Further Education (FE) Admissions SOP

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Academic Year:
2025/26 Onwards

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Responsible Owner:
Head of Admissions and Information Services

Summary of Contents
The Standard Operating Procedure outlines the process the college will follow to ensure a consistent approach to FE Admission and enrolment of students into the College.

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Curriculum Planning, Admissions and Course Cancellation SOP

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N/A

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July 2025

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Summary

2.1 SERC recognises an applicant's first contact with the College is often through the applicant recruitment process. Therefore, the College is committed to creating a clear and 'applicant focused' recruitment process, showcasing the College's courses and support services, while also guiding applicants in both their course choices and each step of the application and enrolment process.

2.2 This SOP aims to bring together the Further Education & Traineeship application and enrolment experience.

2.3 This SOP takes account of all aspects of assessing an applicant's suitability for a course. SERC acknowledges that the decision to offer an applicant a course place goes beyond purely an assessment of academic suitability for the course. The College has a responsibility to consider any learning support requirements or reasonable adjustments that may need to be put in place to enable the applicant to attend College. In addition, the welfare of all staff and applicants must be considered, through the review of disclosed criminal convictions.

2.4 This SOP outlines the admission and course cancellation processes which meet the requirements of the Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access Section of the Quality Code; Competition and Markets Authority guidance for Further Education; and Awarding Organisation requirements.

3.0 Scope

3.1 This SOP will apply to all admissions at SERC. It will outline all aspects of the admissions process and will bring together the application and enrolment process.

3.2 This SOP also meets Competition and Markets Authority guidance for Higher & Further Education, and Awarding Organisation requirements.

4.0 Procedure for Further Education Admissions

4.1 Course Descriptors

Course descriptors must detail all entry criteria and costs pertaining to each individual course. Where a course requires a valid Access NI certificate, this information must be included in the course descriptor information.

Communications and Marketing use this information to promote courses. Courses will not be promoted unless a course descriptor is available online, this avoids confusion and customer inconvenience at enrolment periods.

Creating and Maintaining Descriptors

Senior Admissions Officer will liaise with Heads of School / Deputy Heads of School to create, approve, upload and maintain online course descriptors using the Course Descriptor App. At key times through the year (see Appendix 2) course descriptors will be reviewed and updated and/or new courses will have descriptors created.

All Further Education course descriptors will be updated annually for the academic year sixteen months ahead.

Deputy Principal Planning Performance and Engagement will provide final signoff prior to course descriptors being published on the website.

Quality Monitoring for Descriptors

Senior Admissions Officer will monitor the overall quality of course descriptors in relation to:

- Presence of course descriptor for all live courses
- Completion of all fields in the descriptor
- Grammar/spelling
- Match with template
- Readability/appropriate for customer

Where quality issues arise, the Senior Admissions Officer will liaise with School Support Officers (SSOs) to address these.

A template (Appendix 3) will be kept by the Senior Admissions Officer, which will be subject to annual review to ensure that there is a true reflection of the SERC learning experience.

Senior Admissions Officer will work with the Heads of School to improve quality where issues arise. The accuracy and completeness of course descriptors will form part of the Compliance Audit Schedule which will be overseen by Senior Admissions Officer.

Use of Descriptors for Customer Queries

Customer facing staff providing course information and guidance will use the course descriptors in the first instance. This will help to manage the number of calls/queries transferred to academic staff and will provide instant information for the applicant.

The Senior Customer Services Officers or nominated appointees will provide feedback regarding the content of descriptors and highlight any opportunities for improvement.

Admissions Criteria

The Awarding Body/Validating Organisation will determine the minimum entry criteria. The College reserves the right to enhance the criteria for all courses based on demand and required academic standards as specified by the awarding body.

Applicants are required to upload documentation to provide evidence of the entry criteria being met.

4.2 College Open Days

The College will run a minimum of two open events to showcase College facilities and courses, giving prospective applicants the opportunity to gain an insight into College life.

The College will hold an open event in June which can be used to facilitate the pre-entry advice and guidance sessions for part time FE students.

