Deliverable: Hiring and Admissions Policies

This is what was found by the CREEM Pod at the University of St Andrews Department of Mathematics and Statistics on Hiring and Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve. This deliverable is divided into four sections to address four types of recruitment: undergraduate, post-graduate taught, post-graduate research, and staff hiring.

Undergraduate Admissions

Audit of public-facing information about undergraduate admissions

- [https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/mathematics/mathematics-bsc/](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/mathematics/mathematics-bsc/)
- “Decisions are primarily based on mathematical ability and potential, as demonstrated by school qualifications and position in class or year.”
- Applications are primarily submitted via UCAS, with additional options available for international students
- Standard grades are required for most students, with minimum entry grades required for widening access students (indicator tool available here: [https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/entry/indicator](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/entry/indicator))
- SQA Standard entry grades: AAAAB, including A in Mathematics
- SQA Minimum entry grades: AABB, including A in Mathematics
- GCE A-Levels Minimum entry grades: A*AB, including A* in Mathematics
- IB Standard entry grades: 38 (HL 6,6,6), including HL6 in Mathematics
- IB Minimum entry grades: 36 (HL 6,5,5), including HL6 in Mathematics
- For students who don’t meet the above requirements but meet additional contextual criteria, the Gateway to Science program offers a supported transition program: [https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/gateway-to-science/](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/gateway-to-science/)

URGE Summary Questions – UG

- What EEO statement is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement?
There is an “access and outreach” section of the admissions website (https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/access/) with information about supported pathways.

The above website contains statements like “going to university is a highly rewarding experience and one that everyone should have the opportunity to do” and “the University works hard to make entry into higher education more transparent and fairer.”

There is also information on this website about contextual admissions: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/subjects/entry/contextual-admissions/ which says “the University, as a condition of grant, is required to engage in national inclusion agendas, including Scottish Government initiatives on widening access.” Note that the collection and use of contextual information appears to apply only to “applicants permanently domiciled or seeking asylum in the UK at the point of application, and who have been educated in the UK secondary school system.”

Quantiatively, the focus of “widening access” seems to be on increasing the representation of British students from lower-income areas and state schools.

- Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for admissions?
  - Unclear whether material is sent directly to prospective students or to schools. The website https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/meet-us/ has information about meeting University representatives, including current students (currently remote) as well as information for potential applicants from specific countries.
  - Also unclear to what degree the University as a whole versus specific departments engage in recruitment – this is a question for the M&S admissions officers.

- What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?
  - See above for specific requirements. It’s unclear to us whether the (secondary) school or the student is responsible for the cost of exams.

- How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?
- Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?
- Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
  - These are all questions we will pose to the M&S admissions officers.
Questions for the Admissions Co-Directors: Colva Roney-Dougal, Louise Theran

- EKJ contacted CRD with questions on 09/04/2021, meeting scheduled for 16/04/2021
- Q: Does the School actively recruit undergraduate students? If so, where and how?
- Q: How is the personal statement used to make admissions decisions?
- Q: Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who (if anyone) interacts with the applicants?
- Q: How does the School admissions policy and process contextualize the ways in which exam scores can be indicative of gender, race, and class rather than capability (see figure below for example using gender; we couldn’t find data for race)? (Note that contextual info is flagged centrally according to this policy: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/policy/contextual-data/)
- Q: Has the admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the relationship between University and Departmental admissions? What is the process for changing admissions policies?
- Q: If applicable, have any changes to admissions process been proposed or enacted recently in order to increase the diversity of the Undergraduate student body? If yes, have any particular actions been successful or unsuccessful?

