



3. Academic suitability

3.1 Academic requirements

The standard offer for those with A-levels or equivalent, according to DfE is to be at least 120 UCAS points or equivalent prior to entry where the applicant is taking or has taken tariff bearing awards. This is equivalent to BBB where three A-levels are taken. Details of the tariff points awarded to various qualifications can be found online.²⁹

Where there has been a significant gap since academic qualifications were obtained, programmes should follow their institution's usual practice. This may involve setting additional written work to ascertain current academic writing ability where qualifications are more than 5 years old, for example.

Where applicants offer non-UCAS tariff bearing qualifications, programmes should work with their admissions to agree appropriate equivalent standard offers.

Academically unqualified applicants are accepted by some institutions using set essays or a portfolio assessment to assess academic ability. HEIs will need to be confident that this mode of assessment is rigorous and assesses the ability of the applicant to write extended pieces of work at the appropriate level, without support.

For postgraduate programmes, the DfE has stated that a minimum of a 2:1 at undergraduate degree is usually required as an entry requirement. This reflects the requirement for students to arrive ready to move rapidly through intensive master's level programmes.

WMP recognizes that Clearing is now often used differently compared to in previous times when it had been almost exclusively for those who had failed to obtain a place in the earlier

phases of the UCAS cycle. However, even though this has changed, it is still challenging for professional programmes to recruit and prepare for entry applicants in any significant volume so late in the cycle.

Where clearing is used, programmes should ensure that they continue to use interviews and other processes to assess and ensure suitability as far as is possible.

3.2 Basic skills qualifications

In addition to the academic entry requirements detailed above, all applicants must demonstrate prior to enrolment that they have obtained the following basic level skills:

a. Basic IT skills should also be obtained prior to the start of any programme. This does not need to be evidenced through certification but can be implemented by asking applicants to confirm that they have these skills prior to interview/offer. A sample self-declaration form is located at Appendix 5. (SWE, 2021, 1.1)



²⁹ <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator>



UCAS and direct application forms are the first 'screening point' for applications and it is generally these forms alone which results in the decision to invite an applicant to a selection day or to reject at that stage, although some programme providers do have an additional pre-interview stage which utilizes a focused set of written questions or a focused personal statement.

b. English Language at Grade C/4 or above or equivalent (for example functional skills level 2) is required.

Although SWE do not require programmes to have Mathematics qualifications as an entry requirement, they and we recognise that for many HEIs, this is an important additional indication of the level of education and intellectual competence of applicants. Where included, this will usually be GCSE Grade C/4 or above or equivalent (for example functional skills level 2).

3.3 English language qualifications

Admissions processes must apply the requirement for a good command of reading, written and spoken English. Where previous language of instruction is not English, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) minimum overall score of 7, with no element below level 6.5, is required³⁰. This may be higher than the HEI admissions team recommend as being needed, but this reflects the complexities of social work and the need for excellent communication skills.

3.4 Application form

Applicants state their achieved/pending academic qualifications in the application form. It is standard process that HEI admissions teams initially vet the forms, and only send those applications through to social work programme admissions tutors when it is considered that the academic qualification will meet course entry requirements but practices vary from one provider to another.

To gain a full understanding of an applicant's achievement and ability, admissions tutors are encouraged to consider the 'contextual information' provided in the application and from other source as part of a holistic assessment of a candidate's application. Those applicants who have faced challenges - social, personal or educational - which may have affected their performance should be provided with an opportunity to supply additional information in support of their application. For underrepresented groups, this can be especially valuable

information.

Personal Statements are: an opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their understanding of the social work role; demonstrate any relevant experience; demonstrate their values; and evidence their motivation to undertake social work training. Personal statements also provide an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their writing skills. However, it is important to remember that the quality and level of help writing and presenting personal statements will not be the same for all applicants.

References should provide information on an applicant's character, motivation, work ethic, reliability. The reference should reflect/compliment the points made in the personal statement.

It can be the case that applicants have no choice in who provides their reference, this particularly applies to those at school or college. Programme providers may wish to seek an additional reference to complement the one provided on the application form. If the reference is an academic reference, then the second reference

must be personal, or employment related. If no educational reference is forthcoming, then HEIs need to be explicit in recruitment literature about what is required. Programme providers are advised to conduct checks upon a sample of application forms to verify references. Ref to sector guidance here

Programme providers are encouraged to consider how they can validly limit numbers invited to selection days using screening tools

(Appendix 2), mapped to the entry level PCFs, in shortlisting from application forms. This can provide useful guidance when providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

If the application form does not provide programme providers with enough information to invite a candidate to a selection day, a pre-interview additional screening document can be sent out (Appendix 3) if time and volume of applications allows.

