

**APPLICATIONS FOR THE GRANT
OF TAUGHT DEGREE AWARDING
POWERS, RESEARCH DEGREE
AWARDING POWERS AND
UNIVERSITY TITLE**

Guidance for applicant
organisations in
England and Wales
(August 2004)



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Introduction

This paper sets out the procedures for making applications for the grant of degree-awarding powers and/or university title in England and Wales. These notes of guidance and accompanying criteria have been approved by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Wales Office, in consultation with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 empower the Privy Council to specify institutions of higher education as competent to grant awards, in other words to grant them powers to award their own degrees. In considering applications for such powers, the Privy Council seeks advice from the appropriate territorial Minister with higher education responsibilities. In turn, the appropriate Minister seeks advice from the Agency.

Ministers maintain criteria against which applications are considered. For England and Wales applications are considered under criteria approved by Ministers on 1 September 2004 (included as Appendix 1 to this paper). For Scotland and Northern Ireland, applications are considered under criteria approved by Ministers in October 1999 (which were, before 2004, applicable to all of the United Kingdom). Separate guidance for applicant organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from the Agency at the address provided in paragraph 44 below.

In advising on applications, the Agency is guided by the relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. The Agency's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a sub-committee of its Board.

General principles

- 1 Powers may be granted in relation to two categories of degrees, commonly referred to as 'taught' degrees and 'research' degrees. **Appendix 1** sets out and explains the criteria against which an application for the grant of taught or research degree-awarding powers will be considered (Sections 1 and 2). It also sets out criteria for the granting of university title (Section 3), and criteria for the granting of university title to higher education institutions holding taught degree-awarding powers granted under previous arrangements (Section 4).
- 2 An organisation that wishes to award its own degrees will be required to demonstrate that it meets the relevant criteria set out in **Appendix 1**. 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. In seeking taught degree-awarding powers, organisations should normally be able to demonstrate that they:-
 - 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;
 - normally have the majority of their higher education students enrolled on study programmes which are recognised as being at Level H or above of the FHEQ.
- 3 Scrutiny by the Agency determines whether or not an applicant organisation is fit to exercise the powers being sought, or to hold the title being sought. The applicant 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.
- 4 The criteria are designed to establish that the applicant organisation is a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards. To this end, the Agency will be judging, through its examination of the evidence provided, and against the criteria, the extent to which an 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.

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*.

- 5 An organisation seeking research degree-awarding powers must have first secured taught degree-awarding powers. The Agency 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, the Agency 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.
- 6 In all cases, the Agency will consider applications on their individual merits and make a thorough assessment of the applicant organisation's ability to maintain quality and standards.
- 7 Ministers have stated that the title 'university college' will continue to be available to higher education institutions which have been granted taught degree-awarding powers, but which are not eligible for, or do not wish to use, the title of 'university'. It is for institutions to decide whether they wish to seek the university college title and, if so, to submit an application for approval of a particular title to the Privy Council.

Making an application

- 8 All applications for the grant of degree-awarding powers and/or university title should be submitted by the chair of the organisation's governing body to the Clerk to the Privy Council, Privy Council Office, 2 Carlton Gardens London SW1Y 5AA.
- 9 Applications for the grant of university title to organisations that have been granted taught degree-awarding powers under the criteria set out in Section 1 of **Appendix 1** (i.e. the '2004 criteria') should take the form of a letter of application from the chair of the organisation's governing body. The letter may be supported, if the organisation so wishes, by additional documentation. The material should demonstrate that the organisation meets the criteria set out in Section 3 of **Appendix 1**.
- 10 Applications for the grant of taught or research degree-awarding powers, or for the grant of university title to higher education institutions that have been granted taught degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements, should take the form of a critical self-analysis prepared by the applicant organisation, prefaced by a formal letter of application from the chair of the organisation's governing body. The self-analysis should describe, analyse and comment clearly and frankly on the effectiveness of the means used by the organisation to satisfy itself that it is able to meet the criteria relevant to the powers/title being sought, as set out in Sections 1, 2 and 4 of **Appendix 1** (see also **Appendix 2** for further information for higher education institutions granted powers under previous arrangements). Although it is for organisations to determine how they structure their self-analysis, close reference should be made to the relevant criteria and supporting 'evidence requirements'.

