

# University of York

## Admissions Policy

### Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Selection and Admission of Postgraduate Researchers

#### 1. Purpose and scope of the Code of Practice

- 1.1. This Code of Practice sets out policy and outlines processes specific to the recruitment, selection and admission of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) i.e. those undertaking a PhD, MD, EngD, MPhil, Master of Arts (by research) or Master of Science (by research).
- 1.2. This Code of Practice aims to ensure that recruitment processes are fair, open, and transparent with equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) supported at all stages. It is also designed to support the University's broader aim that the student body reflects UK (and global) society.
- 1.3. This Code of Practice serves as a reference point for York Graduate Research School (YGRS), all staff (academic and professional services) involved in the recruitment, selection and admission of PGRs (whether in academic schools and departments (hereafter 'departments'), faculties or centrally), and PGR applicants. This Code of Practice also applies to Doctoral Focal Awards (DFAs) (previously known as Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)) and Doctoral Landscape Awards (DLAs) (previously known as Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs)).
- 1.4. All stakeholders should adhere to this Code of Practice. DFAs and DLAs may deviate from this Code where required (e.g. when operating in a cross-institutional consortium) with the permission of the Dean of YGRS and where reassurance can be provided that the systems in place meet expected standards for EDI.
- 1.5. This Code of Practice should be read alongside the [University's Admissions Policy](#) (which sets out the high level policy and principles, within an institutional and legislative framework), the [Policy on Research Degrees](#), and [Regulation 2](#).

#### 2. Training of staff involved in PGR recruitment, selection and admission

- 2.1. All staff involved in the recruitment, selection and admission of PGRs should have received training and guidance to prepare them for this role. For academic staff, this must include Unconscious Bias training and Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It may also include Cultural Awareness and Race Equity in Research Supervision and Trans Awareness: The Basics.

#### 3. PGR admissions requirements and considerations

##### Academic admissions requirements for PGR programmes

- 3.1. For MD, MPhil or PhD research programmes, applicants are expected to have a first degree, normally an upper second class (2i) honours degree (or equivalent alternative or overseas qualification) in a relevant subject, or a relevant postgraduate Masters qualification (or equivalent).
- 3.2. For admission to an MA by research or MSc by research programme, applicants should normally have at least a lower second class (2ii) honours degree (or equivalent alternative or overseas qualification)
- 3.3. Some PGR programmes require additional entry requirements so applicants should always refer to the respective individual programme requirements.
- 3.4. Where applicants have not met a higher academic or additional entry requirements of a particular PGR programme, the department should provide them with an opportunity to explain why they have not met

this or allow them to provide alternative equivalent evidence (such as relevant work experience). Within this contextual admissions approach, departments should consider this alternative evidence, particularly from under-represented or disadvantaged groups, and consider the use of an academic waiver where appropriate to allow successful applicants to join the programme.

### **English admissions requirements for PGR programmes**

- 3.5. The University's minimum English language requirements, as set out in the main body of the Admissions Policy, apply to all PGR programmes. Many PGR programmes require a standard of English above the University minimum. Further information is [available](#).
- 3.6. PGR English language requirements are reviewed annually by the Dean of YGRS in consultation with the Faculty PGR Leads and the Heads of Faculty Marketing and Recruitment.
- 3.7. The University's policy on alternative evidence of English Language ability, as set out in the main body of the Admissions Policy and the English language code of practice, also applies to all PGR programmes.

### **Exceptions (academic and English language waivers) for PGR programmes**

- 3.8. Exceptions to academic requirements may be made, for example for applicants with relevant work experience, or for contextualised applications via narrative descriptions of experiences/declared belonging to an under-represented group.
- 3.9. While exceptions cannot be made to assessing English language proficiency for all applicants, the University will consider alternative ways of assessing applicant's proficiency against the advertised English language requirements.
- 3.10. Exceptions require the support of the relevant Graduate Chair (or delegate) and approval of the Dean of the York Graduate Research School (YGRS) (or delegate).

### **PGR applicants who have mitigating circumstances**

- 3.11. If any PGR applicant feels that any disability, long term health condition, other personal circumstance (e.g. bereavement, or other difficult home or family circumstances) or any other event may have affected their previous education, then they are encouraged to complete the mitigating circumstances form. All formal notifications for mitigating circumstances which are supported by a full declaration about the nature of the circumstances will be considered as part of the admissions process, and may be taken into account by the department when considering whether to interview and / or offer a place. Further advice and guidance for PGR applicants with mitigating circumstances is [available](#).

