

Degree Awarding Powers and University Title in Scotland

Guidance and Criteria for Applicants

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Introduction

The right to award UK degrees and to be called a university is a highly prized and legally protected privilege. This handbook outlines the processes for applying for degree awarding powers and university title in Scotland and explains the role played by QAA.

QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of higher education, and the scrutiny of applications for degree awarding powers and university title is one of our most important responsibilities. In undertaking this work, we are mindful of the need to uphold the worldwide reputation of UK higher education and the good standing of UK higher education qualifications.

This handbook has been designed to make the processes involved as clear as possible. Please note that, throughout, 'we' refers to QAA (including the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers and the QAA Board) and 'you' refers to the provider applying for degree awarding powers or university title.

The handbook covers:

- taught degree awarding powers (TDAP)
- research degree awarding powers (RDAP)
- university title.

A general outline of what these powers signify, who is suitable to apply for them, and how the application process works, is given in our guide, *The Right to Award UK Degrees* (2014).

Legislative context

The status of all Scottish universities and degree-awarding bodies is recognised and protected by UK law. The term 'degree' is similarly protected. Older Scottish universities, some with a history spanning many centuries, were granted their rights through a Royal Charter, a Papal Bull or an Act of Parliament. Since 1992, by dint of Section 76 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* and Section 48 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992*, the Privy Council is empowered to specify institutions in Scotland as being competent to award their own degrees.

To understand what these powers mean in practice see Table 1.

Table 1: UK degrees and the power to award them

Type of degree	Level in UK frameworks for higher education qualifications		Level in European qualifications framework	Powers necessary
	England, Wales and Northern Ireland	Scotland		
Doctoral degree (or doctorate)	Level 8	Level 12	End of third cycle	Research degree awarding powers (RDAP)
Research master's degree	Level 7	Level 11	End of second cycle	
Taught master's degree				
Bachelor's degree with honours	Level 6	Level 10	End of first cycle	Taught degree awarding powers (TDAP)
Ordinary bachelor's degree		Level 9		
Foundation degree	Level 5		Short cycle	Foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP)

Criteria

Applications must be in accordance with the criteria set out in [Annex 1](#)¹ These criteria were approved by ministers in October 1999 when QAA was asked to provide its advice on the basis of them for applications across the UK. These criteria continue to apply to applicants based in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These provide a framework to enable an institution to demonstrate that it is worthy of the status that it seeks. In formulating its advice, QAA will not only consider the individual criteria themselves but will also take a view on the way in which the institution is meeting the expectations of the criteria as a whole.

An institution aspiring to the status of university, or seeking the power to award its own degrees, should be one acknowledged as a worthy peer by the community of academic institutions it seeks to join. It should itself be a well founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that demonstrates firm guardianship of its standards.

An application for degree awarding powers and/or university title will not normally be considered unless the institution can demonstrate that over the preceding five years:

- none of its provision has been subject to a finding by the responsible quality assurance body that quality is unsatisfactory, or to a requirement for an improvement plan to be produced; **and**
- there has been no academic audit or institutional review report that has identified serious weaknesses of academic management.

In considering any request for an exception to this general rule, QAA will have regard to the extent and nature of the weakness, the way in which the institution has responded to it, and any countervailing evidence. QAA will also take account of any adverse findings or withdrawal of recognition by a professional or other accrediting body over the preceding five-year period and, where appropriate, the institution's validation or accreditation arrangements with other institutions.

In all cases, QAA will consider applications on their individual facts and merits, and will make a robust and consistent assessment of the applicant's ability to maintain quality and standards.

¹ The criteria in Annex 1 have been extracted from *Applications for the Grant of Taught Degree Awarding Powers, Research Degree Awarding Powers and University Title* (January 1999).

Taught degree awarding powers (TDAP)

Applications for the grant of TDAP are considered in accordance with the criteria common to all applications and the additional criteria for TDAP set out in [Annex 1](#).

The criteria focus on:

- governance and management
- quality assurance
- administrative systems
- academic staffing.

A TDAP scrutiny may also include visits to work-based learning sites, where such activity is significant.

Research degree awarding powers (RDAP)

Applications for research degree awarding powers are normally considered in conjunction with an application for university title. However, specialist institutions with an existing research tradition (and in exceptional circumstances other institutions) may be deemed fit to be granted research degree awarding powers without also seeking university status.

Applications for the grant of RDAP are considered in accordance with the criteria common to all applications and the additional criteria for RDAP and for university title set out in [Annex 1](#).

Applicants seeking RDAP following the successful grant of TDAP are expected to provide evidence that they continue to satisfy the criteria governing the grant of TDAP, and that they are exercising appropriate stewardship of those powers.

The criteria for RDAP focus on:

- governance and management
- quality assurance
- administrative systems
- the environment supporting the award of higher degrees
- academic staffing.

University title

The title 'university college' is available to institutions that have been granted taught degree awarding powers. It is for institutions to decide whether they wish to seek such a title and, if so, to submit an application for approval of a particular title to the Privy Council.

Applications for the grant of university title are considered in accordance with the criteria common to all applications, the additional criteria for RDAP and for university title, and the additional criteria for university title only set out in [Annex 1](#).

