



# Application for taught and research degree awarding powers: Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

## Scrutiny team report

February 2017

### Contents

<b>About this report</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary: taught degree awarding powers</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive summary: research degree awarding powers</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Privy Council's decision</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Detailed scrutiny against taught degree awarding powers criteria</b> .....	<b>6</b>
A Governance and academic management .....	6
B Academic standards and quality assurance.....	10
C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff .....	15
D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes ...	18
<b>Detailed scrutiny of evidence supporting the additional criteria for research degree awarding powers</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Criterion 1 .....	22
Criterion 2 .....	24
Criterion 3 .....	26

## 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 Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine for the power to award taught and research degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2004. In advising on applications, QAA is guided by the 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 TDAP and the three main RDAP criteria laid out in 2004.

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.

## Executive summary: taught degree awarding powers

### Governance and academic management

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (the School) has been validated by the University of Liverpool (the University) since its origins around the turn of the previous century, though since it has always enrolled, taught, examined and housed its students largely independently of the University, it has over 100 years' experience of managing much of its own provision. In 2013 the School was designated a higher education institution in its own right, thereby becoming eligible to receive funding directly from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and in June 2015 its relationship with the University became that of an accredited institution, a status which entitled it to implement significant quality assurance processes in respect of taught provision.

The School is an incorporated body, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its Board of Trustees is both competent and effective, and its Director, who is responsible for implementing Board decisions and for all aspects of management and leadership, equally so. Sound executive and deliberative structures are in place, and the School is characterised by a participative ethos which does not impair its capacity for effective decision making.

Financially the School is in surplus: the majority of its funding derives from contracted research from a wide network of donors, including, most significantly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The School's vision is 'to save lives in resource poor countries through research, education and capacity planning'. Its mission is 'to reduce the burden of sickness and mortality in disease endemic countries through the delivery of effective interventions which improve human health and are relevant to the poorest countries'. Understandably these aims, while they attract widespread support from funding bodies globally, also carry risks, require speedy and effective change management procedures, and can present ethical dilemmas. The School's approach to the associated challenges appears sound.

### Academic standards and quality assurance

The School currently aligns its taught provision with the requirements of the University of Liverpool. Its regulatory framework, to be introduced following the possible award and exercise of taught degree awarding powers, largely replicates this framework, albeit with a number of amendments which reflect the distinctive nature of its academic portfolio. Institutional procedures for ensuring the alignment of the proposed framework with all relevant external expectations are robust, with relevant expectations embedded, sometimes implicitly rather than explicitly, in the relevant documentation. Where, as is largely the case, no Subject Benchmark Statements are in place, the School adheres to generic benchmarks, seeking external academic and professional advice as appropriate.

Procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review are in place; boards of examiners operate efficiently and effectively; observations confirm that external examiners speak highly of the academic standards required and achieved; termination procedures, though rarely implemented, ensure the well-being of students affected; and procedures are designed to ensure the integration of resource allocation and academic objectives. The School's participative ethos ensures the active involvement of staff of all levels of seniority, and the scrutiny team particularly noted the leadership qualities evident throughout the institution.

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

The School makes strategic use of appraisal, peer observation, line management and recognition and reward systems to ensure staff continue to engage with research, scholarship and professional educational practice. Its staff development arrangements are embedded and effective, and will be further strengthened when a more detailed monitoring procedure is in place. Currently the School offers a Professional Certificate in Supporting Learning accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association, and supports academic staff taking an externally delivered Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. It engages with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and plans to introduce its own HEA-accredited framework by the start of academic year 2017-18, mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework. Academic staff engage fully with external networks at discipline level, research delivery is very strong (the School was ranked 24 in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework and sixth for impact), and levels of staff engagement with other higher education institutions are extensive.

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

The School's approach to monitoring taught provision at programme and module levels includes scrutiny of annual reports: these promote review of learning outcomes, delivery and assessment, identification of good practice and areas for enhancement. Students report satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of written feedback on assessed work, both of which are subject to monitoring by the School's Quality Unit.

Procedures for responding to students' opinions, concerns and complaints are in place and were described as effective by the students who met the scrutiny team or whose contributions were observed in committees. The School does not have a student representative body such as a union or guild (it is giving thought to this matter) but will continue to provide extensive advisory and support services. Appropriate learning resources are in place, and a well-regarded central unit provides technology support for both academic staff and students. The School supports and encourages continuing professional development for all staff, and its support for diversity and equal opportunity significantly exceeds its legal obligations.

## **Executive summary: research degree awarding powers**

### **Criterion 1**

The School's submission to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (made in collaboration with two UK universities) was successful, and its impact score particularly so. Its research has a global reputation, and its annual external research income equates to £950,000 per full-time equivalent staff member. All academic staff engage in research and publish regularly in high impact journals; most speak at international conferences and edit or sit on editorial boards of scholarly journals; and many serve on panels awarding research grants and government committees. The School nurtures and encourages such activities in a planned and systematic way.

### **Criterion 2**

The School, which currently follows University policies and procedures, has a regulatory framework for implementation in the event of research degree awarding powers being granted. Current procedures, including the training, supervision, support, monitoring and

examination of research degree students, are aligned with all relevant external expectations, including those of UK Research Councils, and were valued by those students who were met or observed by the scrutiny team. The proposed framework is similarly aligned.

### **Criterion 3**

The School submitted 145 students for conferment of the PhD between September 2008 and September 2016.

### **Privy Council's decision**

The Privy Council's decision is to grant the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine taught and research degree awarding powers from 14 August 2017.

## 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 and research degree awarding powers (TDAP) by Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in September 2015, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Professor Richard Allen, Dr Ian Giles and Professor Gaynor Taylor (scrutiny team members) and Mr James Perkins (student member). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Professor Robert Harris, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in October 2015, culminating in a report to ACDAP in February 2017. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented in support of the application, spoke to a range of stakeholders, and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

## Key information about Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (the School) is situated on a compact but expanding urban campus close to the centre of Liverpool. At the time of applying, the School's higher education programmes, which consist of taught masters and research degrees, were offered on the basis of a franchise agreement with the University of Liverpool. From academic year 2015-16, when the School received accredited institution status, it has received direct funding for its masters students which, however, continue to read for University of Liverpool awards. The School's programmes range between those with a policy or practice orientation and those which are laboratory-based. The School also offers a range of self-validated diplomas and short courses.

