

Application for research degree awarding powers: Southampton Solent University

Scrutiny team report

November 2016

Contents

About this report.....	1
Executive summary	2
Privy Council's decision.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Review of evidence that the criteria for taught degree awarding powers continue to be met.....	6
Detailed scrutiny of evidence supporting the additional criteria for research degree awarding powers	8
Criterion 1	8
Criterion 2	14
Criterion 3	15
Annex: Update to final report.....	16

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 Southampton Solent University for the power to award 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 criteria contained in the 2004 RDAP criteria.¹

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.

¹ The TDAP and RDAP criteria are available in Appendices 1 and 2 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* at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32388/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf (PDF, 304KB).

Executive summary

The Exercise of Taught Degree Awarding Powers

The former Southampton Institute of Higher Education was granted taught degree awarding powers in 2004 under the criteria set out in the 1999 guidance, and university title the following year: at this point it adopted the title Southampton Solent University. The current application for research degree awarding powers, which it regards as a natural next step in institutional development, was timed to coincide with the 10th anniversary of university title.

As part of its examination of this application, the scrutiny team is required to confirm that the University is exercising those powers in a manner which reflects the criteria by which they were awarded. This report confirms that the team found no reason to question the manner in which it is doing so: this finding is consistent with those of the QAA Institutional Review of June 2013, which found that the University met UK expectations in all four judgement areas.

Criterion 1

The University's definition of research is original investigation undertaken to enhance knowledge and understanding, with a special emphasis on applied and professionally oriented approaches; its definition of innovation includes novel outcomes and applications from all discipline areas and enterprise. The University states that the Research Excellence Framework plays only a subsidiary role in this approach. This appears realistic, as in both the 2014 exercise and its 2008 predecessor it entered only around seven per cent of eligible staff, achieving mixed results and making only limited progress between the two exercises.

The breadth of its definition has encouraged the University to require that by 2020 all academic staff will be not only working in applied research or knowledge transfer but be at the 'forefront of their field'. Senior managers told the scrutiny team that some staff, particularly, no doubt, those who had joined the University with extensive professional experience elsewhere, are currently engaging in such activities without recognising them as such, and that the policy will be delivered by a combination of staff development and support (which have been strengthened in academic year 2015-16), the establishment of new research-related structures (notably a system of research hubs matched against the likely units of assessment for the next Research Excellence Framework, introduced in the same academic year) and a revised recruitment policy. Given both the recentness of some enabling structures (which have, however, replaced pre-existing arrangements) and the fact that of the 48 academic staff appointed in academic year 2015-16 only 56 per cent have a doctoral qualification, the scrutiny team cannot say with certainty that this aim is achievable, but it is certainly ambitious.

The University is committed to increasing its external research funding. To this end it has established, again in academic year 2015-16, a Research and Innovation Office. This has been associated with a significant increase in funding (as broadly defined to include innovation and consultancy as well as research income) from £568,799 in academic year 2012-13 to £1,363,962 in academic year 2015-16. Of this latter figure, 59 per cent is from research, as opposed to 17 per cent from innovation and 24 per cent from consultancy.

The University acknowledges that research activity is not evenly spread, and has sought to implement its universal engagement policy by requiring all schools to promote research and supervise research students, and supporting them in doing so by establishing, again in academic year 2015-16, a system of programme group leaders for research and innovation in each school (under the former faculty system this responsibility had fallen to associate deans enhancement). It acknowledges that, at 67, its cohort of experienced supervisors is modest and requires supplementation by external supervisors.

It will by now be clear that the scrutiny was undertaken at a time of considerable development of the University's research and research degree management, and that the scrutiny team is unable, therefore, to provide a full evaluation of the effectiveness of all structures in place.

The scrutiny team undertook a detailed analysis of the University's claims in respect of the three metric tests. As ACDAP is aware, the population involved in each test is subtly, though significantly, different, and in this case the team's conclusions are not wholly clear-cut and necessitate ACDAP making an eligibility judgement in each case.

Metric Test 1 requires a minimum of around half of (all) full-time academic staff to be active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies: the University claims a figure of 50.1 per cent. The scrutiny team confirms the accuracy and integrity of the institutional analysis, but notes that for the metric to be met it is necessary for ACDAP to define applying for a fellowship of the Higher Education Academy as an active and recognised contribution to a relevant professional body.

Metric Test 2 requires a minimum of around one-third of all academic staff to have recent experience of research activity in another university: the examples given are acting as external examiners for research degrees, serving as validation/review panel members, or contributing to collaborative research projects with other organisations. The University claimed initially that 36.5 per cent of such staff meet this test, a figure subsequently adjusted by the scrutiny team to 35.7 per cent. This includes 18.5 full-time equivalent staff who are, or have recently been, both reading for a doctoral degree at another institution and, in addition to that, engaging in collaborative research with members of academic staff of that same institution.

Metric Test 3 requires a minimum of around one-third of those academic staff who are engaged in research or advanced scholarship to demonstrate achievements recognised by the wider academic community as being of national and/or international standing (for example as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews): it is, therefore, a test of research quality. The University acknowledges that its record in the most obvious peer review activity, the Research Excellence Framework, falls well short, but also that this is not a sound or appropriate test. Nevertheless, it identifies 67 per cent of academic staff as engaged in some form of research or advanced scholarship. This includes 34.7 per cent who have published peer-reviewed journal articles in the last three years and 18.5 per cent who have served as editors or members of editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals. The scrutiny team confirms that if the argument that the Research Excellence Framework should be ignored in the context of this metric measure is accepted, and that publishing in, and engagement with, a peer-reviewed journal are acceptable proxy measures, the University is justified in claiming that it meets this measure.

