Research Student Admissions Policy

Aims

1 The College aims, as defined in its Mission Statement, include:
   - Providing part-time higher education courses which meet the changing educational,
     cultural, personal and career needs of adults; in particular those who live or work in the
     London region.
   - Enabling adult students from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate
     in our courses.

2 The College aims, through the procedures which it uses to assess applications and offers
   places, for its admissions decisions to be:
   - easily understood by candidates
   - transparent
   - fair
   - based on principles that are applied consistently across the College.

3 This policy applies to all research degrees offered by the College.

4 For the purposes of this Policy, an applicant is defined as any person that has submitted a
   written application to the College to be registered upon a research degree offered by the
   College, and who has not yet been accepted onto that programme.

Transparency

5 The College's website and printed publications will make available clear information on
   admissions criteria for each programme. The College will publish on its website advice to
   applicants on what the College is looking for in research proposals and to referees on the
   elements that are helpful in a reference.

6 Admissions decisions are formally the responsibility of the appropriate department;
   departments may delegate responsibility either to a nominated individual (referred to
   throughout this document as the Research Degree Admissions Tutor) or committee of new
   fewer than three individuals (referred to throughout this document as the Research Degree
   Admissions Committee).

Consistency

7 The College acknowledges that procedures will vary to some extent across subject areas.

8 In order to ensure appropriate consistency, Departments are required to publish a Research
   Degree Admissions Statement, approved by the Executive Dean of the School, on the entry
   requirements and local procedures they intend to follow when considering research degree
   applications.

9 Staff involved with research degree admissions are required to undergo training provided by
   the College before they first assume the role. Training providers will include staff with
   professional expertise in the relevant areas of legislation and policy.

10 The College will require all Departments to publish entry profiles for their research degrees,
    which will be published in any College prospectus and web-based research degree application
    information.
Responsibility

11 It is the responsibility of the Executive Dean of School to appoint Research Degrees Admissions Tutors and/or Research Degrees Admissions Committees, and to ensure that they are in a position to understand and support the College’s Research Degrees Admissions Policy, are competent to make sound and fair judgments, are appropriately trained and have sufficient resources and time to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

12 The Executive Dean of any School may nominate an appropriate staff member, such as the Assistant Dean with responsibility for the appropriate subject unit, to appoint Research Degree Admissions Tutors and/or Research Degrees Admissions Committees.

Process

13 In order to ensure consistency and fairness, the general principles and procedures set out in this Policy must be followed when considering admission to a research degree. Each Department’s Research Degree Admissions Statement will include:
- the method by which they will support the principles and implement the procedures set out in this Policy;
- specific criteria against which they will assess applicants;
- an indication of how different criteria will be weighted;
- the process for considering forms and assessing candidates;
- arrangements for cross-School admissions;

14 Initial consideration for admission will be based on information supplied to the College in each applicant’s application form which will include a research proposal. Decisions on admission may be made solely on the basis of this form; Departments may require additional information to be supplied before making any decision.

15 Departments may reject applications following initial consideration by one member of staff, where the application clearly does not meet the criteria specified by the Department and/or College for admission, or where the Department does not have sufficient resource, including supervisory resource, available to support the research. Admissions decisions beyond initial consideration will involve at least two members of staff who have received training, advice and guidance for selection and admissions of research degree students.

16 Departments may interview applicants, subject to clearly explaining why and how the interview will be used in assessing the applicants, and to following College-approved procedures. These are:
- All applicants must be treated on an equal and fair basis. This does not necessarily mean that if one applicant is interviewed, then all the others must be interviewed as well. It may, for example, be appropriate to interview applicants who proceed to a second stage of selection or shortlist, to distinguish between applicants with similar profiles, or to interview an applicant whose form does not provide sufficient information on which to base a decision (e.g. an applicant presenting non-standard qualifications).
- Interviews intended to select students must normally be conducted by at least two members of the appropriate department. This should include a member of staff who has undergone training on fair and effective recruitment techniques.
- The interview and consequent decision-making will be consistent with the College’s policy on equal opportunities. Questions related to the race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion or age of the applicant must not be raised either at the interview or in subsequent discussion. However, staff should encourage applicants to disclose any disability to the College, to help ensure that any necessary adjustments can be planned to support their education.
The Department must set criteria for measuring an applicant's performance, which are to be included in the Research Degree Admissions Statement.

A standard format note of the interview must be taken and submitted to the Research Degree Admissions Tutor and/or Research Degree Admissions Committee.

Interviews may be conducted by telephone or appropriate internet-based technology.

In general, the College does not require applicants to provide supplementary written work. Applicants may be asked for an example of their work, or set them a written task, subject to a clear explanation of why and how this will be used in assessing the applicant. It may, for example, be appropriate to set work for applicants who proceed to a second stage of selection or shortlist, to distinguish between applicants with similar profiles, or to give further consideration to an applicant whose form does not provide sufficient information on which to base a decision (eg an applicant presenting non-standard qualifications).

In general, the College does not require applicants to undertake further tests, other than, in certain circumstances, English language tests. Applicants may be set an additional test, subject to a clear explanation of why and how this will be used in assessing the applicant, and to treating all applicants on an equal and fair basis, as for interviews. It may, for example, be appropriate to set a test for applicants who proceed to a second stage of selection or shortlist, to distinguish between applicants with similar profiles, or to give further consideration to an applicant whose form does not provide sufficient information on which to base a decision (eg an applicant presenting non-standard qualifications).