- 11 The critical self-analysis should be accompanied by a list of the evidence used by the applicant organisation to test whether its systems and processes are operating as intended and to judge whether it is discharging effectively its responsibility for quality and standards in respect of the powers being sought. All of the documents cited as evidence by the organisation should be available to the Agency upon request. The organisation is encouraged to supplement its self-analysis with 'off-the-shelf' documents (for example, prospectuses, strategic and operational plans, teaching quality handbooks, and staff handbooks) to help the Agency acquire a full understanding of the organisation and its structure and function.
- 12 Experience suggests that an effective critical self-analysis is likely to be some 60 pages in length, although there will be no penalty for shorter or longer submissions.
- 13 Organisations should submit one copy of the application to the Privy Council Office. The Agency will request further copies (normally 30) of the application from the organisation after the relevant government department has approached it with a formal request for advice. The self-analysis remains confidential to the Agency and those directly concerned with consideration of the application.

Timing of applications

- 14 It is for each organisation to determine when to submit its application for the grant of degree-awarding powers and/or university title. Organisations may wish to bear in mind that the first stage in the Agency's process for scrutinising applications is consideration by ACDAP (see paragraphs 17-21 below). ACDAP normally meets at quarterly intervals in mid to late March, June, September and December each year. The Agency will normally need to receive a request for advice from the relevant government department, and the full application from the organisation, at least three weeks before the meeting of the Committee at which it is to be considered.
- 15 Organisations are strongly advised to approach the Agency for informal discussions before lodging a formal application. The Agency is willing to meet organisations to discuss proposed applications at an early stage to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the criteria, documentation requirements and scrutiny processes.

The scrutiny process

- 16 The application scrutiny process has several stages. These are outlined in the sections that follow. A schematic representation of the process is provided in **Appendix 4**.

Consideration by ACDAP

- 17 On receipt of a request for advice from the relevant government department, the Agency sends to the department and the applicant organisation confirmation that it is considering the application. The Agency will also inform the organisation of the arrangements for coordinating the processing of the application.

- 18 The application will be considered initially at the next available meeting of ACDAP. ACDAP will decide whether there is a case for considering the application further, in the light of:-
- the documentation submitted by applicant organisation;
 - a preliminary synoptic report on the application by ACDAP officers;
 - where appropriate, comments received from validating partner institution(s); and
 - where appropriate, initial advice from the relevant funding council.
- 19 If the Committee decides that the application should receive further consideration, the Agency will make arrangements to undertake a detailed scrutiny of the applicant organisation, and will advise the organisation accordingly.
- 20 If the Committee decides that the applicant organisation has not made an adequate case for further consideration of its application, the Agency will advise the organisation and the relevant government department accordingly.
- 21 Exceptionally, ACDAP may commission an exploratory visit to the applicant organisation to examine specific matters arising from the initial documentation. Such visits will normally be undertaken by two assessors and the ACDAP Committee Secretary, and will result in a report to the next available meeting of ACDAP. In the light of the report, ACDAP will decide either to proceed with a detailed scrutiny, or to advise the organisation to undertake further development work before proceeding with its application.

Detailed scrutiny of the applicant organisation

- 22 Where ACDAP decides to proceed with a detailed scrutiny, the Agency will appoint a small team of assessors. The role of the assessors is to collect evidence on the application. In selecting assessors, the Agency will seek to balance their academic seniority, experience of institutional operations, and appreciation of the organisation's position in the higher education sector.
- 23 The detailed scrutiny will include:-
- review of documentation made available by the applicant organisation;
 - observation of formal meetings, including committee meetings, validation/review events, and examination boards;
 - structured discussions with staff and students; and
 - consideration of external perspectives on the operation of the organisation, through structured discussions with external interest groups and scrutiny of reports arising from external programme/institutional review activities.

- 24 The detailed scrutiny process will be coordinated by an Agency officer and regular monitoring reports will be submitted to ACDAP by the Committee Secretary.
- 25 The precise nature and length of the detailed scrutiny will vary according to the powers being sought and the particular circumstances of the applicant organisation. Organisations should be aware that the scrutiny process is both intensive and extensive. In respect of applications for taught degree-awarding powers, or combined applications for both taught and research degree-awarding powers, the process is likely to extend for at least one complete annual cycle of academic activity. Scrutiny of applications for research degree-awarding powers is likely to be of shorter duration.
- 26 In considering applications, the Agency will make best use of existing evidence about the applicant organisation's quality and standards. Reports by the Agency and other relevant external bodies are made available to assessors. Information included in the teaching quality information requirements of the higher education funding councils will form an important part of the evidence base for the scrutiny of an organisation that is subject to them. Organisations that are not subject to funding council information requirements are nonetheless strongly encouraged to make available similar information.
- 27 Though not a requirement, the applicant organisation may see merit in the establishment of an external advisory group to offer advice and guidance on organisational development, both as part of the application process and subsequently. Organisations that see benefits in establishing such a group may wish to bear in mind the important contribution that can be made by representatives from their validating institution(s) or other external bodies.