The criteria for university title focus on:

- governance and management
- quality assurance
- administrative systems
- the environment supporting the award of higher degrees
- academic staffing
- size and scope of the academic community.

QAA's role

QAA advises the Privy Council, through the minister, on degree awarding powers and university title applications. This work is the responsibility of the **Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP)**, an expert committee of the QAA Board² which considers each application passed to QAA by the Privy Council and decides whether a case has been made to proceed.

If the application does proceed, ACDAP:

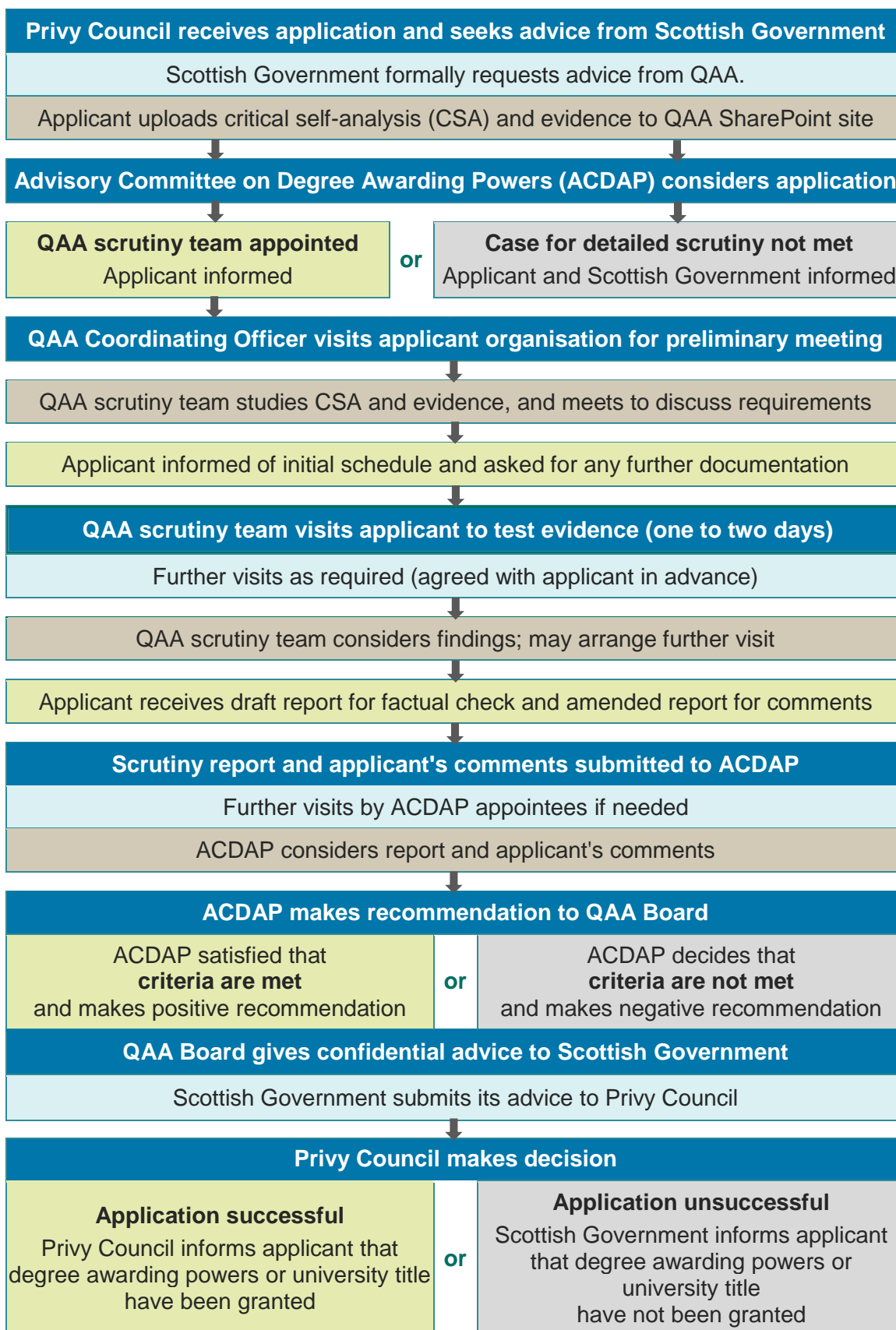
- agrees that a team be appointed to conduct a detailed scrutiny of the evidence submitted by the applicant
- gives close and careful consideration to the scrutiny team's reports, together with the application and supporting evidence, and forms a judgement on them
- makes a recommendation to the QAA Board as to whether the applicant meets the relevant criteria for the powers or title it seeks.

Having received ACDAP's recommendation, the QAA Board then determines the nature of the advice to be given to the Privy Council. Further information is available on our [website](#)³ and in [Annex 2](#).

² www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/ac-dap

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput.

Process chart showing main stages



Your application

As a prospective applicant you are advised to approach QAA for informal discussions, and before you make a formal application, to ensure that you have a clear understanding of:

- the relevant Guidance and the evidence requirements
- the importance of a robust evidence base to inform and support your application
- the scrutiny process
- the obligations placed on a body holding UK degree awarding powers or university title.

This initial discussion with QAA should help you to make an informed decision about the likely timing of any future application, should you decide to proceed. Before submitting an application, you should consider carefully what internal resources will be needed during the preparation and subsequent consideration of your application.

