



# Application for taught degree awarding powers: University Campus Suffolk

## Scrutiny team report

September 2015

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## About this report

This report reflects the findings of a team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to conduct a detailed scrutiny of an application from University Campus Suffolk for the power to award taught degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2004. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the Government's relevant criteria and the associated evidence requirements. QAA's work in this area is overseen by its Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP), a subcommittee of the QAA Board.

ACDAP's initial consideration of applications establishes whether an applicant has made a case to proceed to detailed scrutiny of the application and the evidence on which it is based. If satisfied on this matter, ACDAP agrees that a team may be appointed to conduct the scrutiny and prepare a report, enabling ACDAP to determine the nature of the recommendation it will make to the QAA Board.

Scrutiny teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the four main criteria contained in the 2004 TDAP criteria,<sup>1</sup> namely:

- governance and academic management
- academic standards and quality assurance
- scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff
- the environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes.

Subject to the approval of the Board, QAA's advice is communicated to the appropriate minister. This advice is provided in confidence. The minister determines whether it should be disclosed to the applicant. A final decision on an application, and the notification of that decision, is a matter for the Privy Council.

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<sup>1</sup> The TDAP criteria are available in Appendix 1 of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' *Applications for the grant of taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers and university title: Guidance for applicant organisations in England and Wales (August 2004)* at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32388/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32388/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf) (PDF, 304KB)

## Executive summary

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

The governance of UCS (University Campus Suffolk) lies with the Board, the membership of which has been progressively strengthened by external appointments. The Board is aware of the nature and limits of its responsibilities, which it exercises competently and conscientiously. The scrutiny team noted in particular the meticulous attention the Board and its Audit and Risk Committee pay to risk assessment, and the extent of members' personal commitment to supporting and developing higher education in Suffolk.

Ultimate responsibility for the higher education delivered by UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres rests with the validating universities. In practice UCS exercises considerable (and increasing) responsibility for overseeing higher education delivery, both on campus and in the Centres. Hence its claim that the organisational changes associated with exercising taught degree awarding powers are not great is realistic: the scrutiny team found the necessary governance and management structures largely in place, and in some respects the associated complexities would be less than those required by current arrangements.

The scrutiny team found UCS to be a well-managed institution with a coherent vision of its local and national role; a commitment to that vision and role exists on the part not only of governors, staff and students but also of external stakeholders in the economic, educational and cultural development of Suffolk.

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

At its own request UCS underwent its QAA Higher Education Review concurrently with the early stages of this scrutiny, but with no overlap in team membership. The report of this Review was positive, and covers many of the criteria in this section, confirming UCS's alignment with all external expectations and the satisfactory nature of its arrangements for academic standards, quality assurance, information and quality enhancement.

The findings of the present, more detailed, scrutiny are in all significant aspects consistent with those of the Higher Education Review. In particular, UCS's regulatory framework is robust; its use of external examiners is exemplary; its monitoring procedure is sound and innovative; it has a clear strategic approach to quality management and to teaching, learning and assessment; and its work-based and distant learning arrangements are satisfactory.

The scrutiny team examined UCS's contribution to areas where responsibility lies with the validating universities: in all cases this was positive and well informed.

### **C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff**

There are numerous strands to UCS's approach to strengthening the qualification levels of its academic staff. It is: supporting academic staff reading for a higher degree; supporting staff seeking a higher education teaching qualification and Higher Education Academy accreditation; appointing new staff only with higher, and preferably doctoral, degrees - with specified exceptions; targeting appraisal and staff development at strengthening research and scholarly activity; defining the acceptable boundaries of research and scholarship inclusively in order to support knowledge transfer and consultancy work; recognising continuing professional involvement as legitimate scholarly activity; making strategic use of academic leaders as research exemplars; planning a submission to the 2020 Research Excellence Framework; and ensuring that its strategic approach to research is synergistic with teaching.

While UCS can point to progress in strengthening the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of its own staff, comparable achievement in the Learning Network Centres remains challenging, given that such staff are not UCS employees and, (as is common across the higher education in further education sector) have heavy teaching commitments in a mixed further and higher education environment; in addition, formal responsibility for the higher education delivered by the Centres remains with the validating universities. This report does, however, describe UCS's efforts to meet what it inevitably regards as its own challenge, highlighting some signal successes and confirming that, as far as can be judged (the continuing role of the validating universities places this issue at the edge of the scrutiny team's remit), the experience of Centre students is at or above the threshold of acceptability. The relationships between UCS and Centre managers and staff, however, constitute a sound basis for future work should taught degree awarding powers be granted and, as is currently envisioned, the Centres become collaborative partners of a newly independent institution.

## **D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes**

UCS ensures the effectiveness of teaching by methods which include the comprehensive Risk-based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME) scheme: this provides continuing assurance as to the quality of higher education, drawing on both hard data and student opinion, and transcending the requirements of the validating institutions.

The nature of UCS's relations with its diverse student body and their representatives is positive. Students value their experience, both academically and in respect of learning and personal support, articulating strong institutional loyalty and referring to UCS, often in abbreviated form, as 'the University'. Mechanisms are in place to identify and address student concerns that arise. For example, UCS responded to mixed student views about the timeliness with which assessed work is returned by including a commitment to the standard four-week turnaround time within the Student Charter and introducing an explicit requirement within the Assessment and Feedback Framework for departmental and centre monitoring of turnaround times.