### **Availability of suitable supervision and resources**

- 3.12. PGR applications will only be considered by a department where an appropriate supervisor(s) and resources are expected to be available for the duration of the normal period of study.
- 3.13. Departments should be aware that when a PGR applicant is accepted to undertake a particular research project, the department is responsible for ensuring that their supervisory needs can be met throughout their period of enrolment. Departments should, therefore, be cautious about admitting an applicant to undertake a research project that relies on a single member of academic staff (see section 5 of the PoRD 'Absence and replacement of a supervisor').

### **Funding from external sources with restrictive clauses**

- 3.14. Departments should be aware that some funding for PGRs from overseas governments/agencies comes with restrictive clauses. Such clauses may require an individual to repay the money that they have received for fees and/or a stipend if they are unsuccessful in obtaining their intended award, or if they fail to complete their award within a particular timeframe with no allowance for e.g. leave of absence or extensions. Such restrictive clauses can put considerable pressure on both a PGR and their supervisor(s).

- 3.15. Departments should be vigilant for applicants who would be in receipt of funding with restrictive clauses and give careful consideration as to whether to accept such an individual, particularly if there are any doubts about the ability of said individual to successfully complete their programme within the standard timeframe. The decision to accept or reject such an applicant should be taken by the department as normal but advice may be sought from the PGR Faculty Lead and from the IRPM (who may have knowledge of the funder).

## 4. The PGR application process

### Applications

- 4.1. All PGRs studying at York must make a full application through Select to ensure that the necessary information is collected. Where a DLA/DFA has an admissions process outside Select (compliant with EDI good practice), applicants must be required to make an application via Select once they have received confirmation from the DLA/DFA that their application has been successful.
- 4.2. All applications for PGR programmes must be assessed individually and holistically. This means that due regard should be given to the full set of skills and abilities of an applicant pertinent to success as a PGR. Applicants should not be assessed on academic qualifications alone, nor should assessment be weighted solely on academic factors.
- 4.3. The PGR application process must be transparent to all applicants. There must be clear and accessible information about the application process including: the information that applicants must provide, the criteria used for assessing applicants, and the interview process. It must be clear that the applicant can request reasonable adjustments to an interview, if invited. The applicant should also be properly signposted to the appropriate teams for any queries.
- 4.4. PGR applicants should normally provide the following information via the application form and supporting documentation:
- achievement in awarded or partially complete qualifications
  - predicted achievement in qualifications yet to be awarded
  - personal statement / statement in support of the application / CV
  - evidence of relevant work experience
  - references (see below)
  - sample of written work, portfolio submission, or evidence of professional experience (selected programmes only)
  - research proposal (where required).

### References

- 4.5. PGR applicants are normally required to submit two academic references as part of their application. Further information concerning the content and format of references is [available](#). References should only be assessed during borderline decisions to highlight issues that may prevent the applicant from being successful, and should not form part of the main decision making process.

### Use of generative AI

- 4.6. PGR applicants should not use generative AI to write any aspect of their application: any such use may invalidate their application and lead to the withdrawal of an offer. Generative AI use picked up subsequent to enrolment may be treated as academic misconduct and be considered under Appendix 3 of the Policy on Research Degrees. Departments are reminded that the interview provides an opportunity to explore in detail the application with the applicant.

### Triaging of PGR applicants

- 4.7. Departments may consider the use of a triage system to streamline enquiries from PGR applicants in order to reduce workload for potential supervisors and to ensure a consistent and timely response to enquirers.
- 4.8. There is no central system to support triaging, but suggestions on how departments can approach this are covered in a good practice guide available from YGRS.

### Interviewing PGR applicants

- 4.9. **Before an offer of a place on a PGR programme is made, an applicant *must* be interviewed.** This can be a choice of in-person or remote, and no bias should be shown to either option. At least one of the interviewers should have undertaken relevant EDI training as set out in 2.1.
- 4.10. Dates and timings of interviews should be organised well in advance, with flexibility where needed e.g. to accommodate caring responsibilities. Departments must ask applicants invited to interview about any reasonable adjustments required and put these in place.
- 4.11. The **interview must involve at least two members of academic staff** from the relevant or cognate department (this is to ensure sufficient scrutiny of the applicant and for safeguarding on both sides), **normally the prospective supervisor and an experienced supervisor with a degree of departmental oversight (e.g. Graduate Chair or their delegate, head of the research group etc.).** The organiser of the interview should provide as much information as possible to applicants and panellists in advance about the nature of the interview (e.g. who will be on the panel, length of interview etc.).
- 4.12. The diversity and representation of the interview panel (e.g. gender, ethnicity, career stage) should be considered where possible.
- 4.13. The purpose of the interview is to allow the department to assess the suitability of the potential PGR and (where applicable) the broad viability of their proposed project (including, for example, ethical considerations, funding constraints, or UKVI restrictions). The interview also provides an opportunity for the department to explore any concerns that it may have about the applicant's claimed knowledge and experience.
- 4.14. The interview should include the use of competency based questions to ensure fairness to all applicants, whatever their background.