Reporting

- 28 The detailed scrutiny will culminate in a final report to ACDAP by the assessors. The assessors will not make a recommendation on the application, but will offer peer-referenced views on the detail of the organisation's operations in the light of the individual criteria set out in **Appendix 1**. They may also identify matters for further consideration by ACDAP.
- 29 On the basis of the assessors' final report and its subsequent discussions, ACDAP will formulate its advice on the application.
- 30 Where the final report raises matters for further consideration or clarification, ACDAP may decide to convene a sub-panel of its members to undertake a short and focused visit to the organisation, prior to formulating its advice. Most sub-panel visits will be of one day's duration and will normally involve meetings with governors, senior managers, teaching and other staff, students and relevant external interest groups. The visit will result in a further report to ACDAP. On occasion, ACDAP may wish to supplement the membership of a sub-panel with additional external expertise.

- 31 When ACDAP has concluded its consideration of an application, it will make a report and recommendation to the Agency's Board. Subject to the approval of the Board, these will then be transmitted to the appropriate government department. The advice will be given in confidence. The appropriate Minister will determine whether the Agency's advice should be disclosed to the applicant organisation. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

Feedback

- 32 The Agency's responsibility is to offer confidential advice to the appropriate government department. As a result, the detailed scrutiny process has important differences from other review activities undertaken by the Agency and places some constraints on the nature of the interaction that it is possible to have with applicant organisations. The Agency is conscious, however, of the desirability of maintaining an effective and constructive dialogue with organisations and the schedule of activities for the period of detailed scrutiny will, therefore, include several formal meetings between the Agency's coordinating officer and organisational representatives. The purpose of such meetings will be to discuss progress and any matters requiring further clarification.
- 33 The applicant organisation will be provided with an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the evidence cited in the assessors' draft final report, prior to the submission of the completed report to ACDAP. Organisations will normally be provided with the text not less than five weeks before the relevant meeting of ACDAP, and asked to inform the Agency of any factual inaccuracies within no more than two weeks. The Agency reserves the right to edit the text submitted to the organisation, to the extent necessary to protect the confidentiality of the process and the anonymity of those who have given evidence to the assessors.

Scrutiny of applications for the award of university title to higher education institutions granted degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements

- 34 Some variations to the scrutiny process will be made in respect of applications for the award of university title to higher education institutions granted degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements. Further details are provided in **Appendix 2**.

Combining the scrutiny with institutional audit/review

- 35 Higher education institutions wishing to apply for degree-awarding powers and/or university title at a time when they are scheduled to receive an Agency institutional audit or institutional review may request that scrutiny activities be combined with the audit/review process. Further details are provided in **Appendix 3**.

Role of the funding councils and validating institution(s)

- 36 When it has received the Agency's advice, the appropriate government department may seek the views of the relevant funding council on the financial stability of an applicant organisation that is in receipt of public funding. In instances where the organisation is not in receipt of public funding, the government department may commission a higher

education funding council or other appropriately qualified body to offer professional advice on the financial stability of the organisation.

- 37 Where an applicant organisation has one or more validating partner institutions, the Agency will invite those institutions to offer comments on the nature of the operational relationship that has been established and a judgement as to the suitability of the organisation to be granted the powers and/or title that is being sought.

Costs

- 38 The Agency cannot meet the costs of this activity from its other sources of income. It will therefore levy a charge on applicant organisations for the costs incurred in scrutinising the application and providing advice to the relevant government department. The charge will cover the direct costs of ACDAP and the assessors, and the associated staff and overhead costs incurred by the Agency. Charges will be set at a level that recovers these costs. No surplus will be sought from the activity.
- 39 An initial charge will be made to cover costs incurred up to and including the assessors' final report to ACDAP (see paragraph 28 above). Should any substantial additional expenditure be incurred, this will be charged at the end of the process. Since the amount of the remaining work may vary between applications, such further charges will be set individually.
- 40 With effect from September 2004, the initial charges will be as follows:
- For applications for the grant of taught degree-awarding powers: £30,000 levied at the outset of the detailed scrutiny
 - For applications for the grant of research degree-awarding powers: £15,000 levied at the outset of the detailed scrutiny
 - For combined applications for the grant of taught and research degree-awarding powers: £40,000 levied at the outset of the detailed scrutiny
 - For applications for the grant of university title to higher education institutions that have already been granted taught degree-awarding powers: £10,000 levied at the outset of the detailed scrutiny.
- 41 Before submitting applications, organisations should consider carefully the internal resource costs arising from the preparation and subsequent consideration of the application.

