Application for Research Degree Awarding Powers: St Mary's University, Twickenham

Scrutiny Team report

September 2019

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About this report

This report reflects the findings of a team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to conduct a detailed scrutiny of an application from St Mary's University, Twickenham for the power to award research degrees.

The application was considered under criteria approved by Government in 2015. 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.

Teams produce reports following each of the engagements undertaken. The final report reflects the team's findings and is structured around the three main criteria contained in the 2015 RDAP criteria,[1] namely:

- 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.
- Criterion 2: The organisation satisfies relevant national guidance relating to the award of research degrees.
- Criterion 3: The applicant organisation has achieved more than 30 doctoral degree conferments, awarded through partner universities in the UK.

Applicants for research degree awarding powers (RDAP) must already have, and continue to satisfy the criteria for, taught degree awarding powers (TDAP).

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

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[1] The RDAP criteria are available in Annex A of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' *Taught Degree Awarding Powers and Research Degree Awarding Powers: Guidance for Higher Education Providers: Criteria and Process for applying for Taught Degree Awarding Powers and Research Degree Awarding Powers* (September 2015) at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526813/BIS-15-525-degree-awarding-powers.pdf

Executive summary

The exercise of taught degree awarding powers

The University governance and academic management committees are well prepared, managed and chaired; reporting lines between committees operate effectively and follow-up action is carefully monitored. All committees have precise and interconnected terms of reference, which are reviewed regularly and adhered to closely. Recent changes in the management structure necessitated new key strategic appointments, which have clearly strengthened the University. The Senior Management Team's approach to tackling challenging issues is characterised by a dynamic combination of care and determination. The University's strategic plan articulates its values as a series of key ambitions and targets, including the acquisition of RDAP. It also sets forth a programme of educational and physical development and establishes a clear and ambitious vision for the University.

The University is efficiently exercising its responsibilities for the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the management of academic quality, notably through Academic Board and Academic Scrutiny Committee. External examiners operate effectively in the University and their reports are carefully monitored and addressed. The University 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.

There is a comprehensive suite of policies governing the recruitment, promotion, development and reward of academic staff including a well-established teaching and learning development framework accredited by the Higher Education Academy in 2014. Research informs teaching, notably within taught master's provision and staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, well supported and engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline.

The University provides a strong, supportive learning and teaching environment, characterised by close staff-student relationships and active student engagement. The new strategic plan commits the University to the development of research and enterprise capacity, alongside a renewed emphasis on teaching excellence. The University is gradually adjusting the balance between these components as it sensitively drives the transition from being a mainly teaching-orientated provider to one in which research plays an increasingly vital role.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that St Mary's University, Twickenham continues to satisfy the criteria governing the grant of taught degree awarding powers and is exercising appropriate stewardship of such powers.

Academic staff

In its application, the University outlines a number of initiatives that would, together, help it to achieve its strategic aim of expanding its research culture. These included the appointment of senior staff in strategic roles; recruitment of research-active staff at all levels; development of research centres; the appointment of a Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Enterprise); the introduction of Associate Deans for Research and Enterprise in each faculty; the developing role of the University Research Committee; capital investment in research facilities; and the creation of a Doctoral College. During the time between the application and the end of the scrutiny, the University has made substantial progress with each of these initiatives.

The reorganisation from schools to faculties has produced tangible benefits for the quality and quantity of research output and as a result of this and the initiatives listed above, the University has achieved a step change in its research culture and activity. This is evident in the substantial growth of its research income in recent years

At the beginning of the scrutiny, the University was relying on its awarding body, Liverpool Hope University, for training PhD supervisors and for monitoring the performance of supervisory teams. During the scrutiny, the University has started to develop its own training and support for its research supervisors and has made significant progress with developing its own research degree regulations, which would be necessary were RDAP to be granted.

There are clear and unambiguous criteria for the appointment of PhD supervisors, advisers and directors of study, of which there are currently 81. Criteria for their appointment include appropriate research experience and evidence of publication or dissemination at an appropriate level; the University adheres to this policy. There is a broad spread of research collaborations with other institutions and 68 per cent of supervisors, advisers, and directors of study report external collaborations. The business of the Research Committee and Research Student Sub-Committee confirms there is a sufficient number of staff within the University with substantial relevant knowledge, understanding and experience of both current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that St Mary's University, Twickenham meets Criterion 1.

National guidance

The University's awarding bodies confirm that the University adheres to relevant national guidance. They report actions taken by the University to enhance the educational experience of postgraduate research students and reflect positively on the University's journey in developing its own independent quality assurance frameworks to secure and maintain academic standards. As at June 2019, the University has nearly completed the process of developing its own post-RDAP academic regulations.

The University has robust and established processes and policies that enable it to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The new Doctoral College provides a welcome central hub for postgraduate students. Operational management of research degrees is led with care and efficiency by the Research Services Department and prudent investments in research support services provide evidence of a strategic approach at provider level to enhancing the research infrastructure. The University response to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey outcomes demonstrates a clear commitment to enhancing the student educational experience. The University actively encourages postgraduate research students to engage in the broader research agenda but acknowledges that there is work required to further embed postgraduate research students within its growing research culture.

