



Student recruitment and admissions

Policy No.	SRA-012	Version:	002				
.Title	Policy for undergraduate applications from adult returners to higher education						
Description	How the University manages applications from mature students and adults returning to education after a gap in their formal studies who have not yet obtained a degree.						
Dates							
First approved:	01/09/2004	Last approved:	26/09/2023	Active from:	01/10/2023	Equality impact assessment:	2023
Last reviewed:	05/09/2023	Last amended:		05/09/2023	Next review:		01/04/2026
UK quality code:	Core practices: The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.			Legal/regulatory-driven		No	
Purpose							
This policy aims to establish clear principles for managing applications to the University of Edinburgh from mature students and adult returners who wish to pursue higher education. These applicants face unique challenges when it comes to accessing university education. This policy recognises the importance of ensuring that these students have an equitable opportunity to apply and succeed at the University of Edinburgh.							
Scope						Mandatory	
The policy covers anyone applying to an undergraduate programme at the University of Edinburgh who has had a gap in their formal education of at least three years or is aged 21 or over. The policy is enacted by the College admissions teams.							
Consultation carried out							
College admissions practitioners, SRA stakeholders							
Responsibilities							
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Approving body:	Student Recruitment and Fees Strategy Group						
Related policies:	The University of Edinburgh Admissions Policy; Recognition of Prior Learning Policy						
Policies superseded:	None						
Keywords:	Mature student; adult returner; admissions						



Policy for undergraduate applications from adult returners to higher education

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To set out principles and procedures for the management of applications for admission to the University of Edinburgh from mature students and adult returners to higher education.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to anyone applying to an undergraduate programme at the University of Edinburgh who has had a gap in their formal education of at least three years or is aged 21 or over.

3. Abbreviations

- GCE: General Certificate of Education
- HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency
- HNC/HND Higher National qualifications
- SFC: Scottish Funding Council
- SQA: Scottish Qualifications Authority
- SRA: Student Recruitment and Admissions
- SWAP: Scottish Wider Access Programme
- UCAS: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

4. Definitions

- 4.1. **Adult returner:** a student who has had a continuous gap of at least three years at some point in their formal education, and who has not already gained a degree.
- 4.2. **Mature applicant:** an applicant who will be aged 21 or over at the start of their undergraduate degree programme (as defined for [HESA](#) returns).
- 4.3. **Non-standard qualification:** a type of assessed educational achievement that differs from those most commonly considered in university admissions, such as Scottish Highers or A-levels. These can include vocational diplomas or international qualifications and are evaluated individually to determine if they meet admission requirements.

5. Background

- 5.1. The University of Edinburgh welcomes applications from students returning to education after an absence of at least three years. Many of these applicants will be defined as mature students, however, the University recognises that not all mature students will be defined as adult returners. In addition, some adult returners may be under 21 years of age.
- 5.2. Adult returners and mature students will be applying to the University from a range of backgrounds, with a variety of different qualifications and having had very different life experiences before their application. The University values the contribution that such students make to the diversity of the student community.
- 5.3. Where there are more qualified applicants for an undergraduate programme than there are places available, priority will normally be given to applicants who are applying to study for their first degree, except for courses where there is an established graduate entry route, for example, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Law. Other graduate entry routes are published on the appropriate pages of the [degree finder](#).

6. Policy detail

6.1. Adult Returners

6.1.1. Adult returners of any age will be expected to provide evidence of recent relevant academic studies. Depending on the specific programme applied for, this will normally have been within two or three years of their anticipated date of entry to the University. Applicants are advised to discuss the requirements for any individual programme with the appropriate admissions office before application. Applicants for part-time study on the [Access Programme](#) should check the website for further information, as requirements may differ.

6.1.2. Adult returners who meet the University's entry requirements for the course to which they are applying, including evidence of [English proficiency](#), will be entered into the selection process, though this does not guarantee an offer of a place will be made. Adult returners may demonstrate that they meet the academic entry requirements through qualifications other than SQA Highers/Advanced Highers or GCE A-Levels. These might include:

- Higher National qualifications (HNC/HND)
- Approved Access courses
- Participation in a recognised widening participation programme such as the [SWAP](#)
- Relevant professional qualifications
- Open University modules
- Approved foundation programmes

6.1.3. Adult returners wishing to determine which qualifications and grade requirements are appropriate for entry to their preferred programme are advised to first refer to College webpages for lists of accepted adult returner qualifications and following this contact the [Enquiries Team](#).

6.1.4. Recent relevant non-academic experience may be taken into consideration alongside academic qualifications for some specific courses. Adult returners who believe that they have experience which is relevant to their application should discuss this with the appropriate admissions office before applying.

6.1.5. Where an application from an adult returner is based on non-standard qualifications or non-academic experience, the University may require further evidence to assess both academic potential and the relevance of life/work experience, e.g. sample written work, an interview, a test or assessment, or an additional reference provided.

6.1.6. No applicant is guaranteed to receive an offer from the University of Edinburgh. However, the University recognises that applicants have different backgrounds and experiences and that they do not all have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential. An adult returner whose application includes evidence of disruption or disadvantage during the education process will have their application considered in that context and may receive an offer reflective of the disadvantage through a [widening access](#) route.

6.2. Mature applicants

The University of Edinburgh recognises that mature students may require support through the application process and when they join the University. The College admissions offices are happy to offer advice at the early application stage and there is further guidance available in the [mature students](#) section on our website. There are also teams within some departmental teaching organisations equipped to assist with this.

7. Data protection

7.1. The University of Edinburgh holds information about everyone who applies and studies at the institution. Information supplied as part of an application is used to administer the admissions process and may be shared with UCAS or other bodies to verify the identity, qualifications or references of an applicant. Information may also be used in an anonymised form for statistical purposes, which may be subsequently published or passed to government bodies such as the SFC or HESA to guide policy and funding allocation.

7.2. Information held on successful applicants will be additionally used to administer studies, monitor performance and attendance, and provide student support. Further information about the University's use of data is available from the University's [Data Protection Officer](#).

8. Reporting and monitoring

8.1. The University reports to HESA annually on the number of mature students (defined as those aged 21 or over at the start of their studies).

9. Responsibilities

- SRA team [maintains and reviews the policy]
- Student Recruitment and Fees Strategy Group [Reviews and authorises proposed changes to policy]
- College undergraduate offices [Administer the policy and provide feedback to the SRA team]

10. Related policies

- Policy for admission to the University of Edinburgh
- Policy for recognition of prior learning

11. Policy version history

- Policy approved: April 2014
- Policy reviewed: July 2015, no changes
- Policy reviewed: November 2019, no changes
- Policy reviewed: September 2023, [cover sheet and minor changes to structure and clarity rather than content]