

## **Heriot-Watt University Undergraduate Admissions Policy**

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## **1. Admissions Statement**

Admissions staff at Heriot-Watt University recognise that applying to university can be a complicated and at times, daunting process. This Policy has been developed to provide transparency in the admissions processes and practices at Heriot-Watt in support of you - the applicant, parent, guardian or adviser.

The University is committed to delivering a high quality service to all applicants to our undergraduate programmes that is welcoming, efficient and fair. To help achieve this, admissions staff adhere to the policies, processes and timelines established by UCAS, (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), and to the processes outlined in this Policy.

Heriot-Watt University is committed to equality of opportunity and no applicant should be treated unfairly in relation to any protected characteristics as outlined in the University's Equality and Diversity Policy. All applications are considered on their individual merits. An applicant's qualifications, personal statement, reference and background circumstances are considered by admissions staff when making a decision. Admissions staff for some programmes may also use interview and/or portfolio assessment as part of the decision-making process.

Heriot-Watt University aims to admit highly motivated applicants who can demonstrate a passion and commitment to their chosen area of study, as well as the potential to succeed academically. University admissions staff are available to offer information and guidance on the application process to applicants and those supporting them.

## **2. Admissions Processes**

### **2.1 Applications**

When an applicant selects an undergraduate degree programme at Heriot-Watt University as one of their choices through UCAS 'Apply', the application is sent electronically from UCAS to an Admissions Tutor or Admissions Administrator for the relevant programme. Admissions Tutors are academic members of staff involved in teaching and/or research and who have responsibility for making admissions decisions on UCAS applications. In some Schools, Admissions Administrators liaise with Admissions Tutors on decisions and make decisions on their behalf.

### **2.2 Decisions**

Decisions for each application made by Admissions Tutors are sent to the Admissions Office located in the University's Recruitment and Admissions office where they are processed and returned to UCAS, (the Admissions Office carries out random checks of some decisions to ensure fairness and consistency however, due to time restraints cannot carry this out for every decision).

Applicants are advised to apply by the UCAS deadline of 15 January. Some courses may accept applications after this deadline, however, due to high demand for places on many of the University's programmes this cannot be guaranteed.

### 2.3 Offers

Applicants receive offers via UCAS 'Track'. Following notification from UCAS, they will then have their offer confirmed in a letter from the University. Applicants to some courses may receive decisions within a relatively short space of time, for example, one or two weeks. Applicants to courses which are in high demand and who may be considered for a Conditional offer, (i.e. as they have qualifications outstanding and have not yet met the entry requirements), may have to wait until after the January 15 UCAS deadline to receive their decision. This enables Admissions Tutors to consider equally, and to fairly assess which applicants should be made an offer; where the number of applications exceeds the number of places available.

The University endeavours to make decisions on applications received before the 15 January deadline by 31 March, although UCAS allows the University until 10 May to send any outstanding decisions.

### 2.4 Responding to offers

Applicants who have applied for more than one programme at one or more universities will need to wait until they have received decisions from all their choices before accepting or declining any of the offers they are made. Applicants reply to their offers in UCAS 'Track' and not directly to the university. UCAS 'Track' is an online facility that applicants are given access to by UCAS once their application has been submitted. UCAS will notify applicants of the deadline for replying to their offers and it is important that this is noted and acted upon by the deadline.

### 2.5 Applicant Visits

All applicants who apply before the UCAS deadline of 15 January who are offered or who are being considered for an offer of a place at the University will be invited to an Applicant Visit day between January and April. This affords applicants and their parents, guardians or partners with the opportunity to find out more about the University and the course they have applied for; to hear from staff and students on a range of topics relevant to applicants and to view facilities and ask questions. Admissions Tutors from degree programmes employing the use of interviews and/or portfolio assessments as part of their decision-making process may combine this with the Applicant Visit. In special circumstances, interviews can be carried out via the telephone.

### 2.6 Applicants with a disability

All applicants who are made an offer will be sent a disability questionnaire with their offer letter from the University. Applicants who have specific support needs are encouraged to detail and make these known to the University's Disability Adviser as soon as possible so that any appropriate support arrangements can be made in advance of enrolment. Applicants with a

disability who require specific support arrangements to be made for their attendance at an Applicant Visit Day should contact the University's Disability Adviser.

