

Admissions Policy

Principles

1. Plymouth College of Art is committed to providing a high quality education for life in contemporary arts practice, as the creative catalyst for personal, professional and cultural transformation, enabling students to fulfil their personal ambitions and to progress to enjoy successful careers.
2. Our ethos places the aspirations and support needs of every student at the very heart of our creative enterprise. Our purpose is to provide a distinctive, innovative and supportive learning community in contemporary arts practice; to add value to the cultural, social and economic life of Plymouth and the South West region; and to develop our distinctive profile of our work nationally and internationally. We believe in the centrality of the arts to social value, culture, community, welfare, and prosperity and see our College as a crucible, or laboratory, for artistic experiment, exchange, entrepreneurship and innovation, and for new thinking, in the service of our wider communities. We celebrate social and cultural diversity, and encourage engagement with the community and cross-cultural dimensions of learning in local, regional, national and international contexts.
3. The College is committed to:
 - creating a student body that is balanced and diverse in terms of cultural background and experience
 - providing fair and equal access to all prospective students who are able to demonstrate the potential to benefit from and contribute to a programme of study; and the potential to complete a chosen programme of study successfully, regardless of background
 - providing a professional admissions service with clear, fair and consistently applied policies and procedures.

Conditions of Registration

4. The College is committed to the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration for HE students with the following conditions relevant to this policy:

Condition B2	The provider must support all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
Condition C1	The provider must demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, it has given due regard to

	relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.
Condition Z3	Temporary provisions for sector stability and integrity (covering the making of Unconditional Offers, and making false/misleading statements)

Quality and Standards

5. This policy is also guided by the principles outlined by the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (Schwartz Review, 2004), guidance developed by the independent body Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, and fully compliant with other external agencies such as UCAS.

6. This policy is consistent with the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code and guiding principles: While the principles are not mandatory they underpin the successful delivery of admissions, recruitment and widening access processes and activities throughout the higher education sector. These encompass and build on the foundations laid by the 'Schwartz Report', 'Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice' (2004), but are aligned primarily to the Expectations and Core practices of the Quality Code. QAA encourages HE providers to implement them in relation to the full breadth of their provision, which can include Pre Degree.

- Policies and procedures for application, selection and admission to courses are transparent and accessible.
- Fair, reliable and appropriate assessment methods are used that enable the College to select students with the potential to complete the course successfully.
- Unnecessary barriers for prospective students are reduced or removed.
- Information provided to prospective students for recruitment and widening access purposes supports students in making informed decisions.
- All staff, representatives and partners engaged in the delivery of admissions, recruitment and widening access are appropriately trained and resourced.
- Widening access strategies and policies in line with local and national guidance are continually developed and reviewed.

QAA's Expectations for Standards and Quality relating to Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Participation are at the Appendix.

Governance

7. The Admissions Policy at Plymouth College of Art is overseen and reviewed annually by the Academic Board.

Admissions Responsibilities and Process

8. A central Admissions Office coordinates the admissions process for applicants applying for full time undergraduate programmes through UCAS and liaises directly with UCAS. For part time undergraduate study, for all pre-degree courses and for postgraduate programmes, applications are

accepted directly to the College through the College website (or on paper by request contacting the Admissions Office by email - admissions@pca.ac.uk or telephone (01752 203400/474)). All applicants are assessed as individuals and are given equal opportunity to demonstrate relevant skills and provide supporting information where required on the relevant application form.

9. Plymouth College of Art is committed to ensuring that the admissions process provides fair and equal consideration for applicants who apply by the relevant closing dates, and for late applicants, provided places remain available.

10. The Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions is responsible for:

- advising senior management on matters relating to admissions
- coordinating annual review of the admissions policy
- reviewing admissions procedures to ensure they enable the College to achieve strategic goals and specific objectives
- promoting good practice and consistency
- ensuring all staff involved with the admissions process are thoroughly familiar with requirements and administrative procedures.

