

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

**INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT – IMPACT FOR SEPT 2024
Entry Requirements and Incentive Package**

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper recommends several changes to our international pre-enrolment incentive package and international entry requirements relating to both academic and English language conditions. These changes are based on market intelligence and reflect the changing dynamics of the international student recruitment landscape. **The changes are recommended to be implemented with immediate effect (where possible) to impact the 24/25 recruitment campaigns for both Sept 24 and Jan 25.**

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
	SMT	
	SRC	
	FSC	
	QAC	

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The following recommendations are made:

Incentive Package Recommendations	
1	Continue to support the £750 visa support offered in Jan 24 for the 2024/25 intakes.
2	Provide reimbursement to international students for £776 to cover cost of NHS surcharge for one year.

Academic Requirement Recommendation	
1	Lower current GPA requirement in China for PGT admissions for 2:1 requirements to 70% and 2:2 requirements to 65%
2	Utilise Chinese Pre-Masters Foundation Courses and expedite the process to formalize this route
3	Accept diploma students with relevant work experience to a broader range of courses in our PGT portfolio
4	Permanently adopt existing test optional policy for North American applicants, replacing current year by year extensions
5	Accept UG direct entry from Turkish high school curriculum, based on the above equivalence across all subjects excluding medicine.

English Language Requirement Recommendation	
1	Reintroduce MOI from approved universities in non-majority English speaking countries, utilizing established institutions outlined in the published University of Edinburgh policy available here: Approved universities in non-majority English speaking countries The University of Edinburgh

2	Accept MOI from selected Universities in key South Asian markets, Pakistan and Bangladesh, from students applying via our agent network. (See Appendix 1 for list of recommended institutions)
3	Accept Duolingo to meet language conditions (excluding Medicine) at established IELTS comparative scores
4	Accept National Examinations Council (NECO) in Nigeria, with a minimum of C6 grade in English language, without timelines. Utilise the NECO Portal to validate authenticity. NERVS Portal NECO e-Verification Platform

4. CONTEXT

- 4.1. Across the International recruitment UK sector, challenges relating to recent and predicted government policy, and economic conditions in key source markets are resulting in increased competitive behaviour from Universities across the UK, for international students.
- 4.2. Given this, the University of Aberdeen's (UoA) own 'value proposition' needs to be reviewed to remain in line with key sector movements in order to stay competitive and to protect market share in markets where we have strength, such as China, and to assist in conversion in potential growth markets like Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- 4.3. In some cases a simple reduction in current grade requirements is suggested in order for UoA to remain competitive, particularly against competition from overseas alternative destinations, including Australia, where academic requirements are often lower, but in general the recommendations are about remaining more competitive and gain broader appeal to a wider range of students from a broader range of backgrounds.
- 4.4. In addition to supporting our recruitment activity, these changes reflect commitments in Aberdeen 2040 including those relating to widening access to study within our Inclusivity strand and our desire to become a more diverse and multicultural community withing the international strand.
- 4.5. The changes recommended below, if approved, will be implemented with immediate effect. Communication of these incentives and requirement changes will be delivered to offer holders via ongoing conversion activity currently being undertaken with QS, via our extensive conversion ezine activity, our website will be updated and our agent network in all regions will be informed.

5. INCENTIVES PACKAGE

5.1 Incentive Package for current offer holders - £750 for Visa Support

- 5.1.1 For the Jan 24 intake, UoA provided a £750 payment to students to assist with the costs of attaining a UK visa. This was used to assist conversion and to encourage students to utilise fast track "priority" and "super priority" options to expedite the visa process.

This is a useful incentive tool and valued by our students **and it is recommended** that this be continued into the 2024/25 recruitment cycle for both Sept 24 and Jan 25 intakes.

5.2 Incentive Package for current offer holders – Support the cost of NHS Health Surcharge

- 5.2.1 As part of the visa process, PGT International students are required to make an upfront payment towards any healthcare costs they may incur during their time in the UK. Currently, the NHS surcharge for students is £776 per year. This is another fee students are required to pay prior to arriving in the UK and another potential barrier to arrival. **It is recommended that this fee be reimbursed in a similar fashion to the visa support above to aid conversion for Sept 24 and Jan 25.**

Incentive Package Recommendations	
1	Continue to support the £750 visa support offered in Jan 24 for the 2024/25 intakes.
2	Provide reimbursement to international students for £776 to cover cost of NHS surcharge for one year.

