

# Union School of Theology Admissions Policy

Approved by Union School of Theology (UST) Academic Board 17-01-2018

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## **1. CONTENTS**

1. CONTENTS .....	1
2. INTRODUCTION .....	2
3. POLICY FRAMEWORK .....	2
4. KEY PRINCIPLES.....	2
5. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR APPLICATIONS PROCESS .....	2
6. ADMISSIONS PROCESSES.....	3
7. GENERAL SELECTION CRITERIA (ALL PROGRAMMES) .....	3
8. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION (SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES) .....	5
9. ADMISSIONS WITH ADVANCED STANDING.....	6
10. MATURE APPLICANTS.....	6
11. ENTRY AND ACCESS POINTS.....	7
12. APPLICATIONS TO YEARS OTHER THAN YEAR ONE FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES .....	7
13. DEFERRED ENTRY .....	7
14. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.....	7
15. APPLICANTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS .....	7
16. OUTCOME OF APPLICATION PROCESS.....	8
17. CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
18. DOCUMENT VERIFICATION .....	9
19. PRIOR EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES .....	9
20. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY.....	10
21. MARKETING AND PROMOTION .....	10
22. DATA PROTECTION .....	11
23. THE RIGHT OF APPEAL .....	11
24.PROCESS OF MAKING A COMPLAINT OR APPEAL CONCERNING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS OR DECISION. ....	12
25. POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW.....	12

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This policy applies to admissions to university-validated UST Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes. UST is committed to ensuring that the admissions process is easily accessible, fair, transparent and consistent, and provides each individual with a good quality application experience.

## 3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy has been developed in accordance with the following regulations, policies and procedures. This list is not exhaustive:

- [BA, G. Dip](#) and [MTh](#) Handbooks
- [UST RPL Policy](#)
- [UST Learning Support Policy](#)
- [Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure](#)
- [UST Equal Opportunities Policy](#)
- [UST Data Protection Policy](#)
- [QAA 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)
- [Regulations for Validated Awards of the Open University](#)
- [Criminal Convictions Policy](#)
- UK Visa and Immigration documentation

## 4. KEY PRINCIPLES

**4.1** The School's recruitment, selection and admissions are informed by the School's Mission Statement:<sup>1</sup> with its commitment to *Rigorous, biblical and accessible education, training and resources for churches worldwide.*

**4.2** This document specifies the principles and processes used for considering applications to study at Union School of Theology, linking them with the QAA Code of Practice on admissions, recruitment and widening access.<sup>2</sup>

**4.3** UST is committed to ensuring that all our information for those who enquire and for applicants is clear and provides relevant information for making informed decisions on courses. UST endeavours to ensure that all information available to applicants on its website at [www.ust.ac.uk](http://www.ust.ac.uk) is up-to-date. However, as printed materials may have been published well in advance of the start of any programme, UST reserves the right to make variations to the published contents, methods of delivery or specific entry requirements of courses if such action is reasonable and considered to be necessary. Enquirers, applicants and their families are encouraged to visit the campus in Bridgend, or one of our Learning Communities. Taster days are available by prior arrangement.

## 5. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR APPLICATIONS PROCESS

**5.1** Each application is considered individually, based on information submitted on the application form and supporting documentation required by UST.

**5.2** UST will assess and process all applications only on the information provided.

**5.3** Selection and admissions processes are managed by the Admissions Team, who are trained in all aspects of this policy and admissions procedures, under the oversight of the Provost.

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<sup>1</sup> QAA Quality Code

<sup>2</sup> QAA Quality Code

5.4 All UST staff involved in the admissions process follow the criteria and procedures for selection consistently and professionally. However, academic discretion in considering all other available information underpins the selection process to ensure individual circumstances are taken into account and that it is fair across a range of experiences and expertise.

## 6. ADMISSIONS PROCESSES

6.1 Applications to all undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes must be made directly using the application form available online. Candidates with disabilities which prevent them from using the online form may request application materials in another format, and should do so by emailing us at [applications@ust.ac.uk](mailto:applications@ust.ac.uk)

6.2 Once a complete application is received by ASST, the application will be processed as follows: -

6.2.1 The team must be satisfied that the applicant fulfils the entry requirements for the specific course.

6.2.2 The team normally aims to complete initial processing of all applications within 5 working days, during which time references are requested.

