



Postgraduate Admissions Policy



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1. Context, Governance and Responsibilities

1.1 Introduction

St Mary's University College is a college of Queen's University Belfast. The College enjoys a special relationship of collaborative academic provision with the University but remains legally and financially autonomous with its own governance arrangements. The system for admissions to St Mary's is independent to that of the University. However, the College has the status of a University School or Institute and the College accepts the quality assurance regulations and procedures of the University, as they apply to Schools of the University. Its admissions policy has been drawn up to reflect this and is congruent with the University admissions policy.

This policy applies to the admission of postgraduate (taught) students to St Mary's University College, Belfast. The number of places available for each course is based upon supply and demand factors, with the exception of the PGCE (Irish-medium Education) which is determined by the Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

1.2 Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to the admission of postgraduate (taught) students to St Mary's University College. It provides information on procedures and related matters together with details of the responsibilities of those involved in the process. It is kept under review and updated periodically to reflect progress in implementing the College Vision.

1.3 Institutional Context

The College Institutional Plan for 2020-2023, *Strategy 21*, sets out the vision and mission of St Mary's University College as well as strategic actions and activities within a framework of continuous improvement for the future.

1.4 Equality and Diversity

The policy of the College 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 dependants.

1.5 Quality Assurance

The Admissions Policy complies with relevant legislation affecting the admission of students and meets the expectation of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education (2013) (www.qaa.ac.uk).

1.6 Roles and Responsibilities

The College Strategic Management Team has overall responsibility for institutional policy relating to Admissions. In an emergency situation, this responsibility can be transferred to an Incident Management Team (see appendix 6).

The Academic Registry Office will implement admissions policies and procedures. The Academic Registrar will formally review admission policies and procedures at the end of an admissions cycle. Procedures will also be monitored at each stage of admission and improvements identified or adjusted where necessary. The outcome of this review will be reported to the College Admissions Group.

1.7 Training

Academic Registry staff are provided with training on admissions procedures and related internal and external regulations to ensure that they have the appropriate level of knowledge and expertise to carry out their duties to a high standard.

2. Pre-Application Information

2.1 Entrance Qualifications and Admissions Procedures

St Mary's 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 programme(s) to be made appropriate to their needs, interests, academic qualifications and potential.

Detailed information on entrance qualifications and associated admissions procedures for individual postgraduate programmes is provided. The main sources of information are as follows:

- Online prospectus
- College brochures and leaflets
- College website

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate when it is published. We provide printed materials such as the Masters programme prospectus more than six months before the course begins. Applicants should

therefore refer to the College website to check for updated information about course content and application criteria.

2.2 Applicant Enquiries

Academic Registry provides a central service of admission, processing postgraduate applications to the College and provides pre-application advice and guidance. This includes responding to enquiries on how to apply, the acceptability of qualifications and entrance requirements. Academic Registry can be contacted by telephone, email or post:

Academic Registry
St Mary's University College
191 Fall's Road
Belfast
BT12 6FE

Email: admissions@smucb.ac.uk

Telephone: +44(0)28 90268320

3. The Application Process

3.1 Criteria for Admission and Application Procedures

3.1.1 Criteria for Admission

- i) Applications are considered by Academic Registry on behalf of the Programme teams. Decisions are made on the basis of clear and approved written criteria and non-standard applications are referred to the Programme Co-ordinator when necessary.
- ii) The minimum academic requirement for admission to full time postgraduate programmes is normally a Second Class Honours Degree from a UK or Republic of Ireland Higher Education Provider or an equivalent qualification from outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland, acceptable to the College. The part-time Masters in Education requires a recognised teaching qualification. Specific and alternative entrance requirements (academic and non-academic) for individual courses are available from the Academic Registry office.

3.1.2 Application Procedures

- i) Applications for admission to postgraduate taught courses are submitted via an application form (available from the Academic Registry office or College web site).

- ii) At the time of application, Masters applicants will be asked to indicate which specialism they wish to pursue as detailed in the prospectus.
- iii) Full-time postgraduate taught courses commence in September. Part-time Masters modules commence in semester 1, 2 or in the summer school in July. Students can join the Masters programme at either entry point. Information on starting dates is contained within the Masters prospectus.

