



## The University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure Regarding Admissions Fraud

### 1. General principles

- 1.1 The University of Edinburgh is not prepared to admit applicants on the strength of information considered to be fraudulent.
- 1.2 The University reserves the right to:
  - request additional information to verify an application;
  - put the application process on hold whilst investigating an alleged fraudulent application;
  - reject the application if it is proven, or if the University has reasonable belief, that the information provided is false or if the applicant refuses to provide the requested information, whether or not an offer has already been made;
  - request to see a student's original academic transcripts or certificates provided in the admissions application;
  - impose immediate permanent exclusion from the University with no eligibility for re-admittance to the University on any course or degree programme on any student who is found to have gained his/her place at the University on the basis of a fraudulent application.

### 2. Definitions

- 2.1 Definition of fraud (based on the definition adopted by UCAS):

When a person deceives, or conspires with others to deceive, another person or group of persons into believing that a claim made by that person or group is genuine when in fact it is false. For example, this could comprise false information given on an application regarding qualifications or experience, the provision of a fake certificate or reference to support an application, or the deliberate omission of relevant information, e.g. the non-inclusion of information regarding previous qualifications or relevant criminal convictions, or some other act of deception.
- 2.2 **Definition of plagiarism (based on the University of Edinburgh Assessment Regulations):**

Fraud includes plagiarism, the act of copying or including in one's own work, without adequate acknowledgement, intentionally or unintentionally, the work of another (e.g. the internet, or from another applicant).

### 3. Scope

- 3.2 This policy and procedure primarily applies to the admission of students to undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. However, these procedures could also be

applied to the case of a current student if the University has grounds to believe that they obtained their place based on fraudulent information.

- 3.3 This policy and procedure does not cover suspected cheating by registered students. The University of Edinburgh's Undergraduate and Postgraduate Assessment Regulations outline procedures for this:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment>

#### **4. Right of appeal**

- 4.1 Any applicant whose application is cancelled or rejected within the scope of this policy will have the right to appeal against the decision using the University's *Policy and Procedure for Admissions Feedback, Appeals and Complaints*.
- 4.2 Any registered student who has been excluded under the University's *Code of Student Conduct* on the grounds that he/she has gained their place fraudulently will have the right to appeal against the University's decision using the procedure set out in the *Code of Student Conduct*.

#### **5. Data protection**

- 5.1 The University of Edinburgh holds information about everyone who applies to the University and everyone who studies at the University. We use the information provided in an application to administer the admissions process and may share it with UCAS or other bodies for the purposes of verifying the identity, qualifications or references of an applicant and to compile statistics that may be published or passed to government bodies such as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) or the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
- 5.2 If an application is successful we will also use the information to administer studies, to monitor performance and attendance, and to provide student support.
- 5.3 Further information about the University's use of data is available from the University's Data Protection Officer, [data-protection@ed.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ed.ac.uk).

#### **6. Undergraduate procedures for dealing with suspected cases of admissions fraud**

##### **6.1 Plagiarised personal statements**

- 6.1.1 All personal statements supporting applications to higher education processed through UCAS are checked with a similarity detection system. Each incoming personal statement is compared against a library of personal statements already in the UCAS system, and a library of sample statements collected from a variety of websites and other sources, including paper publications. After it has been processed, each new personal statement is added to the library.
- 6.1.2 Any statements showing a potential level of similarity of 10% or greater will be reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service. Institutions will be notified on a daily basis of any cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect collusion. Applicants will also be notified that the UCAS Similarity Detection Service has identified their personal statement as potentially plagiarised. The decision about what action, if any, will be taken regarding notified cases of plagiarism rests with individual institutions.

6.1.3 Further information regarding the UCAS Similarity Detection Service is available at <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-and-track/filling-your-application/fraud-and-similarity>.

