



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Applications for the grant of Degree Awarding Powers: guidance and criteria for applicants in Wales (2017)

2017

## Introduction

- i. This document sets out the procedures for making applications for the grant of degree awarding powers (foundation, taught and research) to institutions in Wales<sup>1</sup>.
- ii. In accordance with section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (FHEA 1992), the Privy Council may grant powers to award three categories of degrees, commonly referred to as ‘foundation’ degrees, ‘taught’ degrees and ‘research’ degrees. These categories are described in the provisions of section 76. Section 76 empowers the Privy Council to specify institutions which provide higher education as competent to grant awards, in other words to grant them powers to award their own degrees. Section 76 also enables the Privy Council to make orders specifying institutions in Wales within the further education sector as competent to grant foundation degrees. These further education institutions (FE institutions) are those incorporated under section 15 or 16 of the FHEA 1992 or designated under section 28 of that Act.
- iii. Prior to 15 September 2015, applications from institutions in Wales and England were considered under joint criteria and guidance<sup>2</sup>: “*Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title*” (August 2004) and “*Applications for the Grant of Foundation Degree Awarding Powers: Guidance and Criteria for Applicant Further Education Institutions in England and Wales*” (October 2010). From February 2017, this document replaces both the above publications<sup>3</sup> in relation to Wales<sup>4</sup>; however, it should be noted that no amendments have been made to the criteria laid out in the above two publications. The guidance, however, is presented in this document in a more succinct and user-friendly form and has been updated to take into account changes to the higher education landscape since 2004.
- iv. The main change is the removal of references to the Wales Office in the process to reflect the role of the First Minister as a member of the Privy Council in advising Her Majesty in respect of the exercise of her functions which are within the devolved areas of competence, including higher education matters.
- v. The Welsh Government has sought views from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (‘the QAA’) and the Privy Council Office in the production of this document. The guidance has been agreed with the Privy Council.
- vi. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the QAA publication [Degree Awarding Powers in Wales: Handbook for applicants](#) where there is more information on the role of the QAA in the application process, evidence requirements, timings of applications, costs, the scrutiny process and appeals.

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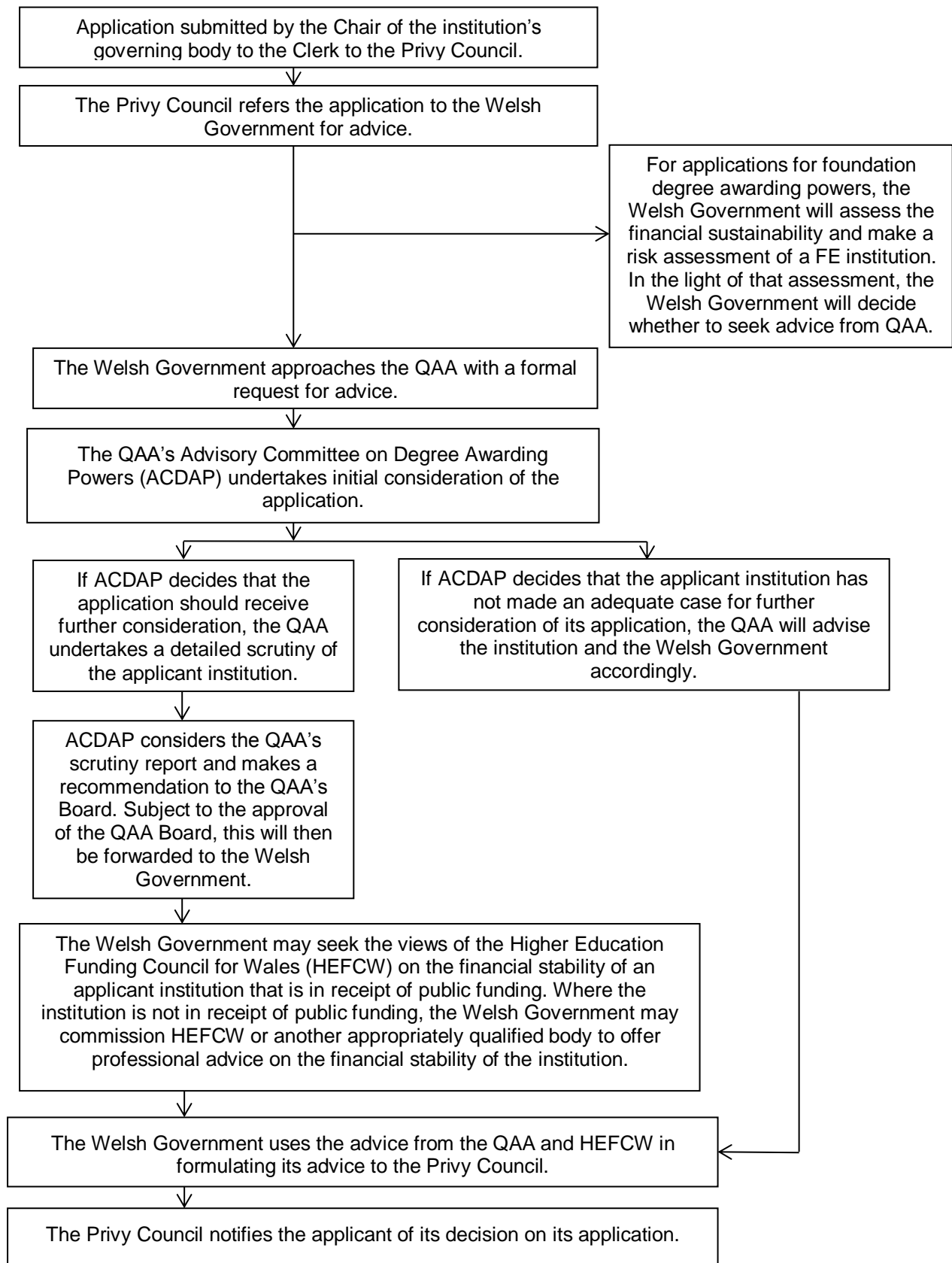
1. Institutions whose activities are wholly or principally carried on in Wales. For these purposes the term ‘principally carried on in Wales’ means the majority of the institution’s activities take place in Wales.