The School's 694 students (253.5 full-time equivalents) come from developed and developing areas of the world and include 113 postgraduate research students. The School employs 62 full-time and four part-time academic staff, all on permanent contracts, and a wide range of administrative and technical support staff. Its four academic departments (International Public Health; Parasitology; Clinical Sciences; and Vector Biology) are overlaid by five cross-cutting themes (Capacity Development; Centre for Applied Health Research and Delivery; Evidence-based Medicine; Neglected Tropical Diseases and the Centre for Health in the Eastern Mediterranean) which draw on expertise from all four departments. The School attracts a high level of research funding, and 80 per cent of work submitted to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (in one unit jointly with the University of Liverpool and in a second jointly with the University of Warwick) scored 3\* or 4\*.

# 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.

#### **Financial planning, quality assurance, and resource allocation policies are coherent and relate to the organisation's higher education mission, aims and objectives**

1 Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (the School) is an incorporated body, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The Board of Trustees (the Board) exercises governance responsibilities, either directly or through its Audit Committee, Finance and Investment Committee, Nomination and Governance Committee or Remuneration Committee. An observation of the Finance and Investment Committee noted that members brought their professional and financial expertise to the School, and confirmed that the Committee offers sound advice on financial matters and strategy, and provides assurance as to the soundness of the School's day-to-day financial conduct.

2 The Director, who is responsible for implementing Board decisions and for all aspects of management and leadership, is supported by a small Senior Management Group and a broader-based Management Committee, the responsibilities of which include scrutiny of management accounts, budgetary planning and staff appointments. The Management Committee consists of senior academic and support staff, including the Directors of Education, International Education and Knowledge Exchange Initiatives, and Finance. An observation provided evidence of detailed and careful consideration being given to management accounts, with faculty deans playing a leading role in questioning and dissecting the figures presented.

3 The School aims for an annual operating surplus of two to four per cent, and has been in surplus for the last 14 years. An annually approved capital expenditure plan constitutes the framework for management decision making, with projects in excess of £100,000 requiring Board approval. The budget-setting procedure, which was amended in academic year 2015-16, involves submissions to a Budget Review Panel being made in April, with recommendations ultimately progressing to the Board, which signs off the following year's budget in July. The scrutiny team confirms that this process is transparent and coherent, aligned with institutional mission, and facilitative of clear communication between academic and service departments. Overall the School is appropriately risk averse in its financial planning and management, and its financial policies are both coherent and aligned with the School mission.

4 The School's approach to teaching quality is strategically driven, aligned with institutional mission and supported by the engagement of the Board. The scrutiny team noted in particular that the recently introduced budgeting template makes an explicit link between institutional vision and mission on the one hand and resourcing on the other, paving

the way for an effective integration of academic, financial and administrative objectives; an observation of the Learning and Teaching Committee confirmed that the process of seeking outline approval for new programmes includes careful consideration of resource. Senior members of the Board informed the team that, following a strategic away-day discussion, investment in teaching was increased. Nevertheless, the nature of the School decrees that it must remain financially dependent on research funding in a context in which funders continually exert downward pressure on overheads. Accordingly, consideration has been given to developing a 'doomsday scenario' to handle any sudden loss of funding, albeit that, given the School's expertise, niche activities, networks and international reputation, its realisation is highly improbable.

5 The Quality Management Committee, which oversees all aspects of academic quality and standards, has representation from all academic departments, a representative of the awarding body and two students, and reports (via the Learning and Teaching Committee) to the Management Committee. An observation confirmed that its agendas are relevant, that it engages with such critical matters as external reference points and external examiner reports, that it is operationally effective, and that its membership is competent and well-informed.

### **Higher education activities take full account of relevant legislation, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), and associated guidance**

6 Members of the Board informed the scrutiny team that legislative compliance is a critical risk factor, particularly given the rapidly changing nature of legislation in areas as fundamental to institutional expertise as the use of human tissue. The School Executive routinely appraises the Board of changes, the Audit Committee meets relevant experts annually, and the team noted that the terms of reference of a proposed Partnership Board will include risk assessment as well as resource allocation and annual partnership monitoring. An observation of the Audit Committee confirmed that the School takes active steps to ensure compliance with relevant legislation: this includes the financial reporting standard, funding council returns, health and safety legislation and EU funding requirements. In addition to ensuring compliance with home or in-country legislative requirements, all research activity, including the research components of taught awards, is subject to approval by the School's Ethics Committee.

7 The School's educational provision is fully aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the Quality Code. The School's formal involvement with professional, statutory or regulatory bodies is restricted to non-credit bearing awards, but it engages with professional and other interest groups to ensure its postgraduate programmes are current and relevant: students confirmed to the scrutiny team that this is so.

### **Higher education mission and associated policies and systems are understood and applied consistently both by those connected with the delivery of the organisation's higher education programmes and, where appropriate, by students**

8 The School's mission is to 'reduce the burden of sickness and mortality in disease-endemic countries through the delivery of effective interventions which improve human health and are relevant to the poorest countries'. To this end the School offers specialist programmes in the major disciplines related to international public health and tropical medicine. The programmes are taken by health professionals and graduates in the biological sciences from developed and developing countries, and are also open to intercalating medical students. Staff and students who met the scrutiny team understood and valued these priorities. Academic staff bring fieldwork experiences into the classroom, and many graduates with humanitarian, health and disease-reduction roles overseas continue to support the next generation of students.



**There is clarity of function and responsibility at all levels in the organisation in relation to its governance structures and systems for managing its higher education provision**

9 An organogram showing the School's committees and their interrelationships provides evidence of a clear structure for management and governance; and observation reports demonstrate that members of the School have a clear understanding of the institutional structure and their roles within it. Committees are effectively chaired, with papers generally circulated well in advance; observations of boards of examiners confirm that procedures are clear and external examiners are complimentary about both meeting management and the efficient and courteous manner in which they are treated.