## 2.7 Applicants declaring a criminal conviction

All UCAS applicants are asked to disclose criminal convictions. It is the policy of the University to 'hold' applications where a criminal conviction has been disclosed in the Admissions Office and to seek full details of the conviction from the applicant before the application can be considered for entry into the system whereby an Admissions Tutor will be able to view and make a decision on the application.

The procedure that the Admissions Office follows is:

- Letter is sent to the applicant enclosing a 'Disclosure of a Criminal Conviction' form for completion and return. The form asks for the main details of the offence and gives the applicant the opportunity to explain the circumstances of the offence.
- On receipt of the completed form, the Admissions Manager and Academic Registrar review the information provided and make one of three decisions:
  - allow the application to be processed as normal (it should be noted that the Admissions Tutor will not be notified of the applicant having a criminal conviction and only the Admissions Manager and Academic Registrar will have access to the completed Disclosure form)
  - allow the application to be processed as normal, however, with the condition that if the applicant is successful in securing a place at the University, that they are not given a place in campus accommodation (if they are considered to be a potential risk to other students)
  - reject the application on the basis that because of the particular nature of the offence, the applicant poses a risk to the University if admitted.

Applicants who declare a criminal conviction are advised to complete and return the 'Disclosure of a Criminal Conviction' form as soon as possible thus reducing any potential delay to their application being considered. In cases where an applicant has been presented with two attempts to complete and return a 'Disclosure of a Criminal Conviction' form and has failed to do so, the applicant would be, regrettably, rejected without further consideration.

## 2.8 Applicants who are unsuccessful

If an application is unsuccessful the applicant will not receive an offer of a place and will, regrettably, receive a 'reject' decision. All applicants are given feedback via UCAS Track. If an applicant wishes to request further feedback on why their application was not successful they should contact the Admissions Manager by letter or email. Under circumstances where the Admissions Tutor is on Campus at the time the request is made, the Admissions Manager will discuss the request with the Admissions Tutor and respond to the applicant within ten working

days. If for some reason the Admissions Tutor is not available at the time of receiving the request, the Admissions Manager will notify the applicant of the expected length of delay in the response.

## 2.9 Appeals and Complaints

Applicants may appeal a decision made by an Admissions Tutor should they consider it to be unfair or should the applicant wish to submit information in support of their application that was previously unavailable, for example, the applicant has since taken up study for an additional qualification not listed on the original application. In such instances, the applicant should contact the Admissions Office by letter or email, outlining in brief the grounds for the appeal. The Admissions Manager will then discuss this with the relevant Admissions Tutor who will make a decision to either accept the information as the basis to make a revised decision/offer, reject the appeal on the basis of insufficient grounds, or ask for more information or more time, for example, in order for the appeal to be received by a panel within the academic School. Should an applicant feel they have been treated unfairly or received a poor level of service as part of the process of applying to the University, they should contact the Admissions Manager in the first instance.

Formal complaints can also be lodged as advised in the University's 'Guidelines for Members of the Public in Raising Complaints and Issues of Concern About Heriot-Watt University' which can be accessed via the following the link:

<http://www.hw.ac.uk/policy/general-complaints-procedures.pdf>

## 2.10 Fee Status Enquiries

Applicants are asked by UCAS to select their 'residential category' from a number of options and the category selected forms the basis for a decision by the University regarding the resident fee status of an applicant. The resident fee status of an applicant is broken down by all Scottish Universities into: '*Scottish/EU(outside of UK)*', which means that the applicant is deemed to have been ordinarily resident in the UK or EU for at least three years prior to the date at which the course they are applying for is due to commence and is therefore liable to have their tuition fees - the amount of which is set by the Scottish Government - paid for them by the 'Student Awards Agency for Scotland'; '*overseas*', which means that the applicant is liable to pay the tuition fee rate for overseas students established by the University; '*RUK*' (Rest of UK outside Scotland), which means that the applicant is liable to pay the rate for RUK students established by the University.

If the University is unclear from the information provided on the UCAS form by the applicant which Resident Fee Status an applicant should be, admissions staff will send a 'Fee Status Enquiry' form to the applicant for completion. At this point the applicants' fee status will be set to 'overseas' or 'RUK', depending on the information provided, and will remain so unless the information returned in the 'Fee Status Enquiry', which is assessed by the University's 'International Student Adviser's Office' for potential overseas applicants, and by the University's funding advisor for potential RUK applicants, demonstrates that the applicant is not liable to pay

overseas or RUK fees. Please note that the University reserves the right to identify the eligibility of a student to pay overseas or RUK fees at any point in the admissions cycle including enrolment.

