

## ADMISSIONS POLICY & PROCEDURE

### 1. Policy Remit

- 1.1. This policy and the procedures apply to all courses offered by the South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) with the exception of its Higher Education courses which are set out in the Undergraduate Admissions Policy.
- 1.2. International applicants who require a Student Route visa to study in the United Kingdom will be advised that due to UK Visa and Applications (UKVI) licence stipulations the STCG can only issue an UKVI Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) to students applying to study a full-time course at Kingston College, based in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.
- 1.3. All data collected will be used in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy.

### 2. Admissions Mission Statement – Policy Overview

- 2.1. STCG is committed to ensuring a high-quality and fair admissions process which provides an equal opportunity for all applicants, regardless of their background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability, experience and aspirations and our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- 2.2. In accordance with the STCG's commitment to a fair admission process all applications will be considered carefully and fairly based on specified entry criteria published on the website against each course as well as general admission requirements that are applied consistently.

### 3. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

- 3.1. All applicants and learners have the right to expect:
  - 3.1.1. accurate, up-to-date and consistent information from STCG about all available programmes,
  - 3.1.2. the learning and pastoral support provided by STCG and
  - 3.1.3. impartial information, advice and guidance throughout the admissions process to assist Applicants to make informed choices about applying to STCG and the courses that best suit their ability, potential and aspirations
- 3.2. The STCG publishes course information and entry criteria on its website and in printed materials. STCG will encourage all Applicants to attend admission events where they can seek any further information to inform their application.
- 3.3. STCG provides a wide range of support and guidance on the admissions process, as well as information on college life and the additional support available. Applicants can contact the admissions team at the relevant college. Admission staff will either answer the query directly or put the applicant in touch with somebody who can. Contact details for admissions teams can be found on the College website (make link to [Contact Us - South Thames Colleges STCG \(stcg.ac.uk\)](#))

#### 4. Bursaries and financial support

4.1. The College understands that money can be a concern when making the decision to study. There is a wide range of financial help available to support students through their studies. Depending on individual circumstances, a student may be eligible for a range of financial support whilst at college, full details can be found on our website:

For students aged 16-19: [Students aged 16-19 - South Thames Colleges Group \(stcg.ac.uk\)](http://stcg.ac.uk)

For adult students: [Students Aged 19 and Over - South Thames Colleges Group \(stcg.ac.uk\)](http://stcg.ac.uk)

#### 5. Course Entry Criteria

5.1. Admission criteria for each course are based on the level and specific demands of an individual course and are designed to ensure that admitted applicants are offered the right course and have a good prospect of a positive outcome.

5.2. The applicant is expected to meet the entry requirements for the course they are applying for, as set out in the entry requirements section of the course page on the college website. Admissions criteria are primarily based on prior or anticipated qualifications, though for some courses may include a requirement for one or more of the following:

- a) a skills assessment or audition
- b) a supporting portfolio of work
- c) a copy of the applicant's latest school report, college report or employer report/reference

Please see Appendix 1 for details of when and how a) to c) are assessed

5.3. Applicants who have had a break in education, or do not hold qualifications in English and maths may need to undertake assessment in these areas.

5.4. Some courses, including many for adults offered on behalf of Merton and Wandsworth Local Authorities, do not have course entry criteria. Where entry criteria are not required for a course this will be made clear on the relevant website page.

5.5. Course entry requirements are reviewed annually and published on the College's websites.

#### 6. Recognition of Prior Learning; APL and Non-Traditional Entry

6.1. Applicants who have completed a full or part qualification (or similar qualification) elsewhere, may be able to enter with 'advanced standing'. For example, enter directly into the second year of a two-year programme. Any admission of this type must satisfy the relevant awarding body requirements and is covered by the Admission with Prior Learning (APL) Policy – (see Appendix 2). The APL Policy may be used to recognise equivalency for whole qualifications or for elements, in line with awarding body requirements.