**There are depth and strength of academic leadership across the whole of the organisation's higher education provision**

10 Some 92 per cent of academic staff have a doctoral degree; 35.2 full-time equivalent academic staff were entered in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, and 80 per cent of the research submitted was classified 3\*-4\*; the staff population contains an appropriate range of experience in curriculum development and engagement with other higher education institutions at home and abroad; and observations confirm not only that committee chairs consistently demonstrated academic leadership but also that this quality was discernible among many committee members.

**The organisation develops, implements and communicates its academic policies and systems in collaboration with those responsible for the delivery of its higher education programmes, and with relevant stakeholders**

11 The School has a consultative and democratic ethos, and discussions about planned changes often take place, with different levels of formality, prior to the initiation of formal procedures. Policies, regulations and codes of practice are developed in the Quality Unit, discussed by the Learning and Teaching Committee (often virtually), approved by the Management Committee, and made available to staff in the Programmes Board, programme boards of study, team meetings and a web-based Quality Manual. The staff members who met the scrutiny team appeared well briefed about academic policies and systems.

**Academic policies, systems and activities are monitored and reviewed, and appropriate and timely action is taken when deficiencies are identified**

12 Operating within the School's academic governance structure, committees have appropriate and balanced membership. Terms of reference and committee structures are regularly reviewed, and an observation provided evidence of this being done in a conscientious manner. The scrutiny team found examples of action being taken when deficiencies had been identified or when circumstances or external drivers had changed: for example, in one observation, when a possible common problem in assessment load and timing was identified, thought was given to how it might be resolved.

**Academic risk and change management strategies are effective**

13 The School's Institutional Risk Register scores risks prior to its submission to the Board; the Board's discussion is strengthened by external expertise, and individuals are allocated to manage specific risks. The Register is formally owned by the Audit Committee, which is responsible for the continuing review of the School's risk management framework, and reports on the Register (by exception) to the Management Committee. The scrutiny team confirms that the structures in place are fit for the purpose of responding to unanticipated risks. A new cycle of risk review, agreed at the October 2015 meeting of the

Audit Committee, includes additional triggers and controls. Separate risk registers are in place for the School's main activities, including teaching and research. These are aligned with funding body policies. Risks from local registers perceived as particularly serious may be escalated to the Institutional Risk Register or be subject to monitoring by the Management Committee. In addition, staff and students planning overseas travel must complete a risk assessment. These arrangements appear robust in design and execution.

**Robust mechanisms are in place to ensure that the academic standards of the organisation's higher education awards are not put at risk**

14 The terms of reference of the Quality Management Committee, which oversees academic standards, include overseeing programme and module approval, monitoring and review, approving external examiners and scrutinising and responding to their reports. Programme approval and review procedures specifically involve confirmation of alignment with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and external examiners' comments are included in annual module and programme review, the reports of which are submitted to the Quality Management Committee. In the event of degree awarding powers being obtained, the School will ensure that this Committee, which currently includes an awarding body representative, retains external membership, which may be extended to include non-governmental organisation as well as external academic representation.

**The organisation has the capability of managing successfully the additional responsibilities vested in it were taught degree awarding powers granted**

15 The scrutiny team confirms that the School's current regulatory documents and codes of practice are soundly designed and operationally effective; those which will replace University policies and procedures in the event of taught degree awarding powers being granted appear at least equally so. Overall the School has shown itself well placed to take on the additional responsibilities associated with degree awarding powers.

## 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.

**The regulatory framework governing the organisation's 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**

16 The School's regulatory framework for taught provision, which is implemented fully and consistently, consists of readily-available codes of practice covering admissions, progress, assessment, appeals and complaints, mitigating circumstances and deferral, the main points of which are included in handbooks and in programme and module specifications.

**A regulatory framework appropriate for the granting of the organisation's own higher education awards is in prospect**

17 The School's status as an accredited college of the University of Liverpool entitles it to implement significant quality assurance processes in respect of taught provision, and its competence to operationalise these responsibilities has been confirmed by the awarding body. The scrutiny team further confirms this competence, and found the proposed regulatory framework, although expressed in less detail than is the case in some institutions, appropriate both to the School's present responsibilities and to those which would accrue in the event of taught degree awarding powers being granted.

### 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.

**Higher education awards are offered at levels that correspond to the relevant levels of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)**

18 The scrutiny team confirms that the School meets all relevant external expectations. In the case of the FHEQ its mapping is fastidious, with clear alignment set out in statements of Learning Outcomes in Programme Specifications.

**Management of higher education provision takes appropriate account of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, national guidance on programme specifications, and the requirements of any relevant professional and statutory bodies**

19 The School's mechanisms for defining and securing academic standards in higher education include programme approval and review, module and programme specifications and the use of external advice: these mechanisms are consistently and effectively applied. The work of the Quality Office ensures that the School is attentive to the Quality Code, changes in which are reliably monitored and implemented.

20 There are no specific Subject Benchmark Statements for the School's postgraduate taught provision and no such programmes are formally linked to professional and statutory bodies. Some non-award bearing programmes are so linked, however, and the School is conscious of the importance of all programmes being aligned to current professional expectations. Within that context, the School adheres to generic benchmarks, and staff research brings it into close contact with health bodies at home and overseas. The evidence that the School's programmes are current and meet professional as well as academic expectations is convincing.

**In establishing, and then maintaining, comparability of standards with other providers of equivalent level programmes, the organisation explicitly seeks advice from external peers and, where appropriate, professional and statutory bodies**

21 The School seeks external advice at programme approval to ensure that appropriate standards and current learning methods will be embedded in teaching and assessment. Examples were found of the School being attentive to external examiners' enhancement recommendations, and none of the external examiners being critical of academic standards: indeed, observations of boards of examiners provided evidence of such examiners being highly complimentary, particularly of dissertation performance. 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 modes of delivery.

22 Procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, which are subject to the approval of the awarding body and fully aligned with the expectations of the Quality Code, are delineated in a unified Code of Practice which specifies a clear sequence of actions and deliberations. Annual monitoring and review are robust, comprehensive in scope and fit for purpose; and conclude with reports which are equally so, and which are addressed conscientiously and professionally. Discussions observed at the Programmes Board further support the conclusion that the School focuses strongly on teaching excellence and innovation.

