Durham University

Inspiring the extraordinary

Durham University STEP Agreement & Code of Conduct 2024

The Durham University Space to Explore Potential, or STEP, Agreement and Code of Conduct outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both Durham University and those taking part in STEP, in order to ensure that the programme runs to maximum effect for all involved.

It is important that you are aware of the following points relating to the programme. If you require any further clarification, we are available by email or you can request a telephone call to discuss these in more detail.

This document is divided up into a few main sections. Please ensure you have read the entire document before agreeing to the declaration in the online student forms. You may find it helpful to keep this document safe, in case you need to refer back to it later on. The sections are:

1) Key Terms and Definitions
2) Eligibility for the guaranteed offer and how it works
3) Expected student conduct
4) Common scenarios explained

1. Key Terms and Definitions:

"Guaranteed Alternative Offer" – Students who complete the programme successfully will be eligible for a contextual offer. They must show a high level of participation in all compulsory sessions. It is important to understand that it is the "offer" that is guaranteed and this is not a guaranteed place at the University – students still need to finish their A levels and achieve the required grades, for example (this is the 'conditional' part of the offer). The offer is also conditional on the submission of a satisfactory UCAS form (see below). The 'alternative' part is best explained as being equivalent to at least two grades lower than the standard offer. Therefore, if the standard entry requirement for your chosen course is AAA, then successfully completing STEP could mean your offer would instead be ABB.

Essentially, this means that based on the outcome of your engagement with the programme, the University *may* give you a promise to make you an offer *if* you apply to us for an undergraduate course in your STEP departments at Durham and you are studying any required level 3 subjects for your chosen course. You will then get a place at the University *if* you 'get the grades'. Please be aware that some offers will include subject specific requirements for example "AAB including an A in History" or "BBB including Maths A Level OR grade A GCSE Maths". We will explain this fully throughout the programme but it is *your responsibility* to ensure you are ultimately able to meet these conditions.

If you wish to apply for a different course or department than the ones you took on STEP, this is normally possible, but we cannot guarantee it. This will be subject to you being able to meet any subject specific or other requirements of the new programme. The University may also need to consider the level of demand for the new programme in the relevant application year. However, we will work with you to try our best to accommodate this wherever possible.

"Home Student" – the additional admissions benefits of successfully completing the STEP programme are limited to students who are recognised as having 'home status' and are classified as eligible for 'home' fees by Student Finance England at the time an application is made through UCAS. This includes the guarantee of an offer and the alternative conditions associated with any offer.

You have been offered a place on the STEP programme based on the information you have provided. From this information, we believe you are likely to be classified as being eligible for 'home' fees as information in your application or other evidence you have supplied could

indicate that you have ‘settled status’ in the UK. However, it is important that you understand that it is not possible to reach a conclusive decision on your ‘home’ status at this stage. Your actual fee status cannot be determined until later in the UCAS application process and the STEP team will not determine this. If you complete the STEP programme but are later classified as ineligible for ‘home fees’, you may not be eligible to receive the benefits mentioned above.

If you know now or learn later that you are not a ‘home’ student it is your responsibility to inform us and to seek further advice. Further information about fee status can be found online at: UKCISA - international student advice and guidance - England: fee status

“Satisfactory UCAS form” – Students applying with a guaranteed alternative offer from STEP are still subject to the rules and regulations of UCAS and of the University. As such, you must submit a satisfactory UCAS form in order to receive the guaranteed offer. In this context, a UCAS form may be deemed unsatisfactory if for example, the personal statement is plagiarised or inadequate, if the qualifications submitted are not suitable for the programme of choice (as above), your application is submitted late, you submit false information etc. It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with such requirements.

“Successful Completion” – In order to successfully complete the STEP programme you must attend all compulsory events and activities.

2. Eligibility for the guaranteed offer and how it works

Students who participate on STEP may be eligible for a “guaranteed offer”. It is important that you understand what this means and particularly, what it does NOT mean.
Simply having a place on STEP does not mean you are automatically eligible for a guaranteed offer. In order to qualify for the STEP guaranteed offer, you must:

- Successfully complete the programme. This means attending all compulsory events and activities.
- Submit a satisfactory UCAS form and complete the application process as normal within the right application year, this includes being able to meet any subject specific grade requirements, admissions tests, or interviews as relevant to your chosen course.
- Be classified as a ‘home’ student when you apply to the University – being given a place on STEP does not mean this assessment has taken place. See ‘Home student’ above.