The Researcher Development Programme sets out a programme of skills-based workshops of considerable breadth and depth. These sessions add transferable professional skills to students' academic skillset, which is developed principally by their supervisory team. The composition of the supervisory team is tailored to the requirements of individual students and their research projects. The University has identified the need to increase its supervisory capacity in light of its stated aim to increase the number of postgraduate research degree students.

At the time of application, the University had no postgraduate research students attracting research council funding. The University is, however, very successful in attracting funding from a variety of other sources and over the last few years research-related income has

increased exponentially. Senior staff are clear that sustainability will be secured by increasing significantly the proportion of income deriving from research council funding and work in this area continues.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that St Mary's University, Twickenham meets Criterion 2.

Minimum number of doctoral degree conferments

From 1995 to the present the University has recommended 75 doctoral students to the awarding body for the conferment of their degree.

On the basis of these findings ACDAP concludes that St Mary's University, Twickenham meets Criterion 3.

Privy Council's decision

The Privy Council's decision is to grant research degree awarding powers for St Mary's University, Twickenham from 1 April 2021.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work and findings of the scrutiny team (the team) appointed by QAA to review in detail the evidence submitted in support of an application for research degree awarding powers (RDAP) by St Mary's University, Twickenham.

The application was considered by QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers (ACDAP) in May 2018, when the Committee agreed to proceed to the detailed scrutiny of the application. The team appointed to conduct the detailed scrutiny comprised Professor Jeremy Bradshaw, Professor Malcolm Cook and Mr Harry Williams (team members) and Ms Beatrice Ollerenshaw (secretary). The detailed scrutiny was managed on behalf of QAA by Dr Melinda Drowley, Coordinating Officer.

The detailed scrutiny began in June 2018, culminating in a report to ACDAP in September 2019. In the course of the scrutiny, the team read a wide range of documents presented in support of the application. The team also spoke to a range of stakeholders and observed meetings and events pertinent to the application.

Key information about St Mary's University, Twickenham

St Mary's University, Twickenham (the University) was established as a teacher training college by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee in 1850. The College was awarded taught degree awarding powers in 2006 and full university status in 2014, to become St Mary's University, Twickenham.

The mission and purpose of the University reads:

> 'We are an inclusive Catholic University seeking to develop the whole person and we empower our community to have a positive impact on the world.'

For over 20 years the University delivered validated research degrees as a designated Associated Institution of the University of Surrey. In 2013, following changes in its strategic priorities, the University of Surrey served notice to discontinue this relationship and in 2014 Liverpool Hope University became the new validating body for the University's research degrees. Under this arrangement, the University offers and delivers MPhil, PhD and EdD professional doctorates.

In 2018-19, there were 4,581.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled at the University: 3,452 FTE on undergraduate programmes and 1,048 FTE on taught postgraduate programmes. There were 110 registered research students (81.5 FTE), of whom 44 (40 per cent) were full-time and 66 (60 per cent) were part-time, 13 (6.5 FTE) of those being members of staff. Research students are distributed across the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Sport, Health and Applied Science, and a separate Institute of Theology. There are 168 full-time academic staff plus 47 on fractional contracts (215 FTE). In total 65 (39 per cent) full-time staff are internally approved to supervise doctoral degree students.

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

The University was granted taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) in 2006, meeting the criteria approved by Government in 2004.

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

A   Governance and academic management

1   The University is a mature, higher education provider with a traditional set of arrangements for governance and academic management. The Board of Governors (the Board) is responsible for the overall character and mission of the University and for the effective and efficient use of its resources. Governance responsibilities for quality assurance are delegated to the Academic Scrutiny Committee, the primary purpose of which is to scrutinise and challenge the Academic Board and the Senior Management Team (SMT) on the quality and enhancement of the academic experience and student outcomes and provide assurance to the Board. Academic Board exercises its authority as the overarching academic body of the University on the basis of a scheme of delegation from the Board. The University's major governance and academic management committees are well prepared, managed and chaired. Reporting lines between committees operate effectively and follow-up action is carefully monitored. All committees have precise and interconnected terms of reference which are reviewed regularly and adhered to closely.

2   When the University achieved university status in 2014, the new Vice-Chancellor initiated an extensive review of the management structure of the University, drawing on external expertise. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was consequently redefined to comprise the Vice-Chancellor; three Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs) for Academic Strategy, Global Engagement, and Research and Enterprise, respectively; the Chief Operating Officer and the Senior Director of People. This change necessitated the making of key strategic appointments, which have clearly strengthened the University, as evidenced by the manner in which the University is preparing for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF), recognising and addressing weaknesses that were not identified in the past (see paragraphs 36-38). SMT was also expanded and now includes SLT plus Deans of Faculty and the Head of the Institute of Theology, the Academic Secretary, the Chief Information Officer and the Director of Finance. SMT's approach to tackling challenging issues is characterised by a dynamic combination of care and determination. This was particularly apparent in the meetings of Academic Board and Academic Scrutiny Committee in which major papers, concerning, for example, the National Student Survey (NSS), UCAS data and results from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey are discussed and analysed.

