The Open University

Validation Handbook

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A: Introduction and background

A1 Introduction

The Open University

The Open University (OU) was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. It is recognised internationally for pioneering open learning, for the quality of its teaching, for its research, and for offering university education to students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to study. The OU's mission can be summarised as: **The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas.**

OU validated awards are conferred under the OU's Royal Charter. They meet the same standards as equivalent awards taken by students directly registered with the OU and/or other UK universities. They are available to approved partners who have demonstrated their ability to quality assure their programmes, with the OU validating the awards.

It is very important to the OU that the academic standards of validated programmes offered through the OU validated awards model meets our criteria and are of a high quality. The OU will take any action it considers necessary under its Royal Charter status to protect the quality of validated programmes and accompanying awards.

Any prospective partner that wishes to offer OU validated awards has to be approved as a partner before programmes of study can be validated.

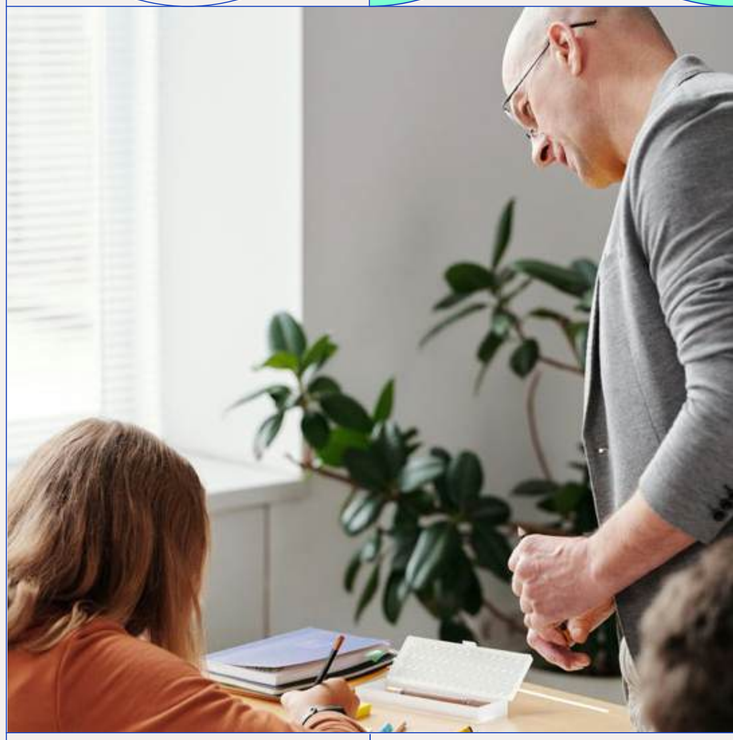
Once approved, a legally binding partnership agreement will set out the relationship and responsibilities between the OU and the partner. Partners may not market or recruit students to any programmes until they are in receipt of the legally binding agreement and have signed the document.

The authority for approving and reapproving partners, and validating and revalidating programmes, rests with the OU Senate and is exercised through the OU's Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

This handbook outlines the processes and procedures required to establish and operate a successful partnership offering OU-validated awards

and ensures clarity on roles and responsibilities.

Sometimes it will become necessary to update information. When this occurs, OUVP will produce an amended copy, issue it to partners for distribution and communicate the date from which it is to be applied. It is expected that approved partners and programme teams are familiar with the content in this handbook.



A2: What are OU validated awards?

A2.1 The nature of OU validated awards

OU validated awards are designed to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Frameworks of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) or where relevant the Scottish Framework (SCQF). See the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University** for details.

All partners are required to comply with the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University.** Some partners are approved to operate under **dual awards regulations**.

Partners are responsible for ensuring that validated provision meets the OU's academic quality and standards requirements. Partners must comply with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) and establish, implement, maintain and review effective policies, procedures, systems and governance arrangements that support the delivery, quality assurance and enhancement of OU validated awards. These arrangements must enable the University to meet its statutory, regulatory and quality assurance obligations, including its obligations as the awarding body and as a registered provider with the Office for Students (OfS) and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr)

Partners must also comply with any legal, regulatory and professional requirements applicable to their provision and jurisdiction.

Additionally, partners that are registered with a regulatory body must comply with the conditions of their registration.

A2.2 Approval of new awards

There is a list of the programmes the OU is permitted to validate, under section 3 in the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University.**

The OU will consider validation proposals in the context of its strategic priorities, existing provision and validation partnerships, taking into account the number, type and range, how the proposed provision complements existing provision, addresses identified learner, employer or sector needs, and contributes to a diverse and sustainable portfolio of OU validated awards.



The supporting role of the OU

The Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP) team oversees approved partnerships offering validated provision, ensuring delivery is managed in accordance with the terms of the agreement. Each partner will be allocated a (Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager (S/QPM) and (Senior) Quality and Compliance Manager(S/QCM) whose joint roles are to support partners through the approval/reapproval process.

Promoting high academic standards

We are committed to helping our partners achieve and maintain the highest academic standards. How the OU supports partners:

Assessing readiness:

We work closely with partners to ensure they meet regulatory and legislative requirements, deliver high-quality academic standards and provide a high-quality student experience.

Advice and information:

We offer expert guidance on best practices in academic quality, standards and policy design, ensuring you have the support you need to excel.

Facilitating collaboration:

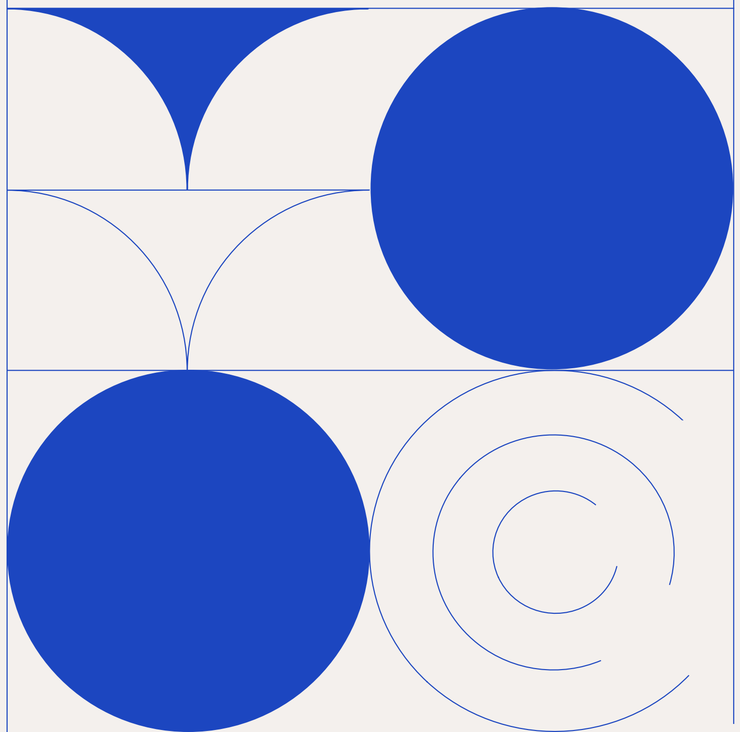
We foster collaboration between the OU, our partners, professional bodies, employers and students, creating a vibrant and interconnected academic community.

External Examiners:

We appoint external examiners for validated awards and attend examination and/or assessment boards, ensuring the integrity and quality of your programmes.

Ongoing support and oversight

Our commitment to your success doesn't end with approval. The OU provides continuous advice, guidance, academic support, and oversight of quality and standards. Our team of academic reviewers (see page 10), (Senior) Quality and Partnerships Managers, (Senior) Quality and Compliance Managers and other university representatives are dedicated to enhancing your validated provision, ensuring you have the resources and support needed to thrive.

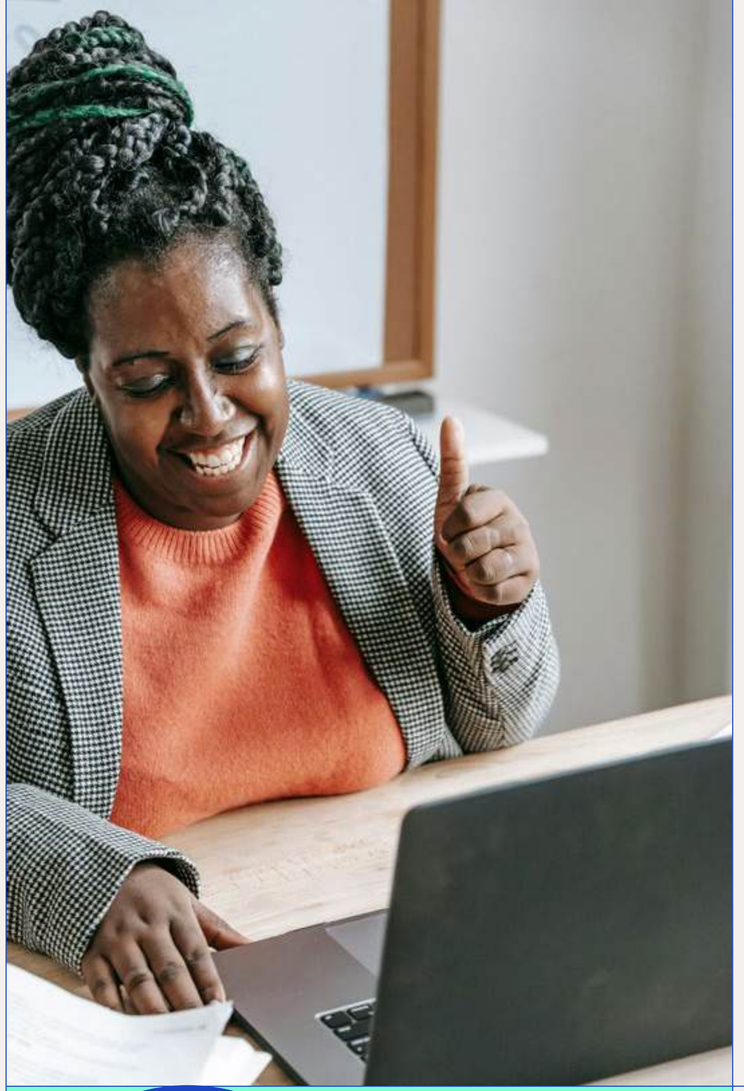


Commitment to a respectful environment

We are committed to creating a respectful and inclusive environment where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. The OU values dignity and respect for all individuals. If you ever feel you have been subjected to bullying or harassment, our Bullying and Harassment Policy is in place to support you.

The OU strives to promote and maintain high academic standards by:

- Assessing each partner's readiness, putting appropriate support in place to ensure partners comply with regulatory and legislative requirements, are delivering good quality academic standards and providing a good student experience.
- Providing a framework of policies designed to foster the development of partners as strong, cohesive and self-critical academic communities.
- Acting as a source of information and advice about good practice concerning all matters related to academic quality and standards.
- Facilitating collaboration and interaction between the OU, partners and national and international organisations, including professional bodies, employers and students.
- Appointing external examiners for validated awards and attending all examination and/or assessment boards where awards are made in the OU's name or where progression is agreed (for validated programmes only.)



Following approval, the OU provides advice, guidance, academic support and oversight of quality and standards. This is provided by academic reviewers, S/QPMs, and other university representatives whose remit is to support the quality assurance and enhancement of validated provision.

OU representatives attend examination board meetings when decisions on OU awards are considered. They also attend some or all key committees and board meetings – academic boards, programme committees, quality standing committees or equivalent meetings, for example. The OU normally agrees with partners at the planning stage which meetings OU representatives will attend.

Partners need to provide the OU with all committee papers and minutes in the year leading up to the Partnership Reapproval Process, as well as supplying minutes of all academic board meetings via the OU's annual Institutional and Programme Monitoring exercise.

Role of OU representatives

Our representatives at key committees will:

- attend committee meetings as agreed
- observe the conduct of boards and committees, ensuring adherence to institutional procedures.
- offer advice on interpreting and applying OU policies and guidance from the UK Quality Code (2024) and all our regulatory bodies (as appropriate.)
- alert the institution and the OU to any potential issues that may impede the effective functioning of boards and committees.
- report to the OU, including Partnership Development and (Re)Approval Process panels.

Academic reviewers

Academic reviewers, are the OU's faculty representatives. They act in an advisory role, engage with programme teams and meet with students registered on OU-validated provision. The role of the OU academic reviewer is integral to the ongoing quality assurance of validated provision and they are expected to submit a summary of their engagements over the year. This is reviewed and reported to the OU's Curriculum Partnership Committee. More information on the academic reviewer role can be found on the OUVP website.



Validation of new programmes

Prospective partners seeking OU approval will be asked to stipulate the programmes they are seeking validation for as part of the application process and this will be discussed with members of OUVP during the discovery phase and discovery meeting. Suitable alternative providers for student transfer, in the event of course closure or whole institutional market exit, should also be identified at this stage.

Existing approved partners will be expected to submit proposals for new programme validations. The proposal should state the rationale, expected student numbers with evidenced local skills need and confirmation of appropriately qualified academic staff and resources. The proposal should also identify suitable alternative providers for student transfer in the event of course closure or whole institutional market exit. OUVP will review proposals, seek faculty approval and advise of any addition charges prior to scheduling the validation activity.

B: The partnership development and approval process, and reapproval process

B1 The principles of partner approval

Partners need to provide evidence that demonstrates their alignment with the OU's principles for (re)approval. They also need to comply with the QAA Quality Code 2024, and any legal, regulatory, statutory and professional requirements applicable to their provision and jurisdiction. Partners will be supported to demonstrate alignment with the OU's principles for approval. These are:

1. Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance.
2. Appropriate academic organisation and the administrative structure to support it and ensure compliance.
3. Provision of an appropriate learning environment.
4. Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement.
5. Engagement with the wider academic and local community

Principle 1: Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance

There should be a governance structure that enables a strategic approach to protecting and assuring the integrity of academic decision-making (which typically covers student admissions, subject curriculum, student assessment, the monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and academic quality) and actively encourages student engagement in academic governance.

There should be an independent body within the organisation with a clear remit for academic development, quality assurance and academic decision-making. This body must be independent of all arrangements the partner has for commercial and/or financial activity.

Where the partner is a company, the owner, shareholders and/or trustees should not exercise direct authority for academic decision-making, as this could lead to role conflict and jeopardise the stability of the academic environment.

The respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different individuals and bodies should be clearly defined within the associated Terms of Reference.

Partners may also find the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) **Committee of University Chairs (CUC) Code of Higher Education Governance**, useful to draw upon when considering Institutional governance arrangements. The Code applies to England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and sets out expectations for accountability, financial sustainability and institutional leadership as well as supporting governing bodies to lead effectively in an increasingly complex environment—while safeguarding institutional autonomy.

Principle 2: Appropriate academic organisation and an administrative structure to support it and ensure compliance

Partners should have an independent governing body that ensures adequate controls are in place to safeguard institutional sustainability, with effective systems for risk management and control.

There should be an organisational structure that is understood and assigns clear executive, administrative and academic responsibilities to individuals and groups to deliver OU validated programmes.

There should be a set of policies, procedures and guidelines, an appropriate regulatory framework, administrative structures and processes in place to support the delivery of OU-validated programmes. All processes and policies involved in the student lifecycle, from recruitment through to completion of students' study, must comply with the OU's requirements and support the University in meeting its statutory, regulatory and quality assurance obligations as a registered provider and awarding body.

There should be a commitment to sharing good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, both formally and informally, across the partner's organisation.

Principle 3: Provision of an appropriate learning environment

Partners should display a commitment to fostering an open intellectual community that expects staff and students to engage in critical reflection and personal, educational or professional development, in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 (see page 206).

The partner must provide sufficient and appropriate facilities, academic learning resources and student support services, enabling it to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

Student support services and academic skills development should be sufficient to support students throughout their student journey. They should cover all key pastoral areas, covering a diverse range of issues. These should include, but not be limited to, mental health and wellbeing, careers advice, safeguarding, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, suicide prevention, faith and community, IT support services, and complaints and appeals.

The partner should have enough qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience, which should be in line with OfS Condition of Registration B2. Academic staff need to have sufficient time allocated to teaching and assessment. They also need to be engaged in designing and delivering programmes, hold an academic qualification or have equivalent experience a level above that which they are teaching and assessing.

All teaching staff should have a shared understanding of the learning outcomes of the programme they teach on, and the strategies for ensuring that these are properly achieved and assessed. The partner should support all students to achieve successful academic and professional/graduate outcomes.

The partner should have a commitment to continuity of the teaching, learning and assessment of a programme(s) in the event of staff absence or departure and ensuring minimal disruption to the student experience.

There should be regular opportunities for staff and the student body to contribute to academic and institutional policy, determination of priorities and discussion of issues affecting the partner's academic performance and direction. The partner should actively engage students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience (and through the (re)validation process).

The partner should ensure a consistent, coherent and evidence-informed strategic approach to the collection, storage and management of data employed across the organisation.

Where appropriate, partners should have a strategic approach to environmental sustainability, which should be echoed in curriculum design and refer to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.



Principle 4: Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement

Partners must demonstrate their adherence to the UK QAA Quality Code 2024 and all the regulatory requirements relevant to the OU, local legislation and any Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies. This also encompasses the use of external reference points, such as apprenticeship standards, where applicable.

Partners should have a system for defining the processes for academic quality assurance and for identifying who has responsibility for decision-making.

The partner's systems should ensure that:

- There are strategic mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on institutional performance, programme performance and student outcomes. These mechanisms should involve processes that are applied systematically and consistently and support compliance with the University's regulatory obligations, as well as any applicable national, local or international regulatory requirements.
- Information and feedback generated from monitoring is assessed and analysed, and then used to evaluate and improve processes, policies, the student experience and teaching, learning and assessment methods
- Outcomes, actions and impact from monitoring and evaluation are communicated to staff, students and external stakeholders.

Mechanisms for institutional and programme evaluation should be informed by, (but not limited to) feedback from the governing body (board of trustees), teaching staff, students, external examiners, external peers and employers, academic reviewers, and statistical information such as student progression, retention and graduate outcomes, as well as external data sets such as National Student Surveys, external quality reviews, previous monitoring exercises, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, employers and The Open University.

Principle 5: Engagement with the wider academic and local community

The partner should ensure that the threshold standards for its qualifications comply with their relevant national qualification frameworks. The partner must be aware of and responsive to national (UK) and international standards, current practice in UK higher education and benchmarks, and (where appropriate) international expectations.

Partners should demonstrate engagement with and awareness of local skills needs and employer demands.

Teaching and learning should be informed by reflective practice. Partners should provide opportunities and support for academic staff to engage in relevant and ongoing professional development, scholarship, research and professional practice that inform programme development and enhancement, support student learning and contribute to high-quality teaching.





B2 Becoming an approved partner

If you are interested in becoming an approved OU partner, please read the following sections carefully. They will provide you with detailed information about how to apply for approval and validation of your programmes.

The approval of a partner—as suitable to design and deliver programmes leading to OU awards—signifies the OU's commitment to ensuring that all registered students are supported to complete their programmes successfully. To ensure this commitment is upheld, the OU reserves the right to request or obtain any information it deems necessary to confirm that a partner continues to meet the principles of approval. This assurance is sought through a structured process of due diligence, during which the OU may seek any evidence it considers appropriate to provide reasonable assurance of compliance and adherence. When a partner has a current or former relationship with another UK awarding institution for the validation of programmes, the OU will ask the awarding institution about the standing and effectiveness of the partner seeking Partnership Development and Approval Process. If the partnership was terminated, the OU will also ask why.

Partners that want to continue offering OU validated awards after the initial period of approval will be subject to periodic partnership reapprovals and Partner Compliance Reviews. Together with annual review, these are key processes used by the OU to ensure partners continue to meet the quality and compliance requirements of an approved validated partner of the OU.

Both parties can agree to withdraw from any phase in the process or choose to amend phases if it benefits the partner or if more development time is required.

Should the OU choose to withdraw from any stage in the approval process, the partner will be informed. The OU may provide specific feedback on areas of development that have been identified.

Should the OU withdraw from the approval, the partner may not reapply for a period of at least 12 months following the decision not to proceed. This is to ensure that the prospective partner has sufficient time to review any feedback and implement the recommendations.

Stage 1: Initial enquiry and application phase

Further information about validation partnerships and other collaborative partnership arrangements is available on the OUVP website. Institutions interested in becoming a partner can also access an application form in the 'Become a Partner' section of the **Validation Partnerships website.** This application form does not commit you to becoming a partner – it facilitates an initial conversation about partnering with the OU, shaped by your interests.

An initial call may be arranged to discuss the proposal and determine suitability and strategic fit. Should all parties wish to proceed, the partner/enquirer will then be asked for further supporting documentary evidence to help the OU undertake the following:

- A due diligence review of the partner including financial due diligence and, where required, enhanced financial due diligence, in order to assess financial viability and sustainability.
- Risk assessment of the partner/ partnership proposal along with clear Market Exit Planning
- Scrutiny of high-level governance, organisational structures and strategic priorities.
- Consideration of current and proposed provision, including programme documentation where available.

Following an application, OUVP might call an initial meeting, either remotely or at the partner's premises. This enables a more detailed discussion regarding the approval process and allows OUVP to learn more about the partner. their experience in delivering higher education, their history and teaching facilities and resources.

The outcomes of this phase, including due diligence, risk assessment and strategic considerations, will inform the University's decision on whether to proceed with the proposal to the next stage. Approval Charges will also be agreed with the partner at this stage.



Stage 2: Discovery phase

An OU team will be appointed to support partners through the approval process.

There will be detailed discussions around the requirements of the Partner Compliance Review (see page 19), and the requirements for Partnership Development and Approval Process (see page 17). The process and requirements of programme validation will also be covered (see page 38).

The OU will work with the institution to assess its readiness for a validation partnership with the OU and identify any areas where further development, support or evidence may be required. The level and nature of support provided by the University will be tailored to the institution's circumstances and may include guidance on approval requirements, quality assurance processes, governance arrangements, programme development and validation requirements. This will help inform the approval journey, including any key milestones and timescales and may result in a review of fees.

The OU may recommend that the partner works with an independent higher education consultant and/or programme subject expert to support them in the approval process. If necessary, this relationship will continue on an ongoing basis.

Face-to-face meetings include a tour of the academic spaces as well as administrative areas, such as the examinations office, secure storage facilities, student recruitment and support team areas and offices, the Learning Resource Centre or Library, plus any on-site student accommodation and student facilities.

A branch or campus approval visit will be required at all locations where delivery of OU validated programmes will take place.

Stage 3: Partner development and approval process

As a four-nation UK University and registered provider, the OU is subject to a range of regulatory and quality assurance requirements. Partners are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and relevant regulatory requirements, and to establish and maintain policies, procedures and arrangements that enable compliance with those requirements in the delivery of OU validated awards.

Partners should take account of relevant UK sector guidance, national qualifications frameworks, applicable regulatory requirements and local legislative requirements when designing, delivering and assuring validated provision. Partners must also support the University in meeting its regulatory and quality assurance obligations as an awarding body.

This process consists of two elements, a Partner Compliance Review (PCR) and a panel approval event.

Partner compliance review

The purpose of the Partner Compliance Review is to:

- Assess the partner's operational and management infrastructure, including the support in place for students studying OU validated awards.
- Assess the relevant policies, procedures and guidance documents for staff and students to ensure compliance with legislation and regulatory requirements.
- (Ensure) that the partner's financial status is sufficiently robust to honour its commitments to registered students, that the partner has appropriate organisational structures to ensure the separation of financial and academic decision-making, and that the partner is of appropriate legal status.

Partner compliance review includes:

- Review of the partner's submitted documentation to ensure it complies with regulation and legislation. This review is carried out by OU subject matter experts.
- An online demonstration to assess the partner's data security and compliance of the partner's virtual learning environment, website and student record system.
- A series of meetings, either face-to-face or virtual, where OU representatives collaborate with the partner to ensure policies meet the compliance criteria, to confirm examination processes and storage facilities, and assess the appropriateness of site facilities (particularly in relation to health and safety, security and safeguarding). Any outstanding due diligence regarding policies and procedures will also be explored as part of the approval event.

Where agreed, the partner will receive additional support with policies that require development or enhancement to ensure legal and regulatory compliance and alignment with OU regulatory frameworks.

Partner compliance review documentation

The partner will need to provide information for the Partner Compliance Review.

The partner will receive a proforma mapping document detailing all the documentation required for the review. Questionnaires and compliance statements may also need to be completed and submitted. The submission requirements are discussed with the partner and agreed in advance.

Submission documents are submitted via MS Teams (where possible). Full instructions are provided on how to do this. The submission should also include the mapping document, detailing which policy, or page within a policy, the OU subject matter expert needs to refer to for each area of scrutiny.

The OU should receive the submission by the date agreed for each policy or area of scrutiny so that it can be considered and reviewed before any review and support meetings take place. Supplementary information may be needed after the documentation has been examined – if so, it will be requested.

All policies and procedures must comply with relevant legislation as detailed within the guidance and proforma mapping document.



Partner compliance review meetings

The partner will be provided with information about Partner Compliance Review meetings, including details of the required documentation, draft agenda and process.

The meetings include discussions with the partner's senior managers, as well as members of administrative staff responsible for those policy/process areas. These meetings enable the OU team to gain a clear understanding of how administrative processes operate, to meet key personnel, and to obtain assurances regarding the adequacy of student support, the suitability of facilities, and the safety of students while on-site.

A separate online demonstration of the student record system and virtual learning environment will also be required.

The OU works with partners to ensure that a compliant suite of higher education policies and procedures are in place.

Conditions may be set regarding reviewed policies and procedures. Those conditions may need to be met before approval can be granted and students can be registered and/or may be set as post approval conditions (see page 24).

Partner approval event

The final stage of the Partnership Development and Approval Process is the approval event at the partner's site, attended by a panel of suitably qualified and experienced academics and industry experts (appointed by the OU). Ahead of the approval event, the partner must provide an electronic submission of documentation, as specified by the OU.

Partnership Development and Approval Process panel members review the submitted documentation before the meeting, identifying areas of questioning that will be included in the agenda. The panel will highlight likely lines of enquiry to the partner in advance of the meeting, although this does not preclude other matters being raised during meetings.

Part of the process is ensuring that the partner's policies confirm the examination process and storage facilities for assessment material are in place, as well as assessing the appropriateness of site facilities, particularly in relation to health and safety, security and safeguarding.

The approval panel may also explore matters related to the Partner Compliance Review.



Approval of new or additional teaching facilities and sites

If a partner changes sites or locations or wishes to add sites or locations that have not been approved as part of the Partnership Development and Approval Process or Partnership Reapproval Process, a site approval visit will be necessary. The OU must be consulted in advance of any sites or locations being used to deliver teaching or services to OU validated students.

Partners should consult with their S/QPM in the first instance and complete the OUVP site approval questionnaire. This will inform the review and approval approach taken by OUVP, based on the type of location or site and its utilisation. OUVP will then let the partner know the format (and fees, if applicable) for the site approval. The partner may need to submit updated policies for key areas that apply to the site/location before the site approval visit - health and safety, business continuity, safeguarding and IT infrastructure, for example. These will be submitted for review and feedback from the relevant OU subject matter expert. If a site approval visit is not required, partners will need to complete a compliance statement.

All locations and sites require approval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. Following approval, the OUVP validation agreement is amended accordingly. Partners may not advertise, offer or register students on any OU-validated programmes at a new location or site prior to OU approval as this will be a breach of contract and consumer protection law.

Appointment of a Process Panel Member

OUVP will appoint a suitable panel member to work as a Process Panel Member (PPM) for both the PDAP process, and on occasion for the Partnership Review Process (PRP) process, to support partners in PDAP and PRP activity.

The PPM will act as a ‘critical friend’, engaging constructively with partner teams to provide thoughtful challenge, test assumptions, and encourage reflective discussion. In doing so, they will offer alternative viewpoints and informed critique, ensuring that proposals are thoroughly considered and aligned with regulatory expectations and sector best practice.

In addition to this evaluative role, the PPM will provide developmental support as partners prepare for the final (re) approval event, helping to identify areas for refinement and strengthening the overall coherence and quality of documentation. This approach is designed to be both supportive and rigorous, fostering a collaborative working relationship that promotes confidence, transparency, and readiness for formal scrutiny. It is an expectation that partners must engage with PPM support and feedback.

The OU requires a formal report from the PPM to be submitted to the panel in advance of the final event, which will detail the support provided and the partner’s engagement in the process. The OU has developed guidance which will be supplied to PPMs as part of the appointment process.



The following criteria will be considered by the OU when appointing the PPM:

- The PPM will be familiar with HE requirements as well as OU validation requirements and have either held or holds a senior, quality-related post
- Conflicts of interest and impartiality; all conflicts of interest will be managed appropriately, i.e. the PPM will not be appointed from an institution that might present as “competition” to the partner, or had formal links with the partner in the last five years as an external examiner or have been employed by the partner, for example:
- Where appropriate, the PPM will have professional expertise from a relevant professional background.
- Individuals who have been engaged by the partner as external consultants for the institution will not be appointed as a PPM.

