rijksuniversiteit groningen

Guidelines for University of Groningen Admissions Boards

Valid from November 2025

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1. Introduction

The Faculty Admissions Board plays a key part in admitting students to individual University of Groningen degree programmes. This Board is responsible for the substantive assessment the previous qualifications of applicants (candidates) with Dutch or international qualifications that are not directly admissible. It then decides whether these applicants are admissible, based on the level of their previous qualifications and the subject matter covered.

This guideline was created to inform Admissions Boards about the principles that apply to them, from a legal perspective. The guideline also explores a number of admission-related topics, such as selection, matching, and cooperation with the University of Groningen's central Admissions Office. Where necessary, the guideline distinguishes between admission to Bachelor's degree programmes and admission to Master's degree programmes.

Application files based on a Dutch qualification that does not qualify for direct admission are sent to the admissions board directly (or via support services). Application files from applicants based on an international qualification are sent to the admissions board via the admissions office. The assessment procedures for both types of files (prior education requirements/selection criteria) are the same.

N.B. This guideline is not intended to be a fully comprehensive document covering all aspects of admission to the University of Groningen. Accordingly, this document will cover most subjects in outline. However, it will include references to the relevant regulations for those who require further details.

2. Legal framework

The Admissions Board has no basis in law. According to the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), the authority to admit students lies with the Board of the University. The Board of the University has elected to appoint Admissions Boards. The authority to admit students was transferred by mandate from the Board of the University to the Faculty Boards, and then from the Faculty Boards to the Admissions Boards. Some Admissions Boards have assigned their authority in this matter to the Admissions Office.
Details concerning the appointment and composition of Admissions Boards are contained in the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER):

Art. 2.5 OER	1. The Admissions Board has the power to decide on behalf of the Faculty Board in matters concerning admission to the degree programme. 2. The Admissions Board consists of: - one member, also the Chair, selected from the professors who teach in the degree programme; - one member/two members selected from the other academic staff who teach in the degree programme. 3. The study advisor for the degree programme (or a comparable faculty employee) will be an advisory member and take on the role of secretary. 4. Nominations are made by the Faculty Board, which also determines the admission requirements.

As the description in the OER makes clear, the Admissions Board decides on the admissibility of students. The legal framework for such decisions derives from the General Administrative Law Act (Awb), the WHW, the Regulations for Registration and Tuition Fees (RIC), and the OER, which apply specifically to the University of Groningen. It is important to stress that this concerns a decision on admission rather than a decision on a student's registration for a degree programme. A number of other conditions, such as completing a matching procedure and paying tuition fees, must be met before registration can take place.

2.1 General Administrative Law Act (Awb)

The Admissions Board decides on applications from candidates with international or non-standard Dutch qualifications. A decision taken by the Admissions Board in this connection constitutes a decision within the meaning of the Awb. This means that any decision-making process must comply with the following general principles of proper administration:

Principle of due diligence	The Admissions Board must exercise due diligence when preparing and taking decisions

Substantiation principle	The Admissions Board must properly substantiate its decisions
Principle of legal certainty	The Admissions Board must formulate its decisions in such a way that students know exactly where they stand or what the Admissions Board requires of them
Principle of equality	The Admissions Board must treat equal cases equally
Principle of confidence	Individuals with good reason (having been given a clear commitment, for example) to be confident that the Admissions Board will reach a decision is fully entitled to said decision

In addition, a legal remedies clause must be included at the end of the Admissions Board's written decision. This must state that any appeals against the decision must be submitted within a period of six weeks, via www.rug.nl/clrs.

2.2 Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)

The rules on admission are set out in Chapter 7 of the WHW.

Admissions to Bachelor's degree programmes	
Art. 7.24 of the WHW	General educational requirement: a vwo diploma
Art. 7.24a of the WHW	Educational requirements for educational module
Art. 7.25 of the WHW	Further educational requirements: specific profiles or subjects
Art. 7.28 of the WHW	Exemption by virtue of other certificates that are at least equivalent to the certificates referred to in Art. 7.24 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the WHW (a pre-university education diploma)
Art. 7.29 of the WHW	Exemption by virtue of a Colloquium Doctum (entrance examination)
Admissions to Master's degree programmes	
Art. 7.30b of the WHW	Admission by virtue of the possession of either a degree or of knowledge, insight and skills at Bachelor's level (University).