6.2. Applicants who do not hold formal qualifications but have relevant and equivalent experience may be able to gain entry to a course through Non-Traditional Entry. This process assesses whether that experience is equivalent to the formal entry requirements for the course. This process may require the applicant to produce some written work or

demonstrate practical skills. It is highly unlikely that a school leaver would have gained sufficient experience to gain entry through this method.

Applicants applying via the Non-Traditional Entry route should make this clear on the application form and discuss this with the tutor at interview or other admissions event. They will review the request and evidence provided in line with the published guidelines and any awarding body regulations.

## 7. General Entry Requirements

7.1. There are General Entry Requirements that the Group will apply to some or all Applicants as follows:

- 7.1.1. Each Applicant must provide (or have provided on their behalf) admissions information which is accurate and complete
- 7.1.2. STCG will require some Applicants to undertake a Disclosure Barring Scheme (DBS) check. STCG will only require an Applicant to undertake a standard or enhanced DBS check where the relevant course or course component falls within an exemption to the rehabilitation of offenders legislation.
- 7.1.3. Where the Applicant is required to pay tuition fees and/or materials they must commit to doing so at enrolment. The applicable fees will be clearly set out in the course enrolment letter sent to the Applicant. The letter will also identify whether the Applicant is eligible to pay in instalments or apply for a loan. Fees and other charges applicable for the courses are identified under the course details on each college website.
- 7.1.4. Students are expected to be 'fit to study', which means that the applicant's physical and /or mental health, taking into account such adjustments as the STCG may reasonably agree to make, enables the applicant, if enrolled, to participate fully and successfully in their chosen course without significant adverse effect on their health, safety, and wellbeing and or that of other members of the college community. Applicants must declare any physical or mental health support needs which may impact on their learning on the application form to ensure the college can assess and make appropriate support or adjustments to support the student. All applicants must provide details if requested of any medical documentation that is relevant to ensure that the applicant is 'fit to study'. Please see our 'Fitness to Study Policy'.
- 7.1.5. Applicants must provide details on request of any relevant unspent criminal convictions they may have. If an Applicant has a criminal conviction and the STCG, following a risk assessment and in its reasonable opinion, considers that the applicant will compromise the STCG duty of care to staff and students or otherwise presents a risk that cannot reasonably be managed will refuse admission. Please see the STCG Criminal Convictions Policy.
- 7.1.6. Proof of qualifications prior to enrolment

## 8. Applications and Interviews

- 8.1. All applicants will be required to complete an application form either online or submit a paper-based form. Applicants to most courses, but not all, will be invited either to an individual/group interview with the course tutor, or another admission event. The purpose of admission events or interviews is to engage in dialogue with Applicants to ensure that the course they have applied for will meet their learning needs and progression.
- 8.2. For most year-long courses, applications open in October for admission in the following September. There is no closing date for applications, however applications are considered as they are received and offers made following applicant days. Applications received after 1<sup>st</sup> June may not be interviewed and offered a place until after GCSE results day.
- 8.3. Most offers are conditional, subject to meeting entry criteria in your offer letter and criteria published on the website course leaflet. Enrolment appointments are allocated in the date order an applicant accepts their offer.
- 8.4. A place on the chosen course is not secure until the applicant attends their enrolment appointment in person, and a place is still available on the chosen course. If a place is not available on a particular course STCG endeavour to offer the applicant a suitable alternative.
- 8.5. Short courses of less than one academic year may start at different times of the year and start dates will be published on the STCG's website. Applications are welcomed at any time for these courses.
- 8.6. Applicants attending interview or other admission events will be informed in writing of the decision to offer a place on the course including details of any conditions for entry (e.g. GCSE grades) either at the end of the interview/event or within ten working days. Decisions are made by course tutors. For most school leavers, offers will be conditional based on their expected performance at GCSE level.
- 8.7. Adult Education/Community Learning applicants complete an enrolment form, in most cases this is all that is required, as long as they meet the general entry requirements in section 7. However, in some cases an applicant may need to have their prior level of learning assessed (for example to assess the correct level of a language course). If an applicant does need to be assessed prior to acceptance on a course this will be made clear in the STCG's promotional literature and on the website. If applicable, each College's prospectus and website will have the following information on Adult Education/Community Learning courses:
- 8.7.1. enrolment instructions
  - 8.7.2. fees, payments and refund policy (if applicable)
  - 8.7.3. payment via instalments
- 8.8. The fees that may be applicable to each course are set out against each course on the college website. The circumstances of each Applicant will determine the fees payable, if any, and is known as the "Fee Status". The factors that determine Fee Status can be found in the STCG Fee Policy. The Fee Status for most Applicants will be assessed at the point of enrolment. but the College admissions teams will advise applicants on any potential fees prior to enrolment. Contact details for admissions teams can be found on the College to [Contact Us - South Thames Colleges STCG \(stcg.ac.uk\)](http://stcg.ac.uk)

