

Approval of university title for Norland College

UKPRN 10008397

The Office for Students (OfS) has consented to the inclusion of the word ‘university’ in Norland College’s proposed new name ‘Norland University of Early Childhood’.

The OfS’s role

The OfS has the legal power to consent to the use of the word ‘university’ in a registered higher education provider’s name.¹ In consenting to the inclusion of the word ‘university’ in any name the OfS has to consider the need to avoid names which are, or may be, confusing or misleading.

The OfS has published guidance for registered higher education providers that wish to use either ‘university’ or ‘university college’ as part of their name (‘university title’ or ‘university college title’). It sets out the eligibility and suitability criteria the provider must satisfy to hold university title, that we will consult on a provider’s proposed new name and assess the extent to which the proposed name is, or may be, confusing or misleading.²

As well as requiring consent from the OfS, a provider also requires approval from the Registrar of Companies (via Companies House) before it can use a name including the sensitive word ‘university’. Under current regulations, the provider needs to seek a view from the Department for Education (DfE), also known as ‘non-objection’, before it can request approval from the Registrar of Companies. In this case, DfE issued a non-objection letter, noting various conditions, on the same day as the OfS’s final decision letter. The provider can now request approval from the Registrar of Companies to use the word ‘university’ in its proposed new name.

Application and assessment

Norland College applied to the OfS for university title with the proposed name of ‘Norland University of Early Childhood’ in August 2025.

We assessed Norland College against the eligibility and suitability criteria and concluded that the provider satisfied the criteria to hold university title. Desk-based research was undertaken to assess the extent to which the proposed name is, or may be, confusing or misleading.

Having considered the OfS’s general duty, under section 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) to use our resources in an efficient, effective and economic way, we ran a targeted consultation that focused on interested parties that were considered to have a particular

¹ See the Further and Higher Education Act 1992
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/section/77>.

² See [Regulatory advice 13: How to apply for university college and university title - Office for Students](#).

interest in the provider's proposed name.³ These included Norland College students, professional organisations and employer groups working with the provider, higher education membership groups, the Department for Education (DfE) and interested parties identified by them, sector bodies, the local council and emergency services.

Consultation responses

We received 74 responses. 69 respondents (93 per cent) responded that, in their view, the proposed name is not, or does not have the potential to be, confusing or misleading. Three respondents responded that the proposed name is or has the potential to be confusing or misleading. Two respondents did not provide a view.

The OfS's consideration of responses

We took the view that the majority of stakeholders will not find the proposed name confusing or misleading. We also concluded that the instances of potential confusion identified are unlikely to lead to any material harm or cause detriment.

The OfS's decision

We have decided to approve Norland College's proposed new name 'Norland University of Early Childhood', consenting to the inclusion of the word 'university' within that name.

In considering this decision, we considered our general duties from HERA, among other factors.⁴ In this particular case, we placed weight on the OfS's general duties to have due regard to the need to protect the institutional autonomy of English higher education providers, and the need to encourage competition between those providers in connection with the provision of higher education. We consider that these duties weigh in favour of consenting to the proposed name.

We also had regard to our regulatory framework, which states 'The OfS will only approve names that it considers not to be, or not to have the potential to be, confusing or misleading'.

In making this decision:

- We have not purported to determine how any acts that might follow from the use of the proposed name might be categorised as a matter of law. The provider must not regard or represent the OfS's decision as endorsing or otherwise granting permission for it to breach or circumvent any laws which may apply to the use of the name, including intellectual property law or consumer protection law. Responsibility for compliance with the law remains with the provider.
- We are approving the name that has been assessed 'Norland University of Early Childhood', and not another variation of that name.

Norland College has indicated that, subject to approval from Companies House, it intends to begin using the name 'Norland University of Early Childhood' from 7 September 2026.

³ See [Higher Education and Research Act 2017](#).

⁴ See [PART I – The OfS's risk-based approach - Office for Students](#).