Although it is not a requirement, it may be helpful to establish an external advisory group to provide advice and guidance on organisational development, both as part of the application process and subsequent to it. In this context, you should bear in mind the important contribution that can be made by representatives from your degree-awarding partners or other external bodies. You should also be aware that, in the interests of obtaining a full and frank appraisal of your capacity to discharge the significant responsibilities associated with the powers you seek, QAA will contact the head of the degree-awarding body or bodies with whom you are in partnership for comment on the nature and efficacy of the collaborative relationship that has been established with you.

Documentary requirements

Critical self-analysis

The Guidance refers to the need for an applicant to be 'a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that demonstrates firm guardianship of its standards'.⁴ Consequently, in making an application, the onus is on you to demonstrate this in the form of a **critical self-analysis** (CSA).

It is for you to determine how you wish to structure your CSA, but you should bear in mind the need to make close reference to the Guidance (see [Annex 1](#)), and to provide evidence to support your case. The CSA should describe, analyse and comment clearly and frankly on your ability to meet the criteria associated with the powers you seek.

It should include clear references to the evidence that supports your claims. The evidence should be listed in your application.

An effective CSA is likely to be approximately 60 pages in length, although there is no penalty for longer or shorter submissions.

The CSA, and the evidence on which it is based, should be uploaded to the QAA SharePoint folder allocated to your application, and you are also asked to submit 20 printed copies of it. In addition, you will need to complete the relevant templates for the powers you are seeking, as detailed in the following subsection.

⁴ 1999 Guidance, page 1, paragraph 3.1 (see Annex 1).

Templates

Your application must be submitted using the relevant completed templates, which can be found on our [website](#).⁵ Please upload the completed templates with your CSA into the SharePoint folder allocated to you.

The templates to be completed for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) are:

- evidence mapping template (indicating where in the CSA and in the uploaded evidence you address the criteria and evidence requirements)
- staffing template
- applicant profile.

The templates to be completed for research degree awarding powers (RDAP) are:

- evidence mapping template (indicating where in the CSA and in the uploaded evidence you address the criteria and evidence requirements)
- data tables.

If you have any queries about the templates please [contact us](#) (full details in [Annex 2](#)).

To help us plan observation visits by the scrutiny team (see page 11) you should upload a copy of your academic calendar, setting out the dates and times of board and committee meetings, including governing body and subcommittee meetings, and key academic decision-making meetings. If the calendar does not cover other major activities (for example, validation and review events, away days and assessment boards) please provide details.

Submitting your application

At least five weeks before the ACDAP meeting at which you expect your application to be considered (see QAA website for ACDAP meeting dates⁶), you should submit the following to the Privy Council:

- letter of application from the Chair of your Governing Body
- a description of your corporate structure and UK Provider Reference Number.

Once the Privy Council has received your application they will inform us, and we shall allocate you a SharePoint site where you will be asked to upload your application and evidence. We shall let you know how to use the site and what happens next.

Four weeks before the ACDAP meeting at which you expect your application to be considered you should send us your application fee and upload the following to your allocated SharePoint site:

- your critical self-analysis (CSA)
- evidence on which you have based your application
- completed templates (available on our [website](#)).⁷

At least three weeks before the relevant ACDAP meeting we shall also require 20 printed copies of the CSA.

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/ac-dap

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput

QAA fees

Initial application fees

We charge an application fee of £2,500, which should be paid by cheque at the time of application. If you need us to raise an invoice first, or if you wish to make the payment via BACS, please please [contact us](#) (full details in [Annex 2](#)) to arrange this in advance.

Where ACDAP determines that a fact-finding visit is necessary, prior to the detailed scrutiny, a fee of £5,000 will be charged in advance of the visit.

Detailed scrutiny fees

Once your application has reached the detailed scrutiny stage, fees are payable as follows.⁸

Powers sought	Fee structure
FDAP	£90,000
TDAP	£90,000
T&RDAP	£97,000
RDAP	£60,000

These fees cover the costs of a typical scrutiny incurred up to, and including, the scrutiny team's final report to ACDAP. Where the number of visits by members of the scrutiny team exceeds that of a typical scrutiny, additional fees will be payable at a rate of £750 per individual observation and will be notified to you in good time.

Additional fees

If a visit from an ACDAP sub-panel or another form of follow-up visit is required, a further charge of £2,000 will be made. Should any substantial additional expenditure be incurred as part of a detailed scrutiny, a further charge may be made to cover costs. Any such additional charges will be set individually per institution and notified to you in good time. All additional fees are payable before the end of the process.

⁸ To check for updates see our website: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/fee-structure.

Initial assessment by ACDAP

Your application will be considered by ACDAP, which will decide, on the basis of what you have submitted, whether it should proceed to the detailed scrutiny stage.

If ACDAP decides that you have not made a sufficiently strong case to proceed, we shall write to you to explain why.

If ACDAP makes a decision to proceed we shall write to you to confirm this. The next stage is that we establish a scrutiny team to consider your application and supporting evidence (see next section).

Detailed scrutiny stage

If your application does proceed, ACDAP will ask that a team be appointed to conduct a **detailed scrutiny** of your application. The team will include senior members of the academic community. We will let you know who they are, asking you to inform us of any conflicts of interest.

