Code of practice for postgraduate research admissions

Academic entry year 2027/28

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Principles

1. The Admissions *Code of practice* provides the basis for the admission practice across the University and sets out a framework for how the University selects and admits students.

2. The University of Surrey offers a high-quality learning and teaching environment, which supports students to achieve their full potential in the academic discipline and prepares them for professional life. It is University policy that all applicants are considered primarily on merit and their suitability and aptitude for carrying out doctoral level research, and the availability of appropriate supervision.

3. The University is committed to securing and promoting the freedom of speech of their students and staff (See *Freedom of Speech Code of Practice*). These commitments also apply to admissions of postgraduate students such that no prospective student will be denied admission to the University for their lawful speech or expression, however controversial or unpopular their ideas or opinions may be, including when their speech may have caused offence.

4. The University's Admissions *Code of practice* is committed to:

    - Providing transparent, consistent and efficient information
    - Selecting applicants who are considered likely to be able to complete the programme within the expected registration periods as judged by their achievements and potential
    - Using reliable assessment methods, including consideration of evidence provided and interviews
    - Minimising barriers to access postgraduate research programmes.

5. Initially, applicants will be considered for entry on to our programmes based on the following criteria (see Sections 3 and 4 for full details of the admissions and selection criteria):

    - Review of prior academic achievement of the applicant
    - Review of future examinations where results are not yet known
    - Review of the referees' assessment of an applicant's ability
    - Availability of appropriate supervisory arrangements
    - Interview.

6. In addition, the following may also be considered where applicable:

    - Review of the personal statement in support of the application
    - Review of relevant work experience
    - Review of a research proposal
    - For visiting PGR students, the agreement in principle from the academic department and potential supervisor is also taken into consideration.

Roles & Responsibility

7. The role of the University of Surrey Admissions Office is to ensure that policies and procedures are carried out in a fair and consistent way in line with relevant legislation and the University strategy.

8. The Doctoral College Board has ultimate responsibility for setting the entry criteria for the admissions of postgraduate research students in conjunction with the University's Admissions Steering Group. Applicants should consider the following points:

    - Details of programme specific entry criteria can be found on the programme pages of the University website.
    - We would ordinarily expect an applicant to be in possession of the required academic qualifications. Academic requirements specific to the programme are published on the programme pages.
    - All applicants must provide evidence that they possess at least the minimum level of English Language proficiency as set by the University's Admissions Steering Group. Details of the required English Language requirements are published on the programme pages or on the Doctoral College website for visiting students. For further details, please refer to the English Language webpage English language requirements | University of Surrey.
    - Applicants are normally expected to meet English language requirements to have an unconditional place onto the programme. They may be granted exemption under certain circumstances when they don't meet standard requirements. For further guidance on this, please contact the admissions office via admissions@surrey.ac.uk.
    - Applicants who have non-standard qualifications or have work experience they wish to have assessed may be considered on an individual basis, in line with the general aims and principles of the Admissions, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), or Recognition of Prior Credit (RPC) policies.
    - Entry on to some programmes of study requires applicants to meet additional non-academic conditions. These conditions usually apply to programmes that have professional requirements and may include Disclosure & Barring and Fitness to Study clearance. Where such clearance is required, information will be provided in programme literature and advice given to applicants.

Admissions criteria and selection principles

9. The University's aim is to select those applicants who are likely to succeed academically and gain from the provision available. Aptitude for an individual programme is the primary criterion for selection, and an academic decision will always be reached on an application before other lawful factors are taken into account.

10. Our Selection Criteria ensures:

    - Decisions are fair and consistent in relation to the published entry criteria.
    - We consider evidence of a candidate's potential to succeed on the programme.
    - We operate a transparent selection process. Selection is normally on the basis of an application form and, where applicable, a research proposal, and an interview conducted by two trained members of academic staff. Candidates will be informed of the process in advance.
    - We endeavour to communicate in a timely way with the applicant, advising them on the outcome of their application. The University will communicate via email and Surrey Self-Service.
    - The University of Surrey will take into account compliancy requirements in regard to external legislation (such as the UKVI requirements) when reviewing an application.

English Language

11. All applicants must meet the University's minimum English language level through the most recent evidence of one of the following prior to admission:

    - An approved Level 2 equivalent qualification including country equivalent. These must have been completed within the last 5 years unless otherwise detailed.
    - An approved English Language test taken within 2 years prior to the start of the course.
    - Successful completion of the appropriate Pre-sessional English Language programme offered by the University of Surrey, provided it is completed immediately preceding the main degree programme or with exceptional agreement.
    - Successful completion of an English Language assessment at the required level according to a University's partnership agreement.