3   In 2016, the Board approved and launched the University's strategic plan for 2016-25, titled *Vision 2025*, which articulates the University's values as a series of key ambitions and targets, including the acquisition of RDAP. It also sets forth a programme of educational and physical development and establishes a clear and ambitious vision for the University. The redefined SLT and SMT, which are now well embedded and functioning effectively and coherently, have made a significant contribution to the development of *Vision 2025*, facilitating its ongoing implementation. SMT, which is a coherent group, is provided with high quality paperwork and is prepared to invest time debating important issues such as NSS outcomes, global engagement, the financial state of the University, the Workload Planning Model, the effectiveness of the University's programmes and its employability strategy.

4　　　　The University 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.

B　　　　Academic standards and quality assurance

5　　　　In 2015, the Vice-Chancellor initiated an in-depth review of the University's committee structure, focusing particularly on the academic side, to ensure that it was fit for purpose. Under the new arrangements, Academic Board, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, discharges its responsibilities effectively, efficiently and productively. Two equally well managed subcommittees report to Academic Board: Academic Development Committee and University Research Committee (URC). URC has two subcommittees and one working group: Research Student Sub-Committee; Research Ethics Sub-Committee; and REF Strategy Group.

6　　　　The University has a robust procedure for the appointment of external examiners and a secure and carefully managed system for dealing with their reports, which are generally positive. Responses to the reports by subject leads, that were reviewed by the team, are detailed and comprehensive.

7　　　　In 2015, QAA conducted a Higher Education Review (HER), which found that the University required improvement in relation to the enhancement of learning opportunities. The University duly produced an action plan, progress reports and supporting documentation addressing the recommendations. The process culminated in the QAA Board deciding sufficient progress had been made and the previous negative judgement was formally amended. The University is continuing to maintain the progress made and is efficiently exercising its responsibilities for the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the management of academic quality, notably through Academic Board and Academic Scrutiny Committee.

C　　　　Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of academic staff

8　　　　The University has a comprehensive suite of policies governing the recruitment, promotion, development and reward of academic staff including a well-established teaching and learning development framework accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2014. The University recognises the importance of scholarship and research for academic staff, and procedures have been revised in recent years to encourage greater engagement. A new Workload Planning Model, aligned with new academic promotion criteria, is currently being implemented. It identifies several career paths differentiated by the relative emphases placed by individual staff on three areas: teaching and scholarship; research; and enterprise and innovation. There is convincing evidence that research informs teaching, notably within taught master's provision and that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, well supported and engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline.

D　　　　The environment supporting the delivery of taught higher education programmes

9　　　　There is compelling evidence that the University provides a strong, supportive learning and teaching environment, characterised by close staff-student relationships and active student engagement. The first commitment in *Vision 2025* is to the investment of £100m in students and staff, including through the development of improved facilities for learning and research, new accommodation and sports grounds. The University's Teaching Excellence Framework Statement notes that most students achieve excellent outcomes, with high proportions of them continuing with their studies and progressing to employment and

further study, with highly skilled employment being particularly notable. NSS results record an overall satisfaction rate of 88 per cent. The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and annual internal surveys of postgraduate research (PGR) students show that PGR students are generally satisfied with their overall experience, with a score of 89 per cent.

10   *Vision 2025* commits the University to a renewed emphasis on teaching excellence alongside the development of research and enterprise capacity. During the scrutiny, the team noted a gradual adjustment in the balance between these components as the University sensitively drives the transition from being a mainly teaching-orientated provider to one in which research plays an increasingly vital role. External examiners are generally supportive in their reports, commenting positively on teaching, assessment and learning resources. Departments respond constructively to any criticisms made. The University acted to address lower levels of satisfaction with resources and facilities and opportunities for developing research skills. Of major significance was the creation of the Doctoral College, to which all PGR students belong and which provides study facilities and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Detailed scrutiny against research degree awarding powers criteria

Academic staff

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.

Policies and procedures relating to research and advanced scholarship are understood and applied consistently both by those involved in the delivery of research degrees and, where appropriate, by the students so involved

11   *Vision 2025* sets out clearly the University's plans to develop its research and enterprise capacity, to expand doctoral provision, to improve its performance in the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise, and specifically states its aim to secure RDAP by the end of 2020. Among the key appointments made following the 2014 review of the management structure (see paragraph 2) was that of the PVC (Research and Enterprise), anticipating this emphasis on research and to implement research strategy.

12   Until recently, there were four Academic Schools, namely: Arts and Humanities; Education, Theology and Leadership; Management and Social Sciences; and Sport, Health and Applied Science. In September 2018 the University restructured into two faculties, the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (EHSS), and the Faculty of Sport, Health and Applied Science (SHAS), and one institute, the Institute of Theology. Senior staff admit that the restructuring process has been difficult, but the aim was to be as transparent and equitable as possible, and the majority of required staffing reductions have been achieved by voluntary severance. Being larger than the schools they replaced, the faculties provide a better structure for supporting research students, and the new role of Associate Dean for Research and Enterprise helps to place a greater emphasis on research. In the Institute of Theology, the equivalent role is known as the Research Lead. Research students generally understand the rationale behind the transition from schools to faculties and are content with the results.