Documentation

Information will be requested for the Partnership Development and Approval Process and in preparation for the visit.

Submission documents should be submitted by an agreed submission date prior to the event, so that it can be considered and reviewed before the final visit takes place. Full guidance on submission requirements is provided by the (Senior) Quality and Compliance Manager. Details of the required documents are provided via guidance and a mapping form in advance of submission and discussed during the discovery phase.

The Partnership Development and Approval Process panel

In order to explore how a partner proposes to meet the requirements for approval, or is already fulfilling them, the panel will meet the groups set out below.

An indication of areas for discussion is listed below, however, other lines of questioning may also be explored, and the panel may wish to discuss similar areas with more than one group.

Panels meeting with senior management and board of trustees (or equivalent body)

The inclusion of governing body representatives in the final review meetings is a critical component of the OU’s quality assurance process. Their presence brings an independent, strategic perspective that strengthens oversight of academic standards and ensures that decisions are informed not only by operational considerations but also by institutional accountability and regulatory expectations. Governing body members are well positioned to provide constructive challenge, scrutinise risk, and test the robustness of evidence presented, thereby enhancing the integrity and transparency of the review. Crucially, their contribution helps to ensure that outcomes are aligned with institutional priorities, public interest, and the requirements of bodies such as the OfS, reinforcing confidence in the process and supporting continuous improvement across validated provision.

Panels meeting with representatives from the partner’s governing body typically discuss topics such as:

- Institutional mission, strategic planning and development.
- Institutional management, policy making, executive and academic structures (including the separation of academic decision-making and the role of the governing body.)
- Commitment to equal opportunities.
- Staffing, staff appraisal and development.
- Finance and resources.

Panels meeting with members of the academic board or board of studies, and those responsible for the standard and quality of programmes will typically discuss topics such as:

- The role and remit of the Academic Board
- Academic responsibilities and quality assurance
- Institutional level policies and regulations
- External examining arrangements
- Institutional assessment policy
- Research and staff development
- Appeals, complaints and disciplinary procedures
- Monitoring and oversight of student continuation, completion and progression data
- The student experience.

Panels meeting with those responsible for programme development and monitoring[1] (an academic standards committee, for example) will typically discuss topics such as:

- Arrangements for programme design, internal approval and monitoring
- Provision for equal opportunities
- Employer links and provision for student placements, where applicable
- Provision for personal development planning
- The role of external input and feedback from students and, where applicable, employers in programme development and enhancement.

Panels meeting with teaching staff and administrative staff will typically discuss topics such as:

- The experience of the partner's academic community.
- Understanding and ownership of quality assurance processes.
- Opportunities to contribute to programme development.
- Staff development and research.
- Student support process and the student journey.

Panels meeting with students, including student representatives will typically discuss topics such as:

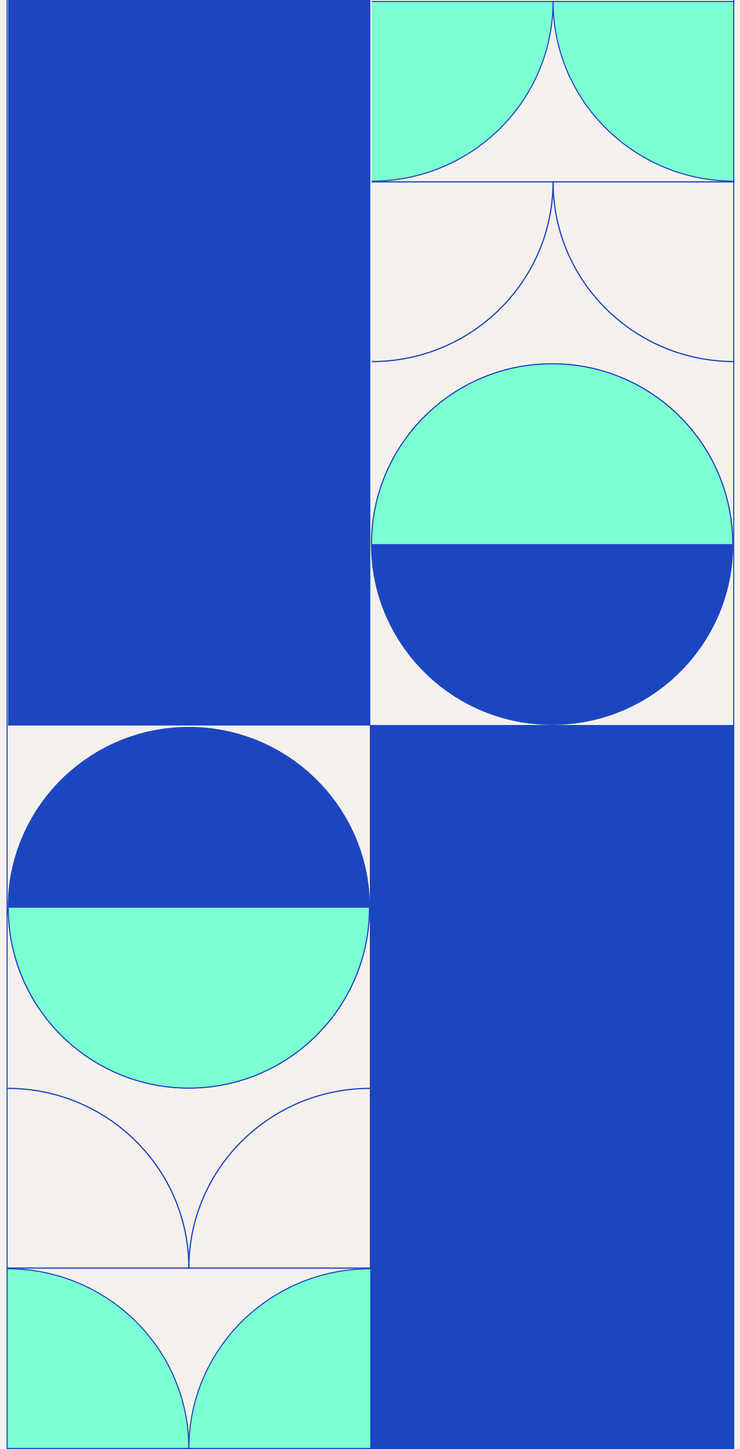
- The student experience of the partner's learning environment, including work placements (where applicable.)
- Student representation within the committee structures and the opportunities for feedback to staff.
- Adequacy of student support, including support for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Panels meeting with employer representatives

If a partner wishes to utilise apprenticeship delivery for some or all its higher education programmes, the panel will need to meet with employer representatives. This may also be appropriate for the delivery of foundation degrees. Doing this enables the panel to explore how these relationships are managed to ensure the student experience is positive. Meetings with industry or employer representatives also demonstrates to panels, how their expertise is used to inform curriculum design and enhancement.



1 OUVP recognise that teaching staff are often responsible for programme development and monitoring. Therefore, this meeting and the teaching staff meeting, can sometimes be combined.



B3 Decisions arising from partnership development and approval process

The approval panel agrees its recommendations for consideration by the OU's Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC), with a draft copy reported to the partner at the end of the final meeting. Once the panel has agreed its conclusion, panel members should not raise further issues or make substantive amendments to any conditions of approval or to its recommendations to the partner. If further questions arise following any resubmission of documents, these will be discussed with the partner, and any amendments agreed. However, when considering the approval panel's recommendations, CuPC may decide to amend or add conditions and recommendations.

Conditions may be set regarding reviewed policies and procedures, and they may need to be met before approval can be granted and students can be registered and/or may be set as post approval conditions.

A draft report on the approval outcomes are sent to the partner for comment on matters of factual accuracy before being presented to the OU's CuPC.

Potential outcomes from the Partnership Development and Approval process

All recommended outcomes of the Partnership Development and Approval Process are presented to the OU's CuPC for approval.

Approval

Where initial approval is recommended, it is normally for a full period of five years. However, the OU reserves the right to instigate an interim review at any time during the initial period of approval. Conditions of approval

Conditions of approval

Approval may be conditional on further work that has to be completed before final approval is confirmed. A condition is an activity fundamental to the quality or compliance of the partner, programme and/or student experience.

Conditions may be pre-approval conditions (which must be met before approval can be granted) or post-approval conditions (which must be met by an agreed timeframe).

All pre-approval conditions need to be fully met before the partner can advertise that they are a partner of the OU or advertise and market any OU validated programmes. Any programmes still to be validated by the OU cannot be advertised or recruited to until the OU has validated and approved them (see page 38). The PPM may be able to support the partner in addressing any conditions set by the approval panel.

Non-approval of an institution

If the panel decides it will not recommend a partner for approval, the chair reports the findings to the institution's representatives at the end of the final meeting.

Within four weeks of that event, a report is submitted to the institution, providing detailed feedback on areas for development and highlighting the rationale behind the non-approval decision. The partner is required to meet its financial commitments to the OU to date.

If a partner wants to reapply to the Partnership Development and Approval Process, it must wait at least 12 months before proceedings can begin again.

Recommendations (for enhancement purposes)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education defines enhancement as the systematic process by which higher education institutions improve the quality of their educational offerings, and the support provided to students' learning.

The approval panel may also make recommendations to support a partner's organisational or process development and enhancement.

A recommendation is an activity/area for the partner to (consider and) explore, with the aim of enhancing the student experience or institutional environment. Recommendations can also be made at programme level at (re)validation.

Recommendations are followed up in monitoring processes and reports to the OU.

Follow-up

When required, a follow-up visit, meetings or demonstrations may take place. This gives the opportunity to examine areas that have been subject to conditions and/or where development was occurring at the time of the review – the introduction of new IT systems or the development of buildings or facilities, for example.

Any changes to processes, policies, guidance documents or infrastructures as a result of changes within the partner or due to regulatory or legislative changes, should reported to the OU as soon as the change is known (if they are changes to pre-contractual/contractual documents between the partner and students on OU validated awards, the OU must first be consulted and then students will need to be consulted and changes agreed). Documents revised because of changes should be submitted to the OU for review and approval.





B4 The partnership reapproval process

For existing partners, Partnership Reapproval is required in the academic year before the most recent approval/reapproval period expires. If there are exceptional reasons for holding an earlier review, then an interim review (see C4.1) is conducted.

The Reapproval consists of a Partner Compliance Review and Reapproval panel visit, with formal outcomes submitted for approval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee (as per the partnership development and approval process see page 12)

However, the documentation required for submission and review by the OU is determined by the OU on a partner-by-partner basis. This will be discussed with the partner at the Advisory Meeting scheduled by OUVP (see below). The OU reviews the period since the last approval/reapproval, considering areas such as:

- Documentation and policies that have not been reviewed/updated via monitoring processes or since the last re/approval.
- Any areas of concern flagged by the OU or the partner through regular partnership management and oversight processes and meetings.
- Any regular themes/patterns/trends identified in monitoring processes and reports
- Any regular themes/patterns/trends identified in monitoring processes and reports.
- Any outstanding actions or recommendations that have not been addressed or considered by the partner.
- Any compliance concerns or discrepancies noted – through website spot checks, for example:
- Discrepancies raised in exam board meetings.
- Any risks or issues currently under review or monitoring.
- Significant changes in staff, structures, organisation, etc.

Partnership Reapproval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee is subject to the satisfaction of any conditions set at both the Partner Compliance Review and by the Reapproval panel. Final reapproval is also subject to the signed contractual agreement between the OU and the partner and in line with the approval letter issued from the director.

Partnership Reapproval confirms the institution's continued eligibility to deliver OU validated awards. Programme validation and revalidations remain subject to the University's validation and revalidation requirements.

Advisory Meeting

An advisory meeting forms part of the Partnership Reapproval Process. This will normally take place online and with key partner colleagues (as advised by the OU). The meeting is designed to provide information on the focus and structure of the final reapproval meeting, including detailed conversation covering documentation submission requirements, the Self Evaluation document and any supporting appendices.

The advisory meeting aims to promote thinking for the partner around the effectiveness of institutional systems and academic oversight since the Partnership Development and Approval process or last Partnership Reapproval Process and to promote the identification of good practice, risks, and enhancement opportunities for inclusion into the SED and supporting documentation.

The meeting is an opportunity to discuss the final event structure, the paperwork required and manage the partner's expectations of the process.

Transnational Education

The QAA defines transnational education (TNE) as **'the delivery of higher education level awards by recognised UK degree-awarding bodies in a country, or to students, other than where the awarding provider is based'**. Transnational education gives students around the world better access to high-quality education, although the OU recognises that there may be different/additional partner requirements to ensure compliance with in-country legislation. This is discussed during the Partnership Development and Approval Process (PDAP)/Partnership Reapproval Process (PRP).

For partners located outside the UK, the OU kindly ask that you provide written evidence showing that our partnership has the approval of the relevant governmental authorities and complies with national laws. We understand that this process involves consulting with these authorities and securing any necessary legal approvals, and we appreciate your efforts in managing this at your own expense.

To ensure the best outcomes for our collaborations, the OU typically approves institutions whose validated awards are recognised in the host country. We encourage non-UK partners to seek validation for programmes that may also lead to other awards, such as professional qualifications or US and European degrees and diplomas.

All agreements between our partners and the OU are governed by UK law. In the event of any disputes, we will rely on the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the UK courts. However, we are committed to resolving any issues amicably and in good faith, through open and constructive negotiations.

We also want to ensure transparency regarding any additional costs the OU may incur in maintaining an overseas partnership. The partner will cover these costs, either directly or indirectly. We work closely with individual institutions to agree the financial arrangements, which are then clearly outlined in the agreement.

Language of instruction and assessment

Programmes leading to validated awards of the OU are normally written, delivered and assessed in English.

If a programme (or a significant part of it) is to be delivered and assessed in a language other than English, overseas or in the UK, evidence must be provided that enough people at the partner organisation are fluent in both the delivery language and English, that they have subject expertise at an appropriate level and have first-hand knowledge of the standards of UK degrees. .

English will be the language of communication between the OU and all partners. English must be used for key documentation including institutional agreements, submissions for partnership approval and validation, definitive programme documents, annual review, external examiners' reports, registration and conferment records, and minutes of assessment boards deciding final awards. Partnership approval, partnership reapproval, validation and revalidation panel discussions will be carried out in English.

Partners need to provide the OU with English translations of programme handbooks and any advertising, publicity and public information relating to OU validated programmes. The OU will also require translations of other institutional documents, assessment strategy, marked student scripts, records and student transcripts.

Except where otherwise agreed, translation of materials is the partner's responsibility and at their own expense. The partner must ensure translations are undertaken by a competent and independent translator.

The OU's award certificates indicate where a programme has been delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English.

It is expected that the minimum IELTS score for postgraduate study is 6.5, and for undergraduate study 6.0.

It is also expected that the minimum score within each test area is 6.0 for postgraduate and 5.5 for undergraduate.

IELTS Score[1]	TOEFL iBT® Equivalent Score[2]	Cambridge English Scale Equivalent Score[4]
5.5	46-59	162
6.0	60-78	169
6.5	79-93	176

2 International English Language Testing System
3 Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet Based Test; https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/scores; https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/scores-admissions/compare/admissions/compare/
4 https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/461626-cambridge-english-qualifications-comparing-scores-to-ielts.pdf

C: Contract and publicity

C1 Institutional agreement

Signing a contractual agreement following re/approval

Following the Partnership Development and Approval Process or the Partnership Reapproval Process, and confirmation that all pre-approval conditions have been met, a formal agreement must be signed between the OU and the institution. This sets out the terms and conditions under which the OU agrees to validate programmes and confer OU awards to the institution's students. The contract aligns with the period of approval granted, the approval letter and certificate of accreditation. This Handbook details the operational requirements referred to in the contract.

C2 OU requirements regarding partner publicity materials

Partners cannot publish any co-branded publicity materials or produce any materials that imply in any way that they have been approved by the OU

until approval has been confirmed via the formal approval letter. Once the approval letter is received, any new programmes pending validation approval may be advertised as 'subject to validation by the Open University', provided that the templates, wording and guidance set out in the Marketing before (Re)Validation Guidance are strictly followed. Please note, partners cannot enrol students onto a programme until all pre-approval conditions have been met and the programme has been formally approved.

Once conditions are met, and a programme is approved, any changes to content and delivery must follow the change process articulated in D7 of the Handbook for Validated Awards.

When a programme of study leads to a validated award of the OU, this should be clearly stated in all publicly available information about the programme, whether that appears in print or online.

Compliance with the OU publicity requirements is a key element of the Partner Compliance Review for PDAP and PRP. Our ongoing due diligence checks seek to ensure that all publicly available material complies with Competition and Markets Authority requirements, OfS C Conditions and Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidance.

C2.1 Use of the OU logo and wording

Partners of the OU are allowed to use the OU logo in accordance with the OU brand guidelines. This does not include use of the OU crest - which cannot be used to promote the partnership. Brand guidelines and a high-resolution logo can be obtained from OUVP at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk. A general guide is that the OU logo should not be used on any of the partner's own correspondence. Using the logo in this manner, (on letters, for example) could be misleading, giving applicants and students the impression that the decision or contents of the letter has been made or endorsed by the OU, when it is not the case.

Validated partners must use the following wording to describe their relationship with the OU:

"[Institution] is approved by The Open University as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards."

Or:

"[Institution] is a partner institution of The Open University."

Partner institutions should use the following wording to describe validated programmes/modules:

"Programmes/modules in [XYZ] subject(s) have been developed and will be delivered by [organisation]. They have been validated through a process of external peer review by The Open University as being of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to The Open University validated awards of [full title of award(s)]."

Or:

"[Title of programme/This award] is validated by The Open University."



C2.2 Marketing before Validation and Revalidation

Once partners are formally approved by the Open University, they may be able to market, advertise, recruit and make offers to prospective students in advance of programme approval or reapproval (validation or revalidation), **provided that** the guidance, mandatory disclosures, prescribed wording and templates set out in the **Marketing before (Re)Validation Guidance** is strictly followed.

The Marketing before (Re)Validation Guidance sets out the responsibilities, permitted activities, mandatory disclosures and approved wording and templates that must be used to ensure compliance with consumer protection law and regulatory requirements during the pre-approval stages.

For the avoidance of doubt:

- **New partners proposing new programmes** must obtain prior approval of all student-facing marketing and recruitment wording before use.
- **Existing partners** do not require routine pre approval of wording for new or revalidated programmes but must ensure that all mandatory disclosures, approved

Prior to programme (re)approval, partners must not: wording and templates are used in full.

- Imply that a programme is approved or guaranteed to run.
- Issue binding offers or enrol/register students
- Collect tuition fees or deposits.
- Omit the required “subject to validation/revalidation wording.
- Fail to clearly communicate the programme’s approval status and indicative timelines.
- Use unapproved wording.

Partners are strongly advised to seek independent legal advice before undertaking marketing, advertising or recruitment activity prior to programme (re)approval, to ensure compliance with applicable consumer protection and regulatory requirements.

C3 Key information partners must ensure is accurate and accessible

Partners are responsible for ensuring that information provided to prospective and current students about OU validated provision is accurate, clear, accessible and kept up to date. Information provided during the research, application and offer stages must comply with consumer protection legislation and relevant Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance.

Material information required to support informed decision-making should be made available through publicly accessible sources at the research and application stage. This includes information relating to programme content, delivery arrangements, assessment methods, study locations, entry requirements, tuition fees, additional costs and any other information likely to influence a student's decision to apply. Further guidance on the research and application stage and material information requirements can be found in paragraphs 4.6-4.22 of the CMA's Advice to UK Higher Education Providers on Consumer Protection Law.

At the offer stage, prospective students must be provided with the information required to make an informed decision, including the pre-contract information described in Annex B of the CMA guidance. As pre-contract information forms part of the contractual relationship between the student and the institution, changes should be carefully considered and, where required, the express agreement of affected students obtained before implementation.

Where material information is amended following publication, prospective students should be informed of the changes in a timely manner. Failure to do so may constitute a misleading omission under consumer protection legislation.



The table below includes details of the checks carried out by the OU on some key information provided by partners. It also outlines the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the sign-off and monitoring processes, both at the OU and at the partner.

	INFORMATION	PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES
1.	**Marketing, advertising, promotional materials and social media**	Partners are responsible for ensuring that all marketing, advertising, promotional materials and social media content is accurate, compliant with consumer law and accurately describes the relationship with the OU and adheres to OU branding rules this includes all printed or online brochures and prospectuses. OUVP will request confirmation of partner compliance via the Annual Review process. The OU will carry out regular spot checks to ensure accuracy and compliance.
2.	**Student Information**	Information required by students should be accessible and kept up to date. This may be provided through student handbooks, programme handbooks, websites, virtual learning environments or other appropriate channels. Where student information contains pre-contract information, that information must also be publicly accessible. **Appendix 1** provides guidance on student information requirements, including information that should be publicly available and information that may be provided through student-facing channels. If the student handbook contains pre-contractual information and that pre-contractual information needs to be changed or updated, students must be consulted and active consent obtained for any changes made. Whenever approved changes made to the programme (see **Section D7** for approval process), require amendment to the programme handbook or student handbook, the OU and students must be given a replacement handbook.
3.	**The Student Guide**	The **Student Guide** introduces students to the OU, and explains what being registered on a programme, or single registerable module, validated by the OU means to them. As well as being available on your website, an electronic copy of the guide must be circulated annually to all students registered on a validated programme or single registerable module.

	INFORMATION	PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES
4.	**Regulations for validated awards of The Open University**	The current version of the Regulations must be publicly available via the partner website, with clear signposting from programme information pages.
5.	**Programme specifications**	All programme specifications for OU validated awards must be available on your public facing website. They should be clearly signposted if embedded in programme handbooks. Programme specifications should be sent to your S/QPM on an annual basis.
6.	**Partner websites and digital content**	Partners are responsible for ensuring that all public-facing website and digital content is accurate, accessible and compliant with relevant legal and regulatory requirements, including consumer protection requirements. OUVP will request confirmation of partner compliance via the Annual Review process. Significant changes to websites, branding or digital platforms should be communicated through normal partnership management arrangements or Annual Review processes.

Retention of material information

Material information (printed or electronic information provided to prospective or current students about validated programmes) should be retained for at least 6 years after the last cohort has completed or withdrawn from the programme. This will enable the institution to evidence exactly what was provided to a student at the research and application stage, for example a student complaint reaches the OIA, CMA scrutiny, OfS regulatory investigations, programme closure or teach out.

For validated provision, the following should ordinarily be retained:

- Prospectuses and programme brochures.
- Website content and programme pages
- Offer letters and applicant communications.
- Programme specifications.
- Tuition fee information.
- Terms and conditions.
- Marketing materials
- Course closure/change communications.
- Records showing when material information was amended and approved.

Degree outcomes statements

Partners delivering Level 6 provision are encouraged to publish a Degree Outcomes Statement that analyses institutional degree classification profiles and summarises the outcomes of institutional review and assurance activities relating to academic standards and student achievement. Degree Outcomes Statements can support providers in demonstrating how they protect the value of qualifications and align with the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and, where relevant, the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration relating to academic standards, including Conditions B4 and B5.

Partners may find it challenging to produce meaningful trend analysis where cohorts are small, where there is limited Level 6 validated provision, or where provision is relatively new. In such circumstances, partners are encouraged to publish proportionate information and discuss appropriate approaches with their S/QPM.

Degree Outcomes Statements are typically concise public documents that:

1. **Review trends in degree classifications over time, where meaningful data is available**
2. **Explain the regulations, policies and processes used to protect academic standards and assure the credibility of awards.**
3. **Summarise actions taken, enhancements implemented and progress made in response to institutional review and analysis.**

Partners should ensure that Degree Outcomes Statements are considered through appropriate institutional governance arrangements and approved by the governing body (or equivalent) before publication. Statements should normally be published on the partner's website and reviewed annually to ensure that they remain current and accurately reflect institutional performance and enhancement activity.

Further information and guidance on Degree Outcomes Statements is available from the **UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) website**.



C4 Post-approval and post-validation changes

Validated provision arrangements (approved or reapproved) are expected to remain in place for the duration of the (re)approval period. If changes are required (for enhancement purposes, to comply with external stakeholder requirements, or to address a concern, for example), OUVP may undertake a review. Partners are asked to consult Section D7 for information on minor, moderate and major changes and the CMA implications and discuss with their S/QPM should they need further information about the review process.

The OU must be advised of any significant changes to personnel, organisational structure. The OU may initiate an earlier revalidation process within the approval period if quality assurance issues indicate a risk. Partners must inform their S/QPM immediately of any changes in staffing levels on OU validated programmes. You must also inform your S/QPM when you appoint a new member of staff on the OU validated programme, securely sending a copy of their CV with the completed cover sheet (using the new staff proforma template - available from your S/QPM). Partners must also inform their S/QPM when staff at partner institutions take industrial action and if this has any impact on students.

C4.1 Interim partner review

An interim review may be triggered, outside of the Partnership Reapproval Process schedule, to consider any wider concerns at institutional level. Although not an exhaustive list, this event will arise if there are:

- changes to the legal ownership or status of the partner institution.
- financial concerns/irregularity.
- wide re-structuring in terms of senior leadership and institutional governance.
- repeated problems with the preparation and/or management of, or unsatisfactory outcomes from regular partner monitoring oversight and annual review.
- significant changes to administrative staffing structure or processes that have an impact on the quality of the management and delivery of higher education.
- organisation-wide issues that impact on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and/or the student experience.
- issues that could impact on future academic standards
- a lack of senior leadership and support for the delivery of higher education validated programmes.
- limited oversight and coordination of quality assurance across validated programmes.
- repeated problems with the preparation and/or management of examination boards.
- issues identified by regulators or by professional, regulatory and statutory bodies.
- Concerns triggered by the execution of the Market Exit Plan
- Reports of whistleblowing or student complaints that require further investigation.

An interim review usually requires the partner to submit documentation for review by the OU, plus a panel visit from the OU. Details are provided to the partner ahead of the review.

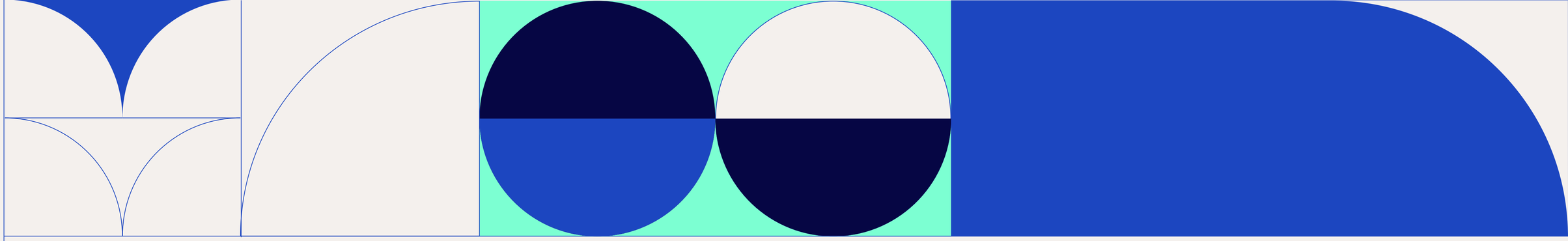
C4.2 Suspension of student registration

The University may suspend the registration of new students to a validated programme or partnership where it has concerns relating to academic standards, quality assurance, regulatory compliance, governance, reputation, financial sustainability, or any other matter that may place students or the University at risk.

The University may also suspend new student registrations where a partner has not met conditions arising from Partner Development (Re)Approval, a Partner Compliance Review, programme approval activity, or other required actions within agreed timescales.

A suspension of registration normally affects the recruitment and registration of new students only. Existing students should, wherever possible, be supported to continue and complete their studies. Partners are therefore expected to maintain appropriate arrangements, including a Market Exit Plan and Student Protection Plan, to protect students' interests in the event of programme closure, partnership termination, or any other situation that could disrupt study.

Where concerns arise that may affect the continuation of the partnership or validated provision, partners should engage with the University at the earliest opportunity to agree appropriate actions and safeguard students.



Reportable events

Partners must notify the University promptly of any event, circumstance or proposed change that may affect a validated programme, the partnership, students, or the partner's ability to meet its contractual and regulatory obligations.