As noted above, UCS encourages academic and support staff to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by a learning institution, not least by supporting them in identifying their needs and upgrading their skills and qualifications. While staff development and appraisal are increasingly geared to meeting institutional objectives, care is taken to align these objectives with staff members' personal and broader professional aims and ambitions.

## **Privy Council's decision**

The Privy Council's decision is to grant UCS taught degree awarding powers for six years from 3 November 2015 to 2 November 2021.

## Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work and findings of the scrutiny team (the team) appointed by QAA to review in detail the evidence submitted in support of an application for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) by University Campus Suffolk (UCS).

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in May 2014, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Professor Alan Jago, Mr Christopher McIntyre and Professor Gaynor Taylor, with Miss Isanna Trevail (subsequently, Mr Gregory Clark) acting as scrutiny secretary. The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Professor Robert Harris, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in October 2014, culminating in a report to ACDAP in September 2015. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

## Key information about University Campus Suffolk

UCS employs 135 full-time permanent or fixed-term academic staff, 53 part-time permanent or fixed-term academic staff, 10 hourly-paid academic staff who make a teaching contribution equivalent to at least 0.1 full-time equivalence, and approximately 222 administrative staff. In addition, two visiting staff, both distinguished in their professional fields, teach at least 10 hours per academic year, and other visiting staff contribute to the life of UCS in other ways, for example, through guest seminars, mentoring, research activity and advisory work, including around 90 hourly-paid staff with a time commitment of less than 10 per cent. Of permanent staff, 10 are professors, their titles having been conferred by a validating institution.

UCS's mission is to be an innovative, flexible, market-centred provider with high quality teaching underpinned by widespread scholarly activity and research in focused areas. In fulfilling its role as a community-impact institution it seeks to have a clear, measurable effect on the economic, cultural and educational lives of the communities it serves. Its vision is to act as a beacon for aspiration and achievement, providing courses that are applied, transformational and closely aligned to regional economic priorities.

ACDAP will be aware that UCS's constitution and governance arrangements are unusual. This being so, members may find the following statement of future contractual and governance arrangements, which is an abbreviated version of information UCS provided for the scrutiny team, a helpful introduction:

'UCS is the authority which has submitted the TDAP application and which will continue to control the organisation once TDAP is granted. The University of East Anglia and the University of Essex have already relinquished their overall majority on the UCS Board and have formally agreed to relinquish control of UCS Ltd upon receipt of TDAP and University Title. This will be achieved through an amendment to the Articles of Association to change the membership of the company from UEA and Essex to the Directors of the Company (ie the individual Board members). The transitional arrangements have been discussed and endorsed by HEFCE in terms of plans for securing institutional designation and becoming an independent HEFCE-fundable university in the HE sector.

'Post-independence, the UCS Board will become the equivalent of the Council of the new university, with Academic Board becoming the Senate. The two remaining UEA and Essex members of the UCS Board (the University Registrars) will withdraw, to be replaced with two new independent members with extensive experience of higher education. The Learning

Network will continue to be represented on both bodies, and will continue to be subject to the UCS-wide regulations, policies and procedures that have been operational since UCS was founded in 2007.

'Upon receipt of TDAP by UCS Ipswich, it is intended that the Learning Network Centres will undergo an institutional validation process to verify that they are suitable for the conduct of higher education programmes leading to UCS awards. Successful institutional validation will allow the creation of a more traditional and less complex relationship between UCS Ipswich (as the awarding body) and the colleges (as the validated partner institutions).

'All four existing UCS Learning Network Centres (UCS Bury St Edmunds, UCS Great Yarmouth, UCS Lowestoft and UCS at Suffolk New College) have confirmed that they will apply for institutional validation and play a full part in the development of higher education in Suffolk post independence.'

# Detailed scrutiny against taught degree awarding powers criteria

## A Governance and academic management

### Criterion A1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers is governed, managed and administered effectively, with clear and appropriate lines of accountability for its academic responsibilities. Its financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between its financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its higher education provision. In the case of an organisation that is not primarily a higher education institution; its principal activities are compatible with the provision of higher education programmes and awards.

1 University Campus Suffolk's (UCS's) framework and reference points for financial planning, quality assurance and resource allocation policies are found in successive Strategic Plans (2010-2015 and 2015-2020). The strategic objectives relating to finance include diversifying income sources through increased student numbers, research and enterprise; and ensuring sufficient surpluses to deliver its investment strategy. These goals are supported by key performance indicators for institutional managers and the UCS Board.

2 The Board's strategic responsibilities are aligned with sector-wide requirements and norms. For example, the Board approves all schemes of delegated financial authority, ensures sound risk management and control, checks legislative compliance, and approves high-value items of expenditure and asset disposal. Its Audit and Risk Committee reviews and ensures the effectiveness of internal financial control systems, identifying and mitigating financial and non-financial risks, including those associated with health and safety and safeguarding vulnerable people. The scrutiny team's observations confirmed that both bodies discharge their responsibilities diligently and competently. External Board members expressed confidence in institutional financial management, and the team found, from observations of the Joint Academic Committee (joint between the validating universities and UCS) and UCS's management and deliberative committees, that a sound understanding of budget planning exists at all institutional levels down to, and including, heads of department.

