



Admissions Policy

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Irish Baptist College

Admissions Policy

Introduction

1. This policy outlines the actions taken in the recruitment of new students, the admissions process potential students undergo and explains the ways in which the College endeavours to continue widening access. It is underpinned by our institutional strategic priorities, which are set out in the College's Values Statement.¹

Purpose

2. To provide policy information about recruitment, selection and admissions at the College. It is the policy framework for all staff who are involved in recruitment, selection, and admissions activity.

Responsible for the Policy

3. The Admissions Policy is approved by the Management Committee. Review and monitoring of its implementation is undertaken by the Admissions Committee which reports to the Board of Studies.

Admissions Principles

4. The College is a confessional Higher Education Institution whose core activity is training men and women for Christian ministry, mission and leadership in the contemporary world. Based in Moira, Co. Down, the College has students enrolled across its validated and non-validated programmes of study and are drawn from a wide range of socio-economic and academic backgrounds and representatives from various age-groups, ethnicities and cultures.
5. The College was founded in Dublin in 1892 in the Spurgeonian tradition, to serve Irish Baptist churches by providing training which embraced natural talents and abilities rather than academic privilege and family connections. The College has remained committed to raising aspiration and opportunity and widening access to education since that time. The admissions process is therefore not based exclusively on academic ability but life and employment experience are also taken into consideration. This makes it possible to equip applicants, and particularly mature students, to make the transition from employment to academic study.
6. Today, the College continues to prepare candidates for Baptist ministry primarily within the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland. It also trains pastors from other denominations and those called to Mission, Youth Ministry and others seeking to enter Religious Education Teaching. Students include those who are pursuing a theological education for spiritual and intellectual enhancement rather than vocational ends. This further enriches the life and experience of the College's diverse learning

¹ As stated in the College's *Values Statement* available on the College website.

community. The College has also developed post-graduate provision for continuing ministerial development.

Scope

7. This policy covers applications for places on our undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses leading to the award of a degree, diploma or certificate.
8. Courses may be offered in one or more of the following study modes, for both credit and auditing purposes:²
 - a. Full Time
 - b. Part Time

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

9. The College believes ‘in the inherent moral equality, dignity and worth of every individual.’³ It is, therefore, committed to providing an environment free from discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation, where all members of its community, including those that seek to apply to the College, are treated equally and with dignity. The College aims to create a culture of diversity within its community, providing a dynamic working and learning environment, where all members are valued for their contribution and individuality.
10. It is the policy of the College that all people, irrespective of their religion, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, marital status or sexual orientation will be treated equally. The College’s Disability Policy and Equality and Diversity policy is applicable to all applicants, students and staff; the full policy can be found on the College website.

Responsibility for Recruitment and Admissions

11. The College is committed to providing a professional recruitment and admissions service to all our applicants. Recruitment and publicity materials are overseen by the College Training Director in co-ordination with the Management Committee. The Admissions Committee carries out all activities from a student’s application through to the commencement of their course.
12. All staff and committee members with designated recruitment, selection and admissions responsibilities are required to be familiar with this policy, and the associated procedures relevant to their areas of responsibility. The College will provide appropriate guidance, training and support for all staff and committee members engaged in recruitment, selection and admissions activities.

² Auditing is the term used for engagement with course material without accumulating credits.

³ *Values Statement*.

The Admissions Committee

13. The Committee reports to the Board of Studies and is responsible for:
- a. monitoring selection criteria and establishing transparent assessment processes;
 - b. overseeing the College's admissions processes;
 - c. identifying training needs and ensuring that staff receive training on relevant changes to the legal and regulatory framework surrounding admissions, so that they can fulfil their role competently and in a manner consistent with the admissions policy;
 - d. agreeing and updating the admission protocols;
 - e. considering non-standard applications;
 - f. considering appeals from applicants;
 - g. considering applications for entry on the basis of relevant experience;
 - h. ensuring that the Admissions Policy is reviewed regularly and best serves our applicants and the College's aims in the light of changing circumstances;
 - i. providing accurate and relevant information to prospective students;
 - j. communicating with applicants during the admissions process, providing information about, for example, the format of interviews and post-application follow-up;
 - k. providing information on international qualification equivalencies ensuring fairness, consistency of interpretation and application;
 - l. sending Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) monitoring reports to the Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC), and to any validating body as required, using the appropriate form(s).