6.2.3 Applicants may be interviewed either in person or virtually as required (see below).

6.2.4 Following interview, the applicant will normally receive a letter of offer (explicitly stating any conditions) or rejection (with explanation and advice) within 5 working days.

6.2.5 When a rejection letter is sent, students will be informed of their right to complain and appeal about an admissions decision, and about the process for doing this.

## 7. GENERAL SELECTION CRITERIA (ALL PROGRAMMES)

7.1 Entry routes for all programmes of study will include the widest possible range of criteria to enable each applicant's capabilities to be fully assessed. The following factors, in no particular order, will be used when deciding whether to make an offer for a particular programme:<sup>3</sup>

- applicant's past performance in public examinations;
- objective assessment of any factors that affected past performance;
- objective assessment of work and/or life experience or skill-based knowledge;
- academic potential including previous theological study;
- applicant's potential to meet specific and general entry requirements;
- ability of applicant to benefit from the proposed programme of study;
- ability of the candidate to complete the learning outcomes of the proposed programme
- applicant's understanding of the programme applied for
- understanding of and acceptance of the aims and ethos of UST
- the observations of the candidate's references as to their suitability for the programme of study
- appropriateness of application according to eligibility criteria
- ability to meet fees

7.2 In order for UST to be assured that the admissions criteria have been satisfied, assessment will be made by means of information contained on the application form, transcripts and qualifications certificates, personal interview (if required, see Section 7.8), and references supplied.

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<sup>3</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 3, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

- 7.3 - UST has the right to consider for discretionary admission, applicants whose lack of academic qualification is compensated by years of ministry or leadership experience.
- 7.4 Applicants are required to declare any relevant unspent convictions and relevant spent criminal convictions as specified in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975. Declaring a criminal conviction will not necessarily disadvantage an applicant, and the issue will be discussed with the applicant during the application process. For more details see the [Criminal Convictions Policy](#)
- 7.5 All places are offered in accordance with this policy.
- 7.6 English Language Requirements

The normal expectation for English language proficiency is IELTS. Where this is not available, assessments of English proficiency, alternative English language qualifications such as ESOL, TOEFL (taken at official testing centre) will be considered.

**7.6.1** For our **Undergraduate programmes**, an IELTS score of 6.0, with a minimum of 6.0 in all categories is required where applicant's home country is not listed by the UK Government as a majority English-speaking country.

**7.6.2** For our **Masters programme**, an IELTS score of 6.5, with a minimum of 6.0 in all categories is required where the applicant's home country is not listed by the UK Government as a majority English-speaking country.

**7.6.3** For our **MPhil and PhD programmes**, an IELTS score of 7.0, with a minimum of 6.0 in all categories, is required where the applicants home country is not listed by the UK Government as a majority English-speaking country.

- a. IELTS scores (or recognised equivalent) will only be accepted within two years of the test result.
- b. Visa students must have an 'IELTS for UKVI' certificate. The IELTS test for UK visa purposes is designed to meet certain administrative requirements that are specific to UK Visas and Immigration. Test Report Forms will be slightly different, to show that test takers have taken the test at an IELTS UK visa session. Please note that a standard academic IELTS will not be accepted by the UKVI.]

**7.6.4** Exemptions from English language requirements are normally only granted to those applicants who have either been resident in the UK for a long period of time or who have obtained their academic entry qualifications, through the medium of English, from a recognised institution. Any claim for exemption from IELTS testing must be emailed to [applications@ust.ac.uk](mailto:applications@ust.ac.uk) at the time of application.

**Student visa applicants must in all cases meet any English language requirements currently laid down by the UK Government.**

- 7.7 Any significant changes to a programme made between the time of offer and completion of registration will be notified to applicants and the options available will be advised at the earliest opportunity.<sup>4</sup> See Section 17.

