



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

TAUGHT DEGREE AWARDING
POWERS AND RESEARCH DEGREE
AWARDING POWERS

Guidance for Higher Education
Providers: Criteria and Process
for applying for Taught Degree
Awarding Powers and Research
Degree Awarding Powers

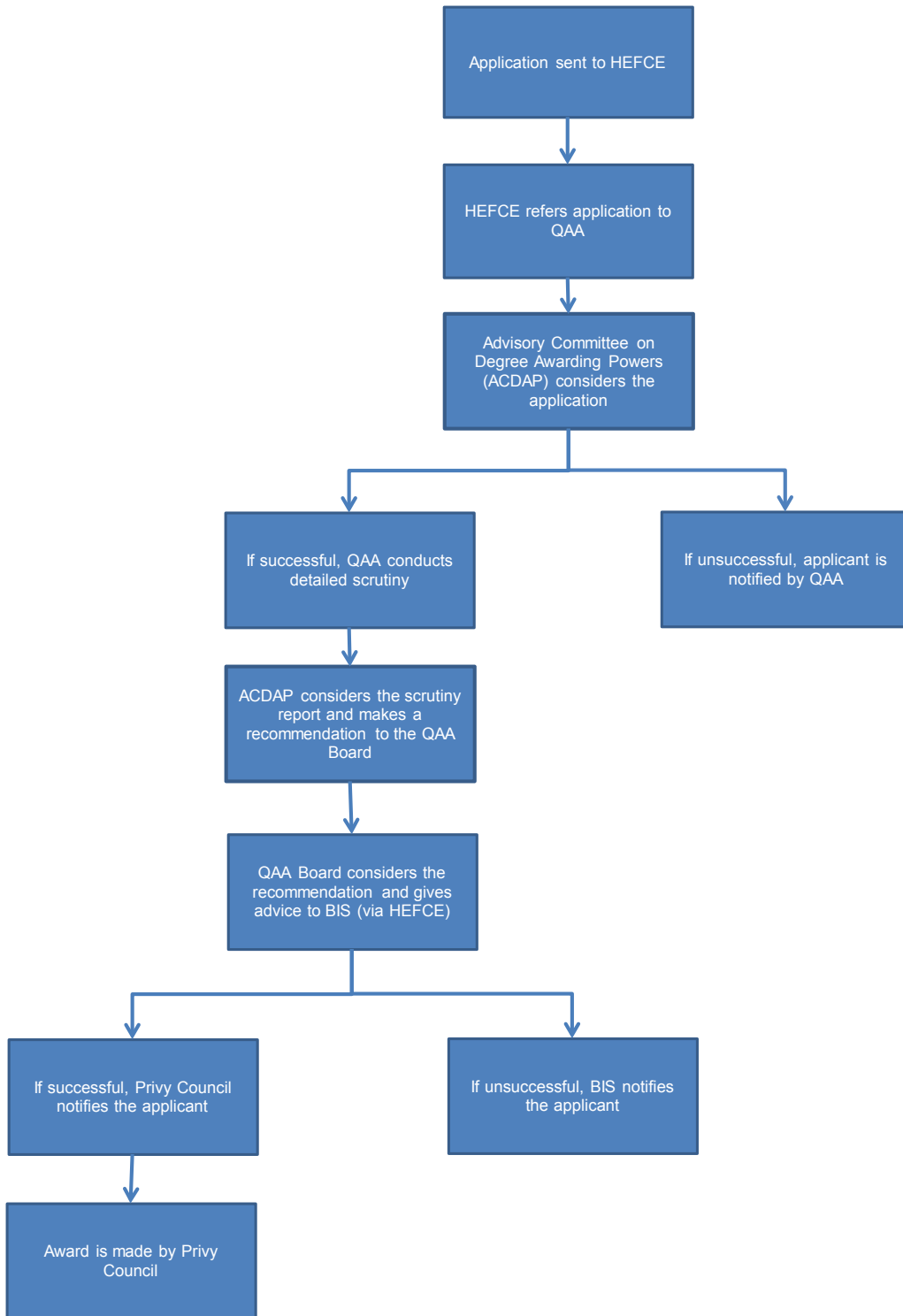
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Flowchart for application process



Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the criteria and application process for taught and research degree awarding powers (DAPs) in England. It replaces and supersedes the criteria and guidance set out in “Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title” (August 2004)¹. In particular it explains:

- who is eligible to apply for degree awarding powers
- how to submit an application
- the criteria against which an application will be assessed
- issues that may arise after an award is made

2. The guidance is issued by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) having consulted its partners in this area: the Privy Council Office; the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

3. This guidance applies to all new applications submitted on or after 15 September 2015.

4. Powers may be granted in relation to three categories of degrees, commonly referred to as “foundation” degrees, ‘taught’ degrees and ‘research’ degrees. This guidance is concerned only with “taught” and “research” degrees. “Foundation” degrees are dealt with in separate guidance.

5. Organisations granted taught degree awarding powers are able to award all types of taught degrees (Foundation, Ordinary, Bachelors and taught Masters) but not doctoral degrees. Only organisations granted research degree awarding powers can award Doctorates². Organisations with degree awarding powers can also award honorary degrees consistent with the type of power they hold – i.e. either taught and research honours degrees for organisations with research degree awarding powers or taught honours degrees for organisations with taught degree awarding powers.

6. Organisations in the publicly funded higher education sector³ will be granted taught and/or research degree awarding powers on an indefinite basis. All other organisations, including institutions in the publicly funded further education sector, will be granted taught and research degree awarding powers for a fixed term period of six years.

¹ This guidance continues to apply in Wales.

² In accordance with the DfES Consultation on Proposed New Criteria for Degree Awarding Powers and University Title issued 16 September 2003

³ In accordance with the provisions of Section 91(5) of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*

7. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the QAA publication [Degree Awarding Powers; handbook for applicants](#). This contains more detailed information on the application process, including:

- how to make an application,
- documentary requirements,
- timing of an application,
- costs
- the scrutiny process.
- appeals

Section 1: Who is eligible to apply?

1. Providers of higher education based in England can apply for taught and research degree awarding powers.⁴ The legal basis for the power to award degrees is set out in Section 76 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. This empowers the Privy Council to specify providers of higher education as competent to grant awards, in other words, to grant them powers to award their own degrees
2. The overarching requirement for degree awarding powers is that ‘an institution needs to be a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to quality assurance supported by effective quality and enhancement systems’ as set out in the House of Commons Official Report vol 201 Written Answers col 31 (16 December 1991). It needs to be able to show the effectiveness of its present regulatory and quality assurance arrangements and its capacity to meet the expectations on academic standards and quality management as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.⁵
3. As part of your application, you will be required to demonstrate that the organisation meets the detailed criteria set out in Annex A. However, you must first be able to demonstrate that it meets the pre-application criteria set out in section 2.
4. You are strongly advised to discuss the proposed application with QAA at an early stage to ensure that the organisation is eligible to apply and that you have a clear understanding of the criteria, documentation requirements and scrutiny processes, conducted by the QAA. You may also wish to discuss your overall application with HEFCE.

⁴ There are separate arrangements for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. For Wales, applications are considered under criteria announced in 2004. Applicant organisations in Wales should refer to the criteria and guidance set out in “*Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title*” (August 2004). For Scotland and Northern Ireland, applications are considered under criteria approved by Ministers in October 1999. Separate guidance for applicant organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland is available on the [QAA website](#).

⁵ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education consists of three parts which address academic standards (including national frameworks for UK higher education qualifications; characteristics statements; credit frameworks and subject benchmark statement); academic quality; and public information

Section 2: The pre-application criteria

1. **Taught degree awarding powers:** In order to make an application you first need to demonstrate that the organisation:

- has no fewer than four consecutive years' experience, immediately preceding the year of application, of delivering higher education programmes at a level at least equivalent to level 6 of the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (*FHEQ*); and
- has the majority of your higher education students enrolled on study programmes which are recognised as being at level 6 or above of the *FHEQ*.