Art. 7.30d of the WHW	As a result of the Lisbon agreements, the entry requirements set out in Art. 7.30b and Art. 7.30c do not apply to persons as referred to under Art. 7.28 paragraph 1 first stipulation
Art. 7.30e of the WHW	Admission to a pre-Master's programme

2.3 University of Groningen regulations: Regulations for Registration and Tuition Fees (RIC) and the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER)

The WHW's rules on admission are further elaborated in the RIC and the OER. The regular intake dates for Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes are listed in the RIC. Aside from this, the Admissions Board can set a different intake date in individual cases. The RIC also states that the Admissions Board decides on admissions to a pre-Master's programme.

Details of a degree programme's entry requirements can be found in that degree programme's OER. An Admissions Board must assess any requests for admission against these requirements.

2.4 From legal framework to decision

As mentioned above, the Admissions Board assesses whether the candidate's prior education meets the requirements set out in the programme's OER. It is important that the Admissions Board acts within its mandate, so that decisions are made by the body that is authorized to make them. For example, the admissions board does not reassess the general level of the prior education. It is essential that decision-making is carried out with due care. Before a decision is made, the admissions board must have all relevant information at its disposal. The Admissions Board then assesses, on the basis of the information provided about the prior education, whether the content of the candidate's prior education meets the prior education requirements laid down in the OER. In its decision, the Admissions Board explains to the student in a comprehensible manner why a candidate does or does not meet the requirements. In doing so, the Admissions Board treats similar cases in a similar manner and dissimilar cases in a dissimilar manner, depending on the degree of dissimilarity. It is also important that the Admissions Board monitors the applicable deadlines so that candidates receive a decision in a timely manner. As a rule of thumb, once a file is complete, it will be processed within six weeks.

After the assessment of admissibility, candidates will receive a written decision (decision letter) from the admissions board or admissions office explaining the decision on their application (not admitted, provisionally admitted, or conditionally admitted) and what they still need to submit (if deemed admissible) in order to be definitively admitted and enrolled. Conditionally admitted means that the candidate does not yet meet all the admission requirements but will meet them by the time they start the programme, usually because they have not yet completed their prior education at the time of application. Provisionally admitted means that the candidate meets the

admission requirements but still needs to provide proof in the form of certified documents regarding their prior education.

The applicant can appeal a decision on admissibility. This appeal will be handled by the Board of Appeal for Examinations (CBE). The CBE informs the admissions board or the admissions office of the appeal and requests that they investigate whether a settlement is possible. This does not mean that a settlement is mandatory, as this is not always possible and often a further explanation of the decision is sufficient. If no settlement is reached, the case will be heard at a hearing of the CBE.

Specifically for international applications: if an applicant lodges an appeal against the level assessment of their application, the entire appeal procedure, including settlement discussions and hearings, will be handled by the Admissions Office. If the appeal concerns a decision on the substantive assessment, the Admissions Office will contact the Admissions Board to transfer the settlement meeting and any hearing to the Admissions Board.

3. Admissions Office (AO)

The Admissions Office (AO) is part of the Student Information and Administration (SIA) department of University Services. It works hand in hand with the Admissions Boards of the University of Groningen's various degree programmes. An Admissions Board can mandate (or sub-mandate) the AO to assess and process applications that are based on international or non-standard Dutch qualifications. To this end, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) can be concluded between the Admissions Board and the AO.[1]

The AO will process applications in the application module in ProgressNet, to which candidates are forwarded after registering in Studielink. In the application module, candidates are required to upload supplementary documentation that the AO can use to assess their application in terms of previous qualification requirements and entry requirements. The AO provides diploma assessment advice based on the prior education data provided by the applicant. The AO examines whether the level of prior education meets the requirements set out in the relevant WHW articles and the SLA. The AO bases its advice on its own sources and independent national diploma and accreditation databases. In some cases, the AO asks the admissions board to assess whether the content of an applicant's prior education contains sufficient academic components to justify equivalence to a university bachelor's degree. The diploma assessment advice is shared with the admissions board via Progress.Net. The Admissions Board is

[1] An SLA is concluded, per faculty, with the faculty's ALO (Admissions (Liaison) Officer – each faculty has one, see the AO's list) contact and the Faculty Board. The SLA annex contains the actual working agreements with regard to entry requirements as well as the Admissions Board's contact details. This annex is agreed with the Admissions (Liaison) Officers annually. The Admissions Boards must consult the Admissions (Liaison) Officers if they wish to make any changes or add any new requests (the ALOs themselves often consult the Admissions Boards each year). The AO must be notified of any changes and new requests by 1 October via the SLA annex, in line with the equal treatment of candidates. On 1 October, Studielink (the University's online application and registration service) will open for applications for the following academic year.

