

Consultation

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CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED NEW CRITERIA FOR DEGREE AWARDING POWERS AND UNIVERSITY TITLE

In the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*, the Government proposed to modernise the criteria governing the granting of degree awarding powers and to allow university title to be granted on the basis of taught degree awarding powers and student numbers. This is a consultation on the details of the proposed new criteria in England and Wales.

department for
education and skills

A CONSULTATION ON THE NEW PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR DEGREE AWARDING POWERS AND UNIVERSITY TITLE

A Consultation

To All Higher Education Institutions in England and Wales
Association of Colleges
AUT
The British Council
Council for Industry and Higher Education
FE colleges in England and Wales offering courses leading to a degree of an institution with degree awarding powers
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Learning and Skills Council
NATFHE
NUS
Regional Development Agencies
SCOP
Teacher Training Agency
UCAS
UKCOSA
Universities UK

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1. **Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, set out the Government's aim for a diverse higher education sector, where institutions play to their strengths and high quality teaching is recognised and rewarded. To this end, we asked the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in May this year to review the criteria governing the granting of degree awarding powers and university title. In light of its advice, we are proposing to:
 - a. modernise the criteria for the granting of degree awarding powers;
 - b. make new degree awarding powers renewable, subject to a satisfactory external quality audit;
 - c. grant university title on the basis of taught degree awarding powers and student numbers (which remain at the current levels); and
 - d. remove the requirement that institutions must have students in five subject areas to be eligible for university title (this will allow institutions specialising in one subject area to become universities).
- 1.2. The proposed criteria make clearer the standards that need to be reached before an institution is granted degree awarding powers. We have strengthened the requirements on evidence that organisations need to provide on their quality assurance arrangements and make clear the higher expectations of teaching staff. The proposed criteria will only apply to *future* applications for degree awarding powers and university title. Nothing in this consultation affects the degree awarding powers and university title that institutions have at present.
- 1.3. This consultation seeks the views of universities, colleges of higher education, further education colleges offering courses leading to a degree and higher education representative organisations on the proposed revised criteria. It runs from 16 September to 12 December 2003. Ministers will consider carefully the results of the consultation in determining the final criteria for the granting of degree awarding powers and university title.
- 1.4. The revised criteria will apply in England and Wales. The Scottish Executive proposes to continue to use the current (1999) criteria in Scotland but is keeping its position under review. The Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland has yet to decide on revisions to the criteria and will be taking a decision in due course.

2. **Background and Context**

- 2.1. All institutions awarding their own degrees do so by virtue either of a Royal Charter, a private Act of Parliament or under the provisions of section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. This last provision empowers the Privy Council to specify institutions which provide higher education as competent to grant awards, commonly referred to as "taught" and/or "research" degrees. In considering applications for such powers, the Privy Council seeks advice from

the appropriate territorial Minister with higher education responsibilities. In turn, the Minister seeks advice from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which assesses the institution against a set of criteria determined by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. University title is currently reserved for institutions with both taught and research degree awarding powers that offer a breadth of subjects and meet student number criteria. The current criteria for degree awarding powers and university title can be found at: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

- 2.2. In Chapter 4 of the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, we set out our proposals to change the current system so that university title is awarded on the basis of taught degree awarding powers and student numbers, removing the current requirement to have research degree awarding powers. We also proposed modernising the criteria for degree awarding powers to reflect the increasing diversity of higher education. The responses to the White Paper indicated mixed views amongst the sector about our proposals on university title.
- 2.3. In May this year, we asked the QAA to review the criteria, taking into account the following:
 - a. the degree awarding powers criteria should be framed so that they could be met by organisations that provide high quality HE teaching but fall outside the traditional university and college sectors;
 - b. the current distinction between taught and research degrees should be replaced by a distinction between taught degrees up to Masters level on the one hand and taught Doctorates and research degrees on the other;
 - c. the granting of degree awarding powers should in future be renewable, subject to satisfactory external audit; and
 - d. university title should be granted to specialist institutions on the current student number criteria and which have taught degree awarding powers.
- 2.4. We are grateful to QAA for the promptness of its response and the quality of its advice, which we received in June. Since then, we have received legal advice that to replace the current distinction between taught and research DAP with that set out in paragraph 2.3b above would require changes to legislation. Ministers have considered whether legislation in this area would meet the principles of good regulation, in particular whether other mechanisms are available for ensuring that taught Doctorates are offered only by institutions with suitably qualified staff. Ministers have decided that further legislation in this area would be a disproportionate response and that the revised criteria can be used to achieve our aims.
- 2.5. In the light of QAA's advice, we are now consulting on the proposed revised criteria. The Government also asked the QAA to consider how it could make further improvements to its processes for considering applications for degree awarding powers and university title, taking account of feedback it has received from key stakeholders. The QAA is to report in November. We will consider the regulatory impact of their proposals as part of that exercise.