4.3 Application, Pre-Entry Guidance and Communication Process

4.3.1 Course Wizard

The College website course finder includes a Course Selection Wizard to assist applicants in their course choices. The wizard will guide applicants in their search for courses of the appropriate type, level, location, and mode of study. Applicants who are still unclear about their career choices submit a request to be contacted by the Careers department at the end of the wizard. Applicants will also be able to request contact from other College Support Services including Learning Support and Student Finance.

4.3.2 Course Applications

Full time applicants can apply for up to three full time courses, while there is no limit on the number of Part-Time courses that can be applied for on the online application portal. Applicants can use the Wizard to help assist them in their course choices. Further Education applicants should only apply for courses at Level 3 or below.

Following submission of a course application the prospective applicant, from here on known as the applicant, will receive an acknowledgement email.

4.3.3 Application Process

All Applicants follow a four-step admission process for Further Education:

Step 1 - Online application

Complete an online application. All SERC applicants must apply online www.serc.ac.uk. They can do this independently or on any SERC Campus (via the Learning Resource Centres). An automatic acknowledgement email will be sent on receipt of application and advising of next steps.

If the application flags that an additional assessment is required (this could be a learning support / reasonable adjustment or the disclosure of a criminal conviction) a member of the Learning Support team will be in touch. (See Learning Support SOP)

4.3.4 Reasonable Adjustments

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 ("SENDO") prohibits discrimination against disabled applicants and prospective applicants by schools and institutions of further and Further education. It introduces the duty not to discriminate against disabled people or applicants to further and Further education institutions. It is unlawful for the College to discriminate against a disabled person: in the arrangements it makes for determining admissions or enrolments to SERC; in the terms on which it offers to admit or enrol a person; and by refusing or deliberately omitting to accept an application for admission or enrolment.

SENDO legislation also requires that SERC make reasonable adjustments to ensure that any applicant with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is assisted while going through the admissions and enrolment process and in the progression and completion of their studies. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is an anticipatory and a reactive duty owed to all disabled people and applicants. However, adjustments cannot be made to the minimum entry criteria/competence standards.

SERC is committed to ensuring that it complies fully with this legislation and that it provides the best possible opportunities for every applicant.

SERC welcomes applications from learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There may be times, however, taking into account the resources of the College, when the nature of a student's ill health or behaviour requires support and adjustments beyond the expertise or capacity that the College can reasonably offer.

If an applicant declares that they have a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition (defined as lasting in excess of 12 months) their needs will be assessed by staff from the learning support unit in line with the Learning Support SOP (Admissions section). An applicant, who has declared a learning support need on their application, may not be issued with a conditional offer or early enrolment until the Learning Support reasonable adjustments assessment has been completed. An offer of enrolment may be rescinded if it is found that the College cannot reasonably meet the needs of an applicant.

4.3.5 Disclosure of Criminal Convictions

SERC is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all applicants, trainees, and staff while they attend the College. SERC is also committed to making sure that there is an equality of opportunity for all applicants including those with criminal convictions.

To help the College fulfil its commitments, all applicants must declare whether they hold or have held any convictions at the time of their application. If an applicant discloses a criminal conviction(s), he or she will not automatically be excluded from the application process. The

disclosure of a criminal conviction means that the College will apply the Criminal Conviction Process. This process allows a senior manager to consider the disclosure in the context of the occupational area that the applicant has applied to, the nature of the offence and the responsibility for the care of staff and applicants. Where appropriate a risk assessment and management plan will be completed and agreed with the applicant prior to the offer of a place on a course.

This is a separate and confidential process which is completed in keeping with Data Protection principles. Affected applicants will be advised about the outcome of this process separately and as quickly as possible. Where a current/previous conviction may preclude an applicant from doing a particular course, alternative appropriate courses may be offered. However, if the College becomes aware of an offence that has not been disclosed, it will review the risk and decide if the student must withdraw from the course (if enrolled) or be prevented from enrolling.

If an applicant declares that they have a previous criminal conviction, when completing their on-line application, they will automatically be directed to the Criminal Conviction Process . Any queries relating to the Criminal Disclosure Process can be directed to the Customer Services Team.

