

# RESEARCH DEGREES WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

## **ADMISSIONS POLICY – RESEARCH DEGREES:**

This policy applies to candidates applying for a research degree (PhD<sup>1</sup>, Professional Doctorates<sup>2</sup> (DClinPsy, EdD, DBA, DPA), MD<sup>2</sup>, MS<sup>2</sup>, MPhil or ResM).

<sup>1</sup>For PhD, candidates are initially enrolled on MPhil and then transfer to PhD after successful completion of the Transfer Process (at 12-18 months for FT candidates and 18-24 months for PT candidates)

<sup>2</sup>For Professional Doctorates and MD and MS degrees please also refer to the specific requirements for these programmes.

### ***Section 1: Aims and principles***

Academic Board monitors the University's Admissions Policy for research students through the Graduate Committee.

#### **AIMS**

Our aim is to:

- Attract and retain students from a diverse community, who have the potential and desire to succeed and benefit from a higher education experience
- Remain true to our widening access roots, and by transforming lives through education, we aim to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all applicants to gain admission to a Plymouth University programme

#### **PRINCIPLES**

We will achieve these aims by:

- Being committed to recognising the academic and other relevant achievements and experiences of each applicant
- Welcoming applications from motivated candidates from all backgrounds
- Being committed to promoting equal opportunities for all applicants and students from the UK, EU and overseas
- Treating all applicants fairly, consistently and expeditiously
- Clearly identifying and communicating the entry requirements for each programme
- Selecting applicants for entry on the basis of a range of criteria including; academic, professional, experiential and personal experience
- Complying with appropriate legislation and Plymouth University policies

## **Section two: application considerations**

Prospective applicants are advised to carefully read through the following section before submitting an application.

### **1. Similarity detection and suspected fraud**

Direct postgraduate application documents submitted are examined, and qualifications are verified with awarding bodies wherever necessary. If fraud is suspected (or confirmed), the University will take action under its own Fraudulent Applications policy.

Offers of a place are conditional upon the information supplied to the University. False statements or omissions of relevant information may lead to the withdrawal of an offer or a place. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the information provided is accurate and complete.

### **2. Relevant criminal convictions**

In accordance with our principles, Plymouth University provides a fair and transparent decision making process for all applications, including applicants declaring a criminal conviction. Applications are subjected to the standard admissions procedures, and if it is decided to make an offer, additional steps are taken to liaise with the applicant and establish the nature of the offence, and any other action required.

For some programmes, disclosure is required by law, particularly for programmes in health and related areas, social work, teaching or working with children.

The University will follow the procedures outlined by the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in respect of the application. The decision to make an offer rests with the relevant Doctoral Training Centre or Faculty/School where appropriate.

If it is discovered during the application process, that an applicant has a relevant criminal conviction that is not spent, and the box has not been ticked on the application form, the University may deduce that the applicant has knowingly withheld information, and will take the matter forward under its Fraudulent Applications policy.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the information provided is accurate, and to quickly respond to our requests for additional information in support of his/her application.

If we do not receive a response to our requests, we will assume that the applicant does not wish to progress any further, and the University will terminate the application.

### **3. Disability**

We welcome applications from applicants with disabilities. Applicants will be subject to standard academic selection procedures. Some students may be invited to attend an information meeting to ensure that Plymouth University can provide the required support, and to indicate where any adjustments may need to be made. Plymouth University's Disability Assist Service is nationally recognised for its good practice in supporting learners with disabilities.

Early disclosure of a disability will assist the University with understanding and supporting the applicant's individual needs. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they make the University aware of their disability. If during the process of the application, the applicant's personal circumstances alter, or the applicant is affected by an injury or disability, they should contact the Graduate School.

### **Disability ASSIST Service**

tel: +44 (1752) 587676

email: [das@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:das@plymouth.ac.uk)

#### **4. Care Leavers/Looked After Children**

The University welcomes applications from applicants who identify themselves as currently in, or have been in Local Authority care. Applicants will be subject to standard selection procedures.

#### **5. Minors (Under 18s)**

Plymouth University welcomes applications from minors admitted as students. If we offer a place to an applicant who is under the age of 18 it is because the University believes that this individual has the ability, potential and intellect to successfully complete the programme offered.

The University does not expect to act 'in loco parentis' and the applicant will need to provide details of their legal guardian. Minors are subject to any legal age restrictions.