3. The Proposed Criteria for Degree Awarding Powers

- 3.1. The proposed new criteria for the granting of degree awarding powers (DAP) are set out at Annex A. The DAP criteria for taught degrees are set out in Section 1 of the Annex, with those for research degrees in Section 2. The Government is keen to ensure that the high standards organisations are required to reach before DAP are granted are maintained. In some key areas we have strengthened the criteria, making clearer the evidence an institution must provide to demonstrate that its quality assurance arrangements guarantee high standards. Overall, the criteria have been consolidated to make it simpler for an organisation to focus on what is essential for the granting of DAP.
- 3.2. The key changes to the criteria for **taught** degree awarding powers, set out in Section 1 of Annex A, are:

Criterion A: Governance and Academic Management

- a. There is increased emphasis on ensuring that an organisation's governance arrangements and internal financial, academic and quality assurance systems safeguard high academic standards and the quality of programmes, although the principles underlying governance and management remain the same as under the current criteria;

Criteria B: Academic Standards and Quality Assurance

- b. The proposed first criterion (B1) under this part is new. It requires the organisation's regulatory framework governing its higher education provision to be appropriate, taking account of the national Academic Infrastructure, and to be implemented consistently;
- c. The proposed second criterion (B2) modernises the current quality assurance criteria relating to establishing academic objectives and maintaining academic standards. It makes clear the importance of ensuring comparability between the academic standards of degrees by referencing them against the relevant levels of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
- d. The proposed third criterion (B3) consolidates the current quality assurance criteria relating to programmes of study being monitored and meeting their stated objectives and ensuring that distance learning and other off-site students are adequately catered for;

Criterion C: Scholarship and the Pedagogical Effectiveness of Academic Staff

- e. The proposed criterion brings together the three current separate criteria on academic staff and makes more explicit that staff should be competent in teaching, facilitating learning and undertaking assessment. The evidence required is more outcome focused, relating to knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced scholarship rather than the current evidence requirements that relate to participation in staff

development. The need to demonstrate how the knowledge and understanding of staff in this area directly inform and enhance teaching strengthens the requirement under the current criteria. The proposed criterion also makes explicit reference to appraisal as a means to develop and enhance professional competence and scholarship;

- f. For those organisations proposing to offer doctoral programmes, wholly or partly by courses of instruction, the criterion clearly requires that academic staff who teach on such courses are personally engaged with research and/or advanced scholarship to a level commensurate with the degrees being offered. This is a proposed new requirement to safeguard the standards of these programmes by raising the expectation we have of staff teaching such courses. Although this will not always be assessable at the time of application, the arrangements being proposed for the renewal of degree awarding powers will ensure that it is reviewed regularly;
- g. Overall, the criteria relating to academic staff have undergone the most significant updating. This reflects our desire to give greater recognition to the role of teaching in organisations and to raise expectations of the scholarship and professional development that staff should undertake; and

Criterion D: The Environment Supporting the Delivery of Programmes

- h. This criterion brings together in one place a number of evidence requirements dispersed in the current criteria that relate to the teaching and learning infrastructure. The organisation's learning and student support services and facilities should seek to maximise students' chances of a worthwhile education, with equality of opportunities sought in all of its activities. The administrative and management information systems should be appropriate.
- 3.3. The key changes to the criteria for the granting of **research** DAP, set out in Section 2 of Annex A, are to consolidate and focus the current five criteria. By requiring institutions to satisfy national guidance relating to the award of research degrees, we have been able to reduce the current criteria without any reduction in the standards which organisations – and staff involved with the delivery of research degree programmes – are required to achieve. The proposed criteria make explicit what we mean by undefined terms in the current criteria such as "significant proportions of staff". This should assist applicant organisations. A final criterion for research DAP requires the organisation to have achieved more than 30 Doctor of Philosophy conferments. This requirement has moved from that currently relating to university title.

