Freedom of Information request: 2019/0034 ES

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 4th February 2019 in which you requested the following:

Your Request:

I am writing … for all information pertaining to the accreditation of BUL Education as an ESRC doctoral training pathway.

Our response:

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation hold information relevant to your request.

Accreditation as an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) is confirmed following a robust peer review process which is described below.

The call for Doctoral Training Partnerships was issued in September 2016 and the call documentation can be found [here](https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/dtps-cdts/dtp-call-specification/). Applications could be submitted either from a single institution or from a consortia. The application from the Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership was submitted by the University of Oxford in partnership with Brunel University London and the Open University.

In their applications, DTPs had to articulate how they would meet the requirements detailed in the [Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines (2015)](https://esrc.ukri.org/files/skills-and-careers/doctoral-training/postgraduate-training-and-development-guidelines-2015/). Training is organised within pathways which we define as the broad training a student will receive in a particular disciplinary or thematic area during the course of their PhD. Applicants had flexibility to determine how they structured their pathways and, for consortia, which partners would be included in each of them.

Accreditation is based on the depth and breadth of training provided across the pathway. It is therefore important to note that the Department of Education at Brunel University is not an accredited pathway in itself, but it is part of the broader Education pathway offered by the DTP.

Research Excellence Framework (REF)-based metrics were used as part of the assessment criteria to ensure that we supported consistently high quality pathways.

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1. [https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/dtps-cdts/dtp-call-specification/](https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/dtps-cdts/dtp-call-specification/)
All DTP pathways had to be made up of Unit of Assessment (UoA) that met all the criteria below:

- a greater than or equal to 50 per cent REF output (3*+4*)
- a greater than or equal to 50 per cent REF environment (3*+4*)
- a greater than or equal to 50 per cent REF impact (3*+4*)
- a research volume equivalent to a minimum of five FTE staff with output at 3* or 4*
  
  (Calculated by number of FTE staff submitted to REF2014 ‘multiplied by’ percentage of REF output at 3* or 4*).

Therefore in order to apply for accreditation, pathways must have met a minimum quality threshold based on independent REF outcomes.

All applications were initially assessed by members of a peer review college specifically established for the purpose of reviewing DTP applications. Membership of the peer review college was drawn from nominations from UK HEIs. Nominees had to demonstrate a broad social science view and have a background in the provision of high quality postgraduate research training.

The proposed DTP directors, and up to three other colleagues, were then invited to attend and interview with a specially convened interview panel.

Applications were assessed by reviewers and panel members against the following criteria:

- Vision for the DTP and how it fits within RO’s overall strategy
- Quality of research environment
- Quality of the training approach
- Supervisory practice and policy
- Partnership and engagement, specifically collaboration with non-academic partners engagement and knowledge exchange
- Management and delivery, including governance structure and administrative support

The panel's recommendations were subject to final approval by the ESRC’s Chief Executive and Directors.

I hope these reassures you that the multi-staged process through which accreditation was confirmed was thorough and robust.

Applications, scores for applications, and peer review comments are confidential and therefore UKRI does not publish this information. As this is the case we are exempting the related application documents as we believe this falls under Section 41 of the FOIA, Information Provided in Confidence. To explain further, applicants submit their applications in confidence with the understanding that details of their application, including their scores will remain confidential. If released we believe it would result in an actionable breach of confidence. As this exemption is absolute there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

If you have any queries about this response please contact me, or if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, please write to:

**Complaints Officer**  
UK Research and Innovation  
Polaris House  
North Star Avenue  
Swindon  
SN2 1FL  
Email: foi@ukri.org
Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Enquiry/Information Line: Between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745
Further information about the Office of the Information Commissioner can be found at http://www.ico.gov.uk/

Yours sincerely,

UK Research and Innovation, Information Governance Team
Email: foi@ukri.org