2. Evidence of delivery of HE programmes equivalent to level 6 will typically be demonstrated via a validating/franchising agreement with a degree awarding body for the delivery of a full degree programme(s). Where your evidence of a track record does not take the form of a typical validating/franchise agreement for full degree provision, you should discuss this with QAA and HEFCE before considering an application.

3. **Research degree awarding powers:** to apply for research degree-awarding powers the organisation will normally have first secured taught degree-awarding powers, but concurrent applications for taught and research degree awarding powers will be processed simultaneously if requested. In considering an application for research degree awarding powers alone, QAA will seek evidence that the organisation continues to satisfy all the criteria governing the grant of taught degree awarding powers and that it is exercising appropriate stewardship of such powers.

4. The detailed criteria for both taught and research degree awarding powers are set out in Annex A.

Section 3: Submitting an application

1. Applications for the grant of taught or research degree-awarding powers should take the form of a critical self-analysis, prefaced by a formal letter of application from the chair of the governing body. The QAA handbook referred to in the Introduction contains more detailed information on the documentation required, including application templates.
2. The self-analysis should describe, analyse and comment clearly and frankly on the effectiveness of the means the organisation uses to satisfy itself that it is able to meet the criteria relevant to the powers being sought, as set out in Annex A. Although it is for you to determine how to structure the self-analysis, close reference should be made to the relevant criteria and supporting 'evidence requirements'.
3. The application should be submitted at least 5 weeks before the meeting of the QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) at which you expect the application to be considered. Dates of ACDAP meetings are published on the [QAA website](#).
4. Further information on how to apply can be found on the HEFCE [website](#).
5. In granting degree awarding powers (DAPs), it is important that there is clarity around the nature of the institution that will have these powers. Therefore, in making an application, it is important that you make clear the name of the institution that is applying and will be responsible for awarding the degrees i.e. the formal name of the institution that forms the cohesive and self-critical academic community that is to be assessed for the DAPs and which, if successful, would be awarding the degrees. You should provide a UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN) if you have one.
6. In applying for DAPs, you will need to submit information about the nature of your organisation. This should information about its current legal identity⁶, corporate structure (including any parent company, subsidiaries or fellow subsidiaries), its relationship with these entities (e.g., any teaching or services they provide for the organisation), and any teaching partners (even if these are part of the same corporate group or under common ownership/control).
7. All applications for the grant of degree-awarding powers should be submitted by the chair of the governing body to: gateways@hefce.ac.uk

⁶ An institution may change its legal form but remain the same institution – see also section 5

Section 4: Assessment of an application

1. HEFCE is responsible for processing applications on behalf of BIS. On receipt of the application, HEFCE will ask QAA to prepare formal advice. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a sub-committee of its board which meets quarterly. At the next appropriate meeting, it will consider whether the application fulfils the basic eligibility requirements set out in section 2, and whether, on the basis of your critical self-analysis, the application is suitable to proceed to detailed scrutiny. If ACDAP considers that the application does not merit detailed scrutiny, QAA will inform you of the reasons why the application has failed to proceed to detailed scrutiny.
2. If the application proceeds to detailed scrutiny, QAA will inform HEFCE and directly contact you to discuss the next steps in the process. The scrutiny process is necessarily intensive and likely to last at least 12 months – 18 months. Once the scrutiny has been completed, ACDAP will make a recommendation to the QAA Board as to whether the application should succeed. The QAA Board will then provide formal advice to the Department via HEFCE.
3. When it has received the relevant advice from QAA, BIS may seek the views of HEFCE on the financial sustainability of an applicant organisation that is in receipt of public funding. In instances where the organisation is not in receipt of public funding, BIS may commission HEFCE or another appropriately qualified body to offer professional advice on the financial stability of the organisation.
4. If the application is successful the organisation will be formally notified by the Privy Council who will make an order under section 76 of the Further and Higher Act 1992 conferring the award. If the application is not successful, your organisation will be notified by BIS. In either case, this should be within a matter of weeks of receipt of the HEFCE advice.
5. Final reports will be published by QAA once you have been formally notified of the outcome of your organisation's application.
6. If the application proceeds to scrutiny but you subsequently wish to withdraw it, you should write formally to HEFCE and QAA referring back to it and confirming that you have decided to withdraw it.

