

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY
for The Open University awards
2020-21

February 2020

Equality Impact Assessment

Date of Equality Impact Assessment	September 2018
Name of policy, practice, process or procedure	Higher Education Admissions Policy
What is the main aim or purpose of the policy, practice, process or procedure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure equitability, fairness and consistency of all Higher Education admissions to South Essex College. • Sets out requirements for admissions, entry qualifications, selection, offer making, communication of offer, and confirmation. • Sets out feedback, appeals and complaint procedures in relation to the above.
Who is responsible for creating/implementing this? Please state job role	Head of Department (where The OU provision resides) Vice Principal Quality and Compliance
Names of staff, learners, stakeholders involved in the equality impact assessment process	Head of Department (where The OU provision resides) Vice Principal Quality and Compliance CMA Compliance & Information Manager (HE)

Information to support the impact assessment process

<p>What evidence is already available to help inform the impact assessment process and to promote the general and specific duties related to equality and diversity? (Consider both quantitative and qualitative information)</p>	<p>SPA Fair Admissions to Higher Education Best Practice Guides</p> <p>Admissions/Training Manuals</p> <p>QAA UK Quality Codes:</p> <p>Pre-August 2018</p> <p>Chapter B2 Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education</p> <p>Chapter B6 Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning</p> <p>Chapter B9 Academic Appeals and Student Complaints</p> <p>Part C Information about Higher Education Provision</p> <p>Post-August 2018</p> <p><u>Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education and associated guidance documents</u></p> <hr/> <p>Access and Participation Plans 2020/21 to 2024/25</p> <p>SPA Supporting Professionalism in Admissions</p> <p>UCAS Good practice resources</p> <p>HE Applicant Reports/HE Applicant Survey</p> <p>Annual review of complaints/Appeals</p> <p>Approved Suitability Procedures</p> <p>Consumer & Markets Authority</p>
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In what areas are there concerns that the policy, practice, process or procedure could have a differential impact?

**Age
Gender
Disability
Race
Sexual orientation
Previous Offenders
Pregnancy & Maternity
Social Class/Background
Language**

<p>What are the risks associated with the policy, practice, process or procedure in relation to the differential impact?</p>	<p>Non-admittance to Undergraduate study (non-widening participation). Discrimination based on any of the above areas is possible if procedures are not correctly applied.</p>
<p>What are the expected benefits of the policy, practice, process or procedure?</p>	<p>Support fair and consistent admission to all Higher Programmes at South Essex College.</p> <p>To ensure consistent/equitable application of published entry criteria</p> <p>DBS checks, Fitness to Practice and audition/interview processes are correctly applied when determining suitability for relevant programmes.</p> <p>To ensure the College and its awarding bodies comply with SPA recommendations and follows the recommended precepts of the Revised UK Quality Code for HE, CMA & OfS in relation to admissions.</p>

SOUTH ESSEX COLLEGE

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY

This policy applies to admission in the academic year 2020/21

SCOPE OF POLICY

This policy applies to all admissions to The OU higher education 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.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY

The *Higher Education Admissions Policy for The Open University awards 2020/21* is approved by the College's HE Committee. Implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the Vice Principal Quality and Compliance.

REVIEW OF POLICY

Monitoring and review of the Higher Education Admissions Policy is undertaken annually by the HE Committee and HE Recruitment Task group.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS

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.

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.

The College acknowledges the principles and precepts governing good admissions practice set out by the Schwartz Report¹ and in The revised UK quality Code for Higher Education (03/2018) and relevant associated guidance. The College welcomes the recognition by Schwartz and UKSCQA of the autonomy enjoyed by higher education institutions in making admissions decisions and of the need to exercise judgement in making such decisions.

¹ Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice ('The Schwartz Report') Admissions to Higher Education Review, September 2004 <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/>
² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

Against this background the College's *Higher Education Admissions Policy for The Open University awards 2020/21* is intended to provide a policy and procedural framework within which admissions decision-making is characterised by transparency, fairness and consistency.

The College strives to observe the good practice guidance provided initially by SPA³ (and more recently by UCAS⁴) and to comply with all relevant legislation in relation to the College's undergraduate and graduate admissions activity.

SECTION 1 – MARKETING

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.

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.

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
- The College website (www.southessex.ac.uk)
- Social and new media
- Pre-enrolment webpages
- Documentation sent to applicants throughout the process

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 the *Higher Education Admissions Policy for The Open University awards 2020/21*.

³ *Supporting Professionalism in Admissions* <http://www.spa.ac.uk/>

⁴ *Good practice resources* <https://www.ucas.com/providers/good-practice>

SECTION 2 – EDUCATION OUTREACH

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.

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

The College aims to deliver a cohesive approach to widening participation and fair access, which is expressed in its Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25, HE Strategy 2017-2020 and the *Higher Education Admissions Policy for The Open University awards 2020/21*.

Marketing, Student Services and Admissions staff maintain a strong working relationship with appropriate representation on the HE Recruitment Task Group and HE Committee to ensure that the admissions policy, access and widening participation and HE Strategy are mutually informed and to maintain a holistic approach to access.