23 In the event of taught degree awarding powers being granted, the School intends, initially at least, to retain the structure of the University of Liverpool's periodic review procedure, with a number of minor amendments, mainly to ensure the procedure's continued alignment to external requirements and expectations. The most recent awarding body review report spoke positively of the manner in which the School implemented the current procedure. While the scrutiny team was unable to see a degree programme approval event, evidence from an observed discussion of a proposed Diploma in Medical Practice showed the School both committed to designing processes to ensure academic standards and the quality of learning experience for students, and approaching an innovative partnership proposal in a collegial and reflective manner. The team has no reason to disbelieve the School's claim that in the event of degree awarding powers being granted its management of these procedures would be other than effective.

**There is an explicit and close relationship between academic planning and decisions on resource allocation**

24 While the School did not consider any proposals for new taught postgraduate master's programmes in the scrutiny period, discussions about the proposed Professional Diploma in UK Medical Practice addressed the likely resource implications, including the cost of training local hospital staff to mark reflective essays and portfolios, and supervise students. In addition, as noted above (see paragraph 14), the process of seeking outline approval for new courses includes giving close consideration to resource needs - a responsibility falling to the Management Committee. The Board of Trustees engages

effectively with teaching and learning, and has, for example, following detailed discussion increased financial support for their enhancement. Overall, noting in particular the integrated planning underpinning such innovations as the establishment of a strengthened virtual learning environment (VLE), it can be confirmed that the relationship between academic planning and resource allocation is both close and explicit, and that it operates both at governance and senior management levels and cascades throughout the institution.

### **Criterion B3**

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

#### **Strategies for learning and assessment are consistent with stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes**

25 The School's four strategic aims in learning and assessment are to deliver: a cost-effective portfolio attractive to students; a high quality learning and teaching experience; qualified, motivated and valued staff; and a high quality learning and teaching infrastructure. The scrutiny team judged these aims appropriate in principle to ensuring that learning and assessment are consistent, and that learning outcomes will be met, and saw no evidence that the system is anything other than effective in practice.

#### **Relevant staff are informed of, and provided with guidance on, its policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review; and responsibility for amending or improving new programme proposals is clearly assigned and subsequent action is carefully monitored**

26 The Code of Practice on the Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Taught Programmes is comprehensive, widely available and effectively disseminated. It specifies all relevant policies and procedures, and links to the awarding body's teaching and learning policies. Observations confirm that responsibilities are allocated to appropriately qualified and committed members of staff, particularly directors of studies, and that their roles and responsibilities are both explicit and understood by their intended recipients.

#### **Coherence of programmes with multiple elements or alternative pathways is secured and maintained**

27 The only programme with alternative pathways is the MSc International Public Health. Students register for a pathway not the programme, and each pathway leads to a discrete award underpinned by common elements and common structures. Separate programme specifications for each pathway have been developed, setting out the core and optional modules for each in the context of the programme as a whole. The scrutiny team considered this approach also a sound basis for the development of any further analogous taught master's programmes.

#### **Close links are maintained between learning support services and the organisation's programme planning, approval, monitoring and review arrangements, and robust arrangements exist for ensuring that the learning opportunities provided to those students that may be studying at a distance from the organisation are adequate**

28 The Director of Education, who heads the wide-ranging Education and Training Department and who is central to the present application, is a member of the Management Committee, chairs the Learning and Teaching Committee, and attends the Programmes

Board; the Education and Training Department is represented on the Quality Management Committee, and is thereby centrally involved in programme approval monitoring and review.

29 The School currently discharges its commitment to capacity building overseas largely on the ground. In particular, the scrutiny team noted that good support, both local and at the School, is provided for students undertaking their dissertation research overseas. It regards distance learning as a potential growth area, and the establishment of a dedicated Unit for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Education and Training Department, the experience of the on-campus VLE, and the overseas academic and professional expertise of many academic staff suggest it has the capacity to develop successful distance learning programmes in the future.

**Through its planning, approval, review and assessment practices, the organisation defines, monitors, reviews and maintains its academic standards, and its assessment criteria and practices are communicated clearly to students and staff**

30 The Code of Practice on the Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Taught Programmes states that maintaining threshold standards is the first aim of approval and review. The contribution of different components to assessing whether students meet learning outcomes is specified in programme proposals, and is subject to subsequent monitoring and review. Programme specifications articulate the assessment strategy and approach, which are also included in programme handbooks. Observations of an approval event, the Programmes Board, and boards of studies confirm that this aim is effectively made operational.

**Appropriately qualified external peers are engaged in the organisation's assessment processes and consistency is maintained between internal and external examiners' marking. The reliability and validity of the organisation's assessment procedures are monitored, and assessment outcomes inform future programme and student planning**

31 The awarding body retains responsibility for the determination of results in taught master's programmes, and its representatives confirmed to the scrutiny team that the University is happy with the School's discharge of its delegated responsibilities. The team also confirms the School's scrupulous management of its own professional diplomas, which it operates under its own authority: here policies and procedures are clearly specified, and evidence of outcomes and effectiveness is evident in the external examiner reports seen by the team. Reports for all programmes are subject to close attention, with thematic issues arising being identified and reported to the Programmes Board and the Quality Management Committee for quality assurance and enhancement purposes. While the School has yet to establish an authority to review and confirm degree results akin to the awarding body's Committee for the Award of Degrees, Diplomas, and Certificates, it is currently addressing the need to do so.

**Clear mechanisms are in place for use when a decision is taken to close a programme or programme element, and in doing so, students' interests are safeguarded**

32 The School's Critical Self Analysis states that any programme closure proposal would be considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee with a primary view to safeguarding the interests of current students. The scrutiny team accepts that such an approach would be logical, but notes that this responsibility does not appear in the Committee's terms of reference.

## Criterion B4

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

**Critical self-assessment is integral to the operation of the organisation's higher education provision and action is taken in response to matters raised through internal or external monitoring and review; and clear mechanisms exist for assigning and discharging action in relation to the scrutiny, monitoring and review of agreed learning objectives and intended outcomes**

33 The centrality of the School's focus on research itself fosters critical analysis and the development of new ideas, and the scrutiny team confirms, from documentary study and observations, that this extends to teaching and learning, supported in particular by the work and support of the Education and Training Department. Two current innovations, the Medical Research Council Doctoral Training Programme and the Professional Diploma in UK Medical Practice, contain novel elements, and the team found evidence of reflective practice in both.