Section 5: Post-award Issues

Renewable DAPs

1. As set out in the introduction, organisations that are not in the publicly funded higher education sector, including further education colleges will be granted DAPs on a renewable basis. The decision to renew degree-awarding powers after each term rests with the Privy Council before the end of each period of six years. The criteria for the renewal of degree-awarding powers are that the organisation has:

- subscribed to QAA for the period it has held degree awarding powers
- been subject to an external review by QAA; and
- not received unsatisfactory judgements at the time of the QAA review. If it obtains an unsatisfactory judgement, it will be required to undergo a process of follow-up activity or partial or full review by QAA, and to achieve satisfactory judgements in all areas, as a criterion for the renewal of the degree-awarding powers.

2. In the event of non-renewal of degree awarding powers, you will be required to put in place secure and clearly stated arrangements to protect the rights and interests of students whose programmes of study may extend beyond the date when the powers lapse. Such protection will normally involve the transfer of students' registrations to an organisation with degree-awarding powers. Students transferred in this way will, if successful in their assessments, be awarded the qualifications of the receiving organisation

3. If you wish to apply for the renewal of DAPs, you should in the first instance contact HEFCE at gateways@hefce.ac.uk

4. You should submit your application 6 months before the date the organisation's current powers expire.

5. If you fail to apply for renewal, the power to award degrees will automatically expire in line with the date on the DAPs Order.

Becoming HEFCE designated post-award

6. If the organisation holds renewable DAPs and is subsequently designated as eligible for HEFCE funding under Section 129 of the Education Reform Act 1988, it will be eligible for indefinite DAPs only at the point at which it has signed up to the terms and conditions of the HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability and is in receipt of HEFCE funding. Once eligible, BIS will recommend that the Privy Council issue a new DAPs Order awarding it indefinite DAPs to coincide with the date the HEFCE funding commences.

7. Organisations in the HEFCE funded sector⁷ will be granted taught and/or research degree awarding powers on an indefinite basis. All other organisations, including institutions in the publicly-funded further education sector, will be granted taught and research degree-awarding powers for a fixed term period of six years.

Treatment of Degree Awarding Powers in the event of a change of ownership or legal status

8. Where a provider with DAPs, however awarded,⁸ has a change in circumstances, for example a change in ownership following a sale, a merger with another organisation or a change in legal status, it must notify HEFCE at an early stage to discuss the potential implications for its DAPs including its continuing eligibility to hold DAPs. The Department takes very seriously the need to maintain the value, standards and integrity of what these represent.

9. The Department needs to be assured that the original ‘institution’⁹ awarded DAPs is the same institution post the change. For this purpose the ‘institution’ is the cohesive and self-critical academic community that was assessed by the QAA for DAPs and, in so doing, demonstrated firm guardianship of its standards.

10. Once awarded, DAPs cannot be ‘transferred’ from one institution to another. After they have been awarded to a specific institution, they are ring-fenced within that institution. Should an institution with DAPs granted by the Privy Council under section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992:

- be bought by another organisation, the DAPs would not apply to the whole organisation but would remain ring-fenced within the purchased institution which was originally granted the DAPs;
- change its legal status, provided that it is the whole institution that is contained in the new legal entity, then the DAPs should remain with the institution.

11. Where an institution granted DAPs through a Royal Charter changed its legal status, the Royal Charter would be handed back to the Crown. As the DAPs only exist in the Royal Charter, the institution would need to reapply [to the Privy Council] for DAPs in its new legal form under section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

12. An institution with DAPs awarded through a Private Act of Parliament that wished to change its legal status would need to discuss the position with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in the first instance as the position of the DAPs will depend on how these were originally granted.