Criterion 2

The Research Degrees Committee functions conscientiously and effectively. While the current Research Degree Regulations are subject to the requirements of the awarding body, the draft Regulations in place in the event of the grant of research degree awarding powers are, like the present ones, fully aligned with all relevant external expectations.

The University participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, which confirms the overall satisfaction of students with the management of their programme and the supervision and support they receive, but shows them less satisfied with aspects of the overall research environment in which they work.

The University has no research degree students attracting Research Council funding, but supports 10 co-funded scholarships in partnerships with organisations in the city and beyond. Its training programme, which is closely aligned with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, has drawn positive comment from an awarding body review conducted in 2014, and appears fit for purpose.

Criterion 3

Since 1993 the University has recommended 172 PhD students to the awarding body for the conferment of their degree.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant Southampton Solent University 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 research degree awarding powers (RDAP) by Southampton Solent University (the University).

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in September 2015, when the Committee agreed to proceed to detailed scrutiny. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Professor Malcolm Cook and Professor Diane Meehan; Ms Sarah Crook (student); and Ms Carole Reid (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Professor Robert Harris, Assistant Director.

The detailed scrutiny began in October 2015 with a preliminary visit by the Assistant Director, culminating in a report to ACDAP in November 2016. 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.

ACDAP's consideration of the final report led to agreement that there was evidence to demonstrate that two of the three criteria (criterion 2 and criterion 3) were met but that several elements of the evidence base in support of criterion 1 required further development and subsequent verification. ACDAP's consideration of the final report led to the decision to place the application into abeyance.

Following a formal request from the university, ACDAP agreed in February 2017 that the detailed scrutiny of the application could be reactivated and a scrutiny team was appointed to visit the university and complete the detailed scrutiny. The team's update to the final report (see Annex) was considered by ACDAP at its meeting in May 2017.

Review of evidence that the criteria for taught degree awarding powers continue to be met

In seeking RDAP, an applicant must have first secured taught degree awarding powers (TDAP), demonstrating that it continues to satisfy the criteria governing the grant of TDAP and exercises appropriate stewardship of such powers. The scrutiny team's findings are as follows.

Southampton Solent University was granted TDAP in 2004 (as Southampton Institute), meeting the criteria set out in the 1999 guidance.

A Governance and academic management

The University is a well-managed institution, and the scrutiny team confirms, from documentary study, discussion with managers, staff of all levels and students, and from observations of meetings, that governance (led by the Board of Governors), the executive system (led by the Vice-Chancellor, in post since 2014) and the deliberative structure operate cohesively and effectively. Meetings function in an efficient and generally inclusive manner, with excellent paperwork, competent chairing and (in most cases) members willingly participating in discussion. An annual summary paper is provided for the Board of Governors as confirmation that the institution is performing well, and the scrutiny team confirms that the organisational structure for taught provision is working effectively.

In August 2015, the University moved from a three-faculty to a six-school structure. The Academic Board has overall responsibility for Academic Standards, delegating some powers to the Academic Quality Committee. This Committee was observed twice by members of the scrutiny team, who describe the meetings positively, though the team noted that research matters fall outside its terms of reference. Observations of other committees similarly demonstrated a carefully managed structure, excellent paperwork, effective chairing and, on the whole, wide participation. Annual monitoring and periodic academic review are effective, and student feedback is collected and addressed.

The University's financial situation appears secure, with returns to the Higher Education Funding Council for England showing a surplus of income over expenditure ranging from £7.697 million in 2012-13 to a forecast of £7.550 million in 2017-18. The annual accountability returns 2014-15 presented to the Board of Governors in February 2016 showed a surplus of £12.7 million, with investments and cash reserves increasing by £8.6 million as a result of the surplus generated for the year. The great majority of income at the present time results from undergraduate fee income: in 2013-14, for example, this constituted £56.291 million (or 56 per cent of the total), while income from research grants and contracts totalled £293,000 (less than 0.3 per cent of the total, though in academic year 2015-16 this increased significantly (see paragraph 6).

B Academic standards and quality assurance

The outcome of QAA's Institutional Review of the University in 2013 was positive, with UK expectations being met in all four judgement areas. Three features of good practice were identified (relating, in brief, to employability initiatives, student support, and strategic enhancement of student learning) and three recommendations of a technical rather than fundamental kind were made (relating, again in brief, to issues about nomenclature and advice-giving in respect of an activity with limited scope, and making external examiner reports available to students). These matters have been addressed in full.

C Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

The University considered the results of the 2015 National Student Survey, which yielded an overall satisfaction score of 82 per cent (described as its best score) to be generally positive. Nevertheless, in spite of putting measures in place to engage with the data and improve performance, the 2016 result saw a one per cent decline in overall satisfaction (though not in all areas which it considers key to academic quality), placing the University at 138 out of 160 entrants.

In terms of research activity, the University's Strategic Plan states that all academic staff 'will be involved in applied research or knowledge transfer by 2020, working at the forefront of their field': the scrutiny team's comments on the realism of this policy appear later (see paragraphs 2 and 8). The scrutiny team confirms that the University distinguishes between research and knowledge transfer; that its approach to research emphasises application rather than abstract theory; and that, while around one-third of present academic staff are defined as non-active in research, this is somewhat mitigated by the University's considerable engagement in third-stream activity.

D The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

No major issues of concern arise in respect of taught provision; the University is exercising taught degree awarding powers with care and concern, and in a manner aligned with all relevant external expectations. The scrutiny team considers it reasonable to assume that, in the event of research degree awarding powers being granted, the same care and concern would be evident in the University's administration of research degrees.

