Admissions Reference Policy

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SCOPE OF POLICY

Queen Mary University of London reserves the right to request references as part of the application assessment process.

This policy sets out to

   a. Create a fair policy regarding the use of academic/professional references as an assessment criterion in the university admissions process
   b. Provide guidelines on the format, content and validity of references, as well as provision of information to applicants on the requirements
   c. Create a fair and transparent process for reference assessment

This policy applies to all programmes leading to the award of a Queen Mary qualification, for which applications are made direct to the university (i.e. not via UCAS). This policy may also apply to credit-bearing study that does not lead to an award. The requirement to provide a reference and/or details of an academic or professional referee will be made explicit to applicants during the process of application.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Applicants to Queen Mary programmes will be required to provide details of at least one academic referee at the point of application. Details of a professional referee will be accepted where this is not possible because the applicant has not been in full or part-time education in the last three years.

References must be provided in an appropriate format and meet requirements in terms of content and validity.

Queen Mary reserves the right to request additional references where further details are needed to assess an applicant's suitability.

The following are the core principles of the reference policy:

a. References must be provided in an acceptable format
b. References must be authored by an appropriate referee
c. References must meet validity requirements
d. The reference policy complies with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation
e. Queen Mary academic staff and members of the central Admissions team will use their professional judgement and guidelines below to determine if a reference can be deemed satisfactory, employing a degree of flexibility where possible and necessary.

FORMAT

References should normally be provided by the nominated referee(s), using the Queen Mary reference collection form.

References should either be uploaded via the secure portal, or forwarded to the Admissions team for review. The referee's contact email address should be:

- a business/company email address (such as gov.uk)
        OR
- a recognised higher education institution email address (such as ac.uk or .edu)

If a referee chooses not to use the reference collection form, they must provide their reference on official letter-headed paper, and the reference must be signed/stamped.

References which are not written in English must be accompanied by an official translation.

The reference should comment on an applicant's suitability for study, to include details of their academic performance to date and potential to succeed on their chosen programme.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE REFEREE TO THE APPLICANT

Referees should know applicants in an academic or, where appropriate, a professional setting, and be able to comment on their suitability for university study.

We would generally expect to receive an academic reference for an applicant who has graduated within the last three years.

Applicants who have graduated more than three years ago may opt to provide a professional reference.

Personal references cannot be accepted.

VALIDITY

All references should be dated within **two years** of the proposed programme start date at Queen Mary University of London.

References outside of this validity period can be considered at the discretion of the Head of Admissions or delegated authority.

REFERENCE COLLECTION

Referee details will be collected at the point of application. For entry to postgraduate research programmes we will usually ask for details of two referees. All other programmes of study will usually require details for one referee.

Applicants will be prompted to supply referee contact details as part of the application form.

- For programmes where we routinely require a reference, a reference request will be sent automatically to the nominated referee at point of application submission. Referees will receive a link to a secure webpage where they can upload their reference. A reminder email will be sent after five calendar days if the reference is still outstanding at that point.
- For all other programmes, we reserve the right to request a reference at any point in the assessment process.

Offers may be made conditional upon receipt of a satisfactory reference. Once a reference has been received, it will be assessed by the Admissions team to ensure it is suitable.

Queen Mary reserves the right to request either a second reference or an updated reference if the format or content is found to be unsuitable.

The final decision on whether to accept a reference or not sits with Queen Mary.

DEFINITION OF A 'SATISFACTORY' REFERENCE

Referees should comment on an applicant's academic potential and suitability to study on their chosen programme.   This should be evidence-based and objective. Queen Mary reserves the right to make the final decision regarding the definition of 'satisfactory'.

VERIFICATION

Queen Mary routinely verifies references with the respective referee. Should any reference be found to be fraudulent, Queen Mary will withdraw the application in accordance with the Admissions Policy[1].

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[1] http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/policy/

EVALUATION PROCESS

Evaluation will be guided by the core principles laid out in this document.

Flexibility may be applied in cases where an applicant is unable to provide a reference in the usual format, but where there is a strong academic profile.

All Admissions Officers will receive training on the assessment of references.

DATA PROTECTION

References are stored in accordance with the Queen Mary Records Retention policy and schedule[2] and Data Protection policy[3].

Confidential references are exempt from subject access requests (SARs), but they could be made available to applicants in a discretionary context.

If a SAR is received and we feel it is reasonable to share a reference, we will always seek to obtain the referee's approval in the first instance. Wherever possible we will seek to anonymise information and redact any comments which relate to a third party.

We would advise referees to supply references based on factual matters.

REVIEW

The Student Recruitment and Admissions Group (SRAG), chaired by the Vice-Principal (Education), approves the reference policy.

The reference policy will be reviewed at least every two years in advance of the start of the admissions cycle.

Approved by: SRAG (April 2019)

Review due: July 2020

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Head of Admissions

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[2] http://www.arcs.Queen Mary.ac.uk/governance/information-governance/records-management/records-retention-schedule/
[3] http://www.arcs.Queen Mary.ac.uk/media/arcs/policyzone/Data-Protection-Policy-v03.0.pdf