13   Research at the University is organised into research centres and research clusters. While the former are tightly defined and closely aligned to University strategy, the latter are less formal affiliations of researchers working in a similar area. New research centres are established through a formal process, which includes the appointment of a director to provide oversight. Annual reporting is required of both. Academic research leads provided practical examples of ways in which research clusters and centres are benefiting research, through workshops, seminars and publications. Research students are expected, though not currently required, to belong to a research cluster. The majority of PGR students met by the team, including distance-learning students, are members of either a research cluster or a research centre (see paragraph 53).

14   The committee structure at the University, revised in 2015 (see paragraph 5), is ensuring that research is given appropriate emphasis. Academic Board receives reports from URC, which oversees the policy and code of practice for the supervision of research students, and promotes good practice in their supervision. Research Student Sub-Committee, which reports to URC, diligently exercises overall responsibility for the welfare and academic progress of doctoral students. It is currently responsible for ensuring that the

regulatory requirements of the two awarding bodies, Liverpool Hope University and the University of Surrey, are fulfilled.

15   The Doctoral College (see paragraph 10) promotes interdisciplinarity and provides study space, training and support for all research students, throughout their studies at the University. It is managed by the Dean of Research, who reports to the Director of Research and Public Engagement. Students express very positive views of the Doctoral College and report that it provides dedicated study space and opportunities for engagement with other research students.

Staff involved in the delivery of research degree programmes, in a teaching and/or supervisory capacity, are themselves active researchers

16   The University actively promotes professional development of its staff and has an effective annual appraisal process. During the scrutiny, which coincided with a particularly active period in the University's preparations for the REF, the University refined its definition of 'research-active staff'. A Workload Planning Model was developed and is now being fully implemented. In the model, individual staff members are allocated to one of the following research bands: Scholarship (4 per cent of workload hours), in which there is no expectation of engagement in original research; Developing Researcher (10 per cent), characterised by original research beyond the level required to keep up to date with the latest developments within the chosen discipline; or Independent Researcher (20 per cent), which requires at least one research output of internationally excellent quality within the previous five years. There is an additional discretionary 10 per cent for staff who have an excellent research publication record, or an approved plan for progressing to a higher research band, or who have returned from maternity leave or other long-term leave of absence, or who have just obtained a PhD. By the end of the scrutiny, the Workload Planning Model had been implemented and was working satisfactorily.

17   The University oversees the research activity of individual staff members effectively. Research-active staff are required to submit annual research plans, which are discussed in appraisal; attainment of the objectives is monitored on an annual basis. Staff are permitted to apply for university-funded sabbatical research leave, but there is no fixed entitlement. Samples provided of successful and unsuccessful applications for sabbatical research leave provide evidence of robust selection and monitoring processes.

18   The Vice-Chancellor is responsible for chairing the promotions panel that receives applications for professorships, readerships, and principal lectureships. Clear criteria for appointment as a professor or reader include possession of a doctorate, a strong track record of high-quality peer-reviewed publications, and the ability to act as a professional role model to other academic staff in relation to knowledge transfer, enterprise or teaching (see paragraphs 8 and 25). At the time of application, the University had 19 professors, nine readers, and one principal lecturer, equating to approximately nine per cent of the total contracted academic staff of 231 FTE.

19   The University adheres scrupulously to the requirements of its awarding bodies. Under Liverpool Hope University, supervisory teams for PhD students comprise at least two members of staff who, between them, have the necessary subject area and methodological expertise. The Director of Studies, who takes overall responsibility for the student experience, is either a permanent member of staff at Liverpool Hope University or a permanent member of staff at a partner institution (of which St Mary's is one), who holds a senior and substantial appointment and is actively involved in the management and oversight of PGR. The Director of Studies is required to have approved research supervisor status. The second team member should have significant subject area and/or methodological expertise and hold approved research supervisor status. Since the Director

of Studies is not necessarily expected to have detailed expertise in the research topics of the students they oversee, there are occasions when an additional approved research supervisor is required. The supervisory function is further enhanced by the possibility of appointing a Research Adviser to the team, when this would be beneficial to the student or would allow staff without approved research supervisor status to develop the necessary skills to become an approved supervisor.

20   There are clear and unambiguous criteria for the appointment of PhD supervisors, advisers and directors of studies. Such appointments currently follow the processes of Liverpool Hope University. Criteria include possession of a PhD or professorial status, current and significant research experience at an appropriate level, evidence of publication or dissemination at an appropriate level, and experience of PGR student supervision to completion (normally two). The effective implementation of these criteria, as evidenced by the curriculum vitae (CVs) supplied, ensures that staff involved in the delivery of research degree programmes, in a teaching and/or supervisory capacity, are themselves active researchers. The University follows a clear procedure for changing the supervisory team.