The HE Recruitment and Retention Task Group through its membership is informed of developments by CMA, SPA/UCAS, awarding bodies, MEG and other regulatory requirements which ensure that the admissions policy, access and widening participation strategy are mutually informed.

Outreach activity is informed in part by the targets and commitments set out in the Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25.

SECTION 3 - ADMISSIONS

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 admissions selectors, who may be members of the academic staff or members of the central HE Admissions team.

RESPONSIBILITY OF APPLICANTS IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

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.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

1. Academic requirements

All higher education applicants are required to meet the College's published entry requirements⁴. Course-specific entry requirements are published annually in the HE 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 Vice Principal Quality and Compliance.

2. English language competence

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 IELTS 7.0 in each band or equivalent.

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

3. Publication of entry requirements

Entry requirements are normally determined around two years before the proposed point of admission, e.g. by January 2018 for October 2020 entry, and are published in the printed prospectus. 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.

⁴ <https://www.southessex.ac.uk/coursefinder?he=1>

4. Acceptable qualifications

The College accepts a UK Honours Degree .

EU and other international qualifications are also accepted. The equivalence of such qualifications to a UK Honours Degree award will be evaluated in accordance with independent national guidance provided by UK NARIC, UCAS and other recognised sources. The HE Admissions Team (Higher Education) is responsible for undertaking such evaluations in consultation with Admissions Selectors.

5. Verification of qualifications

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.

6. Tier 4 requirements

Where an applicant requires a Tier 4 Visa to study in the UK, an offer of a place will be subject to compliance relevant aspects of Tier 4 policy⁵

SELECTION

7. Initial checks

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.

8. Selection decision

In accordance with the College's commitment to fair admissions, each application is considered individually by an Admissions Selector, 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.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa>

09. All decisions (including those to turn down an applicant) are checked by staff in central Admissions team for consistency of Admissions Selectors in applying the entry criteria and adhering to the Higher Education Admissions Policy.

10. Interviews, auditions and other evidence

The Teaching and Learning department will invite all applicants 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.

OFFER-MAKING

11. Communication of offer

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.

12. 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.

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

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

13. Applicants made an alternative offer

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

14. Unsuccessful applicants and feedback

Where the College decides that an offer cannot be made, this is communicated to applicants via email. Admissions Selectors are 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 2020-21. Feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants on request to the CMA Compliance and Information Manager (HE) at HEadmissions@southessex.ac.uk in line with the Admissions Application Feedback, Appeals and Complaints Policy for The Open University awards 2020-21

15. Discontinuation or suspension of courses

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. 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.

CONSIDERATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA IN SELECTION AND OFFER-MAKING

16. Applicants with disabilities

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.

17. Mature applicants

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

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

In accordance with University regulations, applicants who will be under 18 at the time of entry will be required to comply with University child protection procedures. Such applicants will be required to complete the relevant under 18s form satisfactorily, providing parental/guardian approval and details of a UK-based emergency contact who is over the age of 18, before their place is confirmed.

19. Applicants requesting re-admission

Applicants who have previously withdrawn from study at the College, and who wish to be re-admitted, will be considered in accordance with the College policy, where one exists⁷, on the re-admission of students published on the College website.

20. Applicants admitted under specific education outreach programmes

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.

21. Assessment of applicant fee status

Applicants are required to declare their fee status when they complete their application, selecting from a number of options including UK home, EU or overseas (non-EU) 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

⁷The Open University does not have a policy on re-admission. The decision to re-admit a student therefore rests with the College.

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). The College does not exercise discretion when determining applicants' fee status.

The College reserves the right to amend an applicant's fee status after the formal offer has been issued.

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.

22. Fraudulent applications, including similarity detection in personal statements

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

23. Declaration of criminal convictions

Applicants are required to declare criminal convictions that are not spent at the time of application. If the Admissions Selector 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.

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

CONFIRMATION

24. Consideration of applicant results

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.

25. Verification of results

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).

26. Applicants holding CF offers

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).

27. 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.

28. Students requiring a Visa

Where an applicant requires a Tier 4 visa to study in the UK, confirmation of their place will be subject to compliance with relevant aspects of Tier 4 policy.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

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 and should refer to Higher Education Admissions Application Feedback, Appeals & Complaints Policy https://assets.southessex.ac.uk/SEC_DEV/uploads/document/file/8/Compliments_Complaints_Policy_September_2019.pdf.

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

DATA PROTECTION AND COMMUNICATION WITH THIRD PARTIES

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.

SECTION 4 - ENROLMENT AND INDUCTION

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.

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.

SECTION 5 – EVALUATION AND REVIEW

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FROM EACH HE ADMISSIONS CYCLE

An evaluative review will be undertaken by the HE Quality Team following each HE admissions cycle to identify, share and incorporate good practice from the latest HE admissions cycle and consider improvements.⁸ The findings of the evaluative review will be presented to the HE Committee and, where appropriate, the *Higher Education Admissions Policy for The Open University awards 2020/21*.

⁸These improvements will be based on internal and external drivers.