The applicant may be offered a conditional offer or place on the programme pending the outcome of any risk assessments. However, any such offer may be rescinded once the outcomes are known.

Step 2 - Pre-Entry Advice and Guidance Sessions

In certain circumstances and at the discretion of the course team, applicants will need to attend a mandatory scored pre advice and guidance session. The format of pre-entry advice and guidance sessions must remain the same for each applicant. Where pre entry advice and guidance sessions are mandatory, Applicants will receive an invite via email from the relevant Curriculum Team. This email invite will detail the content of the pre-entry advice and guidance session.

Pre-entry Advice & Guidance sessions will run between April and June of each academic year. It is advised that sessions should take place every month, however this will be dependent on the number of applications and availability of staff. There may be a follow up session later in the month which can be used for the Skills Assessment e.g. audition, performance, portfolio, or written assessment to be completed. The requirements for this assessment will be communicated by the Curriculum Team via email.

Applicants will have the opportunity to accept or decline their invite via their online app. Failure to attend may result in your application being suspended. While invites can be accepted/declined/rescheduled up until the day of the session, applicants are advised to make contact with the College as soon as possible if the allocated time does not suit.

All pre-entry advice & guidance sessions will be scheduled through the online application system. A scheduler will be set up to avoid clashes.

Applicants who do not attend pre-entry advice and guidance session will be invited to attend the next available session unless they cancel their application for that course. Customer Services will carry out a ‘cleansing’ exercise for applicants who have not attended and have not cancelled their application. Applicants will be contacted to see if they are still interested in the course or wish to cancel their application. In some instances, the applicant may have received a conditional offer for another course.

The format of pre-entry advice and guidance sessions must remain the same for each applicant. Course Teams must agree the process by setting standardised criteria. All records of pre-entry advice and guidance sessions must be uploaded to the Applicant’s record on the Student Manager App.

In the event that Pre-entry Advice and Guidance sessions are not mandatory, course teams will issue conditional offers based on academic achievement alone.

Courses that are highly oversubscribed will advise their applicants about this fact and encourage them to consider an alternative course to keep their options open.

Step 3 – Skills Assessment

In certain circumstances and at the discretion of the course team, applicants will need to complete a Skills Assessment.

The relevant programme team will include the details of this in the invite to interview email. This assessment considers applicant skills beyond academic achievement. Examples of the assessment include an audition for performing arts, portfolio for art and design, practical task in engineering and feedback in leadership and management. Applicants may also sit a pre-entry test. Full details of assessment methods will be communicated to applicants in advance.

4.3.6 **Outcomes of Pre-Entry Advice & Guidance / Assessment Sessions**

Once the subject pre-entry advice and guidance has been completed or the decision has been taken not to hold advice and guidance sessions, the College can then proceed to one of the following:

1. Conditional Offer (Firm) - the offer of a place on the course if the applicant achieves the course entry requirements and there are places available. In certain circumstances the number of conditional offers issued may be limited to the number of places available on the course.
2. Conditional Offer (Waiting List) – the offer of a place on the course only if there is one available. Priority will be given to those with a Firm offer. Subsequent places will be offered on a date of application received basis
3. Enrolment - The applicant already meets the course entry requirements and successfully passes the pre-entry advice and guidance / assessment session.
4. Further guidance sessions to follow or not successful. If applicants are unsuccessful, the relevant team will direct and support applicants to a more appropriate course option. The applicant can also be referred to the Careers Team for further advice and guidance.

Step 4 – Confirmation of Qualifications on Entry and Enrolment

4.3.7 **Applicants with a Conditional Offer (Firm)**

Applicants will be advised to attend the College in person as soon as results are received. Applicants are also required to upload/submit documentation to their application account to provide evidence of the entry criteria being met. The Course Co-ordinator/Tutor will check and approve the qualifications on entry.

On results day, applicants must log on remotely and upload their results. The College LRCs will be available for this also. These applicants will be treated as a priority, providing that they upload results before the 10am deadline.

