

Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title

Institutional guidance on procedures

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This paper sets out the procedures for making applications for the award of degree awarding powers and/or university title.
- 1.2 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, namely 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.

2 Background

- 2.1 Ministers maintain criteria against which applications are considered. In 1998 the Agency was invited to review these criteria, and proposals for revised criteria were submitted. On 29 October 1999, it was announced that Ministers had concluded that the criteria proposed by the Agency were appropriate, and had asked the Agency to offer its advice on the basis of them. In advising on applications for degree awarding powers received after 25 February 1998, the Agency is, therefore, guided by these criteria. The criteria appear as Appendix 1 to this paper.
- 2.2 Applications for degree awarding powers should relate to 'taught' or 'research' degrees, as defined in the relevant legislation. This distinction is reflected in the criteria. Ministers have stated that the title 'university college' will be available to institutions which 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.
- 2.3 Ministers consider that it will normally be appropriate for applications for research degree awarding powers to be 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.
- 2.4 Ministers have stressed the responsibility that degree awarding institutions have in maintaining the world class reputation of United Kingdom higher education. As such, before higher education institutions are allowed to award their own degrees, Ministers must be satisfied that the quality of degrees will be such as to maintain that world class reputation. University status carries an even greater commitment to quality and high standards.

3 The criteria

- 3.1 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 found, cohesive and self-critical academic community that demonstrates firm guardianship of its standards.
- 3.2 This is not to say that it should be a mere clone of a single model of academic excellence. It should have the self-confidence to pursue its own mission, and to contribute to the diversity of the sector as a whole. But it should do so in a way that commands the respect and confidence of its peers and of its stakeholders.
- 3.3 The criteria provide a framework to enable an institution to demonstrate that it is worthy of the status that it seeks. In formulating its advice, the Agency will consider not only 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.
- 3.4 An applicant institution should be able to demonstrate that it has considered all strategic options

open to it for its own academic development, and that the making of an application is a culmination of a considered process of strategic planning.

3.5 An application for degree awarding powers and/or university title will not normally be entertained 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.

3.6 In considering any request for an exception to this general rule, the Agency 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. The Agency 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.

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

4 Making an application

4.1 Institutions applying for either degree awarding powers and/or university status will be required to prepare a *Critical Self Analysis*. The *Analysis* should describe, analyse and comment clearly and frankly on the effectiveness of the means used by the institution to satisfy itself that it is able to meet the criteria relevant to the powers being sought. Although it is for institutions to determine how they structure their *Analysis*, regard should be had to the relevant criteria and supporting evidence listings. Whilst the list of evidence is reasonably detailed, it is not intended to be exhaustive.

4.2 The *Analysis* should be accompanied by a list of the evidence used by the institution itself to test whether its processes are operating as intended, to enable it to know whether it is discharging effectively its responsibility for quality and standards relative to the powers being sought. All the documents identified by the applying institution should be available to the Agency upon request. Applicant institutions are encouraged to supplement their *Analysis* with documents, such as prospectuses, strategic and operational plans, teaching quality handbooks, and staff handbooks, in order to help the Agency to an improved understanding of the institution and its structure and function. The *Analysis* will be regarded as being confidential to those directly concerned with consideration of the application.

4.3 Experience suggests that an effective *Analysis* is likely to be some 60 pages in length, although there will be no penalty for shorter or longer submissions.

4.4 Applications should be submitted to the Clerk to the Privy Council, Privy Council Office, Whitehall, London SW1A 2AT. Institutions should submit one copy of the application to the Privy Council Office. The Agency will seek further copies (normally 20) of the application from the institution after the relevant education department has approached it with a formal request for advice.

4.5 Institutions are advised to approach the Agency for informal discussions before lodging a formal application. The Agency is willing to meet institutions to discuss proposed applications at an early stage to ensure that the institution has a clear understanding of the criteria, documentation requirements and scrutiny processes.

5 Scrutiny by the agency

5.1 Confirmation that the Agency will provide advice about the application in question will be sent to the appropriate education department and to the institution. The applicant institution will be advised of the arrangements for co-ordinating the processing of the application.

Consideration by the Agency's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers

5.2 The Agency's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) will consider:

- the documentation submitted by the applying institution;
- a preliminary report on the submission by ACDAP's officers;
- where appropriate, comments received from a validating partner(s); and

- initial advice from the relevant funding council;

and will determine whether there is a case for considering further the institution's application.

- 5.3 If the ACDAP determines that, in the light of the preliminary report, the application should receive further consideration, a Scrutiny Panel will be appointed by the ACDAP to examine the application in detail. Scrutiny Panels are chaired by members of the ACDAP and normally consist of between four and six people, of whom some will be heads, or senior members of, higher education institutions. The other members may include individuals with professional or other experience relevant to the applicant institution.