3 Extensive information about the mechanisms for disseminating information and encouraging engagement with UCS's mission, policies and procedures was made available to the scrutiny team, which confirms from meetings and observations that teaching staff understand and buy into them. This buy-in has been achieved by a combination of formal methods, including an annual away day and a magazine, and, less formally and more intangibly, through imbibing the culture of a small, non-hierarchical institution with effective leadership and shared social and educational values. Observed discussions in the Strategic Management Group demonstrated that these values extend to the Learning Network Centres, which UCS is careful, whenever possible, to involve in policy development.

4 Observation of the UCS Board confirms that governors understand their role, have a sound knowledge of structures and systems, and play a significant part in determining the strategic direction of the institution. This knowledge and understanding are clearly held by the University Campus's Provost and Executive as well as by the wider UCS Management Group, which includes heads of department and senior professional service post holders, and by members of the various academic and support subcommittees.

5 UCS has a unique constitutional position: it is an institution jointly validated by two universities, 60 miles apart and with different structures and priorities, delivering higher

education on behalf of those universities not only in its Ipswich campus but also through a network of further education colleges in Suffolk and, in one case, Norfolk. The scrutiny team sought to establish whether, and if so how, this situation impacts upon higher education delivery. It found that, while the structures are intrinsically complex, and while scope for confusion and conflict exists, the structures have been generally successful in facilitating the constructive interpersonal relationships which have driven the institution's success thus far.

6 The Joint Academic Committee (JAC), alternately chaired by each validating university and reporting to both senates, is responsible for academic provision; but UCS's senior committee, the Academic Board, which reports to JAC, has, in practice and in preparation for the possible grant of taught degree awarding powers, increasingly assumed that Committee's responsibilities. Observations confirm that the composition, terms of reference and responsibilities of all these bodies are clear and generally understood. Those not directly concerned in governance and management, for example, junior academic staff and students, appear not to be adversely affected by, or even necessarily aware of, the complexities involved. Students in particular seemed surprised and puzzled that their awards would be from an institution they might never have visited, not from the one with which they identified.

7 A faculty system was established in 2013, and observations of faculty boards and their subcommittees found that, while they operate adequately, the level of debate within them was variable and they have some way to go to fulfil their potential. This, however, is more a developmental than a critical observation. Below faculty boards are departmental academic committees, which are charged with overseeing the development and review of learning, teaching and assessment strategies, ensuring the efficient and effective operation of institutional policies and procedures, and maintaining oversight of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. These operate effectively.

8 The scrutiny team confirms, from documentation (including the curricula vitae of senior staff), meetings and observations, the strength and depth of UCS's academic leadership. These are staff with management or leadership responsibility at institutional, faculty or departmental level. This strength is manifested in research activity, external engagement, participation in strategic planning, and engagement in meetings. Nearly 80 per cent have recently published or presented conference papers, almost three quarters are involved in subject associations, learned societies or professional bodies, and over half have served as external examiner or been involved in validation activity elsewhere. The lively and informed contributions of heads of department to observed meetings was identified as a distinctive feature of academic leadership.

9 The Policies and Procedures Working Group, reporting to JAC and with membership from both validating universities, is responsible for maintaining regulations, policies and procedures. UCS plans significant changes with the aid of working groups with wide institutional representation, normally including students and members of the Learning Network Centres. It was also clear from the observation of the Executive Away Day that UCS has close relationships with local business and industry, using them in developing its course portfolio. Observed discussions confirm that the institutional mission is understood and applied across the centres, and that the centres are involved in policy development.

10 A Quality Manual has been introduced to replace an online Academic Staff Handbook. The manual provides information on policies and procedures and links to online guidance material, and aligns with the Partnership Handbook, which it will ultimately replace. Both current documents are, however, fit for purpose.

11 The Policies and Procedures Working Group reviews policies and procedures on behalf of the Academic Board and Executive. An observation of the Working Group confirmed that each policy has been discussed in advance with stakeholders, whose views systematically contribute to the inclusivity, currency and relevance of institutional policy making.



12 UCS has an Organisational Change Management Policy, an Institutional Risk Register and a Risk Management Policy. Named members of the Executive are responsible for monitoring each risk and reporting on it to the Audit and Risk Committee, and thence to the Board. The scrutiny team confirms that the registers are live documents, regularly updated, actively monitored, and with external members willing to question them. The team particularly noted the Committee's willingness to remove risks no longer salient. Faculties, academic departments and professional service departments are also required to produce risk registers as part of annual planning, to review them regularly, and to use them to inform the institutional register.

13 The scrutiny team found, and UCS's Higher Education Review of 2014 confirms, that course development and approval procedures are mapped against all relevant external expectations. Alignment with such expectations as well as the currency and relevance of what is taught are assured by the Risk-based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME) scheme, as referred to in paragraph 22, external examiners, external peers from the professions and industry, as well as from other higher education institutions.

14 The scrutiny team found that a gradual transition of responsibilities from the validating universities to UCS is under way. For example, UCS is increasingly playing a central role in JAC; recent appointments to the UCS Board have strengthened its independence, with observations confirming that the Board itself is aware of the additional responsibilities accruing to it and that the senior officers who service it are similarly so; and consideration has been given to the membership and terms of reference of an Academic Board (or Senate) should taught degree awarding powers be granted. Observations of this Board and of a validation event confirm that UCS has the capacity to manage the business associated with such powers, and is by no means dependent on guidance from the validating universities.