Granting Degree Awarding Powers for Renewable Terms

- 3.4. Currently, degree awarding powers are granted to institutions indefinitely. We believe that this approach fails to manage fully the risk that organisations with DAP may, sometime in the future, seriously fail to comply with the criteria and damage both the reputation and standing of UK higher education and students' prospects. A sensible safeguard against such a risk is for future applicant organisations to be granted degree awarding powers for fixed terms – we propose six years – with powers renewable subject to a satisfactory institutional audit (which the organisation would receive in any case). There would not be a requirement for a separate audit for this purpose. Section 3 of Annex A sets out the proposals.
- 3.5. Organisations unable to obtain a judgement of broad confidence from the QAA would be required to carry out an agreed action plan. Where an organisation continued to fail to satisfy the QAA, the Privy Council would consider not renewing DAP and arrangements would be made to protect the rights and interests of students.
- 3.6. These arrangements significantly reduce the risk of organisations falling short of the high standards we require of institutions with DAP. However, where an organisation gains both taught and research degree awarding powers the risks associated with such institutions are reduced; there may be a case for treating such organisations differently and we would welcome views. These proposals will not affect organisations which have already been granted DAP, since those were awarded for an indefinite period.

4. The Proposed Criteria for University Title

- 4.1. The current criteria for the granting of university title require institutions to achieve both taught and research degree awarding powers and to offer a wide range of subjects. These requirements limit the diversity of the university sector and discourage institutions from focusing on their areas of strength. In the higher education White Paper, we set out our proposals to allow organisations dedicated to providing high quality teaching to apply for university title if they meet our strengthened criteria for taught DAP and have sufficient numbers of students. Organisations that specialise in particular subject areas will also be eligible. We recognise that higher education institutions, in response to these proposals in the White Paper, expressed a range of views on this proposal.
- 4.2. Section 4 of Annex A sets out the proposed criteria for the award of university title. The key requirements are:
- a. university title awarded on the basis of the strengthened criteria for taught DAP: we believe strongly in the principle behind these changes to the criteria – to create a diverse higher education sector where institutions play to their strengths and high quality teaching is recognised. We propose that institutions are no longer required to achieve research DAP to achieve university title, as teaching is a legitimate primary activity for a university. The proposed criteria for taught DAP, with a new emphasis on staff scholarship, should ensure that teaching standards in organisations applying for university title in future are as high as in current universities.
 - b. the organisation has at least 4,000 full-time equivalent higher education students, of whom 3,000 are registered on degree level courses. This is in line with the current criterion. This requirement gives confidence that the organisation has a body of students sufficiently large to create a continuing academic community. We recognise that smaller specialist organisations, by their very nature, may find this criterion – which mirrors that in the current criteria – difficult to meet and would welcome views on how appropriate it may be for such organisations.
 - c. the current requirement for an institution to have minimum student numbers in five subject areas for the award of university title is being removed. Specialist institutions are an important and valued part of the higher education sector and should be eligible for university title.

5. Consultation Questions

- 5.1. A Questionnaire is provided at Annex B. Comments are welcomed in any format but the questionnaire has been devised to assist us with analysis of the responses.