2. In England, applications are now considered under separate criteria and guidance from those in Wales; this is available at: [Higher education: market entry guidance](#).

3. It also replaces “*Companion Guide for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers*” (October 2010) in relation to Wales.

4. This applies to applications for degree awarding powers only; updated guidance for applications for university title in Wales is to follow. In the meantime applicants for university title should contact the Welsh Government for further details.

## Application process for degree awarding powers



## SECTION 1: Eligibility and meeting the criteria

1. Institutions based in Wales that offer higher education programmes at an appropriate level (described in paragraph 3 below) may seek the power to award their own degrees.
2. The overarching requirement for degree awarding powers is that '*an institution needs to be a self-critical, cohesive academic community with a proven commitment to quality assurance supported by effective quality and enhancement systems*'<sup>5</sup>. An institution that wishes to award its own degrees will be required to demonstrate that it meets the criteria set out in **Annex A**. In particular, it 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 [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)<sup>6</sup>.
3. **Pre-application criteria:**

### Taught degree awarding powers

An institution seeking taught degree awarding powers 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 6 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) published by QAA; and
- have the majority of their higher education students enrolled on study programmes which are recognised as being at Level 6 or above of the FHEQ.

### Research degree awarding powers

An institution seeking research degree awarding powers must have first secured taught degree awarding powers. The Welsh Government and the 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, the QAA will seek evidence that the institution continues to satisfy all the criteria governing the grant of taught degree awarding powers and is exercising appropriate stewardship of such powers.

### Foundation degree awarding powers

FE institutions should be able to demonstrate that they have had no fewer than four consecutive years' experience, immediately preceding the year of application, of

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<sup>5</sup> Set out in the House of Commons Official Report vol. 201 Written Answers col. 31 (16 December 1991).

<sup>6</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education consists of three parts which cover academic standards (including the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, characteristics statements, credit frameworks and subject benchmark statements), academic quality and public information.

delivering higher education programmes at a level at least equivalent to level 5 of the FHEQ.

4. Applicants are strongly advised to contact the QAA, prior to making an application, to ensure they have a clear understanding of eligibility, the criteria, evidence requirements, likely timescales and scrutiny processes.

## **SECTION 2: Making and submitting an application**

5. Applications should take the form of a critical self-analysis prepared by the applicant institution, prefaced by a formal letter of application from the Chair of the institution's governing body. All applications should be submitted electronically by the Chair of the institution's governing body to the Clerk to the Privy Council at [enquiries@pco.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@pco.gov.uk), copied to the Welsh Government at [CeisiadauAU.HEApplications@gov.wales](mailto:CeisiadauAU.HEApplications@gov.wales) and uploaded to the QAA's SharePoint site (please see the QAA publication [Degree Awarding Powers in Wales: Handbook for applicants](#) for further details).
6. The critical self-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, as set out in **Annex A**. Although it is for institutions to determine how they structure their critical self-analysis, close reference should be made to the relevant criteria and supporting evidence requirements. The QAA publication [Degree Awarding Powers in Wales: Handbook for applicants](#) contains detailed information on the documentation required and application templates.
7. FE institutions applying for foundation degree awarding powers will also need to include a progression statement (demonstrating that the FE institution has agreed and is promoting clear progression routes for learners wishing to proceed to a course of higher-level study on completion of the foundation degree); evidence of student consultation regarding whether they should seek to award foundation degrees; and a letter(s) from the FE institution's validating institution(s)<sup>7</sup>. Further details on each of these are described below.