15 Given the importance of the Learning Network Centres to the institutional mission, the scrutiny team paid particular attention to the manner in which, on behalf of the validating universities, UCS oversees, supports and ensures the academic standards and quality of higher education there. An observation of the Strategic Management Group confirms that UCS exercises extensive day-to-day management responsibility of this provision already, and is well equipped to exercise authority over its potential collaborative provision.

## B Academic standards and quality assurance

### Criterion B1

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers has in place an appropriate regulatory framework to govern the award of its higher education qualifications.

16 UCS describes its regulatory framework as extensive, well tested and fit for purpose. Developed over the last 20 years in partnership with, and for approval by, the validating universities, it has been regularly reviewed and refined by the monitoring and review procedures outlined in the Partnership Handbook. The scrutiny team confirms the view of the QAA Higher Education Review team that UCS's regulatory framework is appropriate in design and fully operational.

17 UCS believes its regulatory framework requires only modest amendment to cope with the demands of exercising degree awarding powers. The Policies and Procedures Working Group is currently reviewing all regulations, policies and procedures to ensure that all necessary revisions are developed and approved. As part of this exercise an online Quality Manual, which includes a compendium of procedures mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), has been developed to replace the Academic Staff Handbook and, ultimately, the Partnerships Handbook. The scrutiny team confirms that UCS's planning is at an advanced stage.

### Criterion B2

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

18 The scrutiny team concurs with the view of the QAA Higher Education Review team that UCS's higher education awards are aligned to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Mechanisms to ensure that this is so include the use of external peers on validation panels; external examiners; the regulatory framework (including monitoring and review procedures); the engagement of staff with the activities of the profession; and the involvement of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in academic provision.

19 UCS has drawn on the Quality Code in the production of the Partnerships Handbook and the Quality Manual. Course aims, learning outcomes, delivery and assessment are expected to be congruent with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. That this is so is checked at course development, approval and review.

20 UCS's course design is underpinned by reference to all relevant external reference points; a significant proportion of academic provision is subject to professional, statutory or regulatory body accreditation; and all validation and re-approval panels include independent external peers. While the scrutiny team observed one validation event where two of the three external members of the panel had been involved in the development of the course, when this was brought to the attention of the institution the departmental-level error was promptly acknowledged, and procedural changes were introduced to avoid repetition of a situation where conflict of interest was possible.

21 Course approval is a two-stage process involving agreement first from a strategic and financial perspective, and second, academically: the arrangements are specified in the Partnerships Handbook. The scrutiny team observed the approval procedure in operation, and

confirms, from observation, discussion and documentary sources, that it functions as claimed. The procedure is fit for purpose.

22 UCS's RiME process involves continual monitoring and annual reporting. Course committees, which oversee the operation and management of each course, are significant bodies in that they consider module reports, key performance data, risk alerts and external examiner reports. They review provision as a whole in their final meeting of the year, so contributing to the departmental annual report submitted to the Faculty Board. UCS's Quality Assurance and Enhancement team monitors all such reports, advising the JAC annually on the range of quality assurance and enhancement activities. The scrutiny team found the RiME procedure an innovative, effective and thorough approach to monitoring and enhancement.

23 All courses are subject to review and re-approval on a five-year cycle. The procedure, currently driven by the validating universities, is fit for purpose, and the scrutiny team found that the expertise exists within UCS for it to assume responsibility for this procedure in the event of taught degree awarding powers being granted.

24 As indicated above, all new programmes require approval from a financial and strategic, as well as academic, perspective; authority resting with UCS Portfolio Development Committee. The procedures are sequential rather than integrated, and appear effective.

### **Criterion B3**

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

25 UCS's Teaching and Learning Strategy is available to all staff and students, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Group overseeing its delivery. It is reinforced by an Assessment and Feedback Framework which is aligned to the Quality Code, outlines the principles of assessment in the context of practice elsewhere in the sector, and specifies the reciprocal assessment-related rights and responsibilities of students and institution.

26 Student handbooks, assessment schedules and assignment briefs contain information about module aims, learning outcomes and assessment requirements. All aspects of assessment are addressed and evaluated at monitoring and review, and students and staff who met the scrutiny team had a clear understanding of the system itself and their rights and duties in relation to it. The team confirms that UCS makes appropriate use of all relevant external reference points, ensuring curriculum currency in approval, monitoring and review.

27 At faculty level, deans manage heads of department, and have overall responsibility for curriculum development and delivering institutional policies and procedures. This includes ensuring that curricula are current, relevant and aligned with external expectations: they are supported by faculty boards and a subcommittee structure. Heads of department manage both the course and module leaders responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of day-to-day delivery. Operations at these levels were found to be effective and well regarded by students.

28 As noted in the previous paragraph, leadership responsibilities at faculty and departmental levels are fit for purpose, and adequate procedures exist for the development and strengthening of new course proposals (see paragraph 21). Changes to courses and modules follow a procedure specified in the Partnerships Handbook. Course teams seeking significant revisions are required to provide evidence of consultation and support from the external examiner. To prevent the possibility of curriculum drift, teams are required to summarise all previous changes approved since the last validation or re-approval event, enabling the Course Approvals Group to monitor the overall impact of incremental changes.

