

Approval of proposed new name for Staffordshire University

UKPRN: 10006229

The Office for Students (OfS) has consented to the use of the word 'university' in the provider's change of name from 'Staffordshire University' to 'University of Staffordshire'.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 amended relevant legislation to give the OfS the power to consent to the use of the word university in a registered higher education provider's name. In consenting to the inclusion of the word 'university' in any name the OfS has regard to the need to avoid names which are, or may be, confusing.¹

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 states 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

Staffordshire University applied to the OfS for consent to the use of the word university in its proposed new name 'University of Staffordshire' in February 2024. Due to the similarity of the proposed name to the existing name, we ran a targeted consultation aimed at current students at Staffordshire University to determine whether the new name could be confusing or misleading, and received 94 responses. Considering the responses:

- We took the view that the provider's proposed new name did not appear to be like any other registered English higher education provider's name in a way that could cause potential confusion or be misleading.
- We agreed with some consultation responses which stated that the proposed name could potentially create confusion, for the following reasons:
 - a. The proposed name may be confusing or misleading for graduates who are not aware of the name change, and who were awarded degrees in the university's previous name
 - b. In the transition period, it may be assumed there are two universities.
 - c. The proposed name could be confusing when searching for the university online.
- However, we concluded that the issues raised by respondents to the consultation were unlikely to occur. The provider will publicise its new name, which we expect will address

¹ See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/part/1/crossheading/powers-in-relation-to-university-title/enacted>.

² See 'Regulatory advice 13: How to apply for university college or university title', available at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-13-how-to-apply-for-university-college-and-university-title/.

these points. The university's own stakeholder research, and feedback on the OfS's targeted consultation suggested these potential points of confusion are unlikely to arise. The university will also preserve the current website URL and take a phased approach to the name change. This means that anyone who visits the university's website will see that this has transitioned to University of Staffordshire branding, which will reduce the potential for confusion.

- Therefore, we decided to consent to the proposed new name of 'University of Staffordshire'.
- As well as requiring consent from the OfS we note that, before a provider can use a name including the legally protected word 'university', it also requires approval from the Registrar of Companies (via Companies House). 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 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.