



Union  
Theological  
College

## Admissions Policy for PTFI 2023-24 Entrants

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# Admissions Policy for PTFI 2023-24 Entrants

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## MISSION STATEMENT

Union Theological College welcomes students from all backgrounds to study Christian Theology in a community of faith and research-led scholarship to prepare them for life, work and service in both local and global contexts.

## Guiding Principles for Admissions and Access

Union College seeks to follow clear principles in preparing and administering its Admission Policy. These principles draw on published guidance on best practice in admissions in higher education and reflect the Guiding Principles of the UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance for Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access (2018).

1. Union College ensures that policies and procedures for application, selection and admission are transparent and accessible.
2. Union College will ensure that all applications are treated equally and processed using the same criteria.
3. Union College uses fair, reliable and appropriate assessment methods that enables the selection of students with the potential to complete the course successfully.
4. Union College removes or reduces unnecessary barriers for prospective students.
5. Union College provides information to prospective students that supports them in making informed decisions.
6. Union College ensures that all staff engaged in the delivery of admissions, recruitment and widening access are appropriately trained and resourced.
7. Union College develops its widening access strategies and policies in line with local and national guidance.

## Context, Governance and Responsibilities

1.1 Union Theological College offers postgraduate degrees awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI). This Policy applies to the admission of students to postgraduate programmes offered by Union Theological College. It provides information on procedures and related matters together with responsibilities of those involved in the process.

1.2 It applies to entry in the academic year 2023-24 and is kept under review and updated to reflect progress in implementing the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2020 – 2025.



1.3 The Union College Faculty has overall responsibility for the Postgraduate Admissions Policy. A sub-committee (The Admissions Panel) appointed by the Union College Faculty and comprising of the Principal, the Programme Coordinator for the relevant PGR programme, and the Executive Academic Administrator (Registrar), implements admissions policies and procedures, and reviews the admissions policy and procedures at the end of each admissions cycle. The outcome of this review is reported to the Faculty.

1.4 Members of the Admissions Panel are familiar with related internal and external regulations. They have the appropriate level of expertise and knowledge to carry out their duties to a high standard.

## **Pre-Application Information**

2.1 Union Theological College aims to provide comprehensive, accurate and user-friendly information and advice to applicants and other stakeholders in the admissions process. This is to enable an informed choice of programme(s) to be made, appropriate to the needs, interests, academic qualifications of applicants and prospective students.

2.2 Detailed information on entrance qualifications and associated admissions procedures for individual programmes is provided. The main sources of information are the College website at <https://www.union.ac.uk/courses> and College leaflets and advertisements. In addition, all queries received through the College website contact form and other social media are dealt with on an individual basis either through up to date template replies or personal responses depending on the nature of the enquiry.

2.3 Every effort is made to ensure that the information which the College provides is accurate when it is published. Applicants are encouraged to check the College website for updated information about course content and application criteria.

2.4 Fees and charges relating to each course will be published on the College website, a copy of which can be made available on request. Applicants should be aware that all fees are subject to an annual increase as assessed to be in line with Higher Education and inflation indices.

2.5 The College Administration responds to enquiries on how to apply for PTFI programmes. The College Administration can be contacted by telephone, email or post:

Union Theological College  
108 Botanic Avenue  
Belfast BT7 1JT  
Email: [admin@union.ac.uk](mailto:admin@union.ac.uk)  
+44(0)28 9020 5080

## **The Application Process**

### **Postgraduate Taught Programmes**

3.1 The application procedure for each programme can be found on the College website at [www.union.ac.uk/courses](https://www.union.ac.uk/courses).



3.2 The academic criteria for admissions are clearly explained. English language requirements are outlined and the various ways in which competency may be demonstrated are stated. Applicants are asked to provide a curriculum vitae, a sample of academic work (guidance notes are provided), a letter of intent, two signed letters of reference, and various transcripts and necessary documents. A secure online portal is provided for the collation and uploading of this information.

3.3 At various stages in the process potential applicants are given the opportunity to contact the College to discuss the programmes or entry requirements. Students may request written clarification of their questions. In addition, telephone and videoconferencing conversations are available.

3.4 The closing date for applications is clearly stated. Students are informed promptly of the decision by the Admissions Panel.