Please be aware that it is the offer that is guaranteed, not the place at University. The guarantee therefore is that you will be made an offer if you apply to Durham University for one of your STEP departments and are taking any subject specific requirements for your chosen course. This does not mean you are guaranteed a place. It is important that you understand that you are still required to achieve the grades set out in the offer in order to confirm your place. College allocation is separate to this process and is therefore not guaranteed.

You may be aware that STEP students are sometimes eligible for additional bursary funding. It is important that you understand up front that such funding arrangements can change each year and as it stands currently, additional funding is means tested. This means that you are

not guaranteed to receive any additional bursary funding from the University as a result of your participation on STEP.

Please note that nothing above means you are committing to Durham University early in the application process. You do not make this commitment until you are at the stage of the UCAS process where you would normally be deciding which universities to apply to, that is, September/October of Year 13 at the earliest. You are only committing to have understood

what you would need to do in order to achieve the benefits on offer should you wish to.

3. Expected student conduct

Students are expected to take seriously their commitment to the STEP programme by:

- Committing to attend all compulsory timetabled events and activities, unless, due to reasons beyond your control (i.e. illness) you are unable to participate.
- Informing the STEP team if you are unable to attend any events or activities.
- Informing the University if any issues involving the scheme arise or there are any changes to your circumstances such as changing or dropping A level subjects or if you move house or your contact details change.
- Maintaining regular, appropriate and professional contact with the STEP team, including by replying to all requests for information and signing up to events on time.
- Abide by the code of conduct (below) whilst engaging in online events/activities and attending on site events at the university; and understanding that any breach of the code of conduct could result in your place on STEP being withdrawn.

We want you to have a positive experience and make the most of the programme.

In order to ensure that everyone enjoys the programme it's important that you follow the rules, act with respect and have a responsible attitude throughout your time with Durham University either online or when attending events on site at the university. The following code of conduct applies to any form of interaction with the university as part of the programme. This means both attending events on site at the university and any online activity. Online activity could be using the University's website, Microsoft Teams, or any other online platform as may be used from time to time.

Remember that you are in an inclusive learning environment shared with people who may be of different ages, nationalities, religions, cultures and backgrounds, with different knowledge, ability and experience to you.

It is important to note that for online components of the programme, communicating online through text can lead to misunderstandings, so it is important to give other people the benefit of the doubt, and be kind in your interactions: sometimes it's difficult to know or fully appreciate the situation of the person you're talking to.

We expect all STEP students to:

- Commit to do the best academic work possible and engage positively with all sessions and activities.
- Maintain a high level of engagement with the programme, unless there is a valid reason for absence, such as illness, and you have notified us of this. Online this engagement would include responding to messages, attending webinars, and all compulsory sessions and meetings. At on-site events this would include class sessions, meals, activities, and meetings.

- To catch up on any missed sessions and keep the STEP team informed. For example, if you are unable to attend a live webinar, you may be expected to watch the recording later and to confirm this with us for monitoring purposes.
- Tolerate and respect all individuals including but not limited to people of different races, cultures, religions, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, and national origins.
- Behave in a friendly, cooperative, polite, and responsible manner toward all persons involved in activities. This includes, online sessions and activities, on site events, as well as in the larger campus and local communities.
- Uphold academic and personal integrity, respecting the ideas and property of others, and ensure that those around you do the same. Cheating, copying, and

plagiarising are unacceptable.

- Appropriate use and behaviour when engaging with the official Durham University Instagram account or other University related social media.
- Follow any and all additional session rules as set out below or from time to time by University staff leading on events.
- Respect the privacy of other participants, including by refraining from viewing, using, or sharing contact details such as email addresses. Do not attempt to contact Durham student mentors or University staff using the private chat function in Microsoft Teams, personal email addresses, or to make direct contact via other social media accounts. Similarly, n*o mentor or staff member should attempt to contact you using your social media accounts – if they do, please contact us immediately.*
- Refrain from bringing prohibited items (including alcohol, illegal substances and dangerous items) to any of the events.
- Not use tobacco, cigarettes, vape/e-cigarettes or similar on university premises.
- Use computer and other resources responsibly.
- Report any incidents affecting you or witnessed by you, that you believe to be a clear breach of the above, especially if you are made to feel uncomfortable or upset.

