QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

FACT SHEET 5: COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

Collaborative Provision

1 The University’s collaborative provision involves partnerships with another institution to deliver educational provision which may lead to the conferment of an OU qualification or credit towards an OU qualification. Collaborative provision takes several forms: within the range of collaborative activity leading to an OU qualification there are two main distinctions:

- Partnerships where students are registered as OU students on OU modules, following modules within the OU curriculum for OU named qualifications. These can be direct teaching or collaborative teaching. Such partnerships can also involve the licensing of OU modules and programmes but encompassed into qualifications offered by the partner and some make use of OU services through consultancy contracts. For the purposes of this Fact Sheet we will refer to them as curriculum partnerships.
- Partnerships where students are registered with an approved partner institution, following programmes of study owned and delivered by the partner institution, validated by the University. Students are registered with the OU by the partner institution for qualification purposes only, and receive an OU designated qualification. These partnerships are known as partner institutions and validated awards.

Curriculum Partnerships

2 Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CPC) is responsible to the Education Committee for policy and regulations relating to partnerships for taught provision, including validated provision, leading to an award. CPC comprises a range of external members from higher education, industry and commerce as well as members of the University and representatives of its approved organisations. The Education Committee is responsible to the Senate for strategy and policy relating to curriculum, assessment and qualifications (including collaborative provision), learning and teaching and the student experience in the University in accordance with the University's strategic objectives.

3 The Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) provides institutional oversight and support for partnership activity across the University especially in relation to arrangements in which partners are involved in the development, delivery and/or support of Open University curriculum and which fall under the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B10 Managing higher education provision with others, published by the Quality Assurance Agency.

4 Approval and review: Institutional approval is required for all collaborative provision. An opportunity review is completed, a business case prepared in order for the University to assess the suitability of a partnership and due diligence undertaken. Approval of a partnership must be secured from the Curriculum Partnerships Committee and if the

---

1 Links to external and internal websites were checked in September 2016.
Some web links referred to in this document may be intranet based and so restricted to Open University staff.
Institutional Approval is an international one, initial approval must also be sought from the Open University Worldwide Board of the Directors. New qualifications to be offered in partnership must be approved by the Qualifications & Assessment Committee. All curriculum delivered with partners is subject to the same quality review processes as standard Open University provision (see Factsheet on Internal Review).

Institutional Approval and Validation

Through its Royal Charter the Open University is able to validate programmes of study provided by institutions and organisations that do not have degree-awarding powers or that wish to offer OU awards.

Through the **Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships** (CICP) the University offers institutional approval and programme validation to the providers of higher education worldwide. The University’s approach to approval and validation is based on the following key principles:

- Establishing a partnership between The Open University (through CICP) and the partner institution to enable the institution to offer programmes leading to Open University validated awards;
- Providing a supportive framework within which approved institutions take responsibility for the quality assurance and day-to-day management of their own academic programmes;
- Recognising that approved institutions should decide the range of academic programmes that they wish to offer subject to meeting the Open University’s established criteria;
- Using groups of experts from the Open University, other academic institutions, the professions, the business community and other appropriate organisations to make peer judgements about the quality of institutions and the learning programmes that they offer.

The University exercises its power to approve institutions and programmes leading to validated awards through its Curriculum Partnerships Committee. A framework of principles and regulations which govern its approval and validation activities has been established (which includes criteria for the approval of institutions and programmes). This information is contained in the **Handbook for Validated Awards**.

**Validation of Taught Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes** ensure that programmes leading to Open University validated qualifications are consistent in standard with those throughout higher education in the UK. CICP manages the OU’s system of ‘peer review’ which draws upon national (and increasingly international) peer groups of experts with an acknowledged stake in higher education.

**Institutional Approval** is the process by which a group of external peers judge whether or not an institution is able to provide a satisfactory environment for the conduct of programmes leading to an OU validated award. The institution must demonstrate that it has the following:

- appropriate resources for teaching, learning and assessment;
- an active programme of staff development;
- research and related activities in support of teaching;
- appropriate internal systems of quality assurance.
A panel of specialists is convened to consider a written self-evaluation prepared by the institution. The panel then visits the institution and meets senior management, teaching staff and students. Approval of an institution is a pre-requisite for the validation of any programme of study, although, where appropriate, institutional approval and programme validation may be undertaken concurrently. Partner institutions are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to meet the University’s conditions for validated awards.

Programme Validation involves a process including a specialist panel visit to an institution to discuss the proposed programme with senior management, staff and students. The institution must demonstrate that it will be able to achieve the academic and other objectives set for the programme. Once approved a programme is subject to regular annual monitoring and will be formally reviewed at intervals of not more than 5 years. Different approval procedures apply for vocational qualifications, although the ‘peer appraisals’ philosophy still applies.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ): The oversight of Open University functions as an Awarding Body for NVQs is the responsibility of the Qualifications and Assessment Committee. The approval, re-approval and monitoring of centres involves external verifiers appointed by the Awarding Body.

Review

Review of curriculum partnerships: Curriculum partnerships are agreed for a specific term (which may be fixed or rolling). Curriculum partnerships feature as part of the module and qualification review processes described in Factsheet 3 but they are also subject to a formal annual monitoring process focusing on the general ‘health’ of the partnership. A separate contract renewal process exists. Problems with a contract renewal are submitted to the Curriculum Partnerships Committee for consideration.

The review process includes all partnerships involving use of the OU’s curriculum; it reviews the performance of the partnership over a 12 month period. The Business Development Unit and faculties complete a proforma for all international partnerships and UK licensing arrangements, and academic units are required to complete a proforma for other partnerships, with guidance from the Office of the PVC-RAS.

Review and monitoring of partner institutions offering validated programmes: CICP require partner institutions to regularly monitor, evaluate and report on programme performance by informed groups which include teaching staff, students, external examiners and external peers, and to ensure that action is taken to tackle issues raised through these processes.

Under the terms of approval, the University delegates to partner institutions day-to-day responsibility for quality assurance associated with monitoring of programmes of study. Annual monitoring reports are then prepared by partner institutions on individual programmes together with institutional commentary and an executive summary confirming that programmes have been operated in accordance with validated arrangements. These reports are considered by a Working Group of Curriculum Partnerships Committee drawn from committee members, OU staff and representatives from partner institutions. The main findings of the process are summarised in a report to Curriculum Partnerships Committee and individual feedback is given to each partner institution.

Revalidation: Programmes of study at partner institutions are validated for up to the maximum approval period of five years, and revalidation is the process by which they are re-approved. The process is similar to initial validation, and is documented in Section D3
of the Handbook for Validated Awards, but it is additionally concerned with evaluating the success of the programme in practice and its development since initial approval or previous revalidation. As stated above, authority for taking action to improve or enhance quality is with the partner institution. However, in a situation where external examiners indicate that the standard of the qualification is at risk, the University can (and will) intervene. It is also at the University’s discretion to require review and revalidation of a programme before the due date if there is reason to believe that this course of action is appropriate. CICP harmonises its processes for re-validation as far as possible with the internal quality assurance procedures of the partner institution.

**The Business Development Unit (Open University Worldwide)**

*Open University Worldwide* co-ordinates the international activities of the University. Its activities are to:

- promote and negotiate international collaborative partnerships;
- provide project management for international schemes;
- licence the OU’s intellectual property rights;
- provide a sales outlet for module materials and packs;
- assist in the development of direct teaching schemes internationally, including internet and multimedia initiatives.