34 The clarity with which the School's governance and management structures provide a clear framework of responsibilities is complemented by a framework of executive responsibilities in which the Director of Studies, as responsible for overseeing monitoring and review on behalf of the Programmes Board, plays a key role.

**Ideas and expertise from within and outside the organisation (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**

35 The desire to take account of new ideas from across the sector was particularly evident in meetings of the Learning and Teaching Committee, where the scrutiny team observed, for example, discussions on horizon scanning and a possible reframing of the curriculum on the basis of learning objectives. The School's recently-appointed Director of International Education and Knowledge Exchange also brings knowledge and expertise to the development of new policies. Evidence of discussions in preparation for the possible grant of degree awarding powers was also evident, and the scrutiny team found staff of all levels extensively engaged in external academic and professional spheres both at home and overseas.

**Effective means exist for encouraging the continuous improvement of quality of provision and student achievement**

36 The School's approach to continuous improvement is centrally driven. For example, the current focus of staff development opportunities includes the use of technology in teaching, where the contribution of the Unit for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Education and Training Department is valued by staff and students. Peer review and the career track process also offer opportunities to appraise teaching methods and approaches in the light of new strategies and methods. The scrutiny team also saw outputs from the 2015 Learning and Teaching Away Day and subsequent discussion in the Learning and Teaching Committee which demonstrated that the School engages staff in extensive discussion of teaching method and content.

## **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.

#### **Academic and/or professional expertise**

37 The School makes strategic use of appraisal, peer observation, line management and recognition and reward systems to encourage staff to keep up to date with research, scholarship and professional educational practice. Overall responsibility for staff development lies with the recently appointed Head of Employee Performance and Development, with the Director of Education having a specific remit of promoting staff development for professional practice in learning and teaching.

38 The School aims, particularly through its appointment strategy, its staff development provision, its career track scheme and its promotion policy, to equip academic staff to balance their research and teaching commitments, and to ensure that achievements in the latter are recognised and rewarded. 97 per cent of academic staff have a doctoral level qualification and 23 per cent have served as external examiners for taught programmes at other UK universities in the past three years. Established staff are complemented by external experts (including staff of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital and Alder Hey Children's Hospital) with honorary appointments, whose contributions attract consistently positive student evaluations.

39 The School employs three categories of staff: core (funded by the School); contract (funded from research grants); and teaching and scholarship (funded by the School and employed within the Education and Training Department). All core and contract staff are required to teach, though the balance of responsibilities varies. Contract staff are eligible to apply for career track status, normally involving financial support for three years with permanent appointment following for those meeting pre-set targets in respect of research income and publications, as well as teaching competency and commitment. Academic staff in the Education and Training Department spend the large majority of their time in teaching and teaching-related activities, but normally also pursue research and scholarship.

#### **Engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline (through, for example, membership of subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies)**

40 Following its designation as a higher education institution the School was able to join the HEA. While the School currently considers itself too small to sustain its own HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education it supports staff wishing to undertake such a programme at an external institution. In addition, as academic staff have a mixed view of the usefulness of this programme the School has engaged the HEA to supply an on-site coaching programme for up to 10 staff, and masterclass workshops for up to 20 staff under its Teaching Excellence Programme (Digital and Flexible Learning): these activities will commence in January 2017. The School also aims to have a flexible continuing professional development framework, accredited by the HEA and mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework, for implementation in September 2017.

41 The School recognises the value of continuing professional practice, and a substantial proportion (88 per cent) of full-time academic staff are involved with subject



associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies. Representative activities include participating in events held by the organisation, contributing to projects such as policy initiatives, serving on a governing committee, and promoting the organisation's objectives through public engagement and other outreach activities.

**All higher education teaching staff have relevant knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching**

42 With 97 per cent of academic staff having a doctoral-level qualification, 100 per cent having published in peer-reviewed journals and 65 per cent having been editors or members of editorial boards of such journals in the three years prior to the present application, all academic staff can be said not only to have knowledge and understanding of research but also to contribute to it. The School made a successful submission to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (see paragraph 73), as a result of which the *Times Higher Education* ranked it 24th out of 128 institutions overall and sixth for impact.

43 As a postgraduate institution the School understands research-led teaching in four related ways: (i) where students engage with research-active staff on programmes that reflect its research strengths; (ii) where they understand and can apply the process of research; (ii) where they engage in enquiry-based and research-based learning; and (iv) where their experience is informed by research and evidence regarding student learning. It describes its teaching as strongly research-led with respect to the first three strands, the fourth being an area of development. By way of example, all MSc students take a 30-credit module in Research Methods which provides the information, and are required to plan, undertake, analyse and disseminate their research when they undertake their dissertation; and many publish in peer-reviewed journals. Students who met the scrutiny team confirmed that they value the research dimension of teaching.

**Staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship**

44 The School is committed to ensuring that all staff have the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and experience to enable them to meet institutional strategic aims and objectives. The main aims of the confidential staff appraisal scheme are: to help staff plan and prioritise their work in line with the Strategic Plan and Mission; to identify areas for performance improvement and personal development; to identify goals and objectives and agree how they will be achieved; and to provide staff with a regular opportunity to discuss wider developmental issues with their line manager. Academic staff who met the scrutiny team described annual appraisal as a helpful opportunity to develop a personal development plan reflective of their strengths, weaknesses and contribution to the institution.

45 The Department of Education and Training provides academic staff with opportunities to engage with a range of pedagogic issues. All academic staff involved in teaching are expected to attend two professional development sessions in learning and teaching annually: this, however, is not strictly enforced, nor does any mechanism yet exist to monitor attendance at external events: the scrutiny team learned, however, that such a mechanism is under development and will be implemented in 2017.

**Experience of curriculum development and assessment design**

46 The scrutiny team confirms from its analysis of data on curriculum development and assessment design that both are fit for purpose. This was confirmed by academic staff, who indicated that they feel well supported; that course development is a collaborative activity; that the curriculum is informed by scholarly activity and expertise; and that any available

external reference points are used. The team particularly noted that 65 per cent of academic staff, including all designated academic leaders, have experience of curriculum and/or assessment design, and that the School has plans to work with the HEA to further develop its flexible and distance learning.