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

1 The University's definition of research is original investigation undertaken to enhance knowledge and understanding, with a special emphasis on applied and professionally oriented approaches. It defines innovation as including novel outcomes and applications from all discipline areas and enterprise, thereby reinforcing the applied nature of the research being undertaken, on what it describes as a 'research-innovation continuum'.

2 The University's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 includes Research and Innovation as one of six priorities, setting out the ambition to be a 'research-active institution committed to research-informed teaching and innovation based on new knowledge and enterprise'. In doing so it signals an intention to make a step change, with all academic staff not only being involved in applied research or knowledge transfer by 2020, but also working at the 'forefront of their field'. When the scrutiny team explored the feasibility of this, given that, at the time of the application, around one third of staff were defined as non-active in research, the University emphasised the broad-based nature of its definition and the fact that not all academic staff would be expected to engage in research leading to a Research Excellence Framework submission. Senior staff also believe that some staff, particularly those with extensive professional experience elsewhere, are engaging in such activities without recognising them as such; and the scrutiny team was told by more junior academic staff that, the institutional focus on research being more formal than hitherto, the University is on track to meet its objective. While the University also sees the appointment of well-qualified research-active staff as vacancies occur as contributing to meeting its objective, of the 48 staff appointed in academic year 2015-16, 27 (56 per cent) had a doctoral qualification on appointment. Since nine of the 38 (24 per cent) academic staff who left in the same year also had such a qualification, the net increase in doctoral-level academic staff was 18.

3 Institutional plans for achieving its research ambitions are set out in the University's Research and Innovation Sub-Strategy, approved by the Board of Governors in August 2015, around the same time that the present application was made. The Research and Innovation Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who exercises strategic responsibility for research, monitors the achievement of this Sub-Strategy: a review of progress against its eight key objectives reported to the Research and Innovation Committee in June 2016 provides the basis of the 2015-16 Annual Report to the Academic Board. This Report confirms a continuing commitment to improving staff (and student) engagement with, and outputs from, research and innovation: the achievements noted included establishing a Research and Innovation Office; establishing and developing four research and innovation hubs; appointing a Professor of Research Informed Teaching; identifying a Public Engagement Champion; further developing the current rather limited PhD supervisory capacity; and increasing both the number of bids for external research and innovation funding submitted and the amount of external income deriving therefrom.

4 In its application, the University describes its submission to the Research Excellence Framework as reflecting the emergence of newer research areas alongside well-established ones, but in discussion it was acknowledged that, while the 2014 outcomes had shown a small improvement, the results had been disappointing for at least one subject area. The scrutiny team takes the view that progress has been marginal. In 2008 the University submitted 31.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff (seven per cent of those eligible) to three units of assessment; in 2014 it submitted 35.55 FTE staff (also seven per cent of those eligible) to four units of assessment, of which two were basically the same as in 2008. One unit entered in 2008 was dropped in 2014 and two new units were entered. In 2008 the modal result was 2* in one unit and 1* in two units; in 2014 the modes were 2* and 1* in two units each. In terms of 4* scores (world-leading), in 2008 two of the three units scored five per cent (the third failed to score); in 2014 one unit scored five per cent, one scored three per cent and two units failed to score. At the other end of the scale, in both exercises all units contained unclassified scores (below national recognition): in 2008 the range of unclassified scores was 25 per cent to 10 per cent; in 2014 it was 21 per cent to 10 per cent. Further reference is made to these scores in relation to the metric tests later in this report (see paragraphs 25 and 27).

5 The aims of improving performance in the next Research Excellence Framework and enhancing the University's research league table position are set out in the Research and Innovation Sub-Strategy. This aims to build a strong submission in 'at least' six units of assessment. The University has begun its preparations, and has, following a nine-month consultation period, identified the units definitely to be involved, three of which replicate those submitted in 2014.

6 While the amount of research and innovation income remains modest, the appointment of an External Bids and Contracts Manager in the Research and Innovation Office has been associated with an increase in external research and innovation funding in academic year 2015-16, and academic staff commented positively on the support for making bids now available. The University is aware of the importance of increasing its research income. Total external research, innovation and consultancy income for 2012-13 was £568,799 (£152,219 from research, £0 from innovation and £416,580 from consultancy); for 2013-14 it was £804,386 (£321,956 from research and £482,830 from consultancy); for 2014-15 £715,749 (£157,087 from research and £558,662 from consultancy); and for 2015-16 (the first year in which innovation and consultancy were differentiated) it was £1,363,962 (£808,333 from research, £225,893 from innovation and £329,736 from consultancy, with a further eight major and 12 minor bids in place or awaiting outcomes). The success rate of bids made in academic year 2015-16 was 41 per cent, ranging from 80 per cent for bids made to UK industries through 44 per cent (UK Government), 37 per cent (UK Charities) to 33 per cent (European Union governments). Unsuccessful bids were made to Research Councils UK, the Royal Society and the British Academy. Comparative figures for previous years have not been maintained but are likely to be lower.

7 The University aims to expose all students to research, and provide opportunities for them to be involved in it on a regular basis. The means of doing so currently include an annual Research and Innovation Conference, which encourages presentations from any students on research undertaken through their studies (and was extended to two days in academic year 2015-16); the appointment of a Professor of Research Informed Teaching, to support staff in this developing activity; and establishing an undergraduate research internship scheme to offer undergraduates summer research internships in academic research.

8 The University acknowledges that some academic staff, if they are to be working at the forefront of their field in applied research or knowledge transfer by 2020, will require support to become so: the scrutiny team shares this view. At the time of the application,

around one-third of the curricula vitae submitted were from staff with doctoral level qualifications. As in paragraph 2), during academic year 2015-16, 31 academic staff (nine with a doctoral qualification) left the University and 48 new staff joined, (27 with a doctoral qualification). Existing staff are encouraged to read for a doctoral degree, and 42 academic staff are currently doing so, either at the University or elsewhere. The 20 academic staff reading for a doctoral degree at the University account for 29.4 per cent of the current research student population.