responsible for assessing the substantive alignment of the prior education described in the OER and the SLA, unless a mandate has been issued for this. The central Admissions Office of the UG assesses the general level of the prior education and determines whether it is equivalent to pre-university education or a bachelor's degree, depending on whether admission is to a bachelor's or master's programme. The Admissions Board does not reassess the general level of the prior education, but focuses on any subject-specific prior education requirements (laid down in the OER). The diploma assessment advice of the Admissions Board, combined with the assessment of the subject-specific relevance by the Admissions Board, forms the admission decision. Following this assessment, decision letters will be sent to candidates giving details of the decision on their application ('not admitted', 'provisionally admitted', or 'conditionally admitted') and of what they still need to provide (if they are deemed admissible) in order to be definitively admitted and registered. In this context, the phrase 'conditionally admitted' means that the candidate does not yet satisfy all of the entry requirements. This is usually because they have not yet graduated from their present educational programme. 'Provisionally admitted' means that the candidate meets the entry requirements, but must still provide proof of this in the form of certified documents regarding their previous qualifications.

4. Admission versus selection and language requirements

Admission and selection are two very different things. While a student can be deemed admissible for a given degree programme, that does not necessarily mean that they have actually been selected for that programme. Conversely, a student may have been selected for a given degree programme but may subsequently fail to meet that programme's entry requirements. Entry and selection requirements can be defined as follows:

Admission requirements: these requirements concern the competences that the student acquired when studying for their previous qualifications. These requirements are, therefore, related to that programme's learning outcomes (e.g. pre-university education or a Bachelor's degree programme). Admission requirements apply to the entire programme.
Selection requirements: these requirements concern skills that go beyond/exceed the learning outcomes of the student's previous qualifications. These can be aspects concerning the student's personal qualities (motivation) or the final results reflected in their previous qualifications (and which exceed the level of that degree programme's learning outcomes). Selection requirements may apply to the entire programme or, in the case of bachelor's programmes with fixed quotas, to a track within that programme.[2]

An appropriate previous qualification is a general entry requirement for Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. Art. 7.24 of the Act refers to 'entry requirements'. Paragraph 1 states that the general entry requirement for a Bachelor's degree programme is a pre-university education diploma. Art. 7.28 of the WHW lists the exemptions that apply for candidates with no pre-university education diploma. These include a propaedeutic certificate from a university of applied sciences' Bachelor's degree programme or foreign academic credentials that have been

[2] This is subject to change. The proposal for the Internationalization in Balance Act states that selection at track level is permitted, including for master's programmes.

validated as equivalent to a pre-university education diploma. Certain degree programmes also require a specific profile. These 'additional entry requirements' have been further elaborated by ministerial decree (Appendix A of the Ratho (Regulations on Application for and Admission to Higher Education)). The general entry requirement for a Master's degree programme is enshrined in Art. 7.30b paragraph 1 of the Act – a Bachelor's degree certificate or possession of knowledge, understanding, and skills corresponding to the level of a Bachelor's degree certificate.

In the case of Master's degree programmes, in addition to these general entry requirements relating to a candidate's previous qualifications, it is possible to set 'qualitative entry requirements' (Art. 7.30b paragraph 2). The Act refers to the requirements set out in Article 7.30b as 'entry requirements', but they are, in fact, selection requirements. The Act's references to 'qualitative entry requirements' should be read as 'qualitative selection requirements'.[3] Such requirements may only be imposed if the degree programme in question is selective.[4] The selection requirements must be included in the OER. Paragraph 5 of Art. 7.30b requires that at least two qualitative selection requirements should be used. Selection requirements concern the demonstration of individual competences that exceed the competences the candidate acquired when studying for their previous qualifications. The goal of selection is to find the most suitable students for a given degree programme. In some cases, this may involve programmes with a limited number of places. The decision to opt for a capacity restriction is often prompted by a shortage of placement locations or spaces for practical classes, for example.[5]

In the case of non-selective Master's degree programmes, the only form of verification concerning their previous qualification (or qualifications) that candidates can be required to produce is a certificate, plus a summary and further details of any course units that the candidate has passed. In some situations, it is also possible to request evidence of the attainment of a given language level. The basic language level requirement is that students must have a pre-university education level (or the equivalent) command of English in order to be admitted to a degree programme. If, based on their previous qualifications, it is not possible to determine whether the student has a pre-university education level command of English, then the university is permitted to set a language requirement for the student's admission. The above can also apply to admission to a Master's degree programme if the Bachelor's degree programme's (the previous qualification) learning outcomes include a given level of English, which exceeds pre-university education level English.