### *Progression statement*

- The application will need to include a separate statement on progression, demonstrating that the FE institution has agreed and is promoting clear progression routes for learners wishing to proceed to a course of higher-level study on completion of the foundation degree. In particular, the institution will be expected to put forward proposals to demonstrate what it intends to do to secure that any student to whom it awards a foundation degree has the opportunity to progress onto at least one course of more advanced study.
- The applicant FE institution should list all the progression arrangements in place for each individual foundation degree course it offers at the time of application.

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter B10: [Managing Higher Education Provision with Others](#) of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education contains further information on the role of a validating institution/partner.

- The Welsh Government, when taking into account advice received from the QAA, will need to be satisfied that the institution's academic management is sufficiently robust to ensure that progression routes are, and will be established and promoted, both now and in the future. Progression routes or articulation agreements will need to take account of the guidance on progression set out in Section 2.4 of QAA's [Characteristics Statement: Foundation Degree](#), published in September 2015. When a FE institution is assessed for the award of foundation degree awarding powers, QAA will take a view as to the likely future performance of the institution's academic management and, in particular, whether the institution can be relied on to renew progression arrangements or seek new ones if the old ones should lapse. The six-year 'probationary' period that the Privy Council is likely to be recommended to impose in the first instance on an institution successful in acquiring foundation degree awarding powers will be important to test the institution's development and maintenance of progression arrangements.

#### *Student consultation*

- FE institutions should also submit, at the same time as their critical self-analysis, evidence to the Privy Council Office that they have consulted their students about whether they should seek to award foundation degrees, how that consultation was carried out and the outcome of the consultation. The Privy Council Office will pass on the results of the consultation to the Welsh Government who will, in turn, inform QAA when seeking its advice. Although a FE institution will be expected to have carried out a consultation before the application is considered, it is not necessary for the results to indicate support for the proposals.

#### *Letter from validating institution(s)*

- The critical self-analysis should be accompanied by a letter from the FE institution's validating partner(s) commenting on the nature of the operational relationship which has been established and offering comment on the applicant's capacity to discharge the responsibilities associated with the grant of foundation degree awarding powers. Validating institutions will not have a power of veto over an application and negative comments will not necessarily invalidate an application, but will be considered by QAA as an element of the overall evidence submitted.
8. It is for each institution to determine when to submit its application for the grant of degree awarding powers. Institutions may wish to bear in mind that the first stage in the QAA's process for scrutinising applications is consideration by the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) (see paragraphs 14 - 15 below). The QAA will normally need to receive a request for advice from Welsh Government at least three weeks before the ACDAP meeting at which it is to be considered. This means that the application needs to be submitted to the Privy Council at least five weeks before the ACDAP meeting at which it is to be considered. Dates of ACDAP meetings and application submission deadlines are published on the QAA website<sup>8</sup>.

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8. [Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers](#)

9. Scrutiny by the QAA determines whether or not an applicant institution is fit to exercise 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 academic standards and quality of its degrees.
10. The criteria are designed to establish that the applicant institution is a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards. To this end, the QAA will be judging, through its examination of the evidence provided, and against the criteria, the extent to which an institution 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 institutions 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.

### **SECTION 3: Assessment of application and notification of decision**

11. Following submission of the application to the Privy Council, the Privy Council will seek advice from the Welsh Government; the Welsh Government will then approach the QAA with a formal request for advice.
12. **For FE institutions applying for foundation degree awarding powers:** before seeking advice from QAA, the Welsh Government will assess the financial sustainability and make a risk assessment of the FE institution. In light of this assessment, the Welsh Government will decide whether to seek advice from QAA.
13. On receipt of a request for advice from the Welsh Government, the QAA will send confirmation to the Welsh Government and the applicant institution that it is considering the application. The QAA will also inform the institution of the arrangements for coordinating the processing of the application.
14. The application will be initially considered at the next available meeting of ACDAP. ACDAP will decide whether there is a case for considering the application further. If ACDAP decides that the application should receive further consideration, the QAA will make arrangements to undertake a detailed scrutiny of the applicant institution, and will advise the institution accordingly. Taking account of the formal procedures that follow, the process is unlikely to be concluded in less than two years. If ACDAP decides that the applicant institution has not made an adequate case for further consideration of its application, the QAA will advise the institution and the Welsh Government accordingly.
15. Once the second stage of scrutiny has completed and ACDAP has concluded its consideration of an application, it will make a report and recommendation to the QAA's Board. Subject to the approval of the Board, this will then be forwarded to the Welsh Government. The advice will be given in confidence. The Welsh Government will determine whether the QAA's advice should be disclosed to the applicant institution.
16. **For institutions applying for taught and/or research degree awarding powers:** when it has received the QAA's advice, the Welsh Government may seek the views