6. How to Respond

- 6.1. All responses should be sent to:

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or by e-mail to: DegreePowers.Consultation@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

7. Additional Copies

- 7.1. Additional copies of this document are available free from:

DfES Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham
NG15 ODJ
Tel No: 0845 6022260

- 7.2. Electronic versions of the document are available on the DfES website at: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

8. Plans for Making Results Public

- 8.1. The consultation ends on 12 December 2003. Ministers will consider carefully the responses received before determining the final criteria that will apply to applications for degree awarding powers and university title. We anticipate that the criteria will be finalised in January 2004. The results of the consultation will be published on the Department's website at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

Proposed revised criteria for the grant of degree-awarding powers and university title

Introduction

1. Organisations based in England and Wales that offer higher education programmes at an appropriate level may seek the power to award their own degrees. Degree awarding powers are granted by the Privy Council. In considering applications for such powers, the Privy Council seeks advice from the Minister with higher education responsibilities. In turn, the Minister seeks advice from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

2. In accordance with section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, powers may be granted in relation to two categories of degrees, commonly referred to as “taught” degrees and “research” degrees. These categories are described in the provisions of section 76.

3. An organisation that wishes to award its own degrees will be required to demonstrate that it meets the criteria that follow. These reflect the requirements that are common to all bodies that award degrees in England and Wales. In particular, an organisation must 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 national Academic Infrastructure¹. Organisations should normally have had 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 H of the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) published by QAA.

4. Scrutiny by QAA establishes whether or not an applicant organisation has reached a secure level of fitness for the powers being sought. The applicant must clearly demonstrate that there can be public confidence, both present and future, in its systems for assuring the quality and standards of its degrees.

5. The following sections list and explain the criteria against which an application for the grant of degree-awarding powers will be considered:

Section 1: criteria for taught degree-awarding powers

Section 2: criteria for research degree-awarding powers

Three further sections contain criteria for the continued tenure of taught degree-awarding powers (Section 3); criteria for the granting of university title (Section 4); and criteria for the granting of university title to institutions holding taught degree-awarding powers granted under previous arrangements (Section 5).

6. The criteria are designed to establish that the applicant organisation has a well found, cohesive and self-critical academic community that demonstrates 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 an

¹ The Academic Infrastructure comprises the two Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the other for Scotland; subject benchmark statements; programme specifications; and the *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education*.

applicant organisation can engender public confidence in its capacity to maintain the academic standards of the degrees it offers in the UK and, where relevant, overseas. While some of the evidence that organisations will provide will be quantitative, some will also be qualitative. All evidence will be subject to peer judgements by senior members of the academic community.

7. An organisation seeking research degree-awarding powers must have first secured taught degree-awarding powers. QAA will, however, process applications for both sets of powers simultaneously if requested by the applicant. 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 is exercising appropriate stewardship of such powers.

8. More detailed information about the procedures for applying for degree-awarding powers and the associated scrutiny processes are available separately from the QAA.

Section 1: Criteria for taught degree-awarding powers

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 institution, 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

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. its financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to its higher education mission, aims and objectives;
- b. its higher education activities take full account of relevant legislation, the UK Academic Infrastructure, and associated guidance;
- c. 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;
- d. 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;
- e. there is depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of its higher education provision;
- f. 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;
- g. its academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed and that appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified;

- h. its academic risk and change management strategies are effective;
- i. it has in place robust mechanisms to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education awards are not put at risk; and
- j. 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 *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education* ('the Code of Practice') published by the QAA. Organisations that award degrees are required to have in place a comprehensive set of regulations covering these matters.

Evidence requirement

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. 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
- b. it has in prospect a regulatory framework 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 UK degree-awarding powers need to ensure that their qualifications meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure for higher education, published and maintained on behalf of the academic community in the UK by the QAA. Within the Infrastructure the different levels of higher education qualifications and their distinguishing features are described in the appropriate FHEQ. 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 FHEQ.

Evidence requirement

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. its higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ;
- b. the management of its higher education provision takes appropriate account of the QAA's *Code of Practice*, relevant subject benchmark statements, national guidance on programme specifications, and the requirements of any relevant professional and statutory bodies;
- c. 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;
- d. 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
- e. 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

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. its strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- b. relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review;
- c. responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored;

- d. coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained;
- e. close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements;
- f. 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;
- g. through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, it defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards;
- h. its assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff;
- i. its assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives, learning outcomes and modes of delivery;
- j. appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in its assessment processes and that consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking;
- k. the reliability and validity of its assessment procedures are monitored and that its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning; and
- l. 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

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. 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;