9 The scrutiny team confirms that the University is taking steps to meet its strategic objective of research development. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Research activity is not evenly spread; the University continues to attract only modest, albeit increasing, external funding; the aim of having all academic staff working at the forefront of their field in applied research or knowledge transfer by 2020 is very ambitious; and, in spite of criteria designed to ensure that PhD supervisors are suitably qualified and active researchers, evidence exists of insufficient internal supervisory capacity in some areas and, in consequence, of some continuing reliance on external supervisors (see paragraph 16).

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

10 At the time of the application, the University professoriate comprised 23 professors and 22 associate professors, with 16 emeritus professors, all of whom are expected to mentor and support colleagues at an earlier stage of their research careers and research students. Fifteen of the 16 emeriti are retired, the sixteenth is employed as a research fellow on a fractional contract to cover ongoing doctoral supervision. The fact that the academic staff contract includes a requirement for staff to engage in research and scholarly activity was well understood, albeit that until recently this requirement has not invariably been strictly enforced. Research and scholarly activity are included in the annual performance and development review scheme, where achievements are assessed and objectives set. A spreadsheet is compiled in each case, recording research outputs, contributions to external associations, research activity in other UK and international universities, and collaborative research. Performance and development review is underpinned by a scheme in which academic staff have monthly meetings with line managers to set and monitor eight objectives, of which one is research.

11 While the University acknowledges that some schools are more established in research than others, the priority afforded establishing a strong focus for research and innovation in each school means that all schools are expected to promote research and supervise research students. In support of this priority, to replace the former faculty-based system in academic year 2015-16 each school appointed a programme group leader for research and innovation with specific responsibility for promoting these activities and serving on the Research and Innovation Committee. It would, however, be premature to assess their impact.

12 Cross-institutional and interdisciplinary research is supported through the four research and innovation hubs created in the last academic year from the former 12 faculty-based research clusters established in 2008 as part of the University's Research and Enterprise Strategy. The hubs (Creative and Digital Industries; Sport, Health and Wellbeing; Business and Society; and Maritime, Technology and Environment) are overseen by advisory committees consisting of internal staff and students, and external members (predominantly from relevant industries). Each hub has a champion, who also sits on the Research and Innovation Committee. Hub activities have included training and development and research seminars involving both staff and students, and inaugural meetings of advisory panels have taken place to identify priority areas and develop strategy. With the next

Research Excellence Framework in mind, the hubs are linked to likely units of assessment: the University describe them as encouraging staff to engage in research and as supporting the development of its research culture. They have been well-attended and appear to have served as an effective introduction to research activity for academic staff new to research or lacking confidence. They have not, however, been set targets against which ambitions can be measured, and the recentness of their introduction in their present manifestation again renders assessment premature.

13 The Researcher Development Programme is based on the Vitae National Researcher Development Framework and guided by the Research and Innovation Strategy. It hosted or promoted 84 sessions between September 2015 and May 2016, including 42 hub events involving 1,183 attenders. Attendance at conferences and events is encouraged and supported financially, and all staff are timetabled to allow one day a week for research.

14 The University's Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Fund offers annual opportunities to bid for small (<£10,000) awards which pump prime projects with the potential to attract external funding, support staff seeking to work with a social enterprise or charity, or aim to accelerate the impact of knowledge exchange. In academic year 2014-15, 40 awards were made with total funding of £159,771: this increased to £164,585 in academic year 2015-16.

15 The University acknowledges that its cohort of experienced supervisors is modest: at the time of the application the number totalled 67. The awarding body requires a minimum of two completions in each supervisory team, and that potential supervisors have a doctorate and are active and experienced researchers. Supervisory arrangements are subject to approval by the Research Degrees Committee, which ensures that supervisors have attended, or are committed to attending, the supervisor training programme. This programme also provides continuing professional development opportunities for existing supervisors.

16 The University acknowledges some difficulty in forming internal supervisory teams in some areas, training 13 new supervisors in academic year 2015-16, with a further nine expected to have completed by the end of that year. The number of trained supervisors currently stands at 73 full-time and eight part-time staff, who are supplemented by external supervisors as necessary. External supervisors are normally one of a team of three, though in exceptional circumstances (for example where a supervisor has left the University and no qualified substitute is available) this may reduce to two. In the three years up to the time of this application, the University had made use of 23 external supervisors (25.5 per cent per cent of the total of 90), of which six were former members of staff who had continued to supervise after leaving, and eight had either completed their supervisory duties or are scheduled to have done so before the end of academic year 2016-17.

17 The title associate or full professor is conferred on the basis of, respectively, significant or outstanding achievements. In academic year 2015-16, five full and 10 associate professorial titles were conferred. The scheme, for which an appropriate decision-making procedure and structure are in place, involves an action plan outlining the applicant's future contribution to advancing the interests of the University: this forms the basis of annual review and objective setting. A number of career grade professorial roles were introduced in academic year 2015-16 to strengthen the professoriate's research leadership role: again, however, assessing the effectiveness of this decision would be premature.

18 Staff development in respect of research and innovation is supported by the Researcher Development Programme, hub activities, support for doctoral study, the revised professional development and review system, promotion opportunities and attendance at conferences and other events. The Supervisor Development Programme, developed in

2010, continues to develop, as do the additional expectations visited upon members of the professoriate.