**Engagement with the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations (through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, or external reviewers)**

47 The scrutiny team confirms that 23 per cent of full-time academic staff have served as external examiners for taught programmes at other UK universities in the past three years; 34 per cent have participated in other external learning and teaching events, and 42 per cent have had the title professor conferred with the approval of the awarding body: the School is currently considering the procedures under which it will confer professorial title in the event of degree awarding powers being granted. The team, which found academic staff well qualified for their roles and increasingly emphasising pedagogic scholarship in their work, also noted that an increasing number have higher education teaching qualifications or HEA fellowships, and that students hold their teachers in high esteem.

## **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.

#### **The effectiveness of learning and teaching activities is monitored in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes**

48 The School monitors taught provision at programme and module levels to ensure suitable choice and currency of curricula, and to discuss possible new offerings. Annual reports, which promote review of learning outcomes, delivery and assessment, identification of good practice and areas for enhancement, are monitored on a continuing basis: an observation of the Quality Management Committee provided evidence of this being done in a professional manner. Annual module reviews, proposals for change, and modification activity are also considered by the Quality Management Committee. Awarding body representatives informed the scrutiny team that academic staff operate at the appropriate level, and external examiners commented positively on the suitability of learning and teaching in observed boards of studies meetings. Overall it is confirmed that the School acts effectively to monitor learning and teaching in relation to stated academic objectives and intended learning outcomes.

#### **Students are informed of the outcomes of assessments in a timely manner**

49 Students are informed of the outcomes of their assessments through the VLE or email, with the School defining timeliness as a maximum turnaround period of three weeks. Compliance is monitored by the Programmes Board on the basis of work undertaken by the Quality Unit, which also communicates with students where there is delay. Academic staff informed the scrutiny team that the expectation is clear and monitored, and students confirmed that feedback is provided in a timely fashion.

#### **Constructive and developmental feedback is given to students on their performance**

50 Different approaches are taken to providing feedback, which is, however, always designed to assess achievement and to support future learning. Written feedback can be supplemented by personal discussion of performance, and students confirmed that feedback is of good quality, targeted and constructive. External examiners are encouraged to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of feedback provided to students, and the scrutiny team noted the generally careful manner in which they do so.

#### **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**

51 The School's Code of Practice on Student Engagement and Enhancing the Student Experience outlines mechanisms for collecting, considering and responding to student feedback deriving from national and internal surveys and questionnaires. In addition, the introduction of student-led focus groups, the outcomes of which are documented and reported to boards of studies and student staff liaison committees, has helped achieve a greater focus on student issues. Students stated, and the scrutiny team confirms, that the

School is responsive to feedback. Students particularly appreciated having access to their predecessors' feedback and the institutional response to it.

52 Student representatives sit on all committees relevant to this review. While some students questioned the effectiveness of boards of studies in following up issues identified (a topic also noted in one observation of an overall positive meeting), they stated that they particularly value their involvement in more senior quality committees and the Board of Trustees, where they are well supported and receive the same training as other trustees. Observations of meetings provided evidence that student participation is both welcomed and encouraged.

53 Students are associate members of the awarding body's Guild of Students. The School is currently considering whether to establish a formal representative body for students in the event of degree awarding powers being granted.

54 External examiner reports are considered at boards of studies, where appropriate responses and actions are identified. The scrutiny team confirms, from observation and discussion, that the School takes serious and professional account of the comments received from external examiners, monitoring responses to them on a continuing basis. Professional and industrial input is sought, with relevant external organisations and industry experts invited to contribute to shaping the academic portfolio: the School states that this helpfully complements the continuing professional involvement of academic staff. External examiners attend meetings of boards of studies in advance of examination boards to provide feedback on modules: the scrutiny team confirms that they make use of this opportunity in a manner which appropriately complements their contributions to module review meetings and the MSc Board of Examiners.

55 Prospective students are provided with information about the online application procedure as well as about their proposed year of entry, to enable them to consider the suitability of the School for them; and in some cases pre-arrival tasks are set to familiarise future students with the VLE and the anti-plagiarism software. Induction involves social events and the provision of relevant academic and administrative information supplemented by beneficial advice; in some programmes a residential trip is included, and for MSc students an early focus on possible potential dissertation topics is facilitated. In the course of the scrutiny period the School took steps to address an earlier acknowledged challenge relating to meeting the needs of some specific student categories.

### **Available learning support materials are adequate to support students in the achievement of the stated purposes of their study programmes**

56 The School provides a rich array of generic and specific learning resources, which it reviews cyclically, with the aim of achieving an integrated approach to planning and resource allocation. It is currently reducing its dependency on its awarding body through running library services and resources in-house. Library resources are subject to regular stock assessment, library inductions are provided, and a staff member has been appointed to integrate learning resources and the development of information literacy skills. Students spoke positively of the quality and availability of library resources.

57 A central unit which provides technology support for academic staff and students was described by academic staff who met the scrutiny team as a proactive and beneficial resource. Students spoke generally positively, both to the team and in an observed meeting, about the VLE specifically and learning support materials as a whole, saying also, however, that the potential of available learning technologies has yet to be fully and consistently achieved. The School is working to strengthen its use of e-learning technology to support the

delivery of distance learning programmes (see paragraph 29), focusing primarily on improving current delivery methods.

**The effectiveness of any student and staff advisory counselling services is monitored, and any resource needs arising are considered**

58 The personal tutor system for degree students, which is well-resourced and highly regarded, encourages reflection on learning and progress and discussion of personal issues possibly affecting progress. Students have access to counselling services, and a Student Experience Officer is available to advise students on a wide range of practical issues, support individuals with additional needs, and provide access to a discretionary hardship fund. Students on shorter programmes can seek support from their Director of Studies. The scrutiny team found no evidence to suggest that the quality of personal support currently available is anything other than effective.

**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**

59 Management information on student progression, achievement and support services is administered and monitored by the Academic Registry, assessment records are managed by the Quality Unit. All assessment information, including mitigating circumstances and student achievement records, is held centrally. The Mitigating Circumstances Committee supplements existing intervention strategies, giving due consideration to all relevant factors in a manner designed to achieve fairness and proportionality. Overall the team confirms, from observation, discussion and an examination of external examiner reports, that the administrative support provided for the committee structure enables relevant information to be made available across the institution as a whole, and that the involvement of non-academic support staff helps committees ensure parity and consistency in the learning environment.