21   Doctoral Programme Leads, whose responsibilities include an explicit responsibility to provide workshops and seminars for both PGR students and PGR supervisors, further enhance the student experience and nurture the research environment.

The organisation can demonstrate research and advanced scholarship achievement/output among its full-time staff complement

22   All of the key objectives of the University Research Strategy have been completed or were on track at the end of the scrutiny, including the target of increasing research income to over £1m. Research grant income totalled £32.8k in 2014-15, £395k in 2015-16, £342k in 2016-17, and £1.19m in 2017-18. By the end of March 2019, the total for 2018-19 was £629k. Much of this income has come from research foundations; senior staff recognise that the University must now concentrate on increasing the number and value of its research council grants (see paragraph 57).

23   The University has now raised its target for external research funding to £2m per annum but recognises that achieving this will not be straightforward. Currently, the University does not set targets for the research income of individual members of staff but, as part of a refreshment of the research strategy, there is an intention to set targets at faculty level. Following a recent review of the University's Research Centres, these units are being assigned specific research income targets.

24   While it is too early for the growth in research income to have had an impact on research outputs, the University's 2014 REF submission included a substantial number of 4* and 3* publications (15 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively), and the number of annual outputs recorded in the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Web of Science (formerly the ISI Web of Knowledge) has more than doubled since 2014.

The organisation has a strong and sustainable research culture, which directly informs and enhances the supervision and teaching of research degree students

25   The University claims it has developed its research capacity and environment in several ways, including the development of new research centres and the creation of research clusters; the enhancement of its PhD Researcher Development Programme (RDP); creation of a new Career Development Programme for research students and staff; and investment in PhD studentships by the University. Evidence cited elsewhere in this report, such as the answers to the metrics questions (see paragraphs 43-46) and the recent growth in research income, testifies that this claim has been substantiated.

26   Key to the achievement of these developments has been the relatively recent appointment of a PVC (Research and Enterprise) and the reorganisation from schools to faculties. The University is investing further in the central research support service and has recently appointed an Associate Dean for Research and Enterprise within each of the Faculties and a Research Lead (see paragraph 12) in the Institute of Theology. The creation of these new roles is further strengthening research and research training by building critical mass of researchers. The job description explicitly states the purpose is to work within the University's strategic goals to develop, implement and manage an ongoing process of building a supportive research and enterprise culture in the faculties. It also speaks of providing leadership to research centres, working with doctoral programme leads and raising research income.

27   Reorganisation into faculties has enabled the University to formalise some key research roles, several of which will directly benefit the delivery, support and management of doctoral programmes. In addition to the Faculty Associate Deans for Research and Enterprise and Institute of Theology Research Lead, (see paragraph 12), each faculty or institute has one or more Doctoral Programme Leads, who provide independent advice and support to doctoral students, and work collaboratively with the Research Services Department concerning applications, student progression and completion, and supervision. Alongside Doctoral Programme Leads, the Associate Deans chair the Faculty/Institute Research Committees, which meet regularly to provide an overview of the functioning of the doctoral programmes and administer funds for conference attendance and research costs. They ensure that PGR students are integrated into the research culture of the faculty or institute.

28   Research leaders speak of an environment within the University that supports research through the provision of space and resource; they confirm that central support for research grant applications has improved greatly in recent months. The number of research-active staff members has increased, despite the reduction in total academic staff due to the reorganisation into faculties. Senior staff put this down largely to the introduction of the Workload Planning Model (see paragraph 16). Observations of research cluster meetings provided evidence of an inclusive research culture in which both undergraduate and postgraduate students are able to engage with current research.

29   PGR students met by the team are content with the support available to them at the University and speak positively about the training they have received. They are appropriately supported throughout their time at the University by a wide range of training and development opportunities, starting with an induction day that introduces students to the University, the student support available and the doctoral student journey. While the University does not prescribe any mandatory training for its doctoral students, they are required to submit an account of the training courses and conferences they attend for consideration at their annual review. All the students met by the team had attended training and found it beneficial. The appropriateness of the training and development opportunities provided by the University is enhanced by their close alignment with the RDP. External training and support are also available, including careers and employability support delivered in collaboration with the University of London. Students who teach are effectively prepared for this role through relevant training sessions, at which their attendance is recorded.

The organisation has a critical mass of research staff and students, representing a viable research community internally, while also promoting active engagement in discipline-based and broader based communities of researchers and scholars external to the organisation

30   As of May 2017, the University had 258 academic staff, of whom 200 were full-time and 58 were part time. Of these, 92 of the full-time staff held doctoral degrees (45 per cent) and 57 of them had experience of doctoral student supervision. The recent reorganisation

into faculties has reduced the total number of academic staff but, as part of a wider programme of changes designed to emphasise and facilitate research, the number of research-active staff has continued to grow. In the 2017-18 academic year, the University had 215 academic staff, of whom 168 were full-time, and 47 were part-time. Of these staff, 88 out of 168 (or 52 per cent) of full-time and 25 out of 47 (or 53 per cent) of part-time academic staff were qualified to doctoral level. There were 14 staff studying for a doctorate part-time at the University.