Overseas migrants who are under 18 are legally required, under the rules of the UKVI, to provide a letter of consent from the parent/legal guardian, consenting to the arrangements with regard to the migrant's application, travel, reception and care arrangements in the UK. Migrants aged 16 or 17 have the legal right to live independently in the UK, and so may make their own arrangements for accommodation. But they require the consent of their parent(s) or legal guardian to do this and (if applying from overseas) to travel to the UK.

#### **6. Non-traditional learners and returners to study**

Plymouth University has a long tradition of admitting students who are returning to study, and for this reason we do not set an upper age limit. We welcome the admission of non-traditional learners to the University community and the diverse range of skills and experiences that you bring with you. We will consider entry based on any previous experience under our APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) or AEL (Accreditation of Experiential Learning) policy.

Applications should be sent to the admissions office in the first instance.

#### **7. Fitness to practice, fitness to teach and occupational health assessment**

For a number of health programmes, applicants are required to complete a medical questionnaire. An offer of a place is conditional upon a satisfactory state of health. There is a requirement, for candidates applying to these programmes to pass a fitness to practice assessment. Details of the procedure can be found on our **Occupational Health page**.

#### **8. International applicants and English Language**

See section seven for our English Language policy and standard requirements for International Students.

## **9. Extenuating, mitigating or medical circumstances**

We take into account extenuating, mitigating and medical circumstances that are brought to the University's attention during the application process up until enrolment. We require a supporting statement from the academic referee, and we welcome direct communication from a senior staff member or official from a school/college/university or local community in support of an applicant's circumstances.

## **10. Complaints**

Each application is processed in a fair and transparent way. If an applicant believes that, in the processing of its application, the actions of the University have fallen below the standard expected, then an applicant may make a complaint. A complaint relates to the operation of the University's application process and/or its outcome, or the actions or behaviour of a member of staff involved in the admissions process.

Should an applicant wish to make a complaint/grievance, they are advised to put their complaint in writing to the Graduate School Manager who will acknowledge the complaint, investigate and respond on behalf of the University. Under normal circumstances, applicants should expect to have a response within 15 working days of receipt of the letter.

If, having received a response, an applicant is still dissatisfied, then the query should be put in writing to the Head of the Graduate School who will review the situation.

Graduate School Manager/Head of the Graduate School  
The Graduate School  
Plymouth University  
Drake Circus  
Plymouth  
PL4 8AA  
Email: [graduate.school@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:graduate.school@plymouth.ac.uk)

## **11. Appeals**

Each application is considered in accordance with our principles and offers are made based on the information provided on the application form, the availability of a suitable supervisory team and the entry requirements. If an applicant believes that, in its consideration of their application, the actions of the University have fallen below the standard expected then an applicant may make an appeal.

An appeal should relate to the process of decision making rather than the decision itself which is a question of academic judgment. There is no automatic right of appeal against a decision on whether or not to offer a place.

Should an applicant wish to appeal, they are advised to put their concerns in writing to the Graduate School Manager who will acknowledge the appeal, investigate and respond on behalf of the University. Under normal circumstances, applicants should expect to have a response within 15 working days of receipt of the letter.

If, having received a response to an appeal, an applicant is still dissatisfied, then they may make a further appeal in writing to the Head of the Graduate School. The Head of the Graduate School will convene an admissions appeal panel of senior academics (from outside the faculty or DTC to which the applicant has applied), to

review the application. This panel will have the authority to uphold the appeal and send it back to the faculty/DTC for reassessment, or to reject it. The decision made by the Admissions Appeals Panel is final.

Plymouth University reserves the right to exclude an applicant who is considered on justifiable grounds to be unsuitable for a place on a particular programme according to individual circumstances.

## **12. Interviews**

Plymouth University requires all applicants for postgraduate research degrees to be interviewed. Interviews provide an opportunity for an applicant to demonstrate their skills and abilities, and interest in studying with Plymouth, and are not tests. Interviews are preferably conducted face to face but for overseas applicants video conference or teleconference interviews are acceptable.

The interview and decision-making process will be consistent with the University's policy on equal opportunities. However, if not already done so, applicants are encouraged to disclose any disability to the University to help ensure that any necessary adjustments to support their studies can be assessed by the interview panel.