If all entry criteria have been met and confirmed by the course co-ordinator/tutor, the applicant status will be updated to ‘Enrolled’ and a confirmation email will be sent.

If the qualification documentation does not meet the specific requirements, the applicant will be asked to resubmit their documentation. If entry criteria are not met, the applicant will be advised by the Course Co-ordinator/tutor by email. The Course Co-ordinator/Tutor will endeavour to direct the applicant to a more appropriate course option or refer them to the Careers Team for further advice and guidance on their next step. The Applicant will be moved to ‘Entry Requirements Not Met (Unsuitable for Course).

4.3.8 **Applicants with a Conditional Offer (Waiting List)**

Applicants will be advised to attend the College in person as soon as results are received. Applicants are also required to upload/submit documentation to their application account to provide evidence of the entry criteria being met. The Course Co-ordinator/Tutor will check and approve the qualifications on entry.

On results day, applicants must log on remotely and upload their results. The College LRCs will be available for this also. These applicants will be dealt with in date of application received order and will only be allocated a place if they have met the entry requirements and there is space on the course.

4.3.9 Applicants without a Conditional Offer / New Applicants

Enrolment will take place on all four main campuses.

The enrolment days will be advertised in the local press and prospective students who have not yet applied will be welcome to attend.

Prospective students will be asked to complete an online application or to update their online application with their exam results if they haven't already done so. These later applicants are then directed to the pre-entry advice and guidance area if required for their chosen subject. Applicants will be seen on a 'first come, first served' basis.

4.3.10 Admission Appeals

Unsuccessful applicants have the right to Appeal the decision.

Admissions Appeals will follow the College Complaints Process

Complaints received about course admission will be acknowledged within 2 working days, investigated by the Head of School, and responded to within 5 working days via email.

If an applicant is dissatisfied with the College response to their complaint, they have the right to submit a Complaint Appeal in writing to the Principal and Chief Executive.

If the Applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint appeal, they have the right to refer the matter on to the Awarding Organisation and/or the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

4.4 Keeping in Touch Communications

SERC will maintain regular email communication with applicants during each step of the application process. As well as focusing on the actual application and enrolment process the communications will introduce applicants to the range of Support Services the College offers and highlight 'Good News' stories on the achievements of current applicants.

4.5 Part-time Enrolment

Part-Time applicants who apply for a course that requires an interview will have to attend a pre-entry advice and guidance session. The outcome of this session will either be the offer of a place on the course, or if unsuccessful, directed to another line of study. Their enrolment status will be updated by the tutor to 'application approved' and the applicant will be referred to Customer Services to complete the enrolment process and pay for their course. All Part-Time applicants are required to make payment for their course at the point of enrolment in line with the terms set out in the College Fees Policy

Part-Time applicants looking to enrol after the Part-Time enrolment evenings, will be contacted by the School to arrange a pre-entry advice and guidance session. Course teams should check their application lists weekly to ensure that all applicants are contacted.

Part time applicants who apply for a course that does not require interview should contact the College after they have submitted their application. Customer Services will take their payment

and confirm their enrolment. Places are offered on a first come, first served basis therefore it is the responsibility of the applicant to make payment in order to secure their place.

4.6 Age restrictions

Applicants must reach the age of 16 on or before 1 July of the year on which they wish to study in order to be considered for a Full Time course. Students under the age of 16 on 1 July remain the responsibly of the Education Authority and are not permitted to enrol at SERC.

Students who are under the age of 16 on 1 July may be permitted to enrol on certain Part Time courses. The following conditions must be met:

- Must have approval from Head of School. The Head of School can decide not to approve the enrolment if they deem it to be a risk to the student or other students enrolled on the programme
- Must have a letter from the Principal of their School confirming that enrolling on the course will not have an adverse effect on their studies
- Students who are under the age of 16 who are permitted to enrol on a Part Time course, will pay the full fee. No concession fees will be available

4.7Enrolment After Results Day

Academic staff will be available on a rota basis for any applicants who wish to enrol between enrolments days and the start of term. Academic staff will follow the same enrolment processes for each applicant regardless of when they come to enrol.