29 Where a proposed course is designed to provide alternative pathway options, documentation must be clear about the relevant structures, and each course title has its own specification. Continuing coherence is ensured in monitoring and review on the basis of such management information as student feedback, comments from external examiners and student performance data.

30 The scrutiny team confirms, primarily from documentary study but also from observations and discussion with senior managers, that approval, monitoring and review routinely take full account of learning support needs, and that appropriate services are available to deliver them.

31 The Partnerships Handbook contains procedures for the approval of distance-learning programmes: both current programmes are subject to the same requirements as other provision. Of greater centrality is the opportunity which exists for students to expand their learning within work and practice settings: arrangements for the management of learning opportunities for students participating in work placements and internships are specified in the Work Based and Placement Learning Policy. Handbooks for students and placement mentors are designed to ensure that everyone is clear about the nature and expectations of placement learning. Students who met the scrutiny team confirmed that they had made use of the Student Handbook and were familiar and satisfied with their experience.

32 UCS monitors, assures and maintains academic standards both through its committee structure and through the approval, monitoring and review procedures described above (see paragraphs 21-23). The scrutiny team confirms, from observations and documentation, that these procedures are fit for purpose.

33 UCS explains assessment criteria in all relevant student-facing documentation and the virtual learning environment. Staff are given guidance on developing criteria on the intranet, and students confirmed to the scrutiny team the usefulness and accessibility of information.

34 The scrutiny team confirms, from documentary study and observation, that course approval and re-approval ensure the alignment of learning objectives, intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks and assessment criteria. Module specifications provide detailed information on the assessment strategies for each module, and learning outcomes are mapped on to assessment components to ensure appropriateness.

35 The validating universities make external examiner appointments, but responsibility for nominations rests initially with course teams, the External Examiners Group ensuring that nominations are aligned with UCS's Appointment of External Examiners Policy. All newly-appointed external examiners are invited to an induction event; those who do not attend are sent copies of the presentations. External examiners are required to attend the main assessment boards and submit an annual report on a UCS template, to which responses are required and monitored. The scrutiny team saw evidence that procedures are appropriately designed and fully implemented.

36 Under UCS's detailed assessment board procedures, all results are processed through pre-boards to facilitate prior checking and enable complexities to be resolved. The scrutiny team confirms that assessment boards comply with regulations, operate in accordance with their terms of reference, and are well chaired and robust.

37 The scrutiny team confirms that the RiME procedure involves a review of assessment procedures by each module leader and an overview by the course leader.

38 Course rationalisation is a regular agenda item for the Portfolio Development Committee, which takes into account a range of information, including the student experience. Course closure procedures involve a submission to the Course Approvals Group for

transmission to the validating universities. The procedure, which is fit for purpose, requires course teams to outline action to safeguard the interests of existing students.

**Criterion B4**

An organisation granted taught degree awarding powers takes effective action to promote strengths and respond to identified limitations.

39 UCS describes itself as fostering a culture of critical self-analysis and reflexivity, and as committed to improving the quality of academic provision. It stresses its proactivity in gathering inputs from students, staff, external stakeholders and the wider higher education community, and in producing, reporting and monitoring key performance indicators.

40 The scrutiny team saw extensive evidence of self-criticality in, for example, the modus operandi of senior committees; the way in which UCS responds to external examiner reports; internal reviews; engagement with student feedback; the rigorous deployment of key performance indicators; and the consistent use of action for monitoring purposes. The team also noted the institution's culture of openness, and the predisposition among staff of all levels to engage, seemingly without fear or favour, in lively but responsible debate.

41 The scrutiny team confirms that, as noted in paragraphs 22-23, the monitoring and review of learning objectives and outcomes are integral to course management.

42 Courses developed at UCS are subject to external scrutiny and consultation, and in some cases to professional or regulatory body approval. UCS has benefited from its relationships with its two validating universities and with its academic and industrial contacts in developing its approach to quality and standards. Course approval responsibility currently rests with the validating universities, but UCS considers itself, and appears to the scrutiny team to be, equipped to assume it.

43 UCS claims that quality enhancement is central to its procedures and ethos, citing its Teaching and Learning Strategy and quality assurance procedures as enhancement vehicles. The scrutiny team confirms that RiME in particular invites the systematic and planned dissemination of good practice. In addition, the institution points to its approach to staff development and its encouragement of educational innovation as among the means of encouraging continuous improvement. The team confirms that UCS's approach to strengthening its provision is central to its self-identity and its organisational procedures.

## C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

### Criterion C1

The staff of an organisation granted powers to award taught degrees will be competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded.

44 UCS aims to provide a learning environment permeated by scholarly activity, with high quality teaching underpinned by advanced scholarship across the board, and by research in targeted areas. This commitment is unequivocally endorsed at Board level, and students spoke positively about the quality of teaching. The institution is committed to developing the scholarly practice of academic staff, both by opening career pathways for current staff and by strong new appointments. The scrutiny team reviewed the relevant procedures, finding, for example, lecturer job descriptions refer to engagement in research, scholarly activity, knowledge exchange and continuing professional development; departmental and institutional key performance indicators specify enhancing the level of qualification of academic and support staff; and the impact of new staff is systematically measured by a range of metrics. The team confirms the robustness and realism of these procedures.

