****

**Guidance for Approving and Operating Validation Partnerships**

**Introduction**

The Collaborative Partnerships Code of Practice outlines the processes in place for the approval and oversight of partnership provision within the University of Dundee. As well as this, partnerships based on a Validation model, where the University of Dundee (UoD) awards a degree for a programme devised and delivered by a partner, require specific approval and oversight measures to assure the quality of the award. The [Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) makes clear](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code) that a validating university is responsible for the academic standards of any award granted in its name.

**Definition of Validated Partnership Provision**

UK and European quality body definitions, and therefore UoDs own definitions, of degrees delivered in partnership do not always align with the those of international partners beyond Europe. To allow better alignment with new strategic partners, it is important to clarify and adopt the appropriate terminology.

A dual degree is recognised internationally as one where partner institutions with degree awarding powers in their own countries both award a qualification for the same programme of study. Each award is granted on the basis of the same body of work, assessed in the same way, and studied over the same period of time. One degree is awarded by the University of Dundee and one is awarded by the partner institution. Separate degree certificates are issued by each institution, with a transcript that clearly outlines the programme of study and makes clear the degrees were awarded based on a single programme.

Validations in the UK are not based on dual award arrangements. For UK validation partnerships, the University of Dundee will be the awarding body. In the UK and Europe, validation partners will be institutions that cannot award degrees in their own right, but international partnership arrangements may follow a validation-based model that results in a degree award from each partner.

Partnerships based on a validation model are those where the University makes an award based on a programme of study devised and delivered by the partner. Students are registered with the partner and the partner is responsible for programme delivery and their student experience.

The University is responsible for reporting students registered on offshore validated programmes through the [HESA Offshore Aggregate Return](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-streams/aggregate-offshore). This kind of overseas partnership arrangement is reported as ‘Overseas Partner Organisation/Other Arrangement’, which is defined as *“Students studying for an award of a UK higher education provider. Students studying for an award of a UK HEI are not registered students of the reporting provider but are studying for an award of the reporting provider, and are registered at an Overseas partner organisation or via some Other arrangement.*International partnership models are complex and often unique, and their exact nature is determined by the aims and objectives of the partnership, the regulatory landscape in the partner country, and the needs of stakeholders.

**Oversight**

In order to award a degree that is devised and delivered wholly or mainly by a partner, the University of Dundee requires the following arrangements to be in place in order to discharge its responsibility for the quality and academic standards of the degree it will award.

* An initial Validation Review and Approval will take place, followed by revalidation every five to six years
* A Joint Programme Board will be established with responsibility for ongoing and annual review of the programme and partnership
* A Link Coordinator will be appointed for the validated programme – this will be a UoD academic with relevant subject expertise
* A QAS operational plan will be agreed that outlines oversight arrangements and responsibilities of each partner
* Ensure an [External Examiner](https://www.dundee.ac.uk/corporate-information/policy-and-code-of-practice-on-external-examining) is in place
* Ensure [Exam Boards](https://www.dundee.ac.uk/corporate-information/guidance-conduct-boards-examiners) take place
* Degree Regulations will be agreed and published

The Quality and Academic Standards (QAS) team will be responsible for oversight of arrangements and supporting Schools to manage these arrangements effectively, including ensuring the University’s broader Quality Assurance framework is adhered to. Where a validation-based partnership involves multiple Schools, these arrangements will be managed by QAS in consultation with the relevant Schools’ Link Coordinators.

**Approval**

Approval of validation-based partnerships will follow the process outlined in the Code of Practice for Tier A or B partnerships and the validation of partner programmes will largely be dealt with as a new programme, but with some distinct features:

* A Validation Review and Approval exercise will take place, which is a robust scrutiny activity that combines the requirements of the current PQGA form and the requirement to hold an Approval event for new programmes.
* Validation Review and Approval consists of a range of activities, rather than being centred around one ‘event’ held in one day.
* The Validation Review and Approval Panel will replace the School’s Quality Assurance committee as an approving body during the development stage. This is because the relevant School staff will be panel members and key contributors throughout the development stage and validation review, so this arrangement avoids duplication, particularly for arrangements that involve multiple Schools.

**Validation Review and Approval**

The validation will include an in-depth **review of the programme** to be validated. This will be carried out by UoD academics from the relevant School and discipline. It will include consideration of programme and module specifications, course content, and assessment strategy.

Where a programme is subject to national programme level approvals and/or accreditation, the review panel will also review the reports from those approval/accrediting bodies, and it will not be in scope for the review panel to make recommendations for any changes that will impact this approval or accreditation.

The University of Dundee QAS team will consult relevant quality assurance staff at the partner university to map their QA framework to the UK Quality Code and UoD requirements. It is not expected that approaches will align in their entirety, and the process will take the partner’s national framework into account. Should there be any fundamental differences in relation to key aspects of delivery and student experience, the partners will reach an agreement on expectations and requirements, and these will be made clear in the guidance and regulations for the partnership.