## **Postgraduate Research (PhD)**

3.5 Information regarding the College's PhD programme can be found at <https://www.union.ac.uk/courses/18/phd-theology>. Applicants are advised to contact a member of Faculty in their chosen field. Faculty interests are outlined at <https://www.union.ac.uk/support/faculty-staff/teaching-staff>. Following discussion with Faculty, applicants are required to provide an 800 – 1000 words outline of their proposed doctoral topic. Application is made through the secure portal. The academic criteria for admissions are clearly explained. English language requirements are outlined and the various ways in which competency may be demonstrated are stated. Applicants are asked to provide a curriculum vitae, a sample of academic work (guidance notes are provided), a letter of intent, two signed letters of reference, and various transcripts and necessary documents.

3.6 The decision regarding selection is made by the Admissions Panel which, for the PhD programme, will include the relevant Head of Department. Those applicants who are applying under the Union Theological College and Kirby Laing Centre (KLC) Memorandum of Agreement will be prompted to apply by KLC and the Admissions Panel will include a representative of KLC in attendance.

3.7 For more information see the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

## **Data Protection**

3.8 Union Theological College is required by law to comply with all relevant data protection and privacy legislation. The College is committed to ensuring that all employees, registered students, agents, contractors and data processors comply with legal requirements regarding the processing and confidentiality of any personal data held by the College. Applicants have the right to access any personal data that is being kept about them, subject to a number of exemptions, either on computer or in hard copy. Any person who wishes to exercise this right should make their request in writing to the Executive Academic Administrator (Registrar).

3.9 All applicants for admission to courses leading to PTFI awards will be asked to confirm that they authorize the College to process their personal data supplied on the application form for the purposes of assessing their eligibility for admission.



## **Fraudulent Submissions, Statements and Omissions**

3.10 Information provided for admission should be true, complete and accurate. No information requested should be omitted. If any information is inaccurate, has been omitted or if a transcript is not provided when required, the College reserves the right to cancel the application and the applicant shall have no claim against the College in relation to this.

3.11 Offers of a place are based on the information provided by the applicant and are made in good faith by the College. The College is not prepared to admit applicants who provide false statements/certificates/transcripts or other supporting documentation, who omit relevant information or submit work which is not deemed by the College to be unique to the applicant. Such applications are likely to lead to withdrawal of an offer of a place or the student may be required to withdraw from the College, if registered. The applicant shall have no claim against the College in relation to this.

## **Recognition of Prior Learning**

3.12 The PTFI invites applications to its degree programmes from all prospective students who possess the knowledge, ability and experience required to benefit from them. The College operates a Recognition of Prior Learning scheme which encompasses Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL).

## **Selection and Communication of Decisions Selection Procedures**

4.1 Admissions decisions with respect to PGT are made by the Admissions Panel and reported to the Faculty. Decisions are made on the basis of the criteria for the individual course of study which may include:

- The applicant's academic qualifications
- Interviews, admissions tests, written work, portfolio submission or relevant personal experience.
- Evidence of an acceptable level of proficiency in the use of the English Language is required from applicants for whom English is not their first language.

4.2 The Admissions Panel aims to make each decision within 15 working days of receipt of a complete application. An application is deemed to be complete when sufficient information has been received in order to make each decision, and an application fee has been paid.

4.3 The Admissions Panel, through the College Administration, is responsible for conveying official decisions to the applicant.

4.4 Where an offer is made to an applicant, all communications will indicate that the offer is an offer of admission for a place and not an offer of financial assistance.



## **Applicants with a Disability or Long-Term Condition**

4.5 The College is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students and welcomes applications from people with disabilities and long-term conditions. An individual's disability or long-term condition will have no bearing on the admissions decision.

## **Applicants with Criminal Convictions**

4.6 In line with the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, Union Theological College will only ask about convictions which are defined as 'unspent' within the terms of that Order. A criminal record does not mean refusal to study on a programme. Applicants with a criminal record are encouraged to notify the Admissions Panel and, once the background check has been received, a meeting may be required between the prospective student and a member of staff. Union Theological College undertakes to ensure an open, measured and recorded discussion on the subject of any offences or other matters that might be considered relevant in relation to their participation in a programme. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant could lead to a student being subject to the Student Disciplinary Process.