45 Data show that 35 per cent of academic staff have doctorates as their highest award level; 47 per cent have another postgraduate award (taught or research); 16 per cent have a first degree; two per cent have a lower-level award, including a professional qualification. The distribution of staff with doctorates is weighted towards Science and Technology (56 per cent) and the two Applied Social Science departments (50 per cent) and away from Health Studies and Nursing Studies (eight per cent, though a further 22 per cent is studying for one). A parallel commitment to increasing pedagogical effectiveness is apparent in the creation of postgraduate pathways to professional teaching qualifications: 61 per cent of staff have a teaching qualification, including 41 per cent with a higher education-specific qualification. In Health Studies and Nursing Studies 80 per cent of staff have a teaching qualification including 65 per cent with a qualification specific to higher education. Taken as a whole, this data illustrate a steady improvement in qualification levels.

46 Learning Network Centre staff teaching on UCS courses are subject to approval by UCS on behalf of the validating universities in relation both to the level of delivery and the nature and extent of their contribution, based on academic qualifications, experience and professional qualifications. The scrutiny team found the procedures fit for purpose.

47 UCS makes strategic use of appraisal, line management review and promotions to encourage staff to keep up to date with research, scholarship and professional practice by participation in subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies: indeed, making a substantial contribution to subject associations or policy forums is a promotion criterion. The institution sees such participation as a mechanism for accessing national and international communities of practice, and as critical for course leadership, where sector engagement is key to ensuring currency and relevance, and 73 per cent of designated academic leaders are members of such associations, societies or bodies.

48 A number of staff act as reviewers for academic or professional journals, or serve on editorial panels; many have developed and maintained roles with local, national or in some cases international bodies. UCS is keen to strengthen its engagement with the Higher Education Academy (HEA). It participates in the HEA Network of Deputy Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors and Vice Principals, and offers support (financial and remission) and guidance

to staff applicants. Currently seven members of staff are senior fellows, 30 are fellows, and five are associate fellows of HEA.

49 UCS considers and recognises continuing professional practice as demonstrating engagement with research and scholarship. Such involvement is particularly strong in Health, where many staff engage with their profession, normally through honorary contracts, clinical audit and involvement in service improvement projects. In Art and Design, also, students greatly value being taught by academic staff who remain in practice.

50 UCS defines research and scholarly activity as a continuum from pure research to professional development, seeing a broad portfolio of research, scholarship, enterprise, consultancy and professional practice as reflective of its provenance and ambitions. It describes the last six years as characterised by a progressive, strategically driven strengthening of research, with increasing expectations of staff qualifications and engagement. New academic staff, with some flexibility in specified professional areas, must have postgraduate qualifications and research potential. UCS speaks of teaching teams evolving into diverse research and practice-based communities, contributing to the economic, social and cultural development of the region and to the wider national and international academic community.

51 The institution sees research and scholarship as synergistic with teaching specialisms. For example, a staff member used a PhD in Disability Studies to write new material for a BA course and to develop a forum on research into childhood disability with a validating university. Students told the scrutiny team that they find it inspiring to discover their lecturer is a published author; and they welcome being taught by staff members who, having recent or current industrial experience, introduce the world of work into their learning experience.

52 Research and enterprise activity is overseen by the Research and Enterprise Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board. The Research and Enterprise Services Team is tasked with promoting and supporting research and scholarship, and the scrutiny team confirms that it does so with vigour. For example, it supports an institutional-level approach to encouraging research applications, and delivers an annual research colloquium for staff and students of UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network at which a UCS Researcher of the Year award is presented, to celebrate and disseminate success. This Team also manages the UCS Graduate School, established in 2011 to provide support for postgraduate research students, and currently approved to offer research degree provision in nine areas.

53 While, as a non-autonomous institution, UCS was not permitted to enter the last Research Excellence Framework, it is planning a 2020 entry. Central to research planning are faculty-level, or occasionally cross-faculty, research centres, designed to focus and develop expertise, and provide a coherent narrative for the Research Excellence Framework. For example, within the Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Science the unifying theme will be improving life opportunities for young people, to support which the Institute for Social, Educational and Enterprise Development is drawing together the interests and experience of academic staff across the institution. Secondly, in the Faculty of Health and Science, following a collaboration with the local NHS Trust a nascent Applied Clinical Research Unit will help clinicians, service users and academics develop project proposals and research activity. The scrutiny team confirms that these and other initiatives have contributed to the creation of an increasingly mature ethos of research and scholarly activity.

54 While the overall trajectory is upward, research income, though increasing in the current academic year, declined by over 25 per cent in the previous three, falling short of the relevant performance indicator. Fluctuations of this kind are not unusual in institutions where research income, being modest (in this case +/- £1m), is dependent on a limited number of funded projects, and in the present case the decline was caused by the completion of a major

project and the ending of an income stream. Nevertheless, with increased income in the present year and £3.7m income assured over the next few years, the trajectory is again positive.

55 Consultancy work remains predominantly local, and knowledge transfer is developing, with UCS a member of both the East of England European Regional Development Fund Knowledge Transfer Partnership consortium and of the Eastern Academic Health Services Network. These are areas of significant potential future growth.