**Effective and confidential mechanisms are in place to deal with all complaints regarding academic and non-academic matters**

60 Institutional procedures for dealing with student complaints are aligned with the Quality Code and build on existing arrangements for non-credit bearing awards. A staged process begins with an attempt at informal resolution, with subsequent escalation to a formal internal procedure and thence to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. The scrutiny team was told that while the School uses the outcomes of appeals and complaints to identify procedural weaknesses and enhance provision, only six appeals and no formal complaints have been received over the last three years. Students stated that they would know how to complain but also that the culture of the School is such that issues arising are in practice resolved quickly and informally.

**Staff involved with supporting the delivery of the organisation's higher education provision are given adequate opportunities for professional development**

61 The School's policy on continuous professional development aims to ensure staff are progressing professionally and maintaining professional standards. All staff are expected to attend two half-day development sessions annually, focused on learning and teaching (see paragraph 45) and to participate in a peer observation scheme as part of annual appraisal.

62 An accredited Professional Certificate in Supporting Learning is available to academic staff, postdoctoral researchers, teaching laboratory assistants, external members

of staff involved in teaching, and staff delivering non-credit bearing programmes. The School is developing a modified version of the University programme for research students who teach, which will replace the current course in the event of degree awarding powers being granted. Academic staff informed the scrutiny team that the programme is well-publicised and built into the career track scheme.

**Information that the organisation produces concerning its higher education provision is accurate and complete**

63 The School describes the Student Information System, the definitive management tool for public and internal programme and module information, as the single source of truth. Responsibility for signing-off information as accurate is assigned on the basis of knowledge of the information category involved, though overall responsibility for the System rests with the Director of Education. Students and staff, both on and off-site, are principally directed to the institutional website, respective intranets, the VLE and printed documentation for information. Internal policies and other administrative documentation are available on intranet sites, and course-related module and programme-specific information on the VLE, which, together with email, is used to communicate both practical internal information and external matters of relevance and interest. Academic and student support staff confirmed that procedural changes are communicated in committees, meetings, and electronically, and that information about quality assurance is readily available on the staff intranet.

**Equality of opportunity is sought and achieved in the organisation's activities**

64 The School has been awarded bronze Athena Swan status. Its Equal Opportunities Committee is responsible for producing an annual report on diversity and equality of opportunity, which includes demographic trends in ethnicity, religion and belief, age, sexual orientation, gender and disability. Students with declared disabilities are supported by the Student Experience Officer, who coordinates support and guidance for prospective and current students. Upon disclosure of a disability, students complete a questionnaire to identify required adjustments: policy and guidance identify clear responsibilities at programme, administrative and central levels to ensure students are appropriately informed and supported.

65 Current staff development opportunities include content on diversity and inclusive teaching, and the scrutiny team confirms that the School gives high priority to providing a multicultural and multidisciplinary learning environment, and is in all respects compliant with its legal obligations.

## Detailed scrutiny of evidence supporting the additional criteria for research degree awarding powers

### Criterion 1

The organisation'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.

#### **Research degree programmes supported by staff with substantial relevant knowledge, understanding and experience of both current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area, which directly inform and enhance their supervision and teaching**

66 The School has an international reputation in research. As noted below (see paragraph 73), its entry to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (which was in collaboration with two UK universities) was successful. Its success in securing external research income is similarly so, with its 59.7 full-time equivalent academic staff winning £170.1m in the three years between 2012 and 2015 (consisting of £10.4m from the research councils, £17.4m from the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and £142.3m from other sources). This equates to around £950,000 annual research income per full-time equivalent staff member.

67 All academic staff engage in research, and publish regularly in high impact journals (an average of 18 publications per full-time equivalent staff member over the same three-year period). Most are invited to speak at international conferences (84 per cent of full-time staff); and edit or sit on editorial boards of scholarly journals (65 per cent). Academic staff are members of panels awarding research grants and of government committees, and contribute regularly to national and international guidelines and policy initiatives. Sixty six per cent of the full-time academic staff approved to supervise PhD students were entered in the Research Excellence Framework.

#### **Development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling staff involved in the delivery of research degree programmes to develop and enhance their knowledge of current research and advanced scholarship**

68 The School is committed to developing the research and scholarly practice of academic staff by robust procedures for new appointments, and strategic use of annual appraisal, line management, and the recognition and reward schemes for staff currently on a career pathway. As noted (see paragraphs 38 and 42), 97 per cent of full-time academic staff have a doctorate and the career track scheme is designed to create posts for gifted contract research staff with the potential to become high calibre academic staff. The scheme provides financial support for up to three years, with permanent appointment dependent on targets for research publications, research income, and teaching competency and commitment being met.

69 As previously noted (see paragraph 37), the appraisal system aims to provide an opportunity for all staff to review their achievements in research, administration and teaching, and their development needs with their line manager. The School is currently developing a performance management framework for all staff, and has appointed a Head of Employee Performance and Development as part of the recent restructure of Human Resources. Staff on probation are currently exempted from appraisal.

70 A light-touch and voluntary mentoring system is in place for PhD supervisors, and training is available to support mentors; primary supervisors normally have experience as a secondary or tertiary supervisor. Training for current supervisors on the current PhD regulatory framework is also provided.

**Involvement of a significant proportion (normally around a half as a minimum) of full-time academic staff as active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies**

71 The School claimed that 50 out of 57 full-time members of academic staff (88 per cent) meet this criterion. The scrutiny team accepted that these staff were engaged with such bodies, but discounted six on the ground that the evidence supplied indicated only membership and attendance rather than active and recognised contributions. Nevertheless, with 44 full-time academic staff (77 per cent) confirmed as active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies in terms of organising and chairing events, presenting research results, taking part in working groups and, at the highest level as trustees and directors, the School comfortably meets this metric test.