- b. clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes;
- c. 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
- d. 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. 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 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. In the case of organisations offering doctorates undertaken wholly or in part by means of courses of instruction, it is particularly important that teaching is carried out by staff who are active and recognised participants in research and/or advanced scholarship. 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

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that all teaching staff engaged with the delivery of its higher education programmes have relevant:

- a. academic and/or professional expertise;
- b. engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies);
- c. 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
- d. 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:

- e. experience of curriculum development and assessment design; and
- f. 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

The applicant organisation will be required to provide evidence that:

- a. the effectiveness of its learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- b. students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner;
- c. constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance;
- d. feedback from students, staff, (and where possible) employers and other institutional stakeholders is obtained and evaluated and clear mechanisms exist to provide feedback to all such constituencies;
- e. students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students' needs;
- f. available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of stated purposes of their study programmes;
- g. the effectiveness of any student and staff advisory and counselling services is monitored and any resource needs arising are considered;
- h. 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;
- i. it has in place effective and confidential mechanisms to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters;

- j. the staff involved with supporting the delivery of its higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development;
- k. the information that it produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete; and
- l. equality of opportunity is sought and achieved in its activities.

Section 2: Criteria for research degree-awarding powers

Criterion 1

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 award of degrees that recognise the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other forms of advanced scholarship, 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 the organisation's academic staff and its doctoral and other research students.

Evidence requirement

The applicant organisation will be required to demonstrate that the staff involved with the delivery of its research degree programmes have:

- a. 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;
- b. 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:

- c. a significant proportion (normally around a half as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies;
- d. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff have recent (ie within the past three years) personal experience of research activity in other UK or international university 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; and
- e. a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff who are engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship, can demonstrate achievements that are recognised by the wider academic community to be of national and/or international standing (eg as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews).

Criterion 2

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

Evidence

The applicant organisation will be required to demonstrate that it satisfies, or has the capacity to satisfy, the expectations of:

- a. the FHEQ in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes;
- b. the QAA's *Code of Practice*;
- c. research degree management frameworks issued by relevant research councils, funding bodies and professional/statutory bodies.

Criterion 3

The applicant organisation has achieved more than 30 Doctor of Philosophy conferments, awarded through partner universities in the UK.

Section 3: Criteria for the continued tenure of degree-awarding powers

Degree-awarding powers will be granted under the criteria described in Sections 1 and 2 of this document for renewable periods of six years.

At the end of each period of six years, criteria for the renewal of powers will be that the organisation has:

- a. subscribed for the duration of those six years to the QAA or such other external quality assurance organisation as may be specified;
- b. been subject to an external institutional audit by the QAA or by such other body as may be specified; and
- c. received a judgement of broad confidence in the organisation made by the QAA at the time of the institutional audit. Organisations which fail to obtain such a judgement will be given reasons for this by the QAA and will be required to prepare and carry out an action plan agreed between the organisation and the QAA. Completion of this action plan to the satisfaction of the QAA will be a criterion for the renewal of the institution's degree-awarding powers.

In the event of non-renewal, an organisation 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 usually involve the transfer of students' registrations to an organisation with continuing degree-awarding powers. Students transferred in this way will, if successful in their assessments, be awarded qualifications of the receiving organisation.

Note: These arrangements will not affect organisations which have been granted degree-awarding powers under other criteria in the past, when such powers have been granted for an indefinite period of time. Those powers will remain effective under the terms of the previous arrangements.

Section 4: Criteria for the award of university title

An institution wishing to apply for approval to use the title 'University' must

- a. have been granted powers to award taught degrees; and
- b. normally have at least 4,000 full time equivalent higher education students, of whom at least 3,000 are registered on degree level courses.

Section 5: Criteria for the award of university title to institutions holding degree-awarding powers granted under previous arrangements but not university title

Institutions that have been granted degree-awarding powers prior to the implementation of the criteria shown in Section 1 above may be awarded the title of university on request, provided that they fully meet all the criteria in Section 1 for the award of taught degrees, and the numerical criteria shown in Section 4. An applicant organisation will be required specifically to demonstrate that it is able to satisfy the criteria given in Section 1(C) above.

Department for Education and Skills
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