of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) on the financial stability of an applicant institution that is in receipt of public funding. In instances where the institution is not in receipt of public funding, the Welsh Government may commission HEFCW or another appropriately qualified body to offer professional advice on the financial stability of the institution. Where an applicant institution has one or more validating partner institutions, the QAA 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 institution to be granted the powers that is being sought.

17. The Welsh Government will use QAA's advice in formulating its advice to the Privy Council. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

## **SECTION 4: Duration and renewal of degree awarding powers**

### Taught and research degree awarding powers

18. Institutions in the publicly-funded higher education sector<sup>9</sup> will be granted taught and research degree awarding powers on an indefinite basis. All remaining institutions 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 institution has:
  - subscribed for the duration of those six years to the QAA (or such other external quality assurance institution as may be specified);
  - been subject to an external audit by the QAA; and
  - received a judgement of confidence in the institution made by the QAA at the time of the audit. Institutions 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 institution and the QAA. Completion of this action plan to the satisfaction of the QAA will be a criterion for the renewal of the institution's degree awarding powers.
19. In the event of non-renewal of degree awarding powers, an institution 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 institution with degree awarding powers. Students transferred in this way will, if successful in their assessments, be awarded qualifications of the receiving institution.

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<sup>9</sup> 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 HEFCW.



### Foundation degree awarding powers

20. FE institutions granted foundation degree awarding powers will be able to award foundation degrees only. Powers will be granted by an Order of Council. Section 76 of the FHEA 1992 gives the Privy Council authority to limit the foundation degree awarding powers by making the Order subject to the following restrictions:
- preventing a FE institution from authorising another institution to award a foundation degree on its behalf; and/or
  - preventing a FE institution being able to award foundation degrees to students not enrolled with the FE institution at the time they completed the course of study for which the award is granted.
21. The Welsh Government is likely to recommend to the Privy Council that a FE institution should have restricted powers and that the powers should be time limited to six years in the first instance. Subject to a satisfactory QAA assessment before the end of this six-year 'probationary' period, the Welsh Government will advise the Privy Council on the scope of the powers to be awarded.

# **ANNEX A: The Welsh Government's Criteria for the grant of Degree Awarding Powers**

## **Section 1: Criteria for the award of taught degree awarding powers**

### **A: Governance and academic management**

#### ***Criterion A1***

An institution 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 institution 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 institutions 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 institution 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 Quality Code for Higher Education*, 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 institution 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 institution granted taught degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

#### **Explanation**

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

#### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant institution 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 institution granted taught degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision.

#### **Explanation**

Institutions with UK degree awarding powers need to ensure that their qualifications meet the expectations of the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, published and maintained on behalf of the academic community in the UK by the QAA. Within the UK Quality Code the different levels of higher education qualifications and their distinguishing features are described in the

relevant section of the Qualifications Frameworks. In order to meet these expectations, institutions 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 institutions in the UK should at least meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code.

### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant institution will be required to provide evidence that:

- its higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of the Qualifications Frameworks;
- the management of its higher education provision takes appropriate account of the UK Quality Code, characteristics statements; credit frameworks; relevant subject benchmark statements; 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 institution granted taught degree awarding powers consistently meets its stated learning objectives and achieves its intended outcomes.

### **Explanation**

Institutions 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. Institutions offering higher education awards must have the means of establishing for themselves that their intentions are, in practice, being met.

### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant institution 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 institution'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 institution 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 institution granted taught degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

#### **Explanation**

An institution 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 institutions 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 institution 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 institution (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 institution 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. Institutions 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 institutions 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. Institutions 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 institution 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 institution 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 institutions (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 institution 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. Institutions 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 institution 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 institution'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 institution'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. Institutions 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 institution's academic staff and its doctoral and other research students.

### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant institution 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; and
- 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 institution 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 institutions; 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 institution satisfies relevant national guidance relating to the award of research degrees.

