

Admissions Policy

CATEGORY	Policy
AREA	Curriculum Delivery
PURPOSE	This policy ensures that the College operates a fair, transparent, and inclusive admissions process that aligns with legal obligations, safeguarding responsibilities, and sector best practice. It supports the recruitment of students to appropriate programmes based on merit, while upholding standards related to criminal convictions, fitness to practise or study, and the right to appeal admissions decisions
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Admissions Policy

1. Policy Statement

Northern Regional College is committed to a fair, transparent, inclusive, and legally compliant admissions process. This policy ensures that all applicants are treated equitably and that decisions are made in accordance with published criteria, safeguarding responsibilities, and relevant legislation.

The College aims to:

- Recruit students with integrity, based on aspirations, qualifications, and experience.
- Widen access in line with the Department for the Economy (DfE) Widening Access and Participation guidance.
- Ensure compliance with Consumer Markets Authority (CMA) guidance on admissions and enrolment.
- Promote equality of opportunity in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- Uphold safeguarding and professional standards through appropriate checks and risk assessments.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all applicants seeking admission to:

- Further Education (FE)
- Higher Education (HE)
- Work-Based Learning (WBL)
- Professional qualifications

It covers application, selection, conditional offers, enrolment, and appeals.

3. Definitions

- **Admissions Appeal:** A formal process for challenging an admissions decision.
- **Applicant:** An individual who has submitted an application to study at the College.
- **Conditional Offer:** An offer subject to meeting specified entry criteria.
- **Criminal Convictions Disclosure:** A safeguarding process for assessing risk related to declared convictions.
- **Direct Enrolment:** Admission to a course without a formal application process.
- **Fitness to Practise/Study:** A process to ensure students are suitable for courses leading to professional practice.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** Assessment of existing knowledge and skills against course requirements.
- **Section 75 Characteristics:** Protected equality grounds under NI legislation.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

To ensure the integrity, fairness, and compliance of the admissions process, the following roles are defined:

4.1. Curriculum Director:

- Holds strategic accountability for the College admissions.
- Oversees decisions on course capacity, oversubscription, and cancellations.
- Ensures alignment with sectoral guidance, including DfE, CMA, and awarding body standards.

4.2. Head of Student Experience

- Leads operational management of the admissions process across all campuses.
- Monitors quality assurance, consistency, and compliance with the admissions policy and associated procedures.
- Oversees safeguarding checks, including criminal convictions disclosures and fitness to practise/study assessments.
- Coordinates appeals and feedback mechanisms in collaboration with the Admissions Team.

4.3. Curriculum Management Team

- Develops and signs off selection criteria for each programme annually.
- Approves course-specific entry criteria, including any enhanced or exceptional requirements.
- Scheduled application reviews dates, interview windows, and pre-entry sessions.
- Ensures decisions are evidence-based and free from bias or discrimination.
- Supports the implementation of inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments.

4.4. Admissions Team

- Administers the end-to-end application process, including portal management, communications, and document verification.
- Maintains accurate records in line with GDPR and the College's Retention and Disposal Schedule.
- Flags applications requiring safeguarding or fitness to practise/study review.
- Provides applicants with timely updates, feedback, and guidance on next steps.

4.5. Lecturing Staff / Course Teams

- Conduct interviews, auditions, and portfolio reviews where applicable.
- Provide input on applicant suitability based on course-specific requirements.
- Participate in pre-entry advice sessions and contribute to fair selection decisions.

4.6. Applicants

- Responsible for submitting accurate and complete applications, including supporting evidence.

- Must engage with all required stages of the admissions process (e.g. interviews, advice sessions).
- Must disclose any relevant criminal convictions and participate in risk assessments if required.
- May request feedback or submit an appeal if dissatisfied with an admissions decision.