Applicants are advised to check the details of the programme and their correspondence carefully, as applicants may be required to bring documentation with them to their interview.

Teleconference/Skype interviews will be arranged wherever possible for applicants who are outside of the UK and where travel to Plymouth for interview would be impractical.

Applicants should ensure they include their full contact details on the application form.

## **13. Portfolios (Supplementary Materials)**

For some subject disciplines, applicants will need to submit documents and materials in addition to an application form and evidence of English language qualifications. These may include a CV; a sample of critical writing; and, if engaging in creative or artistic research methods, evidence of the applicant's ability to undertake the proposed practice-led research (e.g. via DVD, portfolio, links to websites, reviews, catalogues, samples of creative writing, etc.). If applicants are required to submit any of these materials as part of the selection and admissions process, this will be indicated in disciplinary-specific guidelines for application.

## **14. Applicant feedback**

The University is committed to providing appropriate feedback to an applicant upon written request only. The request for feedback must be received within 28 days of the University's decision. Feedback will be provided via email direct to the applicant within 10 days.

Feedback requests should be sent to:

The Graduate School  
Plymouth University  
Drakes Circus  
Plymouth  
PL4 8AA

If an applicant wishes to make a complaint or request a review of an admissions decision after they have received feedback, this must be directed to the Graduate School Manager in the first instance.

### **15. Contract of Admission**

The acceptance of a research degree offer enters the candidate into a contract of admission and the University's rules and regulations are incorporated into the contract made. All students are required, as a condition of enrolment, to accept those rules and regulations, which are set out:

- in the Student Handbook,
- in the Research Degrees Handbook,
- on the University's website and available on request from the Faculties or The Graduate School.

Any offer of a place made by the University is made on the basis of the applicant's:

- acceptance of the University's rules and regulations as published and amended from time to time,
- acceptance of the Regulations and Code of Ethics in Research set out in the Research Degrees Handbook (updated annually),
- acceptance of the following statement:

The University Prospectus describes the postgraduate programme of study offered by the University. Further documents will be issued to students to describe the educational services offered by the University, in particular the Code of Ethics in Research and details of enrolment and assessment. These are contained in the "Student Handbook", the "Research Degree Handbook" and the "Quality Procedures for Research Degrees". The University undertakes all reasonable steps to provide the educational services described in the Prospectus and in the documents described but it does not guarantee the provision of such services. Should industrial action or circumstances beyond the control of the University interfere with its ability to provide educational services, the University undertakes to use all reasonable steps to minimise any resultant disruption.

- undertaking to pay the fees required for the programme and any other fees for services offered by the University and accepted, such as accommodation, bench fees, etc.
- statements made on the application form, where the discovery of false statements or omissions may lead to the offer being withdrawn (or in the case of candidates who have already enrolled, to their being required to withdraw).

### **Section three: Entry requirements and qualifications**

The standard entry requirements for a research degree are:

- a masters degree from a U.K. university or a degree of a non-U.K. institution deemed to be of equal standing to a UK degree, or
- a first class or second upper class first bachelor degree award by a U.K. university or a degree of a non-U.K. institution deemed to be of equal standing to a UK degree, or
- a professional qualification recognised as equivalent to a degree, or
- other qualifications and experience that have demonstrated that the applicant can meet the challenges and demands of the programme, and
- two verifiable satisfactory reports from academic referees. Verbal or e-mail references (other than where sent from an academic e-mail address) may not be accepted.

The University's minimum entry requirements are intended to:

- Ensure that applicants are appropriately prepared for postgraduate research study in higher education
- Draw attention to the diversity of qualifications that can prepare applicants for higher education
- Support admission staff in recruiting suitably prepared students who have satisfied the Graduate Committee of the applicant's fitness to pursue such research study and of the DTC's ability to provide all necessary facilities and support.

### **General requirements**

Applicants should normally be able to demonstrate a level of literacy and numeracy appropriate to the course which they are undertaking. The admissions process will identify whether an applicant meets this requirement.

For applicants whose previous studies were not undertaken in the English Language, in particular for international applicants, the following qualifications may be used as a guide to an appropriate level of competence in English language:

- British Council International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) overall band 6.5 or 7.0 depending on the research programme, with a minimum 5.5 score across all elements. Some programmes require a minimum score of 7.0
- Pearson Test of English (PTE Academic), 61

For the full list of English Language requirements, visit the English Language Centre website (<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/international-students-entry-requirements>).