56 UCS recognises that within the Learning Network Centres, while staff are, like their UCS Ipswich counterparts, expected to maintain knowledge and understanding of scholarly developments at a level appropriate to their teaching, achieving engagement with research and advanced scholarship can be challenging. While formal responsibility for doing so rests with the validating universities, UCS offers support by, for example, inviting all approved staff to the annual Research Colloquium, where evidence of active participation was found.

57 UCS analyses student satisfaction, attrition and achievement data in RiME, both comparatively and absolutely. While year-on-year variations are discernible, the institution is confident that all students experience higher education of at least acceptable quality and sometimes more. For example, Suffolk New College's Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review by QAA in 2012 concluded that 'the mix of academic and industry specialists, including part-time lecturers currently employed in professional roles, provides a rich source of knowledge and experience which is up to date and contributes significantly to the quality of teaching and learning'. Through documentary study and discussion, the scrutiny team found evidence of a strategic and professional approach to the research agenda at UCS Ipswich and, to a lesser but still acceptable extent, in the Network Centres.

58 UCS aims to create an academic culture wherein excellence in teaching, learning and other institutional priorities as well as in research is encouraged, recognised and rewarded. The appraisal system balances individual staff needs and aspirations with institutional requirements; and staff development activities are prioritised on the basis of their relevance to institutional objectives. Of particular note is the work of the Elevate Team in promoting technology-enhanced learning and assessment.

59 Although the scrutiny team heard positive comments about appraisal and staff development, both systems are currently under review. UCS acknowledges that hitherto staff development has been predominantly reactive, but the recent introduction of new policies and practices, many of which derive from pedagogic research and research-related activities undertaken within the institution itself, has highlighted the need for a more targeted approach to supporting innovative teaching and learning. UCS has thus far supported 41 projects of this kind, involving 40 different members of staff with an outlay of over £100,000.

60 Current initiatives include an annual Learning and Teaching Day; a Teaching and Learning Conversations (TLC) initiative; an Innovative Assessment and Feedback Project; and Open Webinars for Learning and Enhancing Teaching (OWLETS), involving different universities in online discussions on current debates within higher education. UCS has also initiated an HEA-accredited Professional and Accredited Scheme for Staff Progression and of Recognition in Teaching (PASSPoRT) as part of an initiative to enhance teaching and learning, and increase the number of staff with higher qualifications or professional recognition. It has also undertaken an inclusive review of its Observation of Learning and Teaching Policy, devising and delivering a new peer review scheme emphasising reflexivity, collegiality, and a greater understanding of the scholarship of teaching.

61 Approved Learning Network Centre staff may enrol without charge on any validated UCS academic course. Seventeen such staff are currently doing so and five staff from one Centre have enrolled on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice. Nevertheless, UCS acknowledges that take-up of central staff development opportunities by



Centre personnel remains limited. While the Director of Human Resources has visited each Centre and discussed the obstacles involved (the main one being the teaching timetable); instances exist of UCS Ipswich staff travelling to provide onsite sessions; the Staff Development Committee now includes the Head of Academic Partnerships and Support in its membership; and the scrutiny team found a clear commitment to enabling all staff to enhance their professional competence and scholarship, the hurdle of engaging fully with approved staff of the Network Centres, currently and formally the responsibility of the validating universities, has yet to be cleared.

62 Heads of department are responsible for curriculum development. Responsibility for designing new courses lies with the proposing department or Centre. The scrutiny team studied the guidance materials provided, finding them appropriate in design and comprehensive in scope. This was confirmed by academic staff, who told the team that they are well supported; that course development is invariably a collaborative activity; that the curriculum is informed through scholarly activity and expertise; and that relevant external reference points are always the starting point.

63 UCS values staff involvement as external examiners or external representatives on validation or review panels at other higher education institutions. This is particularly valuable for academic leaders, given the developmental opportunities such experiences present. Fortysix per cent of academic leaders have been so involved over the last three years. In addition, some staff have been appointed reviewers or assessors for professional bodies, participating in monitoring visits to other higher education institutions. UCS acknowledges that invitations to staff to become external examiners are less frequent than it would wish, or than it would anticipate should taught degree awarding powers be granted, but by way of compensation and initiation it invites its own staff to attend external examiner induction sessions: nine UCS staff have attended such sessions in the current academic year.

64 In the last six years collaborative links have been formed between academic staff at UCS and the two validating universities to encourage peer-to-peer liaison and mutual development - notably linking UCS staff to research-active colleagues. A number of professorial titles have been conferred upon UCS staff with validating university approval, and some staff have been increasingly integrated into research communities at one of the two universities, particularly but not exclusively in the field of Health.

65 Overall, the scrutiny team found staff who are qualified for their roles; an acceptable and increasing number with higher education teaching qualifications or HEA fellowships; students who hold teachers in high regard for their professional expertise and approachability; a discernibly increased emphasis on research and scholarly activity; and a realistic understanding of, and engagement with, work still to be done.

## D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

### Criterion D1

The teaching and learning infrastructure of an organisation granted taught degree awarding powers, including its student support and administrative support arrangements, is effective and monitored.

66 Maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are core to successive Teaching and Learning Strategies: hence the Strategy for 2015-2020 stresses innovative and leading-edge approaches to teaching. Evidence for the planning of this lies in part in the activities cited in paragraph 60. UCS has achieved extensive staff and student buy-in to its challenging agenda.