Metric measures

19 The scrutiny team was provided with the curricula vitae of the full-time and part-time staff included in the claim that the metric criteria have been met. This constituted a total of 320 vitae drawn from a population of 361 full-time and 41 part-time academic staff in post at the time (381.5 full-time equivalents and the base figure used). Many of the vitae were in a standard format reflecting the headings of the criteria on which the application is based, with the specific metrics helpfully flagged. The University's analysis against the metric measures was, overall, reliable.

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

20 The University states that 181 (50.1 per cent) of full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to professional, pedagogic and discipline-specific bodies. This includes membership of committees, boards, working groups and review panels, organising and participating in events and other activities associated with them. 29 (16 per cent of the 181) of such staff were included on the basis of recent engagement with the Higher Education Academy, for example applying for a fellowship. The scrutiny team was able to validate the University's claim from the vitae provided.

21 While this criterion involves a measure of subjectivity in relation to the terms 'active and recognised' and the University refers to professional, pedagogic and discipline-specific bodies rather than subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies, the scrutiny team accepts that it has endeavoured to include only academic staff who provided evidence of active and recent engagement. Meeting the threshold is, however, dependent on ACDAP accepting an application for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy as an 'active and recognised contribution' to (in this case) a relevant professional body. On this basis, the University narrowly meets the metric criterion: if the 29 staff whose inclusion derives from recent engagement with the Higher Education Academy are excluded, however, with 42.1 per cent of staff meeting the criterion the University falls short.

A significant proportion (normally around a third as minimum) of academic staff with recent (i.e. 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

22 The University claimed that over one-third of academic staff were actively involved in external research collaboration and that, overall, 139.5 FTE staff (36.5 per cent) met the metric test. Of these, 127.5 FTE staff (33.4 per cent) were cited as having undertaken collaborative research with colleagues in another UK or overseas higher education institution, 21 FTE staff (5.5 per cent) as having contributed to the approval or review of research or research supervisory provision, and 16.5 FTE staff (4.3 per cent) as having experience of externally examining research degrees.

23 When the scrutiny team examined these claims, the team noted that the data included 21.5 FTE staff whose collaborative research appeared to arise wholly or predominantly from their current and previous PhD study elsewhere. Further investigation established, however, that 14.5 staff were currently registered for PhDs in other institutions and the remaining seven had been awarded the PhD already. When the scrutiny team pointed out that 21.5 FTE staff were collaborating with the institutions at which they were

undertaking or had undertaken their doctoral studies rather than elsewhere, the University explained that they had been included because, as well as undertaking PhD study, they were engaged in collaborative research with staff of the institution concerned. The University further explained that its interpretation of collaboration included engagement which had yet to produce a published output: this explains the omission from metric test three of eight of these staff, some of whom were included in the 14.5 FTE currently reading for their degree and the remainder in the seven FTE who had already graduated.

24 The University acknowledged, on the basis of further detailed scrutiny, that in two cases there was no reliable evidence of collaboration, and in a third the activity fell outside the three-year eligibility boundary. Even without these three staff, however, subject to ACDAP accepting the inclusion of staff (a) whose collaborative research activity, while additional to their doctoral study nonetheless relates to it, and (b) whose collaborative research does not have an output, with 35.7 per cent of staff so involved the University meets the metric test. It does so overwhelmingly through research-related activities, and not through external examining or panel membership for research degree provision.

A significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its academic staff who are engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship can demonstrate achievements that are recognised by the wider academic community to be of national and/or international standing (e.g. as indicated by authoritative external peer reviews)

25 While the definitive test of the University's success in meeting this metric measure might appear to be the number and quality of its submissions to the Research Excellence Framework (as 'an authoritative external peer review') judged worthy of classification (see paragraph 4), the University has consistently argued that its submission was small for strategic reasons, and is a poor barometer of institutional research-related activity. Indeed, if this test were to be applied, only 35.55 full-time equivalent staff (13.9 per cent of staff defined as research-active) would be candidates for consideration, and since the proportion of unclassified entries in the four units entered was 21 per cent, 16 per cent, 10 per cent and 19 per cent, the proportion whose work was confirmed as being of at least national standing would be well below this.

26 The University identifies 256 FTE academic staff (67 per cent) as engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship: the scrutiny team validated this from the vitae provided. There was, however, considerable variation in the evidence provided, which, while it included some very established researchers with sustained and relevant research activity, included also staff with one or two outputs. Of the 256 FTE staff, 89 FTE (34.7 per cent) have published articles in peer-reviewed journals (the peer review status of these journals has been confirmed internally); 171 FTE (66.7 per cent) have delivered invited or keynote conference papers or public lectures; 166 FTE (64.8 per cent) have published or produced other public or professional outputs; 42 FTE (16.4 per cent) have organised national or international conferences; and 47.5 FTE (18.5 per cent) have been editors or members of editorial boards of peer-reviewed journals.

27 If the argument that the Research Excellence Framework should be ignored in the context of this metric measure is accepted, while the reputational status of some of the above activities may be disputed, the publication rate (34.7 per cent) and editorial activities (18.5 per cent) in peer-reviewed journals (those concerned are not entirely coterminous) confirm that justification exists for the claim that this metric test is met.

Criterion 2

The organisation satisfies relevant national guidance relating to the award of research degrees.
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Fulfilment of the expectations of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter A1) in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes

28 Responsibility for ensuring the alignment of research degrees with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* at research degree level lies with the awarding body. The QAA Institutional Review and the awarding body's Partnership Review, both undertaken in 2013, confirm that the University was fulfilling its responsibilities in this respect.

29 Observations of the Research Degrees Committee (at which an awarding body representative was in attendance) confirm that this Committee is functioning in line with its terms of reference. The meetings particularly showed thorough consideration being given to research student admission, progression and attainment. Nevertheless, the Committee also reviews thesis proposals from prospective research students to confirm both the feasibility of the research project and the expertise of the proposed supervisors; and the fact that a considerable proportion of such proposals were referred for resubmission after having been approved in principle by prospective supervisors, while confirming the Committee's scrupulous nature of its conduct, also raises questions about supervisory rigour.