## 9. Learning Support

- 9.1. The South Thames Colleges STCG welcomes students with additional needs and encourages students to disclose any learning difficulty, disability or health condition that impacts on learning, at the application stage. Applicants with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) will be invited for a support interview and assessment of needs to establish the learner's support requirements.
- 9.2. The Inclusive Learning teams work collaboratively with Local Authorities through the EHCP consultation process to assess whether the College can meet the needs of prospective learners. A positive outcome from this consultation confirms that the College can meet the support needs of learners with EHCP.
- A positive consultation outcome does not constitute an application to the College. Learners must still complete and submit a formal application through the College's admissions process to be considered for enrolment. The consultation outcome informs the College's capacity to support the learner, but it does not guarantee a place unless an application is made and accepted.
- 9.3 Applicants will need to meet the entry requirements for courses as set out by the STCG, but will not be refused access to opportunities because they have SEN. However, if following a support interview, it is determined that the STCG is unable to provide the required support to meet SEN the STCG will notify the applicant of this position in accordance with its procedures.
- 9.4. All students will be offered tutor led support, adapted equipment, specialist software, a risk assessment and PEEP as needed and so are encouraged to make the College aware of their support needs prior to enrolment.
- 9.5. If the College is unaware of applicant's needs at the point of enrolment it may be unable to make reasonable adjustments at a later stage and therefore reserves the right to withdraw the student under these exceptional circumstances.

## 10. International student applications

- 10.1. South Thames Colleges is a registered Student Route (known formerly as a Tier 4) sponsor and a member of ENIC (the UK National Information Centre) and therefore welcomes applications from suitably qualified students from outside of the UK. Please note that international students who require a visa, are currently only able to study on courses offered at Kingston College sites.
- 10.2. While qualification equivalence may be worked out in most cases, some native language qualifications may require translating for full assessment to be carried out. The STCG uses the UK National Information Centre (ENIC) to ascertain qualification equivalence but may, on occasion, request that applicants translate their qualifications via a professional translation service. All international students who do not have settled status will require a Student Route via to study. For further information on visa requirements, please contact [international.office@stcg.ac.uk](mailto:international.office@stcg.ac.uk) or see the international page on our website.