3.2 Closing Dates for Applications

Closing dates for application will be printed on the application form. Late applications are subject to the availability of places.

3.3 Data Protection

St Mary's University College is required by law to comply with the Data Protection Act, 1998 and, from 25 May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The College is committed to ensuring that all employees, registered students, agents and data processors comply with the legislation, regarding the processing and confidentiality of any personal data held by the College. Applicants have the right to either request a copy of their personal data held by the College, to have it corrected, deleted, or to ask the College to stop using it. Any person who wishes to exercise these rights should submit their request, in writing, in writing, to the Academic Registrar's Office.

In compliance with the Act, all applicants for postgraduate study will be asked to confirm that:

- They authorise St Mary's University College to process their personal data supplied on the application form for the purposes of assessing their eligibility for admission as a postgraduate student and for funding.
- They authorise St Mary's University College to contact their host institution to ascertain exact marks achieved by them in their undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees for the purposes of admission and where necessary ranking their application in the selection process.

3.4 Fraudulent Submissions, Statements and Omissions

Information provided on an application form for postgraduate study should be true, complete and accurate and no information requested should be omitted. If any information is inaccurate, has been omitted or if a transcript is not provided (if applicable), the College reserves the right to cancel the application and the applicant shall have no claim against the College in relation to this.

Offers of a place are based on the information provided by the applicant and are made in good faith by the College. False statements, omissions of relevant information or the submission of work which is not deemed by the College to be unique to the applicant may lead to the withdrawal of an offer of a place or the student may be required to withdraw from the College, if registered.

Online Interviews

If an online interview forms part of the normal selection process e.g. Microsoft Teams/ Skype an applicant will be required to provide photographic identification e.g. passport to satisfy visual identity. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to arrange a suitable location and computer equipment. Applicants are not permitted to engage with a third party during the interview process and any breach will result in the application being withdrawn

3.5 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The College invites applications to its degree programmes from all prospective students who possess the ability, knowledge and experience required to benefit from them. The College operates a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme which encompasses Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). The College adopts the validating University's RPL Policy and is available at <http://go.qub.ac.uk/RPLPolicy>

4. Selection and Communication of Decisions

4.1 Selection Procedures

4.1.1 Postgraduate Taught

Admissions decisions will be undertaken by at least one administrator from Academic Registry. Where limited places are available, a rank order will be determined by the Academic Registrar.

Selectors will make their admissions decisions on the basis of the criteria for the individual course which may include:

- The applicant's academic qualifications. Where a graduate applicant holds or is due to complete a higher-level qualification, the College reserves the right to consider the level of academic performance attained in the higher level qualification, if it is relevant to the course applied for.
- Interviews, admissions tests, written work, portfolio submission or relevant professional experience.
- References are used for admission to the PGCE and also, in exceptional circumstances, for admission to the Masters Programme.

- Evidence of an acceptable level of proficiency in the use of the English Language is required (from applicants for whom English is not their first language). Acceptance is considered in the form of one of the qualifications on the College's list of acceptable English Language qualifications, available on request from the Academic Registry Office. Applicants who are non-UK or Irish Nationals must also satisfy UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) requirements for English language for visa purposes. Further information is available at

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration.

4.2 Turnaround Time for Applications

Academic Registry staff aim to make a decision within ten working days of receipt of a complete application. Where entry requires an interview and/ or admission tests, this decision will inform the applicant of their eligibility or otherwise for interview. An application is deemed to be complete when sufficient information has been received in order to make a decision.

4.3 Applicants with a Criminal Record

The College acknowledges the key role of education in the rehabilitative process and a criminal record will not preclude an applicant from being offered a place at the College. However, as part of its duty of care to its staff and students, the College will ask for information about any relevant criminal convictions that are not subject to filtering. Appendix 2 sets out the College's procedures.

All applicants to courses where their studies will involve interaction with vulnerable groups will be required to give permission for an enhanced Access NI (ANI) check (or suitable alternative in the case of international students) to be carried out. This may be requested post-admission, where the nature of a project requires it or if placement is to be undertaken. Access NI is part of central government and operates under the provisions of Part V of the Police Act 1997.

