

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY

(Including Access & Participation Statement 2023-24)

Access & Participation Statement

Introduction

EKC Group is committed to providing an environment for students that actively provides equality of opportunity, freedom from discrimination and values the diversity of all students and prospective students. EKC Group seeks to broaden the pool of potential applicants by raising awareness and expectations in line with its commitment to widening participation. EKC Group has approximately 15,000 students in total with c. 200 higher education students across three of its colleges.

EKC Group aims to place their applicants on appropriate courses with the support necessary for them to succeed. The admissions process will encompass a range of services, from the provision of information about programmes and services, through to the point of enrolment and beyond. Statements regarding Information, Access and Guidance are in accordance with EKC Group's Student Charter commitments.

This policy applies to applicants and potential applicants to the EKC Group accredited higher education programmes of study and is complementary to the Admissions Policies of EKC Group's validating bodies and university partner. It is intended that the policy should uphold the principles outlined in the Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions (2004)¹, Office for Students² compliance with ongoing condition for registration A2, and the UK Quality Code³.

The Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan (HE QIP) links the strategic aims with policies and the Quality Code, thereby taking deliberate steps to embed enhancement, throughout the student experience.

This policy does not apply to a Higher Apprenticeships. Information on the admissions process for Higher Apprenticeship programmes will be provided on request by the EKC Training (apprenticeships@eastkent.ac.uk).

Students studying at the Group as part of a University of Kent validated partner course, should refer to the university's admissions policy.

Widening Participation

EKC Group highly values the diversity and range of experience that prospective students contribute to college life. Applications are welcome from all students irrespective of background. Recruitment and admissions processes aim to match the abilities, aptitude, and aspirations of the student to their programme of study. EKC Group's offer of Access programmes for mature students helps to increase confidence in academic study, in preparation for higher education. EKC Group is committed to recruitment and admissions processes, which are fair, explicit, and implemented consistently across its range of provision.

¹ *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice* – The Schwartz Report, September 2004

² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

³ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

There are barriers for some students considering entering into higher education for example, if they are disabled, a mature student without traditional qualifications, come from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background or grew up in care. Other barriers may include being the first in the family to enter higher education or finding the cost of study prohibitive. EKC Group is part of the Kent and Medway UniConnect Programme which supports progression from students in disadvantaged wards.

The EKC Group is committed to widening participation and has three dedicated UniConnect Officers. As part of the Kent and Medway UniConnect Programme the Group has identified students within its further education courses who have the potential to progress to higher education (based on their GCSE grades) who live in areas where there is generally low progression into HE. A programme has been developed to run complementary to the students' core curriculum, delivered by UniConnect staff which will target these students with the aim to raise their aspirations and build their confidence to apply to higher education courses with EKC Group or elsewhere. The HE KaMCOP Officers also liaise with Progression Officers at local schools and internal Level 3 students to offer HE taster workshops, Open Days, information sessions, and skills workshops to inspire students to progress to higher education.

Close links with local universities enable students to attend university taster days and liaise with partnership development teams, enabling staff and students to access information and awareness around HE options.

EKC Group measures student satisfaction, progress, participation, and performance through student questionnaires; programme feedback; involvement with the HE Group; student representative, and student voice meetings; through an over-arching HE annual self-assessment programme monitoring report and regular reports to the EKC Group Governors and senior staff.

Tuition Fees and Student Support

Tuition fees are remaining at £6,000 (part time courses £3,000) for the 2023/24 academic year which is significantly lower than local universities. Tuition fees will be reviewed ahead of the 2024/25 academic year with information to follow. In 2022-2023, 20 Bursaries of £500 were offered to students whose income was below £25,000, and upon a successful application, these students are paid in instalments the total award, over the course of the academic year. Students on franchised programmes with the University of Kent can apply for support through the University of Kent Access to Learning Fund.

There is a bespoke HE Induction, and specific ongoing Group Tutorial provision, to support students transitioning into higher education which includes study skills, time management, e-resources, health & safety, PREVENT, safeguarding, HE support services, and programme of study. A dedicated HE librarian is available at Canterbury College to provide one-on-one and group support in accessing on-line learning resources and understanding the Harvard Referencing system (all HE students can access this support, not just those based at Canterbury). The Wellbeing Centres offers access to additional learning support, student counselling, and helps support students with a range of issues, including emotional, family, financial or health related. There is a dedicated HE Student Services staff member who acts a liaison between the college and the HE department to help students identify internal and external support available.