11. The Admissions Office is responsible for:

- implementing the College's admissions procedure and offer-making protocol
- processing applications and the decisions made by programme areas
- liaising with UCAS
- disseminating relevant information to programmes
- communicating with applicants during the admissions process (with support from the wider Brand directorate).

12. The Registrar has responsibility for determining entry criteria and assessment procedures, in conjunction with the Academic Dean and wider Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Heads of School (HE), Pre Degree Manager, and Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions, for approval by the Academic Board.

13. All HE applicants are expected to be able to show examples of their existing work when discussing their application with the College either in person to person meetings, or through an online platform to inform a discussion around their choices. A similar process is required for Pre Degree applicants, noting that in this case the intention is to ensure a basis for discussion around student interests and experience, with examples of work included wherever possible.

14. All applicants will be required to present evidence of previous relevant qualifications (if not automatically transmitted by UCAS), as requested by the Admissions Office.

15. Academic staff have responsibility for conducting discussions with applicants where necessary. It is this member of academic staff who assesses applicants for their potential to undertake the programme of study successfully, based on the quality of their work, application including references,

achievements to date and/or predicted achievements, and qualities for potential studentship. The member of academic staff advises the Admissions Office of the recommendation regarding an offer for the candidate. The Admission Office ensures compliance with the offer-making protocol and consistency between recommendation, records from discussions and UCAS application (where applicable). Admissions staff are responsible for communicating the response formally to candidates (through UCAS for full time undergraduate applications).

16. All academic staff and administrative support staff involved in the process of admissions take responsibility for:

- providing accurate and relevant information for applicants and prospective applicants
- assessing applicants and making offers
- making reasonable local adjustments aimed at ensuring that individual disabled applicants have full access to the admissions process in conjunction with the College's [Learning and Disability Policy](#) and in liaison with appropriate Student Support staff (~~e.g. Inclusive Environments Project Lead, Pre-Degree Learning Support Coordinator~~)
- ensuring full compliance with the Admissions Policy and procedures including fairness and consistency.

17. All members of staff in the Admissions Team are given appropriate guidance in order to fulfil their roles competently and in line with the Policy. Structured guidance is given to programme areas from the College in light of any national or institutional changes to the Admissions Policy or procedures.

18. Ongoing information is given to all admissions staff from the College's Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions, who also ensures initial and refresher training is conducted for academic staff nominated to be part of the application process.

Information to applicants; commitment to fairness, consistency and transparency

19. The College website and printed publications, and the UCAS website where appropriate, provides clear information on the entry criteria. The College publishes its Admissions Policy on its website. Information provided is intended to give potential applicants specific information to help them make informed decisions about applications for programmes. Information available for applicants includes:

- entry requirements which include the details of what is required for entry, such as qualifications, grades, and application and offer-making process
- details of Open Days and other relevant events e.g. campus experience days
- advice and guidance on accommodation, finance and support services
- programme specific guidance including information on the application and offer process, advice about what work could be shown, features of each programme and any particular skills and competences applicants need for the course of study
- information on programme tuition fees and any additional costs that may be incurred e.g. materials and trips

- a Welcome Pack, provided to new applicants
- College terms and conditions for students.

Entry Requirements

20. The typical expected entry requirement for each programme is reviewed annually by the Academic Board. For undergraduate programmes these are expressed as tariff points from the UCAS tariff guide and any accompanying requirements (e.g. English GCSE at Grade C/Grade 4 or above, specified overall number of GCSE passes); for postgraduate programmes these are normally a minimum of a 2:1 honours degree. For Pre Degree students these are expressed in terms of overall numbers of GCSE passes at grade C/4 or above as well as achievement at grade C/4 or above in specific subjects where appropriate; in addition to these for the Foundation Diploma there are also minimum requirements for appropriate Level 3 qualifications.

21. The College entry requirements are provided in the College prospectus, on the College website and also on the UCAS website (as appropriate). The most up-to-date information will be found online.