⁷ The provider must be in receipt of direct HEFCE funding and be subject to the terms and conditions of the HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability.

⁸ Royal Charter, Private Act of Parliament or by Order under section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

⁹ Institutions can operate within a distinct legal entity such as a company, a higher education corporation or a Royal Charter, or they can operate without a separate legal entity such as a trust.

Amendments to Order of Council Issued by the Privy Council under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992

13. The Privy Council does not provide a new Order to an institution with DAPs if the institution changes its legal status or its name since the institution remains the same and is separate from the name and legal status. Consequently, when such a change takes place the Order remains valid.

14. However, at the point at which the DAPs are renewed, an institution can request that its change of name be shown on the new Order. As the DAPs are granted to the institution which is separate from the name and legal status it is not necessary to reflect the legal status of the institution on the Order. This has been the policy position since 1992.

15. If your organisation is a Further Education College which has obtained foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) and then subsequently obtained taught degree awarding powers, the FDAP Order will be revoked and a new Order reflecting the award of TDAPs will be made.

Section 6: Rights and obligations applicable to holders of DAPs

1. If your organisation obtains taught degree awarding powers, the following may be relevant to you:

- **Subscription to QAA:** a successful applicant for degree awarding powers is expected to subscribe to QAA (see also page 10). See the QAA handbook for further details.
- **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA):** All holders of degree awarding powers will be required to subscribe to the OIA.
- **Student Number Controls:** No HEFCE funded provider is subject to student number controls. Alternative Providers who hold degree awarding powers are also not subject to student number controls although they are required to complete the Higher Education Alternative Provider Early Statistics (HEAPES) survey. Further detail is set out in the BIS publication [Alternative Providers Specific Course Designation: Supplementary Guidance for Providers](#). The Department reserves the right to reintroduce student number controls if required to protect the student experience and the public purse.
- **Specific course designation:** Alternative providers with degree awarding powers are not subject to annual re-designation for the purposes of specific course designation but will be reviewed as part of annual monitoring. Further detail is set out in the BIS publication [Alternative Providers Specific Course Designation: Supplementary Guidance for Providers](#)

Annex A: The Detailed Criteria

The criteria are designed to establish that your organisation is a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards. To this end, QAA will be judging, through its examination of the evidence provided, and against the criteria, the extent to which it can engender public confidence in its capacity to maintain the academic standards of the degrees it offers in England and, where relevant, overseas. While some of the evidence provided will be quantitative, some will also be qualitative. All evidence will be subject to peer judgements by senior members of the academic community.

Scrutiny by QAA determines whether the organisation is fit to exercise the powers being sought. In formulating its advice, QAA will consider the application against the individual criteria but it also takes a view on the way in which the organisation meets the criteria as a whole. It must clearly demonstrate that there can be public confidence, both present and future, in its systems for assuring the academic standards and quality of its degrees.

A: Governance and Academic Management

Criterion A1

An organisation granted taught degree-awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its higher education provision. In the case of an organisation that is not primarily a higher education provider, its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

Explanation

Degree awarding organisations must be soundly based in all respects (constitutionally, managerially, financially and academically) so that there can be full public confidence in them and their degrees. It is important that appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure that financial exigencies and other pressures do not jeopardise academic standards or the quality of programmes as specified in the programme specifications.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion A1 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. its financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to its higher education mission, aims and objectives;
- ii. its higher education mission and associated policies and systems are understood and applied consistently both by those connected with the delivery of its higher education programmes and, where appropriate, by students;
- iii. there is a clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation

- to its governance structures and systems for managing its higher education provision;
- iv. there is depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of its higher education provision;
- v. it develops, implements and communicates its academic policies and systems in collaboration with those who have responsibility for the delivery of its higher education programmes, and with relevant stakeholders;
- vi. its academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed and appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified;
- vii. its higher education activities take full account of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and associated guidance;
- viii. its academic risk and change management strategies are effective;
- ix. it has in place robust mechanisms to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education awards are not put at risk; and
- x. it has the capability of managing successfully the additional responsibilities that would be vested in it were it to be granted taught degree awarding powers.