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

30 The University states in its application that its procedures for preparing candidates for postgraduate research awards are aligned with Expectation B11 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code): this again was confirmed by the 2013 Partnership and Institutional Reviews, the reports of which refer, for example, to the satisfactory nature of student representation, supervisory arrangements, progress monitoring and examining arrangements. Procedures for handling cases of possible academic misconduct are aligned with sector-wide practice, including subjecting all applications to formal ethics approval. The scrutiny team also confirms that the draft regulations for implementation in the event of the grant of research degree awarding powers are fit for purpose.

31 The 2013 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey revealed levels of satisfaction overall above the sector average, though satisfaction with the research culture stood at 54.8 per cent against a sector norm of 64 per cent. The most recent (2015) survey also showed high levels of student satisfaction with the supervisory relationship (94 per cent against a sector-weighted average of 86 per cent), research skills (97 per cent against a sector-weighted average of 86 per cent) and opportunities to become involved in the extra-departmental research community (70 per cent against a sector-weighted average of 60 per cent). Overall levels of student satisfaction (91 per cent in 2015) are higher than the sector-weighted average of 82 per cent. Nevertheless, satisfaction with the research culture fell further (to 52 per cent against a sector-weighted average at 64 per cent), and satisfaction with teaching stood at 47 per cent against a sector-weighted average of 56 per cent. The lowest score, however, related to opportunities to discuss research with other students: 33 per cent against a sector-weighted average of 62 per cent. The University promotes the hub system as playing a future role in addressing the challenges associated with these data, and research students told the scrutiny team that they expected the hubs to be a further site in which to discuss their work. Nevertheless, as noted in paragraph 12, the recentness of their introduction makes it impossible for the effectiveness of this to be assessed.

32 The University draws attention to a Research Student Development Day in 2014, which attracted positive feedback from those who attended (though this was less than one-third of the total research student cohort). As noted in paragraph 7, students also have the opportunity to present their work at the Research and Innovation Conference. While the scrutiny team confirms that this constitutes evidence of concrete steps being taken to improve the research culture, it notes that only a few presentations were made by students who were not also members of academic staff.

33 The University's Code of Practice for Research Students specifies the maximum period for doctoral study as 48 months full-time and 96 months part-time: this is aligned with awarding body regulations. The scrutiny team, noting that a number of students take longer than this to complete, explored the reasons for this with the University, which reported that it had, in partnership with the awarding body, made monitoring more robust to ensure earlier interventions as necessary. The issue was explained as arising in part from the high proportion of part-time students, where non-completion rates are higher nationally. Staff who met the team stated that the University had strengthened the transfer procedure from MPhil to PhD, and that the awarding body acknowledged the challenges faced by the University given the demography of its research student population.

34 Of the University's 15 PhD students to have graduated over the last three years, none passed first time with no corrections, three passed with minor corrections, nine with major corrections, and three following referral. The University, acknowledging that this is less than satisfactory, anticipates that the revised transfer procedure, which is monitored by the Research Degrees Committee and includes increasing the number of independent assessors on transfer panels from one to two, will improve its first-time pass rate.

Fulfilment of the expectations of research degree management frameworks issued by relevant research councils, funding bodies and professional/statutory bodies

35 The University has no research degree students attracting Research Council funding, though it supports 10 co-funded scholarships in partnership with organisations in the city and beyond. The Postgraduate Certificate in Research, a mandatory programme for students unable to demonstrate equivalent prior learning, was subject to an awarding body review in 2014. This praised its close alignment with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, the positive nature of external examiner comments, the impressiveness of the course team and the quality of student representation. Students confirmed the programme's usefulness to the scrutiny team.

36 Some teaching opportunities are available to doctoral students, but, as the majority are part-time, in the last three years only three students have taken the 15-credit Professional Development Unit Enhancing Learning in Higher Education, which leads to appointment as associate lecturer. This Unit, which is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework, focuses on educational theories, and learning and teaching methodologies. Its successful completion confers Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy status. .

Criterion 3

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

37 From 1993 to the present the University has recommended 172 PhD students to the awarding body for the conferment of their degree.

Annex: Update to final report

Introduction

38 Southampton Solent University's (the university) 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. A final report on the detailed scrutiny was considered by ACDAP in November 2016.

39 ACDAP's consideration of the final report led to agreement that there was evidence to demonstrate that two of the three criteria (criterion 2 and criterion 3) were met but that several elements of the evidence base in support of criterion 1 required further development and subsequent verification. ACDAP's consideration of the final report led to the decision to place the application into abeyance.

40 Following a formal request from the university, ACDAP agreed in February 2017 that the detailed scrutiny of the application could be reactivated. The university submitted its update and supporting evidence. Members of the original scrutiny team, Professor Malcolm Cook and Professor Diane Meehan, were appointed to complete the detailed scrutiny. The work of the team was coordinated by Mr Matthew Cott, on behalf of QAA.

41 The scrutiny team agreed a programme and visited the university in March 2017 to meet senior managers and other representatives from the university's research community. The team's report from the visit was shared with the university and the university was invited, if it wished, to provide a response to be considered by ACDAP alongside the report.

Structure of this report

42 This report addresses the updated evidence for each of the three metric tests in criterion 1 related to academic staffing and concludes with an evaluation of the broader update provided by the university on the implementation of key developments.

Metric test 1

43 Metric test 1 requires a minimum of around half of full-time academic staff to be active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies: the university claimed a figure of 50.1 per cent.