4.4 Notifying Applicants

Academic Registry is responsible for conveying official decisions to the applicant.

4.5 Offers

All communications from Academic Registry indicate that the offer is an offer of admission for a place and not an offer of financial assistance. The offer requires acceptance by the applicant by a specified deadline. A conditional offer will be made where qualifications are pending. Offers will also be subject to additional health and criminal record checks where appropriate and specified in the letter of offer.

Academic Registry will notify applicants of procedures relating to the submission of degree results, financial responsibilities, applying for accommodation and other support services provided to College students. For non-EU/EEA applicants, detailed information in relation to immigration procedures will be provided.

4.6 Terms and Conditions

Applicants who receive an offer for a postgraduate taught course will be provided with a copy of the College's Terms and Conditions.

4.7 Applicants with a Disability or Long-Term Condition

The College is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all of its students and actively encourages applications from people with disabilities and long-term conditions. An individual's disability or long-term condition is not considered prior to an offer being made and has no bearing on the decision.

The College offers an extensive range of supports for students with disabilities and long-term conditions. The reasonable adjustments available are outlined in the Student Disability Policy available from the College Student Guidance and Support department.

Applicants will be asked to complete relevant questions at registration and to inform the College of any support needs. Where it is anticipated from the information provided that the applicant will require significant support or will require modifications to the academic course, they will be invited to meet staff from Disability Services and relevant members of staff to discuss the applicant's individual needs. In the exceptional and unlikely event where fitness to practise issues give cause for concern or reasonable adjustments cannot be implemented, the College reserves the right to withdraw an offer.

The College recognises that the decision to disclose a disability or long-term condition is a personal one, although it is recommended that applicants do so as early as possible to support the timely implementation of agreed reasonable adjustments. If a disability or long-term condition is not disclosed until a later stage, the College will endeavour to make any adjustments required before the start of the course, but it may not be possible to have everything in place before this.

Applicants who wish to appeal a decision not to implement adjustments requested which may prevent the applicant from taking up their offer of a place on a programme may write to the Student Guidance and Support in the first instance to request a review of the decision.

5. Post-Decision Procedures

5.1 Deferred Entry

Applications for deferred entry will be considered on an individual basis. The deferral will not be guaranteed as factors can impact on the number of places available outside of the College's control. Requests must be submitted in writing and include the main reason(s) for deferral.

5.2 Applicants with Mitigating Circumstances

The College is not best placed to fairly and consistently take account of any mitigating circumstances affecting an applicant's performance in pre-entry qualifications. Examples of mitigating circumstances include personal or family illness. The College expects applicants to have taken appropriate action via their Higher Education Provider to ensure that the relevant examination bodies have allowed for such circumstances prior to the publication of results or following an appeal.

5.3 Significant Changes to Programmes

Significant changes to any of the College's programmes including restructuring or discontinuation will be communicated to relevant applicants by Academic Registry. This will be done at the earliest possible opportunity.

5.4 Feedback

Academic Registry will provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants on request. Academic Registry staff are able to respond to most queries about decisions to the satisfaction of the vast majority of applicants. The request for feedback should be made within six weeks of the decision to the Academic Registry by letter or email: admissions@smucb.ac.uk

Academic Registry aims to respond to requests for feedback within ten working days of receipt of the request. Academic Registry staff will provide feedback in writing by email or letter. Following this feedback, if applicants believe that they have grounds for a formal review of the admissions decision, they should consult the College's Admissions Appeals and Complaints procedure.

5.5 Appeals and Complaints

The College aims to consider all applicants fairly and in line with the principles outlined in the Postgraduate Admissions Policy. However, it is recognised that there may be occasions where applicants wish to request an appeal (review of the admissions decision), or make a complaint about the handling of their application or enquiry.

The College's Appeals and Complaints procedure (attached as Appendix 3) is based on the University-wide Student Complaints Procedure. It covers all applicants to credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses, and can therefore be used by persons who are not currently College students.