6. CHANGES IN ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

6.1. CHINA

- 6.1.1. China is a market where our current market share is exposed. China is a prestige orientated market where students will prioritise ranking over other variables which means should competitors from higher ranked institutions lower their requirements, our current student volume is at risk. The SUIG return from September 23 highlights our position in a Scottish context, thought this is exacerbated at a UK level.

Institution	Sept 23 PGT China Intake
Glasgow	3958
Edinburgh	3104
Aberdeen	337
St Andrews	190
Strathclyde	136
Herriot Watt	78
Dundee	77
Stirling	47
Napier	15
Abertay	14
GCU	5
QMU	2
UHI	0
RGU	0
Total	7963

- 6.1.2 UoA secured 3rd place in Scotland with 337 PGT entrants, giving us 4.2% of the total Scottish market. The combined share of Herriot Watt, Dundee, Stirling, Napier, Abertay, GCU, QMU, UHI and RGU was 238 students, or 3% of market share. UoA must look to broaden the market as well looking to attract those currently choosing Herriot Watt, Stirling, and others.
- 6.1.3 The University of Glasgow have recently amended their entry requirements downwards which will mean a significant proportion of our offer holders will be able to secure offers from considerably higher ranked institutions, including Glasgow.
- 6.1.4 Currently, UoA China GPA requirements vary across schools, but with Glasgow now accepting 2:1 students from China at the 75% level, UoA needs to adapt.

- 6.1.5 ***It is therefore recommended that UoA accepts Chinese students at the following levels: Course requiring 2:1 should accept Chinese GPA's at 70% and courses requiring 2:2 should accept at 65%.***
- 6.1.6 Additionally, UoA receives a small number of students via Chinese Pre Masters pathways. These pathways, often run by Chinese agents in collaboration with Chinese Universities, allow students with lower GPA's an opportunity to enhance their qualifications and receive offers that would otherwise be out of their reach. Currently, Admissions review these on a case by case basis but conversion of these students tends to be considerably higher than average. It is recommended that UoA formalise relationships with partners in China to maximise this market as soon as possible, with a view to impacting September 24. It is suggested that colleagues in Team China, Yu Qi and Qing Ma, work in collaboration with IAG chair, Harminder Battu, to streamline an approval process for this and immediately look to formalise relationships with Wiseway, Dong Fang, New Oriental and Tomorrow Education, four partners where students have already progressed to us via this route, with a view to adding additional partners as appropriate.
- 6.1.7 Another underdeveloped market is with Chinese diploma students. Currently, a small number of our courses will take students who do not possess a degree but have a diploma and suitable work experience. It is therefore suggested that UoA allows a greater flexibility to allow work experience to factor in to our entry requirements from the China market, allowing those with a 2 year diploma and 5 years relevant work experience, or 3 year diploma and 3 years relevant work experience to access a broader range of our MSc portfolio. It is suggested that Team China, Yu Qi and Qing Ma, work with Heads of School to confirm which programmes this would be appropriate for.
- 6.1.8 The following changes in requirements are proposed:

Academic Requirement Recommendation	
1	Lower current GPA requirement in China for PGT admissions for 2:1 requirements to 70% and 2:2 requirements to 65%
2	Utilise Chinese Pre-Masters Foundation Courses and expedite the process to formalize this route
3	Accept diploma students with relevant work experience to a broader range of courses in our PGT portfolio

6.2 USA

- 6.2.1 A test optional policy for North American UG applicants was introduced during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Testing centres were closed in North America which led to students presenting a different range of prior learning to support their university applications. North American Higher Education Institutions implemented the test optional policy to allow fairness for applicants, this was motivated by the issues related to covid and test availability but enhanced by perspectives of equality and access which deemed traditional testing to be potentially unfair. UoA adopted test optional at this time, in line with the wider Scottish sector and this allowed us to maintain application volume and market share during a challenging period. The test optional policy has been extended year by year since then, but this policy should now be adopted permanently.
- 6.2.2 A test optional policy allows equal opportunities for international applicants. From in country market research, many US high schools no longer offer SAT/ACT testing for students (following the closure of many testing sites throughout the pandemic). High schools are continuing to offer AP classes ensuring that applicants have a relevant level of examination for entry into universities.
- 6.2.3 Testing (ACT/SAT) was not always implemented to every high school prior to the pandemic, due to State differences in the high school curriculum. To ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to attend a higher education institution, keeping the test optional policy in place for UG USA applicants allows equal opportunities for all.
- 6.2.4 Scottish universities who have a test optional/ flexible policy in place are as follows: University of Dundee, Abertay University, University of Stirling, University of Glasgow, University of

Strathclyde, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of St Andrews, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University and Queen Margaret University.