67 As will by now be clear, UCS monitors the effectiveness of teaching and learning in all its dimensions through student questionnaires and course committee representation, RiME, external examining, and course re-approval by the validating institutions.

68 UCS's Assessment and Feedback Framework requires assessment feedback to be provided within four working weeks. Adherence to this policy is monitored, and where it cannot be met a rationale and timescale must be provided. Students who met the scrutiny team largely confirmed that they receive feedback within the time limit, but, while this was not a sensitive topic in meetings, criticism in the National Student Survey and the Student Submission to the Higher Education Review has encouraged UCS to review and enhance practice in this area, including an emphasis on effective planning and monitoring of marking schedules, clear communication, and managing student expectations.

69 UCS requires assessment criteria for all modules, and the Assessment and Feedback Framework entitles students to detailed and constructive feedback. Students spoke positively about the form and content of formative as well as summative feedback.

70 The Student Experience Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board, is a forum for the Provost and other senior academic staff to engage with Students' Union officers. Its contributions to policy development include a Student Voice area on the intranet, the Student Charter, the Infozone as a central point of access to student services, and improvements in student representation. UCS managers work closely and regularly with the Union Council on day-to-day issues, and on such strategic developments as the joint promotion of the National Student Survey, and the recruitment, training and support of student representatives. Students spoke positively of the manner in which their voice is heard, and the scrutiny team noted in observed meetings that students were encouraged to participate in discussion, and normally did so competently and in an informed manner.

71 UCS's methods of gaining feedback from staff include formal governance and quality management systems, annual surveys of central services, and a biennial staff survey covering a wide range of aspects of their working lives. A staff suggestion scheme is operational, and an annual staff away day constitutes a further forum for exchanges between senior managers and staff. Staff informed the scrutiny team that the scale and character of the institution facilitate effective and open communications both among staff and between staff and senior management.

72 The UCS Board includes several external stakeholders, and the nomination procedure is designed to achieve a membership with a skill and knowledge set consonant with institutional needs and mission. More generally, UCS's strong vocational focus has led it to establish and maintain regular and constructive relationships with external stakeholders.

This is particularly important in the health professions, where such relationships are crucial to the successful management of academic provision.

73 UCS is committed to establishing effective relationships with applicants, and does so by, for example, the Infozone (see paragraphs 70 and 76), prospectuses, an applicant portal, and a pre-entry skills course. New students are formally inducted with UCS, which regards induction as more a process than an event, tailoring it to its diverse population by means such as the Flying Start programme (primarily for mature and international students), and a buddy scheme. The programme is formally evaluated, and students reported positively on their overall induction experience.

74 The UCS Ipswich Library has oversight of all higher education library services across the Network. Resource and priority decisions are informed by the annual library survey, the National Student Survey, committee discussions and the views of the Students' Union. The policy of increased investment in databases and e-books has been particularly well received. Students are initially encouraged to maximise the benefits of library resources in induction, and supported subsequently by training workshops, tutorials and online guides.

75 Information technology has been strengthened. The IT Services team's more user-focused approach has yielded increased student satisfaction scores; and the virtual learning environment has delivered improvements in blended learning. Students informed the scrutiny team that the resources to support their learning are adequate.

76 The Infozone is a service hub wherein advisers answer queries or direct students to specialist services. The effectiveness of central student support services is monitored in RiME, and an annual report highlights strengths, weaknesses and areas for future development. This arrangement was found to be operating satisfactorily.

77 UCS's single student records system, managed by the Management Information Team and open to all staff, aims to provide accurate and timely information as a basis for performance monitoring. Data are routinely provided for RiME, paying particular attention to the accuracy of Assessment Board information and student progression, performance and withdrawal rates. Key performance indicators are used by the Executive (and reported to the Board) to monitor performance and inform academic and financial planning. In observations, UCS's documentation and record keeping were found to be of very high quality.

78 The Academic Appeals and Complaints Procedures are explained at induction and available online and in course handbooks; while the Dignity at Work Policy addresses allegations of bullying, harassment, and student misbehaviour. The procedures were fully reviewed in 2013 and the scrutiny team found them fit for purpose.

79 The personal development element of the corporate development programme is available to all support staff, and includes identifying training needs, including specific training sessions, which are mapped against particular aspects of an employee's role. UCS is committed to increasing support staff members' levels of qualification. It does so by offering such staff fee waivers for its courses; and support in time or money can be available for those wishing to join professional associations and pursue employment-relevant qualifications

80 The mechanisms to ensure the accuracy and completeness of published information are specified in the Partnerships Handbook. Oversight is the responsibility of the Director of External Relations in consultation with academic areas and central support departments. While noting that the Higher Education Review team found that not all published information had kept abreast of institutional changes, the scrutiny team confirms that, overall, such information is accurate and meets the expectations of the Quality Code.

81 UCS's student body is diverse, and the institution's expectation that the concepts and actuality of equality and diversity permeate all aspects of activity is expressed in the Equality and Diversity Policy and Equality and Diversity Management Framework, the reports of which include equality and diversity monitoring data. The Equality and Diversity Committee is charged with setting, monitoring and reviewing the equality and diversity objectives; specialist staff provide support for students with additional needs and advice for teaching staff on understanding and meeting those needs. These arrangements are satisfactory.

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