The procedure covers the following types of appeal and/or complaint:

- Complaints about the College's handling of a query or an application for admission.
- Allegations that admissions criteria were not applied correctly or even-handedly.
- Emergence of new material information which may have affected the decision.

5.6 Verification of Qualifications

All applicants who have accepted an unconditional offer of a place to undertake a postgraduate taught course are required to bring their original qualification certificates or a certified copy (and official translations in English if necessary) when they first register as a postgraduate student at the College.

6. International Applications

International applications are welcomed and should be submitted in the normal way.

6.1 Status for Tuition Fee Purposes

The College charges different levels of tuition fee. The amount a student will be required to pay depends on a number of criteria.

Details of these criteria and further guidance can be obtained from UKCISA: The UK Council for International Student Affairs. UKCISA provides advice and information to international students studying (or intending to study) in the UK. Information and advice to students is free. For more information please visit www.ukcisa.org.uk

The College's Academic Registry will decide an applicant's fee status on the basis of the relevant fees regulations. Fee status is determined in accordance with the following regulations:

The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (as amended).

In addition to the information supplied at the time of application, applicants may be asked to provide additional details about themselves and their family to help the College assess fee status. Applicants should also provide scanned copies of relevant

documents (for example copies of passports, official letters, evidence of travel, employment etc.) to support the information provided.

6.2 Comparability of International Qualifications

Qualifications obtained from countries outside the UK and Republic of Ireland should be deemed comparable and meet the equivalent level for entry to the course/research programme applied for. The College will only recognise qualifications that are awarded by suitably quality-assured Higher Education Providers with recognised degree awarding authority and listed as recognised Higher Education Providers by the National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC- www.naric.org.uk) or the British Council (www.britishcouncil.org).

6.3 English Language Requirements

Applicants whose first language is not English are required to produce evidence of their proficiency through qualifications such as a Secure English Language Test (SELT) e.g. IELTS for UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) purposes, or an acceptable alternative such as IELTS Academic, TOEFL iBT or an INTO English language test e.g. English for University Study or Pre-sessional English (www.intohigher.com/qub). A full list of acceptable English language qualifications and appropriate scores is available at: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/EnglishLanguageReqs>

6.4 Immigration Procedures

International Student Support is responsible for providing advice and guidance to international applicants and students on the Points Based System (PBS) for immigration, particularly in terms of student entry visas and leave to remain in the UK visa renewals.

International applicants who have met all the course entry requirements and have accepted an unconditional offer of a place to study on a postgraduate programme are eligible to pay a deposit towards their tuition fees, which may assist in the visa application process. Applicants for one-year postgraduate taught courses are required to pay a mandatory tuition fee deposit before a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) can be issued for visa purposes.

The Admissions and Access Service will include appropriate information in the offer letters and guidance notes for international applicants and is responsible for carrying out the appropriate checks, in conjunction with International Student Support, to assess immigration history before issuing CAS for applicants where appropriate. A CAS is valid for 6 months from the date of issue. The Admissions and Access Service will also issue the appropriate documentation required to allow applicants to apply for ATAS clearance where applicable.

An ATAS Certificate is valid for 6 months from the date of issue by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Applicants may apply for an ATAS Certificate up to six

months in advance of the beginning of the degree programme. Further information is available at www.fco.gov.uk/atas

If the applicant will be in the UK for more than 6 months, s/he will also be required to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge at the time of application. More information is available from the Home Office website at

<https://www.gov.uk/healthcareimmigration-application>

At the time of enrolment and registration, all new non-UK/non-Irish students are required to provide evidence (valid passport and visa) that they have the correct immigration permission to undertake the specified Postgraduate Degree Programme at the University.

Programmes with Additional/Special Admission Procedures

This list is not exhaustive. Applicants should consult the College website for information on selection and admission criteria for postgraduate programmes.

Programme	Details
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Irish-medium Education)	All eligible applicants are required to attend for interview and submit written work in Irish.
MEd	Applicants who present a valid Professional Qualification are eligible to apply for credit up to 60 M-level points. This is conditional upon successful completion of the “bridging” process comprising the submission of a 5,000 word reflective assignment assessed as satisfactory at M-level. The process and fee for credit transfer are published in the Masters Programme for Teachers prospectus.