Typical online session rules include:

- Comply with requests of University staff e.g. the STEP team, academic teaching staff, and mentors. Such requests may include turning off your camera/microphone in meetings unless invited to turn them on. This is so that background noise and interruptions can be kept to a minimum for the benefit of all participants.
- Being mindful of your background whilst having your camera on during sessions. Students should avoid having anything in their background that is likely to cause another person upset, offence or would in any other way make them feel uncomfortable.
- Refrain from using inappropriate language or offensive conversation topics and behave in an appropriate and responsible manner at all times. This includes refraining from sharing or distributing inappropriate or offensive material.

When using STEP online communication facilities you may not:

- Post anything abusive, defamatory, obscene or otherwise illegal. This includes but is not limited to not using words or sharing content that is offensive or inflammatory, such as language, names or content that is sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, sexually explicit, abusive, contains swearing or is otherwise likely to cause offence.

- Copy or forward email or any other private messages without permission, unless as reporting inappropriate or offensive behaviour of other users through official channels. Include material that is confidential or the copyright of which is owned by someone else, unless you have first obtained permission. post any advertising or promotional material.
- Behave in an impolite or offensive manner.
- Deliberate or reckless activities having, with reasonable likelihood, any of the following characteristics:
  - Wasting staff effort or Durham University resources;
  - Corrupting or destroying other users' data;
  - Violating the privacy of other users;
  - Disrupting the work of other users;
- Continuing any activity, including use of software or hardware, after Durham

University staff has requested that such activity cease for example where such use or activity is causing disruption to Durham University systems.
- Other misuse of STEP's online platforms, such as the introduction of "viruses" or other harmful software or malware via STEP to resources on STEP, other users of the STEP online platform, or another Organisation's network.

- Durham University reserves the right to remove, vary or amend any of the content which appears on the STEP online platforms at any time and without prior notice.
- When submitting postings or assignments within STEP you must give due acknowledgement for material quoted from other sources.
- **Typical on site rules for student conduct include:**
- Comply with the requests of your Event Staff, Academic Teaching Staff, Site Manager and Mentors.
- Adhere to the timetable including arriving to breakfast punctually and respecting any curfew.
- Attend all classes, guest lectures and activities on time.
- Leave your rooms, the refectory and classrooms tidy at all times and dispose of litter appropriately.
- Not leave the site unescorted by residential staff except by agreement with the STEP senior staff.
- Not wander around the site or use the computer resources unescorted by residential staff unless expressly allowed to do so.
- Not enter any accommodation block or other students' bedrooms, except your own.
- Not deface, tamper with or damage the university's or other people's property.
- Refrain from using inappropriate language (eg, swearing) and behave in an appropriate and responsible manner at all times.
- Not speak to members of the press – should any visit one of the events – unless this has been cleared with STEP senior staff. (This is for the protection and safety of others and to respect the privacy of others).
- Should there be any in place at the time of on-site visits, adhere to any additional university policies or guidelines related to Covid-19 to protect the community (unless you are exempt). The university guidance is continually updated in line with government guidance, and as such any policies or guidelines linked to this, will be communicated separately, prior to each individual on site event, to provide the most up to date information.

Serious Incidents of Misbehaviour

In the event of serious incidents of misbehaviour, such as fighting, damage to property, racial abuse or any other serious discrimination, the use of illegal substances or alcohol, the student(s) concerned will not be allowed to continue on the programme, their parents (or guardians) will be informed and arrangements will be made for the student(s) to be removed.

To the extent that such behaviours can take place online, this includes cyber-bullying or presenting online in a manner consistent with the above. Where such behaviour takes place on site at the university, parents (or guardians) will be informed and arrangements will be made for the student(s) to be returned home. Parents/guardians will be liable for the cost of the student returning home in this event.

Confidentiality

Whilst we respect every individual's right to privacy we cannot promise absolute confidentiality. All information held concerning students on the programme will be kept strictly in adherence to Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation. We observe strict confidentiality regarding all student records. We will, however, inform parents/guardians or other relevant bodies of any issues that we are made aware of that we believe warrant such

action**.** Furthermore**,** for reasons of safety, transparency, and to safeguard all participants of STEP, during online activity, any conversations had on a 1-1 basis between students and members of the University, e.g. within “Chat” functionality, may be recorded and shared with the STEP staff team for moderation. We do not monitor conversations students have with each other.

Security

Each individual is responsible for the security and use of any username and password they may be provided with. You are not allowed to use the account, username or password of any other user. You must not disclose your username or password to anyone else.
In compliance with Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, staff, students and visitors using University IT systems should not create, transmit, receive, view or store material with the intent to radicalise themselves or others.
If a member of the University community believes they may have encountered a breach of this provision, they should contact the Office of the University Secretary immediately.