## **6.2 Process once notified of potential plagiarism via UCAS**

- 6.2.1 Student Recruitment & Admissions (SRA) will contact the relevant College admissions office regarding the UCAS suspected plagiarism notification.
- 6.2.2 The College admissions office notes on the University admissions system that an allegation of plagiarism has been made. This will ensure that this information is recorded accurately and may later be used when confirming the places of applicants after examination results are known.
- 6.2.3 The application is considered according to normal stated entry requirements.
- 6.2.4 If the application is unsuccessful, no further action should be taken in connection with the alleged plagiarism and the decision is processed in the normal way.
- 6.2.5 The unsuccessful applicant may request feedback on the decision, so it should be recorded with or on the application that suspicion of plagiarism was not a factor in the decision.
- 6.2.6 If it is decided that, according to the standard admissions criteria, an offer would be made, the College admissions office should record:
- A copy of the relevant sections of the personal statement, with alleged plagiarism highlighted. For cases notified by UCAS, this can be obtained from UCAS via a link in the notifying email.
  - Details of the face-value assessment outcome.
  - A note of the relevant deadline for a final decision on the application.
- 6.2.7 The College admissions office then undertakes an initial investigation of the plagiarism allegation, to include a check of the UCAS Similarity Detection report and the University admissions system, to verify if the applicant has applied to the University in a previous cycle, and checks of relevant websites, online forums and chatrooms.
- 6.2.8 The College admissions office reviews the information provided about the plagiarism and, in the light of this information, reaches a decision on whether there is a case to be answered. For example, the alleged plagiarism could merely consist of a number of unfortunate stock phrases, rather than falsifying facts. Advice may be obtained from the Head of Admissions or the College Academic Misconduct Officer.
- 6.2.9 If there is no case to be answered, this will be communicated to the applicant and an offer will be made.
- 6.2.10 If it is decided that there is a case to be answered, then the College admissions office should write to the applicant asking for extra or corroborating information, stating that a final decision on the application cannot be taken without the separate consideration of the suspected plagiarism.
- 6.2.11 The applicant is given 15 days to provide the additional information requested. If the applicant does not provide the information within that period, then the application will be automatically rejected.
- 6.2.12 Once the additional information has been received, the College admissions office will consider the case, taking into account:
- The extent of the plagiarism and significance of the plagiarism allegation, e.g. its material impact upon the admissions decision
  - The degree of intent

- The previous educational background of the applicant
- The academic reference on the UCAS application
- The extent of the applicant's knowledge and understanding of the seriousness of the misconduct
- The nature of the degree programme to which the applicant has applied and the standards of conduct required, particularly where this relates to professional practice.

6.2.13 Having considered the case, the College admissions office may:

- accept that there is no substantive evidence to suggest that plagiarism has occurred and advise the applicant accordingly.
- determine that a *prima face* case of plagiarism has occurred but that it is not sufficiently serious to impact on the selection process. This will be conveyed this to the applicant, and a copy of the University's Guidance for Students on Avoiding Plagiarism will be provided for information:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/PlagiarismStudentGuidance.pdf>

- request that a new personal statement is provided and consider the application on this basis.
- decide not to consider the application further. In such cases this decision will be conveyed to the applicant in writing, and the applicant will be informed of the appeal procedure.

6.2.14 In all cases, irrespective of the outcome, the additional information sought from the applicant will be retained on the applicant's EUCLID record.

### **6.3 Notification from UCAS Verification Unit of suspected fraud**

6.3.1 The UCAS Hunter fraud detection database holds records of all applicants previously referred for investigation, and compares with all new applications. The database flags up if any new application matches, and further investigation is then undertaken, as necessary. UCAS copies the University into any correspondence with applicants that have applied to the University of Edinburgh. If UCAS subsequently decides to suspend or cancel the application, then the University will also be informed. It is also flagged at the point a decision on that application is entered on the University of Edinburgh admissions system.

6.3.2 At any point in the application cycle, if a member of staff suspects that an undergraduate applicant has provided false information, then that application is referred to UCAS for investigation and the Head of Admissions in Student Recruitment & Admissions is informed.