B: Academic Standards and Quality Assurance

Criterion B1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

Explanation

The security of the academic standards of degrees and other higher education qualifications depends in large measure on the regulations which govern their award. These can be expected to cover a wide variety of topics ranging from the approval of degree schemes through to the conduct of student assessments and appeals against academic decisions. Many of them are dealt with in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* published by QAA. Organisations that award degrees are required to have in place a comprehensive set of regulations covering these matters.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion B1 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. the regulatory framework governing its higher education provision (covering, for example, student admissions, progress, assessment, appeals and complaints) is appropriate to its current status and is implemented fully and consistently; and
- ii. it has created in readiness a regulatory framework which will be appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards.

Criterion B2

An organisation granted taught degree-awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision.

Explanation

Organisations with degree awarding powers need to ensure that their qualifications meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education published and maintained on behalf of the academic community in the UK by QAA. Within the Infrastructure the different levels of higher education qualifications and their distinguishing features are described in the relevant section of the Qualification Frameworks. In order to meet these expectations, organisations seeking degree awarding powers will need to ensure that they have appropriate and effective quality assurance structures and mechanisms in place. The public interest in the consistency and comparability of higher education qualifications requires that all degrees awarded by recognised degree awarding organisations in the UK should at least meet the expectations of the Quality Code.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion B2 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. its higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the Qualification Frameworks;
- ii. the management of its higher education provision takes appropriate account of the *Quality Code*, characteristics statements; *credit frameworks*; relevant subject benchmark statements; and the requirements of any relevant professional and statutory bodies;
- iii. in establishing, and then maintaining, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, it explicitly seeks advice from external peers and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies;
- iv. its programme approval, monitoring and review arrangements are robust, applied consistently, have at all levels a broadly based external dimension and take appropriate account of the specific requirements of different levels of award and different modes of delivery; and
- v. there is an explicit and close relationship between academic planning and decisions on resource allocation.

Criterion B3

The education provision of an organisation granted taught degree-awarding powers consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes.

Explanation

Organisations offering higher education awards are expected to consider carefully the purposes and objectives of the programmes they are offering. They are also expected to design their curricula and learning support provision in a way that will give diligent students

the best chance of achieving the purposes and objectives and the necessary academic standards for the qualification being sought. Organisations offering higher education awards must have the means of establishing for themselves that their intentions are, in practice, being met.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion B3 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. its strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- ii. relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review;
- iii. responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored;
- iv. coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained;
- v. close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements;
- vi. robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those of its students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation are adequate;
- vii. through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, it defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards;
- viii. its assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff;
- ix. its assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives, learning outcomes and modes of delivery;
- x. appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in its assessment processes and consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking;
- xi. the reliability and validity of its assessment procedures are monitored and its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning; and
- xii. clear mechanisms are in place for use when a decision is taken to close a programme or programme element, and that, in doing so, the interests of students are safeguarded.

Criterion B4

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

Explanation

An organisation that has powers to award its own taught degrees must have in place the means of reviewing critically its own performance. It needs to know how it is doing in comparison with other similar organisations and have in place robust mechanisms for

disseminating good practice; it must also be able to identify limitations or deficiencies in its own activities and take timely and effective remedial action when this is called for. This implies both internal and external elements in the periodic review of its activities.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion B4 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of its higher education provision and that action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review;
- ii. clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes;
- iii. ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation (for example on programme design and development, on teaching, and on student learning and assessment) are drawn into its arrangements for programme design, approval and review; and
- iv. effective means exist for encouraging the continuous improvement of quality of provision and student achievement.