Policy Owner: Group Head of HE & Careers

Approving Body: Education Committee

Stage of approval: Approved

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Provision of Information for Students

Information and advice about programmes and entry requirements will be provided on the EKC Group website and UCAS application website, with further information available from tutors on request if required. Every care is taken to ensure that the information contained in the Group's publications (both paper and on-line) is accurate at the time of publication. However, in response to changing circumstances, the Group reserves the right to cancel, change the entry criteria for, or alter, the content of any programme. Where this is necessary, applicants will be advised at the earliest opportunity.

The Student Support and Careers teams provide information, advice and guidance on all aspects of applications, programmes and funding and guide students to further support when required. The teams actively engage with Level 3 progression, both internally and in schools external to EKC Group.

Additional Learning Support Needs:

Disability Support Allowance (DSA) is a student-initiated process as part of the applicant's Student Finance application. DSA is assessed, awarded and allocated by external providers to support the individual student's needs. In addition, at enrolment, students have the opportunity to declare that they may require additional support when completing their learning agreement as part of the compulsory registration and enrolment process. All students who apply to EKC Group and declare a learning need and/or physical disability are referred to a member of the Additional Learning Support Team, who will contact potential students at that point to identify any support required. DSA students can also be supported in completing their Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) application by the Additional Learning Support Team.

Once a DSA application is processed, an assessment completed, and an award made, the applicant will receive a report listing equipment and other support they can be provided with on their course.

If students are awarded DSA, they may be assisted with the costs of:

- Specialist equipment, for example a computer if needed because of disability
- Non-medical helpers
- Extra travel because of disability
- Other disability-related costs of studying

They will need to pay the first £200 of any computer purchased to help with their study.

More information regarding the DSA process and application can be found here:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898

Student Success – equality, ethnicity, retention and progression

EKC Group is committed to equality and diversity throughout all aspects of college life, and respects differences in race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, and gender re-assignment. EKC Group also actively supports students that face barriers because of social and financial hardship. The three-year Equality Action Plan provides a framework for continuing action in creating an environment where all individuals will be able to achieve their full potential.

EKC Group is committed to supporting students with a range of needs and abilities. Students with a variety of disabilities pursue courses at all levels within the colleges and are shown to have broadly parallel progression rates to students without disabilities. EKC Group has to make courses and facilities accessible to all students and provide a variety of services, including advocacy for students.

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Feedback from students is central to support our diverse group of students, some who have non-traditional entry qualifications compared to universities and other higher education institutions. Feedback from the HE mid-term and end of year survey, unit/module evaluations, student voice meetings and the student representatives' meetings are used to improve student experience.

Data will be sourced from student learning agreements and disseminated to identify diversity within student groups including information on race, gender, age, disability, and previous qualifications. Retention is carefully and continuously monitored throughout the year to identify and offer further support to students where required. Small class sizes provide strong pastoral support for students and there are regular tutorials offered in both groups and on an individual basis. Destination data is obtained from the Graduate Outcomes surveys.

Admissions Policy

It is the policy of EKC Group that:

1. The admissions process will provide a responsive and student-focused service, ensuring all applicants receive the appropriate advice, guidance and information that they need to apply for and enrol on the right programme.
2. All prospective applicants will have access to impartial pre-entry advice, guidance and information about programmes, fees and funding so that informed decisions can be made. Applicants should ensure that they have sufficient information on which to base decisions about programme acceptance and necessary support.
3. The admissions process for entry onto programmes will be clear and concise to prospective students.
4. All applicants will be considered on an equal basis, taking into account their academic record, potential, references, personal statement and experience.
5. The admissions process recognises that not all applicants have had equality of educational opportunity and EKC Group will consider applicants in the light of the opportunities available to them.
6. Programmes and services will be promoted actively in the community to widen access and increase participation in line with the Equality Action Plan principles.
7. The admissions process will have procedures which will enable the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the provision.
8. The Admissions Policy will promote equality and diversity and will be consistent and complementary to all other Group policies.
9. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide full and accurate information as part of the admissions process and to notify EKC Group of any changes or corrections to their original application.

The policy will be implemented in the following way:

1. The admissions process is clearly outlined on the Group website and due care and attention will be taken to ensure that all communications to potential students are clear and unambiguous.