International students who do not meet the full academic admission criteria of Plymouth University may be eligible to commence their university studies via a pathway programme at Plymouth University International College (PUIC) or via the English Language Centre (ELC) pre-session course.

### **Section four: Non-academic policy**

Prospective applicants are advised to carefully read through our non-academic policy.

## **Accreditation of Prior Learning**

The achievement of formal qualifications is not the only way of identifying a student's potential. Admissions staff will assess the application 'holistically', taking into account skills, experience and abilities as well as commitment and motivation to study to establish whether the applicant has the potential to benefit from the programme and graduate successfully. Experience may include knowledge or practice gained from previous work or study, voluntary or community involvement or care responsibilities. Such applications will be dealt with on their individual merits.

## **Confirmation**

Applicants who narrowly fail to satisfy the specific academic conditions of their offer may still be offered a further conditional offer for the following academic year to give the applicant the opportunity to fulfil the conditions during the next 12 months. Such deferred offers are at the discretion of the admissions panel.

## **Assessment of tuition fees**

Applicants will be assessed as eligible to pay either Home/EU, Channel Islands or Overseas tuition fees. Applicants will be required to self-assess their residential category as part of the application process. The applicant may be asked to provide further information if their fee status is unclear. Inaccurate information may make an applicant's offer void. The University will reserve the right to identify an applicant as eligible to pay overseas tuition fee at any point in the admissions process, up to and including the point of enrolment.

Applicants are required to indicate their highest level of qualification on entry to date, in order that their application can be processed accurately, and the correct fee information assigned.

To clarify an applicant's personal situation, especially if an applicant is seeking to check their International/Overseas status, please refer to UKCISA which is a service that offers advice for international students.

## **UK Visa and Immigration**

International applicants will be required to comply with UK immigration legislation and the requirements of the UK Visa and Immigration. The University holds Highly Trusted Sponsor status under Tier 4 of the Points Based System, and takes its obligations very seriously. Therefore any student who has been admitted and is subsequently found to not comply with the UKVI or immigration requirements, is at risk of having their registration revoked. The guidance from the UKVI is subject to change, and applicants are advised to regularly check the UKVI website (<https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa> ) and the guidance pages provided by our International Student Advisory Service (<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/isas>). Please also see further information in section six of this policy.

### ***Section six: Information for international applicants***

The University welcomes applications from International students and we have students from over 100 countries already represented here.

We advise International applicants to refer to our country information sheets (<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/international-students-country-guides> ) for specific advice and guidance before submitting an application. Please note that, if you require a Tier 4 (student) Visa to enter or remain in the UK,

you must ensure that you choose a course which is taught full-time, when you submit your application.

### **Requesting additional information**

During the admissions process, the University may request additional information from you before being able to make a decision on your application. Please respond to any requests within 14 days, or notify us immediately if there will be a delay in providing these documents. A decision on your application cannot be made until the requested information has been submitted.

### **UKVI and Tier 4 Responsibilities**

Please note that Plymouth University holds Highly Trusted Sponsor status under Tier 4 of the Points Based System. To comply with our sponsorship duties under Tier 4 we will ask you to fulfil certain conditions as part of your admission process to Plymouth University, and these may not be restricted to demonstrating your academic and English Language qualifications, but could include providing details of your past study or immigration history in the UK, your current immigration status in the UK and anything else which we may consider relevant to the University's decision to confirm your place and issue you with a CAS\*, if required.

#### *\*Confirmation of Acceptance for Study*

If you are a new student to the University not sponsored by an overseas government you will be required to pay a £2,000 deposit before your place can be confirmed and your CAS issued. If you have an overseas government as a sponsor, we will need to verify your sponsorship before your place can be confirmed and your CAS issued.

Please note that to comply with UKVI requirements there may be circumstances under which we cannot confirm your place even if you have met our academic requirements, for example if by joining a course here you would exceed the time limit allowed in the UK on a student visa, but we would always do our best to advise you of any such concerns early on in the admissions process.

If you are issued with a CAS by Plymouth University and will be studying here on a Tier 4 visa, there are certain responsibilities that you have as our student.

### **UKVI English Language regulations**

Please view Plymouth University's standard English Language requirements (<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/international-students-entry-requirements>).