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<sup>4</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 4, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

## **7.8 Applications for BA**

- After an initial check on suitability, the receipt of all references, and a review of the application by two UST reviewers, all campus-based applicants who meet requirements will be interviewed. Where the candidate is applying to be resident on campus, the Pastoral Dean will usually be one of the interviewers.
- A non-standard application will be requested to attend an interview. Part of the process will involve ID verification.
- A standard application for a non-campus based application, meeting essential requirements, and having acceptable references, will not be requested to attend an interview unless there is an aspect of the application which requires further discussion.
- An applicant who is required to submit valid IELTS certification, in line with our policy, will be interviewed. Part of the process will involve ID verification.
- Interviews will be conducted by two staff at UST.

## **7.9 Applications for GDip**

- After an initial check on suitability, the receipt of all references, and a review of the application by two UST reviewers faculty, a decision will be made whether to interview or not.
- A standard application, meeting essential requirements, and having acceptable references, will not be requested to attend an interview unless there is an aspect of the application which requires further discussion.
- A non-standard application will be requested to attend an interview..
- An applicant who is required to submit valid IELTS certification, in line with our policy, will be interviewed. Part of the process will involve ID verification.
- All interviews will be conducted by two staff at UST.

## **7.10 Applications for MTh**

- After an initial check on suitability, on the basis of the application and the references, a decision is made by two UST reviewers whether to interview or not.
- All non-standard entry applications are interviewed by two UST reviewers. Part of the process will involve ID verification.
- A standard application, meeting essential requirements, and having acceptable references, will not be requested to attend an interview unless there is an aspect of the application which requires further discussion.
- An applicant who is required to submit valid IELTS certification, in line with our policy, will be interviewed. Part of the process will involve ID verification.
- All interviews will be conducted by two staff at UST. Part of the process will involve ID verification.

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## ***8. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION (SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES)***

In addition to the general selection criteria of the previous section, the following criteria apply in specific programmes.<sup>5</sup>

### **8.1 Entry to BA:**

Normally applicants should have at least 64 UCAS Tariff Points from Level 3 qualifications, e.g. GCE A level, or equivalent such as Scottish Highers or International Baccalaureate.

### **8.2 Entry to GDip:**

Normally, applicants should have at least an honours degree in any subject.

Where applicants do not meet the normal entry criteria, admission may be permitted if the applicant's experience and/or qualifications can reasonably be expected to suggest that the

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<sup>5</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle1, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

applicant will succeed on the programme. The School's RP(E)L processes will be used for gathering and assessing evidence.

### **8.3 Entry to MTh:**

Normally, applicants should have at least a lower second class honours degree in theology or a similar discipline. Applicants may also be admitted who have achieved an average of 50% in UST's Graduate Diploma in Theology.

Where applicants do not meet the normal entry criteria, admission may be permitted if the applicant's experience and/or qualifications can reasonably be expected to suggest that the applicant will succeed on the programme. The School's RP(E)L processes will be used for gathering and assessing evidence

Applicants will be asked to produce a recent sample of work from previous study.

**8.4** Candidates with qualifications from other educational contexts outside Europe will be considered on a case-by-case basis, using transcripts and, where necessary, samples of work. Samples of work and transcripts will be assessed by UST faculty for academic equivalence, drawing on their international teaching experience with students from similar contexts.

**8.5** In some cases, where applicants do not meet the academic requirements due to exceptional circumstances, a written piece of work may be set to assess their academic suitability for the course for which they have applied. UST may deem it necessary for the applicant to undertake further work to reach the required standard before beginning any Programme of study.

## **9. ADMISSIONS WITH ADVANCED STANDING**

UST accepts applications based on Prior Learning or Prior Experiential Learning.

**9.1** UST's [Recognition of Prior Learning](#) [RPL] Policy <sup>6</sup> - found along with UST's Policies - is a standard and important feature of School Admissions and all Admissions staff should seek to keep up to date with developments internationally and nationally.<sup>7</sup>

**9.2** The Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning requires a careful assessment of what has been learned and may involve preparation by the applicants in order for them to demonstrate the learning they feel they have already achieved.