31   There are currently 81 postgraduate supervisors, with 43 in EHSS (33 full-time, 10 part-time), 28 in SHAS (27 full-time, one part-time) and 10 in the Institute of Theology (five full-time, five part-time). The team considers this number adequate, given the modest size of the University, and the limited range of research fields currently covered.

32   In 2014-15, the University had 47 PGR students. In 2017-18, this had increased to 99, and by June 2019, to 129. Of these, 113 students were registered on programmes with Liverpool Hope University and 16 with the University of Surrey. Prior to the reorganisation into faculties, some academic schools had a very small number of students, for example the School of Management and Social Science had only seven PGR students. One beneficial outcome of the reorganisation has been the evening out of the spread of research students across the academic subdivisions. As of June 2019, there were 52 research students, including 26 EdD students in EHSS, 32 in the SHAS and 45 in the Institute of Theology. The majority of these students (82) are self-funding, 24 are in receipt of scholarships from the University, 14 are staff members and nine are in receipt of external support.

33   Evidence of the engagement of research staff in discipline-based and broader based communities of research was provided. As described elsewhere (see paragraph 44), 58 per cent of full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to professional societies, and there is a broad spread of research collaborations with other institutions (see paragraph 45). External collaborations are reported by 39 per cent of full-time academic staff (68 per cent of supervisors, advisers and directors of study). The University has established research-relevant links, formal and informal, with other higher education providers and specialist research institutions through, for example, research examinerships (both those appointed as internal examiners of research degrees by the awarding body and University staff appointed to act in a similar capacity elsewhere); and joint research activities.

34   The University has a broad spread of research collaborations with both higher education providers and other bodies, such as the Catholic Bishop's Conference on England and Wales and the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee. The collaborations include joint research projects, co-publications, and research symposia. Many of the partner institutions are based in the UK, such as University of Kent, Queen's University Belfast, Coventry University and the University of Edinburgh, but international partnerships include the Berlin Humboldt, Duke University, the University of Michigan and Munster University. Several of these collaborations have resulted in joint publications.

35   The proportion of academic staff with experience of external examining of research degrees is currently 20 per cent (31 out of 168 full-time and 11 out of 47 part-time staff). While this percentage seems rather small, when expressed in terms of staff who are themselves involved in the supervision of research students, the proportion is much more acceptable. In this category, 43 per cent of staff have experience as external examiners of research degrees (27 out of 65 full-time and 8 out of 16 part-time staff members). There are 17 staff members who act as external supervisors for research students at other providers, and 59 who have experience of collaborative research.

Academic staff command the respect and confidence of academic peers across the sector as reflected, for example, in Research Excellence Framework (REF) entry and scores; other authoritative external reviews; and awards of distinction

36   A total of 58 staff (44.86 FTE) were submitted to the 2014 REF, under seven units of assessment (UoA). The University considers that its submission did not accurately reflect the University's true capabilities. However, even though the quality of the outputs varied widely both across and within the UoA; all but one achieved output ratings of 4* (ranging from eight per cent to 28 per cent) and all achieved a proportion of 3* outputs (ranging from seven per cent to 43 per cent), while three had several unclassified outputs (ranging from three to 14 per cent). The report on the University's submission to UoA 26 Sport and Exercise Science, Leisure and Tourism judged the unit to be conducive to achieving 'very considerable' and 'considerable' impacts in terms of reach and significance.

37   *Vision 2025* includes a research and enterprise strategy. It aims to expand the University's research culture by strengthening selected areas of its research portfolio, forging further long-term strategic partnerships, partnering with local authorities and local, national and international business and industry, developing world leading research and growing the number of visiting professors. Both *Vision 2025* and the Research Strategy express the aim to achieve better results in REF 2021 than in REF 2014.

38   The PVC (Research and Enterprise) has been appointed since REF 2014. A REF Strategy Group, established in 2011 to coordinate the UoA Leads, is tasked with developing and implementing a University REF strategy. It is chaired by the Dean of Research. The Group is efficiently supported in its work by the Research Services Department team. Preparations for REF 2021 are well advanced. The University's code of practice is on course for the June 2019 deadline; the impact case studies have arisen from faculty workshops and are now being finessed.

Staff involved with the delivery of its research degree programmes have substantial relevant knowledge, understanding and experience of both current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and that such knowledge, understanding and experience directly inform and enhance their supervision and teaching

39   Much of this is covered elsewhere in this report (see paragraphs 19, 24, 27, 34, 35, for example). Staff involved in the delivery of research degree programmes, including directors of studies, supervisors and advisers, are required to demonstrate their research experience and activity. The CVs supplied provide evidence that this requirement is being satisfied.

40   The Research Student Sub-Committee is responsible to the Research Committee for oversight of the welfare and academic progress of doctoral students, and for ensuring that the requirements set out in the regulations of the two awarding bodies, Liverpool Hope University and the University of Surrey, are fulfilled. Observation of these committees provided additional evidence that there is a sufficient number of staff within the University with substantial relevant knowledge, understanding and experience of both current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area.