22. The College welcomes applications from mature applicants and believes that a mixture of backgrounds, ages and personalities enriches the student learning experience. We welcome applications from prospective students offering a wide range of appropriate qualifications or experience; where applications are based on prior experience rather than standard qualifications, the previous study or work experience must be cognate with the programme under application. All applications are dealt with in accordance with published timescales and deadlines.

23. HE applicants will be expected to be able to show relevant practical work which demonstrates their ability and motivation, as well as achieving the relevant entry qualifications.

Competence in English Language

24. Teaching and assessment will take place in English, therefore applicants must be proficient in the use of English both in writing and speech. Applicants for whom English is not their first language will be required to demonstrate their proficiency in written and spoken English in order to gain entry to Plymouth College of Art.

25. Any offer made will include the condition of successful completion of an English proficiency test to a required minimum threshold stated in the published entry requirements. Specific information for international applicants is provided on the College website including details of recognised English proficiency qualifications.

Processing Applications

26. In order to ensure consistency and fairness, the general principles and procedures set out below must be followed by all staff involved in the admissions process.

27. Each application will be treated individually and a range of criteria from the application form will be taken into account to identify the applicant's ability to meet the demands of the course. This may include but is not limited to:

- past academic performance
- previous institution
- school/college/employer reference
- predicted qualifications/grades
- commitment, motivation and potential
- relevant experience
- match between applicants and course
- examples of current work and areas of interest

28. Undergraduate applications are acknowledged via UCAS. All postgraduate and pre degree applications are acknowledged automatically.

29. Based on individual consideration of the application, applicants may be made a conditional offer directly and/or invited for a discussion with academic staff, either at the College, a remote location or via an appropriate online platform. The discussion will be based around the applicant's work, academic interests and motivations. Applicants who are made a conditional offer will be encouraged to have a discussion with a member of academic staff around motivations, expectations of study etc.

30. All decisions are processed on the College's Student Records System (SoMIS). Undergraduate applications may also be processed via the UCAS system.

Criteria for assessing applicants

31. Applicants will initially be assessed on their application form, including predicted or achieved tariff/qualifications. Following this, applicants may be made a conditional offer based on their application form and/or invited to have a discussion around their application with a member of academic staff.

32. Undergraduate applicants invited for discussion will normally be able to book their own slot via an online booking system. Following this, details on the process, available support and what will happen next will be available. All applicants will usually receive written notification of the outcome within 5 working days following the discussion.

33. Academic staff are required to use the criteria set by the College in deciding whether an offer can be made following this discussion. The College has an Application Process Guide which is required to be used by all staff as a reference for conducting these discussions. An online record will be used by all staff to ensure parity and consistency. This will be held on the College's student record system, and will be used as the basis of any feedback provided to the applicant.

34. Normally, the College does not require applicants to undergo additional tasks before making an offer. However, staff may set an additional task, subject to explaining to applicants clearly why and how this will be used in assessing the candidate. It is likely that such tasks will normally only be used for non-standard entry applicants, to ensure that they have sufficient skills to enable them to succeed on their chosen course.

35. Applicants must be able to demonstrate the necessary English Language proficiency level to succeed on their chosen programme or course of study.

36. The Personal Statement and Reference provide important supplementary indications of ability, motivation and potential, as well as potentially relevant information about personal circumstances. They are read carefully and taken into account in reaching a decision. Criteria for assessing the Personal Statement may include, for example:

- level of interest in and commitment to the subject
- evidence of clear thinking and understanding
- appropriateness of the course in relation to the candidate's declared interests and career aspirations
- non-academic achievement or extra-curricular interests that indicate the likely contribution a candidate will make to the life of the College.

37. All applicants are encouraged to declare any disability that they may have in their application, and provide any further relevant information relating to their disability, in particular concerning whether additional facilities or support are likely to be required during the course of their studies, or throughout the application process. This could be included in the application, or through direct contact with Student Support services within the College.