12. Applicants can also be exempted from completing one of the above requirements (see paragraph 21) if they are a national of a majority English speaking country, or have studied for a minimum of one full academic year and successfully completed a qualification at least equivalent to a UK Bachelor's degree or higher, taught entirely, or in part, in English at an overseas campus. For further details please visit the English Language webpage.

13. In some cases, a student will present a variety of pieces of evidence, sometimes conflicting, regarding English language ability. The principle here is to judge the student on the most recent piece of evidence, whilst taking all evidence into account, except that an IELTS taken no more than 6 months before the end of a degree course takes precedence over degree study. Where a student registers for an IELTS test but subsequently withdraws without taking the test, they are judged on the other criteria and evidence of the cancelled test will be required.

Applicants with Disabilities

14. The University of Surrey is committed to equality of opportunity for all of its students and encourages applications from students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties. The University's policy of equal opportunity ensures that all applicants are considered on the same academic grounds. It is important, however, that applicants with a disability make this known to the University so that appropriate arrangements for reasonable adjustments to support their education and learning can be made. A procedure for exploring all possible reasonable adjustments with the participation of the applicant will be followed. In exceptional cases, the University may require further advice from health professionals.

15. Occasionally, other criteria may need to be considered, such as the requirements of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies. Any additional criteria will be specified on the PGR programme pages.

Applicant's Conduct

16. Applicants and their representatives should note that the University will not tolerate threatening behaviour or abusive language towards its employees or other applicants during the admissions process. Hostile or abusive behaviour or language, whether expressed verbally or in writing, will be viewed seriously and may adversely affect the consideration of an application, appeal or complaint. Such action may include the withdrawal of an offer or the rejection of an application.

Applicants who have been expelled by another educational institution or have a relevant criminal conviction

17. The University aims to select those applicants who are likely to succeed academically and benefit from its programmes. Being expelled by another educational institution or having a criminal conviction (as defined in the *Procedure for Expulsions and Criminal Convictions*[1]) will not usually prevent an applicant from gaining admission to the University.

18. A failure to disclose any expulsion or relevant criminal conviction(s) (as defined in the *Procedure for Expulsions and Criminal Convictions*) is taken seriously and could result in: the withdrawal of any existing or subsequent offer of a place; or to the termination of any subsequent registration in accordance with the *Student Disciplinary Regulations* or *Regulations for Fitness to Practise*. Please see the *Criminal Convictions Guidelines* for further details.

Fraudulent and misleading applications

19. The University reserves the right to cancel an application or withdraw any offer made on the basis of an application which we have found to be fraudulent. Any student found to have been admitted on the basis of fraudulent information may have their studies terminated. International students who have been admitted on the basis of fraudulent information may have their studies terminated and also be reported to the relevant government agency. We may carry out credibility checks; failure to pass these checks may result in an offer being withdrawn.

Deposit

20. In order to firmly accept a postgraduate offer of admission for research programme at the University of Surrey, applicants are required to pay a deposit of £3000 towards the fee. If the total fee for the year is less than £6000, applicants are required to pay a deposit of 50% towards the tuition fees. There may be a higher deposit if students are applying from a country or region which is considered higher risk in terms of visa refusal rates or low conversion from deposit to enrolment.

21. The deadline to firmly accept your offer and pay your deposit will be highlighted in your offer letter which you can view on Surrey Self-Service. If you pay the deposit after this deadline you will still be considered for entry, subject to places being available on the programme.

22. For programmes starting at any other times of the year, the deposit must be paid no less than 10 days prior to the start of the programme.

23. A deposit is not required where a student is in receipt of a studentship or is being sponsored by an external organisation.

Refunds

If a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) letter has been issued, a refund will be issued only in the following specific circumstances:

- *Refusal of a student visa*

[1] https://www.surrey.ac.uk/quality-framework/academic-and-student-regulations-and-procedures

An applicant will be asked to provide proof that a visa has been refused, and the University must be able to verify through the UKVI that the individual has been refused entry to the UK. An administration fee of £150 will be deducted from the refund. Any visa refused on the grounds of credibility or falsified documentation, or as a result of the applicant's own negligence, will not be eligible for a deposit refund.

- *Extenuating circumstances*
  Extenuating circumstances may include illness, family circumstances, or other issues outside the applicant's direct control. An applicant will be asked to provide proof that these circumstances have resulted in them not being able to take up the place at the University. An administration fee of £150 will be deducted from the refund.

- *Programme closure*

  In the event that the University can no longer offer a place on a programme, due to closure or substantial changes to the programme, a full refund will be given.

24. Should any applicant be found to use fraudulent documents at the time of application or at the time of applying for entry clearance, no refund will be due.

25. If an applicant is unable to meet the conditions of their offer or otherwise wishes to withdraw their application prior to the issuance of a CAS letter, a refund can be requested. No further evidence will be required in such cases, and no administration fee will be charged.