## **Post-Decision Procedures Significant Changes to Programmes**

5.1 Significant changes to any of the College's programmes including re-structuring or discontinuation will be communicated to relevant applicants by the College. This will be done at the earliest opportunity.

## **Deferral Requests**

5.2 Applications for deferred entry will be considered but not automatically granted. This is because either a course may not be offered in a subsequent year, or in the case of research, the research project and/or intended supervisor may not be available in a subsequent year. Requests will be considered on an individual basis.

## **Applicants with Mitigating Circumstances**

5.3 The College is not best placed to fairly and consistently take account of any mitigating circumstances affecting an applicant's performance in pre-entry qualifications. Examples of mitigating circumstances include personal or family illness. The College expects applicants to have taken appropriate action either via their Higher Education Provider or the relevant examination body to ensure that such circumstances have been taken into account prior to the publication of results or following an appeal.



## **Feedback**

5.4 The College will provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants on request. The request for feedback should be made within six weeks of the decision by the College by letter or email. The College will aim to respond to requests for feedback within ten working days of receipt of the request.

## **Appeals and Complaints**

5.5 The College aims to consider all applicants fairly and in line with the principles outlined in this policy. However, it is recognized that there may be occasions where applicants wish to request an appeal (review of the admissions decision) or make a complaint about the handling of their application or enquiry.

### **First Stage: Informal Resolution**

5.6 Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made in writing to the Admissions Secretary by the applicant in question. A written response will be made to every written enquiry normally within ten working days and this written response will mark the completion of the informal stage.

### **Second Stage: Formal Letter to the Operations Manager**

5.7 An applicant who is dissatisfied with the written explanation should put his/her concerns in writing to the Operations Manager within ten working days of the date of the College's written response to the informal request. The letter should set out the grounds for dissatisfaction with the response and include any previous correspondence.

The Operations Manager shall undertake such further enquiries as deemed necessary before providing a written response normally within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint.

### **Third Stage: Appeal**

5.8 Any applicant still dissatisfied after the second stage may appeal to the Management Committee within 10 working days of receiving the Operation Manager's decision. A Review Panel shall then be convened to meet normally within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal letter. However, there is no appeal against an admissions decision which, in the judgment of the Management Committee, results from the correct and impartial application of written criteria and in these cases the application to appeal will be refused.

5.9 Where a review panel is deemed necessary, the Panel shall normally include the Faculty and Student representatives on the Management Committee. Panel members shall not have had any previous involvement in the case. The appellant shall have the right to appear before the Panel accompanied by a friend. No legal representation shall be permitted at any stage during the procedure.





5.10 The Panel may seek written evidence from any witness or person who in the Panel's judgment may have relevant information to contribute. However, neither the appellant nor any witness shall be required to appear in front of the Panel if they do not wish to appear.

5.11 The Panel's findings and recommendations shall be communicated to the appellant within 10 working days of the Panel's meeting. All parties to a complaint are expected to maintain strict confidentiality both during and after any enquiry/appeal/complaint.

## **Deadlines**

5.12 The deadlines set out in this procedure relate to investigations carried out in semester-time only and may not prove possible to meet at particularly busy periods for Admissions (e.g., August- September or November, December) or when key staff are on leave or indisposed. The College will at all times strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as circumstances allow and applicants will be advised of the reasons for any delay.

## **Confidentiality and Enquiries from Third Parties**

5.13 All parties are expected to maintain strict confidentiality, both during and after any appeal and/or complaint. These should normally be made by the applicant in question.

When an admissions decision is queried by a third party, the College may supply a generalized answer on admissions policy but is precluded from discussing individual cases by the terms of the Data Protection Act. However, complaints and/or appeals will be accepted if the applicant confirms in writing that the third party is acting on their behalf and the applicant wishes the complaint and/or appeal to be investigated.

## **Central Monitoring of Admissions Appeals and Complaints**

5.14 The College regards appeals and complaints, if substantiated, as opportunities to put things right for the applicant and to learn lessons which might ultimately lead to improved standards. Accordingly, the College Administration will prepare a summary report of admissions appeals and complaints, preserving anonymity, for Faculty each year.