Institutional scrutiny

- 5.4 The Scrutiny Panel may commission a preliminary visit to the applicant institution to explore matters arising from the initial submission documentation and other information available to it. The information made available should include the plans of the institution and its validating partner(s) for the progressive transfer of full responsibility for degree awarding functions, in the event that the application succeeds. Two assessors and the ACDAP Secretary will normally undertake the visit. A report of the visit will be prepared for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel. In light of that report, the Scrutiny Panel will decide either to proceed with its scrutiny, or to advise the institution to undertake further development work before proceeding with its application.
- 5.5 Where the Scrutiny Panel decides to proceed with a scrutiny, the Agency will appoint a small team of assessors to collect evidence on the application. In selecting assessors, the Agency will seek to balance academic seniority, experience of institutional operations and appreciation of the applicant institution's position in the higher education sector. The assessors will not make recommendations on the application but will, with reference to the agreed criteria (both individually and collectively), offer peer referenced views on the detail of institutional operations and will identify matters for subsequent further consideration by the Scrutiny Panel.
- 5.6 Scrutiny activities will take a number of forms, for example:
- reviewing documentation made available by the applicant institution;
 - observing formal meetings, including committee meetings, validation/review events, and examination boards;
 - structured discussions with staff, students and external interest groupings.

Regular monitoring reports on the institutional scrutiny process will be submitted to the appointed Scrutiny Panel by the ACDAP Secretary.

The precise nature and length of the scrutiny process will vary according to the powers being sought and the particular circumstances of the applicant institution. In scrutinising the institution's application, the Agency will seek external perspectives on the operation of the institution and review reports arising from external programme/institutional scrutiny processes.

- 5.7 Though not mandatory, the institution may see merit in the establishment of an external advisory group to offer advice and guidance on institutional development, both as part of the application process and subsequently. Institutions which decide that there would be benefits in establishing such a group will need to bear in mind the important contribution that, where appropriate, may be made by representatives from their validating institution(s) or other external bodies.
- 5.8 Subject to satisfactory progress, applications for degree awarding powers and/or university title will culminate in a Scrutiny Panel visit. The visit will normally involve meetings with governors, senior managers, teaching and other staff; with students; and with relevant external interest groups. Thereafter, the Scrutiny Panel will formulate its report.

6 Reporting arrangements

- 6.1 At the end of the scrutiny process, the report of the Scrutiny Panel will be considered by the ACDAP. The ACDAP will then formulate its advice on the application. Subject to the approval of the Board, this advice will then be transmitted to the appropriate education department. The advice will be given in confidence, it is for the appropriate Minister to determine if it should be published or disclosed to the applicant institution. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.
- 6.2 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, and the full application from the institution, at least five weeks before the meeting of the Committee at which it is to be considered.

- 6.3 While it is not possible to give a precise indication of the duration of the process, applicants should be aware that the nature of the scrutiny process is both intensive and extensive and is, therefore, likely to extend for at least one complete annual cycle of academic decision making. The Agency shall advise on the likely duration of individual scrutiny processes.

7 Role of the funding council and validating institution(s)

- 7.1 An education department may seek views from the relevant funding council on the financial stability of an institution seeking degree awarding powers (irrespective of whether the institution is in receipt of funding from that council).
- 7.2 An applicant institution's validating partner(s) will be advised that an application has been made. They will be invited to offer their comments on the nature of the operational relationship that has been established and their judgement as to the suitability of the applying institution to be granted the powers they are seeking.

8 Costs

- 8.1 The Agency will levy a charge on applicant institutions to recover the costs that it incurs in scrutinising the application and providing advice to the relevant Education Department. The Agency has no other income that it is able to apply to dealing with applications. The charge will cover the direct costs of the Scrutiny Panel and its 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 generated from the activity.
- 8.2 An initial charge will be made to cover costs incurred up to and including the initial report to the Scrutiny Panel (see paragraph 5.4). The current (January 2000) charge is £15,000. A further charge will be made for the remaining work. Since the amount of such work may vary between applications, such further charges will be set individually. The Agency will be happy to advise on the likely charges for any application.
- 8.3 Before submitting applications for either taught degree awarding powers or university title/research degree awarding powers, institutions will wish to give serious consideration to the internal resource costs arising from the preparation and subsequent consideration of the application.

9 Further information

- 9.1 Enquiries regarding the submission of applications for degree awarding powers or university status should, in the first instance, be made to the ACDAP Committee Secretary or the ACDAP Committee Administrator at the following address:

Dr Irene Ainsworth (Committee Secretary)
Assistant Director for Degree Awarding Powers and University Title
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557019
Fax: 01452 557011
Email: i.ainsworth@qaa.ac.uk

Mr Nick Pack (Committee Administrator)
Project Officer for Degree Awarding Powers and University Title

Tel: 01452 557039
Fax: 01452 557011
Email: n.pack@qaa.ac.uk

Appendix 1

Criteria common to all applications

Governance and Management

Criterion

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.

Quality Assurance

Criterion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 taught degree awarding powers

Academic Staffing

Criterion

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

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

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 university title and/or research degree awarding powers

The Environment Supporting the Award of Higher Degrees

Criterion

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

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

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

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

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 criteria for university title only

Criterion

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.

Subject Categories

Clinical and Pre-Clinical subjects

Subjects and Professions Allied to Medicine

Science

Engineering and Technology

Built Environment

Mathematical Sciences, Information Technology and Computing

Business and Management

Social Sciences

Humanities

Art, Design and the Performing Arts

Education, Initial Teacher Training and Qualified Teacher Status