Admission of Applicants with a Criminal Record

It is the policy of the College to consider applications for admission on their individual merit in the light of all available information. The primary selection criteria are those related to the qualifications, skills, abilities and personal qualities of an applicant. The College will investigate the criminal record of a new applicant only if the primary selection criteria for a course have been met. The College acknowledges the key role of education in the rehabilitative process and a criminal record will not debar an applicant unless the nature and seriousness of the offence in question is incompatible with:

- (i) the course applied for;
- (ii) the ultimate professional or vocational goal;
- (iii) participation in an academic and social setting and the College's responsibility to ensure a safe and neutral environment.

The following regulations are therefore intended to establish appropriate procedures so that applications from candidates who have a criminal record are handled in an open and non-discriminatory manner. All information will be treated in strictest confidence.

Regulations Concerning Admission of Applicants who have a Criminal Record

1. To help the College reduce the risk of harm or injury to its students, staff, visitors or other users of its facilities, it must know about any relevant items on a criminal record that an applicant may have. In addition, the College must also meet its obligations under Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults legislation. Applicants seeking further information on the following regulations should contact the Academic Registry at the College and, where appropriate, refer to the College's Child Protection Policy.
2. Applicants to courses in teacher education and Liberal Arts courses covered by the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults legislation.

Applicants must declare any criminal convictions that are not 'protected' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, as amended in 2014. Prior to admission to these courses, the University will request that the appropriate authority carries out the required checks on applicants under the College's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. In Northern Ireland this organisation is called AccessNI. Applicants should be aware that the Enhanced Disclosure Certificate (EDC) which is issued contains details of any spent and unspent convictions, as well as any cautions, informed warnings and diversionary youth conferences that are not protected. It may also contain non-conviction information (for example attempted prosecutions which were unsuccessful) that are held in police records which a Chief Police Officer thinks may be relevant to the post applied for (ie "soft police intelligence"). The police may also include information that is protected and has been filtered by AccessNI on the basis that "it might be relevant and ought to be disclosed." EDCs also contain the results of checks of The Children's Barred List and/or The Adults' Barred List as appropriate.

Failure to provide permission for an appropriate check will prevent further consideration of the application.

An applicant who acquires a criminal record or is informed of a prosecution pending after applying and before the date of admission to the College should inform the Academic Registrar of this matter in writing without delay.

3. Applicants to all other courses

- (a) Applicants must declare on their applications any relevant items on a criminal record, i.e. for offences against the person, whether of a violent or sexual nature, and convictions for offences involving unlawfully supplying controlled drugs or substances where the relevant item concerns commercial drug dealing or trafficking. Items that are spent (as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Order (NI) 1978) are not considered to be relevant and you should not reveal them.
- (b) If the College discovers that an applicant has failed to disclose information about relevant items on a criminal record, as outlined in paragraph 3(a) above, it may withdraw or amend any offer(s) of admission or terminate the applicant's subsequent enrolment at the College.

An applicant who acquires a relevant item on a criminal record after applying and before the date of admission to the College should inform the Academic Registrar in writing without delay.

4. In line with the procedures used for all applicants and following the requirements of its Statutes, the College may, subject to the applicant's permission, seek further information, including a character reference, from any individual or body where it is considered appropriate.

5. Consideration of cases

Cases will initially be considered by the Academic Registrar and Co-ordinator of Student Guidance and Support. The College may decide to invite the applicant for interview, if considered to be appropriate. If an offer is not made at this stage, or if the case requires further consideration, it will be referred to the Co-ordinator of Student Guidance and Support. If it is thought that the application should be turned down, this will be referred to the Admissions Group. The latter will appoint a sub-group to consider the matter. A meeting of the Sub Group will be held and will normally be serviced by the Academic Registry. Neither applicants nor their representatives will have the right to appear before the Admissions Group. Minutes shall be taken as a formal record of the meeting and retained.

