

Degree awarding powers and university title

Terms of engagement

1 What can applicant organisations expect from QAA?

QAA is required to provide the Privy Council with confidential advice on applications for degree awarding powers (DAP) and university title (UT) application. In so doing, we (QAA) are providing a service to that body, and not providing consultancy for an applicant organisation. The advice we give has recommendation status only. The disclosure of that advice is a matter for the Privy Council to determine since it is that body which makes the final determination, not QAA.

In submitting applications for degree awarding powers or university title, applicant organisations are making claims that they meet the relevant criteria, which are maintained by government ministers. The purpose of a QAA scrutiny is to assess whether those claims are well founded. It is not our role to coach an applicant organisation through the DAP process.

We are accountable to the relevant government in each UK administration for the appropriate implementation of the scrutiny process as set out in the relevant guidance and criteria and any supporting documentation. In considering your application, you (the applicant organisation) can expect QAA to show impartiality, fairness, independence, honesty and a professional approach. Consideration of your application will be conducted on the basis of an evidence-informed scrutiny process involving initial consideration by the QAA Board's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers to establish whether there is a case to proceed to the detailed scrutiny stage.

If the Committee agrees that the application merits detailed scrutiny, we will appoint a QAA officer to coordinate the scrutiny and will engage a team of senior and experienced higher education assessors to conduct a detailed scrutiny of the evidence submitted by you to demonstrate your claim to be ready to assume degree awarding powers or university title, as applicable.

The scrutiny coordinator will visit you to discuss the arrangements for the scrutiny and address any queries you might have about the scrutiny process.

We engage assessors on a contract basis. The contracts specify our expectations of assessors. Assessors are not QAA employees.

We appreciate the need for discretion in managing applications for degree awarding powers or university title given the commercial and other sensitivities involved. Applicant organisations should be aware, however, that there is considerable public interest in degree awarding powers and university title activity. Consequently, you should be aware that, in applying for powers or title, you are taking yourself out of the entirely private arena and into the public domain.

We operate an [Information publication scheme](#)¹ which sets out when information related to degree awarding powers applications will be released.

2 Do applicant organisations have to be a QAA subscriber before applying for degree awarding powers and/or university title?

No, it is not necessary to subscribe to QAA before applying for degree awarding powers or university title. However, it is open to you to subscribe if you wish, and further information, including fee levels, can be viewed on the section of the QAA website devoted to [subscribing institutions](#).²

Should your application for degree awarding powers be successful, and you are not in the publicly funded higher education sector and are not currently a QAA subscriber, you will be required to (a) subscribe to QAA (or such other external quality assurance organisation as may be specified) (b) have been reviewed by QAA and (c) obtain a successful outcome before the Privy Council can renew your degree awarding powers.

3 How much does it cost to apply for taught degree awarding powers?

Current fees are published on the [DAP/UT section of the QAA website](#).³ Once QAA has agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of an application, an initial charge will be made to cover costs incurred as part of the detailed scrutiny process. We cannot meet the costs of scrutiny activity for degree awarding powers from its other sources of income.

Consequently, should a scrutiny incur substantial additional expenditure either as a result of being placed in abeyance (to provide the applicant with the time and space required to address any gaps in the evidence base submitted in support of its application) or as a result of complexities associated with the applicant, we will make a further charge reflecting the additional work involved. This charge will be made towards the end of the scrutiny.

4 Why is there a fee and when is the fee payable?

We do not receive any funding to cover the direct costs incurred in the scrutiny of applications for degree awarding powers or university title. Consequently, the costs of such activity must be borne by applicant organisations.

We will issue an invoice once the Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers agrees that an application should proceed to the detailed scrutiny stage. The fee is payable within 30 days.

5 Is it possible to pay the fee in instalments?

Not at the present time. The fee is payable in full within 30 days of receipt of the invoice.

6 Is the fee refundable in the event of an unsuccessful outcome?

No.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationpolicyscheme

² www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/subscribing-institutions

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/dap

7 Is there a fee attached to the renewal of degree awarding powers?

No. However, an organisation granted degree awarding powers is required to become a QAA subscriber. The future costs of institutional reviews are covered within the annual subscriptions payable by subscribers.

8 How does QAA deal with confidential information provided in support of DAP and UT applications?

QAA staff and individuals appointed to conduct work on our behalf are required to manage with care all documentation, papers, records, communications and other materials containing confidential information. Our electronic communications policy and data protection policies apply.⁴ Confidential information means all information that you disclose as part of the scrutiny process or that an individual becomes aware of during the scrutiny of your application. [Various policies demonstrate our concern for confidentiality](#), as appropriate, and are available on our website⁵.

Individuals contracted by QAA may not at any time during, or for a period of five years after the termination of, a contract:

- divulge or communicate confidential information by any means whatsoever to any person, institution, body, company, business entity, media, or any other organisation
- use confidential information for their own purposes or for any purpose other than those of QAA
- through any failure to exercise due care and diligence, cause any unauthorised disclosure of any confidential information.

These obligations of confidentiality do not extend to information that:

- is in the public domain (other than by reason of any error by a QAA member of staff or contractor)
- was already known to the contractor prior to disclosure by QAA
- the contractor is required to disclose by law or by a requirement of a regulatory body.

Our [Information publication scheme](#)⁶ sets out how we handle material received in relation to degree awarding powers and/or university title. Our [policy on the disclosure of records relating to applications for degree awarding powers](#)⁷ and university title can be found on the QAA website.

9 How does QAA deal with conflicts of interest?

We require those individuals we propose to appoint to a scrutiny team to notify us of any connection or interest that might conflict with the work to be undertaken. Since much of QAA's activity is based on peer review, with an expectation that individuals who have worked or are working in the higher education sector will contribute to the maintenance of the reputation and standing of UK higher education, we do not consider that an individual working in a similar type of higher education provider would, of itself, preclude that individual from serving as a member of a scrutiny team. Applicant organisations should be aware that,

⁴ They can be found, respectively, under 'Human resources policies' and 'Corporate policies' on this web page:

www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate/policies

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/corporate/policies

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationpolicyscheme

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/dap/pages/disclosure-policy.aspx

in seeking degree awarding powers or university title, they are committing themselves to collective responsibility for the quality and standards of UK higher education.

10 How does QAA deal with complaints and representations?

We are committed to working in an open and accountable way, subject to any limitations placed upon it by external bodies. A complaint is taken to mean an expression of dissatisfaction with services we provide or actions we have taken. [Further information about the complaints procedure](#) can be found on our website⁸.

Since QAA is not the final decision maker in the case of applications for degree awarding powers or university title, complaints about our advice, or representations against subsequent decisions by the Privy Council, should be addressed to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Scottish Government or Welsh Assembly Government depending on the location of the applicant organisation.

11 How does QAA deal with offers of inducements or bribery?

Applicant organisations should be familiar with the Bribery Act 2011. We recognise that there is significant commercial and reputational value attached to the granting of degree awarding powers. QAA staff, assessors, trustees and Committee members are not allowed to accept inducements such as hospitality (other than that provided as part of a detailed scrutiny), gifts, contracts, awards, shares or payment from any organisation that is, or has been, subject to degree awarding powers processes. They are not allowed to trade in stocks and shares of applicant organisations nor to divulge information that would advantage others who may do so.

Should applicant organisations offer inducements or attempt to bribe staff, assessors, trustees or Committee members then the application will be suspended pending investigation by the appropriate authorities (for example, the police, the Serious Fraud Office, or the Financial Services Authority).

⁸ www.qaa.ac.uk/complaints/complaints-about-qaa