#### 2.11 Deferred entry

Applicants wishing to defer their entry to a programme of study until the year following the current application cycle are advised to check with the Admissions Tutor to find out if this is possible. There may be limits on the number of deferred applications that a particular course is accepting. If the Admissions Tutor advises that you can go ahead and apply for deferred entry, the UCAS personal statement should include a short statement on the reason for deferral, for example, to enter paid employment and save towards the cost of university or to carry out voluntary work or travel to gain life experience and maturity.

Applicants who have already accepted an offer of a place and then decide that they would like to defer their entry should contact the Admissions Office. We will discuss this with the Admissions Tutor and unless there have been an unusually high number of requests for deferred entry, will change the offer for entry to the following year.

#### 2.12 Applications from overseas students

We welcome applications from students of all nationalities from anywhere in the world and have extensive experience of making offers on a wide range of international qualifications. Visit our website at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/student-life/international-students.htm> to find out more about applying as an overseas applicant.

### 3. Selection of Students

To receive an offer of a place of study at the University, applicants are required to demonstrate that they have the relevant academic qualifications at the required grades. The qualifications attained to gain successful entry to the University must therefore be equal to or above the established University minimum entry level for the qualification(s) being presented. Entry requirements for specific programmes can be found in the Undergraduate Prospectus as well as on the University and UCAS websites. Entry requirements shown are the minimum that are required. For programmes where the number of applications greatly exceeds the number of places available, achieving the minimum entry requirements does not guarantee entry to the programme.

Applicants should also be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary personal and social skills required for successful performance at University. To enable an Admissions Tutor to determine whether or not to offer an applicant a place of study at the University, three main sources of information are examined:

- Academic Qualifications
- Teacher/ Tutor Reference
- The Personal Statement

### 3.1 Academic Qualifications

Provided the qualifications taken by the applicant are of the level required for entry to Higher Education, we will consider them for entry to our degree programmes. We will often request specific grades in specific subjects to ensure that applicants have the required background knowledge to succeed on their chosen programme.

Similar programmes offered at different Heriot-Watt University campuses - Edinburgh, Scottish Borders, and Dubai - may have differing entry requirements reflecting variations in demand and the number of available places.

#### 3.1.1 Specific considerations related to Scottish Secondary School qualifications

The University understands that there are varying models of delivery of the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence in Secondary Schools in Scotland and that the curriculum aims to provide flexibility for learners. The University aims to be as supportive as we can be to all applicants, irrespective of their particular learner journey. Key aspects of our policy in relation to qualifications taken in Scottish Secondary Schools are outlined below.

- Overall entry requirements

Our overall entry requirements for applicants studying qualifications within Curriculum for Excellence are expressed in terms of Highers for Entry to Level (Year) 1 and in Highers and Advanced Highers or Scottish Baccalaureate for entry to Level 2.

Whilst the University does not specify any particular Highers that we will not consider for entry, applicants should be aware that in the context of high demand for places, subjects such as Drama, PE and Photography, may be looked upon less favourably than more academic subjects. Whilst we recognise the value of such subjects individually, the more an applicant's Highers are aligned to the chosen area of study, they more likely they are to receive an offer.

Applicants may wish to avoid taking subjects which are extremely similar, for example, Biology in S5 and Human Biology in S6. Depending on the other subjects taken, such a choice could limit the breadth of knowledge achieved by the applicant and disadvantage them alongside an applicant who, for example, was to choose Biology in S5 and Chemistry in S6 in order to broaden their base knowledge of science.

- By-passing of National 5s and going straight to Highers

It is a requirement of the University that all new students have English at a minimum of National 5 or equivalent. Some disciplines will also require Mathematics at a minimum of National 5 or equivalent. Applicants who proceed to Highers in these subjects without sitting the National 5 examination, will have their Highers accepted in lieu of the National 5s.

- Highers taken in one year in S4

The University understands that some pupils may wish to take one or two Highers after one year of study in S4. Whilst these will contribute to entry requirements over all, Admissions Tutors will wish to see a minimum of four Highers, or mix of Highers and Advanced Highers, being taken in one sitting in a subsequent year to ensure that the applicant can cope with the breadth and depth demands of university study.