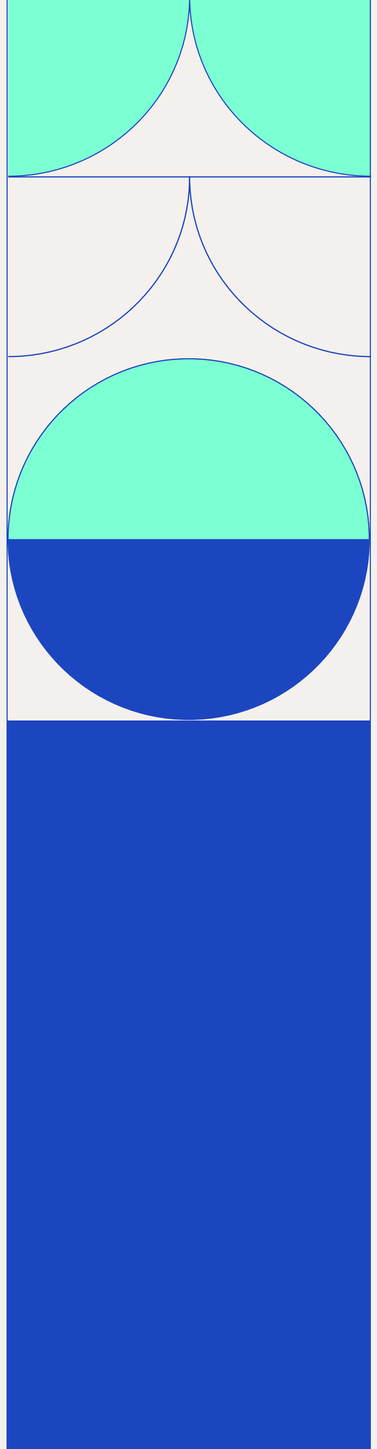
While the Office for Students provides guidance on reportable events, responsibility for determining whether an event should be reported to regulators rests with the relevant provider. Partners that are registered with the OfS are responsible for meeting their own regulatory reporting requirements.

If a partner becomes aware of an actual or potential reportable event, it should contact its S/QPM at the earliest opportunity to discuss the matter and agree any required actions.

Engagement with external regulatory and quality bodies

In relation to engagement with external regulatory bodies, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and other external agencies, partners are required to:

- Inform the OU in advance of any audit, accreditation, inspection, review or investigation relating to the partner or to OU validated provision.
- Provide draft self-evaluation and review documentation in sufficient time for OU consideration and comment, where appropriate.
- Provide copies of reports, findings, recommendations and communications received from external bodies, including draft reports where these are shared with the partner.
- Provide the OU with an opportunity to comment on draft action plans arising from external reviews, where appropriate.
- Keep the OU informed of progress against action plans and any subsequent engagement with the external body.
- Provide the OU with copies of relevant OfS registration, refusal, compliance or monitoring correspondence, including details of any conditions of registration and Access and Participation Plans, where applicable.
- Nominate and maintain an accountable officer, where required, and inform the OU of any changes.
- Comply with all applicable regulatory requirements, conditions of registration and funding conditions.
- Notify the partner's S/QPM promptly of any actual or potential reportable event and, where applicable, fulfil any associated regulatory reporting requirements.
- Understand and comply with the legal and regulatory requirements relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom.



C5 Exiting the partnership

If either the partner or the University decide to exit the partnership, the exit will be managed following the terms within the contractual agreement, the Student Protection Plan and/or the Market Exit Plan. Partners must cooperate with the University in the development, maintenance and review of a Market Exit Plan and must maintain an appropriate Student Protection Plan and associated policies, including refunds and compensation arrangements. These arrangements should support the protection of students' interests in the event of programme closure, partnership termination, institutional closure, or any other circumstance that may affect the continuity of study.

If a partner decides to exit from a validation arrangement with the University, written notification must be provided to the Director of OUVP and the partner's S/QPM in accordance with the Validation Agreement. The notification should be signed by the institution's accountable officer, chief executive, principal, or equivalent authorised representative and should set out the reasons for the proposed exit together with any relevant supporting information.

In all exit scenarios, the interests of existing students must be the primary consideration.

Wherever possible, priority should be given to enabling existing students to complete their studies through a managed teach-out arrangement. Where a teach-out is not practicable, alternative arrangements may be considered, including transfer to another awarding body or provider. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, taking account of academic standards, regulatory requirements, contractual obligations and the interests of students.

The University and the partner will work together throughout any exit process to ensure that students are supported and that communications are timely, accurate and coordinated. Communications relating to partnership exit, programme closure, transfer arrangements or related student protection measures must be agreed with the University before being issued to students

Where the University withdraws, suspends or terminates approval, validation or student registration rights, the provisions of the Validation Agreement will apply. The University may require the implementation of student protection measures, teach-out arrangements, transfer arrangements or other actions necessary to protect students and meet its regulatory obligations.

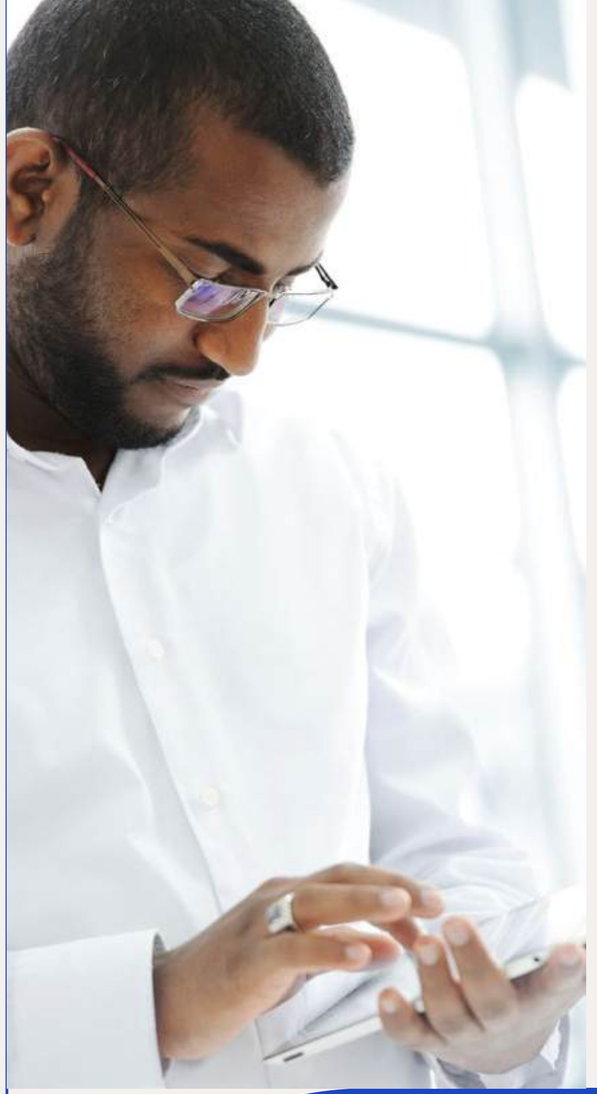
Market Exit and Student Protection Arrangements

Students studying on validated programmes are registered with, and hold a contractual relationship directly with the partner institution rather than the Open University. Responsibility for the student contract, consumer protection obligations, complaints handling, refunds and compensation arrangements, and day-to-day delivery of the student experience therefore rests primarily with the partner institution. As the validating body, the University has responsibilities relating to academic standards, quality assurance, student protection and its own regulatory obligations. In certain circumstances, the University may require enhanced oversight or intervention to protect students, safeguard academic standards or meet regulatory requirements.

To support effective partnership risk management, business continuity and student protection, all validated partners are required to maintain, and review regularly, the following:

- A Student Protection Plan.
- A Market Exit Plan developed and maintained in partnership with OUVP.
- Refunds and Compensation Policies.
- Student Complaints Procedures.
- Student Terms and Conditions.

The S/QPM will support the development and periodic review of Market Exit Plans and may request updates where circumstances change or risks emerge. Market Exit Plans should be reviewed regularly and updated whenever there is a material change in circumstances, including the addition or removal of programmes. Partners should not rely solely on the annual review cycle to ensure that plans remain current and effective.



Market Exit Plans should set out the arrangements that would apply in the event of an orderly or disorderly cessation of delivery, significant disruption to provision or termination of the validation relationship. Plans should identify and address, as a minimum:

- Triggers that might lead to Market Exit.
- Protection of students and continuity of study.
- Communications with students, staff, applicants and regulators.
- Teach-out and transfer arrangements.
- Access to student records and academic information.
- Staffing, facilities and learning resources.
- Refunds, compensation and complaints handling arrangements.
- Relevant regulatory and contractual obligations.

Partners must notify OUVP promptly of any actual or potential issue that may present a material risk to the continuation of validated provision and may be considered a trigger for Market Exit. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Financial distress or insolvency risk.
- A significant decline in student recruitment or not recruiting the required number of students to remain financially viable.
- Loss of key staff, facilities or resources.
- Regulatory intervention or investigation.
- Loss of PSRB recognition or accreditation.
- Staffing, facilities and learning resources.
- Significant governance, ownership or organisational changes; or
- Any other matter that could affect the partner's ability to deliver validated provision.

Student Protection Plans must be maintained by all validated partners, whether or not they are registered with the Office for Students. Plans should be proportionate to the risks faced by the institution and should include arrangements for programme closure, institutional closure, partnership termination, teach-out, transfer opportunities and student support measure.

Practical Considerations for Partnership Exit Planning

When developing or implementing a Market Exit Plan or Student Protection Plan, partners should consider the following areas to help protect students' interests and meet their contractual, regulatory and consumer protection obligations:

1. **Communication and transparency:**

- Communicate proposed changes and exit arrangements clearly and promptly to students, applicants, staff and other relevant stakeholders.
- Explain how the exit may affect programme delivery, assessment, support services, awards, and student options.
- Ensure all published information remains accurate and up to date throughout the exit period.

2. **Continuity of study:**

- Prioritise arrangements that enable students to complete their studies with minimal disruption.
- Consider teach-out arrangements wherever practicable.
- Where teach-out is not possible, identify potential transfer opportunities and provide students with clear information about available options.
- Provide clear guidance on the process for transferring credits and qualifications.

3. **Student financial protection:**

- Ensure students are informed of any implications for fees, funding or other costs.
- Make students aware of relevant refunds and compensation arrangements.
- Review whether any changes to delivery could result in financial or other detriment to students.

4. **Legal and regulatory compliance:**

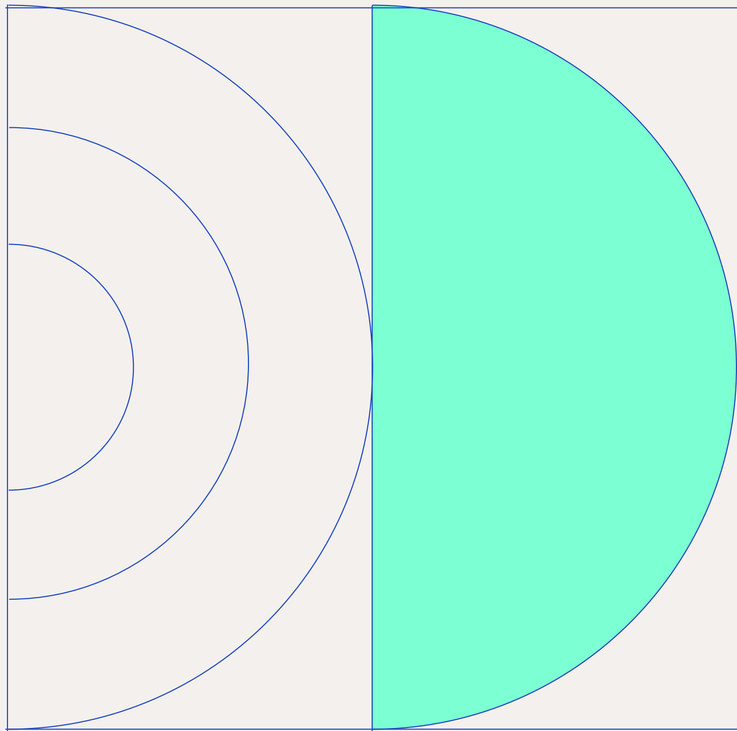
- Ensure the institution continues to meet relevant contractual, regulatory and professional body requirements throughout any transition period.
- Consider any implications for regulatory reporting, reporting of material changes, and external accreditation requirements.

5. **Student support services:**

- Maintain appropriate academic, welfare and wellbeing support throughout the exit process.
- Provide additional guidance and support where students are required to make decisions about transfer or completion arrangements.
- Ensure students know how to raise concerns, complaints or requests for support.

6. **records and Information management:**

- Maintain accurate records of decisions, communications and actions taken during the exit process.
- Ensure continued access to student records, academic information and award documentation.
- Update websites, prospectuses and other public information to reflect any changes.



Student Protection Direction

The Office for Students (OfS) may issue a Student Protection Direction where it considers there to be a significant risk that a provider will cease, or be required to cease, the provision of higher education in England. The purpose of such directions is to protect students' interests and support the implementation of appropriate student protection measures.

Where a Student Protection Direction or equivalent regulatory intervention applies, partners must work closely with the University and any relevant regulator to implement appropriate student protection measures. These may include:

- Teach-out arrangements to enable students to complete their studies.
- Transfer arrangements and support for students moving to alternative providers.
- The award of exit qualifications, credit or certification, where appropriate.
- The provision of information, advice and guidance to students.
- Effective complaints handling arrangements.
- Refunds and compensation for disruption to study, where applicable.
- Archiving arrangements to ensure continued access to student records and academic documentation.
- Any other actions required by the regulator, the University, or the partner's Student Protection Plan or Market Exit Plan.

Partners must notify OUVP immediately of any actual or potential issue that may present a material risk to the continuation of validated provision and must cooperate fully with any resulting regulatory requirements or investigations.

Student Protection Plans must be maintained by all validated partners, irrespective of whether they are registered with the Office for Students. Plans should be proportionate to the institution's circumstances and risks and should address programme closure, institutional closure, partnership termination, teach-out, transfer opportunities and student support arrangements.

C6 Compliance responsibilities for partners

Partners are responsible for maintaining compliance across all aspects of their provision. These responsibilities form part of the OU's expectations for all partners.

C6.1 Compliant processes

Partners must implement and maintain robust and compliant processes to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and services. This includes adherence to all contractual obligations, legislative and regulatory requirements, and the standards set out in this handbook.

C6.2 Feedback and compliance confirmation

Partners must consider and respond to feedback and actions arising from University approval, oversight, review, monitoring and compliance activity. Confirmation of actions taken must be provided within agreed timescales or through the Annual Review process.

C6.3 Use of submission systems

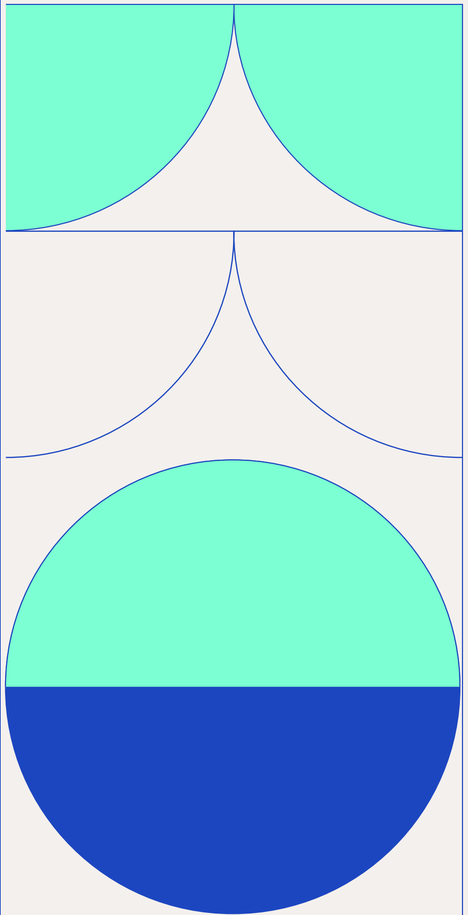
Partners must use the systems, platforms and processes specified by the University for the submission of documentation and exchange of information, unless otherwise agreed in writing.

C6.4 Annual policy monitoring

Partners must confirm through the Annual Review process that institutional policies and procedures remain current, compliant and effective. Updated versions of policies must be submitted to the University where changes have been made. Partners must notify the University of material changes to policies, procedures or institutional arrangements as they arise and ensure that the University retains current versions of all relevant documentation.

Compliance responsibilities for validated partners

The Handbook forms part of the Validation Agreement. The table to the right highlights some of the key operational compliance responsibilities that partners should be aware of. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list and should be read alongside the Validation Agreement and the Handbook as a whole.



Compliance area	Handbook reference (and specific clause, where applicable)
General quality and compliance	A1.6, B5, C6, E1–E4
Compliance with legislation	B5, H, Clause 20
Regulatory compliance	B5, C2, C4, Clause 20
Quality assurance processes	A1.6, D1, E1–E4
Feedback and compliance confirmation	C4, C6.2, E4.2
Data submissions and reporting	E3.2, E4.1, Clause 15
Use of submission systems	C2, C6.3, E4.1
Annual partner monitoring	C6.4, E1-E3, Clause 15
Student registration information	G1, Clause 14 and 19
Data protection and retention	F1.10, F1.11, Schedule 1
Consumer protection, student contracts, refunds and compensation	C2, C5, Clause 19
Student complaints and dispute resolution	C2, C5, Clause 19
Market Exit Planning	C5, Clause 6.13
Reportable events and material changes	C4, C5, Clause 20
Student Protection Plans	C5, Clause 6.12

Student debtors

Validated partners must comply with applicable consumer protection legislation and guidance, including guidance issued by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

The CMA guidance makes it clear that partners cannot withhold certain services or prevent students' progression if they owe certain debts to the partner institution they are studying at. Please see **Consumer law advice for higher education providers** for further guidance.

Validated partners cannot withhold services that have been paid for, nor can they use sanctions that are disproportionate to a student's conduct.

Partner institutions should also ensure that examination boards routinely consider progression and award decisions for all students, regardless of student debt status.

The CMA has made clear that sanctions relating to student debt must be fair, transparent and proportionate. Academic sanctions should not be applied automatically or in a blanket manner, particularly in relation to non-tuition fee debts. Partners must ensure that their policies, processes and procedures comply with current consumer protection requirements and any updates to CMA guidance.

Updates to responsibilities

The University may update these requirements from time to time to reflect changes in regulatory, contractual or operational expectations. Updates will be communicated to partners in writing. Partners are expected to comply with such updates. Failure to do so may result in additional monitoring, compliance review activity, suspension of student registrations or other action in accordance with the Validation Agreement.



D: Validation and revalidation

D1 Validation and revalidation process

Programmes leading to validated awards must be approved prior to commencement. Validation is the process by which the OU considers and approves proposals of programmes of study leading to OU validated awards. Revalidation is the reapproval of the programme(s). Programmes may be validated as face-to-face delivery, online or distance learning (or via a combination of these and 'mixed-mode') and partners should consult page 110 of the OUVP Handbook for Validated Awards for more information on offering awards via flexible/distance learning.

Validation can take place concurrently with the Partnership Development and Approval Process or at a mutually agreed time following that process.

Validation includes analysis of the partner's internal quality assurance arrangements at programme and module level and how that meets with the OU's validation requirements.

All proposals for validation or revalidation will be assessed against the validation criteria. The criteria inform the validation processes and provide the basis for the agenda for validation events and the structure of validation reports. Therefore, the criteria assists the institutional staff responsible for programme development and for validation submissions.

A planning meeting with your S/QPM will take place early in the new academic year. Part of this meeting will focus on plans for the validation of new programmes, the revalidation of existing ones and any other events, such as the Partnership Reapproval Process or external review by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies.

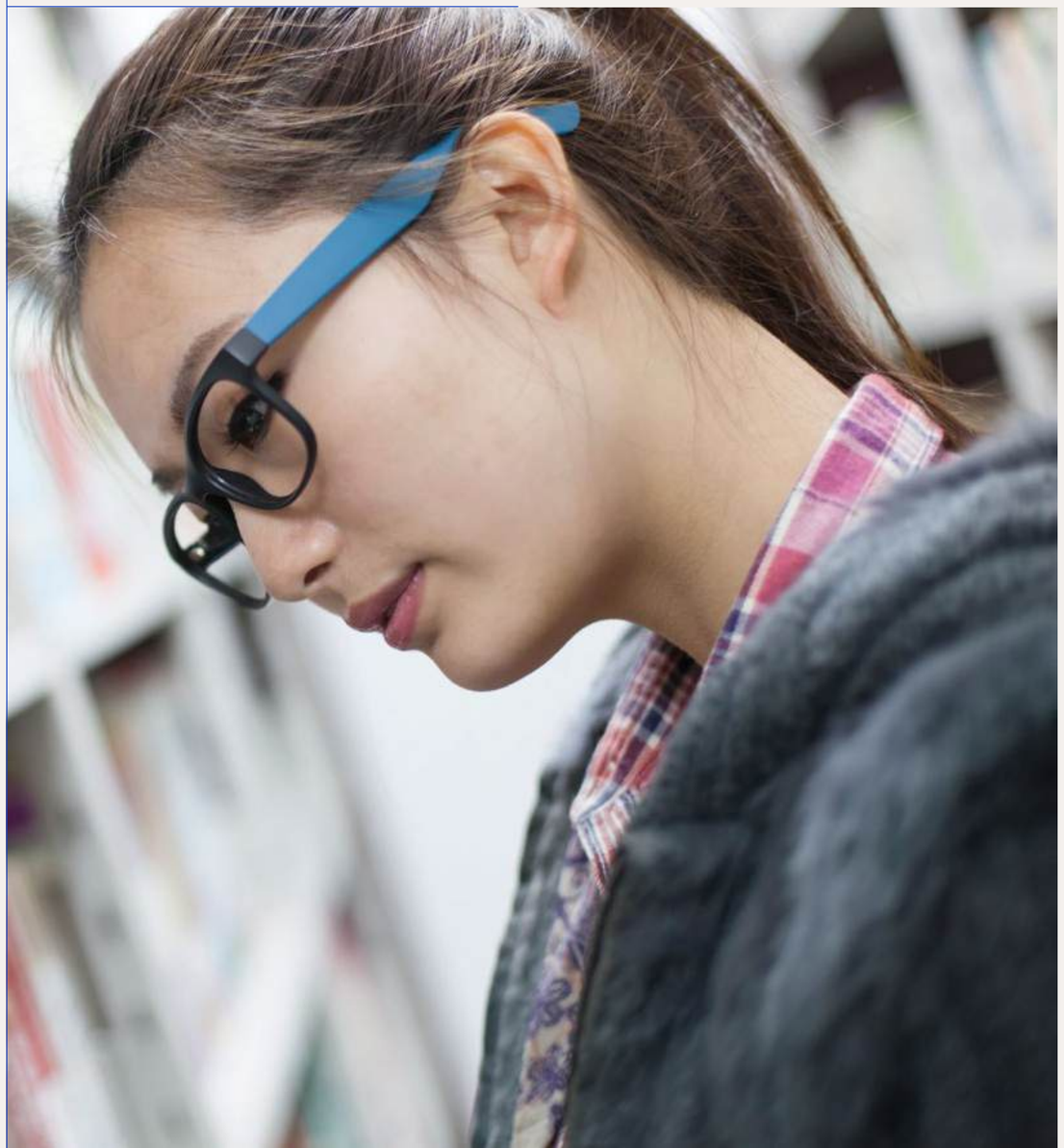
Transfer of programmes validated by other validating universities

If a partner institution wants to transfer a programme to the OU from another validating body, the OU will require it to undergo a full validation. As part of this validation process, discussions will include:

- Ownership and management of the intellectual property
- **The possibility of transferring external examiners from the original validating body to the OU.**
- **Students' rights under Consumer Protection Law and the necessary communication and arrangements to be made in respect of students already following the programme.**
- **Marketing and information available on the partner's website**

The charge for validation and revalidation

Charges are discussed with prospective partners as part of the discovery phase and with current partners annually and when new programmes are discussed. To ensure impartial and independent scrutiny of the design, review and development of all provision, partners should, where appropriate, engage one or more external experts and employers as advisers.



Current partners – development of new programmes

Each January/February the OU sends out its annual workload request, asking partner institutions to indicate any validation plans for the next academic year, including major changes to programmes currently in validation. All new programme proposals must allow sufficient time for completion of the OU's validation process. The OU cannot guarantee that a proposal will be scheduled for validation if it is not included in the workload return.

Partners are also advised to review the information provided in Section 8.4 and consult with their S/QPM if the proposed programme falls within a subject area that is either new to the partner or not currently validated by the OU. This includes entirely new subject areas or existing subjects being offered by the partner for the first time.

Requests for new programme validations will be carefully considered by the OU. If a validation is included in a planning meeting, costs may be incurred if the event is subsequently cancelled.

Partners are also asked to consider the information in Section 8.4 and liaise with their S/QPM if the programme(s) is/are offered in new subject areas that the OU does not currently validate, or it is/they are a new subject area being offered by the partner and currently not in validation.

Current partners – development of existing programmes

The workload return sent in January to February (as indicated in the section above) also lists the programmes due for revalidation. The partner must confirm that they plan to revalidate these programmes (or enter teach out) for the new academic year. A date for the revalidation event will be discussed and agreed at the planning meeting attended by the partner institution and S/QPM.

Documentation

Throughout the (re)validation process, partners are required to use the documentation templates provided by the University. The University will advise on the specific documentation required during planning discussions. Templates should be completed in the format provided to ensure consistency, ease of review and effective consideration by panel members and University staff. Where additional information is needed, this should be provided as supporting appendices rather than by altering the template structure.

For practice-based programmes and for PSRB based programmes, it is expected that the documentation expresses the articulation, balance, and sequencing of theory and practice in the curriculum. This is reflected in the intended learning outcomes of practical/ performance work and how they will be assessed.

Where the (re)validation of distinctive pathways within a programme are required, partners should ensure that they provide a separate rationale and learning outcomes for each route, particularly if the alternative routes branch out to distinct subject areas. The partner should ensure that the title **accurately reflect the subject focus**, there should be a **clear rationale** for the title, and any named pathway should be **sufficiently distinctive in curriculum content** to justify separate recognition in the award title. The Partner should ensure that they present the information with the programme specification in a manner which can be understood by students, and is demonstrably distinct from other pathways or routes within the same award. Therefore, a named pathway may only be included in an award title where it represents an approved and clearly defined specialism within the programme, accurately reflects the student's completed study, and is demonstrably distinct from other pathways so as to justify separate recognition. The (re) validation panel will explore the rationale and structure of the pathway at the (re)validation event with the partner.

The Regulations for validated awards of The Open University recommend a minimum requirement of 25% subject specific credits for pathways, with specialism in the subject at Levels 5 and 6.

Where appropriate, the proposal should include the (re)validation of exit qualifications and ensure the programme specification includes distinctive learning outcomes for such qualifications.

When the programme is offered in different modes of attendance (e.g. part time, distance learning, apprenticeship or as single registerable modules) panels must ensure there is parity of the student experience across all modes of attendance. Therefore, documentation should detail any additional mechanisms in place for the support and guidance for part time, distance-learning, apprenticeship or module only students.

The programme development team should produce the draft documentation required for the preliminary (re)validation meeting: Please refer to the Guidelines on Document Submission for Programme (Re)validation available on the OUVP website.

The preliminary (re)validation meeting

All partners are advised to hold a preliminary (re)validation meeting. This meeting is organised by the partner and is held with a panel that could include a process panel member (PPM) The meeting may be in person or conducted remotely.

The purpose of the preliminary (re)validation meeting is to confirm that the programme proposal is fit for purpose and may proceed to final stage (re)validation. The PPM will be asked to provide a summary of key findings/ discussions to the OU on completion of the meeting. This also provides an opportunity to iron out any issues with the documentation.

Nomination of an OU representative as a PPM

The OU may nominate a representative as a process panel member (PPM), someone who can make comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The PPM will be a member of both the preliminary (re)validation meeting organised by the partner and a final (re) validation meeting organised by the OU.

Following the meeting, the PPM and S/QPM will discuss the preliminary meeting and will be asked to confirm the following:

- That the programme documentation contains all specified requirements, including a complete and appropriate programme specification.
- That appropriate learning resources that support the programme have been properly evaluated and that a strategy and plan are in place to meet the needs of the programme and have full institutional support.
- That the proposal demonstrates how the programme is aligned with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024 and the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies where appropriate.
- That the regulations for the programme meet the OU's requirements for validated awards and are in accordance with the regulatory framework.
- That the proposal addresses PSRB requirements.
- That the proposal should proceed to a final (re)validation meeting.

The partner is required to produce a summary report of the preliminary (re)validation.

The report should summarise:

- Issues that have arisen and how they have been resolved.
- Outstanding issues, together with proposals for their resolution.

The report will be received as part of the documentation for the final (re)validation meeting.

If the outcome of the preliminary (re)validation meeting is that the proposal needs further work before it can proceed, the OU will decide whether the final (re)validation meeting should be cancelled or deferred (depending upon the time needed to undertake the required work). The views of the partner institution, the S/QPM and the PPM will be considered.

During the initial private panel meeting (held before the final panel meeting) the PPM will be invited to summarise their initial feedback and inform the Panel and Chair of any key themes/ issues that were found.



Documentation for the final (re)validation meeting

The submission for the final (re)validation meeting should include the partner institution's revised documentation, as well as the preliminary summary report. The SQPM will discuss with the partner the most appropriate way to submit the documentation to OUVP. Please refer to the **Guidelines on Document Submission for Programme (Re)Validation** available on the OUVP website. The paperwork must include responses to any recommendations set at the preliminary meeting.

