**Simplifying Access to the Market: Degree Awarding Powers and University Title**

*Question 1: Do you agree or disagree that the OfS should consider applications for New DAPs for research awards from providers without a three year track record of delivering higher education in England?*

We have concerns generally about track record and degree awarding powers (as expressed in our answer to Question 3), as we believe that granting degree awarding powers simply on plans for the future rather than on evidence of current capability exposes students to far too much risk. These concerns apply particularly to research awards. The ability to award research degrees of the requisite standard is based on a research culture built up over many years that allows and supports staff in the provider to make confident assessments of research performance and to compare these to national and international expectations in their discipline. It is unthinkable that such a culture would arise in a period of less than three years; indeed, even three years is considerably too short a period to generate any security of a capability to award high-standard research degrees.

*Question 3: Do you have any comments on the proposed New DAPs test and associated processes? In particular, do you think these tests and processes provide appropriate safeguards whilst enabling high quality new providers to access DAPs?*

We would argue that encouraging students, often young people with little experience of making major decisions, to place their hopes and ambitions (and money) with providers who have no track record in higher education is exposing them to unacceptable risk. Granting degree award powers simply on plans for the future, rather than on evidence of the exercise of current capability, is far too weak a test.

The consequences for students of a provider failing its probation and having its degree awarding powers withdrawn would be appalling. In reality, this will place enormous pressure on the OfS to avoid such a judgement, inevitably weakening the rigour of the process. The result will be low-quality providers being allowed to continue to operate, students and employers (and the taxpayer) continuing to lose out as a result, and the international reputation of UK higher education suffering considerably.

It is therefore imperative that degree awarding powers are only granted where there is a high level of confidence in the quality of the provider, and we believe that this confidence can only be properly be generated by an examination of the past and current performance of that provider.

*Question 6: Do you agree or disagree with the suggested change regarding the possible variation of the level 6 TDAPs criterion?*

We disagree with this particular change. The secure exercise of degree awarding powers requires that the provider be focused on degree-level studies. The requirement that the majority of provision must be at Level 6 should therefore remain.

*Question 9: Do you agree or disagree that for providers that have obtained DAPs on an exceptional basis without having the majority of higher education students at level 6 or above (as proposed in question 6), the 55 per cent criterion for University Title should be adjusted to additionally require the majority of higher education students to be on courses at level 6 or above?*

We agree. The general conception of the University Title within society is that it applies to providers who are primarily engaged in awarding degrees rather than sub-degree qualifications. This conception should be respected in the criteria for University Title.

*Question 12 Do you agree with this assessment of the factors that should be set out in Secretary of State guidance to which the OfS must have regard to when determining applications for University Title? If you disagree, please give reasons. If you believe any additional factors should be included, please indicate what these are with reasons.*

We believe that the OfS should also have regard to the following factors in determining applications for University Title:

* Size of provider. This has been rejected in the past but we would continue to hold that the general conception of a University is of an organisation of an appreciable size. Setting no minimum in this regard risks deceiving applicants and others as to the true nature of the provider.
* Track record. The three years necessary for obtaining unlimited degree awarding powers is not a sufficient period of time for the granting of University Title. The general conception of a university is of an organisation that has been established and operating effectively for a significant period of time. We would recommend a period of 10 years as matching public expectations in this regard and therefore avoiding giving applicants and others a false impression of the stability and provenance of the provider through the granting of University Title.
* Range of disciplines. The very etymology of the word ‘university’ refers to wholeness and provides foundation for the expectation of students that in entering a university they will be rubbing shoulders with scholars from a range of disciplines. Granting University Title to providers in just a single or very few subjects therefore confuses and devalues this aspect of what it means to be a university.
* Research activity. Universities are places where knowledge is created as well as transmitted. University Title should not therefore be granted to organisations that do not play a significant role in advancing knowledge through their research activity. By the same token, only providers with research degree awarding powers should be eligible for University Title.
* Overall student experience. The registration conditions do not capture whether the everyday experiences of a student at the provider match those that are associated with university attendance in this country. This goes beyond simple satisfaction and attainment to whether the culture and ethos of the organisation provide an experience that is fully developmental and prepares students in every respect for the challenges ahead in life. Making such a judgement before granting University Title would require a holistic, qualitative assessment of the provider by the OfS; probably involving a team spending time with the provider. The costs of any such exercise should be borne by the provider to avoid cross-subsidisation.