### **6.4 Notification of a fraudulent application**

6.4.1 In such cases, UCAS undertakes all the investigation and makes the decision on whether to cancel the application on the University's behalf. If UCAS decide not to cancel the application, but it is felt that there are still outstanding issues, then the applicant will be asked to provide further information.

### **6.5 Process for verification of qualifications and references**

6.5.1 Most qualifications are confirmed via UCAS, and references are usually submitted direct to UCAS rather than being submitted by the applicant.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A list of those qualifications confirmed by UCAS is available at:

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-and-track/results/sending-exam-results>

- 6.5.2 If the level 3+ qualifications are not verified by UCAS and/or there is concern that the applicant has supplied a fraudulent reference, the College Admissions Office will write to the applicant to request verification of their qualifications and/or write to the referee to request confirmation of the reference sent by the applicant before the applicant is allowed to register.
- 6.5.3 If, following investigation, the decision is that there is no case to be answered, this will be communicated to the applicant by the College admissions office and the application will be considered against the standard admissions criteria.
- 6.5.4 If, following investigation, there is evidence to suggest that the application contains fraudulent information, the application will be automatically rejected, whether or not an offer has already been made. The applicant will be informed in writing by the College admissions office.
- 6.5.5 If a student has already registered at the University and, following investigation, there is evidence that they have gained their place through a fraudulent application, the student will be subject to the disciplinary processes set out in the University of Edinburgh *Code of Student Conduct*:  
<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/StudentCodeofConduct.pdf>
- 6.5.6 Relevant details of cases of fraud will be held by SRA for monitoring and reporting purposes and to inform future consideration of cases of suspected fraud.

## **6.6 Process for the verification of identity at interview**

- 6.6.1 Any applicant invited to attend an interview as part of the admissions process may be asked to provide photographic identification to verify his or her identity.

## **7 Procedures for dealing with suspected cases of admissions fraud from postgraduate or visiting students**

### **7.1 Identification of suspected fraud during the admissions process**

- 7.1.1 Applications for postgraduate and visiting student programmes are made directly to the University, and are considered and processed by the relevant College or School, or by the College Visiting Student Office. The relevant College, School or Visiting Student Office is responsible for assessing the validity of documents supporting an application for postgraduate study.
- 7.1.2 Electronic copies of all supporting documents, such as transcripts and degree certificates, are required as part of the postgraduate admissions and visiting student process. These are checked by admissions staff for signs of fraud. The University reserves the right to ask applicants to provide paper copies of supporting documents if required.
- 7.1.3 Where an English language qualification such as IELTS, TOEFL or PTE is required, the validity of these qualifications will be verified directly with the awarding body.
- 7.1.4 All cases of suspected fraud should be referred to the relevant College office for further investigation.
- 7.1.5 It is essential that any case of suspected fraud is investigated promptly to maintain the integrity of the admissions process.
- 7.1.6 While a case of suspected fraud is being investigated, the application should be put on hold and an explanatory note should be added to the notes field of the EUCLID record. No further correspondence should be entered into with the applicant, no offer should be made to the applicant, and no information regarding visa sponsorship should be provided, until the

investigation is complete, and only then if it is found that there is no evidence of admissions fraud.

- 7.1.7 Student Recruitment & Admissions (SRA) should be informed of all cases of suspected fraud. Advice regarding the investigation of fraud may be sought from SRA at any stage in the process.

## **7.2 Process of investigation of suspected fraud**

- 7.2.1 The process of investigation may vary according to the nature of the suspected fraud. However, it may include:

- Requesting the student for further information to verify their application
- Requesting certified copies of supporting documents if not already received
- Seeking confirmation from a third party, such as an awarding institution to confirm the applicant's grades or attendance
- In the case of visiting students, contacting the applicant's home institution for verification of documentation, applicant's grades, attendance, etc.
- Contacting the referee to confirm information provided or to check authenticity

- 7.2.2 Following investigation, if parts of the application cannot be verified, the applicant should be informed in writing and given the opportunity to provide further supporting information. The applicant should be given 15 days to respond to this request.