We will also identify a QAA Coordinating Officer to manage and coordinate the detailed scrutiny and ensure you are clear about what to expect, and what is expected of you. Further details about the Coordinating Officer's role and responsibilities are given in [Annex 3](#).

The scrutiny team and its role

Scrutiny team members have first-hand experience of existing universities or other degree-awarding bodies. They typically also have experience of QAA review work. We always ensure that the team contains sufficient seniority, knowledge and experience to conduct the detailed scrutiny to the highest professional standard. Where possible, subject to experience, and in the interests of continuity, we aim to include individuals who have previously been part of a QAA review team at your organisation. Teams always include a student member.

Normally, there are:

- five team members for TDAP
- four team members for RDAP
- five team members for university title

with one member of the team acting as Scrutiny Secretary.

Scrutiny team members will read the CSA and the evidence you supply, and familiarise themselves with your organisation. They will consider the detail of your application against the relevant criteria contained within the Guidance. This involves:

- examining documentary evidence
- conducting on-site observations of meetings and events
- meeting students, staff, governors and other stakeholders
- visiting employers for TDAP where there is a significant element of work-based learning.

As the scrutiny progresses, they will hold confidential team discussions about their findings. For more on their role see [Annex 2](#).

Aims and duration of the detailed scrutiny

The detailed scrutiny stage is intended to establish:

- whether an applicant meets the criteria for the powers or title it seeks
- whether an applicant has the ability and sustained capacity to assume the powers or status it seeks
- that there can be public confidence in any powers or title granted.

In considering these matters, the scrutiny team will be actively seeking manifestations of 'a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that demonstrates firm

guardianship of its standards'.⁹ To that end, you can expect the team to focus on the internal procedures you have established for setting and maintaining appropriate standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of your degree programmes. They will also be interested in the relationship between corporate and academic decision making. The team will wish to know about your analysis of the qualifications and experience of your staff, and how well the staff support student development and achievement.

We shall be seeking evidence that your organisation has the capacity, self-criticality and organisational maturity to be granted and consistently exercise the powers you seek. We will need to be satisfied that you understand and 'own' the significant responsibilities and obligations that would be invested in you in the event of degree awarding powers being granted, including your contribution to the collective security of the UK degree brand in a global environment.

The detailed scrutiny is not a developmental activity. The onus is on you to demonstrate that you have reached a sufficient level of institutional maturity to warrant the grant of degree awarding powers or university title and that there can be public confidence, both present and future, in the systems and supporting infrastructure you have in place to assure the quality and standards of degrees to be awarded in your name.

The detailed scrutiny is both intensive and extensive. As it is not mechanistic, its nature and length are likely to vary, depending on such factors as your higher education track record, the robustness of your CSA and supporting evidence, and the powers sought. In non-problematic cases the process might be expected to extend over a full academic year (excluding time spent to produce the report). Taking account of the formal procedures that follow, the process is unlikely to be concluded in less than two years.

Preliminary visit by the Coordinating Officer

The Coordinating Officer will contact you at an early opportunity to arrange a preliminary visit. This would normally take place within eight weeks of ACDAP's decision to proceed and provides an opportunity for the Coordinating Officer to establish contact with relevant and key personnel, to discuss the scrutiny process in more detail, including operational considerations, and to answer any questions.

Typically, the preliminary visit will enable you to find out more about the detailed scrutiny process, including:

- its anticipated duration
- the evidence you will need to provide
- meetings and events likely to be of interest
- arrangements for site visits in relation to work-based learning
- your policy on the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults (if individuals within these categories are likely to be present at locations visited by the scrutiny team) and any implications
- your organisation's point of contact for the scrutiny
- how you can provide feedback later.

⁹ See note 4.

Planning the visits to your organisation

The scrutiny team will hold a meeting to plan its visit, after which the Coordinating Officer will send you a schedule of proposed meetings and engagements (to be updated as the scrutiny progresses), enabling you to plan the scrutiny team's visit(s). He/she will discuss any particular requirements or practicalities with your representative, for example any necessary safeguarding requirements in relation to children and vulnerable adults during site visits. For more details and protocols relating to the scrutiny team's conduct see [Annex 3](#).

Should there be any changes to the timing or date of any engagements to which you have initially agreed, you should let the Coordinating Officer know as soon as possible.

Visits to your organisation by the scrutiny team

Detailed scrutiny typically involves a series of visits to your organisation, and other learning environments that you use, such as work-based settings. These may be undertaken by the scrutiny team as a whole or by individual members of it. All visits have a clear and identified purpose as advised by the Coordinating Officer. Visits are usually planned and agreed with you well in advance.

Team members follow a schedule of planned engagements as agreed with you. These may involve the team visiting as a whole or team members visiting individually. Anything that is likely to be useful for the final report will be recorded in writing. Team members' reports on particular engagements will be shared with other members of the team (and, if relevant, with ACDAP and the QAA Board) but are otherwise kept confidential.

In the interests of maintaining an effective and constructive dialogue, the Coordinating Officer will seek to speak with and/or meet regularly with your representative(s) to discuss progress and identify any matters where further evidence is required. Typically, such meetings or contact would follow the scrutiny team's progress review meetings/discussions.