**9.3** Requests for entry or advanced entry are normally dealt with at application stage.

## **10. MATURE APPLICANTS**

Anyone who is 21 at the start of their undergraduate course is eligible for consideration as a mature student. The School recognises that typically such applicants are highly motivated. Many may apply who do not have appropriate qualifications from within the formal education system; therefore RPEL (Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning) may be applicable to meet entry requirements.

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<sup>6</sup> UST Recognised Prior Learning Policy, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 5, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

## **11. ENTRY AND ACCESS POINTS**

The diagram below shows normal entrance and exit routes for undergraduate access.

<b>Level/Award</b>	<b>entry</b>	<b>exit</b>
Certificate	Level 4	Level 4
Diploma	Level 4 or 5	Level 5
BA (Hons)	Level 4 or 5	Level 6
Graduate Diploma	Level 6	Level 6
MTh	Level 7	Level 7

## **12. APPLICATIONS TO YEARS OTHER THAN YEAR ONE FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES**

The Programme Officer may under RPL procedures, exempt from part of a programme of study individual students who have satisfactorily pursued a previous programme of study in another theological institution of an appropriate nature and standard. Where a student is offered a place on a programme starting in a year other than the first year, the Programme Leader must be sure that the student has already gained the required knowledge and skills for which exemption is awarded, and that their ability to follow the rest of the programme will not be jeopardised.

## **13. DEFERRED ENTRY**

Deferred entry is granted at the discretion of admissions staff. Applications for deferred entry will be considered equally up until the point of confirmation. Normally, deferred entry is granted for one year only.

## **14. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

All non-UK students require permission to study in the UK for courses longer than 6 months. UST can currently sponsor students for student visas.

## **15. APPLICANTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS**

The School operates a Policy to ensure [equal opportunities](#) and access for people with disabilities including those with additional learning needs. Applications from students with disabilities and additional learning needs are welcomed by UST.<sup>8</sup>

**15.1** The School seeks to ensure that those responsible for the recruitment of students do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against people with disabilities.

**15.2** Admissions staff will ensure that any necessary special arrangements are made to enable an applicant with a disability to complete the applications form, submit relevant documentation, and attend a formal interview.

**15.3** Support for students with disabilities and additional learning needs is set out in the [UST Disability Policy](#) and the [UST Learning Support Policy](#).<sup>9</sup>

## **16. OUTCOME OF APPLICATION PROCESS**

**16.1** Applicants who do not meet the entry requirements for the course they wish to take will be informed of other more appropriate courses offered by UST at the same time as being notified of the decision on their initial choice. All applicants will be informed of their right to complain and appeal against an application's decision or the conduct of the process. See [UST Policy and Procedure for Complaints About the Applications Process and the Outcome of an Application](#).

**16.2** Applicants who have met the entry requirements of UST will receive a written offer of a place on the programme. Any offer of a place will include details on how to respond to the offer and further information on subsequent steps.

**16.3** Applicants who have accepted their offer and met all the conditions of an offer will be informed of procedures and requirements for enrolling as students of Union School of Theology. They will be registered with UST for their programme of study and also with the relevant validating university. UST seeks to make the transition to student membership helpful, and its induction, orientation and registration arrangements are geared towards providing the best and most informed start for its students.

**16.4** The following, additional information will be made available to students before they commence their programme of study:

- academic and other support services available;
- link to student handbook;
- links to relevant programme handbook and programme regulations;
- links to UST's Policies and Procedures
- recommended reading lists;
- accommodation booking details;
- induction orientation information.

**16.5** Students are invited to pre-programme orientation via zoom prior to their first week of study. This introduces them to their course and to the resources available for induction and study skills on the VLE.

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<sup>8</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 3, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access. See also the School's Disability Policy

<sup>9</sup> See UST Policies and Procedures Handbook.



## **17. CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES**

**17.1** UST reserves the right to make alterations to the contents or methods of delivery of programmes or assessment but only if such action is absolutely necessary for one or more of the following reasons: compliance with the validating university or regulatory bodies; in response to external examiner or stakeholder feedback; as part of periodic or annual review measures; in response to technological developments. When this occurs, UST will inform students as soon as feasible, and request feedback from and engage in dialogue with students to ensure that the changes are not disruptive to the student experience.