- 7.2.3 If no response is received by the end of the 15 working day period, the application will be automatically rejected, whether or not an offer has already been made, and the applicant will be informed in writing of this outcome by the College postgraduate office or the College Visiting Student Office.

- 7.2.4 If a response is received within the 15 working day period, the College office should refer the case to SRA to provide an independent assessment (providing the application and any relevant correspondence or documents). A course of action will be agreed in discussion with the College office.

- 7.2.5 If the decision is that there is no case to be answered, this will be communicated to the applicant by the College postgraduate office or the College Visiting Student Office, and the application will be considered against the standard admissions criteria.

- 7.2.6 On completion of the investigation, if there is evidence to suggest that the application contains fraudulent information, the application will be automatically rejected, whether or not an offer has already been made. The applicant will be informed in writing by the College postgraduate office or the College Visiting Student Office.

- 7.2.7 If a student has already registered at the University and, following investigation, there is evidence that they have gained their place through a fraudulent application, the student will be subject to the disciplinary processes set out in the University of Edinburgh *Code of Student Conduct*:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/StudentCodeofConduct.pdf>

- 7.2.7 Relevant details of cases of fraud will be held by SRA for monitoring and reporting purposes and to inform future consideration of cases of suspected fraud.

## **8 Anti-fraud checks post-registration**

- 8.1 The University may, at any time, request to examine the original documents used by a current registered student in support of their application to study at the University. Such documents may include transcripts, qualification certificates and passports.
- 8.2 Such a request does not necessarily indicate that the University suspects the student to have used fraudulent documents to obtain entry to the University, and is part of the University's standard anti-fraud procedures.
- 8.3 If a student is required to present these original documents, they must do so. The student will be given a minimum of five working days to present the documents, and will be informed when and where these should be presented. This will normally be the relevant College admissions office or postgraduate office.
- 8.4 The receiving office may retain the documents for up to three working days in order to conduct anti-fraud checks. The office will provide the student with a receipt indicating which original documents have been provided.
- 8.5 All original documents will be stored securely in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/records-management-section>
- 8.6 Anti-fraud checks of original documents will be carried out by appropriately trained staff.

## **9 Training**

- 9.1 Colleges are responsible for ensuring that admissions staff are appropriately trained in the implementation of these procedures and the identification of fraudulent applications.
- 9.2 Student Recruitment & Admissions, in consultation with the International Office, will organise appropriate training and briefing sessions for admissions staff to enhance and support College training provision.
- 9.3 The International Office will provide the Colleges with intelligence regarding trends in international admissions fraud as and when it becomes available, for dissemination to admissions staff.

## **10 Reporting & Monitoring**

- 10.1 College undergraduate and postgraduate offices will inform the Policy and Project Manager in Student Recruitment & Admissions of any cases of suspected fraud they have dealt with, together with the outcome. This can be done by individual email following an incident, or cases can be collated and submitted annually no later than 31 August each year.
- 10.2 Student Recruitment & Admissions will keep a record of fraud cases, and will monitor levels of fraudulent activity and associated outcomes. Student Recruitment & Admissions will report to the Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group on an annual basis.

Introduced August 2012

Revised June 2016

## Appendix 1

### Template letters/emails regarding suspected plagiarism in undergraduate applications

#### 1a: Request for further information from an undergraduate applicant

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN/UCAS number**

**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

The University of Edinburgh has been alerted by UCAS to similarities between the personal statement submitted by you as part of your application and others held in the UCAS similarity detection system.

In accordance with the University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>), I have carried out an initial investigation and am satisfied that there is a case for you to answer.

I am now writing to request any information you can provide that explains either:

- that the personal statement you submitted is your own work and was not copied from another source

or

- why your personal statement is not your own work.