**A significant proportion (normally around a third as minimum) of academic staff with recent (that is, within the past three years) personal experience of research activity in UK or other 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 organisations**

72 The School claimed that 56 out of 57 academic staff (98 per cent) have recent experience of research collaboration in other UK or international research institutions. The scrutiny team accepts that this may well be so, but disqualified five staff on the ground that insufficient evidence was provided for the claim to be verified, leaving a total of 51 staff (89 per cent). Forty-three (75 per cent) have acted as PhD examiners and 13 (23 per cent) have been involved in the review of research provision. The School comfortably meets this metric test.

**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 (for example as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews)**

73 The School submitted 35 Category A staff (61 per cent of the current 57 staff) in two units of assessment in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework. Of the work submitted, 31 per cent was classified as world leading (4\*), 49 per cent as internationally excellent (3\*), 19 per cent as recognised internationally (2\*) and the remaining 1 per cent as recognised nationally (1\*). There was no unclassified work, so all the work submitted meets this criterion. The School was ranked sixth in the UK in this exercise for impact, highlighting the close relation between research activity and the School's mission. In addition, in the last three years 62 out of the 64 staff employed over that time (97 per cent) have published refereed articles. The School comfortably meets this metric test.



## Criterion 2

The organisation satisfies relevant national guidance relating to the award of research degrees.
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

### **Fulfilment of the expectations of the FHEQ in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes**

74 Postgraduate research students remain subject to awarding body regulations since delegation of responsibilities is more cautious in this area than in respect of taught provision. Senior staff of the awarding body confirmed to the team that the School implements these regulations appropriately. The satisfactory nature of the School's regulatory framework for taught provision justifies confidence that its extension to research degree programmes will be satisfactorily achieved. For this purpose the School has created a shadow framework, which provides clear statements of what is required of students and the institution. While no explicit references to the FHEQ appear in the proposed Code of Practice for Research Degrees, the scrutiny team confirms that external examiners are required to ensure alignment with it, that institutional regulations describe MSc and PhD in the differentiated terms used by the framework, and that there is every reason to anticipate that the proposed academic standards will be rigorous.

### **Fulfilment of the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

75 The School's current and proposed procedures are aligned with the Quality Code. Current students confirmed to the scrutiny team that their interests are effectively met, that they value the School's informal and participative ethos and its emphasis on teaching, which is both research led and professionally and practically focused.

76 Extensive policy documentation confirms that clear structures governing current students and developed by the School in partnership with the awarding body are in place and congruent with the expectations of the Quality Code. The School has yet to establish an authority to review and confirm degree results akin to the awarding body's Committee for the Award of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates, but is aware of, and is currently addressing, the need to do so.

77 The School's Code of Practice for Admissions is supplemented for research students, where prospective supervisors become involved prior to admission, but with the Director of Postgraduate Studies involved in all decisions. The scrutiny team was informed that all staff involved in admissions receive appropriate training. While evidence from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey shows a mixed response to School-level induction, this may be influenced by the fact that students are able to begin their studies on the first day of any month throughout the year. Although an induction day is held annually, induction is an individual matter involving primarily student and supervisor with further support from the Research Degrees Administrator. Students who met the team said they were happy with their own induction.

78 The newly adopted Procedure for the Supervision of Postgraduate Research Students constitutes an appropriate framework for action in the event of research degree awarding powers being granted. All students will have at least two supervisors with one designated primary supervisor expected to provide not less than 50 per cent of the supervision. The procedures set out comprehensive guidelines in most key areas, but do not include third party monitoring other than the availability of the Director of Postgraduate Research. Current arrangements for research to be undertaken overseas are congruent with awarding body requirements: specified stipulations are designed to ensure equivalence of

student experience and academic standards: these include clarifying the status of off-site supervisors and supervisory details, and will continue largely unchanged in the prospective regulatory framework.

79 The recent Procedure for Monitoring the Academic Progress of Postgraduate Research Students is aligned to the expectations of the Quality Code. Formal requirements will be centred on an annual submission to an independent Progress Assessment Panel; students will be registered directly to the PhD programme with no transfer from MPhil, but with a more stringent review at the end of the first year. The procedure sets out clear and fair procedures for managing occasions when a student is deemed not to be progressing, and enables the School to declare an inactive and unresponsive student 'deemed withdrawn' when evidence indicates that is appropriate

80 Students are required to attend a development programme currently offered in partnership with the awarding body. The main elements of a School programme to be offered in the event of research degree awarding powers being granted are in place.

81 The Postgraduate Research Board of Studies, which reports via the Programmes Board to the Learning and Teaching Committee, is the main focus point for programme evaluation, and its minutes show discussion of a wide range of aspects of procedures and suggested new possibilities. Student feedback is gathered by the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the results of which are widely discussed. Issues arising from external examiner reports are considered by the Programmes Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee.

82 The newly developed Procedure for Examination of a Research Degree Thesis specifies the procedure to be followed in the event of research degree awarding powers being granted. It stipulates matters which include the appointment of internal and external examiners, the circumstances in which an independent chair should be appointed, the submission of independently produced reports by examiners ahead of the viva, the conduct of the viva, determination of results and resubmission arrangements. It is aligned to the Quality Code.

83 Responsibility for establishing examination panels and for the selection and appointment of examiners rests with the Director of Postgraduate Research, whose responsibilities are clear. The School specifies the possible outcomes of examination in the regulations, and the definitions against which research degrees are to be measured are set out in the templates for external examiner reports. The prospective documents suggest, however, that students may not be made explicitly aware of the criteria against which their work will be judged. The Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees cites only general definitions of research, and, while the regulations cite the same FHEQ-based definition as the template for external examiner reports they do so only in a general introductory section and not in the section on examinations. The scrutiny team has not seen the proposed Student Handbook but notes that the current one makes no reference to these examination criteria.

84 The Procedure for Dealing with Academic Appeals (Research Programmes), which specifies the grounds for appeal and the circumstances in which appeals may not be made, are aligned with the expectations of the Quality Code.

### **Fulfilment of the expectations of research degree management frameworks**

85 The fact that the School has been selected as a regular partner by the Medical Research Council constitutes evidence that it is both familiar and compliant with such expectations.

### Criterion 3

The applicant organisation has achieved more than 30 Doctor of Philosophy conferments, awarded through partner universities in the UK.

86 The School submitted 145 students for conferment of the PhD between September 2008 and September 2016.

**QAA1959 - R4900 - Sep 17**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)