**17.2** A student may not always be able to study a particular module when student demand is limited, and in such a case will be asked to take an alternative.

## **18. DOCUMENT VERIFICATION**

**18.1** All students will be required to upload scans of academic and personal documentation as part of the application and admissions process.

**18.2** All documentation is verified by the Admissions Team. If any information relevant to the application is found to be fraudulent, inconsistent with the application or missing, the application will be deemed void and the offer of a place will be cancelled.

**18.3** Students must supply references to support their application. If UST has any reason to believe that the student or their referee have:

- a) left out any information (including qualifications the student has completed, any qualifications with an unsuccessful grade; or any qualifications for which results are still pending);
- b) given false or misleading information;
- c) supplied a personal statement, or parts of a personal statement, that has not been written by the student

UST reserves the right to take any necessary steps to check with the student and third parties whether it is accurate or complete.

**18.4** UST has the right to cancel an application without returning an application fee if, having carried out suitable checks, any of 18.3 a) b) or c) are deemed to have taken place.

## **19. PRIOR EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES**

**19.1** It is the applicant's responsibility to inform UST of any extenuating circumstances that may lead, or have led to, past academic performance that is not truly indicative of their true potential.

**19.2** UST reserves the right to request further information from a third party when an applicant requests extenuating circumstances for past qualifications. If deemed necessary, and with the applicant's permission, the applicant's academic institution, examination body, doctor or other appropriate third party may be contacted.

## 20. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The School recognises its moral and legal responsibility to provide equality of opportunity to all potential students at enquiry, and to follow a fair, transparent and professional recruitment and selection process.<sup>10</sup>

**20.1** UST will make every effort to ensure that applicants are treated solely on the basis of their merit, abilities and potential. UST is committed to ensuring that unlawful direct or indirect discrimination does not take place. We are also committed to avoiding discrimination on grounds of socio-economic background. We believe that diversity is a positive contribution to the learning experience at UST (see [UST Equal Opportunities Policy](#).)<sup>11</sup>

**20.2** UST will ensure that all applicants are treated fairly by showing appropriate sensitivity to individual differences. It will also ensure that decisions about recruitment, selection and admission at all levels are based solely on objective academic and non-academic criteria that have been made available to applicants prior to application.<sup>12</sup>

**20.3** The School will ensure that staff involved with admissions are aware of the moral, regulatory and legal issues affecting equal treatment of potential students and applicants.<sup>13</sup>

**20.4** The School will ensure that policies and procedures related to admissions and enrolment are regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to support the School mission and strategic objectives and that they remain current and valid in the light of legislation and regulatory requirements. The School will also ensure that staff involved with recruitment and admissions are competent to undertake their role and kept up to date with legislation and regulatory requirements.<sup>14</sup>

**20.5** The School will seek to promote and develop diversity of its student body by:

- i. treating each applicant on his/her own merit;
- ii. identifying student potential as well as acknowledging past academic and other achievements;
- iii. ensuring that all publicity campaigns and material, correspondence and application forms reflect the diversity of the student population and potential application group, avoiding inappropriate images or descriptions of the student body or School life.

## 21. MARKETING AND PROMOTION

**21.1** Information contained in prospectuses, website, flyers or brochures will be available to applicants before and during the application process. This information should be comprehensive and will cover the following areas:<sup>15</sup>

- programmes offered, details of programme structures, duration, mode of attendance and end qualifications;
- the nature of the School, its purpose, ethos, aims and objectives;
- the cost of application process;
- academic entry requirements;
- details of tuition and other fees and payment arrangements where these have been determined in advance of publication of materials;

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<sup>10</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 1, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

<sup>11</sup> See UST Equality Opportunities Policy

<sup>12</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 1, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

<sup>13</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 5, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

<sup>14</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 5, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

<sup>15</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 1, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

- accommodation available on campus;
- the cost of accommodation;
- advice on sources of financial assistance (internal and external);
- institutional policies on equal opportunities;
- Taster Days or Open Days;
- issues for international applicants;
- the complaints policy;
- the role and requirements of any external validating and accrediting bodies.