![Figure 1: A level results for students in England. The horizontal axis indicates the line above which male students outperform female students at achievement of A/A* grades. The vertical axis indicates the line to the right of which more than half of students are male.](image)

Recommendations

- TBD
Post-Graduate (MSc) Admissions

Audit of public-facing information about post-graduate taught admissions

- Required: good 2.1 undergraduate Honours degree in mathematics
- For US applicants, 3.2 or above (based on a 4.0 grade point average GPA scale)
- Application: CV, personal statement (optional), two “original signed” references, academic transcripts and degree certificates, evidence of English language proficiency (if English is not first language)

URGE Summary Questions – PG

- What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?
  - For postgraduate research programme: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/apply/postgraduate/research/
  - CV, cover letter/personal statement, academic transcripts and two academic reference letters.
  - They are all barriers but all necessary. Similar requirements for all. There is a possibility of discretion in some cases i.e. accept professional references instead of academic if for example the applicant was working prior to the application. There are different grades requirements for different countries. Also there are different grade requirements within a country for different Institutions – though this is not publicly available.

- How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?
  - There are three independent decision makers. The minimum requirements are public, but the final decision is not.
  - Even if you remove the name, (which is not happening) the biases remains as the origin/country of the applicant can be understood from the names of the universities that went.
  - Regarding the public process. Until recently, an applicant was getting an offer as far as was fulfilling the minimum criteria. Now this has changed. Now the applicant who fulfill the minimum criteria is getting on a waiting list. These waiting lists are ranked and the best applicants are receiving an offer. The final decisions now are not publicly available.

- Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?
  - PGA: Three independent decision makers, who convene periodically. The applicants can interact directly with the decision team. But the central University interacts as well with the applicants initially.
Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
  o PGA: No external consultants. The process for changing the procedure is to raise the issue with the postgraduate community. Most of things can be changed. But it is not easy to change.

Questions for previous coordinator of Stats MSc: Carl Donovan (CD)

  • Q: Does the school actively recruit PGT students? If so, where and how?
    o CD: The school generally does not recruit – the university has processes for this. However, for selected courses, we advertise over selected mailing groups (the MSc in Statistical Ecology in particular).

  • Q: Beyond the required degree, how are admissions decisions made?
    o CD: Assuming “required degree” means the pre-requisite academic qualification – we decide based on the totality of the application. If a candidate is immediately noteworthy, they will be offered a place. Others are placed on a waiting list and then ranked. The number of places available is determined periodically and then offers are made down the list.

  • Q: Are any students offered funding? If so, how are those decisions made?
    o CD: There is very little funding available that is under direct control of the school. There are some governmental scholarships that students apply for, and we write supporting letters to those deemed academically best. The ultimate decision is made elsewhere. We have some internal scholarships that are allocated on the basis of merit – taken in totality, rather than pure academic performance e.g. experience in ecology, need and likelihood of moving into a research career.

  • Q: Are any bias-reduction strategies like removing applicant names used?
    o CD: Not in any explicit way. Applicants are ranked on approximately objective criteria, but with some consideration of circumstances i.e. perceived need, with regards to scholarships.

Recommendations – PG

  • More explicit evaluation rubric
    o Some criteria, like “noteworthy”, “merit”, “academically best”, “best applicants” could be better defined and explained
    o This would help prospective students evaluate whether the program is a good fit for them, and decrease any unintentional bias in the admissions process

Postgraduate Research (PhD) Admissions

Audit of public-facing information about postgraduate research admissions

  • https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/mathematics-statistics/prospective/pgr/
• Requires an upper second class Honours degree from a UK University (or an equivalent international degree)
• Application: CV, two references, academic transcripts and degree certificates
• “The main selection criterion for a PhD place in St Andrews is academic excellence.”
• “Once the School has offered PhD places, they will then select the academically best-qualified applicants for financial support. Financial support is subject to availability of funds and eligibility.”
• “To apply, you should first identify and contact a potential supervisor you would like to work with in your intended research area.”

Note about internally available information

• There is a folder on OneDrive that contains information about prospective PhD students:

URGE Summary Questions – PGR

• What EEO statement is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement?
  o None that we could find

• What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?
  o See above for details. No standardized test scores are required.

• Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for admissions?
• How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?
• Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?
• Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
  o These are all questions we will pose to the M&S admissions officers (see below)

Questions for the PGR Admissions Committee (J Mitchell (C), M Chaplain, L Thomas, T Neukirch, R Cumberland)
  o EKJ contacted LT with questions on 29/03/2021, and again on 9/4/2021

• Q: I’ve been reviewing the public-facing information about PGR applications and admissions. Are there any other internal documents that guide the admissions process?
• Q: Does the School actively recruit PhD students? If so, where and how?
• Q: How are PGR admissions committee members chosen?
• Q: How does the committee make decisions about which students to admit? The website mentions that an upper second-class Honours degree is required and says that “the main selection criterion for a PhD place in St Andrews is academic excellence.” What determines academic excellence?
Q: There is no personal or research statement required in the application. How does the committee evaluate the prospective student’s capacity to undertake independent research?
Q: How does the committee make decisions about which students to fund? The website says that “Once the School has offered PhD places, they will then select the academically best-qualified applicants for financial support.”
Q: How does the committee decide whether to admit “self-funded” students? What is the impact of such students on the department?

Recommendations – PGR

- TBD following response from committee
- More explicit evaluation rubric
  - Some criteria, like “academic excellence”, “academically best-qualified” could be better defined and explained
  - This would help prospective students evaluate whether the program is a good fit for them, and decrease any unintentional bias in the admissions process
- Possible modifications to make the process for contacting prospective PIs easier?
  - E.g., more detailed info on the website about what is expected

Staff Recruitment

Audit of public-facing information about staff recruitment

- The staff recruitment process differs somewhat depending on the role advertised. The further particulars include a rubric with essential and desirable skills attributes. In general, the job is advertised online with a closing date. After the closing date, the selection committee reviews applications and forms a longlist of approximately 10-20 candidates. From this list, a shortlist of approximately 5 candidates is narrowed down, and at this point, references are contacted. The shortlisted candidates are invited to interview.
- Interviews typically consist of a presentation that is open to everyone in the department, followed by a Q&A session, and then a closed interview with the selection committee.
- The University has a policy that there should be no single-gender shortlists, though in practice this is not always enforced.

URGE Summary Questions – Staff Recruitment

- What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available?
  - "We are fully committed to equality and diversity in our recruitment and employment policies. We operate family-friendly hours for core meetings and are happy to discuss flexible working arrangements for staff."
  - “Applications are particularly welcome from women, people from the Black, Asian, Minority or Ethnic (BAME) community and other protected characteristics who are underrepresented in Academic posts at the University.”
“The University of St Andrews is committed to equality for all, demonstrated through our working on diversity awards (ECU Athena SWAN/Race Charters; Carer Positive; LGBT Charter and Stonewall). More details can be found at https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/hr/edi/diversityawards/.”

- Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?
  - https://www.vacancies.st-andrews.ac.uk
  - Often posted to Twitter (from School account, and/or personal staff accounts)
  - Response from LT about advertising and contacting prospective applicants: “I put the adverts on all the free lists and sites I can think of […] I encourage everyone I know to contact everyone they think might be interested; I go through conference talk titles and contact people with relevant talks ( […] it’s very time consuming) […] There is a list, on the stats OneDrive, under recruitment […] tabs contain people contacted under previous rounds of recruitment. I alerted everyone to the presence of this at the last 2 stats staff meetings, and in the agenda and minutes.”

- What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?
  - Application materials are not listed in job announcements
  - Applications for academic positions require the submission of a CV and a cover letter, as well as contact information for several (usually 3) references.
  - The application form also requires information about education and training (i.e., list of degrees) and professional qualifications.
  - The application form has an “Equal Opportunities” page, with questions about ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, marital status, and disabilities. For most of these questions, there is the option “prefer not to say”.
  - The requirements are barriers but they are necessary for the selection process. They apply the same to everyone.

- How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?
  - Each job listing includes a rubric of essential and desired attributes

- Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?
  - To ask the HoS

- Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
  - To ask the HoS
- Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies like cohort hiring, mentoring, dual career support and partner hires, re-visioning your work culture, or other considerations outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices”?  
  o To ask the HoS or possibly HR

**Recommendations – Staff**

- Wider advertisement at venues targeting underrepresented groups
- Include a criterion for interest and engagement with DEI efforts in the evaluation rubric
- Implement a “tiebreaker” policy to hire underrepresented applicants when all else is equal
- Implement policy so that single-gender shortlists trigger readvertisement