicant must meet.

13.2 Conditions of offer. The offer letter sets out the specific entry requirements that the applicant must achieve in order for his/her place to be confirmed. The offer will be expressed in terms of UK Qualifications or the equivalent for applicants who are taking alternative qualifications and GCSE maths and English requirements. Where appropriate the offer will include the English language requirement that the applicant must achieve in order for his/her place to be confirmed.

13.3 The College normally makes the Standard Conditional Offer (SCO) for the course.

13.4 The offer letter may also set out non-academic conditions that the applicant must meet before admission to the course can be confirmed.

13.5 In cases where the applicant is deemed unlikely to achieve the entry requirements for the course for which they have applied but where an alternative course is available, a 'change of course offer' may be made.

13.6 Where the College decides that an offer cannot be made, this is communicated to applicants via email. The programme Leader is required to record the reason(s) for not making an offer in each individual case. Unsuccessful applicants have right to appeal or complain as stated in the Admissions Application Feedback, Appeals and Complaints Policy for The Open University awards. Feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants on request to the HE Admissions Team at HEAdmissions@southessex.ac.uk in line with the Higher Education Admissions Application, Feedback, Appeals and Complaints Policy for The Open University awards which can be accessed under The Open University section in [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads](#).

14. Discontinuation or suspension of courses

14.1 The College reserves the right to discontinue or suspend a course for which offers have already been issued, but undertakes to do this in exceptional circumstances only.

Exceptional circumstances in this context refers to a decision to discontinue a course or not to recruit new students to a programme in future intakes, typically due to insufficient demand.

Where a course is discontinued, applicants holding offers are informed as soon as possible, and where possible and appropriate, are offered a place on an alternative course offered by the College or alternatively supported by our Information Advice and Guidance team to secure a place elsewhere with another provider.

15. Applicants with disabilities

15.1 Applicants who declare a disability in their application are referred to the College's Student Support team, which may issue advice and guidance or, where appropriate, make an assessment of the applicant's reasonable adjustment needs and what arrangements may be necessary to enable students to meet the course requirements. In individual cases Student Support may invite applicants for an interview to support the assessment process. The Student Support assessment of applications from students who declare a disability takes place independently of the academic selection process, which is based entirely on academic merit and takes place in accordance with standard policy.

16. Mature applicants

16.1 All Applications from mature students, are welcomed and will be given equal consideration with all other applications.

17. Applicants who will be under 18 at the time of entry to the College

17.1 There is no entry to students under 18 on The Open University provision offered at the College.

18. Applicants requesting re-admission

18.1 Applicants who have previously withdrawn from study at the College, and who wish to be re-admitted, will be considered one a case by case basis by the College.

19. Applicants admitted under specific education outreach programmes

19.1 The College may admit applicants under specific programmes designed to encourage applications from students who have experienced educational disadvantage. Such programmes include specification of additional consideration that may be given to applicants during the admissions process.

20. Assessment of applicant fee status

20.1 Applicants are required to declare their fee status when they complete their application, selecting from either home or international fee status. The central Admissions team check information in the application relating to fee status, including the nationality, country of residence, address and declared fee status of each applicant. Where the combination of information provided suggests that the fee status declared by the applicant may be incorrect or insufficient information is provided the College carries out a fee status assessment. Fee status assessments are carried out by trained members of HE admissions staff in accordance with UK fees and awards regulations and guidance provided by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (www.ukcisa.org). [UKCISA - international student advice and guidance - Studying in the UK?](#) The College does not exercise discretion when determining applicants' fee status.

20.2 Fee status is determined in accordance with [The Education \(Fees and Awards\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#) or [The Student Fees \(Qualifying Courses and Persons\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

20.3 The College reserves the right to amend an applicant's fee status (home or international) after the formal offer has been issued, in the event of misrepresentation.

20.4 The tuition fees for the first year of the course of study, together with the applicant's fee status, are included in the offer letter issued to the applicant. This indicates the type of fees you are eligible for, not the actual fee amount. You accept to pay tuition fees based on the fee status category allocated to you. Our fees policy can be found on the website here.

21. Fraudulent applications, including similarity detection in personal statements

21.1 Applications submitted via the college [website](#) are subject to the college's anti-fraud procedures.

22. Declaration of criminal convictions

22.1 Applicants are required to declare criminal convictions that are not spent at the time of application on their application form, via the Online Services portal. If the programme leader recommends that an offer be made, such applications will be referred for consideration in accordance with the College's Suitability procedures. Formal offers of admission will only be made following consideration of the conviction and application in accordance with the procedures. Application of the procedure takes place independently of the academic selection process, which is based entirely on academic merit and takes place in accordance with standard policy.

22.2 Applicants for specific courses may be required to declare spent criminal convictions and will be notified of this where appropriate.

22.3 Please refer to appendix 1 for more detail on the process of applicants with criminal convictions

23. Confirmation Consideration of applicant results

23.1 The College considers the results of all applicants who are holding a Conditional Firm (CF) place before deciding whether to confirm an applicant's place. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide the Admissions team with evidence of the results of academic and English language qualifications. The College reserves the right not to confirm an applicant's place if they do not provide evidence of having met the conditions of their offer.

24. Verification of results

24.1 The College reserves the right to verify all results by receiving and checking original certificates prior to confirming an applicant's place and/or permitting enrolment with the College. English language test results will be verified with the qualification awarding body (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL).