C: Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

Criterion C1

The staff of an organisation granted powers to award taught degrees will be competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

Explanation

The capacity and competence of the staff who teach and who facilitate and assess learning are central to the value of the education offered to students. Organisations awarding their own degrees have a crucial responsibility to ensure that students' chances of receiving a worthwhile education and securing the necessary academic standards for their qualification are maximised by effective teaching undertaken by staff with academic, professional and vocational expertise in line with the provider's curriculum offer. This includes a responsibility for ensuring that staff maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in research and scholarship in their subjects and, where relevant, keep in touch with practice in their professions and that structured opportunities for them to do so are both readily available and widely taken up. It also means that teaching for degree-level qualifications should reflect, in a careful, conscious and intellectually demanding manner, the latest developments in the subject of study. . Organisations also have a responsibility for making certain that the assessment of their students is carried out in a professional and consistent way that ensures the maintenance of the academic standards of their degrees.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion C1 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that all teaching staff engaged with the delivery of its higher education programmes have relevant:

- i. academic and/or professional expertise;
- ii. engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies);
- iii. knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching; and (in the case of those teaching on doctoral programmes offered wholly or in part by courses of instruction) active personal engagement with research and/or advanced scholarship to a level commensurate with the degrees being offered; and
- iv. staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship.

In addition, the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that staff with key programme management responsibilities (for example, programme leaders and assessment coordinators) have relevant:

- v. experience of curriculum development and assessment design; and
- vi. engagement with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers).

D: The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

Criterion D1

The teaching and learning infrastructure of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers, including its student support and administrative support arrangements, is effective and monitored.

Explanation

The teaching and learning infrastructure – all those facilities and activities that are provided to maximise students' chances of experiencing a worthwhile education and of obtaining the qualification they are seeking – is a means to an end. Organisations that award their own degrees are expected to have in place mechanisms for monitoring whether their teaching and learning infrastructure is meeting stated objectives and for responding to identified limitations in a timely and effective manner.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion D1 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. the effectiveness of its learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- ii. students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner;
- iii. constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance;
- iv. feedback from students, staff, (and where relevant) employers and other institutional stakeholders is obtained and evaluated and clear mechanisms exist to provide feedback to all such constituencies;
- v. students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students' needs;
- vi. available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of stated purposes of their study programmes;
- vii. the effectiveness of any student and staff advisory and counselling services is monitored and any resource needs arising are considered;
- viii. its administrative support systems are able to monitor student progression and performance accurately and provide timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic management information needs;
- ix. it has in place effective and confidential mechanisms to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters;
- x. the staff involved with supporting the delivery of its higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development;
- xi. the information that it produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete; and
- xii. equal opportunities policies are in place and implemented effectively.

Research degree-awarding powers

Criterion 1: Academic staff

The organisation's supervision of its research students, and any teaching it undertakes at doctoral level, is informed by a high level of professional knowledge of current research and advanced scholarly activity in its subjects of study.

Explanation

The creation and interpretation of knowledge which extends a discipline, usually through original research, is a defining characteristic of the UK doctorate and the award of research degrees places a particular and substantial responsibility upon an awarding body. The organisation's academic staff should accordingly command the respect and confidence of their academic peers across the higher education sector as being worthy to deliver research degree programmes. Organisations wishing to offer research degrees should have in place a strong underpinning culture that actively encourages and supports creative, high quality research and scholarship amongst its academic staff, and its doctoral and other research students. Such a culture typically involves exposure to a range of discipline-based, professional practitioner and research-active communities and is in keeping with an expectation that research students should only be accepted into 'an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research and where high quality research is occurring' (precept 5, *QAA Code of practice, Section 1: postgraduate research programmes* (September 2004)).