Criteria for assessing candidates

The College reserves the right to reject applicants to its programmes for any lawful reason where it considers it is in its interests to do so. The College publishes its terms and conditions of registration at http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/20100420_TermsAndConditionsOfEnrolment201011.pdf.

Research Degree Admissions Tutors and/or Committees must set criteria that support the College's admissions aims and be in accordance with this policy.

Admissions staff are expected to use academic judgement in assessing the academic potential of individual applicants; offers of admission should be based on a judgement as to the likely success of the applicant in successfully completing their research degree within four years (full-time) or seven years (part-time). In exercising their judgement, admissions staff must operate in a way that is consistent with this Policy.

Departments may set minimum entry requirements and may insist on specific criteria; for instance a minimum grade achieved at examination in a particular subject and/or at a particular level may be specified as a criterion.

In addition to academic criteria, Departments will consider, on the basis of the research proposal, whether there are sufficient resources in place to support the student to successful conclusion. This will include whether there is a supervisory team available with sufficient relevant expertise to support the research. Any such consideration will be mindful of the College’s Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes’ provision on the maximum number of students that may be supervised by individual members of staff.

The College may, at the discretion of the admitting department, consider admission to students to follow a programme of “practice-based” research. Students wishing to submit a thesis in such a format must have a written request giving an outline of the proposed thesis
structure with an indication of the proposed word-length of the critical thesis approved by the College's Research Student Sub-Committee.

25 Departments must be confident that the applicant has the proficiency in the English language necessary to succeed in the chosen course or programme. Applicants may be required to take an IELTS or similar test; an appropriate standard requirement for performance will be set in this test.

26 All relevant data will be considered when assessing an application, which may include, in addition to educational qualifications:

- The Research proposal
- Academic references
- Supervisory and other support required
- Professional qualifications
- Relevant work experience

27 Consideration of applications from students who declare a disability is based on the same criteria and principles as for other applicants. The College seeks to reduce any barriers that might confront a student with a disability seeking to undertake research. A decision may need to take into account any overriding health and safety concerns, barriers relating to professional requirements, or the College's ability or inability to make any necessary adjustments. Such cases will be addressed on an individual basis. Implementation of the Research Student Admissions Policy will be sensitive to the different experiences of disabled applicants, and will take into account their response to the opportunities and challenges they have encountered, on the understanding that these may be individual to the applicant. Applicants with a disability are encouraged to disclose this to the College, to enable any necessary adjustments to be planned in support of their education. Failure to do so may impact on the ability to make any necessary reasonable adjustments.

28 Attending a non-accredited preparatory course or summer school provided by the College or other agency does not in itself guarantee a place, although it may be taken into account as an indicator of motivation and commitment.

29 Admissions staff will disregard any criminal convictions which are spent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, unless the research is likely to bring the student into contact with children or vulnerable adults. If this is the case, a disclosure will be sought through the Criminal Records Bureau. Where an applicant has an unspent conviction, a decision on whether to offer a place will be made by the sub-board of examiners, or their delegated officer(s) in consultation with the Academic Registrar or nominee. Details of unspent convictions or relevant spent convictions must be disclosed upon application to the College; failure to disclose such convictions at that point will normally result in rejection of the application, cancellation of any offer or cancellation of registration.

30 The College is not prepared to admit applicants on the strength of information believed to be either fraudulent or plagiarised, and reserves the right to reject or cancel an application or offer under these circumstances.

Offers

31 Wherever possible, all applicants are contacted by the College within 4 weeks of their application being received, to establish contact and inform the applicant of the process to be followed.
Conditional offers made must normally be in line with published entry requirements and should not normally vary substantially from these.

Different levels of offer may be made to applicants, to meet individual circumstances. Any offer made by the College will be made in writing.

Applicants to whom an offer is not made

The College aims to send a letter or email to all unsuccessful applicants, in order to explain the outcome in general terms.

The College will correspond about a decision only with the candidate. There is no right of appeal, and the decision will not be reviewed, (although feedback may be provided at the discretion of the Department). However, concerns that the College’s Research Student Admissions Policy has been incorrectly implemented may be investigated under the Student Complaints Policy, at the discretion of the College.

Conditional Offers

On occasion, the College will make conditional offers to applicants. The College will outline clearly what any conditions of admission are as part of the Offer made by the College (please see paragraph 32).

Applicants who fulfil the conditions required by any conditional offer will have their place confirmed as soon as possible once the College has been notified of the fulfilment of any condition.

Should exceptional circumstances occur that prevent an applicant from demonstrating that they had achieved the conditions of admission, the College will make every possible effort, once fulfilment of the conditions is confirmed, to offer places to candidates retrospectively who had achieved the terms of their offers but who had not been previously been allocated a place. Depending on the timescale and availability of places, it might be necessary to offer a place for the following (i.e., deferred entry) academic year.

Funding

Departments will publish details of any funding opportunities that it oversees, indicating the criteria that will applied for any such opportunities, application processes and deadlines. This will include details of funding from the College and research council funding schemes operated by the College.

Departments may consider any application received for a research degree as an application for funding that that Department offers unless the applicant considers otherwise or the application is received after any published deadline for the source of funding in question.

All applications for funding will be considered in accordance with published criteria; where an application for funding is successful, the funding will be offered in accordance with the terms and conditions of that source of funding.

Academic Board
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