Global Partnerships will carry out the **due diligence** outlined in the Code of Practice and provide input on the **business case**.

Members of the Validation Review and Approval Panel will conduct a **Site Visit** to meet with partner staff and to evaluate the facilities and resources at the partner.

**Validation Review and Approval Panel**

From each relevant School: Academic subject specialist, equivalent Programme Lead, Associate Dean Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Associate Dean International. One of these School representatives should, where possible, be the person that will be the Link Coordinator if the validation is approved.

Externality: For validation arrangements for existing programmes within other established degree awarding institutions, the External Examiner for the equivalent programme at the University of Dundee will be asked to comment. For validations of entirely new programmes, or for partners that do not have degree awarding powers, two additional independent external reviewers will be required (as is the case for approval events).

Professional Services: Quality and Academic Standards (QAS) Collaborative Partnership Manager and Global Partnerships (GP) Manager. QAS and GP will determine, in consultation with the School, and as appropriate to the nature of the partnership arrangement, which UoD professional services staff will be required for the review panel. Consultation with Legal will happen as part of the Due Diligence process, and Registry will be consulted in relation to awarding certificates and transcripts, as required.

Student representation: As students on validated programmes are not registered students with UoD, there will be no student representation on the review panel. However, student feedback will be considered as part of the annual review and review panels will meet with students during the periodic review/revalidation visits. Where UoD is validating an established programme within another degree awarding institution, the site visit should include a meeting with students to discuss their experience of the programme.

An appropriate Chair for the panel will be agreed with QAS, as relevant to the size and scope of the validation arrangement.

**Site Visit**

A minimum of three panel members, representing the School, QAS and Global Partnerships, will visit the partner as part of the review. The School representative must be an academic with knowledge of the programme discipline, preferably the person that will be the Link Coordinator. The aims of the visit are to:

* Meet with academic staff to discuss the curriculum and learning and teaching approaches in more detail
* Tour facilities and ensure the relevant resources are in place
* Meet with students to discuss their experience on the programme or at the institution
* Meet with QA staff to agree the QAS operational plan and ensure each partner understands the QA framework of the other
* Meet with professional services and leadership staff to discuss the business case and/or any other relevant matters

A report on the visit will be prepared by QAS and shared with the full Validation Review and Approval Panel.

**Annual Review**

The University of Dundee is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the quality and standards of all awards made in its name, so will review the programme and modules on an ongoing basis, in line with its institution-led quality review process. The Joint Programme Board (JPB) will review the programme annually with reference to the agreed QAS operational plan, and based on the information noted below in the JPB terms of reference. As a minimum, representatives from the School and QAS (normally, the Link Coordinator and QAS Collaborative Partnership Manager) will visit the partner annually.

**Joint Programme Board**

Terms of Reference

It is the responsibility of the Joint Programme Board to monitor the quality and standards of the validated programme. The JPB will meet at least annually to consider and respond to:

* Student outcomes and progression data provided by the Exam Board
* Programme and module annual monitoring and enhancement reporting
* External Examiner’s report
* Student feedback
* Academic or operational changes to programme
* Changes to partner policy or processes
* Staffing changes
* Any other matters arising pertaining to the quality, academic standards and enhancement of the programme

Membership

The exact membership and Chair will be agreed during the initial validation process, as part of the QAS operational plan, and will include, as a minimum:

University of Dundee – Link Coordinator, Nominated Associate Dean from the lead School, QAS Collaborative Partnership Manager

Partner – Selected representatives appropriate to the programme and partnership. For example: Programme lead, Faculty/School senior leader, QA representative

Where the partnership involves multiple validations in adjacent disciplines, the JPB will be a Joint ‘Programmes’ Board that looks at a suite of courses within a School or faculty.

For large scale strategic partnerships, a senior oversight committee will also be convened, to which the JPB will report. The terms of refence and membership of that body will be agreed during the initial validation and noted in the partnership agreement.

**The Link Coordinator**

The Link Coordinator (LC) will play a key role in programme validation and any aspects of ongoing oversight that relate to the subject discipline. The expectation for a validation based model would be to operate at scale, so an LC is likely to have responsibility for a group of programmes related to their academic discipline.

The LC will maintain contact with academic staff at the partner throughout the year and inform QAS of any changes or issues that may impact quality and standards. They will work closely with QAS and play a key role in exam boards and annual and periodic review processes.

The appointed LC will be supported by QAS and have full training on the responsibilities of the role.

**Exam Boards and External Examiners**

Arrangements for Exam Boards and the appointment of External Examiners will be agreed with the partner during the initial validation process as part of the QAS operational plan. UoD is responsible for ensuring suitable arrangements are in place, however these will be dependent on the scope and scale of the partnership and on the current processes in place at the partner.

**All Validation partnerships should be developed in consultation with Global Partnerships and QAS. The School should contact their Global Partnerships Manager and the QAS Collaborative Partnership Manager to discuss proposals in the first instance, and for any queries relating to any of the above**