The Scrutiny Secretary takes notes of meetings and keeps a rolling record of interactions. The Secretary is also familiar with the Guidance and contributes to the planning of scrutiny activities and the preparation of the team's final report.

The first team visit (one to two days) provides an opportunity for the team to meet a representative cross-section of your organisation to place the application in context. To help them evaluate your CSA and supporting evidence, team members are likely to want to meet, and hold structured discussions with all, or some, of the following:

- your head or principal
- governing body members
- members of the senior management team
- academic leaders
- teaching staff and research supervisors
- administrative staff
- students and alumni
- external examiners
- representatives from your degree-awarding body/bodies (past and present)
- employers and other external stakeholders.

Where there is a need to visit sites of work-based learning it is your responsibility to brief the employers/providers on what to expect.

The scrutiny team is also likely to request to observe meetings and other activities that they have identified as significant, including:

- governing body meetings
- internal committee meetings
- validation/review events
- examination boards
- any other activities pertinent to the application.

Before a scrutiny team member attends a formal committee meeting or similar, you may wish to provide them with a short preparatory briefing. Team members will not participate in meetings that they observe, but they will take notes.

The team is also likely to ask to see minutes, agendas and papers relating to internal meetings and any other activities having a bearing on the application, including those of:

- the governing body and its subcommittees
- assessment boards
- validation/review panels.

Scrutiny team members may request additional documentation from you during this and any subsequent visits. Any such documentation should be uploaded to the QAA SharePoint folder that has been allocated to you.

Team members do not provide feedback to you, and you are asked to ensure that all parties involved are aware of this.

The scrutiny team may request additional meetings as the process evolves, and, in some cases, further visits may be necessary. These will be arranged between the Coordinating Officer and your representative(s).

The scrutiny team convenes at key stages in the scrutiny process (for example, after one term or semester), to review progress, establish where gaps in their knowledge remain, and agree next steps. Progress reports of these meetings are submitted to ACDAP.

At the end of the detailed scrutiny, the scrutiny team may wish to arrange a final visit for clarification purposes.

Other evidence

There may be others, including teaching staff, students or other interested parties, who wish to bring information about you and your provision to our attention. Any comments received will be considered as long as the information is relevant and submitted before the scrutiny has ended. Information should be submitted in writing by filling in our [enquiries form](#) or by post using the QAA address given in [Annex 2](#). Relevant information will be forwarded to the scrutiny team for consideration. You should be ready to provide further details on request.

To ensure teaching staff and students are aware of this aspect of the process, and the benefits of raising any issues in advance, we will send you a standard email which you should circulate to staff and students once the detailed scrutiny stage has been approved. We will also send you a standard poster about the protocol for submitting comments, and this should be displayed prominently.

We have a dedicated scheme for investigating any concerns about serious systemic or procedural problems in relation to academic standards and quality at any Scottish higher education provider. These may be submitted by students, staff or any other interested party.

Any such investigation relating to your organisation will be taken into account during the detailed scrutiny. Should you be successful in obtaining the powers you seek, any future concerns raised about your institution will also be subject to the Scottish [Concerns Scheme](#).¹⁰

¹⁰ www.qaa.ac.uk/concerns

Final report and recommendations

The detailed scrutiny culminates in a formal **report** to ACDAP, in which the scrutiny team:

- provides clear evidence-based expert analysis on how your organisation satisfies, or falls short of, the criteria
- explains the critical issues
- indicates areas where further development may be required to secure a successful outcome of your application.

We will send you the draft report at least eight weeks before the ACDAP meeting at which it is to be considered. This gives you the opportunity to inform us of any factual inaccuracies. You will later receive a copy of the finalised report and be invited to submit further written comments for consideration alongside it, should you so wish.

The report, ACDAP's subsequent discussion of it, and your comments (if any), will form the basis of ACDAP's **recommendation** on the nature of the confidential advice to be given to the minister, which will be presented to the next QAA Board meeting. We will notify you if ACDAP is **not** in a position to make a recommendation (see section below on insufficient evidence).

On the basis of ACDAP's recommendations and report, the QAA Board will determine the nature of its **confidential advice** to the minister, which is the final stage of our involvement in the process. Once the Board has submitted this advice we will write to let you know that this has happened. The minister will pass QAA's advice to the Privy Council.

Matters requiring clarification

If, on the basis of the report, ACDAP identifies matters for further consideration or clarification, it may ask the scrutiny team (or a subset of it) to undertake further activity to address these issues, or may convene a sub-panel of its members (supplemented, if appropriate, by additional external expertise) to undertake a short and focused visit to your organisation. Most such 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, brief report to ACDAP, to inform its recommendation.

Insufficient evidence that criteria are met

Where ACDAP considers there is insufficient evidence that you satisfy the criteria in the relevant Guidance, it may recommend that your application be rejected.

Alternatively, ACDAP may recommend that your application be placed **in abeyance**, giving you time to take such developmental action as will enable the scrutiny to be resumed at a later date. If this is the case, you will be informed.

ACDAP will determine the period of abeyance, which is no longer than one year, and will inform you of those areas that need to be addressed.

If your application is placed in abeyance but further evidence is not presented by the end of the agreed period, your application will be considered to have lapsed. ACDAP will notify the QAA Board that you have not satisfied the criteria for the powers you seek.