Please note our requirements take into account UKVI (<https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa/knowledge-of-english>) minimum requirements for B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) where appropriate.

 UKVI list of approved English Language tests and B2 levels can be found at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/applicationforms/new-approved-english-tests.pdf>.

### **Pre-sessional English Language courses**

If your English Language level does not meet the entry requirements for your degree programme at the University, we may be able to recommend one of our pre-sessional English Language courses, which you must successfully complete before you will be able to commence your degree studies. During the application process,

we will advise you as to which pre-sessional course is appropriate for you, if one is required and how to apply.

For further details please see our English Language web pages (<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/international>).

### **Your qualifications**

The University welcomes a wide range of international qualifications. We use UK NARIC (<http://www.naric.org.uk/> - the national agency responsible for providing advice on academic qualifications), in addition to other advisory bodies, to determine the equivalence of qualifications at non-UK Universities.

### **Applicants with disabilities**

Applicants with disabilities are strongly advised to declare their disability on the application form, even if you do not think that a disability will impact upon your studies. This enables us to consider well in advance, any support requirements that you may have.

Further information is available from our Disability ASSIST Service (<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability>).

### **Contacts**

You are welcome to contact us throughout the admissions process. Please email: the Graduate School at [graduateschool@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:graduateschool@plymouth.ac.uk) including your full name, date of birth, and University reference number (if issued).

### ***Section seven: DBS requirements, criminal convictions and medical checks***

**Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS)** A number of programmes require an enhanced DBS check. The DBS procedure may be a discreet part of the admissions process, separate from the academic decision making process.

Prior to the DBS check:

- If you have ever received a caution, reprimand or conviction, you must declare this on your application form
- If you declare a conviction on your application form, then you will be required to provide further details regarding the conviction so that we can assess your suitability for the programme. Where information of a conviction is provided, admissions staff will review this
- You may be contacted by the Graduate School to provide further information and/or be interviewed. This will happen once the DBS form has been returned.

If a DBS check reveals a disclosure, a Professional Issues committee will need to consider the information in light of the relevant professional criteria, bearing in mind:

- The nature of conviction/offence/police notes
- The likelihood of harm to clients and peers
- How recent the conviction is, and the time which has elapsed since the offence/notes were recorded
- Your age at the date of the offence
- What has been done since conviction

- And in cases where the offence was not disclosed on the application form; the reasons for this.

This is standard procedure for all disclosures which indicate particular types of offences or where police notes raise any concerns. It does not mean that your application will be rejected.

Your personal and sensitive data will be held by us, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

### **Medical checks/Occupational health assessments**

You will be required to complete a medical questionnaire if you are offered a place in certain programmes, normally those in medicine and dentistry, to ensure that you are physically and mentally able to work in those areas. As a condition of entry onto the programme, you must pass this check prior to the programme commencing.

Health Assessment forms are sent to all applicable applicants who have been offered a place. Applicants are asked to return completed forms to the DTC Office as soon as possible.

Our Occupational Assessment team carries out an assessment based on information provided by you on the form. If you are declared fit, then your application progresses. If further information is required, then you will be contacted.

### **Criminal convictions obtained following the submission of an application.**

If you receive a criminal conviction during your application process you must declare this to the Graduate School, who will liaise with the relevant admission staff to identify if the conviction has an impact on the admissions process.

You will be contacted to discuss the progress of your application. The University will investigate the declaration because it is concerned with:

- Duty of care: to staff, students and visitors
- The protection of children and vulnerable groups
- The requirements of professional bodies, regulating organisations and placement providers.

A conviction obtained during the application process will not always result in the withdrawal of a place, but early advice is essential.

Your personal information will be kept securely, in accordance with our data protection policy.

### **Entry requirements for international students**

Non-EU students can only study full-time if they are coming to study in the UK. In exceptional circumstances, and depending on each applicant's circumstances, part-time study or research carried out mainly overseas are allowed. Please contact The Graduate School for further information.

The University community gains much of its strength from the diversity of experience which our students bring with them and so we welcome men and women from all over the world and from all walks of life. We are looking for people who not only have a powerful commitment and enthusiasm to learn, but who are determined to make a significant contribution to society after they graduate.

Our Country Information Sheets provide a guide of minimum entry requirements based on local qualifications. However if your country is not represented you can seek advice about your qualifications by emailing [international-admissions@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:international-admissions@plymouth.ac.uk).