26. If applicants wish to request a refund they must complete and submit a refund request through our online form. The refund must be requested either:
    a. Within four weeks of the original start date of the course, or
    b. Within one week of receiving a visa refusal, or a negative outcome from a visa administrative review, provided that the visa application or the administrative review was requested before the start date of your course.

Applicants who require a Student Route Visa to study in the UK

27. The UK government operates a points-based immigration system for all overseas students. Further details can be accessed at gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration.

28. The University is licensed with the Home Office as a Student Route Visa Sponsor. To apply for a Student Route Visa, students must have a Confirmation of Acceptance (CAS) for the University they wish to study at. This is a unique number which will enable students to apply for their visa. The University is under no legal obligation to sponsor any individual and exercises caution with respect to issuing a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) to not risk its status as a Student Route sponsor.

29. Confirmation of Acceptance to Study (CAS) will be issued in accordance with the Student Route and CAS Issuing Policy, available at: https://www.surrey.ac.uk/apply/policies.

Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS)

30. It is mandatory for some applicants who need entry clearance to study in the United Kingdom and who are applying to certain programmes to have an ATAS Certificate. We will not be able to issue a Confirmation of Acceptance to Study (CAS) or register applicants on to the programme until their clearance has been received. For further details, please visit the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website: https://www.gov.uk/academic-technology-approval-scheme.

Visiting Researchers

31. Visting PGR students registered at another higher education institution who apply to undertake research at the University of Surrey are required to abide by University *Regulations* and *Codes of practice*. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Executive Dean of the Faculty or the Head of School authorises these appointments upon satisfaction that the individual concerned is suitably qualified and that all necessary arrangements, including visas, can be made well in advance of their arrival.

32. Visting Researchers are not registered on research programmes offered by the University; therefore, they are not eligible for the University of Surrey award.

33. University of Surrey and Education Agents
34. University of Surrey is a supporter of Agent Quality Framework (AQF), and signed the AQF pledge on 12 March 2024 as a symbol of our commitment to the best practices of recruiting international students. That pledge can be found at - https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AQF-pledge.pdf. As part of AQF, the University of Surrey works closely with its network of partners to ensure international students receive professional and competent guidance, ethical advice and knowledge regarding their options of studying in the UK.
35. University of Surrey has a commercial relationship with its network of education agents. A placement fee is paid to overseas representatives, who successfully enrol international students.
36. International students, who received unsatisfactory services from their representative, whilst applying to the University of Surrey, can share their feedback and report their experiences by completing the report an agent form.

Disclosure of Information

37. Failure to disclose relevant information or providing false information may result in the place being withdrawn.

Feedback

38. The University may provide feedback on an application if requested. Applicants must be aware that feedback will only be given directly to them unless the University has received written permission that the applicant is willing for the matter to be discussed

with another named individual. The applicant should also be aware that there may be cases where highly specific or tailored feedback may not be possible.

Complaints

39. The University of Surrey is committed to delivering a high quality, efficient, and fair admissions service in line with its selection criteria and guidelines. In the event that an applicant wishes to make a formal complaint, the University will ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, promptly, consistently, and with due regard to the Equalities Act (See Appendix A). If a complaint is upheld, the University will take appropriate action. If a complaint is not upheld, the reasons for the decision will be communicated clearly to the applicant.

40. An applicant does not have the right to appeal against an academic decision not to offer them a place at the University, as long as the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with the University's published entry requirement and selection criteria.

41. The University will only correspond with the applicant, unless the applicant has provided written permission for the University to discuss the application with another person. Full details of the complaints process can be found on Appendix A of this *Code of practice*.

Disclaimer

42. The University undertakes a continuous review of its programmes, services and facilities to ensure quality enhancement. The University is also largely funded through public and charitable means and is required to manage these funds in an efficient and cost-effective way for the benefit of the whole of the University community.

43. The University, therefore, reserves the right if it considers it to be necessary:

    - To make reasonable variations to the content and syllabus of programmes of study (including in relation to placements).
    - To suspend or discontinue programmes of study or to combine or merge them with others.
    - To make changes to its statutes, ordinances, regulations, policies and procedures which the University reasonably considers necessary. Such changes, if significant, will normally come into force at the beginning of the following academic year and, depending on the nature of the change, will normally be applied to all students regardless of the date of their enrolment.
    - To make reasonable alterations to the timetable, location, number of classes, content or method of delivery of programmes of study and/or examination processes.

44. To the extent permitted by law, the University hereby expressly excludes:

    - All conditions, warranties and other terms which might otherwise be implied by statute, common law, or the law of equity.
    - Any liability for any direct, indirect or consequential loss or damage incurred by any user in connection with our site or in connection with the use, inability to use, or results of the use of our site, any websites linked to it and any materials posted on it.