The Privy Council's decision

Having received QAA's advice from the minister, the Privy Council makes the final **decision** on the outcome of your application.

If you are **successful** in obtaining the degree awarding powers that you have sought, you will be formally notified by the **Privy Council**. You should advise us straight away so that we can brief you on requirements pertaining to your new status as a degree awarding body (see next section).

If you are **unsuccessful** you will be notified by **the minister**.

We will publish the scrutiny team's final report on our website once the minister has notified us of either outcome.

Evaluation and follow-up

You will be invited to provide written feedback at two stages: at an interim point and at the end of the process.

We will send you a feedback form at an interim stage which will be four weeks before you are scheduled to have a scrutiny progress meeting with the Coordinating Officer. Please return it within two weeks of receipt. Any issues arising can then be discussed at the scheduled progress meeting.

At the end of the process, when we have considered your application and informed you that we have submitted our advice to the minister, you, the Coordinating Officer and the scrutiny team will be asked to evaluate the process. Evaluations will be conducted in confidence by our Research and Intelligence team. The outcomes will be used internally to review and improve the scrutiny process.

Policy on the disclosure of records

Under our *Policy on the Disclosure of Records Relating to Degree Awarding Powers/University Title*,¹¹ all records are closed until a decision has been reached. After this we will publish the scrutiny team's final report on our website. As specified in the policy, some additional records will be available on request at this time.

Ten years after the notification of your outcome we will give access, on request, to the records pertaining to your application, subject to any enduring issues of commercial confidentiality.

Written representations to the QAA Board

If ACDAP recommends that your application should be rejected we will inform you of this and the reasons for it before the Board considers ACDAP's recommendation. This gives you the opportunity to make written representations directly to the Board. The procedure for this is explained on our website.

Subscription to QAA

If your application is successful and you are granted UK degree awarding powers you will be required to subscribe to QAA as a condition of the grant of those powers. Subscriber commitments are set out on our website.¹² We will contact you about subscription once the minister has notified us of the successful outcome of your application.

¹¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/further-information

¹² www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/subscribing-institutions/applying-to-qaa

Annex 1: Criteria

Included in full below are the criteria relevant to applications for TDAP, RDAP and university title in Scotland. They previously appeared as the appendix of a separate Guidance document published in January 1999)¹³

[Criteria common to all applications](#)

[Additional criteria for TDAP](#)

[Additional criteria for RDAP and for university title](#)

[Additional criteria for university title only](#)

Criteria common to all applications

Governance and Management

Criterion 1

The institution's governance, management, financial control and quality assurance arrangements are sufficient to manage existing operations and respond to development and change

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- its academic and financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to its mission, aims and objectives;
- there is a clarity of function and responsibility in relation to its governance and management systems;
- across the full range of its activities, there is demonstrable depth and strength of academic leadership;
- policies and systems are developed, implemented and communicated in collaboration with staff and students;
- its mission and associated policies and systems are understood, accepted and actively applied by staff and, where appropriate, students;
- it is managing successfully the responsibilities vested in it pursuant to the grant of degree awarding powers, or by its validating university;
- its operational policies and systems are monitored, and that it identifies where, when, why and how changes might need to be made;
- there is demonstrable information to indicate continued confidence and stability over an extended period of time in its governance, financial control and quality assurance arrangements, and organisational structure.

¹³ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2763#

Quality Assurance

Criterion 2

The institution has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for establishing its academic objectives and outcomes

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- its programmes of study are offered at levels that correspond to the levels of the overall qualifications framework for higher education;
- in seeking to establish, and then maintain, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, advice is explicitly sought from academic peers in other higher education institutions and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies.

Criterion 3

The institution seeks to ensure that its programmes of study consistently meet stated objectives and outcomes

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- self-assessment is integral to quality assurance and the management of the institution;
- ideas and expertise from within and outside the institution, on programme design and development, on teaching, and on student learning and assessment, are drawn into its arrangements for programme approval and review;
- staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policy and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review;
- its strategies for teaching, learning and assessment relate to its stated objectives and learning outcomes;
- there is a close interrelationship between academic planning matters and decisions on resource allocation.

Criterion 4

Programme performance is carefully and regularly monitored

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- responsibility for amending/improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action carefully monitored;
- close linkages are maintained between learning support services and programme approval, planning and review;
- clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in the scrutiny, monitoring and review of existing programmes;
- coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained;

- clear mechanisms are employed when a decision is taken to close a programme or programme element, and, in doing so, the interests of students are safeguarded.

Criterion 5

The effectiveness of the institution's learning and teaching infrastructure is carefully monitored

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- the effectiveness of teaching and learning is monitored in relation to stated objectives and learning outcomes,
- collections of books and other materials contained in, or directly accessible through, its library/learning resources centre are adequate to facilitate the programmes pursued by students in the institution;
- action is taken to maintain and enhance quality and the role of staff and students in this process;
- students are advised about, and inducted into, programmes and study and account is taken of different students' needs;
- means exist for identifying good and poor practice and for disseminating and implementing improved operational methodologies.

Criterion 6

The academic and related support requirements of students studying off-site are taken into account

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- clear and understood arrangements exist for monitoring the opportunities and achievements of those of its students studying outside the institution, including those outside the UK.