5. Admissions Principles

- 5.1. **Equality and Inclusion** All applications will be considered equitably without regard to any inappropriate distinction e.g., Section 75 characteristics such as age, ethnic origin, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender, religious or political beliefs, marital status, care experience and/or socio-economic background. Decisions about eligibility for a course will be made objectively and without discrimination. Staff will not venture outside of the agreed processes for reviewing applicant suitability for a course and in the issuing of any offers.
- 5.2. **Merit-Based Selection:** All applications are assessed on merit, using the information provided in the application form and supporting documentation. The College reserves the right to review previous academic records and engagement history to assess suitability.
- 5.3. **Evidence Submission:** Applications are considered based on the information and evidence required and submitted (e.g. photographic ID, prior qualifications, health declarations, employer forms) by the advertised deadlines. Failure to do so may result in delayed processing or withdrawal of the application
- 5.4. **Pre-Entry Engagement** For all full time and substantial part time FE, HE and WBL programmes, a pre-entry advice session will be offered, and for many courses, will be mandatory. Failure to attend a mandatory pre-entry advice session without reasonable notice may impact on an applicant's place in the recruitment process. The College reserves the right to reallocate priority based on a lack of communication or engagement in the College recruitment process from any applicant.
- 5.5. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** The College recognises applications from applicants with non-accredited work and/or life experience. As such, RPL may be used to assess whether an applicant meets the entry requirements/learning outcomes of a course through prior experience or qualifications. RPL assessments are subject to the same quality assurance processes as standard assessments.
- 5.6. **Fee and Funding Confirmation:** All courses have a fee assigned to them, and a fee assessment will determine if an applicant is entitled to fee remission or exemption. Applicants must evidence that they have means to pay for the course where appropriate. This may mean payment in full, evidence of an application for funding, or an agreement to pay fees in instalments. Offers made may include payment as part of the conditions of enrolment.

- 5.7. **Safeguarding and Suitability:** The College has a duty to ensure applicants are suitable for their chosen programme, particularly where professional practice is involved. This includes consideration of criminal convictions and fitness to practise/study. Decisions will be made in line with safeguarding legislation and the College's duty of care.
- Applicants with declared criminal convictions are subject to a pre-entry risk assessment under the [Student Criminal Convictions Disclosure Policy](#). The College will assess whether the applicant poses a risk to others or is unsuitable for the chosen programme.
- Applicants to programmes leading to professional practice (e.g. health, social care, education) must meet the standards outlined in the [Fitness to Practise and Study Policy](#). The College may refuse admission if there is evidence that the applicant is not suited to the demands of the course and/or the responsibilities of the profession.
- Please note that if an occupational health check is required as part of course admission, this must be sourced and funded by the student.
- 5.8. **Transparency and Consistency:** Selection criteria are published annually on the College website and in the prospectus. These are approved by the Curriculum Management Team and applied consistently across all applicants.

6. Qualifications on Entry

The College advertises entry criteria for courses on the website and within the online prospectus and it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure they meet the entry criteria prior to enrolment. Entry requirements must be met prior to enrolment and conditional offers will be based on eligibility against these advertised qualifications.

Any applicant who has applied for a Level 2 or Level 3 vocational study programme will be enrolled on Essential Skills or GCSE Maths or English as part of their programme of study. This is only in instances where it has been approved for an applicant to be enrolled on a vocational programme without these qualifications as a prerequisite. Enrolment on Essential Skills or GCSE Maths and English is mandatory, and no student will be enrolled onto a Level 2 or L3 full time vocational programme without this. If an applicant declines this at the enrolment stage, their application to the full study programme will be withdrawn and the waiting list will be accessed to offer the next available space to a student.

The College delivers and assesses all qualifications in English, and as such, an appropriate level of English is a prerequisite for all courses, apart from those aimed at non-English speakers i.e., ESOL. Progression from ESOL through to full-time L2 and L3 vocational programmes is possible, and further information can be gained from the ESOL section of the College prospectus.