Complaints and representations

- 42 Complaints relating to the Agency's processing of applications for the grant of degree-awarding powers and/or university title should be made in accordance with the procedures published on the Agency's website www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutqaa/procedures/complaints.htm.

- 43 The Agency's role in considering applications for the grant of degree-awarding powers and/or university title is to offer confidential advice to the relevant government department. The Agency and its committees do not themselves make final decisions about applications. Complaints about the Agency's advice, or representations against subsequent decisions by the Privy Council, should be addressed to the relevant government department and not to the Agency.

Further information

- 44 Initial enquiries about the submission of applications for degree-awarding powers or university title should be made to the Secretary of ACDAP at the following address:

Dr Irene Ainsworth
Head of Degree Awarding Powers/University Title
Reviews Group
Quality Assurance Agency
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557019
Fax: 01452 557011
E-mail: i.ainsworth@qaa.ac.uk

or

Mr Nick Pack
Project Officer (Degree Awarding Powers/ University Title)
Reviews Group
Quality Assurance Agency
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557039
Fax: 01452 557011
E-mail: n.pack@qaa.ac.uk

Appendices

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Appendix 1

The Government's criteria for the grant of degree-awarding powers and university title

Introduction

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 for Higher Education (QAA).

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.

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. In seeking taught degree-awarding powers, organisations should normally be able to demonstrate that they:

- 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;
- normally have the majority of their higher education students enrolled on study programmes which are recognised as being at Level H or above of the FHEQ.

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.

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

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

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 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.

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.

Organisations in the publicly-funded higher education sector² will be granted taught and research degree-awarding powers on an indefinite basis. All remaining organisations will be granted taught and research degree-awarding powers for a fixed term period of six years. At the end of each period of six years, the criteria for the renewal of degree-awarding powers will be that the organisation has:

- subscribed for the duration of those six years to the QAA (or such other external quality assurance organisation as may be specified);
- been subject to an external audit by the QAA; and
- received a judgement of confidence in the organisation made by the QAA at the time of the 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 organisation's degree-awarding powers.

In the event of non-renewal of degree-awarding powers, 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 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 qualifications of the receiving organisation.

Organisations which have been granted degree-awarding powers under other criteria in the past will continue to hold those powers indefinitely.

² In accordance with the provisions of Section 91(5) of the *Further and Higher Education Act (1992)*, institutions in direct receipt of public funding from HEFCE or HEFCW.

Section 1: Criteria for the award of 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:-

- its financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to its higher education mission, aims and objectives;
- its higher education activities take full account of relevant legislation, the UK Academic Infrastructure, and associated guidance;
- 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;
- 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;
- there is depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of its higher education provision;
- 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;

- its academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed and that appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified;
- its academic risk and change management strategies are effective;
- it has in place robust mechanisms to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education awards are not put at risk; and
- 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:-

- 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
- 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:-

- its higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the FHEQ;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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
- 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:-

- its strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review;
- responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored;
- coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained;
- close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements;
- 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;
- through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, it defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards;
- its assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff;
- its assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives, learning outcomes and modes of delivery;
- appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in its assessment processes and that consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking;

- the reliability and validity of its assessment procedures are monitored and that its assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning; and
- 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:-

- 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;
- clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes;
- 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
- 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:-

- academic and/or professional expertise;
- engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies);
- 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
- 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:-
- experience of curriculum development and assessment design; and
- 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:-

- the effectiveness of its learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes;
- students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner;
- constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance;
- 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;
- students are advised about, and inducted into, their study programmes in an effective way and account is taken of different students’ needs;
- available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of stated purposes of their study programmes;

- the effectiveness of any student and staff advisory and counselling services is monitored and any resource needs arising are considered;
- 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;
- it has in place effective and confidential mechanisms to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters;
- the staff involved with supporting the delivery of its higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development;
- the information that it produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete; and
- equality of opportunity is sought and achieved in its activities.