Criterion 7

Standards of students' achievements are maintained at a recognised level and there is a strategy for developing the quality of academic provision

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- through its assessment practices, it seeks to define, monitor and maintain its academic standards;
- its assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff;
- it assures itself that its assessment practices fully cover all declared learning objectives and learning outcomes;
- external peers are engaged in its assessment processes;
- 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;
- students are informed of the outcomes of their assessment;
- information on assessment outcomes is given to students in a timely manner;
- constructive feedback is given to students on their performance.

Criterion 8

Effective action is taken to address weaknesses, promote strengths and demonstrate accountability

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- a rigorous approach is adopted in response to matters raised through self-assessment;
- actions are regularly monitored to ensure the maintenance of quality and standards;
- feedback from students, staff and external interest groups is secured and evaluated and clear mechanisms exist to provide feedback to interested stakeholders;
- use is made of feedback at departmental, programme or programme-element level;
- external views and involvement are sought in programme design and review, teaching and student learning;
- information arising from feedback is disseminated within programmes and across the institution;
- the effectiveness of student advisory and counselling services is monitored and resource demands arising from such activities are considered and acted upon;
- effective means exist for encouraging the continuous improvement of quality of provision and student achievement.

Administrative Systems

Criterion 9

The institution's administrative systems are sufficient to manage its operations now and in the foreseeable future

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- its administrative support systems are able to monitor student progression and performance and provide timely and accurate information to satisfy academic and non-academic information needs
- it provides access to comprehensive library and computing services, support and demand for which is regularly monitored and, where appropriate, improved
- high quality and confidential support services are provided for students and staff
- equality of opportunity is achieved in its activities
- it has in place effective and confidential mechanisms to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters
- its administrative staff are given adequate opportunities for professional development.

Additional criteria for TDAP

Academic Staffing

Criterion 10

The qualities and competences of staff are appropriate for an institution with taught degree awarding powers

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that a significant proportion of its academic staff have:

- higher degrees and relevant professional qualifications
- teaching experience in other higher education institutions
- experience of curriculum development and assessment design
- relevant experience outside higher education, for example in professional practice.

Criterion 11

The institution's staff are actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- a proportion of its academic staff are active in subject associations and relevant professional bodies
- a significant proportion of its academic staff participate in professional development schemes
- there are institutional and local level strategies of staff development designed to establish, develop and enhance staff competences
- an extensive portfolio of teaching development activities has been established
- staff contribute to academic publications.

Criterion 12

Staff maintain high professional standards

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- feedback on performance is regularly received from students, employers and other institutional stakeholders;
- the outcomes of external scrutiny exercises undertaken by bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the funding councils and professional and statutory bodies are carefully considered and actioned.

Additional criteria for RDAP and for university title

The Environment Supporting the Award of Higher Degrees

Criterion 13

The institution has an environment of academic staff, postgraduates and postdoctoral workers which fosters and actively supports creative research and scholarly activity

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- it exercises prudent management of its portfolio of research and consultancy activities;
- a substantial proportion of its academic staff are engaged in research and scholarship;
- in the majority of academic areas within which it undertakes research, or other forms of advanced scholarship consistent with its mission, it demonstrates achievement of national and/or international standing;
- it is successful in securing income for its research activities;
- it has implemented effectively the provisions of the QAA *Code of practice on postgraduate research programmes*.

Academic Staffing

Criterion 14

The qualities and competences of staff are appropriate for an institution with university title and/or research degree awarding powers

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that a significant proportion of its academic staff have:

- higher degrees, doctorates, relevant professional qualifications and fellowship of learned societies;
- teaching and/or research experience in other universities in the United Kingdom and abroad;
- experience of curriculum development, assessment design and research management in other universities and higher education institutions;
- relevant experience outside higher education, for example in professional practice or in industrial research and development.

Criterion 15

The institution's staff are actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- a significant proportion of its academic staff are active in subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies

- a significant proportion of its academic staff participate in professional development schemes;
- there are institutional and local level strategies of staff development designed to establish, develop and enhance staff competences;
- an extensive portfolio of teaching development activities has been established.

Criterion 16

Staff of the institution have acknowledged academic expertise

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate:

- that a significant proportion of its academic staff are engaged in research, academic reviews and scholarly commentary, produce articles, text books and other academic-related materials;
- that it has academic staff who are invited to contribute to the work of expert committees, either as advisers, expert witnesses or commentators;
- that it is able to attract individual or institutional commissioned research and/or consultancy;
- the extent to which it is able to attract funding or sponsorship for academic development initiatives;
- that it is valued as a partner in collaborative projects;
- that it is involved in research partnerships and technology transfer schemes with outside enterprises.

Criterion 17

Staff maintain high professional standards and willingly accept the professional responsibilities associated with operating in a university environment

Evidence

The institution should be able to demonstrate that:

- feedback on performance is regularly received from students, employers and other institutional stakeholders;
- the outcomes of external scrutiny exercises undertaken by bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the funding councils and professional and statutory bodies are carefully considered and actioned;
- a significant proportion of its staff act as external examiners in other higher education institutions;
- a number of its academic staff act as external academic auditors, external subject reviewers, or in some other external review capacity.