- Any liability for direct or indirect financial or other losses arising from any discontinuations, changes to or mergers of any programme of study, service or facility.

Monitoring and review

45. The *Code of practice* is reviewed regularly by the Admissions Steering Committee, Doctoral College Board and the University Education Committee.

Appendix A – Admissions Complaints guidance

Summary

1. The University of Surrey is committed to delivering a high quality, efficient and fair admissions service in line with its selection criteria and policy. In the event that an applicant wishes to make a formal complaint, the University will follow this procedure to ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, promptly, consistently and with due regard to the Equalities Act.

Scope

2. These procedures set out how an applicant may raise a complaint about the admission process.

3. The Complaints Procedure may be invoked by any individual who has submitted an application either via UCAS or through the University's online application system for an integrated foundation year, or an undergraduate, postgraduate taught, or postgraduate research degree.

General principles

4. An applicant does not have the right to appeal against an academic decision not to offer them a place at the University, as long as the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with the University's published entry requirement and selection criteria.

5. In the vast majority of cases an applicant's complaint can be handled fairly, amicably, and to the satisfaction of all concerned without the necessity of a formal complaint.

6. The University will ensure that all complaints are dealt with promptly and with fairness and consistency. There will be no discrimination against any applicant who makes a complaint.

7. If a complaint is upheld, the University will take the appropriate action and will do so promptly. If the complaint is not upheld, the reason for the decision will be communicated in a timely manner to the applicant.

8. An applicant making a complaint, and those whom the complaint is made about, can expect the complaint to be dealt with confidentially. It may be necessary, however, to disclose information to others in order to deal with the complaint; in these circumstances the parties concerned will be informed of such disclosure.

9. A complaint should be made by the applicant. Complaints made on behalf of the applicant by parents, representatives, school or another third party will only be considered in exceptional cases where there are clear reasons for doing so. Complaints that are made anonymously cannot be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure.

10. This Complaints Procedure covers both the informal and formal stages in handling a complaint.

Informal complaint

11. Most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily at this stage.

12. The applicant should first raise their complaint in writing with an Admissions Officer. In most cases this should be the member of staff who processed the application, unless the complaint is about that individual. In those cases, the complaint should be addressed to the Admissions Pre-enrolment Manager.

13. A complaint must be made within 14 days of the admissions decision or any other action of which the applicant wishes to complain. Complaints made outside of this timeframe will not be considered, unless there are valid reasons why the complaint could not be made within the time scale. The Admissions Officer will respond to the complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being made and shall retain a record of the correspondence and any action taken. If it is not possible to fully respond within the 10 days, the complainant will be advised of the timescale for a full response.

14. Where the complaint concerns non-selection and the Admissions Officer is satisfied that the application was considered fairly and that the decision complies with the selection procedure, they will respond explaining the context of the decision and any selection processes that were applied. The Admissions Officer will also at this stage draw to the attention of the complainant the Complaints Procedures, should they wish to pursue the matter further.

15. In relation to complaints about all other matters relating to the admissions process, the Admissions Officer will provide written reasons for their decision.

16. If the Admissions Officer concludes that the decision was unfair and/or not in accordance with the Admissions Procedure; they will refer the complaint to the Head of Admissions.

Formal complaint

17. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the response received from the Admissions Officer or Admissions Pre-enrolment Manager, they should submit, within 10 working days of receiving the response from the Admissions Officer or Admissions Pre-enrolment Manager, a written complaint to the Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions. Any complaints received out of the timeframe will not be considered.

18. The complaint should be set out to include the informal steps that have already been taken and details of any response received, a statement as to why the applicant remains dissatisfied, and the outcome the applicant is seeking.

19. The Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions will acknowledge in writing a receipt of the complaint within 5 working days. The Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions will then investigate the complaint and submit a written response to the complainant within 14 working days from acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint.

20. The Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions' decision following completion of this process will be considered as final.

21. During the main results period or where the Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions is not available through absence, a member of the Senior Management Team for UK Recruitment & Admissions will handle the complaint. Their decision following completion of this process will be considered as final.

22. If the Director of UK Recruitment and Admissions has had previous involvement in the applicant's admissions process or complaints procedure for an individual, they will refer the complaint to the Director of Marketing, Recruitment & Admissions. The Director of Marketing, Recruitment & Admissions' decision will then be considered as final.

Appendix B – Related documents

Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

Student Route and CAS Issuing Policy

Expulsions and Criminal Convictions guidance

(https://www.surrey.ac.uk/office-student-complaints-appeals-and-regulation/declaration-expulsions-and-criminal-convictions)

Terms and Conditions of Offer

Data Policy

Disability and Neurodivergence

(https://www.surrey.ac.uk/policies/disability_policy_staff_students_visitors.pdf)