44 The scrutiny team's report asked ACDAP whether applying for a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) is considered as an active and recognised contribution to a relevant professional body. The Committee agreed that the criteria allows for interpretation but noted that this was the first institution to count HEA fellowship in this metric and that in principle, membership of HEA is seen as a one-off engagement, rather than active engagement, although the revised membership structure for HEA which allows for progression to Senior and Principal Fellow attempts to mitigate this for the future.

45 In relation to the point above, the Committee considered the university's response to the scrutiny team's report and noted the update of June 2016 that the measurement for metric test 1 had risen to 60.16 per cent meaning that the metric could have been met without inclusion of the 29 staff originally included on the basis of their engagement with HEA Fellowship processes. The Committee agreed it would be necessary for the updated data to be verified by the team to be assured that metric test 1 is indeed met.

46 The university provided revised figures for metric test 1 for the period up to 30 June 2016 having reviewed the data provided at the end of the original scrutiny period. As noted

above for metric test 1, in the original update of June 2016 the university claimed that 228 or 60.16 per cent of full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies. The March 2017 update provided to the scrutiny team claimed that 191 or 50.4 per cent of staff meet metric test 1. Neither the original June 2016 update nor these revised figures now include staff for whom engagement with the HEA fellowship process is the only measure for meeting the metric test.

47 The additional evidence to support the recently updated data was drawn from two sources; curricula vitae (CVs) for 49 staff appointed during 2015-16 and updated evidence relating to 22 staff, 20 of whom had been included in the original submission and two from the 2015-16 academic staff appointments. In the case of the former source of data the CVs had been provided as part of the June 2016 update but due to the timing of the update had not been annotated by the university to indicate evidence of alignment with the metric tests. As part of the March 2017 update the university provided the team with a list of those staff from the 2015-16 appointees who were claimed to meet this metric. In the case of the latter source of data the team noted that most of the supporting evidence was not new and had originally been flagged as supporting metric test 3, being predominantly conference presentations. The scrutiny team explored the reason for this and established that during the updating of the metric data the university had noted that these staff had not originally identified these activities as belonging in metric test 1 but further testing of the evidence supported their inclusion in this metric.

48 The scrutiny team also explored how the university interpreted 'active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies.' The university stated that in their view active and recognised contributions vary depending on the association and, for example, could include active membership but may also be reflected in presentations at an annual (or less regular) association conference or through other engagement with the association or society. The university also confirmed that the data provided had been verified and re-examined through conversations with staff to ensure that the engagement with the subject association, learned society or professional body met the requirements of the metric test.

49 As noted above metric test 1 requires a minimum of around half of full-time academic staff to be active and recognised contributors to subject associations, learned societies and relevant professional bodies. The university now claims that 50.4 per cent of staff meet the requirements of the metric test. The scrutiny team confirms the accuracy and integrity of the institutional analysis relating to this metric test. The metric test is met and the data no longer includes staff for whom application for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy provides the sole evidence.

Metric test 2

50 Metric test 2 requires a minimum of around one-third of all academic staff to have recent experience of research activity in another university. The university's figure of 35.7 per cent included 18.5 full-time equivalent staff who were, or had recently been, both reading for a doctoral degree at another institution and, in addition to that, claimed to be engaging in collaborative research with members of academic staff of that same institution.

51 The Committee noted (scrutiny report, paragraph 24) that the collaborative research activity, while additional to their doctoral study nonetheless related to it, and that some of this collaborative research did not as yet have an output. It was considered that the lack of evidence of research output fell short of this metric. Verification of the evidence of collaborative research would therefore be required on a case-by-case to verify that metric test 2 was met.

52 The university provided revised figures for metric test 2 for the period up to 30 June 2016, having reviewed the updated data provided at the end of the original scrutiny period. In these revised figures the university claimed that overall 151 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff (147 full-time and eight part-time staff), or 36.5 per cent of all staff meet the metric test. Of these, 140 FTE staff (33.8 per cent) were cited as having undertaken collaborative research with colleagues in another UK or overseas higher education institution, 24 FTE staff (5.8 per cent) as having contributed to the approval or review of research provision, and 20.5 FTE staff (5 per cent) as having experience of externally examining research degrees.

53 In support of its claim, and as required by ACDAP, the university has reviewed its data and provided additional information relating to this metric for a number of staff who were included in the original submission as well as staff from the 2015-16 appointees. In all cases claimed as meeting the metric test under collaborative research activity, an appropriate output or outcome has been achieved. The university also provided supporting information in relation to the other elements of this metric test namely contribution to approval or review of research or research provision and external examining of research degrees; the relatively small increase in these elements of the metric were largely due to 2015-16 staff appointments.

54 The scrutiny team can hence confirm the accuracy and integrity of the claim that 140 FTE staff (33.8 per cent) have undertaken collaborative research with colleagues in another UK or international higher education institution leading to an appropriate output or outcome. As stated in the final scrutiny report, the university meets the metric test although it does so overwhelmingly through collaborative research-related activities, and not through external examining or panel membership for research degree provision.

Metric test 3

55 Metric test 3 requires a minimum of around one-third of those academic staff who are engaged in research or advanced scholarship to demonstrate achievements recognised by the wider academic community as being of national and/or international standing.

56 The Committee noted the university's response to the scrutiny team report challenged the emphasis placed on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) results rather than the university's approach to research and innovation but confirmed performance in the REF is an achievement recognised by the wider academic community and so should be given due attention. Nonetheless, the Committee agreed that it was appropriate to look at other forms of recognition of national and/or international standing, but it was incumbent on the university to demonstrate how these other forms of recognition enabled it to meet metric test 3. The Committee agreed that satisfaction of metric test 3 had not been demonstrated.