Additional criterion for university title only

Size and scope of the academic community

Criterion 18

An institution wishing to apply for approval to use the title 'University' should normally have:

- at least 300 full-time equivalent higher education students in five of the subject areas listed for this purpose below;
- a higher education enrolment of at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students;
- at least 3,000 full-time equivalent students on degree level courses;
- at least 60 current research degree registrations and more than 30 Doctor of Philosophy (or direct equivalent) conferments.

Annex 2: Contacts and further information

For pre-application enquiries and general information, please [contact us](#), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): www.qaa.ac.uk/contact-us.

Contacts

Scottish Government

You should send one copy of your application to your contact at:

Advanced Learning and Science Directorate
Higher Education and Learner Division
6th Floor
5 Atlantic Quay
150 Broomielaw
Glasgow
G2 8LU

Telephone: 0300 244 4000
Email: Karen.Frew@gov.scot

Privy Council

The Privy Council Office,
2 Carlton Gardens,
London
SW1Y 5AA

Telephone: 020 7747 5310
Email: pcosecretariat@pco.gov.uk

QAA

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education,
Southgate House,
Southgate Street,
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Telephone: 01452 557050
Email: please fill in our [enquiries form](#).

Further information

Information, templates and publications relating to degree awarding powers applications can be found on our website: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput and www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/guidance-and-criteria

Supplementary guidance

The following supplementary QAA guidance is available:

Guidance on Scholarship and the Pedagogical Effectiveness of Staff: Expectations for FDAP and TDAP

Guidance on Applications for the Grant of RDAP: Academic Staff (Criterion 1)

Links to other relevant information

Information about the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP):
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/ac-dap

Table of fees:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/fee-structure

Disclosure policy and terms of engagement:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/daput/further-information

QAA Scottish Concerns Scheme:

www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/concerns

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code):

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

Annex 3: Roles and protocols

The role of the Coordinating Officer

The Coordinating Officer will:

- pay a preliminary visit to the applicant to ensure they know what to expect
- brief the scrutiny team about requirements, protocols, obligations and responsibilities
- agree the schedule of engagements with the applicant
- coordinate the work of the scrutiny team
- discuss with the applicant any requests for additional information made by the scrutiny team
- provide progress reports to ACDAP
- oversee the production of the scrutiny team's final report to ACDAP.

Scrutiny team protocols and procedures

All communications (written or oral) connected with a scrutiny are treated as confidential to the team and QAA. Written communications are made through QAA's SharePoint site.

Protocols

Scrutiny team members are expected to:

- be courteous and friendly at all times during visits and meetings
- respect organisational sensitivities and practices
- base the views they form on clear and demonstrable evidence
- strictly observe the confidentiality of the scrutiny process.

Team members may not:

- engage in informal discussions that might compromise the validity and independence of subsequent judgements
- participate in formal meetings that they observe (though they may take notes)
- accept gifts or invitations to formal events (such as dinners or award ceremonies)
- engage in consultancy with a provider while engaged in scrutinising their application, nor for up to one year after termination of that contract.

The planning meeting

Prior to the detailed scrutiny, team members are expected to read the CSA and evidence provided by the applicant. The Coordinating Officer and the scrutiny team will hold a planning meeting when the team will:

- review and consider the application and supporting information provided
- share members' understanding of the organisational context
- consider members' responses to the documentation provided
- decide how best to secure the extra evidence needed
- agree a schedule of engagements, including visits to sites of work-based learning where appropriate, to be updated as the detailed scrutiny progresses
- agree a programme of meetings for the initial team visit over one or two days
- agree the indicative agenda to be followed at meetings held during the initial visit
- agree who will lead on particular aspects of the scrutiny and on the corresponding

- sections of the final report to ACDAP
- consider measures that might need to be taken in respect of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in the case of site visits (for example, Disclosure and Barring Service checks).

Members will be briefed about recent developments in relation to degree awarding powers; the provider context; and relevant reference material, templates and communication mechanisms that have been developed to enable them to carry out their roles with consistency and confidence.

Reports on meetings and engagements during the scrutiny visits

After each organisational engagement, team members are required to complete a report detailing their findings about the extent to which the relevant criteria are met. The report is compiled using a template and is uploaded electronically to the dedicated SharePoint site within 10 working days of a visit. Comments made by individuals in discussion sessions are not attributed. These reports identify any outstanding issues, inform the planning of further engagements and form a key resource in the preparation of the team's final report. They are confidential between the scrutiny team and QAA, and are not made available to any other party.

The scrutiny secretary keeps a record of all substantive discussions involving the team as a whole and will circulate them to the team.

The outcomes of any informal meetings and conversations with the applicant's stakeholders must be formally recorded if the information is subsequently to be used as evidence. Team members should exercise discretion and judgement in deciding whether to use information gathered on an informal basis.

Scrutiny teams must balance the value of workplace evidence against the time available and the need to minimise inconvenience to employers.

Interim team meetings and periodic progress reports

The scrutiny team meets at key stages in the scrutiny process (for example, after one term or semester):

- to review progress
- to establish where gaps in the team's knowledge base remain
- to agree the next steps.

Each scrutiny is monitored by way of progress reports submitted to scheduled meetings of ACDAP.

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