## 11. Successful and Unsuccessful Applications

- 11.1. Applicants that meet the General Entry Requirements and any specific courses entry requirement will be admitted to the course they apply for provided there is an available place.
- 11.2. In some cases, the predicted grades or actual qualifications held by an applicant or other course specific requirements will not satisfy the course entry requirements and the Applicant cannot be admitted to the course. In these cases, the STCG will endeavour to offer an alternative course.
- 11.3. As noted in section 9 above, there are some cases where the College is unable to meet the needs of an individual student who has additional needs, in this case the STCG will offer guidance to attempt to support the applicant to find an alternative placement for the applicant
- 11.4. As noted in section 7.1.5 above, there may be some applicants who have unspent criminal convictions, which lead to a risk assessment being undertaken by the STCG using the STCG Criminal Convictions Policy. Should that Risk assessment determine that the risk is too high to admit the applicant, they will be offered guidance to attempt to support the applicant to find an alternative placement.
- 11.5. As noted in section 7.1.4, there may be cases where it is determined through the Fitness to Study Policy that the applicant is not 'fit to study', which means that the applicant's physical and /or mental health, taking into account such adjustments as the College may reasonably agree to make, enables the applicant, if enrolled, to participate fully and successfully in their chosen course without significant adverse effect on their health, safety, and wellbeing and or other students or staff. In such cases the applicant will be offered advice and guidance to explore alternative options, which could include re-applying at a later date, when the health condition has abated.
- 11.6. The College reserves the right to withdraw a student's application or offer to study for misconduct. This relates to any inappropriate behaviour by an applicant or anyone accompanying them, at any stage of the Admissions process.

## 12. Changes to information / Cancellation of Courses / Waiting lists

- 12.1. STCG will ensure that all applicants are aware that under some circumstances it may not be possible to run a particular course. Examples of these circumstances include if STCG is unable to recruit appropriate staff to run the course, if permission to deliver a course is withdrawn by an awarding body, or if numbers recruited to the course are so low that the student experience would be compromised. In cases where the STCG is unable to continue a course, or certain elements of a course, for reasons beyond its control, STCG will notify applicants as soon as is practical. Where STCG is unable to deliver the course, support will be offered to find an alternative course within STCG, or with another provider. STCG will reimburse Applicant any course fees paid by the Applicant, but it will not reimburse applicants for any other loss or expenditure occurred as a result of the changes to information, withdrawal of an offer, a course cancellation and accepts no liability for any loss occurred.

12.2. A waiting list is established when a course enrolment capacity has been reached. Where a waiting list exists, the applicant will be informed by phone, email or in person during interview or enrolment. The College will strive to secure a place for all applicants on their chosen course. However, where this is not possible, the applicant will receive clear advice and guidance on their options and alternatives available across South Thames Colleges Group.

### **13. Appeals and Complaints**

13.1. Any admission appeals should be sent in writing to the College Principal, within 5 working days from the decision being communicated.

13.2. Appeals will only be considered on the following grounds:

- There is new evidence that was not earlier considered and could have been expected to have materially affected the decision
- The College did not adhere to its own policies and procedures when arriving at the original decision

13.3. Appeals will be considered by the College Principal or their nominated Senior Manager, whose decision is final.

13.4. The decision to be communicated as soon as reasonably practical and no later than 20 college working days of the appeal being received.

13.5. Complaints about the Admissions process can be found within the Group's Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure.

## Appendix 1: Course Entry Criteria

For Level 1, Level 2 and most Level 3 courses entry will be determined based on applicants' previous qualifications and academic performance.

For Level 3 and above courses where additional course entry criteria is deemed necessary one or more of the following criteria may be used:

Criteria	Purpose	Assessed by	Basis for judgement	If no offer is made based on this criterion	How moderated
<b>Skills assessment</b>  <b>Audition</b>	Demonstrate that the applicant has the appropriate level of skills required to be successful on the course.	Course tutor(s)	Criterion referenced and scored according to a framework available to applicants.	<p>All no offers should be evidence reviewed by a panel chaired by the Head or Deputy Head to ensure consistency and transparency.</p> <p>An alternative skills assessment/audition opportunity should be available for no-offer candidates, where appropriate and/or available.</p> <p>All no offer students should be offered a place on an alternative course, where appropriate / available, and/or invited to an IAG meeting.</p> <p>All applicants are entitled to appeal an admissions decision</p>	<p>Review of all no offers by panel.</p> <p>Published skills assessment criteria / framework</p>
<b>Portfolio</b>	Demonstrate that the applicant has the appropriate level of skills required to be successful on the course.	Course tutor(s)	Criterion referenced and scored according to a framework available to applicants.	<p>All no offers should be evidence reviewed by a panel chaired by the Head or Deputy Head to ensure consistency and transparency.</p> <p>All no offer students should be offered a place on an alternative course, where appropriate / available, and/or invited to an IAG meeting.</p> <p>All applicants are entitled to appeal an admissions decision.</p>	<p>Review of all no offers by panel.</p> <p>Published skills assessment criteria / framework</p>
<b>Previous School, College or Employer Report to determine whether necessary course entry attendance levels have been met</b>	To assess whether the applicant can evidence that they are able to meet the attendance level to successfully complete the course.	Course tutor(s)	Applicants with attendance below 85% will be deemed not to have met this criterion.	<p>Where a learner is unable to evidence, via a school report or reference the required attendance levels the College should look to provide a transition year opportunity where learners can develop the core life and employability skills required to elicit a positive application in subsequent years <i>e.g. via the Princes Trust course</i>.</p> <p>All candidates should be given an opportunity to discuss the reference with a team member identify any evidence based mitigating circumstances that may have affected the reference.</p> <p>All no offers should be evidence reviewed by a panel chaired by the Head or Deputy Head to ensure consistency and transparency.</p> <p>All no offer students should be offered a place on an alternative course, where appropriate, and/or invited to an IAG meeting.</p>	<p>Review of all no offers by panel.</p> <p>Annual pre interview training for all application decision making staff.</p>

## APPENDIX 2: ACCREDITATION & RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY & PROCESS

A number of assessment processes allow achievement from a range of activities, using any valid assessment method, to be recognised. These include Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA). Provided that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met, these processes can be used to accredit part of a unit(s) or a qualification. For the purposes of this document this will be referred to as RPL throughout. Any students hoping to accredit any prior learning should discuss with their interviewer who will review the procedures for the specific awarding body and confirm if the student's prior evidence is suitable.

Students should be aware that where qualifications have changed to new specifications the older specifications may not be accepted as evidence; and where qualifications have a similar title it does not mean that their content is always the same. For example: units from a Sport qualification may not be accepted on Sport and Exercise Science.

### Scope of Policy

Students may be able apply Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to internally assessed parts of vocational qualifications. The use of recognition of prior learning is optional. For example, if the student has completed a unit at another centre but achieved a grade lower than they were able, or the assessment was some time ago discretion can be used as to whether to accept their prior learning. Some awarding bodies do not allow the use of RPL for external assessment, set exams or set assignments.

### What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?

RPL is about using a student's evidence of earlier learning and achievement towards part of a qualification. An assessor reviews whether the evidence is enough to show that a student has met the assessment requirements for a current qualification. The student needs to show that through knowledge, understanding or skills they already have, they do not need to repeat the course or complete extra assessment activity.

If there is evidence that the student has previously shown the knowledge, skills or understanding required by a qualification, this may be used towards achieving that qualification.

The evidence must be:

- valid
- current
- reliable
- authentic
- sufficient

RPL is not normally used to provide evidence against achievement for an entire qualification. This would be called an exemption and is usually used where a student must gain a specified qualification for a particular purpose (for example, as an entry requirement for further study, employment or registration). If you or your students think that they are entitled to an exemption, we recommend you refer to the organisation which has specified the original qualification requirement.

If a particular qualification is specified as an entry requirement to a qualification offered by us, we will list any appropriate exemptions in our specification.

### **Can students use a previously achieved certificate towards a qualification?**

Some awarding bodies will map or give guidance to show shared content across units or qualifications (for example, First Aid Certificates). In these cases, a student may use a previously achieved certificate as evidence without them having to repeat learning or assessment. If the awarding body has not mapped the qualification, the course team will need to map and check that the student's previous certificated achievement meets the current qualifications assessment criteria. It is important that you keep a record of the mapping so that the awarding body can confirm that it is valid. No extra assessment is needed if a student's previously achieved certificate or qualification meets the requirements of a whole unit.

