Document Verification and Fraudulent Applications Policy

1   General principles

1.1   The University of Bristol does not admit students whose applications (including any documentation provided during the admissions process) are believed to be fraudulent and reserves the right to reject or cancel an application on these grounds.

1.2   The University also reserves the right to:

   a.   Request additional information to verify an application (including verification of relevant document, results and attendance with third parties such as other universities, test providers, schools, referees and other external parties assisting with application) and/or with the applicant directly;
   b.   Request to see original academic transcripts or certificates provided in the admissions application;
   c.   Suspend the application process while investigating an alleged fraudulent application and/or plagiarism;
   d.   Withdraw the application/registration/place if it is proven, or if the University has reasonable belief, that any information supplied by the applicant or within any of their documentation provided is false, or if the applicant/student refuses to provide the requested information;
   e.   Terminate a student's registration if they are found at a later stage to have submitted a fraudulent application to the University.

2   Implementation/enforcement

2.1   Implementation of this policy varies because of the differing nature of the application process for programmes. Standard operating guidelines have been developed to underpin the policy in all areas.

2.2   Admissions teams will inform the Admissions Compliance team of cases of suspected fraud and such cases will be investigated promptly to maintain the integrity of the admissions process.

2.3   The University strives to verify all parts of an application within a reasonable timeframe. However, given that the verification process often relies on the timeliness of response from third parties, we cannot provide a deadline for which we can anticipate such cases to be resolved.

3   Scope

3.1   This policy applies to applicants to the University. However, it may also be applied retrospectively in line with the Student Agreement if it becomes apparent that a registered student gained admission through the use of fraudulent, false or misleading information.

3.2   The University has additional procedures for current students covering plagiarism in examinations and assessed coursework and provides advice on how to avoid

plagiarism in coursework. Further information on current student regulations can be found on our [Student Support webpages](#).

4   Definitions

4.1   **Fraud** (based on the definition adopted by UCAS) is deemed to have been committed when a person or persons conspire to deceive another person or group of persons into believing that a claim made by that person or group is genuine when in fact it is false. This could comprise giving false information in an application regarding qualifications or experience, providing a fake certificate or reference to support an application, or deliberately omitting relevant information, such as information relating to previous qualifications, or committing some other act of deception.

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion in an application of material derived from the published or unpublished work of another person or source (including generative AI tools), whether intentional or unintentional.

5   Anti-fraud checks for accepted applicants before registration

5.1   It is the responsibility of the Admissions Office to ensure that all students admitted to the University have verified qualifications. Admissions staff will refer any suspected cases of fraud or plagiarism for further investigation, to maintain the integrity of the admissions process.

5.2   Admissions teams will carry out this verification (where possible) on behalf of the University. The process for which qualifications, references and other supporting documents are verified and dealt with where fraud/plagiarism suspected is detailed within this policy.

5.3   In the case of language proficiency tests, most test reports and certificates can be verified by the relevant test provider. Where such verification is possible, the University will require such documents to be verified directly by the test provider in order to proceed with any further CAS/Visa processing.

5.4   As a UK Visa Sponsor, the University must ensure that **all** documents considered in the offer-making process are authentic and verified where possible, prior to allowing applicant to register or issuing CAS/Visa documentation. Confirmation of Acceptance (CAS) may be withdrawn on the basis of suspected/confirmed fraud or where documents cannot be verified. Where this occurs, applicants will be notified.

6   Procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism

6.1   Applications that include personal statements or other documents which show significant similarity to existing sources, or which appear generic, formulaic, or inconsistent with the applicant's academic profile, may be subject to further investigation by the University. Where plagiarism or inappropriate use of AI tools is suspected, additional checks may include comparison with other submitted materials, use of similarity detection software, or assessment by experienced admissions staff. Undergraduate applications are also routinely screened via the [UCAS Similarity Detection Service](#).

6.2   Where plagiarism is suspected, the admissions team will annotate and save a copy of the document containing the alleged plagiarism. The application is then considered

using the normal admissions criteria, without further reference to the alleged plagiarism, to determine whether the application might qualify for an offer.

6.3   Where it is found that an application might qualify for an offer, the admissions team will undertake an initial investigation in consultation with relevant academic staff, to determine the extent and severity of the alleged plagiarism, and whether there is a case to be answered. For example, the alleged plagiarism could merely consist of a number of unfortunate stock phrases that may amount to lack of originality rather than actual plagiarism.

6.4   If there is no case to be answered, the application will continue in the admissions process as normal.

6.5   If there is a case to be answered, the application will be subject to a more extensive investigation and a final decision on the application will not be made without resolution of the alleged plagiarism. Applicants will be contacted by email to request that they provide further information and an explanation of the alleged plagiarism within 14 days. If the applicant does not provide the information within that period, the application may be withdrawn.

6.6   On receipt of the additional information, the case is referred to the Admissions Compliance team and Head of Admissions to consider the extent and significance of the plagiarism allegation, with consideration of the nature of the course applied for and any fitness to practice implications (if relevant). These factors are balanced against the rights of the applicant not to be discriminated against.