25. Applicants holding CF offers

25.1 On receipt of the applicant's results the HE Admissions team check to see if the conditions of the offer have been met. Where they have, the place is confirmed and the applicant's status is now Unconditional Firm (UF).

25. Applications holding UF offers

25.1 An **unconditional offer** means that a student has met all the academic and entry requirements for their chosen course and has secured their place without needing to achieve any further qualifications or conditions.

26. Communication of Confirmation Decisions

All applicants holding CF offers are informed of the College's confirmation decision via email (full time & part time applications), regardless of whether they have successfully secured a place or not. All decisions are communicated within 3 working days once all conditions have been met and evidenced.

27. Students requiring a Visa

27.1 Where an applicant requires a Student visa to study in the UK, confirmation of their place will be subject to compliance with relevant aspects of the UK Student Visa policy.

28. Complaints and appeals

28.1 Applicants do not have a right of appeal against the academic judgment of the College. However, if following receipt of feedback (as detailed above), an applicant feels that an error has occurred, they have the right to request a formal review of the selection decision in line with the Higher Education Admissions Application, Feedback, Appeals and Complaints Policy for The Open University awards which can be accessed under The Open University section in [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads](#).

28.2 Complaints are different to requests for feedback or appeals. A complaint does not necessarily have to be in connection with a decision to turn down an applicant. A complaint is a concern about a particular procedure, or process in the administration of an application. Complaints may cover any aspect of the admissions process and will normally focus on a specific issue or situation (which could include the feedback request). A complaint does not necessarily question the decision of the College, but raises a concern about how the selection process has been managed. The OU Admissions, Application, Feedback, Appeals and Complaints policy can be found under The Open University section in [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads](#).

29. Data protection and communication with third parties

29.1 The Information Services team aims to operate in compliance with data protection legislation and good records management practice. Applicants' data is treated as confidential by all staff involved in the admissions process and is not divulged unnecessarily or inappropriately. In accordance with College policy, staff involved in admissions communicate only with applicants themselves, unless the applicant has given express permission for a third party to communicate on his/her behalf. Third parties may be parents, teachers, advisers or agents acting on behalf of applicants.

30. Enrolment and induction

30.1 The College aims to provide a comprehensive academic and pastoral induction programme in order to support the transition of applicants to registered students at the end of the admissions process. Before arrival at the College applicants are provided with information about registration and enrolment with the College and induction activities. This will normally include: information about events provided by departments and the Student Union; services provided by Student Support; and general study skills provision, as well as information about

good practice in academic writing, such as effective referencing and advice on how to avoid plagiarism.

30.2 Prior to enrolment applicants receive information relating to arrangements for enrolment and induction. These are published on the college website and provided by email/postal correspondence during the application cycle.

31. Evaluation and review

31.1 An evaluative review will be undertaken by the course team following each HE admissions cycle to identify, share and incorporate good practice from the latest HE admissions cycle and consider improvements.

Policy End



Appendix 1 - Student Policy Criminal Convictions

Recruitment of Ex-Offenders

1.1. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, legislation makes it unlawful for employers, or prospective employers, to take into account offences in relation to which the candidate is deemed rehabilitated.

1.2 In practice, this means that an applicant who has been found guilty of a criminal offence will, after a set period of time, be able to state that they have no criminal convictions. The Act lays down specific time periods after which a person is deemed rehabilitated and therefore does not need to disclose a criminal record.

1.3 There are exemptions where all previous offences can be disclosed. These cover individuals employed as teachers and whose occupation brings them into contact with young people under the age of 18 years or with a learning difficulty or disability. The exception applies to Staff employed at the College.

2. Disclosure of Criminal Records

It is mandatory for all applicants on ITE provision, to undergo a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service at Enhanced Disclosure (DBS). This is processed by the DBS Team. This is a requirement because the nature of this programme will bring them into regular contact with young people under the age of 18 years or students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The College complies fully with the Disclosure and Barring Service Code of Professional practice, as may be amended from time to time.

The College undertakes to treat all applicants fairly with equality of opportunity and not discriminate unfairly against any subject of an Enhanced Disclosure on the basis of a reprimand, caution, warning, bind over or criminal conviction or on any other information that is disclosed.

All applicants are required to disclose information relating to any reprimand, cautions, warning, bind over or criminal conviction in the electronic application form. We ask applicants to share this information to enable the College to complete a risk assessment. For the purpose of applying to the College nothing is considered a spent conviction. Information disclosed will only be seen by those who need to see it as part of the application process. Applicants may be asked to provide additional information only in the interest of clarifying the circumstances about a 'spent' or 'unspent' conviction as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

If prior to interview or during the interview and application process, an applicant discloses a criminal offence, advice must be sought from the Head of School and Human Resources for risk assessment and decision on the way forward. This applies whether internal or external applicant.

The College or University undertakes to discuss any matter revealed in the Disclosure with the applicant before making a decision to withdraw a conditional offer.

Having a criminal record does not necessarily bar an applicant from studying at the College or University. Consideration will be given to the specific details of the conviction (etc.), and programme studying.

Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant could lead to withdrawal of an offer with the College or University. If found out at a later date during term time, it could lead to withdrawal.

If a student receives a criminal conviction during their study at the College, this must be reported to the programme leader or the Director of People and Organisational development.

The Director of People and Organisational development will review the disclosure and advise the programme team on how to proceed. This may result in the student being asked to be withdrawn from the programme due to the programme requiring a clear DBS.