Section 2: Criteria for the award of 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:-

- 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;
- 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:-

- 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;
- a significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff have recent (i.e. 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
- 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 (e.g. 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:-

- the FHEQ in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes;
- the QAA's Code of Practice;
- 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 award of university title

An organisation wishing to apply for approval to use the title 'University' must:-

- have been granted powers to award taught degrees;
- normally have at least 4,000 full time equivalent higher education students, of whom at least 3,000 are registered on degree level courses (including foundation degree programmes); and,
- be able to demonstrate that it has regard to the principles of good governance as are relevant to its sector.

Section 4: 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 criteria shown in Section 3.

An applicant organisation will be required specifically to demonstrate that it is able to satisfy the criteria given in Section 1(C) above.

Appendix 2

Consideration of applications for the award of university title to higher education institutions granted degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements

- 1 The 2004 criteria include the provision that higher education institutions which have been granted degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements may be awarded the title of university on request, provided that they fully meet all the criteria for the award of taught degrees (**Appendix 1**, Section 1) and the specified numerical criteria (**Appendix 1**, Section 4). Attention is drawn in the criteria to the need for an applicant institution specifically to demonstrate that it is able to satisfy the criteria listed in Section 1(C), which relate to the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff.
- 2 The consideration of applications for the award of university title to institutions granted taught degree-awarding powers under previous arrangements is based on a scrutiny that focuses on whether the institution concerned satisfies the criteria set out in Section 1(C) of the 2004 criteria.
- 3 The key elements of this process will be as follows:-
 - submission by the institution of a short document which describes and analyses the ways in which it believes it satisfies the criteria set out in Section 1(C);
 - a short, targeted, visit to the institution by a small team of assessors, to test the institution's claims and the evidence upon which they are based;
 - a report to ACDAP by the assessors;
 - a recommendation by ACDAP to the Agency's Board, and a subsequent recommendation by the Board to the Privy Council.
- 4 This activity may be undertaken separately, or as an additional element of the Agency's institutional audit/review process, according to the preferences of the institution concerned.

Applications for taught degree-awarding powers currently under consideration (January 2004)

- 5 A number of applications for taught degree-awarding powers submitted under earlier arrangements are either under active scrutiny by the Agency, or have been put into temporary abeyance but are likely to be reactivated in the future. Institutions with applications in this category may request that scrutiny against Section 1(C) of the 2004 criteria is added to the scrutiny activities with which they are already engaged. Provided that they satisfy the earlier criteria, those institutions that are judged also to satisfy the Section 1(C) criteria (and meet the relevant numerical criteria) may apply for university title without being subject to a further, separate scrutiny process.