Staff involved in the delivery of research degrees have staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their knowledge of current research and advanced scholarship

41   The University positively promotes professional development of its staff, by providing access to training and development opportunities and by operating an annual appraisal process. In addition to providing supported HEA fellowship routes, there is a

comprehensive RDP that is open to both staff and students, covering research integrity and ethics, quantitative methods, presentation skills, academic publishing, and career management for early career researchers, among a wide range of other topics. A Staff Development Programme provides additional support and training in personal development, leadership and management, teaching and learning, information technology, and other areas. A mentor scheme, for early career researchers and any academic member of staff who requests mentoring support, was approved by URC in June 2018 and is currently being implemented.

42   Training for supervisors of research students is provided by the two awarding bodies. Attendance at the training sessions is recorded. This external training is supplemented by informal one-to-one briefing sessions by staff at the University. Aware that it will need to develop its own training programmes should RDAP be awarded, the University is currently developing its own programme of training workshops in preparation for RDAP.

Metrics Tests

43   CVs were supplied for all 168 full-time and 47 part-time academic staff in post during the 2017-18 academic year. All were in a standard format allowing the criteria required for the metrics calculations to be carried out. This data and the calculations were summarised on a spreadsheet and detailed review by the team confirmed that the University's calculations are thorough and accurate.

A significant proportion (normally around a half as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors to at least one organisation such as a subject association, learned society or relevant professional body

44   The University's calculations show that 58 per cent (98 out of 168) of its full-time academic staff are active and recognised contributors. This percentage has grown in recent years, from 53 per cent (94 out of 177) in 2015-16 and 56 per cent (112 out of 200) in 2016-17. The number of staff members on part-time contracts has decreased in recent years, and the proportion of active and recognised contributors has dropped slightly. The proportion was 54 per cent (35 out of 65) in 2015-16, and 51 per cent (24 out of 47) in 2017-18. The CVs supplied enabled the team to verify this claim.

A significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff have recent (i.e. within the past three years) personal experience of research activity in other UK or international higher education or specialist research 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

45   The University identified 65 out of a total of 168 (39 per cent) of its full-time academic staff as having recent experience of research activity in other UK or international higher education or specialist research institutions. This proportion has been stable over the last three years. In contrast, the proportion of part-time staff in this category has remained almost constant, despite the drop in the total number of part-time staff, meaning that the proportion has risen from 35 per cent (23 out of 65) in 2015-16 to 47 per cent (22 out of 47) in 2017-18.

A significant proportion (normally around a third as a minimum) of its full-time academic staff 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)

46   The number of full-time academic staff who are able to demonstrate achievements recognised by the wider academic community to be of national and/or international standing is 103 (61 per cent). This figure has grown from 54 per cent (96 out of 177) in 2015-16. The figures for part-time staff show a similar increase from 45 per cent (29 out of 65) to 57 per cent (27 out of 47). The CVs supplied enabled the team to verify this claim.

National guidance

Criterion 2

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

The organisation satisfies, or has the capacity to satisfy, the expectations of the Qualifications Frameworks in relation to the levels of its research degree programmes

47   Responsibility for ensuring that research degrees delivered by the University align with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* currently lies with the University's awarding bodies, the University of Surrey (MPhil and PhD awards) and Liverpool Hope University (MPhil, PhD, and EdD awards). Currently, oversight of these awards is exercised through institutional reviews and annual reports that are submitted to the relevant awarding body. Reports from the awarding bodies positively identify actions taken by the University designed to enhance the educational experience of PGR students and also reflect on the University's journey in developing its own independent quality assurance frameworks to secure and maintain academic standards. The University has now nearly completed the process of developing its own academic regulations for its PGR awards post-RDAP (see paragraph 51).

The organisation satisfies, or has the capacity to satisfy, the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education

48   The University has robust and established processes and policies that enable it to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The University's two awarding bodies confirm that it adheres to relevant national guidance in validation and periodic review events and draw attention to several commendable actions designed to enhance the PGR student educational experience, including developing a specific central resource for postgraduate student support.

49   The Doctoral College provides a central hub for PGR students throughout their studies at the University. Led by the Head of Research Services, reporting to the Dean of Research, the Doctoral College is subject to ongoing reviews and consultations with PGR students who speak very favourably of the facility.

50   Operational management of research degrees is led with care and efficiency by the Research Services Department. The University has also invested prudently in other roles, including a Bid Writer and a Research Commercialisation Lead who work with academic staff to support their research and seek opportunities to commercialise that research. Such developments provide evidence of a strategic approach, at institutional level, to enhancing the University's research infrastructure.