Partners must provide documentation for consideration by panel members at least three weeks in advance of the final (re)validation meeting. This includes the documents required for the preliminary event plus any other documents agreed with the S/QPM. This deadline is important and must be adhered to so that panel members have sufficient time to give it due consideration.

Final (re)validation meeting

The OU arranges the final (re)validation event. It is set up and organised as agreed at the planning meeting. It is normally scheduled to take place at the partner's premises or online and lasts a whole or half day, depending on the complexity of the proposal and the nature of the issues identified during the programme development and preliminary (re)validation phases.

The final (re)validation panel will have a chair and at least three panel members, although in exceptional circumstances, panels may be larger or smaller, dependent upon the spread of subject expertise and the subject area under consideration. Its composition will include an OU academic member of staff (who may undertake the role of the chair) and external panel members as appropriate:

- **The external member(s) nominated by the OU who may have been a member(s) of the preliminary (re)validation meeting (PPM.)**
- **The external member nominated by the partner institution who may also have been a member of the preliminary (re)validation (IPPM.)**
- **Other external subject specialists (which may include one member of academic staff from another OU collaborative partner.)**
- **For programme revalidations one panel member from the previous event, if possible.**

The (Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager will produce the report from the event.



Observers at final (re)validation meetings

Institutional agreements make provision for the partner's staff to observe the (re)validation process. The OU encourages observers nominated by the partner to have overview of the (re)validation process and, as appropriate, attend any meetings, except those with students.

Observers are not decision-making members of the panel but are encouraged to assist the panel by contributing factual information and intervening if the panel appears to be making incorrect assumptions. However, if a situation arises where an observer's participation is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the chair can ask observers to leave until recalled. This action should only happen on rare occasions.

Observers will not normally be from the partner's senior management team or from persons involved with the management or teaching of the programme under (re) validation.

The agenda for the final (re)validation meeting is set by the S/QPM in discussion with the partner. The validation panel will typically consider the following areas on a in some instances, evidence may be submitted in advance for virtual review, and, where possible, activities such as tours and meetings with senior management should be arranged efficiently.

Core agenda items include:

- Meeting with the Senior Management Team
- Meeting with the Programme Team
- Meeting with a representative group of students
- Tour of facilities (including a demonstration of the Virtual Learning Environment)
- Private panel meetings
- Meeting with employer representatives (where the programme encompasses work-based learning or is aligned to an apprenticeship).

The final (re)validation meeting is an opportunity for the panel and the programme team to discuss the process of programme design and related academic requirements, and for the panel to resolve any outstanding matters relating to the academic rigour of the proposal and the ability of the partner to support it and deliver a good student experience. It also allows the panel the opportunity to scrutinise assessed student work if the programme has been (re)validated previously. The final (re)validation meeting does not deal with regulation matters, unless there are specific professional accreditation regulations to be met.

The final (re)validation panel reserves the right to assess itself of the adequacy of learning resources, scrutinising them before giving its final approval.

At the end of the final meeting, the panel proposes the outcome, detailing any commendations for good practice, conditions for approval and recommendations. This takes the form of an oral report to the partner. The final approval decision is made by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. In all cases, the period of (re)validation is subject to satisfactory monitoring made through the annual review process.

The written report should be available within four weeks of the final meeting. The partner institution is invited to comment on matters of factual accuracy.

Possible outcomes of (re)validation

The following (re)approval decisions may be proposed by the panel and may be amended by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee:

a. Full-term (re)approval

A programme, and any registerable modules within, may be (re)approved for a specified period of not more than five years, subject to revalidation before the end of the (re)approval period. If a partner fails to register students on a programme of study for two consecutive academic years, (re)validation will be required, with a short re-approval process before it is offered again.

b. (Re)approval for a shorter period

(Re)approval may be granted for a shorter period, if the validation panel thinks there is a clear rationale - this may be to align with professional body accreditation approval lengths or to ensure currency of the programme. In such cases, revalidation of the programme is required before the end of the specified period and partners need to consider whether this will impact on students completing their award and discuss with students accordingly.

c. Conditional (re)approval

(Re)approval may be conditional, with the partner having to fulfil certain requirements, by a specified date(s). Partners are responsible for ensuring conditions are met, in accordance with the terms of the requirements set out in the validation report. Students may not be enrolled until the panel has confirmed that a formal (re)approval letter may be issued.

Partners are allowed up to two attempts at fulfilling the conditions of (re) validation (an initial response to the conditions, plus a resubmission if the panel requests further work to be undertaken). A third submission will only be allowed at the invitation of the OU.

d. Recommendations

The panel may make recommendations for ongoing follow-up by the partner and a response will be required through the annual review process (see Section E) for the programme. Recommendations focus on longer-term developments and areas of enhancement. Recommendations do not have to be addressed before students can register for an OU validated award.

e. Non-approval

The panel may decide not to recommend (re)approval of the programme or any of the registerable modules. The panel will not be able to recommend approval of registerable modules unless approval is also recommended for the overall programme. The partner may be provided with a date for a second attempt and additional charges will apply.

Correspondence events

A correspondence event is a fully rigorous alternative to a (re)validation event, conducted by a quorate panel with complete documentation and typically involving online meetings with institutional representatives and students. It results in the same approval outcomes (with or without conditions and recommendations), normally requires at least six months to complete, and applies where a previously validated programme has not recruited for two years and requires reassurance of its continued currency and resourcing.

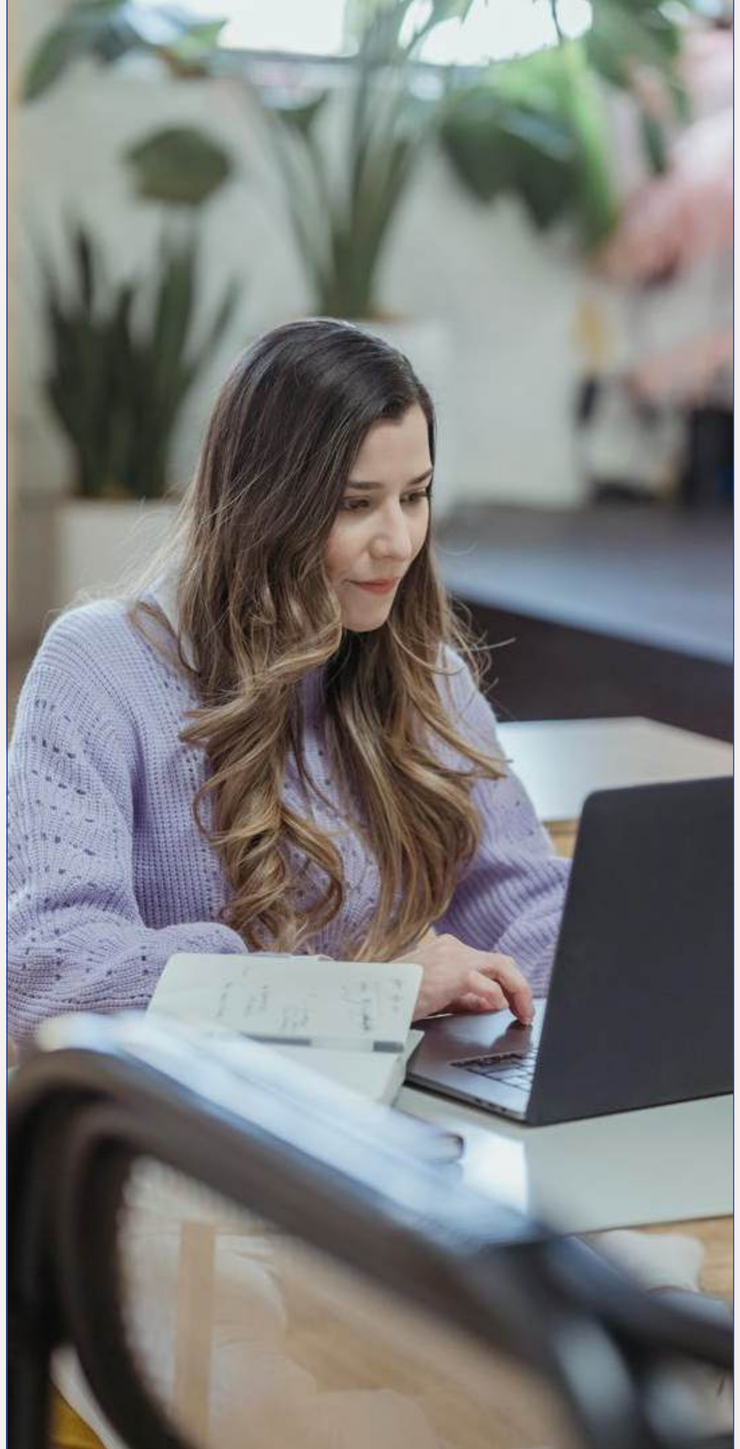


D2 Criteria for validation and revalidation

All programme proposals must meet the principles below to be validated and revalidated.

The principles relate to:

- Tested market demand for the programme from both local employers and students
- The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study.
- The curriculum and structure of the programme of study.
- Teaching and learning.
- Programme management and monitoring.
- Admissions and transfer.
- Assessment regulations.
- Staffing, staff development and research.
- Teaching and learning resources
- Other resources for students
- Information publicly available to students, their advisors, employers and other stakeholders.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Arrangements for any work-based learning aspects of the programme.
- Approval of the embedded academic element of any apprenticeship programmes.
- How the curriculum meets external reference points and how these are embedded, including (but not limited to) the Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ), QAA Subject Benchmarks statements and characteristics statements, QAA Quality Code 2024, OfS conditions of registrations and OfS strategy, Ofsted, and any PSRB requirements.
- Viable alternative providers and programmes in the event of Market Exit or course closure.



D2.1 The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study

Rationale and aims

Validated programmes reflect the mission, strategic direction, and academic goals of partners, and fulfil a demonstrable market demand.

They must stimulate an enquiring, analytical and creative approach, encouraging independent judgement and critical self-awareness.

The aims of a validated programme are appropriate to the award.

Learning outcomes

The programme's intended learning outcomes must be clearly defined and aligned with the overall aims of the programme. They should demonstrate the development – at the appropriate level for the award – of a body of knowledge and understanding relevant to the field of study. These outcomes must reflect academic, professional, and occupational standards, as well as **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

The required levels are defined in the **QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications**, which are mandatory. Partners in Wales or Scotland must also align with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks. The **SEEC Credit Level Descriptors** provide additional useful guidance.

Learning outcomes should also align with relevant external reference points, including the requirements of any professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies, and, where appropriate, European reference frameworks.

Generic transferable skills

Learning outcomes must incorporate a range of generic, transferable intellectual and practical skills that are appropriate to the level of the proposed award. These skills should support students' academic development and enhance their employability across a variety of contexts. Intellectual skills may include critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, and the ability to construct and communicate arguments effectively. Practical and transferable skills may encompass communication, teamwork, digital literacy, time management, and independent learning.

The inclusion of these skills ensures that graduates are equipped not only with subject-specific knowledge but also with the broader capabilities required for lifelong learning, professional adaptability, and active citizenship. These outcomes should be clearly articulated and aligned with the relevant qualification level descriptors, such as those found in the QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and other national or sector reference points

English language requirements

See **Page 28, Language of instruction**.

D2.2 The curriculum and structure of the programme of study

Curriculum design and content

A programme development toolkit is available from your S/QPM to support the design and approval of new and revised provision. Programme teams are expected to make use of this resource when developing submissions and are drawn to its contents for guidance and information which will be supplied by your S/QPM.

Curriculum design and the content of validated programmes enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical and professional skills, and key transferable skills. Curriculum design also needs to take account of students' progression to employment, research or further study, and personal development.

The curriculum design and content need to be informed by any new developments in teaching and learning techniques, current research and scholarship, Generative AI and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements. Partners should use external expertise - employers and professional bodies, for example - in their programme development process.

Programmes must demonstrate an appropriate balance between academic and practical components, personal development and academic achievement, as well as breadth and depth within the curriculum. They must also exhibit coherence, ensuring that the overall student experience is logically structured and underpinned by intellectual integrity. Where relevant, the role of practical project work or work-based learning (as defined by QAA in Work-based Learning and Apprenticeships information) needs to be specified and how it is integrated in the programme(see **Section D3** work-based learning).

Where relevant, curriculum design should also address themes of environmental sustainability, drawing on the relevant **Subject Benchmark Statements**. Consideration should also be given to the **Inner Development Goals (IDG) Framework**, which focuses on the personal and societal capabilities needed to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, **Advance HE** and the **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)** emphasise the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), highlighting the critical role of higher education institutions—and their graduates—in leading the transition to a more sustainable future and supporting society in living within the planet's ecological limits. The curriculum must also specify any proposals for dissertations or written projects, including approval of chosen topics and arrangements for supervision. Partners may also find it useful to refer to the **OU resources available**.

Programme structure

The programme documentation indicates links with other programmes (e.g. common foundation year, common modular structure, top-up award) and opportunities for transfer and progression. When a foundation degree is put forward for validation, a clear progression route must be articulated within the documentation. For a top-up degree, entry routes and pre-requisites must be clearly articulated (this may include the provision of programme specifications for the foundation degree feeding into the top-up degree).

The documentation needs to include provision for exit awards. Exit awards must have their own learning outcomes articulated within the programme specification. Exit awards can only be classified as pass or fail. A distinction or merit cannot be given for an exit award.

The structure of the programme will be adapted to accommodate students following different modes of study, as well as those with diverse entry backgrounds or special educational needs and disabilities.

The determination of core and optional elements and of any prerequisites or constraints on choice should be clearly defined.

Where relevant, the structure specifies the distinction between the honours route and routes leading to other awards within the same scheme, such as Diploma of Higher Education and unclassified/ordinary degrees.

D2.3 Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning strategies for validated programmes need to be appropriate to the aims, learning outcomes and diversity of the student intake.

There must be adequate levels of staffing with appropriate experience to support programmes.

The partner must have policies in place to ensure continuity of the teaching and assessment of programmes and ensure contingency in the event of the departure or prolonged absence of members of staff. This must include policies for staff recruitment, deployment and development, and for the development, availability and sharing of teaching, learning and assessment materials. Partners must inform their S/QPM immediately of any changes in staffing levels on OU validated programmes. They must also inform their S/QPM when they appoint a new member of staff on the OU validated programme, sending a copy of their CV with the completed cover sheet (using the new staff proforma template). Partners must also inform their S/QPM when staff at partner institutions take industrial action and if this has any impact on students.

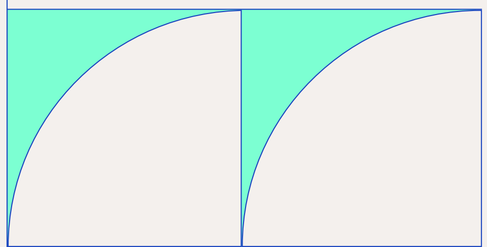
Staff must be appropriately qualified and experienced, and their teaching must be informed by active participation in research or relevant scholarly, professional or consultancy activities. It is expected that academic staff engaged in designing, leading, delivering and assessing programmes should hold an academic qualification a level above the one being delivered or have equivalent industry experience.

The ability to use and understand AI and Generative AI is fast becoming an essential skill for all staff. This is an evolving ‘discipline’ and like most organisations, OU partners must be committed to ensuring that their approach to using AI and Generative AI is responsible, ethical, and legal. Partners must understand the needs of staff, students and the wider community, helping them develop their understanding of how to use this technology and enabling them to utilise it to its full potential.

There must be effective engagement with and participation by students, including the opportunity to serve on committees at all levels as appropriate. Mechanisms will be in place for student engagement and collecting student feedback, implementing changes and communicating them to students in a transparent way.

There must be a clearly defined and coherent strategy for academic support, including written guidance, that is tailored to the characteristics and needs of the student population (the student profile). This includes consideration of factors such as level and mode of study, prior educational background, and any specific support requirements. The strategy should also align with the overall aims of the provision—that is, the educational goals and intended outcomes of the programme, such as preparing students for professional practice, academic progression, or personal development. Effective arrangements must be in place for academic support and supervision, including for students undertaking work-based learning, studying abroad, or taking individual modules for credit. These arrangements must be communicated to students in a transparent and accessible manner. If common teaching with other programmes is proposed, there should be a clear strategy setting out how this common teaching will be managed.

Panels need to be able to assess that personal development planning is visible in the programme documentation (whether discrete or embedded).



D2.4 Principles related to programme management and monitoring

Arrangements must be in place to enable programme teams to review and seek to enhance standards, taking account of any developments in teaching and learning techniques, new research and scholarship, and any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements.

Partners are expected to review the continuing relevance of any programmes in light of changes to external reference points, such as subject benchmark statements, or the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Partners should adopt a consistent, coherent, and evidence-informed strategic approach to the collection, storage, and management of student data. Key data sets should include information on student applications, completion and attainment rates, demographic profiles, employment outcomes, student satisfaction, and widening participation efforts. This data should be actively used to enhance student outcomes and address performance gaps – for example, in areas such as employment opportunities, progression to further study, and skills development. Oversight of these areas should rest with the partner's academic board and be reported through the OU's partner monitoring processes. The OU's requirement for data retention of award data is birth plus 120 years/indefinitely.

The Office for Students (OfS) explicitly states in its **Supplementary guidance: Retention of assessed work:**

"A provider should retain 'appropriate records' of assessed students' work, including for students who are no longer registered on a course, for a period of five years after the end date of a course."

This expectation is tied to regulatory conditions B4 (Assessment and Awards) and B5 (Sector-recognised Standards). The rationale is that assessed work serves as primary evidence for evaluating whether students have been assessed effectively and whether awards are credible.

Key points from the guidance:

- The five-year retention period starts after the official end date of the course/qualification, not the date a student leaves.
- Providers are not expected to retain all assessed work – only what is deemed "appropriate," which may include sampling.
- The OfS may request access to assessed work within this five-year window as part of its risk-based monitoring.
- Providers can make contextual judgments about what to retain but must document their rationale.

Relevant extracts from the guidance:

"Providers are autonomous institutions and should interpret and implement the guidance as they consider appropriate for their own context. This means that a provider has latitude to judge what may constitute 'appropriate records' for retention and should not understand this to mean 'all records for all students in all contexts'."

"A provider should document the evidence and analysis that has informed its decisions about the assessed work it will retain, and the reasons for this, in order to demonstrate why it considers that judgement to be reasonable."

You can view the full guidance here: [OfS Supplementary guidance: Retention of assessed work]

GDPR Considerations

Data minimisation: Retain only what is necessary.

Legal defensibility: Five-year retention aligns with the UK statute of limitations for breach of contract (six years).

Security: Records must be stored securely with restricted access.

Recommended approach for validated partners

Given the above, it is recommended that partners adopt the following approach:

- For students registered on full qualifications: Retain appropriate records of assessed work for five years after the official end date of the course.
- For students registered on standalone modules: Retain appropriate records of assessed work for five years after the module completion date.

This approach aligns with OfS guidance, reflects possible registration models, and avoids the impracticality of retaining large volumes of records or maintaining unnecessarily lengthy retention periods.

- **Retention period:**

  Assessed work must be retained for **five years** after the official end date of the course or module (depending on student registration type).

- **Responsibility:**

  The **partner institution** is responsible for the retention, secure storage, and management of assessed work.

- **Scope:**

  Applies to **all work that contributes to final marks and award decisions (summative assessments)**, whether submitted digitally or in physical format, across all campuses and delivery modes.

- **Sampling:**

  Where full retention is not feasible, partners must:

  - **Define a sampling strategy** appropriate to their context.
  - **Document the rationale** for the sample selected.
  - Ensure the sample is **representative across grade bands** and sufficient to support internal and external quality assurance.

- **Storage:**

  - **Digital work** should be stored securely on platforms such as **Moodle, Blackboard, or equivalent virtual learning environments**.
  - **Physical artefacts** (e.g. artwork, models) should be documented via **photographic or video evidence**.

- **Contextual documentation:**

Partners must retain supporting materials such as:

- **Assessment briefs**
- **Marking schemes**
- **Moderation records**
- **Feedback templates**

- **Policy basis:**

  Retention practices should be governed by the partner's **Records Management Policy and Retention Schedule** and must be compliant with **GDPR (or any equivalent data protection legislation relevant to the partner's location)** and **OfS regulatory conditions B4 and B5.**

Feedback Mechanisms

Partners must have mechanisms in place to ensure the effectiveness of arrangements for collecting and acting upon feedback from students and staff, and for identifying and addressing any difficulties arising from changes to the staff team. There must be student representation at all levels of the partner institutions' governance committee structure where issues concerning students, learning support, and physical and staffing resources are discussed. There must be at least one student representative on each of the groups or committees dealing with programme-level matters. It should always be explicitly clear that students have been consulted in preparation for programme (re) validations, and (re)validation panels will want to meet with students and hear their views. Student representatives must be given adequate induction to their role and support in fulfilling their responsibilities.

A partner must have processes in place to ensure that recommendations for action are followed up and remedy any shortcomings identified.

When programmes have employer links – foundation degrees and work-based learning, for example – partners will have processes in place for obtaining and acting upon feedback from employers.

Partners routinely monitor programme effectiveness by engaging with external examiners and considering the content of their reports.

The academic reviewer's feedback, based on their engagement with the programme, may also be taken into account during the evaluation process.



D2.5 Admissions and transfer

Partners must ensure that their admissions policy contains comprehensive details about their transfer policies and procedures. They must make this information publicly available, such as on their website. Transparency helps students understand their options and the processes involved in transferring to a different programme or institution.

All validated programmes must have effective criteria and arrangements for admission related to the level of the programme/module, its learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessment. For further guidance see **QAA 2024, Principle 9**.

See the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University** for more information. The regulations also give guidance on recognition of prior learning.

D2.6 Assessment regulations

All partners must comply with the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University**. Some partners are approved to operate under **dual awards regulations**.

The purpose of assessment is to encourage effective learning and enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled a programme's learning outcomes and achieved the standard required for the award. The assessment process must be undertaken by impartial internal and external examiners. External examiners must have the ability and competence to make judgements about the performance of individual students regarding the assessment criteria and learning outcomes and to students on other, comparable programmes.

All programme/module assessment regulations must be in line with the regulations for validated awards of the OU and should be clearly articulated in relevant documentation reviewed at (re)validation.

The assessment strategy

The assessment strategy must have an effective formative role in enhancing student skills and abilities. The assessment process enables learners to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended outcomes. It must be clear to students what the success criteria is, and it must relate to the intended learning outcomes. The assessment strategy for postgraduate programmes must be explicitly designed or adapted to reflect the level and nature of postgraduate study, ensuring appropriate academic challenge and the assessment of advanced, higher order skills.

The assessment strategy provides evidence that the standards achieved by learners meets the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant QAA subject benchmarks and the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. As part of the validation process, any QAA subject benchmarks and QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications listed in the validation documents will be checked for consistency and accuracy.

For further guidance, see the **Framework for Enhancing Assessment in Higher Education | Advance HE**.

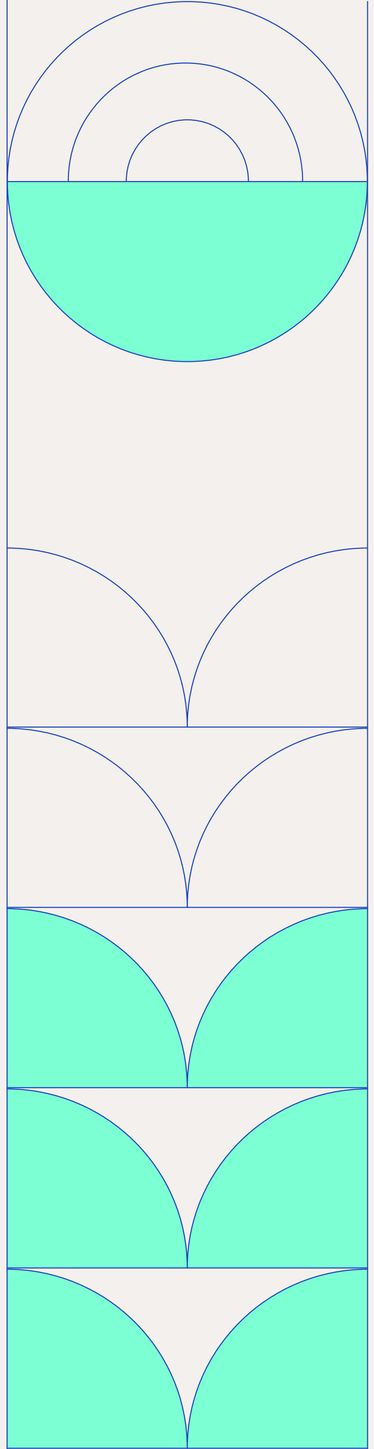
The assessment process

The OU must have full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures. It is crucial that students and staff acknowledge when GenAI tools are used. There needs to be transparency in the assessment process in line with the guidance outlined in Section F1.19 of the OUVP Handbook for Validated Awards - Procedures for dealing with academic misconduct. The proposed arrangements to ensure the validity and objectivity of the assessment process must be clear. Programme staffing arrangements must ensure continuity of the assessment process if members of staff leave, are absent or undertake industrial action.

Arrangements need to be in place for the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process. This includes criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement. The criteria for assessment needs to be clearly specified and measures taken to ensure that they are understood and applied by all the external examiners.

The composition of the board of examiners needs to be in accordance with the OU requirements for boards of examiners, as set out in **Section F4** of this handbook. When a complex scheme requires a tiered structure of assessment boards, adequate arrangements need to be in place for the examiners to have oversight of each student's performance.





D2.7 Staffing, staff development and research

There needs to be sufficient teaching and support staff, and they need to be appropriately qualified so that the programme's aims and learning outcomes can be fulfilled. If staff numbers are inadequate, plans need to be in place to address the situation so that key staff are in place in time for delivery of the programme. This applies to learning support services staff (including library and media services, computing, and information technology) and technical and administrative support staff.

There should not be an over-reliance on one or two staff members. Arrangements for staff deployment and development must ensure continuity of the teaching programme if certain staff members become unavailable to the programme. Staff should be able to draw upon research, scholarship, and/or professional activity to inform their teaching, and arrangements must be in place for supporting staff in these activities.

When a programme involves a period of external work-based learning or residence abroad, the partner must demonstrate that they can provide the student with adequate contact with tutors and/or supervisors during this period.

When part-time or visiting staff deliver a programme, mechanisms must be in place to promote their integration and access to staff development opportunities.

D2.8 Teaching and learning resources

The physical resources needed to teach the programme must be adequate. These resources may include accommodation, relevant library (including e-resources) and computer provision, media resources, specialist laboratory, equipment or studio facilities, and facilities for students with disabilities.

If the partner does not have all the necessary resources, appropriate arrangements must be in place to secure access to resources elsewhere (e.g. through collaboration with other institutions). The OU must approve all facilities used for delivery purposes. Any facilities acquired after the (re)validation process that will be used for teaching and assessment of OU validated programmes will need approval prior to the teaching and assessment taking place.

If none of the required resources are available at the time of the visit, an appropriate resource plan must be in place, articulating the implementation timeline. This must be made available to the (re) validation panel.

For distance learning programmes, essential physical resources must include printed or online learning materials, as well as other media formats. These resources should be supported by an efficient delivery system to ensure timely and reliable access. Additionally, all materials must be provided in accessible formats to accommodate diverse learner needs.

D2.9 Other resources for students

Students should be able to engage in collaborative activities within and across programmes.

The partner must make relevant student guidance and support available - induction, programme-specific career services, personal tutoring, mental health and wellbeing, and support for students with disabilities.

D2.10 Information publicly available to students, their advisors, employers, and other stakeholders

All validated programmes must have a programme specification (including module descriptors) and they must signpost students to all the relevant student-facing information. This should also include content listed in Appendix 1. The programme specification should be clear and accurate and, together with module/unit descriptors, the student handbook and relevant institutional regulations, should include all programme-related regulations and procedures needed by applicants, students, staff and external examiners. The student handbook, programme specification and regulations should be available to potential students through a public facing part of the institutions' website.

D2.11 Equality, diversity and inclusion

All regulations and procedures related to programme design (as well as admissions, delivery, staffing, assessment, learning resources (including programme specifications and module descriptors), and guidance and support services) must aim to prevent discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. They need to enable the partner to respond effectively to students' different needs and circumstances. Where permitted by local legislation, the policies and procedures should align with the OU's, which can be found on the OU's Equality and Diversity website. See Section H of this handbook for further information.



D3 Additional guidance on (re)validation of programmes that include work-based learning

Where appropriate (and with reference to QAA work-based learning and apprenticeships guidance) provision must be made for supervised work experience, community experience or experience abroad and clarification is needed on how these elements fit with the rest of the programme. As part of the validation and revalidation process, partners must demonstrate in their programme documentation (and during the validation event) that they are fully aware of and can adhere to all professional body requirements (including a mapping to the competencies/ Key Performance Indicators required by the PSRB).