6. If an applicant is rejected on the basis of the information obtained under the above regulations, the applicant will be informed of the decision in writing by recorded delivery. The letter will also state whether he or she can re-apply for that course and the minimum amount of time that must elapse before any re-application will be

considered. Potential applicants who were rejected on a previous occasion should contact the Academic Registry for further details.

7. Appeals

The applicant may appeal in writing to the Principal of the College on any of the following grounds:

- (i) new evidence has become available which could not have been made available to the Admissions Group (evidence withheld from the Admissions Group will not normally constitute new evidence); or
- (ii) the decision was too severe or inappropriate.

The appeal, stating with reasons the grounds for appeal, must be made in writing within ten working days of the date of the letter stating the decision. Copies of previous correspondence and any supporting documentation must be attached to the letter of appeal.

8. The Principal will convene the Admissions Review Appeal Panel (ARAP) to consider the grounds for appeal (see below).

The Panel normally will comprise:

- the Principal (in the chair);
- a Programme Chair from a programme other than the one(s) applied to;
- a member of staff from the programme applied to; and
- the Human Resources Manager or nominee.

The meeting will normally be serviced by the Academic Registry. Panel members will not have had any prior direct involvement in the case. The Panel membership will be chosen as far as possible to reflect the diversity of the Northern Ireland community. Minutes shall be taken as a formal record of the meeting and retained.

9. If it is decided that there are no grounds for appeal, the applicant will be informed of the decision in writing, with reasons, within five working days of its having been made. The decision of the ARAP is final.
10. Where the ARAP decides that there are grounds for appeal it will normally meet within 15 working days of the date of that decision. The Academic Registry shall write to the applicant notifying him or her of the date and venue of the meeting. The appellant will have the right to appear before the ARAP accompanied by a member of teaching staff from his or her present or former school or college or a friend. No legal representation will be permitted at any stage during the procedure. Minutes shall be taken as a formal record of the meeting and retained.
11. The ARAP may seek written evidence from any witness or person who in the ARAP's judgement may have relevant information to contribute. Any such person will have

the right to see relevant documentation to be considered by the ARAP in advance of the hearing and shall have the right to appear in front of the ARAP if he or she wishes, accompanied by a student or staff member of the College. However, neither the appellant nor any witness will be required to appear in front of the ARAP if they do not wish to appear.

12. Should the appellant fail to appear before the ARAP at an appointed time and without valid reason, the ARAP will have the right to reach a decision in the appellant's absence.
13. The ARAP's findings and recommendations will be communicated to the appellant in writing by recorded delivery within 5 working days of the ARAP's meeting. The letter will also state whether he or she can re-apply for that course and the minimum amount of time that must elapse before any re-application will be considered.
14. The ARAP will also send a report to the Senior Tutor and Academic Registrar, summarising the ARAP's conclusions and recommendations. The decision of the ARAP is final.

Admissions Appeals and Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

St Mary's University College receives approximately 2,000 applications for admission to undergraduate programmes, and a further 200 applications for admission to postgraduate programmes. However, the undergraduate intake and Post Graduate Certificate in Education each year is dictated by a government-imposed cap, which means that not all suitably-qualified candidates can be accommodated. There is no government cap on in-service places, but the number allocated can be determined by the availability of funding, which is limited and awarded on a competitive basis.

College policy is formulated in line with the strategic plan. Admissions criteria - i.e. the entry qualifications and grades for individual courses - are determined by the Academic Registry in consultation with relevant academic staff for the purposes of implementing the strategic plan, within the overall constraints placed on student numbers by both government and professional bodies.

Most undergraduate admissions decisions are based on transparent academic criteria – e.g. GCSE and A Level performance. The study area of the College website (<https://www.smucb.ac.uk/study>) 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. interviews are sometimes used to identify whether candidates have the desired attributes, but in all such cases selectors are required to use clearly stated selection criteria.

Academic Registry staff 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 is based on the University-wide Student Complaints Procedure. It covers all applicants to credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses, and thus can be used by persons who are not currently St Mary's University College students.