Student Recruitment: Information for Enquirers and Applicants

14. The College is committed to the provision of timely, comprehensive, accurate and appropriate pre-entry information and support to prospective students, enabling them to make informed decisions. The College recommends that applicants check the entry requirements for specific programmes of study before submitting an application.⁴
15. The provision of information by the College is guided by the following principles:
- a. **Accuracy:** The College is committed to providing accurate and detailed information on the nature of its courses, content, duration, modes of assessment, and associated fees or additional costs.
 - b. **Transparency:** Information about courses and the student experience more broadly is communicated through multiple channels including: the College website, course brochure, digital communications, open days, open evenings and College deputation.

⁴ All information relating to students will be handled in accordance with the College's *Data Protection Policy*.

- c. Timelines: The College will provide appropriate information at each stage of a prospective student's admission process.
- d. Deadlines: Applications for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Courses should be received no later than 31st August. However, applicants are advised to apply as early as possible.

Assessment of Applications

- 16. Assessment and selection of applications is carried out in line with all relevant regulatory and legislative requirements, including equalities, data protection and consumer protection legislation. The College is committed to:
 - a. delivering a fair admissions system that admits students of potential, irrespective of their background.
 - b. ensuring that selection criteria and decisions on applications are applied consistently. Equal consideration is given to all applications received.

Entry Requirements

- 17. Subject to paragraph 22, all applicants must meet academic and English language entry requirements in order to be admitted to a programme of study. Entry requirements for all programmes are clearly indicated on the College website.
- 18. The Board of Studies approves the entry requirements for all the College's courses.
- 19. In exceptional cases, subject to the recommendation of the Director of Training and/or the Director of Postgraduate Studies, the Admissions Committee may approve the admission of an undergraduate or taught postgraduate applicant who has not met the general and/or programme of study entry requirements.

Acceptability and Verification of non-UK Qualifications

- 20. The College accepts a wide range of academic and English language qualifications from UK and international applicants. The Admissions Committee assesses the equivalence of international (including European) qualifications to standard UK qualifications at the relevant level in accordance with independent national guidance and other recognised sources. The Admissions Committee is responsible for determining international equivalencies.
- 21. The College may seek to verify the result of any relevant qualification declared or submitted by an applicant before permitting them to enrol at the College.

English Language Requirements

- 22. Our teaching, assessment and student support are delivered in English. Applicants must therefore demonstrate proficiency in the written and spoken use of the English Language to the general standard required by the College and in the specific entry requirements of the course for which they are applying. International

applicants, who require a Student Route visa to study, are required to meet UK Visa and Immigration's English Language requirements.⁵

23. The minimum acceptable level of proficiency for most courses is GCSE English Language (grade 4 or C) or an International English Language Testing (IELTS) average score of 6.5 for Undergraduates, 7.0 for Postgraduates.
24. The Admissions Committee may seek to verify, if appropriate, that applicants have the correct English Language qualifications necessary for a programme of study.

Duty to Disclose Criminal Convictions

25. The College has a duty to ensure the safety of its student and staff community, and that of other people with whom students interact as part of their course of study. If it is discovered that any aspect of a student's application, or any information they provide to the College for the purpose of gaining admission to a programme of study at the College, contains incorrect or fraudulent information, or significant information has been omitted from their application form, the College may withdraw or amend their offer, according to the circumstances.
26. Applicants for the Preparation for Ministry Course which includes placements that involve regulated activity with children and/or vulnerable adults must declare all criminal convictions, including spent convictions and cautions and bind-over orders. Applicants for the Preparation for Ministry Course will also be required to complete criminal records check with AccessNI.