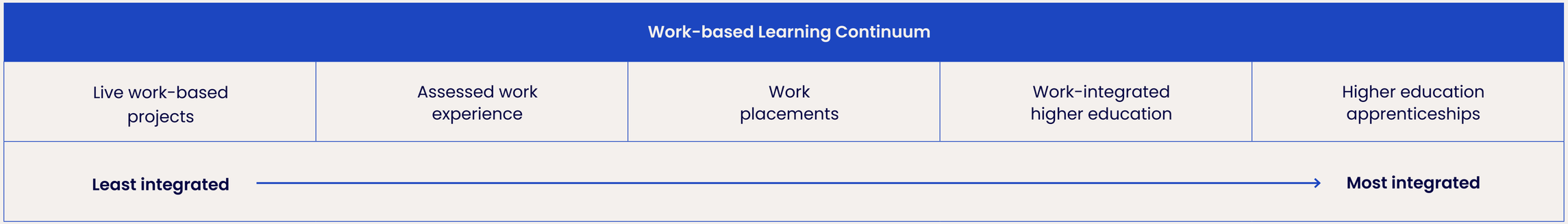
Work-based learning quality assurance documentation must be included within the submission for the (re)validation event. This should evidence how the quality and standards of work-based learning are secured in practice and may include, but is not limited to: employer handbooks or guidance; mentor/supervisor guidance and training materials; student handbooks or placement guides; placement approval and risk assessment processes; learning agreements or tripartite agreements; arrangements for support, monitoring and communication during the placement; assessment guidance specific to work-based learning; and mechanisms for collecting and responding to employer and student feedback.

Work-based learning for higher education courses describes courses that bring together higher education providers and work organisations to create learning opportunities. This needs to be considered in conjunction with other regulatory requirements, including providers' academic regulations, funding body requirements and the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies' (PSRB) rules and regulations.

While work-based learning offers clear benefits to students, education providers and employers, it also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining consistent quality and standards across diverse partners with differing expectations. Where work-based learning contributes to academic credit or credit-bearing awards, the awarding institution retains responsibility for defining, assuring and overseeing the quality and standards of that provision.

Partners may also want to refer to the guidance laid out in the Advance HE framework for embedding employability in higher education, ASET-Good-Practice-Guide-to-Successful-Work-Based-Learning-for-Apprenticeships-in-Higher-Education, and Good-Practice-Guide-for-Managing-Health-Safety-and-Welfare-for-Student-Placements.

Figure 1: *Work-based learning continuum*



D3.1 (Re)validation of foundation degrees

Programme teams involved in the design and validation of foundation degrees are advised to use the QAA's foundation degree characteristics statement as an external reference point.

All proposals for validation or revalidation of a foundation degree should comply with the following expectations and contain evidence of:

- **Systematic and formalised arrangements for maintaining effective links with employers and practitioners in the relevant field**
- **Inclusion of at least 25% (60 credits) of work-based/related learning across the programme. Please see Figure 1 above taken from the QAA work-based learning advice and guidance document**
- Formally agreed progression routes to specified honours degrees, together with arrangements for approved bridging units.

D3.2 (Re)validation of awards leading to higher or degree apprenticeships

OU partner institutions require the validation of foundation degrees, undergraduate degrees and master's qualifications for higher and degree apprenticeships.

Partner institutions may want to have specialist/specifically designed qualifications validated in order to deliver against an apprenticeship standard. Due to the complex changing environment, partners must speak to their S/QPM when considering developing/revising an apprenticeship. When putting an apprenticeship forward for approval, partners need to have evidence that they have completed the process of applying for a place on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register for that programme. Partners will need to provide evidence they have applied, or are already are an Apprenticeships end point assessment organisation.

In all models, the OU's responsibility lies with the higher education qualification element of the apprenticeship. The wider apprenticeship responsibility of delivery against the apprenticeship standard and any assessment of it lies only with the partner and employer.

However, the student experience is clearly of concern to the OU, so any factors impacting it (including the wider apprenticeship) could fall within its remit, if necessary.

The latest Department for Education (DfE), OfS and QAA guidance - Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current Approaches, and the QAA Degree Apprenticeship Characteristics Statement - should be used to inform the development of awards for apprenticeship delivery. Partners may also refer to guidance published by **ASET Good Practice Guide to Successful Work Based Learning for Apprenticeships in Higher Education**.

When a partner institution wants to use an existing or new validated award for apprenticeship delivery, the partner is guided by the S/QPM on the process and documentation required for submission.

Higher technical qualifications

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, such as Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas. They are an option for young people starting their career and for adults looking to upskill or retrain.

HTQs have been approved against employer developed standards, also known as occupational standards. This ensures learners gain the skills that employers want, and employers can feel confident that learners have the knowledge, skills and behaviours for a particular specialist role.

The qualifications last between one and two years full-time, with part-time and distance learning options available.

HTQs are available across a wide variety of sectors.

To become an HTQ provider and display the HTQ quality mark, qualifications must be approved by the DfE against occupational standards. The quality mark was introduced because of an increasing demand for skills at these levels.

Partner institutions are asked to discuss the requirements for validating a HTQ programme with their S/QPM in the first instance.



D4 (Re)validation of blended, flexible, and distributed learning courses and programmes

The OU allows (re)validations to be undertaken for learning modes other than purely face-to-face delivery.

The (re)validation process, detailed in **Section D**, , concentrates on programmes with a traditional classroom-based delivery. If a partner wants to move away from this delivery method, the (re)validation panel needs to consider additional requirements to meet the extra level of scrutiny for programmes delivered using distance learning elements. Whilst a definition is provided on blended, flexible and distributed below, the term 'distance learning' is used in this section to cover all forms of delivery that are not 100% face-to-face.

Blended, flexible and distributed learning have evolved in recent years and now take many different forms, encompassing a wide spectrum of activities and delivery models. However, all the models have synergies and can be viewed as a process for acquiring knowledge and skills through distributed information and instruction.

Programmes offered on a blended, flexible and distributed basis should be designed so that the academic standards of the awards are consistent with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024, as well as meeting the OU's requirements.

If a partner institution wants to submit a blended, flexible or distance learning programme for (re)validation, they should make it clear in the template for programme descriptions and in the planning meeting discussions with the S/QPM.
If a partner institution wishes to use delivery methods that combine face-to-face with distance learning methods, it should be clear in the template for programme descriptions and specifications which methods will be used and where.

The partner institution needs to submit the programme documentation set out in **Section D2.2**, making clear reference to the planned delivery methods.

In addition to the standard documentation, the partner institution needs to provide the (re)validation panel with a cross section of online information for each level of the programme, demonstrating:

- What students will see while studying each module.
- How the students and tutors will interact with the online material, and how assessment feedback will be provided to students.
- How the online material links in with the classroom delivery (if relevant)
- Any additional support systems which will be in place to assist students working with a distance learning delivery (including pastoral and IT support).

D5 Single registerable modules

D5.1 Development of single registerable modules

Single registerable modules are small, credit-bearing, taught modules of study, usually between 10 and 30 credits. They have clear learning outcomes, can be studied at any level (undergraduate or postgraduate) and must be part of a full programme of study validated by the OU and consistent with the registerable awards set out in the regulations for validated awards (section 3).

Study on a registerable module must comply with any normal curriculum prerequisites in place for that programme. Capstone, research, or dissertation modules cannot be offered as registerable modules. Nor can placement or work-based learning modules.

Module students normally study alongside programme students. However, this is not a requirement, although the approach must be clarified when the approval paperwork is submitted. Either way, equivalent support and access to resources should be provided to all students.

D5.2 (Re)validation of single registerable modules

Registerable modules are considered for approval as part of a normal (re)validation process, through a correspondence event or a major change process where the related programme has already been validated. There also needs to be some initial scrutiny of the institutional arrangements in place for this delivery model.

Registerable modules may be delivered face-to-face, blended or online, provided it meets the approved module aims. Any variances between the programme and the registerable modules must be set out in sufficient detail for the (re)validation panel to clearly understand the intentions. This includes:

- Whether the modules will be taught full-time or part-time
- Mode of delivery – e.g. face to face, online, blended learning.
- Pattern of delivery: whether each module will be delivered over a longer or shorter period than the same module delivered within the programme.
- Any other variances to the teaching and/or assessment schemes.

D5.3 Award of credit for single registerable modules

Registerable modules must comply with standard processes for the confirmation of results and the awarding of certificates, as set out in Section F6 of the Handbook for Validated Awards.

Datasheets for registerable module students are presented separately to the examination board to ensure consideration is given to performance and trend data.

Students receive a certificate from the OU, in PDF form, setting out the details of the study. This includes the credit value upon successful completion of a registerable module.

An OU validated award can be made up of cognate registerable modules (also known as “stacking”) if it meets all the requirements of the programme specification (credits, learning outcomes, admissions criteria etc). Registerable modules may also be counted for classification purposes within an OU validated programme at the partner institution in which they are offered, provided they meet the programme requirements and the institution’s Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy. They also stand as credits for transfer to other institutions in line with the RPL policy of that institution.

The regulations for validated awards apply to students on registerable modules.

D6 (Re)validation of accelerated degrees

The OU will consider proposals for the validation of ‘accelerated’ degrees in its partner institutions. It has broadly adopted the Office for Students definition of accelerated degrees. This includes the following:

- They are structured differently to traditional degrees.
- They deliver the same number of credits (360) as a three-year degree.
- They offer the same number of teaching weeks as a three-year degree but are scheduled so they are (or can be) completed in a shorter period. They reduce the overall duration of the course by utilising the traditional summer holiday for teaching and learning.
- They effectively reduce full-time study time to two years and part-time study to four years.



An OU (re)validation panel will be guided to consider additional requirements for the approval of degrees in an accelerated mode of delivery. These include:

Programme design and structure

The programme documentation needs to evidence how the timing and sequencing of levels, modules, pathways, and intakes within the programme will work in an accelerated context. Accelerated programmes should offer the same number of teaching hours as standard programmes but scheduled to complete in shorter periods (for example a common model uses the summer holiday period as a third semester or fourth term). Accelerated degrees also have the same credits as a traditional degree (360) but normally deliver 180 credits per year rather than 120 credits. There must be a clear rationale for any blended learning or work placement elements incorporated into the programme. When designing the programme and assessments, consideration needs to be given to any additional challenges students may face on an accelerated programme. Many students on accelerated degrees are driven to succeed, have a good work ethic, and are keen to complete their studies with a good degree and return to the workplace. However, the increased workload, reduced time for reflection and other external influences can be problematic and hinder progress.

Student support and guidance

The partner institution needs to demonstrate that students on the accelerated programme receive the same level of support as students on traditional modes of delivery, including access to tutorial and peer support, pastoral advice and guidance, IT and financial assistance.

Staffing

The partner institution must provide assurance that students on accelerated programmes have access to teaching staff through the duration of their studies, including periods normally considered as holidays. The partner institution must also ensure that appropriate staffing levels are maintained throughout the validation period, staff workloads are appropriately managed, and that staff have sufficient time for staff development and research despite the concentrated teaching load.

Access to facilities and resources

Students on accelerated programmes need access to study facilities, learning resources and IT services throughout the calendar year, including periods normally considered as holidays. Students who study on an accelerated route may also require access to learning resources outside of the traditional working day. Given these factors, the development and approval of accelerated degrees needs to demonstrate greater consideration of student needs.

Assessment arrangements

The assessment timetable and timing of progression and award boards (including for resits) must be adapted to suit the accelerated timeframe. There needs to be sufficient time for marking and moderation in order for students to receive feedback and grades on time to progress to the next stage of the programme.

Programme admissions

The admissions criteria must ensure that only students with sufficient motivation and aptitude to cope with accelerated study are admitted onto the programme. For example, the admissions process might include compulsory interviews, or the programme could be specifically tailored to mature professionals with significant relevant work experience. Partners may also choose to introduce different admissions points onto the programme.

Administrative systems

Accelerated degree programmes may require additional administrative systems for the operation of credits, recognition of prior learning and to track students' progress. The OU expects partners to track and monitor student outcomes on accelerated degree programmes so that issues regarding parity of experience with traditional modes of delivery are identified and addressed.

Programme transfer

The partner should consider embedding arrangements for students on accelerated programmes to transfer onto traditional programmes within the same subject area if they find the fast-track option does not work for them.

D7 Changes to validated programmes and compliance with consumer law

Introduction

The OU expects validation arrangements (approved and reapproved) to remain in place for the duration of the (re)approval period. If material changes are required (for enhancement purposes, to comply with external stakeholder requirements, or to address a concern, for example), the OU usually undertakes an interim review.

Changes can be made to approved programmes of study in between formal revalidation events, but the partner needs to consider and mitigate the impact any changes will have on applicants and students.

Partners must distinguish between:

- The University's assessment of academic significance for validation purposes; and
- The impact of a proposed change on students and applicants under consumer protection law.

A change categorised as minor, moderate or major for academic purposes may nevertheless constitute a material change from a student or applicant perspective.

For more information on your obligations when making changes to any advertised or published information, please read **UK higher education providers - advice on consumer protection law**. The OfS has also recently published an insight brief **Protecting students as consumers** which partners should consult and refer to.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) provides guidance to ensure that higher education providers comply with consumer protection law. This guidance is crucial for protecting applicants and students' rights and ensuring they receive accurate and transparent information about their courses and any potential changes.

The OU expects partners to review and adapt approved programmes based on monitoring and evaluation outcomes, in line with their commitment to continuous improvement. If changes are necessary, they must be managed appropriately in accordance with consumer law obligations (such as obtaining applicant or student agreement where necessary). Additionally, a separate OU process must be followed to determine the academic scrutiny required to confirm the proposed changes.

Impact of changes on applicants and students

- **Consultation and agreement:** When making changes to validated programmes, partners must assess the impact on students and applicants and take appropriate action in line with consumer protection requirements. This may include consultation, notification, obtaining agreement, providing mitigation, or offering applicants and students the opportunity to withdraw, as appropriate.
- **Notification of changes:** Applicants and students should be notified of any changes to their programmes in a timely manner, and the impact of the changes, along with their options, should be clearly communicated.

The OU distinguishes academic changes into three categories: minor changes, moderate changes, and major changes. These categories relate only to academic validation requirements and do not correspond or relate to the impact these changes might have on applicants and students as determined by consumer law advice or CMA guidance. The governance process for each of the OU categories is detailed below. Please note: what might be considered a minor change to the academic integrity of a programme of study, as determined by the OU, may be considered a "major" change to the (pre) contractual information the applicants and students originally signed up for. Therefore, the partner must determine the consumer law impact and complete the necessary consultation/mitigation prior to making any changes to OU validated and/or advertised programmes.

D7.1 Minor changes to programmes

The OU interprets minor changes to programmes of study as those which do not singly or incrementally change the basis on which the validation of the programme was made. They do not usually involve any significant change to the programme specification and do not change the nature of the programme.

Examples of minor changes:

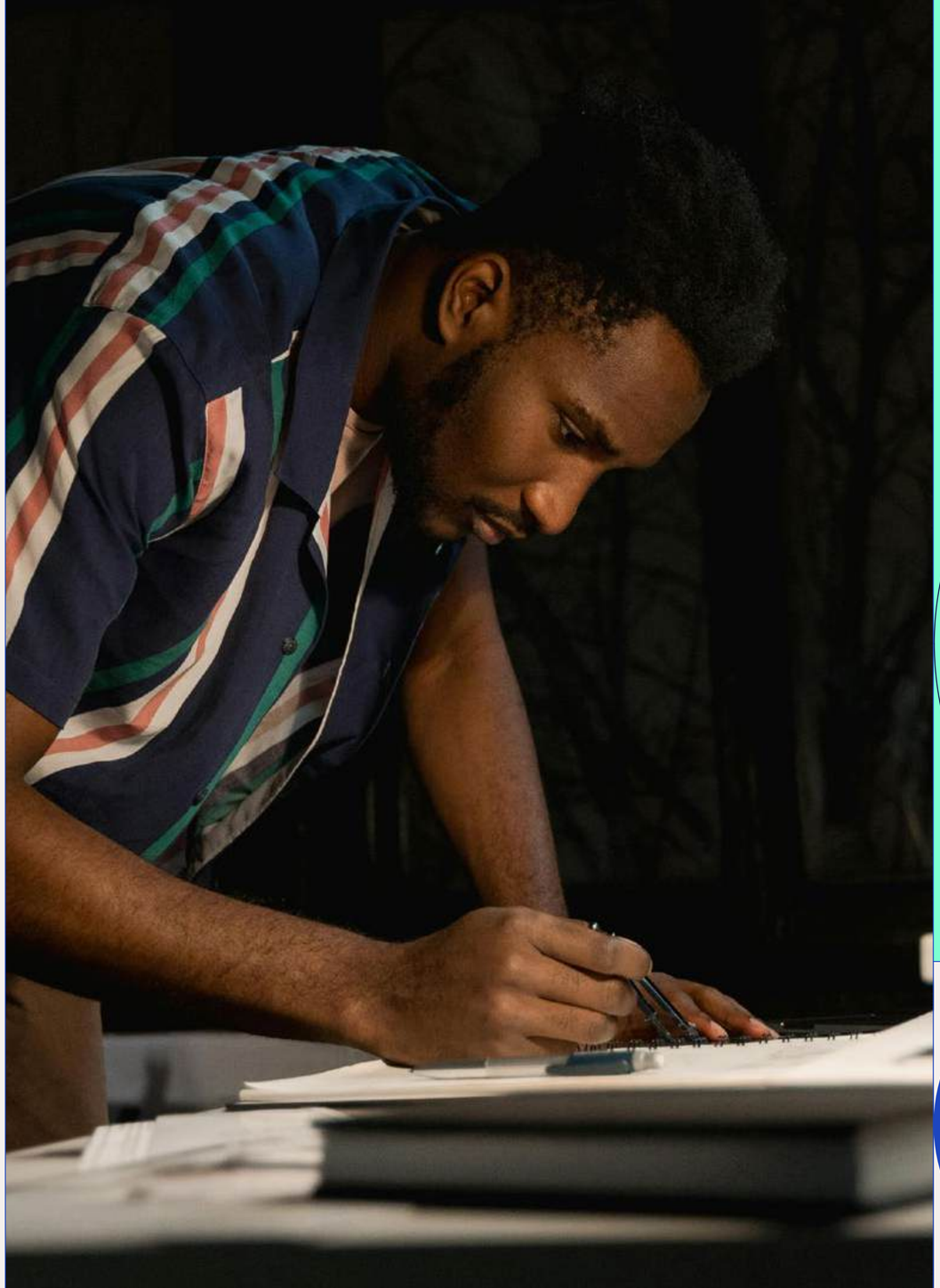
- Change of module title.
- Replacement of a module in a pathway with another OU-approved module without changing the overall learning outcomes for the pathway.
- Minor changes to teaching or delivery methods.
- Minor change in assessment approved by the external examiner (changes to low-weighted assessment components).

These changes are reported via regular Annual Review processes. Partner institutions should consult with their external examiner(s), academic reviewer and S/QPM regarding the changes.
External examiner approval is required for any minor change in assessment.

Although categorised as minor for validation purposes, partners should consider whether any proposed change could constitute a material change from the perspective of applicants or students.

Partners should also comply with the University's guidance on **Marketing, Advertising, Recruitment and Offers Prior to Programme (Re)Approval** and any associated requirements relating to material changes, applicant communication and consumer protection obligations.

This should then be reported, with evidence (where deemed necessary), to the OU via the annual review submissions.



D7.2 Moderate changes to programmes

The OU indicates that moderate changes are changes such as minor curriculum adjustments, or teaching and assessment matters. They are unlikely to conflict with the decisions of the original validation panel.

Examples of moderate changes:

- Change of programme title (without changing curriculum)
- Change of pathway title (without changing curriculum)
- Change to an exit award title (without changing curriculum)
- Change to module learning outcomes (not overly significant)
- Moderate change in assessment (changes to heavily weighted assessment components)
- Change to teaching and learning strategy
- Change to the number of intakes per year.

These changes are approved by OUVP's quality management group. Partner institutions also need to consult with their academic reviewer, external examiner(s) and S/QPM.

The partner institution should be mindful of consumer law advice and determine any obligations regarding applicants and student agreement. This should then be reported to the OU, with evidence (where deemed necessary), at the same time as the documentation requesting the moderate change. These changes are approved by OUVP's quality management group, and on an annual basis to Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC).

D7.3 Major changes to programmes

A change categorised as 'major' by the OU is one that materially and significantly alters the curriculum content, the method of teaching, or the approach to assessment. It is typically the kind of change that would likely have been a topic of discussion during the programme's validation process.

Examples of major changes:

- Changing the title of the degree
- Introducing new modules or pathways within a programme, or changing the syllabus content in a way that significantly affect learning outcomes so that is becomes a new module or pathway
- Significant changes to assessment (changes to core project/dissertation/ capstone and/or change in overall assessment strategy) and relationship to other programmes
- Significant changes to modular learning outcomes and to programme learning outcomes
- Significant changes to programme delivery/mode of study
- Restructuring the level of study or moving modules to a different level of study
- Introducing or adding any validated programme modules to be individually registerable for credit (single registerable modules)

These changes are approved by the OU's CuPC. Partner institutions are also expected to consult with their academic reviewer, external examiner(s) and S/QPM.

The partner institution should be mindful of consumer law advice and determine any obligations regarding student agreement. This should then be reported to the OU, with evidence (where deemed necessary), at the same time as the documentation requesting the major change.

Major changes are scrutinised by a panel of external subject experts as part of the major change process. These changes are approved by the OU's CuPC.

D7.4 Process for approval of changes to programmes

If a partner institution is considering a major, moderate or minor change, the OU must be consulted in advance of the change being implemented.

When minor changes arise from programme management experience, subject area developments, or external examiner advice, they must be approved following the partner institution's agreed procedures and in consultation with the OU. The S/QPM may want to consult the academic reviewer before allowing minor changes to be implemented. The OU expects programme teams to make full use of the opportunity to make minor changes in the interests of keeping programmes relevant and up-to-date, and in response to the quality monitoring outcomes. The partner institution must provide a brief account of any changes and document the approval process for the changes (including evidence of student consultation and communication, mitigation or student agreement activities undertaken, where applicable) in the subsequent Annual review process (see Section E).

Moderate changes to a programme require formal OU approval. The request should be submitted at least six months prior to the date on which the change is due to come into effect. A rationale for the changes must always be provided, alongside evidence of student consultation and consent. In most cases, consultation with external advisors is required. Approval is obtained from the Quality Management Group and reported to Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

Major changes to a programme require formal approval by the OU. Proposals for changes should be submitted as part of the annual workload request. If, for any reason this is not possible, the request should be submitted at least six months prior to the date on which the change is due to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes depends on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided. In most cases, consultation with external advisors is required alongside evidence of student consultation and consent.

Major changes are generally approved by correspondence. The documentation required to support the change should be discussed with the S/QPM. The outcomes are the same as for a (re)validation event, i.e. a recommendation of approval or not, with or without conditions and recommendations.

If the changes being proposed are of such a magnitude that the programme specification requires significant revision, a full programme revalidation will be required. It is also possible that several smaller changes made to the programme during the approval period could lead to a full programme revalidation. Changes affecting the assessment or progression of students must have the explicit written consent of the programme's approved external examiners.

Approved changes must be incorporated into relevant student facing information which must be sent to the OU before the programme commences.

D8 Other validation and revalidation considerations

D8.1 Recognition of study below higher education Level 4

The OU does not validate study below Level 4.

However, study below Level 4 can either be incorporated as part of the degree at the time of initial programme validation event or introduced later.

Students must register from the outset for the whole qualification, including the pre-Level 4 part.

Study below Level 4 is not a standalone qualification - it carries credit at Level 0 and should be described in terms of student learning hours.

Students either pass or fail below Level 4.

Students who pass pre-Level 4 are deemed to be at the appropriate level to commence Level 4 study and must be guaranteed progression to Level 4 of the relevant named award.

Students who pass pre-Level 4 study but leave without progressing are provided with a transcript by the partner institution. The transcript states that the student has completed a course that would have enabled them to meet the admissions criteria for Level 4 of the relevant degree programme had they chosen to continue.

The partner must make sure that the regulations for validated awards and the student handbook (or virtual learning environment) include the following:

- The options available to students who fail pre-Level 4 study, indicating arrangements for resits and progression.
- The options available to students who pass pre-Level 4 study but do not wish to progress immediately.
- The time limit within which students must progress to HE Level 4 after completion of pre-Level 4 study should reflect the length of time the skills gained at the latter are likely to remain current with the former.

D8.2 Validation of programmes approved by other authorities

The OU values the fact that many Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) accept that programmes leading to OU validated awards fulfil their requirements for professional accreditation.

The OU agrees procedures for joint validation with PSRBs where appropriate. A major objective of such agreements is to minimise duplication of effort. Should you be considering a PSRB approval of a programme at (re)validation you should flag this to the SQPM via the programme description template and at the annual planning meeting. In all instances it is the partners responsibility to ensure that PSRBs are kept informed.

D8.3 Dual approval

When a programme is approved or recognised by a professional or statutory body or another authority, the partner must ensure that the body concerned is informed of validation proposals and outcomes.

D8.4 Approval of programmes offered in new subject areas

The OU will consider approving programmes in new subject areas not previously offered for higher education awards, or where a partner institution has expanded its offerings and seeks to introduce new subjects.

When making a proposal, partners should consider that:

- There is sufficient intellectual depth within the subject to provide the challenges demanded by degree level study.
- A body of scholarship and sufficient subject expertise exists in the area.
- Published research in the area is available in referenced journals.
- There is a formally constituted body of practitioners or people employed in the area.
- In the sciences, technology and health studies areas, a widely recognised scientific or medical basis exists for the theories embodied in the study.
- When practice is involved, a well-founded causal explanation of the techniques used, along with evidence from scientific studies and assessments of the practice results, is available.
- Those proposing the programme are appropriately qualified in established areas of study.
- Qualifications are available at sub-degree levels.
- Well-established qualifications are available in closely associated areas of study.

If a partner wants to offer a non-cognate subject or new curriculum area that is not currently offered by the partner, it will be discussed and approved with the relevant OU faculty before the proposal can proceed to validation.





D8.5 Programmes with multiple intakes per academic year

Special consideration needs to be given to programmes or single registerable modules that plan two or more intakes per academic year. The following need to be addressed within the submission documents:

- How each intake will be ensured an equivalent experience.
- Access to resources.
- Adequacy of staffing levels.
- Implications for external examiner workload.
- Arrangements for exam boards, resubmissions, and retakes aligned with an academic calendar for the programme.
- Compliance with OU regulations for validated awards.

Further information on the implications of multiple intakes will form part of your workload discussion with your S/QPM.

E: Annual review

What is Annual Review?

AM is the predecessor to institutional and programme monitoring (IPM), which is currently being rolled out in stages.

Any partner institutions who are still under the AM process should not use the guidance within this section. They are advised to liaise with their S/QPM for further information and support, if needed.

E1 What is Annual Review?

Once approved, partners' are required to develop and deliver OU validated programmes within a quality assurance and enhancement framework defined by the OU

A key element of this framework is the Annual review process.

Annual Review replaces Institutional and Programme Monitoring (IPM) with a proportionate, risk-based approach that embeds quality assurance and enhancement within normal partnership activity. Rather than relying on multiple annual data returns and reports, Annual Review draws on information gathered throughout the academic year through ongoing engagement between partners and their S/QPM, information held within Salesforce, examination board outcomes, external examiner feedback, academic reviewer engagement, and other quality assurance activity.

Partners are expected to maintain accurate and timely information within Salesforce, including:

- Recruitment, registration and student status data;
- Continuation, progression, completion and student outcome data; and
- Other information required by the University to support monitoring and oversight.

Student registration and status information should be updated following each recruitment and registration cycle. Progression, completion and student outcome information should be updated following each Board of Examiners to ensure that information held by the University remains current and can be used for ongoing monitoring and oversight.

S/QPMs review this information throughout the academic year alongside examination board outcomes, external examiner reports, academic reviewer feedback, reportable events and other relevant information. This evidence informs regular partnership management discussions and helps identify emerging risks, examples of good practice and opportunities for enhancement. It also enables targeted support and intervention where required.

Rather than requiring every partner to submit formal annual monitoring reports, the University uses this information to maintain oversight of academic standards, quality, student outcomes and regulatory compliance. Where additional reflection or assurance is required, partners may be asked to complete an Institutional Overview and/or Programme Review submission.

The Annual Review process aims to:

- Provide continuous assurance regarding academic standards and quality;
- Support enhancement and continuous improvement;
- Reduce duplication across quality assurance activities;
- Take a proportionate and risk-based approach to oversight; and
- Ensure compliance with regulatory and contractual requirements.

Supporting guidance, templates and briefing materials relating to Annual Review are available through the OUVP website, Partner Team Site and your S/QPM.

