E12. Equal Opportunities Policy

Policy on Equal Opportunities for Students

1. Introduction

1.1 In pursuit of its mission the University is committed to:

- promoting access for all who can benefit including those for whom Higher Education has traditionally not been accessible
- encouraging equality of opportunity by creating a diverse learning environment within which individual characteristics are recognised and valued
- eliminating unfair discrimination in recruitment and admissions processes and in assessment decisions.

1.2. The University recognises that its practices must accord with the requirements and intent of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Special Education Needs Disability Act 2001.

1.3. The principal objective of this policy is to ensure that students are treated fairly at all times in an atmosphere where they are encouraged to achieve their full potential. Unfair discrimination based on individual characteristics will not be tolerated.

1.4. In supporting these policy objectives the University is developing an appropriate system for monitoring the student profile and the outcomes of the admissions processes. The data produced will be used to inform the strategic and operational planning cycle.

1.5. The Vice-Chancellor has overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy and Deans are responsible for its implementation at school level. Every employee has an individual responsibility not to practice unfair discrimination in carrying out his/her duties.

1.6. This policy applies to all programmes of study (whether taught or research-based) delivered by the University, and it applies to all students studying in all modes including full-time, part-time and distance/open learning. When the University enters into agreements with collaborative partners (for
example institutions delivering Brookes’ franchised courses or work placement employers) they are expected to work to the broad principles expressed in this policy.

2. Recruitment and Admissions

2.1. In its recruitment and admissions processes, the University seeks the widest possible response from across regional, national and international communities.

2.2. Promotional material about courses and programmes of study will include positive written information about men and women, people from different ethnic origins and disabled people. Where visual images are used these will reflect a diverse student population.

2.3. The University requires Schools to remove any nonessential barriers to access, and welcomes students with a variety of traditional and non-traditional entry profiles.

2.4. The University requires explicit selection criteria to be established for admission at different levels for every programme of study in order to provide a framework for fair selection based on merit, qualification, experience and potential. Selection criteria will specify different qualification routes. At undergraduate level this may include A-levels, Access Courses, GNVQs, performance as associate students and Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). At postgraduate level this may include honours degrees or equivalent academic qualifications, professional or research experience, membership of professional bodies, or APEL. Depending on numbers applying, fulfillment of stated selection criteria does not guarantee admission.

2.5. The University aims to select those students most likely to achieve the stated learning outcomes of programmes of study. The primary criterion for selection is aptitude for a particular programme. A student’s academic qualifications provide evidence of aptitude, but other evidence relating to the student’s academic record or equivalent experience is also taken into account. Admissions tutors are expected to use discretion in cases where there is evidence of academic potential despite under performance due to mitigating circumstances and frame the offer accordingly.

2.5. Information provided to applicants about programmes of study must specify compulsory course requirements in advance. This includes any additional costs such as for field trips, attendance requirements outside the normal timetabled day, and work placements. Information about the time tabling of modules or units is to be provided as far in advance of the academic year as possible.

2.7. The University will develop a system for recording the factors that were taken into account in making offers to, or rejecting, candidates.
3. Curriculum and Teaching

3.1. The University aims to provide programmes of study and perspectives which recognise and value the diverse needs, interests and backgrounds of all students.¹

3.2. The University aims to ensure that documents associated with programmes of study such as student handbooks, field guides, teaching materials and examination papers reflect the principles of equal opportunity, and that a diverse range of case histories, illustrative examples and models are used. University support departments such as Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development (OCSLD) and Learning Resources will assist schools in the development, cataloguing and dissemination of examples of good practice.

3.3. The University encourages staff and students to use language that is non-discriminatory and inclusive, and which does not cause offence to particular groups.²

3.4. The University is sensitive to the needs of individual students. In particular, the way courses are organised, delivered and examined takes account of the needs of those with caring responsibilities, disabilities and cultural and religious commitments. Where it is not possible to organise part of a course in such a way that a student can participate fully, consideration will be given to the provision of alternative learning methods. The University’s quality assurance processes, including periodic quality audit, are used to monitor and evaluate the extent to which equal opportunity objectives have been achieved in the design and delivery of the curriculum.

4. Assessment

4.1. The University requires clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria to be specified for all taught modules and courses in order to provide a framework for fair assessment. All programmes of study are required to make use of a range of assessment methods to give students opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.

4.2. The University operates appropriate examination and assessment procedures to ensure that students are not unfairly disadvantaged because of a disability.

¹ The following are examples of individual characteristics which contribute to diversity amongst the student population and which will not be used as discriminatory factors in selection or assessment decisions (except where the nature of the programme of study make this essential and legislation permits): disability, gender being trans-sexual, marital status, health status (including mental health) age, race, colour, nationally or national origin religious or political beliefs, socioeconomic background, being lesbian, gay or bisexual, having caring responsibilities, membership of or activity in a trade union or other legally permitted organisation, and having served spent offences. This list is not exhaustive

² Guidance on the use of language is available for members of the University in support of this policy objective.
4.3. Each School is required to ensure that each taught programme of study has a system for moderating the marking of coursework and examinations to ensure reliability and consistency. This system will be related to assessment criteria and it will be communicated to students.

4.4. The University is committed to ensuring there is anonymous marking of examination scripts in the first instance. Thereafter, students will be identified in order to take account of special circumstances such as illness or disability, and to complete record sheets.

4.5. When external examiners are appointed for taught courses, the Examination and Conferment Unit is required to draw her or his attention to the University’s policy on equal opportunity for students. External examiners are expected to act in accordance with this policy.

5. **Support Services**

5.1. Equal opportunities underpins all areas of the University’s activities and, accordingly, the University makes resources such as time, people, money and space available as far as possible to facilitate equality of opportunity. This includes the provision of specialist advisers in Student Services and literature targeted to particular student groups.

5.2. The University provides a range of childcare services for the use of student parents. Students are represented in the management of these services through membership of the Childcare Advisory Committee.

5.3. The University’s current policy is to allocate places in residential halls on the basis of the geographical location of the student’s permanent home. All students who are not allocated a hall place are provided with help in securing local accommodation. The impact of this policy on different student groups will be kept under review.

5.4. The University will keep under review its provision of support services and, subject to the availability of financial resources, seeks to provide the best possible service.

6. **Training and Development**

6.1. The University is committed to providing training to facilitate the implementation of this policy and through the OCSLD will secure an appropriate training programme to support this policy. The University is working towards requiring only those who have received specified training to take part in the admissions process.

7. **Complaints**

7.1. If a candidate considers that her or his application has not been treated in
accordance with this policy, the complaint, which should specify which part of the policy has not been applied, should be referred to the Head of Admissions for investigation. An annual report of complaints received will be presented to the Strategy and Planning Committee.

7.2. Any student who considers that he or she has not been treated in accordance with this policy may use the Student Complaints Procedure.

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