Course teams should check their applications daily to ensure that all new applications are attended to in a timely fashion.

The School Support Officers will receive an alert of any new applications made after enrolment days via email.

Notification of Course Enrolment

All applicants will receive an email and a text message confirming their start date and time. This will be issued by the Senior Admissions Officer

Enrolment After Course Commencement

Applicants may still apply post commencement of the Course Start Date. Course teams should continue to check, in conjunction with the alerts, their application lists to ensure that late applications are dealt with appropriately.

5.0 Complaints

If an applicant wishes to lodge a complaint about the admissions process, they should refer to the College's Complaints Process, available at link Complaints and Compliments Policy - SERC

6.0 Responsible Owner

It is the responsibility of Head of Knowledge Management to ensure that this procedure is implemented, adhered to and reviewed.

7.0 Communication Plan

This SOP will be available on the Learning Engine on the Staff Intranet and the SERC website under ‘Public Information’.

8.0 Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	July 2023	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
1.1	April 2024	4.3 PEAG and Skills assessments are no longer mandatory and are at the discretion of each school. Conditional offers may be rescinded following the outcome of any risk assessments. In certain circumstances the number of conditional offers issued may be limited to the number of places available on the course. Responsible Owner title updated to Head of Knowledge Management.
1.2	October 2025	Responsible Owner updated. Reference to Head of Knowledge Management replaced with Senior Admissions Officer throughout. Reference to Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support replaced with Deputy Principal Planning Performance and Engagement 4.3.7 Remove words “with a conditional offer”.
1.3	May 2026	Conditional offer process updated to reflect limiting of offers if needed. 4.6 Added guidance for enrolment for under 16s.

Appendix 2: Further Education Timeline of Events

Title	Event	Timeframe	Responsible Owners
Course Offering Full time	Course offering review	November	Head of Quality, Intelligent Analytics, Heads of Schools, Training programmes Manager
Course Offering Full time	Provision updated and rolled over	November	Data Quality Unit
Course Offering Full time	Course Descriptors updated	November / December	Senior Admissions Officer, Deputy Head of School, School Support Officers
Course Offering Full time	Course Descriptor checking	December/ January	Senior Admissions Officer, supported by Communications & Marketing
Course Offering Full time	Course provision signed off	January	Data Quality, Heads of School
Course Offering Full time	Prospectus sign off	January	Communications and Marketing, Director of Strategic Planning Quality and Support
Course Offering Full time	Live for applications	January	MILT, Data Quality, Admissions
Course Promotion	School Visits	Oct – April	Communications & Marketing, Careers, Training Organisation
Course Promotion	FE Prospectus Launch	January	Communications & Marketing
Course Promotion	College FT FE & HE Open Day (online applications)	March	Communications & Marketing, Customer Services, Training Organisation

Pre-Entry Advice & Guidance for applicants	Pre-Entry Advice & Guidance Sessions	April – June	Schools
Contact with Applicants	Keeping in Touch Communications	June – August	Senior Admissions Officer
Enrolment	August Enrolment Days	Held on GCSE results day each year	All SERC Staff

Appendix 3: Course Descriptor Template

Title	Event
Name of school	(main areas of study)
Awarding body	Provision updated and rolled over.
Course code	Insert unique course identifier code.
Campus	List all campus on which course will be delivered.
Status	Full-time / part-time (delete as appropriate)
Short description	This should be a brief description / overview of the course.
Course overview	In this section you must include how the course is delivered i.e. classroom based / placement etc including hours. It must include purpose and objective and highlight where qualifications could lead. It should outline core modules and skills that will be covered for duration.
Course modules	List of modules to be studied during the course.
Ideal if	Should detail who the course is aimed at.
You'll learn	A brief idea of what is taught throughout the course.
You'll love	Gives applicants an idea about what they will particularly enjoy about the course.
You'll progress	Sets out clear progression pathways.
You'll need	Sets out the minimum entry criteria needed for the course.
Minimum number to run course	State minimum number of applicants to be enrolled for course to run.