E2 Key Principles of Annual Review

The process is designed around the following core principles:

- **Proportionate and risk-based** – activity is targeted where it adds most value.
- **Continuous assurance** – monitoring takes place throughout the academic year and will form ongoing conversations between S/QPM and the Partner.
- **Data-informed -** Oversight is informed by student and performance information held within Salesforce and other quality assurance evidence.
- **Enhancement-focused** – emphasis on reflection, improvement, and outcomes rather than compliance.
- **Streamlined reporting** – where formal submissions are required, templates are designed to be concise, focused and avoid duplication.

E3. Overview of the Annual Review Cycle

Step A: Annual Planning and Confirmation of submission Requirements

At the start of each academic year, the S/QPM will confirm with each partner the Annual Review requirements applicable to their institution. Annual Review comprises two potential submission elements:

- An Institutional Overview (IO); and
- One or more Programme Reviews (PRs).

Not all partners or programmes will be required to complete both elements each year.

Where a Partnership Reapproval Process (PRP) is taking place during the review cycle, the **Institutional Overview requirement will normally be waived**, as equivalent institutional assurance is provided through the PRP process.

Where a programme is undergoing revalidation, the **Programme Review requirement for that programme will normally be waived**, as equivalent programme-level assurance is provided through the revalidation process.

All partners remain subject to the ongoing Annual Review process, including monitoring through data held on the OU's Salesforce database, examination board outcomes, external examiner reports, academic reviewer engagement and regular discussions with the S/QPM.

Step B: Ongoing Monitoring and Engagement

Throughout the academic year, assurance is delivered through:

- Regular engagement with your S/QPM.
- Attendance at and outcomes from Boards of Examiners.
- Review of partner risk registers by the S/QPM and OUVP SMT.
- Review of any reportable events.
- Review of recruitment, registration, continuation, progression and student outcome information held within Salesforce.
- Review of complaints and academic appeals.
- Consideration of external examiner and academic reviewer feedback; and
- Ongoing discussions relating to quality assurance, enhancement and regulatory compliance.

Partners are expected to maintain accurate and up to date data within Salesforce as a core component of this process and are asked to update Salesforce following periods of recruitment and after each examination board to ensure data is accurate and the S/QPM can monitor the information.

Step C: Data Review (Autumn Term)

During the autumn term:

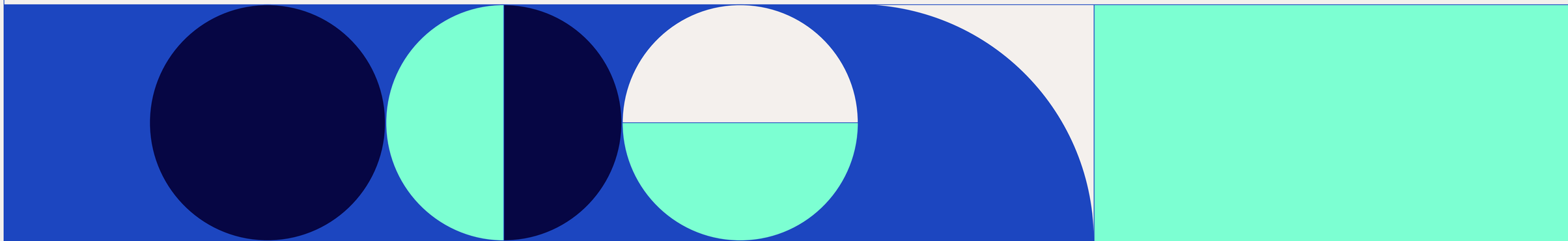
- The OU will review available student and performance data.
- Partners may be asked to confirm the accuracy of data.

This ensures that any subsequent review activity is based on robust and current information.

Step D: Annual Review Submission (submitted in March each Academic Year)

Where required, Annual Review submissions will consist of **Institutional Overview** (institution-level reflection), and/or **Programme Review** (Programme Reviews are not normally required for programmes undergoing revalidation during the review cycle.

The S/QPM will confirm each year which submissions, if any, are required.



Step E: Content of the Review

Where a submission is required, partners should provide:

- Reflective, analytical commentary (not purely descriptive).
- Evaluation of trends in student outcomes and performance.
- Consideration of external examiner feedback.
- Progress against previous actions and evidence of impact.
- Identification of risks, issues, and areas for enhancement.
- Confirmation of any policy or procedural changes, with updated documents provided where appropriate.

Step F: S/QPM Evaluation and Review

Where an Institutional Overview and/or Programme Review submission is required, the documentation will be reviewed by the S/QPM, drawing on the following information accrued over the year:

- Data and performance indicators held within Salesforce;
- Examination board outcomes;
- External examiner and academic reviewer feedback;
- Reportable events and risk information; and
- Ongoing engagement with the partner.

The S/QPM will complete an internal Annual Review evaluation (or equivalent proforma) which records:

- key strengths and examples of good practice;
- risks, concerns or areas requiring action;
- progress against previous actions;
- any requirement for escalation or further scrutiny; and
- an overall assessment of the partner's provision and associated risks.

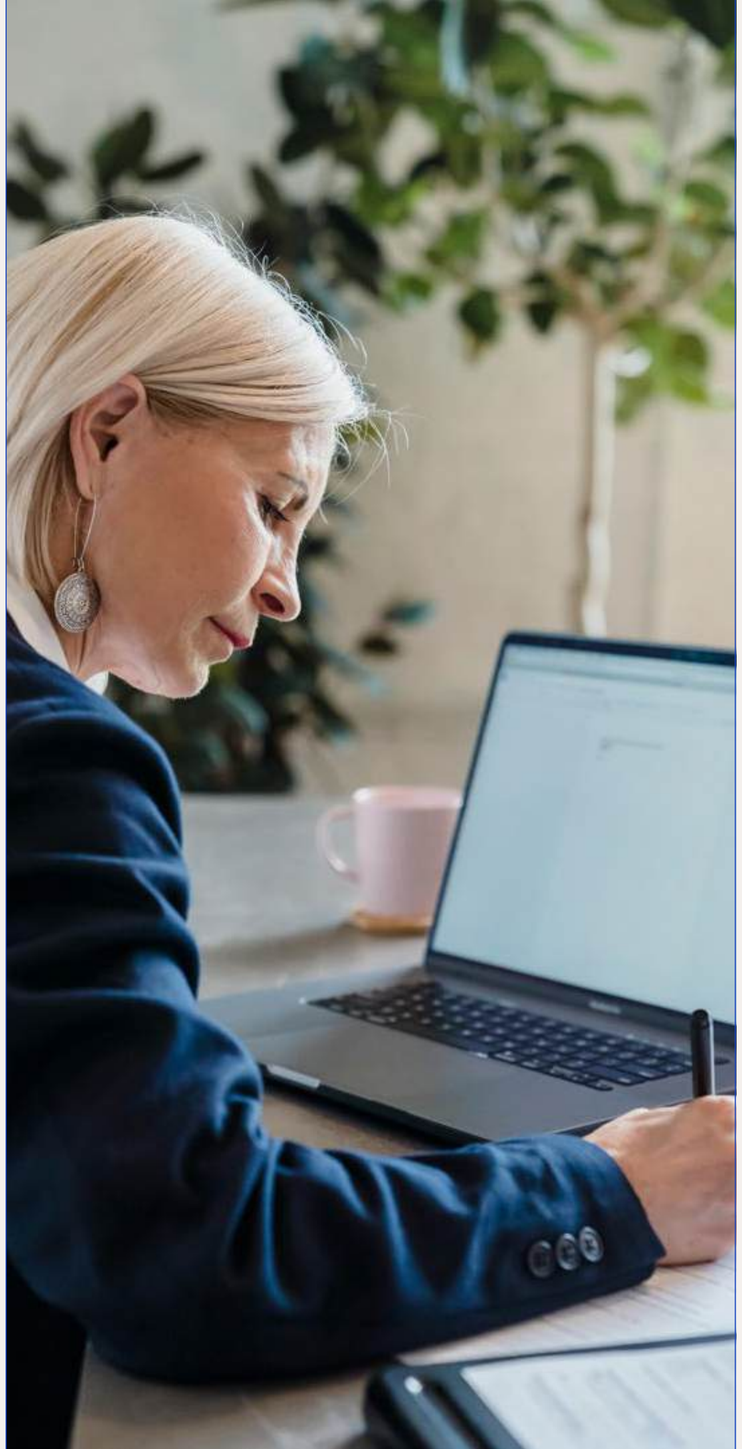
The completed evaluation informs institutional oversight and any subsequent actions.

Step G: OU Oversight

OU oversight is provided through the Annual Monitoring Review Group (AMRG), which:

- Reviews outputs from across the partnership portfolio.
- Identifies cross-partner themes and risks.
- Provides assurance to OU governance committees.





E4 Analysis of key feedback

E4.1 Feedback from external examiners

Programme teams are required to consider comments and issues raised by external examiners as detailed in the external examiner reports submitted to the partner. These should be clearly identified and a response to the external examiner report must be produced, reflecting on the report's contents, and detailing any actions generated to address the external examiner's comments.

E4.2 Feedback from OU academic reviewers

Academic reviewers, who are the OU's faculty representatives, submit a summary of their engagements over the year. When comments are submitted regarding particular programmes, they should also be considered. It is expected that academic reviewers will engage with students at least once a year and will include feedback about these meetings in their reports. More information on what the Academic Reviewer role consists of can be found on the OUVP website.

E4.3 Staff feedback

The programme team should reflect upon the success of the programme and consider whether amendments are desirable in the areas of:

- Curriculum design, content and organisation.
- Teaching, learning and assessment.
- Student progression and achievement.
- Student support and guidance.
- Learning resources, including staffing and staff development.
- Quality management and enhancement.

E4.4 Employer and workplace feedback, as appropriate

Include employers' feedback in the programme evaluation, particularly for foundation degrees or degree apprenticeships. It is evidence of the achievement of intended learning outcomes and can inform the review of programme specifications, teaching methods and assessment strategies. When a programme includes student placement or work enrichment activities, include an account of the effectiveness of the arrangements in place and whether they can be enhanced, using student and employer feedback. In the case of foundation degrees, include an account of the continuous involvement of employers in the programme design and assessment.

E4.5 Student feedback

Partners must formally obtain students' views of each programme, including suggestions for possible improvements, and specify how this is obtained and analysed.

E4.6 Feedback should be evaluated in the following areas:

- Teaching quality.
- Learning resources.
- Assessment and feedback to students on assessment.
- Student support and guidance.
- Personal development planning opportunities.

Partners should indicate action taken or planned as a result of student feedback.

E4.7 Learning resources, student support and staffing

Partners should comment on the adequacy of learning support and physical and staffing resources. Evidence could include student evaluation, feedback from meetings involving student representatives, minutes of teaching and learning committees, programme committees (or equivalent), external examiners' reports, student progression and achievement data, and reports from professional accrediting bodies or the OfS, or QAA and programme validation or revalidation reports.

Include a staff list and ensure it reflects all staff appointed since the previous Annual Review, Partnership Reapproval Process (PRP), validation or revalidation activity, as applicable, together with an evaluation of the consequences of staff turnover. The relevant academic reviewer needs to comment on the appropriateness of staff appointed and CVs of any new academic appointments should be submitted to OUVP throughout the year. The OU should be informed of any changes to the staff team, even if the changes are temporary.

E5. Relationship to Other Processes

Annual Review operates alongside, and is integrated with:

- **Partnership Reapproval Process (PRP)** – replaces Annual Review at institutional level where applicable.
- **Programme Revalidation** – replaces Programme Review requirements.
- **Examination Boards** – provide core assurance of academic standards.

This ensures duplication is avoided and assurance activity is streamlined.

E6. Transition and Implementation

- The 2026/27 academic year operates as a transition year, with previous IPM requirements (Submissions A, B and C) removed.
- From 2027/28, Annual Review will operate as a steady-state, embedded process.
- Annual expectations will be confirmed in advance for each partner.

Further information and guidance can be found on the OUVP website and via your S/QPM.



F: Assessment regulations and the external examiner process for validated partners

F1 Assessment regulations for validated awards

F1.1 Definition and purpose of assessment

Assessment is the means by which a student's ability, progress and achievement are measured against agreed criteria. It provides the basis on which decisions can be made about a student's learning needs and whether a student is ready to proceed or to qualify for an award. It also enables students to obtain feedback on their learning and helps them improve their performance. As such it must be an integrated aspect of a programme's teaching and learning strategy.

The purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the intended aims and learning outcomes of the programme of study, and achieved the standard required for the award they seek. The OU therefore requires that students are assessed in accordance with those aims and learning outcomes.

Assessment should be designed in a way that promotes effective learning, minimises the potential for plagiarism or other forms of unfair practice and encourages academic integrity.

When developing assessment methods, student feedback should be utilised regarding the nature, form and content of the proposed assessment.

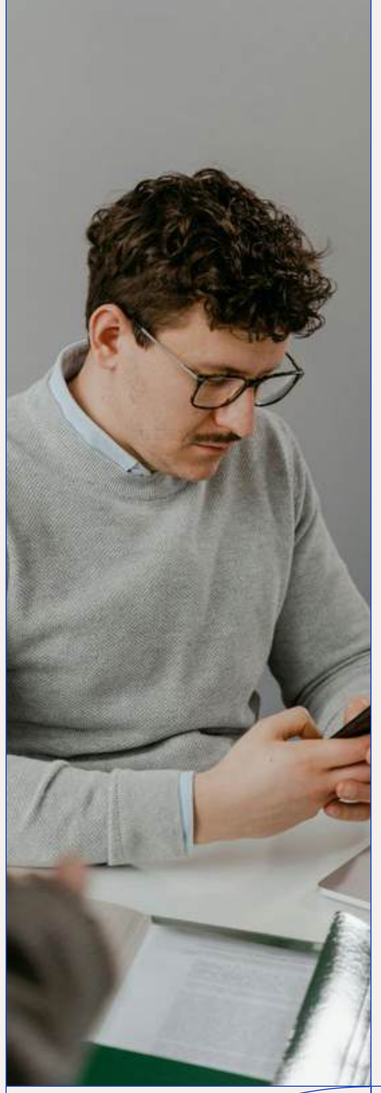
A partner's arrangements for quality assuring assessment integrity are a key focus for the OU and monitors this closely following initial approval of a partner institution.

F1.2 Examiners' judgement

Assessment must be carried out by competent and impartial examiners, using methods that enable them to assess students fairly. In order to achieve this, the OU requires external examiners to review assessment that contributes towards an OU validated award, and to be involved whenever there is progression from one level to the next in a validated programme. The external examiner role is to ensure that the individual student has a good learning experience and that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained. A key part of an external examiner's role includes confirmation of assessments topics and standards before they are issued to students.

Within the constraints imposed by the requirements of Section F4, boards of examiners have discretion in reaching decisions on the awards to be recommended for individual learners. They are responsible for interpreting the regulations for validated awards of the OU and good practice in higher education. Their academic judgements cannot be questioned or overturned.

The OU's requirements related to the remit and powers of boards of examiners for validated awards are detailed further in Section F4.



F1.3 Types and methods of assessment

Most assessment is likely to fall into one or more of the following categories:

a. Diagnostic assessment, providing an indicator of a learner's aptitude and readiness for a programme of study and identifying possible learning problems or study needs. .

b. Formative assessment, designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development but does not count towards the students' final grades.

c. Summative assessment, providing a measure of a learner's achievement in relation to the intended learning outcomes of a programme of study, through formal grading which counts towards the final award.

A variety of assessment methods should be used. Each method may involve more than one of the three types of assessment defined above. The OU requires that the methods and types of assessment encourage and support effective student learning and relate closely to the learning outcomes and subject matter of the programme of study. The learning should be consistent with agreed subject benchmarks where available.

Programme assessment strategies must include compulsory forms of assessment that aim to ensure the integrity of the award (i.e. examinations, presentations, etc.). The module specifications should clearly state whether module grades are determined by a threshold score (40% at Levels 4, 5 and 6 and 50% at level 7) for each weighted assessment component (multiple assessment) or a straight average of all the assessment tasks (single component assessment).

For single component assessment, students still need to demonstrate all the module learning outcomes and achieve an overall weighted average score of at least 40% at undergraduate level or 50% at postgraduate level. Approval of single component assessment strategies may also be subject to professional body requirements and are not normally permitted at Level 6.

For students taking single registerable modules, all assessments must meet module pass marks. Component compensation (also known as 'in module' compensation) is not permitted for registerable modules.



F1.4 Regulations on assessment

All new student cohorts on programmes leading to an OU validated award are subject to the regulations for validated awards of the OU.

The regulations for validated awards for the OU also apply to students on single registerable modules.

Each programme of study leading to a validated award must have assessment regulations covering all the matters set out in the sections below, in accordance with the OU's requirements and expectations. Assessment regulations governing different programmes need to be as consistent as possible across the partner institution. Assessment regulations specific to a programme of study are validated at the point of programme approval and subsequent revalidations.

The assessment regulations for a programme of study must state the basis on which students are assessed for an award. The assessment regulations for a programme of study must specify the criteria on which students will be assessed for an award. These regulations should align the assessment requirements with the general educational aims and learning outcomes for OU validated awards, the programme specification, and any special assessment requirements associated with the award. Assessment procedures must state clear criteria for marking and grading assessments, including learning outcomes-based assessment and assessment of employability skills. In order to support this, the module specifications need to identify which assessment elements must be achieved for the module to be passed (see Section 15 of the **Regulations for validated awards of The Open University**).

Partners are expected to review the programme assessment regulations on a frequent basis to ensure they are still fit for purpose, and amend them as necessary. A review of assessment regulations can take place following discussion with the S/QPM, through the annual programme evaluation (as part of the institutional and programme monitoring process), engagement with external examiners, and preparations for revalidation. Any changes of a significant nature need to be approved by the OU (please see **Section D7** for more information).

F1.5 Scheduling, timing and volume of assessment

The scheduling, amount and weighting of assessment types must be appropriate to the level of the award, the programme of study and the delivery mode. These issues are considered at validation and revalidation, but partners should keep them under review and monitor their effectiveness. A fundamental principle of assessment is that the quantity and timing of assessments should ensure the evaluation of intended learning outcomes and facilitate the effective measurement of student achievement. Assessment scheduling must leave adequate time for students to reflect on their learning before being assessed, and so that they can benefit from feedback. Assessment must also be designed to minimise plagiarism and encourage academic integrity.

F1.6 Examination centres

If a partner intends to use a third-party examination centre, they must notify their S/QPM six months in advance of the examination date. If the centre is not affiliated with the British Council, the OU will make a decision regarding centre approval.

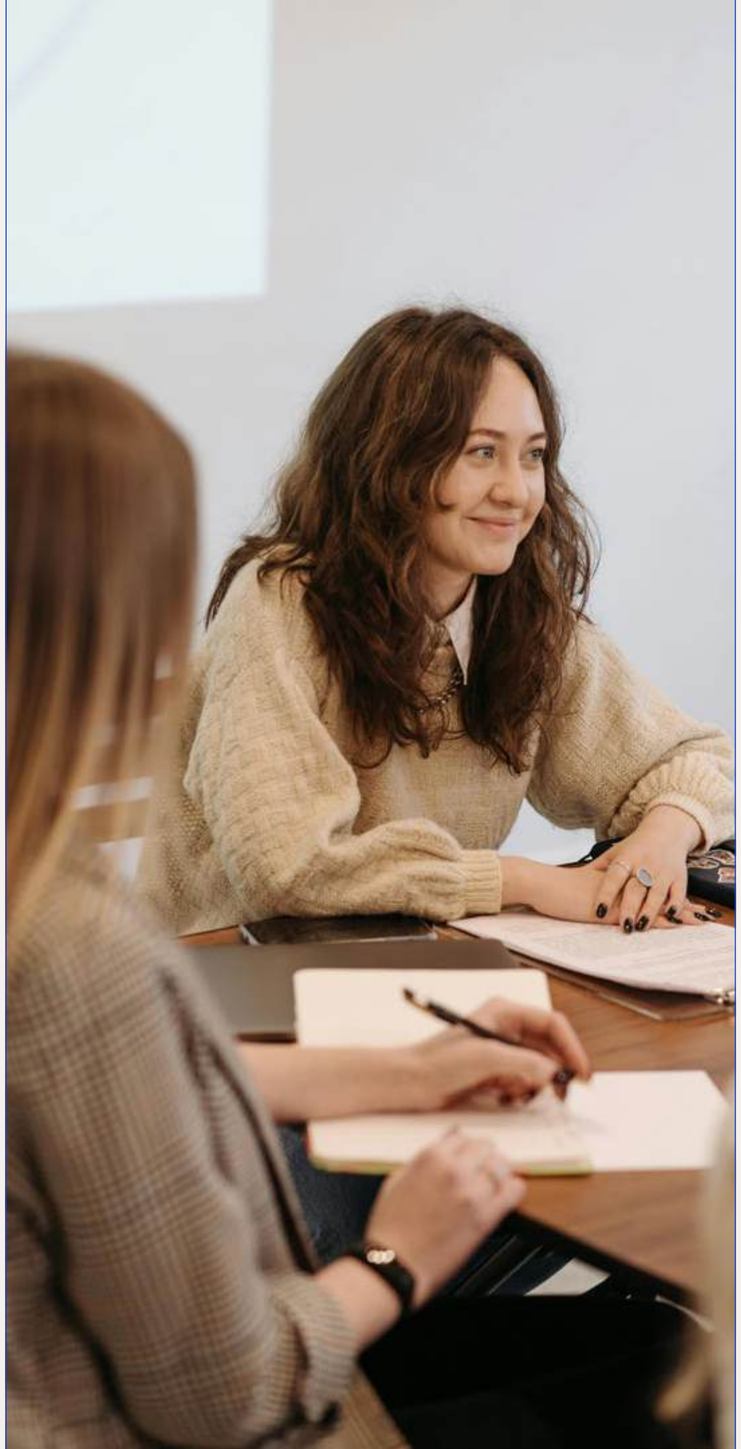
F1.7 Staff development and training related to assessment

The OU expects partners to provide any necessary support and training to members of academic staff involved in the assessment of students to ensure that they fully understand the application of assessment criteria. Partners also need to give administrative staff training so they understand the assessment regulations and can manage the administrative aspects of the assessment process effectively.

Good practice ensures the following are considered:

- Understand the assessment theory, practice and implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment.
- Ensure effective ways of measuring the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Ensure effective ways of engaging with students to enable and promote. dialogue about, and reflective use of, feedback.
- Awareness of the importance of designing assessments that minimise opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of unacceptable academic practice.
- Have opportunities to learn about new approaches to assessment and devise new methods, as well as the best way to operate existing methods.
- Develop awareness of assessment implications for a diverse range of students, including cultural diversity, differences in learning methods and the need for inclusivity.
- Have other training opportunities related to the interpretation of regulations, chairing assessment meetings, and record-keeping at boards of examiners.





F1.8 Assessment guidelines to students

The assessment of an individual programme of study is subject to both regulations for validated awards of the OU and regulations specific to that programme, meaning students must be made aware of the detailed requirements of both sets of regulations.

The partner must ensure the assessment requirements for programmes of study that are made known to students include the type, volume, weighting and timings of assessments. This information should be given to students at the beginning of each study phase, before any assessment is taken. Assessment regulations for each programme must be included in the student handbook (or virtual learning environment).

F1.9 Feedback to students on performance

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their own performance. The OU requires partners to provide constructive and timely feedback to students on assessed work to promote effective learning and facilitate improvement. Academic staff need to be given adequate marking time for this to happen.

Feedback should be based on clear assessment criteria, giving students a good understanding of how their mark was derived, and how well learning outcomes have been met.

As noted in Section F1.5 above, the scheduling of assessments must ensure that students can benefit from feedback, particularly in cases where summative assessment follows formative assessment.

F1.10 Assessment arrangements for students with impairments

If a student cannot be assessed by the methods specified in the assessment regulations, the OU expects partners to take steps to accommodate their needs by making special arrangements for examination or assessment.

The external examiner may agree a variation in the methods used, keeping in mind the programme's learning outcomes and the need to assess all students on equal terms.

The partner must have procedures in place for approving any special arrangements in advance of a student's first assessment. Partners must ensure reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate students' needs, and need to be mindful of any relevant legislation.

Failure to implement any special arrangements that have been formally agreed may be grounds for an appeal (Section H of the regulations for validated awards of the OU).

F1.11 Identification of all elements of assessment

Assessment regulations must cover all assessments which formally contribute to progression or final award recommendations, at the point in the programme that they are taken. Assessment regulations must identify all the elements to be assessed, including any assessed supervised work experience.

Regulations and module specifications must specify which or how many elements must be passed to obtain an award and what weighting each carry in the assessments.

The minimum and maximum number of elements to be attempted must be identified in the regulations and module specifications.

Regulations for validated awards of the OU define when and how each of the assessment elements are assessed by internal examiners, and the role of external examiners in moderating assessment.

F1.12 Processes for internal moderation of marks

The OU expects partners to have transparent and fair mechanisms for internal marking and moderation of marks. The QAA Quality Code states that clear assessment criteria and, where appropriate, marking schemes are key factors in assuring that marking is conducted fairly and consistently.

Assessment regulations must specify arrangements for second marking by internal examiners and other measures used to ensure the first round of marking is fair and consistent with the marking scheme, and to ensure comparability of assessment across a cohort. Partner institutions must establish procedures to ensure that marks generated by a first marker (or marking team) are scrutinised to verify the appropriateness of the marking and to provide a second judgment, especially for very good/poor performances.

In accordance with good practice, partners are asked to consult the regulations for validated awards of the OU and associated policies when considering the following:

- How borderline marks or grades are defined and treated. The board of examiners can consider borderline only in exceptional circumstances (See the Regulations for validated awards of The Open University, Section 19.5.)
- When assessing larger groups of students, a partner must define the criteria for sampling of assessment for the purposes of moderation. This includes the size of the sample to be drawn from each group of assessed work.
- The circumstances that warrant the third marking of a whole batch of scripts due to significant discrepancies between the first and second markings.
- The method of reconciliation of the first and second marking where applicable. If two markers cannot agree a final mark, a third marker (if this stage is included in the partner institution's assessment policy), the board of examiners or a subsidiary committee, will determine a final mark in consultation with external examiners.
- In order to ensure consistency and fairness to students, how amendments to sample marks as a result of internal moderation must be applied to the rest of the cohort.

F1.13 External moderation of marks

Following internal moderation, all assessment that contributes towards an award must be moderated by external examiners, and advice provided to internal examiners as appropriate. The sample selected for external moderation normally includes all summative work for an agreed selection of students from a given cohort, based on the marks agreed by internal examiners.

When students are taking single registerable modules, these must form part of the sample to the external examiner, as well as the sample for programme students on the same module.

F1.14 Provision for exit awards

Programme specifications must make provision for exit awards at intermediate levels, and clear achievement criteria must be stated. These are approved by the OU at validation and revalidation.

Exit awards can only be classified as pass or fail. A distinction or merit cannot be given for an exit award.

Similarly, awards of credit for those on single registerable modules are only classified as pass or fail.

F1.15 Penalties for late or non-submission of work

The regulations for validated awards of the OU set out the consequences and penalties incurred for late or non-submission of material for assessment. This information must be widely available to students.

F1.16 Identification of requirements from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Programme regulations must clearly set out specific assessment requirements that have to be met in relation to professional bodies, or accreditation requirements relevant to the programme of study.

Programme regulations must clearly set out assessments under the regulatory framework of another awarding body that counts to the award.

F1.17 Programme regulations on progression and attendance

Partner institution programme regulations must set out the way(s) students' progress through the programme and identify the compulsory and optional elements.

When attendance is compulsory for certain elements, regulations must detail the attendance requirements students have to meet.

Regulations must detail any formal arrangements designed to monitor students' progress and warn students of possible failure.

Regulations must specify the provision for exclusion from the programme on academic grounds.

F1.18 Definitions of academic misconduct

The regulations for validated awards of the OU define misconduct in respect of assessment. In particular, it defines what constitutes cheating or plagiarism. The partner institutions' regulations must also set out penalties and provide procedures for when these offences are suspected or alleged.



F1.19 Procedures for dealing with academic misconduct

Boards of examiners should be responsible for confirming any decisions related to suspected cases of misconduct that have been reported to the exam board via an academic misconduct panel or equivalent. As part of the regulations for validated awards of the OU, the OU requires partner institutions to have detailed procedures for investigating and documenting alleged misconduct in assessment within the following broad guidelines:

- When a case of misconduct is suspected, the board of examiners should make a decision on the candidate's result until the facts have been established. The partner should establish a process that allows all evidence to be collated and documented by a formal panel before a case is reported to the board of examiners.
- When a case of misconduct has been established, the academic misconduct panel or equivalent should decide the significance of the academic misdemeanour and exercise its discretion as appropriate to the case. If it is established that a student has attempted to gain an unfair advantage, the panel should have the authority to rule that the student has failed part or all of the assessments, and the authority to determine whether or not the student should be allowed a reassessment.
- All such cases should be treated seriously and should be reported to the board of examiners and passed to the academic board to note.
- When evidence becomes available, following the recommendation of the board of examiners, it should be possible for the matter to be reopened.
- Procedures dealing with misconduct must be applied consistently across the validated provision. Partners must establish procedures that allow an institution-wide overview, including the AMBeR Tariff.