- 6.2.5 These universities will now ask for a GPA along with either SAT, ACT or AP Examinations. SAT/ACT are now no longer a requirement at the above-named institutions.
- 6.2.6 Permanently adopting the test optional approach allows for greater clarity on our messaging to market as we are often in dialogue with prospective students two or three years prior to their arrival on campus. This change would not prohibit students from applying with traditional tests but would allow us to be clear with prospective students that the position adopted during covid, and maintained across the sector, would also be permanently supported here.
- 6.2.7 To keep us in line with competitors, it is proposed that the Undergraduate entry requirement for MA, BSc, BEng and Law should be updated to permanently ask for a high school GPA along with one of the following: SAT, ACT or AP Examinations (in relevant subjects).

Academic Requirement Recommendation	
4	Permanently adopt existing test optional policy, replacing current year by year extensions

6.3 TURKEY

- 6.3.1 Turkey has shown the largest growth in International UG applications through UCAS in the 24/25 cycle, with an additional 810 applications. Currently, UoA does not accept direct applications from students completing the Turkish high school Lise Diplomasi, though many in the UK sector do. It is noted that Turkey is a price sensitive market and further expansion of the UG scholarship provision would also need to be considered to maximise impact in this region, but accepting the Lise Diplomasi for direct applicants would begin to expand our applicant pool.
- 6.3.2 The following table provides the equivalent grades as used by the University of Surrey and it is recommended that this be adopted by UoA across the UG portfolio, with the exception of Medicine.

A Level Requirement	Devlet Lise Diplomasi/ Lise Bitirme Diplomasi equivalent
A*AA	85%
AAA	80%
AAB	75%
ABB	70%
BBB	70%
BBC	Lise Diplomasi with 65% in the final year
BCC	Lise Diplomasi with 60% in the final year
CCC	Lise Diplomasi with 55% in the final year

Academic Requirement Recommendation	
5	Accept UG direct entry from Turkish high school curriculum, based on the above equivalence across all subjects excluding medicine.

7. CHANGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

- 7.1. Currently, there is no requirement to reduce language requirements but there is need to broaden the range of accepted methods for evidencing language ability. In many markets, access to our existing range of test providers can be limited. Tests are often costly and in addition to the test cost, there is a travel and time burden to students who need to book tests outside their local city/state.
- 7.2. Additionally, UoA removed Medium of Instruction (MOI) as a means of confirming English Language ability in 2022. This was a reaction to challenges around potential fraud and compliance risk, particularly in South Asian markets. **As a highly cost effective method of proving language ability, this is attractive to students from price sensitive markets and improvements in our fraud detection processes combined with the introduction of a deposit scheme mitigate a significant proportion of the risk the blanket ban served to protect us from.**
- 7.3. It is therefore recommended that UoA increases means of evidencing language in the following ways:

English Language Requirement Recommendation	
1	Reintroduce MOI from approved universities in non-majority English speaking countries, utilizing established institutions outlined in the published University of Edinburgh policy available here: Approved universities in non-majority English speaking countries The University of Edinburgh
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8. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Ashar Ehsan, Director of Student Recruitment and Joseph Whimster, Head of International Recruitment, j.whimster@abdn.ac.uk.

[26th Feb 2024]

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Closed

Appendix 1:

List of approved institutions by market where MOI will meet our Language conditions. We approve the named institution only, affiliated colleges and other related institutions are not covered, and an English language test is still required.

Bangladesh:

Private Universities:

1. North South University - NSU
2. Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB)
3. BRAC University
4. East-West University - EWU
5. American International University of Bangladesh (AIUB)
6. Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST)

7. United International University – UIU
8. University of Liberal Arts of Bangladesh – ULAB
9. Daffodil International University – DIU
10. University of Asia Pacific- UAP
11. East Delta University-EDU
12. International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT)
13. Stamford University Bangladesh. (SUB)
14. International Islamic University Chittagong. (IIUC)

Public Universities:

1. IBA – University of Dhaka
2. Bangladesh University of engineering and Technology (BUET)
3. Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET)
4. Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET)
5. Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET)
6. Bangladesh University of Professionals(BUP)

Pakistan:

1. COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT)
2. Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi
3. Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore
4. National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST), Islamabad