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2. Accurate information and advice about programmes and entry requirements will be provided on the EKC Group website.
3. All prospective students who declare a learning difficulty or disability will be advised of the support available to them, including the process for applying for Disabled Students' Allowance.
4. Guidance is available to students interested in entering into higher education from the Student Support/Information Centre. Programme directors and the higher education department is also available to assist in the choice of the most appropriate programme of study and to get information on level 4 qualifications and higher. Advice about fees and student loans should be directed to the HE Student Support & Information Officer.
5. The Admissions process is monitored through feedback and, where necessary, appropriate action is taken to address areas for development identified.
6. Academic departments and awarding bodies are responsible for setting the entry criteria for their programmes. Decisions on applications are made by tutors on behalf of their Head. This process will take into account:
 - The applicant's potential to succeed on their chosen programme of study
 - The applicant's actual or expected academic or professional qualifications and grades
 - Relevant work or other experience
 - The applicant's own statements of interest in the programme/subject
 - References
 - Where appropriate, an interview, portfolio or audition
 - Qualifications in the use of English language
7. For some programmes, there will be more applicants than places and competition for offers is unavoidable. In cases where EKC Group is unable to make an offer for the applicant's original choice of programme, an alternative will be provided, though this may not necessarily be for a higher education programme.
8. EKC Group reserve the right to cancel courses before commencement should it not be in a position to run the course. In this instance, applicants will be notified in writing at the earliest opportunity and the Student Protection Plan followed to minimise any detrimental impact to the applicant.
9. EKC Group, in conjunction with admissions tutors, have the right to amend entry requirements during confirmation and clearing. Each application will be considered on an individual basis.
10. All applications for full time programmes should be made through UCAS. No preference will be given to applications which are received in advance of the main UCAS deadline date. Applications which are received after this date will be considered if places are still available. Applications for part time programmes should be made directly to EKC Group through the website.

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11. All applicants will be offered an interview. This will usually be scheduled to coincide with Open Days or taster sessions but can be arranged at other times at the discretion of the relevant tutor(s). Where an interview in person is not practical, a video or telephone interview should be offered.
12. Applications from students who have non-standard qualifications or wish work experience to be taken into account as part of their application will be considered on an individual basis.
13. Applicants may be made one of three types of offer:
 - Unconditional offer: Where an applicant has *already* met the entry criteria [for example, if the applicant obtained the grades then had a gap year] for a programme and there are sufficient places remaining on the programme, an unconditional offer may be made. This is subject to the timely completion of the enrolment process.
 - Conditional offer: Where an applicant is able to demonstrate that they are likely to meet the entry criteria for a programme by the enrolment period and there are sufficient places remaining on a programme, a conditional offer may be made. A conditional offer is subject to the achievement of the entry criteria and to the timely completion of the enrolment process. Applicants will be informed of the conditions that they will have to meet before they will be enrolled onto the programme.
 - Withdrawn offer: the Group reserve the right to withdraw an offer if an applicant has not responded in a timely manner to communication requesting confirmation that they wish to take up the offer of a place. The reason for the withdrawal will be added to a student's application within the UCAS portal.
 - Applicants Acceptance of Offer: Applicants are expected to respond to an offer using the appropriate method via UCAS, or by emailing highereducation@eastkent.ac.uk.
14. In exceptional circumstances, the Head of Department or their nominated deputy can authorise entry onto a programme of study if an applicant has not fulfilled all the entry criteria for the programme. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they have a commitment to succeed and they will be required to participate fully in any learning support which is considered necessary to achieve the qualification.
15. Where an application has been rejected, the applicant may appeal in writing to the Head of Department if they believe that the policy has not been applied correctly in the processing of their application. Appeals will only be upheld where the Admissions Policy was not applied, and the incorrect application of the policy led to the rejection of the applicant.
16. The admission of students with a declared criminal conviction is subject to assessment by the Senior Safeguarding Officer with regard to the duty of care to the respective wider College's community. All information disclosed is confidential and will be held in accordance with the requirements of the data protection legislation.
17. Most applicants wishing to defer the start of their course for a year, will be required to meet any conditions in time for the original start date. Where a deferral is agreed, it will be for one year only. Any applicant wishing to defer for a second year will be required to submit a new application.

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18. At enrolment, all students will be provided with a copy of their Learning Agreement, which they have signed, outlining the responsibilities of the EKC Group, the local college and the student.
19. Should any applicant be unsuccessful in their application, they have the right to appeal to the Group Head of HE & Careers within two weeks of their application being rejected.
20. Students wishing to use prior attainment or experience as evidence of prior learning are asked to refer to the Higher Education Recognition of Prior Learning Policy for further details. Using evidence of prior learning to enter into higher education must be made known at the time of application to the tutor/programme director and the Group Head of HE & Careers to ensure that the appropriate report is filed.
21. EKC Group does not currently hold a Tier 4 license to sponsor international students.

Related Policies and Procedures

- Fees Policy
- HE Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
- HE Student Protection Plan