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[3] Understandably, this creates confusion. The option of selecting students for a Master's degree programme was introduced when the Higher Education (Quality in Diversity) Act came into force. Furthermore, the Explanatory Memorandum to this Act refers to 'selection requirements' in Article 7.30b, rather than to 'entry requirements'. See also: *Parliamentary Papers II* 2012-2013, 33519, 3, p. 17.

[4] In its annual plan letter, the Faculty Board can ask the Board of the University to make a given degree programme selective.

[5] The fixed quota degree programme is regulated in Art. 7.53 of the WHW. The system is the same for these degree programmes. They are restricted to qualitative selection requirements, and there must be at least two of them.

The diagram below illustrates the difference between entry requirements and selection requirements:

Term	Definition	Admission	Selection
Criterion	The capabilities a student must have	Substantive knowledge, insight, and skills at Bachelor's degree level	Capabilities that exceed Bachelor's degree level or that correspond to it
Standard	The level to be attained by the student with regard to these capabilities	Dutch Bachelor's degree level	Exceeds/corresponds to Dutch Bachelor's degree level
Method	The procedure used to determine whether a student meets the standard.	A range of procedures can be used, such as: related Bachelor's degree certificate or an unrelated Bachelor's degree certificate with subjects/minors/course units/tests (e.g. GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)/language test with a score equivalent to a related Bachelor's degree)	– A grade point average (GPA) – A score in a test (e.g. GMAT/language test) – A cover letter – A CV
Score	The weight assigned to the outcome of the procedure used.	a. Graduated from a related Bachelor's degree programme, or b. passed specific subjects/course units/minors, with a score of X in the examination (in accordance with the level of a Dutch Bachelor's degree)	Exceptional motivation, score X (above the level of a Dutch Bachelor's degree)

A summary of selective Master's degree programmes at the University of Groningen can be found here: https://www.rug.nl/education/master/nederlandse-studenten/aanmelding-en-inschrijving/selectieve-masteropleidingen/. Degree programmes that do not feature in this summary (i.e. non-selective programmes) may only impose entry requirements that are related to candidates' previous qualifications. They may not impose any selection requirements.

5. Expenses

The basic principle is that students must not be asked to pay for anything other than tuition fees. This is enshrined in Art. 7.50 of the WHW. There are a few exceptions to this principle, which are set out in the Regulation for additional contributions from students in higher education (*Regeling andere bijdragen van studenten in het hoger onderwijs*).[6] According to this national Regulation, students can be asked to pay for the cost of any administrative work involved in the assessment of the prospective student's foreign academic credentials[7], in assessing the language level of prospective students with foreign academic credentials, and in administering an entrance examination. Regarding the assessment of the prospective student's foreign qualifications, an own contribution of prospective students in the amount of €100 has been established. This own contribution is referred to as the application fee.

The above concerns payment towards the cost of admission to a degree programme, and is related to the student's previous qualifications. The Regulation sets out specific details concerning a number of situations. On the other hand, students may not be asked to contribute towards the costs of selection procedures and the associated selection requirements. Students may not be charged for any costs related to their ability to comply with a degree programme's qualitative selection requirements. Therefore, it is relevant to ask whether entry requirements or selection requirements are involved, as this will determine whether or not the students concerned can be charged for any costs involved.

6. Fixed quotas

Some Bachelor's degree programmes within the University of Groningen are subject to a capacity restriction or fixed quota. The RIC contains a summary of all those degree programmes that have a fixed quota.
Quotas can be set either by the Minister or by the Board of the University. The Minister can impose restrictions on degree programmes such as Medicine or Dentistry, in connection with the situation in the labour market. The Board of the University may impose capacity restrictions on other grounds. Faculty boards can request the Board of the University to do so. Fixed quota degree programmes are subject to both admission requirements and selection requirements. The Admissions Board restricts its active assessment of entry requirements to those students who have no previous Dutch qualifications. The degree programme in question carries out its own assessment, to determine whether a candidate meets its selection requirements (unless selection is done through an unweighted lottery). It then draws up a ranking list. Accordingly, this involves two different procedures.