### **Evidence**

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

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

## ***Criterion 3***

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

## **Section 3: Criteria for the award of foundation degree awarding powers**

### **Introduction**

The criteria A-D in this section, taken as a whole, are designed to enable a judgement to be made about whether an applicant further education institution (FEI) satisfies the overarching requirement set out in the House of Commons statement. The criteria assess the capacity of the applicant to demonstrate firm guardianship of its academic standards and its capacity to contribute to the continued good standing of UK higher education.

### **A: Governance and academic management**

#### ***Criterion A1***

An FEI granted foundation 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. As is generally the case for other institutions receiving degree awarding powers that are not primarily a higher education institution, its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

#### **Explanation**

Foundation degree awarding FEIs must be soundly based in all respects (constitutionally, managerially, financially and academically) so that there can be full public confidence in them and their foundation 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 FEI 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 the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and associated guidance;
- makes reference to QAA's *Characteristics Statement: Foundation Degree* which is part of the UK Quality Code;
- 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 FEI 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 foundation degree 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 foundation degree awarding powers.

## **B: Academic standards and quality assurance**

### ***Criterion B1***

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

### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant FEI 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 created in readiness a regulatory framework appropriate for the granting of its own higher education awards.

## **Criterion B2**

An FEI granted foundation degree awarding powers has clear and consistently applied mechanisms for defining and securing the academic standards of its higher education provision, wherever, however and by whomsoever it is offered.

### **Explanation**

FEIs with foundation degree awarding powers need to ensure that their qualifications meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published and maintained on behalf of the academic community in the UK by QAA. Within the UK Quality Code the different levels of higher education qualifications and their distinguishing features are described in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*. In order to meet these expectations, FEIs seeking degree awarding powers will need to ensure that they have appropriate and effective quality assurance structures and mechanisms in place. This is particularly important where elements of a programme are offered outside the college's own environment. The public interest in the consistency and comparability of higher education qualifications requires that all degrees awarded by recognised degree awarding institutions in the UK should at least meet the expectations of the FHEQ.

### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant FEI 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 UK Quality Code for Higher Education, characteristics statements; credit frameworks; relevant subject benchmark statements, and the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- in establishing, and then maintaining, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, it explicitly seeks advice from and engagement with external peers and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies and relevant employers;
- 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;
- where its programmes are delivered outside the college's own environment, appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanisms are used to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and quality; and
- there is an explicit and close relationship between academic planning and decisions on resource allocation.

### **Criterion B3**

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

#### **Explanation**

FEIs 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. FEIs offering higher education awards must have the means of establishing for themselves that their intentions are, in practice, being met.

#### **Evidence requirement**

The applicant FEI 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 FEI'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 FEI or in work based settings 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 FEI granted foundation degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

#### **Explanation**

An FEI that has powers to award its own foundation degrees must have in place the means of critically reviewing its own performance. It needs to know how it is doing in comparison with other similar institutions 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 FEI 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 FEI - particularly from relevant employers (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 FEI granted powers to award foundation 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. FEIs 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 foundation degree qualification are maximised by effective teaching. This includes a responsibility for ensuring that staff maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in 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. FEIs 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 FEI 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 scholarly developments in their discipline area and at a level appropriate to a foundation degree and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching;
- opportunities for accessing relevant employment experience and studying the implementation of relevant and up to date professional practice; and
- staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship.

In addition, the applicant FEI 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 institutions (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers).



## **D: The environment supporting the delivery of foundation degree programmes**

### ***Criterion D1***

The teaching and learning infrastructure of an FEI granted foundation 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. FEIs that award their own foundation 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 FEI 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, 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 and all students, part-time or full-time, have equal access to learning resources and support materials;
- 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 4: Scope, duration and renewal of foundation degree awarding powers**

FEIs granted foundation degree awarding powers will be able to award foundation degrees only. Powers will be granted by an Order of Council.

##### **Limitations to powers**

Section 76 of the FHEA 1992 gives the Privy Council authority to limit the foundation degree awarding powers by making the Order subject to the following restrictions:

- preventing an FEI from authorising another institution to award a foundation degree on its behalf; and/or
- preventing an FEI being able to award foundation degrees to students not enrolled with the FEI at the time they completed the course of study for which the award is granted.

The Welsh Government is likely to recommend to the Privy Council that an FEI should have restricted powers and that the powers should be time limited to six years in the first instance.

##### **Renewal of powers**

Subject to a satisfactory QAA assessment before the end of this six-year 'probationary' period, the Welsh Government will advise the Privy Council on the scope of the powers to be awarded.