### Departmental interview and selection panels

- 4.15. As an alternative to a bespoke panel (see above), departments should consider the use of a departmental interview and selection panel to improve consistency of interviewing and/or selection and ensure equality. A departmental panel should consist of **at least two members of staff from the relevant department.** Departments may wish to expand the membership of the panel to include one or more members from outside the department, in order to provide a fresh perspective and increase neutrality and/or appropriate EDI representation.
- 4.16. Once established, the membership of a departmental panel should be consistent where possible. The proposed supervisor of an applicant would not be part of the panel, unless already a panel member and, in such a case, would recuse themselves from making a selection decision. If an applicant is judged successful by a panel without having a proposed supervisor, a subsequent process for matching them with a supervisor would take place but no member of staff should be compelled to supervise an applicant.

### Standardised matrices for selection decision making

- 4.17. Departments should consider using a standardised quantitative matrix, with pre-defined scoring criteria for decision making. This scoring criteria should be broad, in order to enable comparison of standard academic achievements (e.g. marks in a Masters programme) with broader achievements (e.g. working to fund studies/ industry experience, interpersonal skills and qualities), and include scoring of competency questions. A narrow range of scores per criterion is recommended (e.g. out of 3 or 5, rather than 10). Each department should agree their own matrix and criteria, to ensure these meet their recruitment needs.

## Post-interview decisions

- 4.18. The **decision (post-interview) to offer a place on a PGR programme must involve at least two members of academic staff** from the relevant department, normally including the Graduate Chair (or their delegate) and the prospective supervisor.
- 4.19. Successful applicants will receive an offer letter from the University which sets out the key details of the PGR programme, any conditions attached, and which draws attention to the regulations, policies and guidance applicable to PGRs. The offer letter forms a binding contract with the University and, upon acceptance, on the applicant.
- 4.20. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the decision and the reason they were unsuccessful by Postgraduate Admissions. Applicants wishing to request additional feedback should contact the Postgraduate Admissions team in the first instance.

## 5. PGRs wishing to transfer to a PGR programme at York from a PGR programme at another University

- 5.1. If a PGR wishes to transfer from another university to York, they must apply via the postgraduate admissions portal for PGRs (see Appendix 1 for more details).
- 5.2. Transfer requests must have a clear rationale, such as the PGR's supervisor accepting a post at the University of York.
- 5.3. Transfer requests will not normally be accepted from PGRs who are in the final stage of their programme (i.e. year 3 for a full-time PhD PGR) or in a continuation period (or equivalent). Transfer requests at this stage will only be permitted on exceptional grounds, with the permission of the Dean of YGRS and Academic Registrar.
- 5.4. Where an academic has accepted a post at the University of York and they have a PGR who does not want to transfer to York (e.g. because the PGR's funding is tied to the other institution) or the PGR is in the final stage of their programme and so cannot transfer (see above), the expectation is that the PGR will complete their enrolment and examination at their original institution (noting that most universities will allow an outgoing supervisor to continue to support a PGR in a co-supervisory capacity). It may be possible for a PGR who does not wish to, or cannot, transfer to York to enrol as a visiting PGR at York but the department must gain permission from the PGR Faculty Lead as this has budgetary implications.
- 5.5. The department must ensure that the research to date is subject to a light touch ethical review in accordance with the University's Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance.
- 5.6. It is the responsibility of the **incoming PGR** (or the PGR's supervisor if they are also transferring to York and their PGR's funding is allocated directly to them) to check that any funding they receive for their programme (fees and/or studentship) can continue if they transfer to York.
- 5.7. The enrolment period at York will be reduced to take account of the time already spent by the incoming PGR on their research at the institution they are transferring from. It is accepted that changing university can cause some upheaval, particularly for laboratory-based PGRs. It is not expected, however, that additional enrolment time will be routinely granted for transferring PGRs. Transferring PGRs will be able to apply for an extension, if required, in the usual way (no earlier than 3 months prior to the final submission deadline).
- 5.8. Accreditation of prior learning may be granted for modules or courses already undertaken.
- 5.9. The Policy on Research Degrees ([section 7](#)) includes additional information on policy applicable to PGRs who transfer to York.