**21.2** Promotional material will not contain unfair or misleading statements about other institutions.

**21.3** School staff should follow the principles of responsible recruitment. All staff involved in the admissions process will work closely together to ensure they are fully aware of the information that should be made available to applicants.<sup>16</sup>

**21.4** The School will respond to all enquiries as quickly as possible and normally no later than a maximum of 5 working days, after receipt of an enquiry.

## **22. DATA PROTECTION**

**22.1** All applications to UST are covered under the General Data Protection Regulation. The information provided in applications will only be used for admissions purposes and will form part of the student's record if they accept a place. Data relevant to the application will be entered into the UST database and the progression of the application monitored through to commencement on a UST programme of study. The information will be confidential between the applicant, UST and any other parties the applicant has consented to as part of the application process (e.g. referees and validating university). However, UST may have to release information to authorise outside agencies, such as the police or the Home Office, to prevent or detect fraud.

**22.2** UST will submit student name and contact details to its validating university solely for the purposes of recording student details and progression information. By registering for a programme leading to a university validated award the student agrees to the sharing of their information with the validating university. The validating university will not make any contact with students unless there is a specific need in relation to their studies towards a validated award. It is the student's responsibility to keep their personal information up to date with UST and to notify them of any changes or errors.

**22.3** In line with the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation, applicants are entitled to a copy of all their personal data held by UST. All requests should be made to the Programmes and Registry team.

**22.4** For full details of Data Protection see [UST's Data Protection Policy](#).

## **23. THE RIGHT OF APPEAL**

Union School of Theology wishes all applicants to have a positive experience in going through the application process and makes every endeavour to provide applicants with all the necessary information they require and to support them in making an informed choice regarding the best course for them. However, applicants who are unsatisfied about the handling of their application, have the right to make either an informal and/or formal complaint or appeal under UST's [Policy](#)

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<sup>16</sup> QAA Quality Code, Guiding Principle 5, Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access

[and Procedure for Complaints About the Applications Process and the Outcome of an Application which is found here](#) <sup>17</sup> Please note that academic judgment cannot be appealed.

## 24. PROCESS OF MAKING A COMPLAINT OR APPEAL CONCERNING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS OR DECISION.

24.1 Notice of an intention to appeal must be given in writing to the UST Academic Registrar by the applicant within 30 working days of the date of the letter containing the disputed decision on the application.

24.2 The process set out in the UST's [Policy and Procedure for Complaints About the Applications Process and the Outcome of an Application](#) should be followed.

## 25. POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW

This policy approved by the UST Academic Board, as well as all other policy, procedure and guidance documents relating to students studying at UST, will be available to all, monitored regularly and reviewed and evaluated periodically.

25.1. The Provost, Academic Dean, Programme Officer, and ASST have overall responsibility for the admissions policy, including its approval and annual review.

25.2 The Programme Officer and ASST have responsibility for overseeing the admissions process and ensuring that decision making complies with the regulations of the validating university and other external bodies, where appropriate.

25.3 This document can be found on the UST website: [www.ust.ac.uk](http://www.ust.ac.uk) .

25.4 Every effort will be made to respond to any request to provide this policy in a different format.

25.5 This policy will be included in staff induction.

Version	Author	Review Date	Reason for change	Equality Impact Assessment check (and comment)	AB Approval date *
1.1	Iain McGee	Sept 2024	Exclusion of minimum suggested age of study for entering the BA programme (21), plus updates on admissions processes per programme, and shift of responsibilities in line with team restructuring. Updating 17.1 and 17.2 to make clearer the conditions and provisions for programme / module discontinuity.	Possible age discrimination dropped by the exclusion	29 <sup>th</sup> November 2022
1.2	Iain McGee	March 2025	Feedback from OU AA revalidation	Checked	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2023

<sup>17</sup> UST's [Policy and Procedure for Complaints About the Applications Process and the Outcome of an Application](#) is found on [www.ust.ac.uk](http://www.ust.ac.uk) and on the Union Cloud VLE (Virtual Learning Environment).

			Section 24.2 removed (no immediate appeal to OU) Section on health in 7.1 deleted. 7.4 spent criminal convictions policy exceptions documented		
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