F1.20 Reassessment and resits

Within Section 17 of the Regulations for validated awards of The Open University, guidance is provided on options for the repeat of study, including partial and full repeat of a stage.

Boards of examiners have discretion to interpret regulations for reassessment on a case-by-case basis. This is subject to the requirements of the OU's principle that a validated award is only made when a candidate has fulfilled the programme's learning outcomes and achieved the required standard.

Regulations make it clear that boards of examiners should not unreasonably withhold permission for a student to be reassessed in accordance with the regulations.

The reassessment section of the regulations provides guidance to boards of examiners and students on the circumstances under which consideration will be made for:

a. compensation

b. resit failed assessment

c. retaking a module

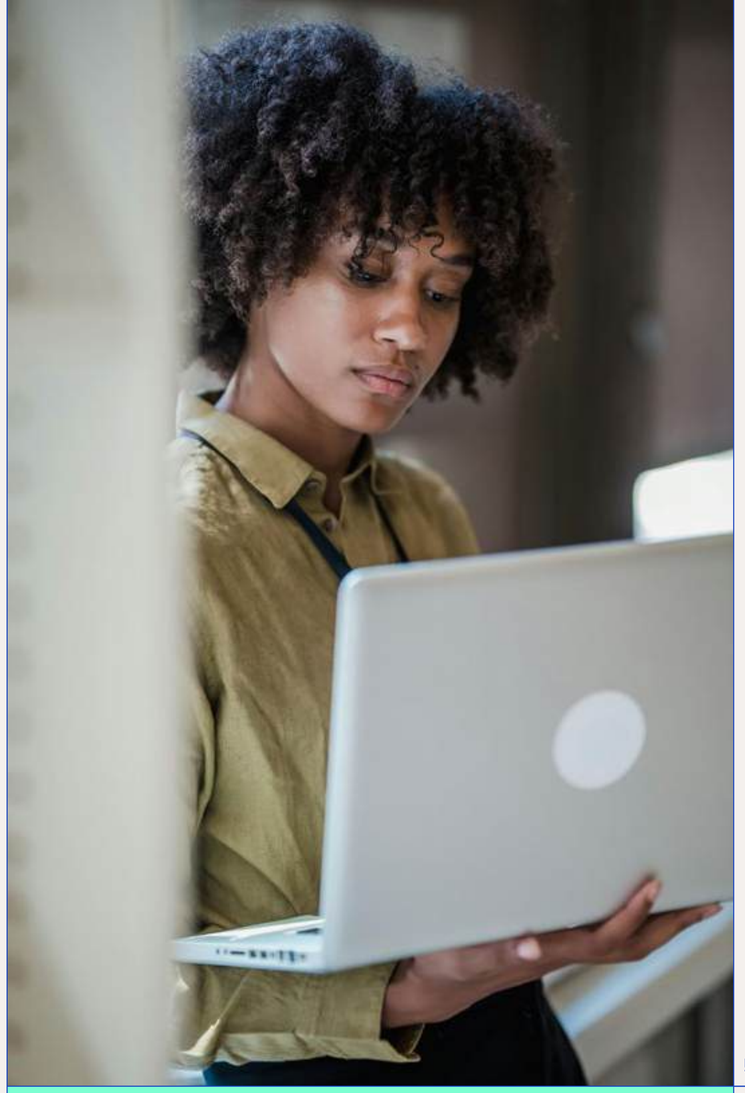
d. taking a replacement assessment

e. taking an alternative replacement module (only in specific circumstances)

Reassessment regulations also specify the criteria for the capping of marks for reassessed elements. Students who have already passed a module or assessed elements within a module are not allowed to be reassessed for that module or element, nor can they retake it in order to improve marks.

A candidate for reassessment may not demand reassessment in elements that are no longer current in the module or programme. The board of examiners may, at its discretion, make special arrangements that it deems appropriate if it is not practicable for students to be reassessed in the same elements and by the same methods as at the first attempt. However, when a validated programme or single registerable module is discontinued, provision has to be made to ensure fair assessment opportunities for all enrolled students. This must include appropriate provision for resit opportunities and for students who intermit, interrupt or intercalate in accordance with the validated programme regulations.

If programme regulations permit it, the board of examiners may decide the candidate has achieved the level required for a lower award and may offer the candidate the choice of accepting the lower award immediately or resitting for the higher award.



F1.21 Reassessment regulations specific to professional doctorates

Candidates studying for a professional doctorate award who fail to satisfy their examination panel in their first attempt in the viva voce award assessment may be permitted, at the discretion of the examination panel, to resubmit for re-examination once only. Programme regulations need to make clear the conditions under which resubmission and re-examination for the viva voce component of the doctorate is permitted and, where appropriate, the circumstances under which the award of a master's degree or postgraduate diploma may be recommended.[5]

F1.22 Provisions for compensation

Within the regulations for validated awards of the OU, conditions for the application of compensation at stage level – that is, within a specific year or level of study – are clearly outlined.

Assessment regulations and/or module specifications must make clear any compensation provision for failure in assessment and identify any elements that may under no circumstances be the subject of compensation for failure. Compensation should not be applied to an element:

- that forms a substantial proportion of the assessment for the award
- that is central to the fulfilment of programme aims
- that is specifically precluded from compensation by programme regulations
- that is being studied as a single registerable module.

F1.23 Extenuating circumstances

Section F of the Regulations for validated awards of The Open University provides information on procedures for extenuating circumstances.

5 From 2022, Doctorates are managed by the OU Graduate School

F1.24 Aegrotat

Where available, an Aegrotat award may be recommended when the board of examiners does not have enough evidence of the student's performance to recommend the relevant award or a lower award specified in the programme regulations, but is satisfied that the student would have reached the required standard had it not been for illness or some other valid reason – further information on aegrotat awards and how they are awarded is in the Regulations for validated awards of The Open University.

Before an Aegrotat recommendation is submitted to the OU, the student or their next of kin must have signified willingness to accept the award and understand that this implies waiving the right to be reassessed.

F1.25 Provision for viva voce examination

Section 16 of the regulations for validated awards of the OU provides information on provision for viva voce examination.

F1.26 Procedures for the conduct of assessment

As well as procedures in the regulations for validated awards of the OU, partner institutions must produce regulations or codes of practice that set out arrangements for the conduct of assessments including:

- Respective student and staff responsibilities. This should include any requirements for staff to mark and return annotated work in a timely manner, for example, or requirements for students to retain material for a specified period.
- Invigilation requirements setting out the minimum ratio of invigilators to candidates, for example, and the duties of invigilators for collection and handling of scripts.
- Arrangements to ensure the security of assessment papers and other forms of assessment, such as arrangements for tracking and returning drafts sent to external examiners and originals sent for secure printing.
- Arrangements to ensure students taking an assessment are the same as those against whose names the marks are recorded by - by checking against (photo) identification, for example
- Special arrangements that may be necessary for the assessment of materials based on work placements or periods of study abroad, when the assessment cannot be conducted by an overseas partner.
- Arrangements for recording and publishing assessment decisions, communicating results to students and clarifying when results will be ratified if they are provisional.
- Arrangements for the retention of assessed materials (in line with the guidance from the OfS), whether by students or the partner, until the last opportunity for appeal has passed.
- The procedures and arrangements above are monitored by the OU at partnership development approval and reapproval through the Partner Compliance Review. Partners are also required to report any significant changes to processes in their annual review report.

F1.27 Validated partner complaints and academic appeals procedures

Complaints and academic appeals procedures

All partners should have clear and well-publicised complaints and academic appeal policies and procedures that follow the guidance set out in the **Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework**. This includes ensuring all information is in line with the **OIA's ten key principles**: accessible, clear, fair, independent, confidential, inclusive, flexible, proportionate, timely and improves the student experience. All partners based in Northern Ireland must follow the **Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)** Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). However, all OU validated students retain the right to request a review by the OU and the OIA.

OUVP has additional guidance on complaints and academic appeals which can be accessed here: **Complaints and academic appeals | Validation Partnerships**. Please note that guidance specific for Northern Irish Partners can also be accessed here within the same page.

Every partner should have a clearly defined process for complaints and academic appeals with a stage for requesting a review by the OU.

These stages should be:

- **Stage one** – Early Resolution (Informal) (by the partner).
- **Stage two** – Formal internal consideration (by the partner).
- **Stage three** – Referral/escalation to the OU review (OU/NIPSO for NI).



There should be a clear distinction between the complaints and academic appeal process, and each should be clearly explained to the student. Accessible and clear Information should be given to students on:

- How they can submit a complaint and/or academic appeal.
- The role of an advocate and how a student can be supported during the process.
- Group complaints/ appeals.
- Confidentiality.
- How feedback from stakeholders helps improve policy and procedures.
- Complaints.

- The OIA defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider”.
- The complaints policy and procedure should set out what the partner considers is a complaint and give examples to help the student. The partner should also consider whether administrative appeals are covered under their complaints policy and procedure.
- The complaints policy and procedure should explain how students can make complaints about staff or other students and whether they are dealt with under the complaints policy or another specific policy, such as harassment and bullying policy.



Academic appeals

The OIA defines an academic appeal as "**a challenge to or request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body that makes decisions on student progress, assessment and awards."** This may include a request to change marks or progress decisions, or final award classifications.

An academic appeal policy and procedure should set out the grounds on which an appeal will be accepted, including information on not accepting appeals against academic judgement. Students have the right to appeal the outcome of other internal procedures, such as academic misconduct and fitness to study/practice decisions. Therefore, the appeal route should be made clear to the students.

It should be explained to students how their academic appeal will be investigated and by whom, as well as the involvement of the academic board or board of examiners.

Timeframes

Students should be clearly informed of the timeframes for each stage of the process. The OIA Good Practice Framework states that the process should be completed within 90 calendar days from the start of the formal stage, and NI based partners comply with the NIPSO timelines.

This means the stage two formal process and the stage three OU review process need to be completed within 90 calendar days of the formal complaint/academic appeal being received by the partner.

- **Stage one** – Early resolution (Informal) (by the partner).
- **Stage two** – Formal consideration (by the partner) – up to **41 calendar days** to carry out and complete.
- Partner issues 'Completion of Internal Procedures' letter to student.
- Student has up to **21 calendar days** in which to then contact the OU for review.
- **Stage three** – Formal review by OU –up to **28 calendar days to carry out and complete.**

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a table outlining these timescales Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a table outlining these timescales.

OU review stage

If students have exhausted all partner procedures (stages one and two), they have the right to request for review by the OU. The OU conducts this review following the procedure set out in Appendix 1.

Partners should ensure the OU review stage is referred to in their policies and procedures, by signposting to the procedure in Appendix 1.

The partner institution has the right to be heard and to present its case regarding any formal complaint I or academic appeal made against it to the OU.

In such cases a partner is expected to:

- respond in an open and timely manner to any requests made by the OU in relation to a complaint or academic appeal, without disadvantage to the student.
- act in accordance with the final outcome of the complaint or academic appeal to the OU.
- report to the OU that action has been taken in response to a complaint of academic appeal or complaint.

The OU reserves the right to require a further report from the partner's academic board if it has reason to believe that the standard of a validated award is at risk or that the regulations for validated awards of the OU might have been breached. The OU will intervene directly if concerns remain after all institutional procedures have been exhausted.

The regulations for validated awards of the OU, Section H, provides information on academic appeals and complaints, including information on:

- General requirements related to complaints and academic appeals procedures
- Grounds for appeal.
- Consideration of appeals by the academic board or its appointed sub-committee.
- Procedures of the appeals committee or equivalent.
- Consequences of established cases of procedural irregularity.
- Action following completion of complaint or academic appeal procedures.
- Appeals to the OU.



F1.28 Staff at partner institutions studying their OU validated awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalised procedures for assessing any of their own staff that are taking any OU validated provision.

The procedure should be as follows:

a. The OU should be made aware at the beginning of each academic year if any members of staff have enrolled on OU validated provision via Salesforce.

b. The external examiner for the programme(s) in question should be made aware of any employees taking the award.

c. All summative assessments taken by employees must form part of the sample sent to the external examiner.

d. Funding bodies should be made explicitly aware of any employees taking an award as part of an apprenticeship framework to ensure they meet the funding eligibility criteria.

e. Minutes from the academic board, or equivalent meeting, where any changes to procedures are approved to safeguard the integrity of the award should be forwarded to the OU, along with the amended procedures.

f. An employee cannot be a member of the examination board for an award they are working towards.

g. A declaration document should be produced for the employees and their line manager to sign, confirming that they do not have access to beneficial assignment or examination material in relation to the award. The document should also state that the employee and their line-manager are responsible for informing the examination board and university if this situation changes during the course of their studies so appropriate action can be taken. Copies of the declaration form should be sent to the OU when registering employees for the award.

F2 Regulations relating to external examiners

See relevant sections of the QAA Quality Code 2024.

The following are available on the OUVP website

and QAA website respectively:

- Guide for External Examiners of OU Validated Awards
- External Examiner Report Template
- Application forms for appointment/extension of appointment of External Examiners
- External Examining principles

F2.1 Validated partners' responsibilities related to external examiners

Partner institutions are responsible for:

- Nominating external examiners.
- Providing external examiners with briefing and induction (in addition to OU briefing).
- Seeking approval from the external examiners of the assessment briefs at the start of each academic year.
- Ensuring external examiners are sent samples of student work in a timely manner (at least five working days) in advance of any boards of examiners
- Managing boards of examiners.
- Ensuring external examiner reports are formally considered and appropriate action is taken, where necessary.
- Providing external examiners with a response detailing the actions taken after receiving their reports.
- Providing the OU with an account of the responses made, through institutional and programme monitoring, to issues raised by external examiners.
- Making external examiners' reports available to students in full, with the sole exception of any confidential reports made directly to the head of the partner institution.
- Including the name, position, and institution of their external examiners in module or programme information provided to students. External examiners must refer any direct correspondence from students back to the partner institution. Partner institutions should include this advice in their guidance to external examiners.

It is the partner institution's responsibility to manage the working relationships with external examiners.

F2.2 The OU's responsibilities related to external examiners

External examiners are appointed by and report to the OU. The terms under which they engage with the partner institution and the programmes to which they are appointed are those determined by the OU.

The OU sets the regulations and procedures related to external examining and keeps them under review.

The external examiner role is critical to the OU's confidence in the quality and standards of its validated provision. The OU places great value on the external examiner system and requires partner institutions to make responding to their advice and feedback a top priority.

F2.3 The rights and responsibilities of external examiners of OU validated programmes

The OU appoints external examiners for two main reasons: to benefit from their direct experience of relevant standards in other universities,

and to ensure that its examining methods and processes are subject to independent external assessment and that academic standards are maintained.

The role of external examiners appointed by the OU for a validated programme or group of modules is to provide independent assurance of the quality of the student learning experience and the continued maintenance of the academic standards of OU validated awards

In order to carry out their responsibilities, external examiners must:

- Be able to assess students impartially, on the basis of the work submitted for assessment, without being influenced by their previous association with the programme, the staff or any other students.
- Be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers taking comparable higher education programmes in the UK, and in the light of subject benchmarks and qualification descriptors, as appropriate.
- Moderate and approve the final draft of each examination paper or end-of-module component, using the related marking scheme or notes for the guidance of markers. This activity should include scrutinising the form and content of examination papers, coursework and other assessments (including assessment drafted for resit/ retake opportunities), for all award levels in a way that enables the external examiners to determine whether students have fulfilled the programme's aims and learning outcomes and reached the required standard. This activity should include alternative assessments and adjustments made for students with declared disabilities or impairments, to ensure all students are assessed fairly in relation to the programme syllabus and regulations.
- Be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations or assessment strategy which will directly affect students currently on a programme.
- Have access to all assessed work, and see samples of the work of students proposed for each category of award and for failure, to ensure assessment criteria have been interpreted correctly and that there is parity of assessment across the cohort.
- Consider the reliability of the mode of monitoring the marks of module assessments and the final end-of-module component (e.g. examination) and report to the board of examiners on any revisions they consider necessary.
- Have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners where it is within the programme regulations and if does not bias the overall assessment or cause unfairness to individual candidates.
- After consultation with the partner have the right to meet students and, where appropriate, conduct a viva voce examination of any candidate.
- Ensure that assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved programme regulations.
- Attend board of examiners meetings where decisions on recommendations for award are made, ensuring that the recommendations have been reached in accordance with the OU's requirements and normal practice in UK higher education.
- Participate as required in any review of decisions about individual students' awards taken during the examiner's period of office.
- Report back to the OU and the partner institution on student performance and academic standards, as well as on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them.
- Report in confidence to the OU's Vice-Chancellor on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments which put the standard of the OU's validated award at risk.

Within the terms of programme regulations, it is for external examiners to decide in detail how to fulfil the responsibilities described above. The OU requires programme regulations for validated awards to describe the nature and methods of assessment and show how external examiners will be involved in assessment. External examiners should be involved in all assessments and the recommendation of an award, including progression from one stage of the programme to the next.

Programme regulations related to external examining must take into account how any tiered boards of examiners operate, where applicable. As noted in **Section F4,** terms of reference of subsidiary boards need to be approved by the OU, normally at validation and revalidation.

F2.4 Criteria for the appointment of external examiners

An external examiner should be a senior member of another university or have appropriate standing, expertise and experience to maintain academic standards in the context of UK higher education as a whole, as indicated by accepted attainments and standing.

The OU will only approve external examiner nominations if the nominee can show appropriate evidence of the criteria below. These must be considered by partner institutions when nominating external examiners to the OU. They are adopted by the OU when scrutinising nominations by appraisers for approval. The external examiner must:

- Be resident in the UK and have the right to work in the UK. As part of the appointment process, the OU undertakes checks to ensure these criteria are met to our satisfaction.
- Possess knowledge and understanding of the current UK sector-agreed reference points for maintaining academic standards and ensuring and enhancing quality.
- Be fluent in English. When programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, they must have fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information required to make their assessments).
- Have competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof.
- Possess relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate.
- Have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers.
- Have competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and operating assessment procedures in assessing students in the subject area concerned.
- Are aware of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula.
- Are familiar with the standard expected of students to achieve the award being assessed.
- Possess the competence and experience necessary to enhance the student learning experience.
- Meet applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

F2.5 Other considerations when nominating external examiners

External examiners should be selected from a variety of institutional and professional contexts and traditions, ensuring the programme benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. There should be appropriate balance and expertise in the team of external examiners, including:

- Examining experience.
- Academic and professional practitioners.
- The range of academic perspectives.
- Members from different types of institution of higher education.

If someone is appointed who doesn't have external examining experience, they should join a more experienced team and/or with the agreement that a more experienced external examiner from within the same institution (to which they are being appointed) will act as a mentor. It may also be possible to arrange mentoring across institutions for those who do not have a sufficient number of external examiners to arrange this internally. Ensuring continuity within the external examiner team is key to managing external examiner appointments. One way of ensuring continuity is to phase appointments.

Ideally, a programme area should not appoint an external examiner from any institution that has supplied examiners for that area within the preceding five years.

F2.6 Conflicts of interest

An external examiner must be independent of the module on which they serve. Nominees for apprenticeship external examiner roles may be granted exemption for some criteria, provided they satisfy all other eligibility criteria and no further conflicts of interest are identified.

The OU will not approve the appointment of anyone who:

- Is a member of a governing body or committee of the OU or one of its collaborative partner institutions, or a current employee of the OU or its collaborative partners.
- Is a member of a governing body or committee of the partner institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the partner institution or its collaborative partners.
- Has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study or related single registerable module(s).
- Is required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study or related single registerable module(s).
- Is, or knows they will be, in a position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme of study or related single registerable module(s).
- Is currently, or has recently been, involved in substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme or module(s) in question.
- Is a former member of staff or student of the OU unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).
- Is a former member of staff or student of the partner institution, unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s).
- Would replace an external examiner from the same department in the same institution.
- Is from the same department of the same institution as another member of that team of external examiners.

- Is a consultant to the module/programme team, or if they contributed to writing the teaching materials. (In exceptional circumstances, the OU may approve the appointment of a person who contributed to the module/programme as external examiner, provided this is not when the module is first presented, and that there is no other eligible person available to serve.)
- Has had further engagement with the partner institution beyond their external examiner responsibilities (unless approved by the OU.)

There must not be a reciprocal external examining arrangement involving cognate programmes in two institutions.

A proposed external examiner should not have been appointed to examine at another OU partner institution within the past five years.

Examiners should not have too heavy a workload in respect of external examining duties. An examiner should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time, including the OU appointment.

A proposed external examiner should not have been an examiner on a cognate programme within the partner institution.





F2.7 Nomination of OU staff as external examiners

The following categories of people are not eligible for appointment as external examiners on any validated award:

- All salaried staff of the OU (including associate lecturers).
- OU residential school staff.
- Visiting members of academic staff.
- Part-time members of OU academic staff holding dual appointments.
- Emeritus Professors.

F2.8 Nomination of individuals retired from their academic or professional posts

The OU expects external examiner nominations to be individuals who hold current substantive academic or professional posts. However, retirees can be considered provided they have retired recently and still have an affiliation with a UK institution of higher education. The OU will consider such nominations provided a robust case can be made for that person's continuing academic or professional currency for the duration of the proposed appointment.

F2.9 The nomination process

The OU has standard forms for the nomination of external examiners, which can be downloaded from the OUVP website in the **Supporting information: external examiners** section.

The OU organises the appraisal of external examiner nominations. In all cases, the OU retains responsibility for approving and appointing external examiners for its validated awards.

When recommending individuals as external examiners for a programme or modules, appraisers seek to ensure that the external examiners will be competent and impartial.

Partners must ensure nominations arrive at least six months before the examiner assumes their duties. A nomination should be made on the appropriate application form and include the nominee's current and detailed CV. The nominee's CV should be submitted electronically. When considering nominations, partners are asked to ensure there remains an appropriate balance and diversity on the board of examiners to ensure students are fairly assessed.

A nomination may be rejected by the OU at any stage. When that happens, a partner may be asked to provide a new nomination, or the OU may appoint an external examiner of our choosing. Any further details or clarification may be requested from the nominating partner at any point.

F2.10 Approval and appointment of external examiners

All external examiner appointments are made by the OU. The OU follows our approval process before making any appointment. External examiners formally report to the OU but are asked to send copies of their reports to the partner institution as well.

F2.11 External examiners' term of office

New examiners should take up their appointments on or before the retirement of their predecessors. External examiners should remain available after the last assessments (including resit boards) they are associated with in order to deal with any subsequent review decisions.

External examiner appointments normally last four years, although in exceptional circumstances, extensions can be granted of up to one year to ensure continuity. This includes any time already served as an external advisor or assessor on the same module or programme if the programme was validated with a different university prior to OU validation. And it is not dependent on the frequency of presentation of the programme or module.

An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances, but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

If external examiners change jobs, a revised CV must be submitted to the OU to ensure they are still eligible to externally examine their appointed programmes (see F2.5–F2.9). If an external examiner takes on additional external examining duties during the period of their tenure, the S/QPM must be informed.

If an external examiner retires whilst in appointment, they will remain as the external examiner for the remainder of the academic year and up to two years following retirement. If the external examiner continues to have an affiliation with a UK institution of higher education, they can remain in post for the full duration of their contract.

F2.12 Requests for extension of approval of external examiners

The nomination process is also used for any proposals to extend the period of approval of existing external examiners or to extend their duties to other related programmes - a new pathway or a top-up award, for example. Requests for the extension of the period of approval are not generally encouraged, but are considered in exceptional circumstances. If this happens, a clear rationale for the request must be provided on the F5D nomination form found in the '**External examiners**' section of the OUVP website.

The term of office of an existing external examiner may be extended in exceptional circumstances, up to a maximum of 12 months beyond the expiry date of the original appointment.

F2.13 Notification of decisions

External examiners are appointed by the OU, with the OU sending an offer of appointment to the approved nominee. Once the examiner has returned their contract acceptance form and any right to work checks are completed, the OU sends an approval letter to the head of the partner institution, copied to the institutional primary contact.

The OU writes to all newly appointed external examiners, providing them with a copy of the most recent (re) validation report for the programme(s)/modules they have been appointed to, together with some briefing material. The OU also provides an official briefing, which consists mainly of clarification regarding the OU's expectations, reporting lines, and the relationship between examiners, partner institutions, and the OU. As noted in Section F3, partner institutions are required to supplement this material with a range of institution-specific induction and briefing material for external examiners.

F2.14 Payment of fees

The OU is responsible for paying external examiner fees and expenses.

F2.15 Termination of approval of external examiners

The OU retains responsibility for terminating external examiner appointments. If a partner institution wishes to terminate an external examiner's appointment, the OU must be informed of the grounds for termination and approve the termination. A reasonable minimum period of notice should apply. If possible, termination should occur at a natural point in the assessment cycle, such as after the last meeting of the board of examiners at the end of the academic year.

If an external examiner resigns, the OU should be informed immediately.

The OU reserves the right to terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time, subject to approved university procedures – if the external examiner has failed to fulfil their obligations, for example, or failed to produce reports in a timely manner or to an appropriate standard.

Other circumstances that may constitute grounds for termination include:

- Failure to attend a board of examiners meeting without good reason.
- A new conflict of interest has arisen that cannot be resolved (e.g. due to the external examiner's substantive post changing post-appointment.)
- Discontinuation of the programme.

F2.16 Chief external examiners

The OU may appoint a chief external examiner should the approved board of examiners' arrangements require it. The approval of the appointment of a chief external examiner is subject to the criteria set out in **Section F2.5**.

The chief external examiner role can be useful in a variety of situations. For example:

- For partners which use a tiered exam board system
- By partners who have a large provision and wish to oversee exam board decisions at faculty/school level.

The chief external examiner should work closely with the partner institution and OUVP, approaching their role with flexibility to ensure they create additional value for the individual programme/subject level external examiners and institutional programme teams.

The following guidance on the role of chief external examiners gives some ideas on how their role may be developed. OUVP anticipates that following the appointment of a chief external examiner, discussions are held with the partner institution and the S/QPM to formalise key areas of activity.

Guidance on the role of chief external examiners

- Be able to review a sample of student work from selected modules across the programmes.
- As a last resort, confirm grades if external examiners cannot be physically present (this normally means the external examiner contacting the chief external examiner with a written report, confirming they have seen the work and agree with the grades, and providing the chief external examiner with their comments.)
- Be able to make observations on the conduct of the exam boards.
- Discuss the effectiveness of the team of external examiners with registry.
- Mentor any new external examiners who are not experienced in external examining.
- Identify where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice across the faculty provision.

F2.17 External examiners' reports

Following each board of examiners meeting, external examiners must submit a report to the partner institution's academic board and the OU, detailing the conduct of the assessments which have just concluded, and the standards being set and achieved. This includes:

- Whether the standards set are appropriate for the award by referring to any agreed subject benchmarks, qualifications frameworks, programme specifications or other relevant information.
- The quality of the students' work and their knowledge and skills in relation to their peers on comparable programmes.
- Students' strengths and weaknesses.
- The quality of teaching and learning, as indicated by student performance.
- The quality of the curriculum, course materials and learning resources.
- The quality and fairness of the assessments, in particular their design and structure, how they relate to the programme's stated objectives and learning outcomes, and the marking.
- Good practice and innovative learning, teaching and assessment.
- Opportunities to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.
- When the programme has specific work-related learning outcomes (e.g. foundation degrees), the assessment and achievement of these outcomes, including employers' involvement, where relevant.
- The administration of the assessments, how examination boards operate, briefing of external examiners, access of external examiners to essential materials, etc.
- Whether any issues identified in previous external examiners' reports have been addressed by the partner.

These reports should be received no later than one month following the board of examiners' final meeting at which progression and awards are decided. Reports must be received in the relevant academic year for payment to be made. The OU has a **template for the submission of reports** which external examiners must use.

The purpose of the report is to enable the OU and the partner to decide whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next revalidation. Partners need to give detailed written feedback to external examiners on action taken in response to their reports, and provide an update to the OU via the annual review process.

Under their institutional agreement, partner institutions are required to provide the OU with an annual report for approved programmes, including an account of responses to the issues raised by external examiners. If an external examiner's report raises issues that question the quality of the programme or the standard of the award, the OU requires an immediate account of the measures being put in place to consider the issues, and identify and rectify any deficiencies. The OU must provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report it receives, outlining any actions it will be taking or require the partner institution to take as a result.

Partner institutions must make external examiners' reports available in full to students, with the sole exception of confidential reports made directly to the head of the institution.

If external examiners' reports are too brief or too broadly phrased to provide an agenda for quality enhancement opportunities, the OU is responsible for taking appropriate action to ensure that more comprehensive reports are submitted in future.