- Two-year Highers taken over S4 and S5

The University accepts Highers studied in greater breadth and depth over S4 and S5 with examinations in S5 as having been attained in one sitting. We advise that applicants take a *minimum* of four Highers in this scenario.

- Highers taken over more than one sitting

We accept that some learners may not obtain all the qualifications required for entry in one sitting and welcome applications from pupils in S6 who are undertaking further Highers and/or Advanced Highers to add to Highers they have already taken. We particularly welcome applications from pupils at schools/ who live in communities which have a low progression rate to Higher Education, or who have spent time in care, and who are seeking to achieve the required entry standard from the qualifications they are taking in S6.

- Advanced Highers

Applicants who are seeking to enter Level 1 and who do not hold the requisite Highers from their studies in S4/S5 are advised to take further Highers or Advanced Highers in S6. Whilst we recognise the progression in knowledge and skills that undertaking Advanced Highers provides learners, applicants must still be able to present with the required number of different subjects at specific grades; bearing in mind that we do not count the Higher and Advanced Higher results for the same subject twice. The majority of our programmes can be entered directly in Level 2 by applicants with the required Advanced Highers and we encourage learners to consider this as an option.



### 3.1.2 Specific Considerations Related to A Levels

Offers are made on A2, A Level qualifications only and not on A1, AS Levels. Some Admissions Tutors do not include A Level General Studies in their assessment of the three A Levels required.

### 3.1.3 Advanced entry to Level 2

We welcome applications from students studying for Advanced Highers, the Scottish Baccalaureate or A Levels (and many more qualifications from the EU and overseas) for advanced entry to Level 2. Details of entry requirements for Level 2 entry with Advanced Highers and A levels are detailed in the Undergraduate Prospectus and on the University website. Offers for Level 2 entry for students studying the Scottish Baccalaureate will be made on the basis of the Highers and Advanced Highers the student is taking with acknowledgement of the UCAS points and skills accrued for the Interdisciplinary Project.

Even if you are studying for one of the above qualifications and apply for Level 1 entry, provided you have the potential to meet the entry requirements, we will make an offer for Level 1 entry and also an offer for Level 2 entry. This enables you to decide on which year you would like to enter at the University once your examination results are known, should you choose to accept your offer of a place at Heriot-Watt.

### 3.2 Tutor/ Teacher Reference

This is useful in providing a 'second opinion' on the appropriateness of your application to your chosen area of study. We understand that your Tutor/ Teacher will have first-hand experience of your performance in education and therefore consider carefully their views. Any predicted grades for outstanding qualifications noted by the referee also help to provide an indication of what we can expect from the applicant. That said, the reference is considered alongside the information presented by the applicant themselves and cannot, by itself, determine the outcome of the application.

### 3.3 The Personal Statement

We select applicants who create a positive impression and demonstrate their enthusiasm and suitability for the degree they have chosen, in their own words. Specifically, we want applicants to demonstrate the following:

- Knowledge and understanding of the subject
- Motivation for the degree programme applied for
- Evidence of commitment, motivation and ability to cope with the challenges of university life
- Skills derived from non-academic extra-curricular activities such as engagement in sport, the arts, voluntary or community work, work experience or paid employment.

The University occasionally receives tutor references and/or personal statements from the one centre that are very similar and we strongly discourage the adoption of a 'template' style for such important information.

#### 3.4. Additional Information Taken into Consideration

We will take into consideration the circumstances of applicants who have experienced particular disadvantage in relation to their education. Examples include: applicants who have experienced a serious illness or disability which has had an impact on their studies; those who have spent a significant amount of their life in care/being looked after; those who have spent considerable time caring for a family member.

### 4. Widening Participation

#### 4.1 The LEAPS Admissions Pledge

The Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools, (LEAPS), supports talented young people in Edinburgh and the Lothians, as well as those at particular Schools in the Scottish Borders and Forth Valley region, providing them with information and encouragement to apply to higher education. Support is specifically targeted to those young people with little or no family experience of higher education or those who may have experienced adverse social and/or economic circumstances.