Where English is not an applicant's first language, they may be required to undergo an assessment of their English verbal and written skills prior to enrolment

If an applicant presents with international qualification/s, they can access the services of the College Careers Team for a 'Statement of Comparability' that will be suitable to demonstrate they can meet the course entry requirements for study at Northern Regional College. Email careers@nrc.ac.uk

7. Non-Admission

The College reserves the right to refuse admission to the following:

- a) The applicant does not meet the published entry criteria.
- b) The applicant has previously been excluded from the College or a partner institution.
- c) There is evidence of poor engagement or failure to complete previous studies.
- d) The applicant fails to attend required pre-entry sessions without valid reason.
- e) The applicant has outstanding debts to the College.
- f) Reasonable adjustments cannot be made to support the applicant's participation.
- g) The applicant has already attained a qualification at the same or higher level without a clear rationale for re-entry.
- h) The applicant poses a safeguarding risk or fails a criminal convictions risk assessment.
- i) The applicant is deemed unsuitable under the College's Fitness to Practise/Study Policy.

The College will only accept applications from those who meet all the eligibility criteria as listed by the Awarding Organisation, including age, qualifications, and/or experience. (For example, a course where students require 2 GCSEs)

Applicants must be at least 16 years of age on or before 1 July in the year of proposed entry to the course. If you have recently completed year 12 (or Rest of UK equivalent) in England, Scotland or Wales and will be 16 on or before 31st August and wish to be considered for college entry, please contact admissions.

The College will not accept applications from applicants who are in secure accommodation at the point of entry. However, should a current student be placed in a Secure Environment while they are a student at the College, we will make every effort to accommodate their learning, to sit exams and/or submit assignments.

The College does not currently hold a Tier 4 licence issued by the Home Office and is consequently unable to enrol International Students. For non-UK citizens who apply, the College is required to check their eligibility to study in the UK.

8. Oversubscription

If more applicants for a course meet the entry criteria than places available on the course, this Admissions Policy must be adhered to. Applicants must not be turned away from courses, and no course is full until deemed so by the Curriculum Director at the 4pm daily enrolment meetings.

If an additional cohort cannot be offered to deal with the increased demand, places will be allocated in order of the criteria which is:

1. Course listed as first preference.
2. Date of application.
3. Attendance at the first available interview and/or information session if required.
4. Upload of any evidence required by the advertised dates e.g. photographic ID, prior achievement, employer response form, vision verification form, as requested by the publicised date and in any communication issued.
5. Previous College student or a student from a partner school.

Enhanced entry criteria must only be used by exception and in agreement with the Curriculum Director. It must be applied alongside the above criteria and all applicants treated in a fair and equitable manner

9. Waiting List

A waiting list will be available in instances where offers exceed the number of advertised places on a course

10. Course Cancellation

The College reserves the right to cancel courses at any time prior to the enrolment period commencing, and in some instances, cancellation may take place after enrolment has commenced. Courses may be cancelled prior to or after enrolment due to low demand or strategic changes.

In all instances of course cancellation, the College will inform applicants as soon as possible and will make every effort to reassign the applicant to an alternative suitable course.

All course cancellations will be approved by the Curriculum Director prior to any communication being issued to applicants.

11. Safeguarding

The College will adhere to the FE Sectoral Safeguarding, Care and Welfare policy in relation to all applications. This policy can be accessed [here](#).

12. Admissions Feedback and Appeals Procedure

The College is committed to fair, transparent and consistent admissions practices and believes that providing constructive feedback about an unsuccessful application will help an applicant to achieve a successful outcome in the future.

The College will therefore provide feedback, when requested, to anyone whose application to study at the College has been unsuccessful.

Applicants have the right to appeal an admissions decision if there are sufficient grounds (e.g. procedural error, bias, or new evidence). Appeals are managed under the [Admissions Feedback and Appeals Procedure](#), which outlines the process and timelines

13. Quality Assurance

Comments and complaints regarding this document will be handled through the College's comments and complaints mechanisms. For more information, please access the [Complaints Policy](#). If you have a comment or complaint, or require further information regarding the process, please e-mail quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk.

14. Monitoring and Review of this Policy

This Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subject to a full review at least every two years. It may also be updated if changes or improvements in processes or procedures are identified.