38. After the academic decision has been made, this information may be used by Student Support in liaison with the subject leader in considering the ability of the College to meet specified additional needs by reasonable adjustments or additional support. This is always subject to consent from the applicant to share information regarding any disability, and if not forthcoming may constrain the ability of the College to meet any additional needs.

39. Allowance shall be made for any applicant with verified exceptional circumstances or who has faced difficult challenges, where these are made known to the College (e.g. illness, death of a parent, poverty, disrupted education, refugee status, care leaver). Academic staff may decide to offer a place to an applicant whose academic performance appears to have been affected by such circumstances and who might otherwise have been expected to do better.

40. The application process is consistent with the College's policy on equality and diversity. Applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnic background, nationality/race, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, disability or age. Questions related to these protected characteristics will not be posed. No condition of entry shall be imposed which members of a particular group are less likely to be able to satisfy than other applicants not of that group, unless such a condition is justifiable on academic grounds. Consideration of applications from students who

declare a disability is based on the same criteria and principles as for other applicants; any information provided or known regarding an applicant's disability is not used in the academic decision making process.

41. Applications from mature and other students who have non-standard qualifications or who wish for work or life experience to be taken into account as part of their application will be considered on an individual basis.

42. Feedback from applicants is sought at certain points throughout the application process, with the opportunity to ask any further questions also provided. This feedback is monitored closely by the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions.

Criminal convictions

43. UCAS no longer requires applicants to declare criminal convictions with the aim of ensuring higher education is open to everyone. Likewise, the College does not wish to create unnecessary barriers for individuals with criminal records from taking advantage of the opportunities provided by higher education (or further education courses) and will not ask students to declare any spent convictions.

44. However, the College has a duty to ensure that it provides a duty of care to its staff, students and other stakeholders, and also to be able to provide appropriate guidance for anyone with a relevant criminal conviction or who is involved in ongoing criminal proceedings. Therefore, potential students who have an unspent conviction or an ongoing or pending criminal proceeding, will be asked to disclose this as part of the enrolment and registration process. The College will make a decision on whether to proceed with registration or how best to support the student, or, for example, whether it may be more appropriate for the student's place to be deferred until after any criminal proceedings are complete.

45. Students coming to the College with ongoing proceedings, spent or unspent convictions may find it useful to advise the Admissions Office before arrival to be signposted to relevant support services and gain additional support as part of their transition into higher education. Disclosure of any convictions/proceedings will be dealt with in strict confidence.

Offers

46. A conditional offer means that Plymouth College of Art will offer an applicant a place providing certain conditions are met before enrolment on the programme. Usually conditions are based on the completion of outstanding qualifications. Conditional offers may state the grades that must be achieved and/or specific grades in named subjects and may also be based on tariff points or a further task. Conditional offers will be in line with published entry requirements and will not be higher than the standard offer.

47. Each offer is specific to the applicant's individual qualifications and circumstances. The College reserves the right to refuse admission to applicants who do not meet the terms of their conditional offer.

48. As previously indicated, the admissions team aims to process all applications as quickly as possible and to provide an initial decision within five working days. Decisions for UCAS applicants are sent electronically to UCAS and can be seen on UCAS Track. Other applicants will be contacted by email with their decision.

49. An offer letter is then sent (electronically or by post) from the Admissions Office to the applicant. This letter states whether the candidate has been successful (or not), and if so whether the offer is unconditional or conditional, together with the conditions of the offer if the latter. Details of the programme / course, start and end date are included, as are the College terms and conditions for students.

50. The applicant will need to choose whether to accept or decline the offer, either through UCAS if the application has been made through UCAS, or via communication with the Admissions Office where UCAS is not applicable.

51. Applicants who narrowly miss meeting the academic requirements in their conditional offer may be accepted at Confirmation subject to review of records, work, achievements, any extenuating circumstances as well as availability of places on the course or programme.