Applicants who are LEAPS-eligible and who apply in S6 and who have not yet achieved the minimum entry requirements can expect to be given a Conditional offer of a place as long as they are taking the qualifications and subjects needed to meet the requirements in S6, regardless of a disappointing outcome in S5. The University will also take into account the LEAPS Summer School report when making a final decision on an applicant once the SQA exam results are known in S6. Applicants who narrowly miss their conditions may still be made an Unconditional offer if they have received an excellent Summer School report in the right subject areas, however, an excellent Summer School Report does not guarantee entry for those applicants who do not meet their conditions for entry in the specific subjects that are noted for entry in the Undergraduate Prospectus, for example Chemistry for a degree programme in Chemistry, or Maths and Physics for a degree programme in Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

#### 4.2 HNC/D applicants seeking to articulate to Years 2 or 3 of a degree programme

The University has a number of active routes to enable HNC applicants to apply for Year 2 of some of our degree programmes and HND applicants to apply to Year 3. The University guarantees entry for a set number of applicants from specific college programmes who go on to achieve A grades in their Graded Units. Only college courses which have an established 'articulation agreement' with the University will have a set number of guaranteed places. To find out if your college course articulates to the programme of your choice at Heriot-Watt, visit:

<http://www.hw.ac.uk/student-life/entry-requirements/college-qualifications.htm>

We cannot guarantee an offer of a place for applicants studying for an HNC/D at a college which has no established articulation agreement with the appropriate degree programme at Heriot-Watt, however, applications will still be considered. The University's Colleges Liaison Officer can provide advice and guidance on applying.

#### 4.3 Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)

Heriot-Watt University is an active partner in SWAP-East and welcomes applications from SWAP students. Our Colleges Liaison Officer organises visits to the University for individual and cohorts of SWAP students who are considering applying for one of our courses and is available to provide advice and guidance at any point in the application stage.

#### 4.4 Contextual Admissions Policy

Heriot-Watt University has adopted a contextual approach to considering UCAS applications in our admissions process for 2013 entry to enable us to identify applicants with the greatest potential to succeed. The Policy focuses on Scottish applicants where the number of students we can accept to the University is limited by the Scottish Government and therefore where the greatest risk for the potential of some applicants to be overlooked exists. The criteria we use to assess which applicants will be made a contextual offer focus mainly on socio-economic disadvantage although there are other factors that could impact negatively on an applicant's subject choices and level of attainment that we consider as detailed below:

- The applicants' home postcode is within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 20% or 40% most disadvantaged areas.
- The applicant is at a low progression school that is part of the 'Schools for Higher Education Programme' (SHEP).
- The applicant has spent time in local authority care/being 'looked after'.
- The applicant has been a carer for a long-term ill or disabled parent which has had a demonstrable impact on their studies.
- The applicant has suffered from an illness or disability which has had a demonstrable impact on their studies.

Applicants studying Highers/ Advanced Highers may then be given a measure of flexibility in the offer-making stage and/or at confirmation. Flexibility may take one or more of the following forms:

- Making an offer of, or accepting a student at confirmation with, up to two grades lower than the standard entry requirements. For example, AABB would become BBBB, AACC or ABBC.
- Making an offer of, or accepting a student at confirmation with, one less Higher than the standard entry requirements. For example AABB would be AAB or ABB. BBBBC would be BBBB or BBBC.

- At the offer or confirmation stage, counting one Advanced Higher taken in S6 as additional to the Higher taken in the same subject in S5, (as opposed to current practice where an Advanced Higher cancels out the same Higher).

#### 4.5 Access Bursaries

Applicants from schools and colleges in Scotland who are in receipt of the full Education Maintenance Allowance; applicants on HNC/D and Access programmes in Scotland; applicants who have spent a significant amount of time in care/being looked-after anywhere in the UK; and who have firmly accepted an offer of a place at the University are eligible to apply for an Access Bursary. This comprises of a maximum of £4,000 and is paid in yearly instalments of £1,000 for each year the student progresses on their Honours course.

The deadline for applications for the Access Bursary is typically around the end of June and applicants are notified of whether or not they have been successful in securing a bursary by around the end of July. Unfortunately at present, we cannot guarantee that all applicants will receive a bursary as the volume of funding we have available does not equal the demand. In previous years around 20% of applicants who applied for the Access Bursary received one.

Applicants should be aware that the University offers a range of Scholarships for which the application deadline is earlier – currently this is set at 31 March. Details of these can be found on the University website at:

<http://www.hw.ac.uk/student-life/scholarships/scholarships-bursaries.htm>

### 5. Further Information

If you have any questions regarding any of the information in this Policy, or if indeed you have unanswered questions related to undergraduate admissions at Heriot-Watt University, please contact:

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