

Consumer Protection Self-Assessment

Provider : The University of Buckingham
Provider's UKPRN : 10007787
Registered address : Yeomanry House, Hunter Street, Buckingham, MK18 1EG
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Date : July 2025

Introduction

The University of Buckingham is an established provider of over 40 years' standing. Founded in 1976, the University was incorporated by *Royal Charter* (RC000730) on 11 February 1983 and is authorised to award taught and research degrees in perpetuity. The University is listed on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKPRN 10007787) and is registered with both the Office for Students as an *Approved Provider* and the Charity Commission for England and Wales as a not-for profit Charity (Charity Number 1141691).

Our Approach to Ensuring Compliance with Consumer Protection Law

The Competition and Markets Authority confirmed that the University's practices were compliant with all consumer protection-related legal requirements in July 2016. The University is satisfied that the work undertaken in the lead up to this confirmation has led to consumer protection being well embedded in the University's cultural, strategic and policy frameworks.

During 2022, the University reviewed and updated its recruitment and admissions procedures to ensure they remained in line with the guidance provided by the CMA and thus in compliance with consumer protection law. This review supported the University's efforts to ensure that its admissions procedures remain transparent, reliable and valid, notably in respect of the information provided to students, the terms and conditions of registration and complaints handling processes and practices.

The University's *Student Contract* makes clear students' rights and responsibilities in relation to consumer law. It is updated regularly and iteratively for future cohorts in response to changing regulatory requirements, sector practices or internal needs. Draft amendments are authored and sponsored by the Registrar and approved by the Executive Group.

Updates to programme and module specifications are authorised through the *New Programmes and Modules Approval* or *Making Changes to Programmes and Modules* procedures and are only operationalised following ratification by the Senate. Once changes have been authorised, updates to the University's management information system and dynamic Curriculum Handbooks are coordinated by the University's Quality team.

The *Making Changes to Programmes and Modules* procedure requires academic staff to categorise proposed changes as either *Major* or *Minor* and, in the case of the former, to carry out consultations with affected staff and students. Where changes are significant enough in scope or scale to warrant a full review, they are then treated in accordance with the *New Programmes and Modules Approval* procedure. All proposals for change must be accompanied

by complete paperwork outlining the nature of the change and rationale for it, the outcome of consultations with students, staff, external examiners and reviewers as well as any professional body, regulatory and resource implications.

Proposals for programmes and modules to be discontinued are approved in accordance with the *Closure of Programmes* procedure. Deans and/or Programme Directors submit a request for the closure of the programme, outlining the rationale for the closure and the arrangements for the teaching-out or transfer of affected students or applicants. The University's *Closure of Programmes* procedure makes clear the requirement for the University's approvals committees to ensure students affected by the closure of a programme are consulted and their interests protected.

The University ensures a *Contingency Plan* exists for each collaborative partner which considers the best means to allow students to continue their studies in the event of the failure of a collaboration. In most cases, a 'teaching-out' arrangement is the preferred option as it is in the best interest of the students, although the worst-case scenario (sudden closure) is also considered. In the cases of the collaborative partnerships that have ended thus far, all students have been able to complete their courses – with the 'official' acknowledgement of the partnerships' cessation concluded after the final graduation. The University's Collaborations *Contract* reflects the need to include a provision relating to termination or withdrawal of validation.

Our Approach to Providing Information to Applicants and Students

The University of Buckingham publishes a significant quantity of material on its website (www.buckingham.ac.uk), including information pertaining to governance, the history of the University, student life, academic provision (both taught and research), the research environment and policies and procedures. Narrower in scope, the University's *Undergraduate and Postgraduate Mini Guides* showcase the University's academic provision and supporting services.

The Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer, in conjunction with the University's Legal Services, Academic Services and Marketing teams, is accountable for the accuracy of the information presented on the website and in other collateral. The University's approach to information is governed by its *Public Information Policy*; a definitive record of the University's policies and procedures (including their authors, approving committees and dates of approval and forthcoming review) is maintained.

The University's Marketing department is responsible for operational oversight of the website, for advertising and for promotional activities. A key aim is to ensure applicants receive all the information they require in order to make an informed choice by providing detailed course, fees and other information (including that covered by the *Transparency Return*) considered relevant for prospective students through the University's website, and, by way of the *Unistats Return*, through the *Discover Uni* website. Within Marketing, the International Student Recruitment team are responsible for liaison with, and oversight of, overseas recruitment agents.

Full course information, including the programme specification and all current calendar entries, is accessible from the Course Info tab within each course page on the website. Entry requirements and admissions processes are clearly specified on the website and are accessible from the Entry Requirements tab within each course page. In line with GMC requirements, the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences operates a separate *Code of Practice for Selection* that is provided to all applicants. Admissions staff build up a rapport with applicants through regular contact by email, telephone and SMS text messages.

The University's website also provides details of both admissions and examinations procedures for disabled students. Where additional needs are disclosed via the application form, or in one-to-one discussion with the University, Admissions Officers record the information on a spreadsheet that is shared with the University's Wellbeing, Skills and Diversity department and applicable Admissions Tutors; an assessment of whether the University can make the adjustments necessary to support the student can then be undertaken prior to any offer of a place being made.