Applicants Seeking to Enter with Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

27. Applicants for College courses may be considered for entry through the accreditation of prior learning, which may be certificated. The Admissions Committee is responsible for determining the grounds on which APL may be used to meet entry requirements. Credit is allocated for evidence of achieving appropriate and assessed learning outcomes. APL credit will normally be accepted within a maximum of ten years from the date it was awarded. Applicants who are considering applying through AP(E)L for a course are strongly advised to discuss their circumstances with the admissions staff before submitting an application.

Applicants with Disabilities or Specific Learning Needs

28. The College welcomes applications from people with disabilities or specific learning needs. It operates procedures to ensure that these applications will be considered appropriately and that applicants with additional support needs will be provided with appropriate support for the application process and their subsequent study.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt>.

Applicants with Special Circumstances

29. Applicants with special circumstances that have affected previous study or are likely to affect academic performance in current studies should provide this information at the point of application. If these circumstances are encountered after the submission of an application, applicants should inform the Registrar as soon as possible.

Applicants Wishing to Reapply

30. Applicants who are unsuccessful in applying for a programme of study may apply again for the same programme in a subsequent year. Re-applications will be considered against the standard course entry criteria for that year of entry. The new application should demonstrate an improvement from the previous application. The College may draw upon all information from previous applications, or any previous registrations at the College as a student, when assessing suitability for a course.
31. Students who are unsuccessful may apply for a different programme of study in the same year.

Admissions Process

32. When a completed application is received it is processed by the Registrar. The procedure is:⁶
 - a. Hard copy and electronic student files are created;
 - b. Acknowledgment of receipt of application is sent to the applicant;
 - c. References are requested from referees;
 - d. A completed medical form is required from the applicant. The student completes section 1 and section 2 is completed confidentially by their GP;
 - e. Once references are received information on the interview process is conveyed to the applicant;
 - f. The Admissions Committee convenes for interview;
 - g. The process on the day of interview includes the submission of a short written piece, a five-minute verbal presentation and standardised interview questions are asked by the panel. The Admissions Committee will endeavour to conduct the interview in a professional but relaxed manner to put the applicant at ease;
 - h. Applicants are assessed and places are offered on the professional judgement of suitably qualified staff & committee members in accordance with appropriate admissions protocols;
 - i. Applicants will normally receive a response within five working days of the receipt of a completed application. The response, where appropriate, will contain information regarding the next stage in the admissions process.

⁶ Postgraduate applicants are not required to submit a medical form (step d) or undertake the short written piece and five-minute verbal presentation at the interview stage (step g).

33. All applicants who are offered a place to study at the College will receive an *Offer Letter*,⁷ an *Acceptance Form*,⁸ the *Student Handbook* and a *GDPR Statement*.⁹ The Offer Letter will include details of any individual requirements that need to be fulfilled before an applicant can be enrolled on a programme of study at the College.
34. Applicants in receipt of a conditional offer are responsible for providing evidence that they have met the conditions of their offer. This evidence could include, for example, certificates and degree transcripts.
35. Applicants who have not achieved the conditions of their offer may be considered for alternative courses where the entry requirements are lower, for example a non-validated award programme. Applicants are under no obligation to accept the alternative course.

The Student Route

36. International applicants will be admitted in accordance with current UK government regulations.
37. The UK government operates a points-based immigration system for all international students which was updated on 5 October 2020. Applicants who are not British citizens, or who do not hold European Union Settlement Status should refer to the UKVI guidelines.¹⁰
38. The College is licensed with the Home Office as a Probationary Sponsor. The College aims to provide a Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) in good time for the visa application. The applicant is responsible for:
 - a. Making an early application for admission including details of all previous study and periods of study in the UK;
 - b. Responding fully and in good time to the Offer Letter and completing the Acceptance Form;
 - c. Responding fully to requests for any further information, for example, passport details and financial records;
 - d. Providing a current email address to which the CAS will be issued.
39. In order to comply with the relevant UK legislation and immigration regulations, the College will notify the immigration authorities, where relevant, of any non-arrival, or late arrival, of an applicant and of any subsequent changes to a student's registration status. The College reserves the right to refuse admission should an applicant be found not to be in a position to meet all UK visa requirements for the anticipated full duration of his/her programme of study.