### **Standard Process for RPL Stage 1: Awareness, information and guidance**

Before enrolling the student, the option of using RPL to claim units for some of their past learning or experience should be considered. This should normally occur during interviews by the subject teachers/lecturers where the student's previous education and experience will be discussed.

- If the teaching team believes that RPL is a suitable option for the students they should discuss with their Head of Section / Curriculum Manager / Head of School. Advice from the Quality Nominee may also be required.
- The course lead should check that the evidence provided by the student for RPL has been achieved before the start of their course of study and discuss the process with the student.

### **Stage 2: Pre assessment, gathering evidence and giving information**

- Register your student as soon as they officially start to gather evidence.
- To help the student in gathering evidence you could create an assessment plan or tracking document.
- The evidence gathered needs to meet the standards of the unit, or part of a unit, that the evidence is being used for.
- Evidence from a student's past experience could include: previous education, home or family life, noncertificated education or learning, paid work, community or voluntary work.

### **Stage 3: Assessing and documenting evidence**

- Tell your Standards Verifier (SV) /External Verifier (EV) / External Quality Assurance (EQA) before any monitoring activity starts, if you have applied RPL for any particular units or students. Your SV / EV / EQA may include these in their sample.
- A student's past achievement that would show evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills varies between industries. It depends on the range of their experience, technological changes and the nature of the outcome claimed. The Assessor may ask questions or ask a student to show them skills, to check that their understanding and skills are current.
- The assessment strategy, where stated, for each qualification must also be followed.

- Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgements about a student's past learning and experience in relation to unit standards. The Assessor may look at:
  - o Work experience records, validated by managers.
  - o Past portfolios of evidence or essays made by the student.
  - o Reports validated as being the student's own unaided work.
  - o Expert witness testimonies.
  - o Professional discussions.
  - o New assignment briefs or tasks that have been created to fill any gaps in the student's work.
- SV / EV / EQAs are not required to give feedback on an assignment brief or task if the assessor chooses to set one as part of RPL.
- Evaluate all the evidence using the learning outcomes and assessment criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. In assessing a unit using RPL the Assessor must be satisfied that the evidence from the student meets the standard for all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- If the awarding body have published assessment or grading criteria, the assessor should review the evidence against all the criteria.
- If the assessor finds gaps in the student's work through RPL, then they will need to use more assessment methods to create enough evidence to be able to award the learning outcome for the whole unit.

#### **Documenting evidence**

- Evidence collected through the RPL process needs to be assessed and verified through the same quality assurance procedures that your centre uses for any other internal assessment methods.
- Ensure records of assessment against prior learning are kept and are available for verification if requested.

#### **Stage 4: Outcomes of the RPL process**

- Once the course team has checked a student's evidence and made an assessment decision, it is important that feedback is given to the student including the assessment decision and what options are available to the student if they have decided not to award the unit or qualification.
- The team should check that the student understands how they can appeal if they do not agree with the assessment decision via the STCG Appeals Process. The Internal Verifier for the course should check the evidence if there is a query from the student. If a decision cannot be made the team should seek the advice of their Head of Section / Curriculum Manager / Head of School and the Quality Nominee if required.
- The student may then choose to complain to the awarding body to appeal the decision. If the student can show that they have met all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria using RPL they will be able to claim for the unit or qualification. If the awarding body identify that not all unit requirements have been met, they may ask the centre to provide more evidence, or ask the student to complete the standard assessment requirements if they want to achieve the qualification.

**Stage 5: Claiming certificates**

- Teams can claim certificates once the quality assurance processes have been successfully completed using the standard procedures.
- After certification, the centre must keep the assessment and internal verification records, along with any extra RPL records for the time required by the awarding body (e.g. 3 years for Pearson).

**Stage 6: Appeals**

- If a student wants to appeal against a decision made about their assessment, they first need to follow the STCG Appeals policy and procedures and then contact the relevant awarding body.