[6] https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0045324/2021-09-01
[7] Prospective students from the EEA are admissible, unless it can be demonstrated that their qualifications are significantly different to those of students with a comparable Dutch certificate. Students with a certificate from a country in the Benelux region are excluded from this stipulation. Prospective students from countries outside the EU/EEA are admissible if it can be determined that the certificate concerned is equivalent to a certificate awarded to the graduates of a Dutch educational programme.

7. Matching

The WHW states that students are entitled to a matching process. Matching is an activity organized by the staff of individual programmes. It is designed to verify that the selected Bachelor's degree programme is indeed suitable for the student in question. Bachelor's degree programmes that are subject to selection procedures do not use matching. Master's degree programmes never use matching procedures.
In the case of the University of Groningen, matching is stipulated in the RIC (Art. 8 et seq.). The staff of individual degree programmes can decide for themselves whether matching procedures should be optional or mandatory. Both options are subject to the legal registration deadline of 1 May. Those degree programmes that use a mandatory matching procedure are listed at the University of Groningen's website. Prospective students who have not participated in a mandatory matching procedure cannot be registered as students at the University of Groningen. The SIA office will contact students to inform them of decisions taken in this regard. The Admissions Board or the AO might decide that a given student is admissible, however, they would be unable to proceed with registration if that student failed to comply with the rules regarding matching.

8. Legal rights

Any students (or prospective students) who dispute a decision by the Admissions Board or the AO can submit a notice of appeal via www.rug.nl/clrs within six weeks. The Board of Appeal for Examinations handles issues such as appeals against decisions regarding admission to a Bachelor's or Master's degree programme. Information about the approach used in these procedures can be found at the University of Groningen's website. Objections to decisions regarding selection procedures or matching are handled by the Disputes Committee.

9. FAQ

The following is a list of frequently asked questions and the corresponding answers. People with different questions about the legal aspects of the Admissions Boards' work should send them to onderwijs.abjz@rug.nl.

1. Q: Is it possible to impose different entry requirements or selection requirements on a track by track basis?
   A: Admission requirements apply to the entire programme. For bachelor's programmes with a fixed quota, selection at track level is possible. The definition of a bachelor's track is: 'a programme within a bachelor's program whose study load and the qualities in terms of knowledge, insight, and skills that a student must have acquired upon completion of the programme are equal to those of the programme'. For selective master's programmes, selection at track level is not permitted at this time.[8]

2. Q: Is it possible to disregard the diploma assessment advice of the Admissions Office?
   A: If the Admissions Board disagrees with the advice, it is possible to present arguments as to why the level requirement is or is not met. The Admissions Office will then reconsider the matter. The Admissions Office bases its recommendations on, among other things, the relevant articles of the WHW. It is not possible to deviate from these. For example, it is not possible to grant admission to a bachelor's programme on the basis of prior education below the VWO (pre-university education) level, or admission to a master's programme on the basis of prior education below the university bachelor's level.

3. Q: If, in order to be eligible for admission to a Master's degree programme, students must have followed a specific specialization/minor within a Bachelor's degree programme, is this still considered to be a general entry requirement?
   A: No, if you reject other students who have followed the same Bachelor's degree programme but who completed a different specialization/minor within that programme, this constitutes a form of selection. Admission involves previous education requirements and such requirements refer to a related Bachelor's degree certificate (for example). This must involve a Bachelor's degree programme in its entirety, rather than just a part of that Bachelor's degree programme.

4. Q: In the context of admission, is the university entitled to request different documents from students with different backgrounds, to assess substantive aspects of their previous qualifications?
   A: Yes, provided that the entry requirements are the same for all candidates. Candidates with different previous qualifications must all undergo the same admissions procedure. Where possible, candidates should be treated as a collective but, where necessary, admission will be considered individually.

[8] This is subject to change. In the proposal for the Internationalization in Balance Act the possibility to select students on the level of tracks instead of on the level of the degree programme is included.

5. Q: What is the procedure for designating a degree programme as selective?
   A: In its annual plan letter, the Faculty Board can submit a request to the Board of the University to this effect (deadline: mid-February).

6. Q: Is a language requirement always an entry requirement?
   A: No, a language requirement that exceeds pre-university education level or Bachelor's level can also be imposed. However, this requirement must apply to all students and then is a selection requirement. As a result, this can only be used by degree programmes that are selective. If a given level of English is one learning outcome of a Bachelor's degree programme (the previous qualification) and if this level exceeds that of pre-university education level English, then this higher-level language requirement can serve as an entry requirement for the Master's degree programme without being a selection requirement.