⁷ The letter offering a place at the College on a programme of study, setting out any conditions associated with the offer.

⁸ The form provided to students with their *Offer Letter* to be completed if the offer of a programme is being accepted.

⁹ During the Application Process, the *GDPR Statement* requiring consent is signed by the student to indicate their agreement to the College's use of their personal data.

¹⁰ Further details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/student-visa>.

40. All applicants requiring a visa to study in the UK must not currently be, nor have ever previously been, in the UK for any purpose without valid immigration permissions. If, either during the process of admitting a student or subsequent to that student enrolling upon their programme of study, the College is informed that the applicant/student is (or has previously been) in the UK without such valid permissions, it may be required to inform immigration authorities and/or withdraw the offer of a place and/or withdraw its sponsorship of the individual's visa.
41. The College may need to review this policy in light of changes to Home Office Immigration Rules regarding the Student Route in order to remain compliant with Sponsor duties. This may result in changes to matters such as the evidence required for English Language proficiency at short notice. Where changes are necessary due to Home Office changes the College will endeavour to contact all applicants holding an offer and on whom the change will impact, within six weeks.

Interaction Between the College and Applicants

42. The College will communicate regularly with offer holders providing relevant information such as accommodation, immigration requirements, start of year enrolment process and introductory week events.

Applicant Behaviour

43. The College has a diverse population and expects all interaction between applicants, representatives of applicants, students and staff to be conducted with courtesy and respect. The College does not tolerate inappropriate behaviour towards members of our community. Examples of inappropriate behaviour include hostile or aggressive behaviour or the act of offering a bribe or financial inducement. Inappropriate behaviour will be viewed seriously and may prejudice the further consideration of an application, appeal or complaint. Applicants will usually be warned by the College when their conduct is such that action is being considered. In exceptional cases, such as a threat to a member of staff, then no warning needs to be given before action is taken.

Fraud, Omission and Plagiarism

44. Applicants must not omit any requested or relevant information, make any misrepresentation (for example, through plagiarism) or give false information at any point of the application process including after an offer is made. Should this occur the College reserves the right to dismiss the application, withdraw an offer of a place and/or revoke an applicant's registration. The College may also, in accordance with its obligations, notify external organisations about any suspected misrepresentation.
45. Scanned copies of documents are generally accepted during the admission process but original documents may be requested.

Data Protection

46. The College holds information about all applicants to the College and all students at the College.
47. Students should refer to the College's Data Protection Policy for more information, which are available on the College's website.

Tuition Fees

48. The College's Tuition Fees Policy is available on its website.

Feedback, Appeals and Complaints

49. The College considers all applicants fairly and effectively against the published entry requirements and in line with its procedures. It will provide feedback on request to applicants whose application has been unsuccessful to enable them to reflect on their progress through the application process. Feedback is usually given in writing, at the discretion of the Chair of the Admissions Committee. To request feedback, applicants should contact the Registrar.
50. If applicants or prospective students are dissatisfied with the outcome or treatment of their application, the following procedure applies:
 - a. The appeal must be sent to the College in writing within four weeks of the outcome.
 - b. The appeal must clearly outline the reasons why the applicant believes the decision is incorrect.
51. On receiving the appeal, the College will undertake the following review of the original decision:
 - a. The Admissions Committee will discuss the appeal and make a response to the applicant within four weeks of the appeal request being received.
 - b. If the applicant wishes to appeal further against the decision of the Admissions Committee, this must be lodged with the College within a further two weeks of receiving the outcome of the Admissions Committee decision.
 - c. At this stage the appeal will be passed to the Principal, whose decision is final.

Monitoring and Review

52. This policy and related recruitment and admissions procedures and practices across the College are overseen by the Admissions Committee. Activities or developments that have implications for the policy are considered at each meeting.