52. An unconditional offer must be compliant with the OfS condition of regulation Z3¹ and means that an applicant has been accepted onto their chosen programme at the College without having to fulfil any further conditions of entry. It is reserved only for those candidates who demonstrate abilities in a practical way through examples of their current work (including for example videos, drawings, paintings, photographic pictures, audio recordings), which is a key part of the discussion held with the candidate by a PCA subject tutor. This applies to all candidates whether they have already attained Level 3 or higher qualifications, are applying on the basis of relevant prior experiential learning, or are in their final year of Level 3 study. For such exceptional candidates for undergraduate study, the decision should also take into account the combination of factors of prior achievements, experience, references, and predicted grades.

53. Applicants who have not communicated with the College about their application or offer may be considered to be rejected or declined by default. Every effort will be made to contact the applicant before this happens, and in most cases, should the applicant wish to resume the application, arrangements can be made to do so.

Requests for Deferral or Withdrawal

54. Any applicant wishing to request deferral of entry to the following year should indicate to this effect on their application form or submit a request directly to the Admissions Office as soon as

¹ OfS condition of regulation Z3 available from OfS [webpage](#)

possible after submitting an application. Requests for deferral after an offer has been made will be considered. Applicants should contact the Admissions Office at admissions@pca.ac.uk.

55. Applicants who wish to withdraw after an offer has been made must contact admissions@pca.ac.uk. An application may be withdrawn either by the applicant or by the College. In most cases if the College withdraws an undergraduate application the reason will be displayed on UCAS track. An applicant may be withdrawn if they persistently fail to engage with requests for further information without making contact with the College.

Re-admission of students

56. Applications from the following students will be referred to the Registrar for approval, who will consult where relevant with the Director of Finance:

- students whose previous studies were terminated by the College
- students who have previously withdrawn from the College and are seeking readmission to the same programme
- students who have an outstanding debt to the College.

Responsibility of applicants

57. It is the responsibility of applicants to provide full and accurate information in an application and to notify the College of any changes or corrections to original details. The College will follow UCAS procedures regarding any fraudulent statements and omissions, and if such cases arise reserves the right to dismiss an application, withdraw an offer of a place, or revoke registration.

58. The UCAS Similarity Detection Service processes all personal statements received in support of applications to Higher Education through UCAS.

Feedback requests

59. Should an applicant require feedback, this will be provided upon receipt of a written, signed request to the Senior Admissions Officer. The feedback will be based on information held on the applicant. Brief feedback regarding unsuccessful UCAS applications is given on UCAS Track for undergraduate applicants to view.

60. Any concerns that the College's admissions principles and procedures have been incorrectly implemented should be addressed to the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions.

Complaints

61. Any complaints with regard to the College's admissions process should be directed in the first instance to the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions (admissions@pca.ac.uk, telephone 01752 203400/474) and if appropriate will be dealt with under the College's [Complaints Procedures](#).

Appeals

62. An applicant may appeal an admission decision made by the College when:

- the applicant believes the College has not followed its Admissions procedures
- the applicant has further relevant information in support of his/her application that was not provided during the original application process, and there were valid reasons why this information was not provided.

63. There is no right of appeal against an admission decision concerning matters of academic judgment regarding an applicant's suitability to study a programme. Applicants wishing to appeal should contact the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions as soon as possible and at the latest within **one month** of receipt of the original decision either by post (College address) or email (admissions@pca.ac.uk) setting out the grounds for their appeal. Appeals will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a formal response will be made by the Head of Compliance & Quality Systems, normally within 20 working days. The outcome of the appeal will be one of the following:

- to reject the appeal and uphold the original decision,
- to uphold the appeal and amend the decision, or
- to uphold the appeal and invite the applicant to a discussion.

UCAS Extra

64. UCAS Extra runs from February until early July and gives applicants for undergraduate programmes who are holding no offers a further opportunity to make an additional application. The College will declare to UCAS the programme for which they will accept Extra applications and these will be posted on the UCAS website at www.ucas.ac.uk.