Prospective and incoming students are made aware of the University's student services through the website and other collateral and at open days (at which interested applicants can meet face-to-face with members of the various student services' teams). Incoming students receive further information about the University's services at Induction and are routinely referred to them by members of staff.

The University's management information system maintains a central register of modules, programmes and awards and houses the associated specification documents. *Programme Specifications* are published in the dynamic Curriculum Handbooks and accessed via the website. *Module Specifications* are made available to staff and students at the commencement of each module via the VLE.

The University maintains a record of current collaborative partners and validated programmes on its website. In addition to this, since 2014, the Collaborations department has maintained a *Collaborations Register*, updated and presented to the Executive Group on a quarterly basis, that records the number of students enrolled with collaborative partners, as well as the programmes on which they are enrolled and the due dates of annual and periodic review.

Collaborative partners are required to make it clear to both prospective and current students the nature of the relationship between the University (as the validating / awarding body) and the partner (as the delivery body) and provide the University with marketing and publicity material for checking before it is published. Staff from the Collaborations department routinely check the integrity of the information available during visits, and through general inspection of public platforms such as the website and social media.

Collaborative partners are provided with the University's entry requirements (including English language proficiency) and must ensure that local requirements are in line with those of the University. Where applicants fall outside of the given guidelines, approval for their admission must be sought from the University. Collaborative partners must also use the University's forms where an application for credit exemption or transfer is made.

The Collaborations department maintains a record of programme and module specifications for all provision across its collaborative partnerships.

Our Contract Terms and Conditions

The University's *Student Contract* was comprehensively updated in May 2024 and represents the contractual agreement between the University and its students. Applicants are informed that by accepting the University's offer of a place that they are accepting the terms of the *Student Contract* and other associated documents in full (Clause 1.2).

Where applicable, applicants are made aware that some courses may require them to agree to the terms and conditions of professional bodies or third-party providers; details of these requirements are set out in the Offer and applicants are made aware that, by agreeing to the University's terms and conditions, they also agree to abide by any relevant professional bodies' terms and conditions (Clause 14.1). Applicants are made aware that any questions or concerns about the *Student Contract* can be directed to the University's Central Admissions team (Clause 1.3).

The University's *Student Contract* makes clear students' rights and responsibilities in respect of the following: the accuracy and integrity of their application (Section 2), the conditions of admission and registration (Section 3), financial obligations (Section 4), immigration compliance (Section 5), , expected behaviours – including the potential consequences of misconduct (Section 6), disability support (Section 7), engagement with the educational provision on offer – including the potential consequences of non-engagement (Section 8), intellectual property (Section 9), complaints and appeals (Section 10), cancellation rights (Section 11), data protection (Section 12), and liability (Section 13).

The University's Collaborations *Contract* makes clear that the responsibility for admissions is delegated to collaborative partners; however, guidelines for admitting students to programmes are included in the Collaborations Handbook and partners' admission practices are subject to random audit at the discretion of the University. Collaborative students are required to enrol with the partner institution first and are then recorded by the University.

Our Complaints Handling Processes and Practices

The University of Buckingham operates multi-stage complaints and academic appeals procedures in addition to specific academic integrity, non-academic misconduct, fitness-to-practise and admissions-related complaints and appeals procedures. The University subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and references its procedures to the Good Practice Framework.

The University employs a dedicated Student Casework team whose role is to administer, under the direction of the Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework), these procedures and ensure that the University's practices are consistently in line with its published policy framework as well as any relevant sector guidance (including that published by the OfS, the OIA and UUK).

Underpinning the University's commitment to the staff / student partnership is the right of the University's students to raise matters of concern without disadvantage; this right is guaranteed in all cases by the diffusion of responsibilities between academic and administrative staff at all levels and by the routine involvement of staff outwith the department that is the subject of concern.

The University's complaints and appeals procedures are published to the website via the *Regulations Handbook* and are characterised by the use of plain English and a low level of bureaucracy. The University's complaints and appeals forms ensure students are able to make their case in the most coherent manner possible; however, the University maintains a pragmatic approach to students' use (or non-use) of the forms. Early dispute resolution is included as part of the *Complaints* procedure; however, all academic appeals are handled formally and individually for reasons of probity.

In addition to the published procedures, students may obtain general advice regarding the formalities of making an appeal or complaint from administration staff. Students may also seek the assistance of the Students' Union in completing the requisite forms and/or approaching the requisite academic and/or administrative staff.

The University's complaints and appeals procedures include timescales for the instigation and completion of each stage. Conformance with published timescales is monitored by the Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework). Where the demands of equity, probity and/or the objective, subjective and logistical complexities of individual cases mandate the need for additional time, the Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework) continues to monitor the situation and ensure that any delays are adequately communicated to affected students. To this end, the University's procedures indicate that where delay has been unavoidable, students can expect to be kept informed.

Where follow-up action is required in response to issues raised in a complaint or appeal, lines of communication are kept open to ensure all interested parties are aware of the actions to be taken and by when and by whom they will be taken. Where the outcome of an appeal or complaint suggests potential for enhancement, this is shared with members of staff and/or committees as appropriate. The number, generalised outcomes and thematic issues of complaints and appeals are reported to the Senate annually.

Collaborative partners are also required to make their policies and procedures, including those pertaining to complaints and appeals, easily accessible to students.