Please provide any evidence you can to support your case. This will then be considered by the College admissions office before a decision is made on the outcome of your application.

Information must be submitted to me in writing, by email or by letter. In order for it to be considered, I must receive this information within 15 days of the date of this letter, i.e. by **<DD-MM-YYYY>**. If I have not received the information by this date your application will be automatically rejected. I must also advise you that, in line with UCAS regulations, the University reserves the right to reject an application, whether or not an offer has already been made, where it is found that an applicant has submitted incorrect information as part of the application.

I look forward to receiving information from you shortly. In the meantime, if you have any queries about the content of this letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**1b: notification of successful application post-consideration of evidence from the applicant**

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN/UCAS number**

**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

Following the submission of information by you and in accordance with the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud* (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>), further consideration has been given to the alleged **<fraud/plagiarism>** present in your application.

I am pleased to inform you that, after careful consideration of the evidence, the University has decided to offer you a place on the above degree programme. You will shortly receive confirmation of this offer via UCAS Track.

I enclose a copy of the University of Edinburgh Guidance for Students on Avoiding Plagiarism, for your information.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

**Letter 1c: notification of unsuccessful application post-consideration of evidence from the applicant**

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN/UCAS number**  
**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

Following the submission of information by you and in accordance with the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud* (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>), further consideration has been given to the alleged **<fraud/plagiarism>** present in your application.

After careful consideration of the evidence, it has been decided that the University will not consider your application further. You will shortly receive confirmation via UCAS Track that your application has been unsuccessful.

You may appeal this decision according to the process defined by the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure for Admissions Feedback, Appeals and Complaints*:  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>

Yours sincerely,

## Appendix 2: template letters regarding suspected fraud in postgraduate applications

### 2a: Letter requesting information from an applicant to assist with the investigation of potential fraud

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN**  
**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

The University of Edinburgh has reason to believe that parts of your application may be considered fraudulent under the terms of the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud* (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>). These concerns relate to:

*[delete or add additional items as necessary]*

- Plagiarised personal statement
- False reference(s)
- Fraudulent qualification certificates
- Omission of relevant information (e.g. criminal convictions)

*[insert a paragraph here to explain to the applicant what the specific concern is with their application, so that they know what they need to address in the information they supply]*

Your application has been put on hold while we investigate this further.

We would like to give you this opportunity to provide any evidence you can to demonstrate that your application is not fraudulent. Any information you provide will be considered by College postgraduate office before a decision is made on the outcome of your application.

Information must be submitted to me in writing, by email or by letter. In order for it to be considered, I must receive this information within 15 days of the date of this letter, i.e. by **<DD-MM-YYYY>**.

I must advise you that the University reserves the right to reject an application, whether or not an offer has already been made, where it is found that an applicant has submitted incorrect information as part of the application.

Yours sincerely,

**Letter B: notification of successful application post-investigation of suspected fraud**

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN**

**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

Following the submission of information by you and in accordance with the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud* (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>), we have completed our investigation into possible fraud in your application.

I am pleased to inform you that, after careful consideration of the evidence, the University has decided to offer you a place on the above degree programme. You will shortly receive confirmation of this offer in your MyEd portal.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

**Letter C: notification of unsuccessful application post-investigation of suspected fraud**

Dear <Applicant name>

**UUN**

**Application for <Programme title>**

I am writing to you regarding your application to the above programme.

Following the submission of information by you and in accordance with the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure regarding Admissions Fraud* (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>), further consideration has been given to the alleged fraud in your application.

After careful consideration of the evidence, it has been decided that the University will not consider your application further. You will shortly receive confirmation via your MyEd portal that your application has been unsuccessful.

You may appeal this decision according to the process defined by the *University of Edinburgh Policy and Procedure for Admissions Feedback, Appeals and Complaints*:  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-advice/admissions-policy/policies>

Yours sincerely,