Clearing and Adjustment

65. The UCAS clearing scheme offers a final opportunity to applicants for undergraduate programmes who have not secured a place by early August. The UCAS website contains further information on eligibility to enter the clearing process.

66. Each year some applicants pass exams with better results than expected. The Adjustment process is for applicants who meet and exceed the conditions of their firm choice. It provides an opportunity for them to reconsider where and what to study. The UCAS website contains further information on the Adjustment period.

Confirmation

67. Confirmation is the name given to the period in August each year when the College receives A-level and other UK qualifications results for any applicants who have accepted conditional offers. On the basis of these results, applicants who achieve the grades required by their conditional offer, academic and non-academic, have their place confirmed. Applications from those applicants who have

not met the conditions of offer may be reviewed and their places may be confirmed, based on the application and previous discussions, and any extenuating circumstances.

Data Protection

68. The College operates in full compliance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR. All applicants' details are handled and stored securely in electronic form within the College. Any enquiries are retained for no longer than 2 years. Once a student is enrolled, limited personal data (name, programme and results/grades are retained securely for 6 years after last contact, usually graduation. The College will only share information with third parties where consent is provided to do so, or where it is necessary for us to help safeguard the health and safety of the applicant, or the health and safety of others, in accordance with the [Data Protection Policy](#) and Privacy Statements.

Changes to programmes

69. Should there be any significant changes to a programme between opening for applications and enrolment, applicants are notified of this as soon as possible by the Brand, Recruitment and Admissions team between the time the offer is made and enrolment.

Incoming Erasmus and Exchange Students

70. Students wishing to undertake an Erasmus placement will follow the application process stipulated by the Erasmus programme. On receipt the Admissions team will follow the direct entry procedure. Students on any direct exchange placement will apply directly to the College using the procedure above.

Communications

71. The College will send regular updates to enquirers and applicants about relevant information. These will generally be emails from the Brand, Recruitment and Admissions team, and may contain information on forthcoming events e.g. Open Days and key points in the application cycle e.g. UCAS deadlines, Student Finance England deadlines, as well as information designed to support potential students e.g. advice the admission process and starting the course.

72. Receipt of this information is optional, but applicants should be aware that they will still receive communications about the status of their application. The College may also send general updates about the application cycle to parents who have opted in to receive these communications through contact at events such as Open Days. These will not contain information about individual students.

Appendix:

1. Expectations for Standards and Quality - Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Participation

Appendix 1

QAA Quality Code for HE - Expectations for Standards and Quality - Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Participation

Expectations for Standards

- **The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.**
 - *Effective admissions, recruitment and widening access policies and procedures enable providers to recruit students who are capable of meeting the required standards for their course.*
- **Core Practice for Standards**
 - The Core Practice states that ‘the provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.’
 - *In practice, this means managing expectations of students, from researching prospective courses through to admissions and enrolment. The College needs to ensure that only students for whom there is a reasonable expectation that they are capable of completion are admitted.*

Expectations for Quality

- **From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.**
 - *Admissions, recruitment and widening access sets the tone of engagement for a student with their provider and the wider sector. Therefore the support a student receives from pre-entry to enrolment will be instrumental in laying the foundations for a successful educational experience.*
- **Core Practices for Quality**
 - The first Core Practice for quality states that ‘The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.’
 - *In practice, this means that fairness and reliability are embedded principles within admissions and recruitment, and inclusivity pervades throughout the process from outreach activity to processes and practices to enrolment.*
 - The second Core Practice states that ‘The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.’
 - *In practice, this means that there needs to be active engagement with students who have recently gone through the admissions process and those who declined, with a view to continuously improve the process for future diverse cohorts.*

- The third element of the Core practices state 'The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.'
 - *In practice, this means that providers adhere to the practice of having clearly articulated and transparent processes for handling complaints of prospective students that are accessible to all stakeholders. These should be monitored and reviewed to mitigate against the same issues arising in the future.*

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Policy owner and Lead contact:	Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions Email: cdeeming@pca.ac.uk