51   Research degrees at the University currently operate under two sets of regulations. A few students (16, at the time of application) are studying for research degrees under the regulations of the University of Surrey, which include regulations on supervisor training. The majority of students (113 at the time of application) are studying for research degrees governed by Liverpool Hope University's regulations. A Research Student Handbook and Codes of Practice set out clearly the processes pertaining to each award. In preparation for RDAP, the University has established a Regulations Working Group, which is finalising a new set of bespoke research degree regulations for the University to use post-RDAP. Modelled initially on those of Liverpool Hope University, the new regulations are being drafted better to reflect the particular character of the University and to take into account practice in the sector.

52   In the 2018 PRES, supervision, progress and assessment, clarity around responsibilities, research skills, and professional development all scored above the University's 2017 benchmarking group. However, PRES data in both 2018 and 2017, identified as areas requiring development both the quality of teaching and learning resources and the integration of PGR students within the University's research culture. A PRES action plan was produced and considered at both programme and University level, via the Research Student Sub-Committee and URC. Discussion was robust and productive, demonstrating a clear commitment to enhancing the PGR student educational experience.

53   The University actively encourages PGR students (and frequently the public) to engage in the broader research agenda by organising seminars, workshops, and conferences such as the 'Writing for Research' session, which formed part of the University's Career Development Programme, and the annual conference organised for EdD students. Students are also encouraged to participate as members of the various research clusters, centres, and the Institute, which all organise meetings aligned to their respective areas of expertise. Students and student representatives met by the team report that while some students are aligned to a research cluster, centre and/or the Institute, others are not, with the result that the quality of the PGR educational experience varies between subject areas. The University acknowledges that there is work required to further embed PGR students within its growing research culture.

54   Applicants for research degrees are interviewed by a panel of three, a process organised effectively by the Doctoral College. This, alongside scrutiny of each prospective student's research proposal ensures that the University admits students on to research degrees for which there is sufficient supervisory expertise. The Research Student Sub-Committee ultimately decides if an offer should be made to an applicant before this decision is sent for approval to the relevant awarding body. The Research Student Sub-Committee undertakes a comprehensive examination of research proposals prior to their submission to the relevant awarding body. Students and representatives from the Students' Union met by the team confirm that their experiences of studying a research degree at the University have met their expectations. The RDP, which is mapped to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, sets out a programme of skills-based workshops for PGR students. These sessions successfully enhance student employability by equipping students with transferable professional skills in addition to their academic skillset, which is developed principally by their immediate supervisory team.

55   The Doctoral College and Research Services Department share responsibilities for ensuring that arrangements for PGR students to progress through their studies and for their final examination are in place. Students at different points in their respective programmes reflect positively on the support and assistance provided by the Doctoral College and Research Services Department. The Research Student Handbook outlines clearly the requirements and timings of the two important review mechanisms: the interim review and subsequent annual review. Transfer from Year 1 of the PhD programme to Year 2 takes

place between months 12 and 15 (months 24 and 30 for part-time students) following a formal panel-based interview with the supervisory team. Progression from Year 1 of the EdD programme to Year 2 takes place following the successful completion of six modules (180 credits), normally taught over 24 months. Students are supported in the final stages of their research degree by their supervisory team and the Doctoral College which, in response to student feedback, successfully introduced a system of mock viva voce examinations. Internal and external examiners for the final viva voce examination are appointed using a clear process. In the event that the doctoral candidate is also a member of staff, the University appoints a second external examiner. Although the University is responsible for identifying potential viva voce examiners, the relevant awarding body ultimately approves their appointment. These mechanisms are monitored by the University's Research Student Sub-Committee, observations of which confirm an effective and efficient operation.

56   Each PGR student has an appointed supervisory team, led by the Director of Studies, to support their development. The composition of the supervisory team is tailored to the requirements of individual students and their research projects; they may include supervisors, advisers and/or external advisers, as appropriate. While the University also uses the Liverpool Hope University training programme for their supervisory teams, they are in the process of developing their own programme of workshops in preparation for RDAP. At the time of application, the University had 58 current research degree supervisors aligned to different academic schools. During the review visit, the University identified the need to increase their supervisory capacity in light of its stated aim to increase the number of postgraduate research degree students and work in this area is ongoing.

The organisation satisfies, or has the capacity to satisfy, the expectations of research degree management frameworks issued by relevant research councils, funding bodies and professional/statutory bodies

57   At the time of application, the University did not have any PGR students attracting research council funding. The University is, however, very successful in attracting funding for research students and projects from a variety of sources including the UK Government and a range of businesses and charitable foundations. The University has set itself ambitious targets in relation to the generation of external research funding and over the last few years research-related income has increased exponentially (see paragraphs 22-23). Senior staff are clear that sustainability will be secured by reshaping fundamentally the profile of the University's research income by increasing significantly the proportion deriving from research council funding. Although the University does not currently have to satisfy any research degree management frameworks, the team considers that the University's mature relationships with its awarding bodies, coupled with its broad experience of working with commercial and charitable organisations demonstrate the capacity to satisfy research degree management frameworks issued by relevant research councils and other bodies.

Minimum number of doctoral degree conferments

Criterion 3

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

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58   From 1995 to June 2019 the University has recommended 75 doctoral students to the awarding body for the conferment of their degree.