Academic staff involved in the delivery of research degrees are expected to have knowledge, understanding and experience of research and advanced scholarship that go well beyond maintaining the 'close and professional understanding of current developments in research and scholarship in their subjects' (Criterion C1, Explanation, page 18, required for staff engaged in the delivery of taught degrees. Strength and depth in research supervision capacity, research performance in authoritative external peer reviews, and demonstrable involvement in research-related activities with other higher education providers or comparable organisations engaged in research, are all factors to be taken into account in any consideration of the merits of an application for research degree-awarding powers.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion 1 the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- i. its policies and procedures relating to research and advanced scholarship are understood and applied consistently both by those involved in the delivery of research degrees and, where appropriate, by the students so involved;
- ii. staff involved in the delivery of research degree programmes, in a teaching and/or supervisory capacity, are themselves active researchers;

- iii. it can demonstrate research and advanced scholarship achievement/output among its full-time staff complement;
- iv. it has a strong and sustainable research culture, which directly informs and enhances the supervision and teaching of research degree students;
- v. it has a critical mass of research staff and students, representing a viable research community internally, whilst also promoting active engagement in discipline-based and broader based communities of researchers and scholars external to the organisation;
- vi. it has established research-relevant links, formal and informal, with other higher education and specialist research institutions through, for example, joint research activities; and research examinerships (both those appointed as internal examiners of research degrees by the awarding institution and staff of the applicant organisation appointed to act in a similar capacity elsewhere); and
- vii. its academic staff command the respect and confidence of academic peers across the sector as reflected, for example, Research Excellence Framework (REF) entry and scores; other authoritative external reviews; and awards of distinction.

The applicant organisation will also be required to provide an analysis of the data it has used to satisfy itself that it can demonstrate that the staff involved with the delivery of its research degree programmes have:

- viii. substantial relevant knowledge, understanding and experience of both current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and that such knowledge, understanding and experience directly inform and enhance their supervision and teaching; and
- ix. staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their knowledge of current research and advanced scholarship.

In addition, the applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- x. a significant proportion (normally around a half as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to at least one organisation such as a subject association, learned society or relevant professional body. Such contributions are expected to involve some form of public output or outcome, broadly defined, demonstrating the research-related impact of academic staff on their discipline or sphere of research activity at a regional, national or international level. Data should be provided for the three years immediately preceding the submission of an application for research degree awarding powers;
- xi. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff have recent (i.e. within the past three years) personal experience of research activity in other UK or international higher education or specialist research institutions by, for example, acting as external examiners for research degrees, serving as validation/review panel members, or contributing to collaborative research projects with other organisations. An applicant organisation will be required to demonstrate both that such activity has taken place, and that the activity meets the

requirement of personal experience of research activity in other UK or international higher education or specialist research institutions; and

- xii. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff can demonstrate achievements that are recognised by the wider academic community to be of national and/or international standing (e.g. as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews). Other than in respect of the REF where the most recent submission will be accepted, data should be provided for the three years immediately preceding the submission of an application for research degree awarding powers.

Whilst these evidence sources relate only to full-time members of academic staff, it is appreciated that the research-related activities of some institutions are significantly enhanced by the contributions of staff on fractional contracts. Where this is so, applicant organisations are invited to make it known by including a separate analysis of the performance of all fractional staff in relation to these three measures in their application document (see QAA Handbook).

It is the responsibility of the applicant organisation to establish for itself and to demonstrate for external scrutiny purposes that a staff member meets the metric requirements outlined above. Applicant organisations should be aware that numeric criteria contribute to a broader assessment of their capacity to assume the 'particular and substantial responsibility' (Criterion 1, Explanation above) placed upon organisations holding research degree-awarding powers and necessarily involves an evaluative dimension.

Criterion 2: National guidance

The organisation satisfies relevant national guidance relating to the award of research degrees.

Evidence requirement

To assist in meeting Criterion 2 the applicant organisation will be required to demonstrate that it satisfies, or has the capacity to satisfy, the expectations of:

- i. the Qualifications Frameworks in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes;
- ii. the UK Quality *Code* for Higher Education; and
- iii. research degree management frameworks issued by relevant research councils, funding bodies and professional/statutory bodies.

Criterion 3: Minimum number of doctoral degree conferments

The applicant organisation has achieved more than 30 doctoral degree conferments¹⁰, awarded through partner universities in the UK.

¹⁰ Includes professional doctorates



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