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Introduction

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 (2018).

1. Union College ensures that policies and procedures for application, selection and admission are transparent and accessible.

Up-to-date and accurate information with regard to entrance requirements, application process and Admissions Policy is provided on the college website. Prospective applicants are encouraged to communicate directly with the College.

2. Union College uses fair, reliable and appropriate assessment methods that enables the selection of students with the potential to complete the course successfully.

The Admissions Panel is responsible for making decisions based on the published entrance requirements for each programme. The College processes are subject to review in order to ensure that any exceptions have been made in a fair and equitable way and that the needs of different categories of students have been met. This is part of the annual review of the Admissions Policy itself.

3. Union College removes or reduces unnecessary barriers for prospective students.

The entrance requirements for each programme are clearly described on the college website and the selection criteria are applied so that no unnecessary barriers exist. Students are accepted on the basis of their ability to succeed in the programme.

4. Union College provides information to prospective students that supports them in making informed decisions.

In all recruitment activities, prospective students are given all relevant information that will enable them to make informed decisions.

5. Union College ensures that all staff engaged in the delivery of admissions, recruitment and widening access are appropriately trained and resourced.

The Admissions Panel is responsible for ensuring that all staff involved in recruitment, admissions and widening access are trained in the policies and procedures with regard to these areas, and they are supported in their roles.

6. Union College develops its widening access strategies and policies in line with local and national guidance.

The College is committed to developing and implementing a Widening Access Framework which identifies priority groups and monitors the student population on an annual basis.

1. Context, Governance and Responsibilities

1.1 Union Theological College is a constituent College of the Institute of Theology at Queen's University. As such, all admissions to Queen's University degree programmes are managed by the University's Admissions and Access office. This policy applies to the admission of students to programmes offered by Union Theological College¹. 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 2020-21 and is kept under review and updated to reflect progress in implementing the College's Quality Action Plan.

1.3 The Admissions Policy meets the expectation of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, B2, Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education.²

1.4 The Union College Faculty has overall responsibility for college policy relating to Admissions. A sub-committee (The Admissions Panel) appointed by the Union College Faculty and comprising the Principal, a Head of Department, and administrative staff implements admissions policies and procedures, and reviews the admissions policy and procedures at the end of each admissions cycle. The outcome of this review will be reported to the College Faculty.

1.5 The Admissions Panel are made familiar with related internal and external regulations to ensure that they have the appropriate level of expertise and knowledge to carry out their duties to a high standard.

2. 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 College leaflets and advertisements, the College Handbook, and the College website.

2.3 Every effort is made to ensure that the information we provide 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 The College Office responds to enquiries on how to apply. Details about the acceptability of qualifications and entrance requirements for ministry preparation courses are provided by the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development (DMSD). The College Office and the DMSD can be contacted by telephone, email or post:

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

¹ Union Theological College delivers programmes which lead to awards by The Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI)

² See Appendix for undergirding principles.

3. The Application Process

Ministry Training in PCI

3.1 For those seeking entry into the Ministry Training Pathway for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, applications forms and associated information are available from the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development. Formal applications require supporting references from an applicant's Kirk Session and Presbytery.

3.2 Students are accepted following successful completion of a placement and a formal interview by the Council for Training in Ministry. Those accepted are normally admitted to the appropriate PTFI pathway for ministerial training. Entry to any particular programme is not automatic for PCI ministry students. The programmes offered are not exclusive to PCI ministry students.

3.3 The normal academic requirement for admission to a PTFI award is a degree from a UK Higher Education Provider or an equivalent qualification from outside the UK.

3.4 The closing date for applications is printed on the application form.

Online courses

3.5 The application procedure for online programmes is clearly set out on the course website.³

3.6 The criteria for admissions are clearly explained and international qualification equivalents are provided. 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.

3.7 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.

3.8 The closing date for applications is clearly stated. Applications are considered initially by the Admissions Panel. Final admission decisions are taken by the Union Theological College Faculty. Students are informed promptly of the faculty decision.

Data Protection

3.9 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. Applicant have the right to access any personal data that is being kept about them, subject to a number of exemptions, either on computer

³ For example, <https://institute.biblemesh.com/uniononline/mth-pgdip-reformed-theology/>

or in hard copy. Any person who wishes to exercise this right should make their request in writing to the Bursar.

3.10 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.
- They authorize the College to contact their host institution to ascertain exact marks achieved by them in their undergraduate degrees for the purposes of admission.

Fraudulent Submissions, Statements and Omissions

3.11 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.

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).

4. Selection and Communication of Decisions

Selection Procedures

4.1 Admissions decisions with regard to acceptance as students for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are dealt with by the Council for Training in Ministry and are communicated by the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development in his role as Secretary to the Interviewing Panels.

4.2 Admissions decisions with respect to PTFI programmes are made by the Admissions Panel and reported to Union College Faculty. Selectors make their decisions 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.
- References are used for admission to ministerial training pathways for those who are not students for the ministry of PCI.
- 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.

4.3 The Admissions Panel will aim to make a 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 a decision.

4.4 The Admissions Panel is responsible for conveying official decisions to the applicant.

Applicants with a Disability or Long Term Condition

4.5 The College is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students and actively encourages applications from people with disabilities and long term conditions. An individual's disability or long term condition is not considered prior to an application being considered and has no bearing on the decision.

5. 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.

Feedback

5.2 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

5.3 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.

5.4 First Stage: informal resolution

Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made 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.

5.5 Second Stage: Formal Letter to Principal

An applicant who is dissatisfied with the written explanation should put his/her concerns in writing to the Principal 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 Principal shall undertake such further enquiries as deemed necessary before providing a written response normally within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint.

5.6 Third Stage: Appeal

Any applicant still dissatisfied after the second stage may appeal to the Management Committee within 10 working days of receiving the Principal'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.

5.7 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.

5.8 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.

5.9 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.