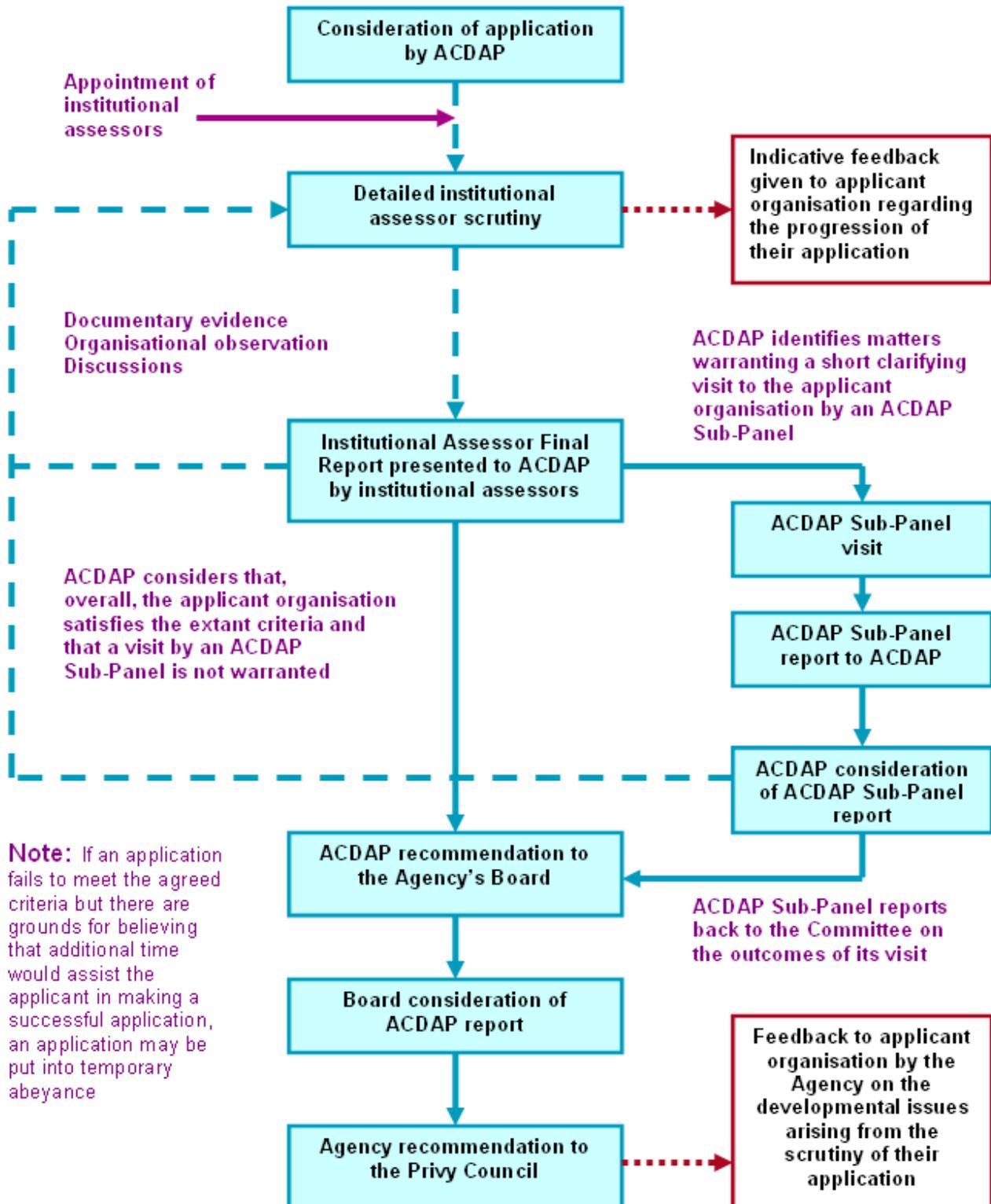
Appendix 3

Combining the scrutiny process with institutional audit in England and institutional review in Wales

- 1 The Agency believes that there are significant benefits in participating in an Agency institutional audit or institutional review in advance of making an application for degree-awarding powers and/or university title. In particular, the outcomes of an institutional audit/review may usefully inform the timing and format of an application. Nonetheless, higher education institutions wishing to apply for degree-awarding powers and/or university title at a time when they might also be subject to institutional audit/review may, at their request, undergo a combined process.
- 2 The key elements of the combined process will be as follows:-
 - submission by the institution of a critical self-analysis, as the basis of the application for degree-awarding powers and/or university title. The self-analysis will also serve as the institutional self-evaluation document required by the institutional audit/review process and, for institutions in England, will form the basis for the selection of disciplines to be trailed as part of that process;
 - the appointment by the Agency of a single team of assessors, auditors/reviewers and an audit/review secretary. There will be no lead assessor/auditor/reviewer, but at least one member of the team, with experience in both degree-awarding powers scrutiny and audit/review, will have responsibility for keeping an oversight of the team's activities and for ensuring that it gathers sufficient evidence to enable it to meet the required outcomes of the separate processes;
 - a private briefing meeting for the team, at which the programme of activities - for both the degree-awarding powers and/or university title scrutiny and the audit/review - is determined;
 - a period of detailed scrutiny against the criteria for degree-awarding powers and/or university title by the appointed assessors, the length of which will depend on the particular circumstances of the applicant institution and the powers being sought;
 - a tailored and truncated institutional audit/review engagement by the appointed auditors/reviewers, to take place towards the end of the period of detailed scrutiny for degree-awarding powers and/or university title. Where appropriate, elements of, and information arising out of, the audit/review engagement may also be incorporated into the scrutiny activity;
 - a confidential final team report to ACDAP on the application for degree-awarding powers and/or university title; and
 - a separate institutional audit/review report on the institution, to be published once the degree-awarding powers and/or title process has been completed. In accordance with standard Agency procedures, this report will be submitted to the institution in draft form prior to publication, and the institution will be asked to provide corrections of any errors of fact.

Appendix 4

Schematic representation of the scrutiny process



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