6.7   If substantial plagiarism is established, the application will be withdrawn. The applicant will be emailed to notify them of this decision and informed of their right to contest the decision under the applicant appeals and complaints policy.

6.8   In all cases, if it is found that there is no case to be answered, the applicant will be notified, and the application process will continue as normal.

7   Procedures for dealing with applications that require additional document verification

7.1   Where there is any suspicion of fraud within an application, or where it is determined that any documentation requires additional verification, the admissions process is suspended pending investigation of the application. During this time, no offer is made to the student, and visa sponsorship information will not be provided (or will be withdrawn if already provided), until the investigation is complete, and verification obtained.

7.2   In the case of undergraduate applications that require additional document verification:

7.2.1   The admissions team will typically refer any application that requires additional verification to the UCAS Verification Team who will undertake fraud and similarity detection procedures on behalf of the University. Applications may be cancelled or withdrawn where false, missing, and/or misleading information is found provided.

7.2.2   Where the University finds reasonable evidence to suggest that an application contains fraudulent information, the application may be withdrawn without referral to UCAS and the applicant will be informed of the outcome in writing. Any CAS or

Student visas that may have been obtained through the admissions process will also be withdrawn.

7.3   In the case of all other applications submitted direct to the University:

7.3.1   The University of Bristol may request applicants from identified areas or countries to complete enhanced fraud and security checks to satisfy our UKVI compliance obligations. Such applicants may be required to submit their certificates to a third party for verification, to support our internal document checks outlined below. Where this is necessary, the applicant will be contacted with instructions for how to do so.

7.3.2   The admissions team will contact the applicant to request that they provide further information to support our verification processes. This will usually include the completion of a Document Verification form and providing appropriate third-party contact details (such as the awarding institution) to be used within the verification process. The timeframes for response will be made clear to the applicant in all email communications. If no response is received, or if the details provided are inadequate, the application will be withdrawn. Any CAS or Student visa that may have been obtained through the admissions process will also be withdrawn.

7.3.3   Following the submission of further information by the applicant and/or the relevant third-party contact, the admissions team will carry out an independent assessment of the case to determine document authenticity. This may include the University making direct contact with relevant third parties (such as the awarding institution) to obtain further verification of the document in question.

7.3.4   If no response is received from the third party within the specified timeframe, the admissions team may apply further discretion and allow the applicant additional time to contact their awarding institution directly in attempt to obtain the required verification of their qualification. At certain points of the admissions cycle and where appropriate, the University may contact the applicant in first instance to obtain a letter of authenticity from their awarding institution, in place of the process detailed in the steps above.

7.3.5   A Document Verification form will not necessarily be required in all cases. In many cases it will be possible for the University to carry out online verification checks and independent investigations to determine the validity of a document, without any further information being required from the applicant to reach this outcome.

7.3.6   If the University finds reasonable evidence to suggest that an application contains fraudulent information, the application will be withdrawn and the applicant will be informed of the outcome in writing. Any CAS or Student visas that may have been obtained through the admissions process will also be withdrawn.

7.4   In all cases where it is found that there is no case to be answered, the Admissions team will notify the applicant and the application will continue in the admissions process as normal.

8   Current students suspected of obtaining a place based on fraudulent information

8.1 The Secretary's Office is informed of cases where a current student is suspected of fraud and agrees a course of action with the relevant academic school and Admissions Office. Applicants/students who have already registered at the University are subject to the Student Agreement.

8.2 In cases of fraud, this agreement may be terminated under section 11, Termination of Agreement, or the student may be subject to the Student Disciplinary Regulations.

9 Future applications

9.1 Applicants who have previously submitted fraudulent or misleading applications will not be permitted to reapply within the same admissions cycle. The University also reserves the right to reject applications submitted in future admissions cycles where there is evidence of past fraudulent activity.

10 Right of appeal

10.1 Any applicant whose application is cancelled or rejected within the scope of this policy may seek a review of the decision through the applicant appeals and complaints policy, which is available on our website.

11 Data protection

11.1 It is a condition of acceptance of a place at the University that information obtained by the University for the purposes of the assessment of an application will be retained and used in accordance with the University's Fair Processing Notice and with reference to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and Data Protection Act 2018.

12 Reporting and monitoring

12.1 The Admissions Office monitors levels of fraudulent activity and associated outcomes and reports to relevant University committees on an annual basis.

13 Training

13.1 Whilst some responsibility for identification of fraud rests with UCAS and language test centres, Admissions Office staff are also trained to identify fraudulent qualifications and implement the University's procedures.

13.2 Training is organised by the Admissions Office. In addition, Admissions Tutors are briefed annually on current procedures, which are also available on the internal admissions website.

14 Further information and advice

14.1 Further information and advice on implementing these procedures can be obtained from the Admissions Compliance Officer or Head of Undergraduate / Postgraduate Admissions.