## 6. Applicants who have previously started but not completed a PGR programme at the University of York or another institution

- 6.1. An application from an individual whose enrolment on a PGR programme at the University of York or

another institution has been terminated as academically unsatisfactory (including failure to progress or failure of the programme or misconduct of any kind) must provide the department with an explanation for the termination that provides reassurance that they are a suitable case for (re)admission. If the application is supported by the relevant Graduate Chair, it must be submitted for approval by the Dean of YGRS (or delegate) to ensure that (re)admission is in the best interests of all parties. This applies regardless of whether the applicant is seeking to study in the same or an alternative disciplinary area.

- 6.2. An application from an individual who has withdrawn from a PGR programme at the University of York or another university must provide the department with an explanation for the withdrawal that provides reassurance that they are a suitable case for (re)admission. This applies regardless of whether the applicant is seeking to study in the same or an alternative disciplinary area. Individuals must apply as new PGRs, they are not permitted to transfer. Any cases where a department wants a second opinion may be referred to the Dean of YGRS (or delegate).
- 6.3. Permission for (re)admission should only be granted if there is evidence that the applicant will have a realistic chance of successful on-time completion and - in the case of applicants who have previously had their registration terminated as academically unsatisfactory - that the issues that led to their registration being terminated are not likely to occur again. Conditions may be imposed on (re)admission, for example around the choice of research topic and/or supervisors and/or the provision of a support plan or specific training for the applicant.
- 6.4. If an individual who has previously been enrolled on a PGR programme at York is readmitted they will do so as a new PGR i.e leave of absence and other time-limits are reset.

## **7. Responsibility for the Code of Practice**

- 7.1. This Code of Practice is the responsibility of the Head of Admissions and Applicant Experience. It is reviewed and updated annually or whenever legislation or the Admissions Policy is amended, in consultation with YGRS.
- 7.2. Responsibility for reviewing individual cases against the Code of Practice is the responsibility of the Dean of the York Graduate Research School.
- 7.3. Responsibility for detailed processes arising from this Code of Practice rests with the York Graduate Research School. Processes are reviewed annually or, sooner if legislation, the Admissions Policy or this Code of Practice is amended.

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## Appendix 1: Application process for PGRs transferring in from another university

1. PGRs that wish to transfer to York from another University must apply via Select.
2. A PGR wishing to transfer should include their current PGR programme within the education section of the PGR application form, and should also note their aim to transfer within the personal statement section of the PGR application form.
3. A department should identify any applicants who wish to transfer during their assessment of the application, and notify the PG Admissions team (PGA) when recording their recommended offer.
4. PGA will seek further information from an applicant who wishes to transfer, as follows:
  - a. A registration/enrolment certificate from the applicant's current institution detailing: the PGR's start date; projected end date; mode of study; programme name;
  - b. Details of any changes to mode of study or periods of leave of absence to date;
  - c. A reference from their current supervisor;
  - d. Proof of passing any progression points (or if this is not applicable, a letter from their current department stating that the PGR is in good academic standing within their programme);
  - e. The applicant's preferred start date at York (this cannot be backdated);
  - f. How many months of prior enrolment the applicant wishes to claim;
  - g. Any claim for accreditation of prior learning to recognise modules or courses already undertaken;
  - h. If the applicant is in receipt of a student loan from the Student Loans Company, the Student Support Number (SSN) (the unique identifier).
5. PGA will send the information to PGRA who will check that the application aligns with policy.
6. PGRA will send the information to the department that the applicant is applying to. The application should be considered by the Graduate Chair and the potential supervisor(s) for academic approval of their admission, and a decision about the length of prior enrolment and, if applicable, the accreditation of prior learning. The department does not have to agree with requests put forward by an applicant but should be able to justify any contrary decision (advice may be sought from the Head of PGRA).
7. The department should notify PGRA of its decision.
8. The incoming PGR will be informed by PGRA of the basis on which they are being accepted. This will include: (i) the length of enrolment (including any entitlement to a continuation period) to recognise their prior enrolment, (ii) any variation to standard progress and review arrangements, and (iii) if applicable, any accreditation of prior learning to recognise modules and courses already undertaken etc.
9. PGA will update the incoming PGR's SITS record to enable it to issue a tailored offer letter to the incoming PGR.

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