The procedure covers the following types of appeal/complaint:

- complaints about the College's handling of a query or an application for admission;
- 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 faculties or departments, or to caps on student numbers in particular courses whether imposed by the University, government or professional bodies. Any correspondence on these matters should be directed to the Senior Tutor who has overall responsibility for admissions.

In cases of collaborative provision, i.e. where a 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 the Academic Registry at St Mary's University College. Where the admissions query relates to a programme designed as an entry route to St Mary's (e.g. an Access course for mature students), enquiries should 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).

3. Submission and Investigation of Enquiries/Complaints/Appeals

3.1 First Stage: Informal Resolution

Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made by the applicant in question and should be directed to the Academic Registry in the first instance (telephone 02890 268320, email admis@smucb.ac.uk or write to the Academic Registry, St Mary's University College, 191 Fall's Road, Belfast BT12 6FE). If necessary, the Academic Registry will consult with relevant faculty staff before responding to the query. 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 Senior Tutor

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

A Senior Tutor (or nominee) shall then consult with the Academic Registry and relevant members of staff as necessary, and shall undertake such further enquiries as are deemed necessary before providing a written response normally within 15 working days of 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 a Senior Tutor 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 appeal to the Principal within 10 working days of receiving a Senior Tutor's decision. 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. In such cases, the Principal shall communicate this decision in writing to the appellant, normally within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal.
- (ii) Where a Review Panel is deemed necessary, the Panel shall normally comprise:

The Principal (in the chair);

- a Senior Tutor;
 - Human Resources Manager or Nominee;
 - the President or other sabbatical officer from the Students' Union;
 - Coordinator Student Services.
- (iii) 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.
 - (iv) 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 teaching staff from the appellant's present or former school or college. No legal representation shall be permitted at any stage during the procedure.
 - (v) 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 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.
 - (vi) 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.
 - (vii) The Panel's findings and recommendations shall be communicated to the appellant within 10 working days of the Panel's meeting. The Panel shall also send a report to the Senior Tutor and the Academic Registrar, summarising the Panel's conclusions and recommendations.

4. Deadlines

The deadlines set out in this procedure relate to investigations carried out in semester-time only, and may not prove possible to meet at particularly busy periods for the Academic Registry (e.g. August-September). The 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), the 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 Academic Registrar shall prepare an annual summary of the nature and outcome of any formal admissions appeals/complaints for the Learning & Teaching Committee each year.

Emergency Procedures

1 Introduction

In the event of an emergency, St Mary's University College may establish an Incident Management Team (IMT) to deal with business continuity issues and consider adjustments to procedures. The scope of the IMT incorporates all College operations including admissions, recruitment and selection of students to College programmes. Decisions made by IMT will supplement or supersede standard procedures where necessary to ensure that student numbers are recruited as closely as possible to quotas issued by the relevant government authorities.

The Admission Policy incorporates changes to procedures under section 1.9: Roles and Responsibilities, taking into consideration any necessary in-year review at each stage of admission. The premise for all reviews will remain consistent with the aims and objectives of the Admission Policy. In considering adjustments, particular attention will be given to the overarching principles of a fair admissions system to ensure that no one or group of candidates is disadvantaged in the decision-making process. St Mary's complies with the QAA Code of Practice and procedures are guided by the principles of the Report of the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group 2004 (the Schwartz Report). The College is therefore committed to the principle of consistency, equal opportunity and fairness for all applicants.

2 Emergency Response

In instances where a public health or other incident determines the closure of the College to students and visitors, standard face to face processes, such as the interview required by the Department of Education for Initial Teacher Education places must be reviewed. Additional internal selection methods, including the practical assessment for Physical Education options within the BEd and Liberal Arts programmes and writing task for the PGCE programme must also be re-assessed in terms of alternative delivery or removal.

The College should also consider the impact of emergency procedures in the final decision-making stage of admission in order not to disadvantage applicants. Such measures may include a review of deadlines for notification of results following revised release dates of entry qualifications.

3 Annual Review of Emergency Procedures

A rolling review of admission procedures will be conducted by Academic Registry for the relevant stages of admission as required. Consideration will be given by members of the College Admissions Working Group with recommendations made to SMT or IMT.