In monitoring and reviewing this policy/strategy, the following will be taken into consideration:

- feedback regarding the content and format of the policy/strategy;
- uptake and usage;
- comments or complaints regarding the policy/strategy;

15. Links to other Documents

15.1. Internal Documents:

- [Admissions Policy](#)
- [Admissions Feedback and Appeals Procedure](#).
- [Fitness to Practice/Study Policy](#)
- [Retention and Disposal Schedule](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)

- [SLDD Policy](#)
- [Student Criminal Convictions Policy](#)
- [Student Equal Opportunities Policy](#)
- [Terms and Conditions](#)

16. Appendix 1 - Applications – How to apply timeline

Step 1

- Find the course you are applying to and select "Add course to basket" and apply now.
- You will be redirected to the [admissions portal](#).

Step 2

- Create an account using a personal email address and password
- If you are a current or past Northern Regional College student, please add in your current student ID number when prompted.
- Enter your qualifications
- Evidence upload - upload supporting documents for your application in the evidence section, for example, photographic ID, exam certificates and references.
- Review and submit. The application confirmation page will then be displayed.
- You must select a preference for each course eg 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th choice.
- You will receive an automatic response by email confirming your application, please check your spam and junk folders.
- Please also check your online account regularly for updates and correspondence about your application.

Step 3

- Your application will be reviewed on the following dates by the Curriculum Area Manager or delegated to the Curriculum Teaching Team:

Application Review Dates

19 January
2 February and 16 February
2 March, 16 March and 23 March
13 April and 27 April
11 May and 26 May
8 June and 22 June
10 August

You will receive an email communication from the College within 5 working days of each of these dates to update you on the progress of your application. You may be contacted outside of these dates if you are outstanding any information required to process your application. Please submit outstanding information as soon as possible otherwise your application may be delayed.

- You may be invited to an information event which may be held on campus or online. For apprenticeships, you may have to complete an aptitude test.

- You may be made a conditional offer which is subject to you meeting the specified entry requirements and any other criteria. If a course is oversubscribed, enhanced criteria may be applied which will be published in advance.
 - **Note: a conditional offer does not guarantee you a place on the course.**
 - If you have been made a conditional offer, you will be sent instructions on how to upload any evidence required and enrol.
 - You may be invited to make a payment to secure your place, pending availability
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Step 4

Enrolment

- Once you receive your results you can enrol online from home. Further details will be sent via email, text or postcard.
- If you need help to enrol online, please contact any campus reception and we will assist with this.
- If you have not met the conditions of your offer, the College will assist you in finding another suitable course. If you change your mind, you can withdraw your application at any time.

17. Appendix 2 - Pre-entry Information sessions / Interviews / Auditions

Despite impressing with your application, the Curriculum team may still want to meet you before making an offer - give yourself the best chance of securing your place by discovering how to prepare for a Northern Regional College interview

What to expect

Interviews, information sessions and auditions are sometimes used by lecturing staff towards the end of the College application process as a means of comparing applicants with a good chance of being offered places on their courses.

They're more likely to be held for creative or care-related programmes, as well as for entry into many of the Work Based Learning courses.

While the form and length of the interview will vary between College Departments, most are based on a discussion with the course lecturer.

For some courses, you may need to bring along a portfolio showing examples of your best work. This usually only applies to courses in the arts, but those wishing to study Performing Arts may be required to perform an audition piece. This can happen in person or you may be asked to submit an audition piece directly to the lecturer.

The interviewer will want to maintain an element of surprise with regards to the interview - but they should at least let you know in advance if you'll be expected to complete a task.

How to prepare for a College interview / audition / information session

In advance of your interview, it's important to prepare properly. You can do this by:

- sorting out your travel arrangements in plenty of time
- finding out exactly where the interview / audition information session will take place
- ensuring your laptop and webcam are all set up and working correctly - if your interview is being held online
- thinking carefully about why you've chosen this course, making notes from your application
- planning questions to ask the College interviewer
- thoroughly researching the course and the College
- ensuring you're up to date with current affairs relating to your subject
- carrying out a mock interview with a careers adviser or teacher to see how well you perform under pressure and to ensure you're adopting the right body language

If you're wondering how to get the most out of the interview experience, we offer the following pointers:

- **Decide if this is where you want to study**
- **Be prepared for group discussions**
- **Showcase your skills**