Copyright
Copyright of any study material and all other content of STEP are owned or controlled by Durham University. You are permitted to view, copy, and print any documents shared with you as part of the programme subject to your agreement that:

- Your use of the material is for your own personal information, and for non-commercial purposes only.
- You will not modify the documents or graphics in any form or manner.
- You will not copy or distribute graphics separately from their accompanying text and you will not quote materials out of their context.

Additional Rules and Requests

When you engage with the university either online or at events on site, staff may explain some additional rules and regulations that will apply to specific sessions or activities. As such, it is expected that you will adhere to them for your own health and safety, and that of other students and staff. The above provides a broad overview of our expectations but failure to adhere to additional rules and requests at events, not set out above, will be deemed as a breach of the code of conduct.

Please note:
We operate a “zero tolerance policy” with regards to the above. This does not mean that students will be removed for minor breaches but it does mean that we will challenge negative behaviours. However, if students do not adhere to this Code of Conduct or we otherwise feel it is in the best interests of the wider STEP cohort or University community, they may be withdrawn from the scheme by the STEP Manager at any point. Persistently negative behaviours (even if minor) or serious breaches that are incompatible with the supportive and inclusive environment we create will result in students being removed.

4. Common Scenarios Explained

Withdrawal from the programme / exclusion from events –

You have been accepted onto this scheme because we believe you have academic potential based on the information given on your application form and support from your school or college. If for any reason your school or college no longer wishes to support your

participation in the scheme, or your academic achievement is significantly lower than predicted, it may no longer be appropriate for you to continue on the scheme.

Additionally, the STEP team work hard to ensure that all events are safe and enjoyable for all participants. To help us achieve this it is important to ensure that you follow the rules, act with respect and have a responsible attitude throughout your time with us. With this in mind, we may withdraw anyone from the programme who acts in breach of the code of conduct, session rules or any rules outlined on events.

Changing subjects –

Due to competition for places, it may not always be possible to change subject throughout the programme, particularly where subject strands are full. We may be unable to accept subject change requests within four weeks of the Summer School as we need to confirm numbers with academic staff for planning and admissions purposes. It is important to note that although we may agree to consider a request, this does not guarantee that your request will be successful. If you are concerned about your subject allocations, it is imperative that you seek advice from the STEP team as soon as possible.

Combining subjects –

If you wish to apply for a Joint Honours, Combined Honours in Social Sciences, Liberal Arts or Natural Sciences programme at the University, you may be able to do so through STEP. However, it is not possible to run strands for these programmes for the purposes of the STEP events. The rules on these programmes vary, such as we may not be able to make you more than one offer if you apply for Natural Sciences. Advice about this and similar scenarios will be provided throughout the programme, and you can seek advice from the STEP team if you have any questions. You can e-mail step@durham.ac.uk.

Attendance at events –

If you are unable, for any reason, to attend any of the programme events, particularly the summer residential, you should contact us immediately. Please note that it may be appropriate to withdraw students from the programme in order to give a place to a candidate who is able to complete the programme.
We highly recommend that you attend all events to make the most of your experience. We have selected you partly based on your assumed motivation for the programme and thus we have an expectation that students will participate in every event, except in exceptional circumstances such as illness or other unforeseen circumstances. If for whatever reason you cannot attend an event, it is important that you give us as much notice as you can.

Deferring your STEP offer –

Sometimes students want to take a year out from their studies (gap year) to work or travel before coming to university. Where students have an offer from a university but want to start a year later, this is called ‘deferred entry’ or a ‘deferred offer’. For example, if you are in Year 13 in 2024/25 you would ordinarily be applying to start your course at university in September/October 2025. This is called ‘2025 entry’. However, if you apply for deferred entry this would mean starting a year later in September/October 2026 or 2026 entry.

It is possible but not guaranteed that STEP students can defer their STEP offers. There are two main ways this can happen:

1) Students apply through UCAS in Year 13 as usual but apply for deferred entry. This means you will find out whether or not you have a place for the relevant entry year sooner.
2) Students choose not to apply in Year 13 but submit a request for the STEP offer

to be held over for a subsequent entry year.

If you are thinking of applying for deferred entry then we will be happy to discuss this with you at that time.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. We appreciate that there's a lot to take in. We also understand that for the vast majority of students the matters we draw attention to in the code of conduct will never be an issue, with or without a formal document. So we also appreciate you taking the time to read this.