57 In its original submission, the university identified 256 FTE academic staff (67 per cent) as engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship. In its June 2016 update the university claimed that 273 FTE (or 66 per cent) of staff are engaged in research or other forms of advanced scholarship; the updated figure includes some staff from the 2015-16 staff appointees. In its March 2017 update to the scrutiny team the university noted that providing additional verification in relation to this metric had involved the location and verification of evidence of 'authoritative external peer review' of 'institutional research-related activity'. The university also stated that the task of assembling evidence to provide independent verification of all the activity of all of the 256 FTE academic staff originally identified in this metric was extremely time-consuming so the process was halted once the metric threshold had been comfortably achieved; the university's revised claim is that 153 (56 per cent) of the 273 FTE research active staff have met this metric test with outputs that have been quality assured through authoritative peer review. Evidence was provided to the scrutiny team to support this claim. The scrutiny team also explored again with the university

how they had been assured in the original submission that the achievements met the requirements of the metric test and it was re-confirmed that the process of verification at that time had been through interviews with academic staff and validation by senior academic subject staff. In addition, the scrutiny team explored the role of the university's new database system Pure (see paragraph 62) going forward and established that as research outputs are captured in Pure they undergo a quality checking process before being made publicly available.

58 The scrutiny team confirms that the university has now provided sufficient evidence of verification of the quality of staff achievements highlighted under this metric test to meet the requirement that a minimum of around one-third of those academic staff who are engaged in research or advanced scholarship have demonstrated achievements recognised by the wider academic community as being of national and/or international standing. In future, all such research outputs will be recorded in Pure and will hence automatically undergo a quality checking process prior to being publicly available.

Key developments

59 The scrutiny team's report had drawn attention to several recent developments in the university's arrangements designed to drive and promote research activity and to achieve the university's Research and Innovation Strategy (2015-20). A number of new structures had been introduced in February 2015: the Research and Innovation Office; the four cross-institutional research hubs; the programme group leaders with key strategic responsibility for research within the schools, the postgraduate research degree co-ordinators and the research and innovation fellows based in the hubs. The team had considered it too early to comment on the impact of these initiatives. The university's update provided further evidence of the implementation and evaluation of the wider impact of these developments.

60 Following the report of *Building on Success and Learning from Experience: An independent review of the Research Excellence Framework* (July 2016), led by Lord Nicholas Stern (Stern report) and the need for all staff to be entered into a future REF, the university has responded positively, recognising now, if not before, that while the local approach was often focussed on applied research, 'academic' studies relating to such research were important and needed to be undertaken. Although the university clearly values peer review processes, staff indicated that there had been relatively limited support for engagement with the previous REF; this approach had changed after the appointment of the current Vice-Chancellor, leading to more sustained investment in research.

61 During the course of the scrutiny team's meetings participants spoke of their perspectives on the research culture of the institution and their experience of research as a significant element of day-to-day activities. This is also evidenced by continued emphasis in the annual Performance and Development Review process and by the recognition that all staff need to be involved. The appointment and work of a Professor of Research Informed Teaching has had a major influence in this area, encouraging staff whose major interest was in teaching to realise that research is an element of such work and encouraging people to adjust their emphasis and to become research active. The team formed the view that a major shift had taken place in the research culture across the institution.

62 The scrutiny team met with a group of eight post-doctoral researchers whose appointment had clearly had a significant impact. They spoke with enthusiasm about the institution, its genuine interest in research, the major role of the research hubs in fostering research across the disciplines and the care with which they were treated in the institution. The post-doctoral researchers stated that they had been attracted to the university by its emphasis on what they called 'real world research' and indeed by the nature of the research

hubs. A key objective was to seek publications in peer-reviewed journals and to seek partners across the university and beyond. The university stated that it was intended that there would be regular appointment of new post-doctoral researchers in the institution, resulting in energising research activity with a constant supply of new blood and new ideas. It became clear that while, in the earlier scrutiny, the research hubs were still finding their way, they had become a much more stable and effective resource for the facilitation of interdisciplinarity across the institution. Similarly, the introduction of the new research database 'Pure', had had a major impact on the visibility of research activity with all staff submitting their research productions, allowing individuals more easily to seek partners across the institution.

63 The scrutiny team also met a group of 'strategic leads'; the role of these leads was to run sessions within the research hubs, to develop research ideas and to ensure that the university's research strategy was being implemented in the schools. Again, there was emphasis on the usefulness of Pure and the suggestion that new staff and the post-doctoral researchers would encourage people across the university to be more active in submitting research bids. A later meeting with representatives of the professoriate clarified the expected roles of professors in the university: to write papers and bids and to perform a leadership role, mentoring colleagues and stressing the importance of research in a post-Stern world.

64 The university has recognised that external research income needs to be increased and the Research and Innovation Office has proved to be a sound investment, encouraging and supporting research activity across the institution. The university has increased the number of research bids but is also continuing to analyse the strength of any potential bids to increase the success rate of bids submitted. The university has sought major external partners both in the university sector and beyond to enhance its profile and its external income. The work of the Office was praised by the post-doctoral researchers, the strategic leads and by representatives of the professoriate.

65 The final scrutiny report indicated that the university's internal supervisory capacity was modest and required supplementation by external supervisors (final report, paragraphs 9 and 16). In 2016-17 the university has taken steps to increase its capacity by appointing four experienced supervisors with an exclusive focus on doctoral supervision and mentoring newer supervisors.

Conclusion

66 To conclude, the scrutiny team considers there is evidence that the three metric tests relating to academic staff are now met and that there has been genuine progress in the institution's research arrangements. Developments that were nascent at the time of the scrutiny have matured and are fostering energy across the institution, leading to a major shift in the university's research culture.

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