If an external examiner has serious concerns about systemic failings regarding the academic standards of a programme or programmes, and they have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures (including submitting a confidential report to the head of the institution) they may invoke the **QAA's Access to Higher Education Concerns Scheme** and/or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

The report presented at the end of an external examiner's term of office should include a brief retrospective on their experience and perceptions of the programme/module throughout their association with it.



F3 External examiner briefing

F3.1 Introduction

The OU provides external examiners with a briefing and induction. This section gives partner institutions guidance on local briefing and induction of new external examiners. The OU recommends that each partner institution develops a set of briefing documents for their external examiners to supplement the regulations set out in Section F2, to give a range of further institution-specific information. The OU requirements must be included in the briefing.

F3.2 Briefing to external examiners

External examiners receive information on their role, some of which is detailed in the appointment letter. Links to the relevant documentation are also available on the OUVP website.

The OU's briefing includes:

- Term of appointment, with provision for termination on either side. This indicates the required notice period if the external examiner chooses to terminate their position. It also outlines reasons why the partner institution might terminate the relationship - non-fulfilment of responsibilities, such as not providing the required report or not attending the board of examiners meetings without good reason, or changes in circumstances affecting the criteria of appointment.
- Information about the membership and remit of the external examining team for the programme, identifying a chief external examiner who is responsible for the preparation of summaries of external examiners' findings for publication, if relevant.
- Arrangements for the submission of reports.
- Arrangement for payment of fees and expenses.

The partner institution's written briefing should include:

- A comprehensive list of institutional contacts (administrative and academic), indicating who to contact about what. This varies according to who in the partner institution is allocated responsibility for different aspects of the relationship with external examiners.
- The programme handbook, incorporating the programme specification (including any programme-specific assessment regulations) marking schemes and assessment criteria (both generic and module-specific), as appropriate.
- Information about any single registerable module(s) within the programme, including the relevant student handbook (or on the virtual learning environment.)
- Information about internal moderation arrangements.
- Arrangements relating to moderation of assessment.

The head of department or programme leader is usually responsible for:

- Arranging external examiners' scrutiny of assessment-setting.
- Arrangements for sampling assessments, (as typically negotiated with external examiners), should align with the OU's expectations as outlined in Section F2.3. Provision of marking schemes and the internally moderated list of marks for the cohort being assessed.
- External examiner involvement in resit examinations, appeals, suspected cases of cheating and plagiarism.
- Consulting on and agreeing to any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations or assessment strategy which will directly affect students currently on a programme.

F3.3 Induction meetings

The OU recommends that new external examiners are invited to meet with colleagues at the partner institution to clarify their role and responsibilities, to get to know staff and, if available, students. This is a good opportunity to discuss interactions during the academic year, such as dates of visits and sampling of assessments.





F4 Board of examiners requirements

F4.1 Appointment of boards of examiners

The Regulations for validated awards of The Open University, Section G, provides information on the appointment, membership and authority of the boards of examiners.

F4.2 Timing of boards of examiners

The OU requires that dates for formal meetings of boards of examiners are scheduled by the partner at the start of the academic year and forwarded to the OU. The OU sends a representative to all final award and progression boards of examiners meetings, and partners must advise the OU of any date changes. In some cases, a senior member of the OU's academic staff assumes the position of chair at boards of examiners meetings. This is confirmed with the partner at the start of each academic year and is detailed in the partnership development plan.

Dates should be agreed (with external examiners) at the earliest opportunity – normally at an annual meeting - for the coming year and not changed, except by agreement of all parties involved. Dates for other events, such as approval of draft papers or assignment/project titles, should be fixed at the same time and arrangements made for the involvement of external examiners as appropriate. Arrangements and dates should also be established for dealing with any reassessments. These arrangements commonly involve assigned members and officers of the board working with the appropriate external examiners.

F4.3 Delegation of responsibility for reassessments

The approved board of examiners is responsible for the reassessment or deferred assessment of students. When it first meets to decide its recommendations, the board may agree arrangements for delegating that responsibility to a sub-group. That sub-group must include at least one external examiner. Delegation is not appropriate for all reassessments or deferred assessments, so the board must be satisfied that it is appropriate in the particular circumstances before agreeing to delegate responsibility.



F4.4 Documentation for boards of examiners and record keeping

The OU requires the partner institution's academic board or equivalent to ensure that arrangements are made to appoint a secretary to each board of examiners and that the partner institution keeps detailed and accurate records of each board of examiners' procedures and decisions, including the circumstances under which academic discretion is exercised.

The registrar (or equivalent) or a nominee – acting with the authority of the secretary to the academic board – should normally be appointed as secretary.

Documentation for boards of examiners typically include:

- **An agenda** that is circulated to all board members in advance of the meeting and includes a reminder to members of the need to maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- **Minutes of previous meeting(s)**, which are confidential and members should be reminded to take appropriate care in how they use and store them (and data.)
- **Mark sheets** that contain all assessment components completed by students (regardless of the students' debt status with the partner institution), together with information about pass marks for each component (the university may wish to see these in advance of the meeting.)
- **Statistical analysis of marks** sufficient to allow the identification of any student performance or marking practice trends that warrant the board's attention.
- **The regulations for the programme** as approved by the OU.
- **The OU's regulations** on issues such as the treatment of borderline cases, rounding up of results, extenuating circumstances, and academic misconduct.
- **Reports from any subsidiary boards**, including reports on extenuating circumstances or student misconduct.

Mark sheets are normally be tabled at the meeting. Under no circumstances should members remove them afterwards.

When recommendations for conferment of awards are to be made, the board of examiners may need appropriate results information from previous assessments to ascertain overall outcomes and profiles.

The OU requires partner institutions to have systems in place for verifying that marks are recorded accurately, to avoid transcript errors.

Recommendations regarding conferment or classification of awards or credit for single registerable modules should be recorded by the secretary (on the documentation for submission to the OU) as they are agreed.

The list should be read over and confirmed by the board before being signed off by the external examiners, before the meeting is closed.

F4.5 Powers of external examiners

No recommendation for the conferment of a validated award of the OU may be made without the written consent of the approved external examiners. Any matter which the external examiners has declared a matter of principle, the board of examiners either accepts the external examiners' decision as final, or it is referred to the academic board. Disagreements between external examiners are referred to the academic board or the OU, as appropriate.

External examiners attendance at board of examiners meetings

If a board of examiners does not include approved external examiners, it is not authorised to assess students for an award or to recommend the conferment of an award upon a student. Recommendations to the OU for the conferment of an award are not valid without the written endorsement of the external examiners. See also Section F5 on the role of the OU's representative.

All external examiners must attend relevant board of examiners meetings, including any resit boards - do not assume that a board can be held without the presence of the external examiners. If unforeseen circumstances prevent attendance and an external examiner is the sole examiner, the partner institution and the OU should be informed so that a decision can be made regarding the postponement of the board. If an external examiner is one of a pair or team of examiners, they should also inform fellow examiners of their absence.

In the event of non-attendance, external examiners must indicate this in their written report at paragraph 9, 'The administration of the assessments, operation of examination boards…' and confirm that they were fully involved in the moderation of assessment and the external examining process. The written report should be submitted in advance of the board of examiners meeting so that the external examiner's comments can be formally considered and recorded.

If an external examiner does not attend and without good reason and without pre-approval by OUVP, it usually constitutes grounds for the termination of appointment.

F4.6 Use of chair's action

If circumstances mean a board of examiners has not been able to make a final decision, it is possible to use chair's action to confirm decisions following a board, except for confirming final award recommendations. However, this should only be used in exceptional circumstances and in agreement with the OU representative.

Introduction of the Module Awards Result Group (MARG) – UK based partners

Following approval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC), the Open University has introduced a new **Module Awards Ratification Group (MARG)** process for UK based partners. This follows the cessation of the University's longstanding **Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP)**.

The MARG process has been developed following extensive consultation with academic colleagues, Academic Reviewers, external examiners and quality assurance stakeholders. It has been designed to provide a proportionate and efficient mechanism for the ratification of module results, awards and classification decisions, whilst maintaining appropriate academic oversight and assurance.

For the majority of partners, there will be **minimal visible change** to existing board arrangements.

As currently happens, your Examination Board will continue to:

- Consider and approve student results and award recommendations;
- Be attended by the external examiner and OUVP representative as appropriate;
- Submit the required examination board documentation and reports following the board.

Following the Examination Board, documentation will be reviewed through the new MARG process, which will undertake the formal ratification of outcomes before confirmation is issued that results may be released to students.

The new arrangements have been introduced to:

- Maintain robust academic oversight and assurance;
- Streamline the current ratification process;
- Reduce unnecessary administrative burden;
- Align with established OUVP governance arrangements.

Ratification Process for partners offering dual awards – (Chief)
Academic Reviewer Attendance at Final Award Board

The Open University has introduced a new ratification process for the those partners that align with dual award regulations. Under the new arrangements, an **Open University Chief Academic Reviewer (CAR)*** will attend all of your **final award/classification Examination Boards** each academic year.

** The Chief Academic Reviewer can be permanently appointed from existing ARs, or the post may be rotated within the current pool of ARs appointed to the partner. Your Senior Quality and Partnerships Manager will ensure that an AR is in attendance at all relevant boards.*

The Chief Academic Reviewer's attendance will enable award and classification decisions to be both recommended and ratified through the final board process, providing timely confirmation of outcomes whilst maintaining appropriate academic oversight and assurance. AR may also be in attendance of sub-boards as per current processes, though may have more of a visible profile during the examination board processes at partner institutions.

This change replaces the previous process whereby outcomes were subsequently considered through the University's Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP), which has now been discontinued.

The Chief Academic Reviewer will attend the final award board alongside:

- The external examiner;
- OUVP representatives; and
- Appropriate institutional staff.

The Academic Reviewer's attendance will enable award and classification decisions to be both recommended and ratified through the final board process, providing timely confirmation of outcomes whilst maintaining appropriate academic oversight and assurance.

F5 Role of university representatives attending board of examiners meetings at partner institutions

F5.1 Guiding principles

The OU is represented at all final examination boards at partner institutions where award and progression decisions are made.

The primary role of OU representatives is to support boards of examiners or their committees in the continued assurance of academic standards. Attendance at boards of examiners also gives the OU oversight of the assessment process for its validated awards. The OU representative does not participate in making academic decisions/assessments but can bring their own knowledge and experience of the assessment process to the discussion of outcomes. OU representatives respect the partner institutions' autonomy (as detailed in the institutional agreement) but does need to take the OU's obligations and national requirements into account.

F5.2 Terms of reference

The purpose of attendance at progression and award boards is to confirm:

- That the OU's regulations have been properly observed.
- That the assessment and qualification processes have been implemented with appropriate quality assurance and control procedures.
- That there is confidence that the precisely detailed cohort of students have met the threshold (academic) standards required for eligibility for the identified award of credit and/or qualifications.

University representatives attend meetings of the partner institution's boards of examiners or their committees to:

- Observe the conduct of the board of examiners, ensuring its in accordance with the partner institution's own procedures.
- Provide advice on the interpretation and application of university policies and of guidance offered by QAA in the UK Quality Code 2024 and elsewhere.
- Alert the partner institution and/or the OU to policies, procedures or circumstances which are likely to impede the effective functioning of the board or the discharge of their responsibilities by internal or external examiners.
- Provide feedback to the OU which will be included in briefing for partnership reapproval panels.

To align with the new ratification process (as outlined above), partners offering dual wards should ensure that the Terms of Reference reflect the attendance of the Chief Academic Reviewer.

F5.3 Reports from university representatives attending boards of examiners meetings

University representatives will prepare a report confirming (or otherwise) the following:

- Action from the previous meeting of issues raised at the previous meeting, including those raised by the external examiner(s) have been addressed.
- The assessments have been moderated internally in accordance with approved regulations.
- The assessments have been moderated externally in accordance with approved regulations.
- Approved procedures for dealing with students with particular needs have been applied.

F5.4 Decision-making

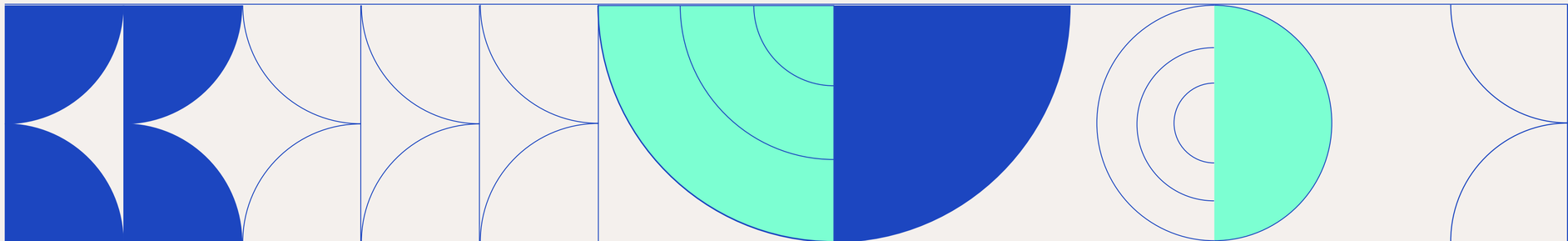
Progression decisions and award recommendations should be reached in accordance with the OU's requirements and normal practice in UK higher education. Specifically, that:

- The external examiners have reviewed a sample of work selected according to the Handbook for Validated Award requirements, and any consequent adjustments to marking scales or marks of complete cohorts have been entered in the schedules for consideration (see also QAA Quality Code and OUVP Handbook for Validated Awards, Section F2.)
- Classification bands were properly observed.
- Borderline students were given appropriate consideration.
- Arrangements have been made for who will deal with academic appeals
- The application of compensation procedures was consistent with agreed regulations.
- Any mitigation pleas entered before the due date have been considered in a fair and equitable manner and in accordance with approved regulations.
- Instances of academic misconduct and other assessment regulation violations have been addressed and/or will be resolved in accordance with the established guidelines, ensuring fairness and appropriateness throughout the process.
- Entitlements and arrangements for re-assessment have been confirmed.

F5.5 Conduct of the meeting

- The meeting must be properly constituted, with the required number of members present (quorate), and must operate within the scope of its terms of reference.
- Mark sheets were available at each level within each award, the sheets were easy to read and understand, and additional data was provided to aid decision-making, where appropriate.
- An appropriate officer made a record of the board of examiners' decisions.
- Everyone present was familiar with and understood the regulations for the programme/award, and any general institutional regulations impacting on the programme and the criteria for progression or award.
- External examiners were present and made an oral report to the board.
- Approved procedures for dealing with students with impairments, such as dyslexia and other disabilities, had been applied.
- Consequences of academic misconduct and other breaches of assessment regulations were discussed and dealt with appropriately and fairly, applying the appropriate regulations.
- Partner institutions should ensure examination boards routinely consider progression and award decisions for all students, regardless of debt status.
- Progression decisions were confirmed by the board and awards signed off by the external examiners.
- If the meeting did not consider all students registered for the award, clarification was provided on what arrangements were in place to deal with progress and or reassessment of the remaining students.
- Arrangements were in place for publishing assessment results and the provision of follow-up support for failing students.
- Marks were kept secure and confidential (by collecting mark sheets and deleting all electronic copies.)

A copy of the feedback reports prepared by university representatives on assessment and/or meetings is conducted should be submitted simultaneously to the partner institution and to the OU, within two working days.



F6 Examination boards: requirements for the approval of awards

All awards (including credit for completed single registerable modules) recommended by partner institution examination boards are ratified by the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval (see section F4.6 above).

Following the disbanding of the Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP), a new approach to the ratification of student outcomes has been established for validated provision, with distinct processes for UK and international partners from September 2026 onwards. Both models are designed to ensure continued assurance of academic standards, alignment with sector expectations, and timely confirmation of results, while reducing unnecessary duplication and administrative burden.

For **international partners**, ratification will take place within the final Board of Examiners (BoE), with a Chief Academic Reviewer in attendance alongside the external examiner and OUVP representative. This enables awards to be both recommended and ratified at the point of decision-making, reflecting the higher risk profile of overseas provision and ensuring direct, independent oversight.

For **UK partners**, a streamlined post-board ratification process will be applied through a **Module Awards Result Group (MARG)**, comprising appropriately experienced academic staff who review and formally confirm outcomes after the BoE. This dual approach maintains robust oversight across all provision, balancing risk, proportionality, and efficiency, and is supported by standardised documentation, clear governance arrangements, and ongoing monitoring and review.

Results cannot be issued to students until they have been ratified (as above), and formal notice has been received from the OU that they can be released.

To ensure the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval can discharge its responsibilities, the OU requires partner institutions to provide key information following board of examiners meetings. Additionally, examination board dates must be confirmed well in advance – the OU recommends that the dates for the following year's boards are set at the previous board.

Partner Institutions are requested to provide the following document:

- Award recommendation list signed as indicated.

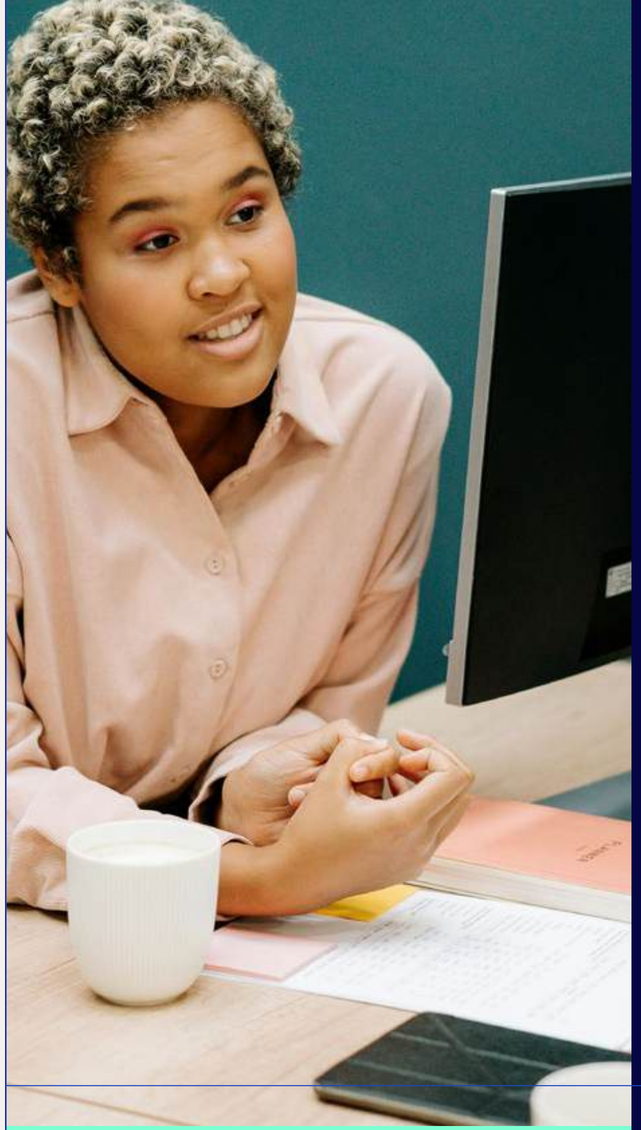
The documents should be sent to ouvp-examboards@open.ac.uk within two working days of the examination board. Failure to supply the required paperwork in a timely fashion may delay the approval of the results. Once the paperwork has been submitted, it is checked against the exam board report from the S/QPM and dealt with by the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval within seven working days of receipt. If the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval raises concerns regarding the exam board paperwork, the partner institution is asked for further clarification. If an immediate response is required, a six-week deadline is given. If the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval is not satisfied with the response, further action may be necessary.

F7 Graduation ceremonies

Partners will run their own graduation ceremonies for validated programmes. OU representatives are always delighted to attend partner graduation ceremonies. The OU is proud of the achievements of students studying validated programmes and welcomes the opportunity to celebrate their success. Please contact your S/QPM once ceremony dates are known.

If it has been explicitly agreed with the individual partner or within the contract, students studying on OU validated programmes may be eligible to attend an OU graduation ceremony.

Students studying single registerable modules that do not lead to a full award are not eligible to attend graduation.



G: Registration for students on validated programmes

G1 Student registration

G1.1 Student registration with the OU

Partner institutions need to register students enrolled on validated programmes or approved single registerable modules with the OU. Guidelines related to student registration are published every year and can be downloaded from the OUVP website.

Partners should nominate specific registration contacts. They will have access to the OUVP partnership portal. Each registration contact is provided with log-in and password details.

There are two main registration sessions, commencing on 1 September and 1 March each year. Partner institutions who register students outside of the above main registration periods should notify OUVP-Admin@open.ac.uk.

Students' personal data to be submitted to the OU includes the contents of the table on the right:

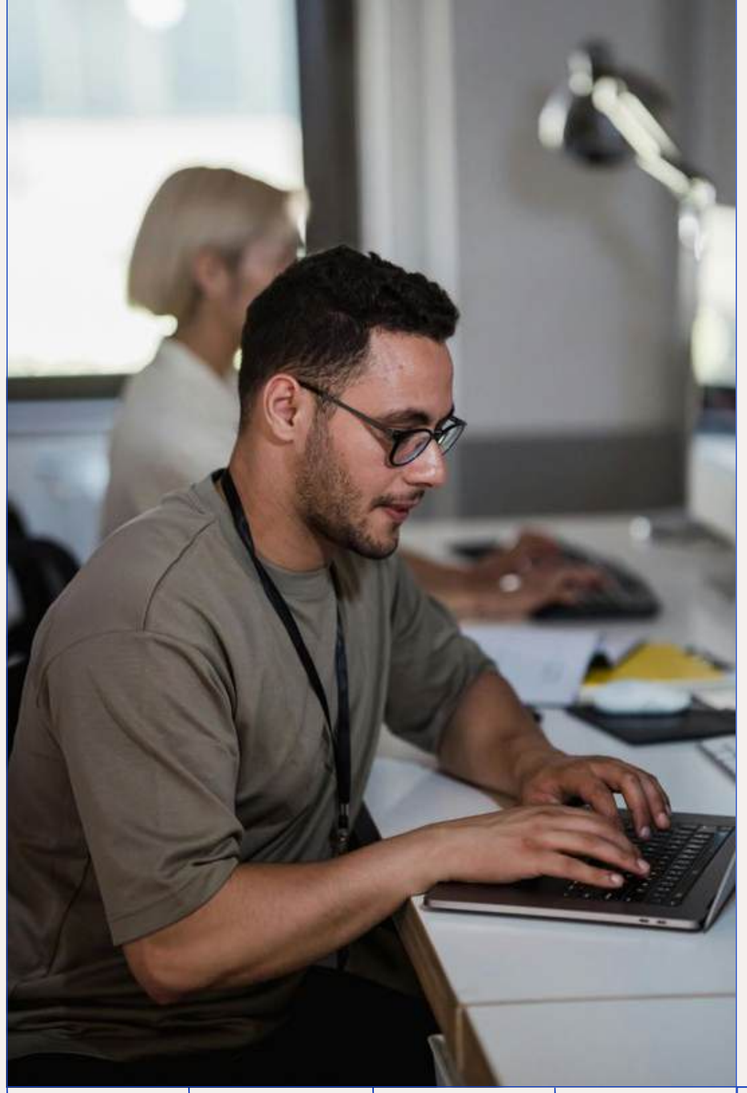
If a member of staff at the partner institution is studying an OU validated course, this should be identified on the student registration.

We collect data on ethnicity and disability as part of our reporting requirements for the Office for Students.

It should also include details of the partner institution – the programme of study and the award being sought. Students should be informed that all information provided to the OU and stored in computer files is subject to the partner institution's registration with the Data Protection Registrar. This registration permits access by, or disclosure to, the OU for the purposes of registration and conferment of awards.

Full instructions relating to the student registration process are sent to individual partners.

Data field	Description
Institutional Student Reference	Partner student reference
Salutation	Mr, Ms etc.
First Name	First name of student
Surname	Last name/Family name of student
Date of Birth	Student's date of birth
Gender	Male, Female, Non-binary, Not listed
Address	Home address of Student
Phone Number	Phone number (landline)
Mobile Number	Phone number (mobile)
Email address	Email address
Staff Member	Is the student a member of staff at the partner institution?
Highest Qualification on Entry	What is the student's highest qualification when they start this course?
Ethnicity	Student's ethnicity
Disability	Any declared disability made by the student



G1.2 Maintenance of student records

Please ensure that full legal names of students are given at registration. Partner institutions should also advise students that they need to notify the partner of any change to their name, prior to conferment. An award certificate will not be amended or reissued in a different name if the partner is notified of a name change after the date the qualification is conferred, unless the OU or the partner institution has made an error, or if a valid request is made under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

Partners are also required to perform regular maintenance activities throughout the year to ensure student records are accurate at all times. The student maintenance session is available all year round. The maintenance session gives access to all current student records. Partners should update any changes to student names and contact details in the maintenance session. The maintenance session should also be used for withdrawing and deferring students. Any students withdrawing from a programme should be presented to the relevant examination board and a check made for any exit awards due.

During registration sessions, the maintenance session can also be used to:

- Transfer students to another validated award
- Re-register students on a higher award
- Second register students on unrelated awards or single registerable module(s)
- Concurrently register a student on an additional award or single registerable module(s).

The OU undertakes an annual audit of partner institutions' student records.

G1.3 Maximum period of registration

Students remain registered with the OU for three years beyond the expected duration of the validated provision - partner institutions must ensure student contractual documentation is kept for this time. This policy applies to both full-time and part-time modes of study. If a student wishes to complete a programme of study after this period, they need to reregister.

All partner institutions are required to comply with **The Open University's regulations**. Some partner institutions are approved to operate under **dual awards regulations**.

G1.4 Staff member registration on OU validated awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalised procedures for the consideration of assessments for any of their staff who are taking OU validated provision before registering staff members on OU validated awards. The full procedures are in Section Section F1.28.

G1.5 Student transcripts

As the validating institution, the OU is responsible for ensuring there is adequate backup should a partner institution not be able to issue replacement records of study. To meet these requirements, partner institutions must provide OUVP with transcripts for all students (completing, progressing and on single registerable modules) on an annual basis. These transcripts should conform to section 4.3 of the exemplar **Diploma Supplement** which can be found on the OUVP website. The transcripts should be provided by the end of November each year. An annual request for this data is sent out with detailed guidance.

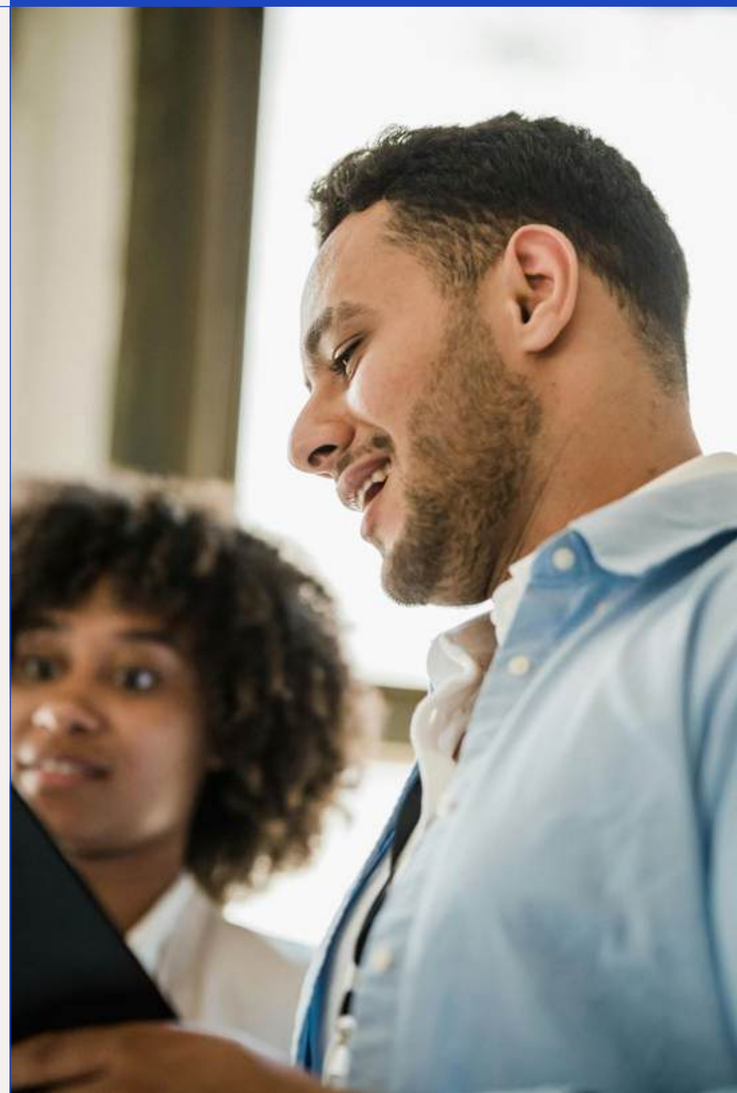
Transfer of student records is via a secure file transfer system and the files received are securely and confidentially stored. Details of the secure file transfer system are provided with the annual request.

G1.6 Student diploma supplements

Partner institutions must ensure all students completing an award are issued with a comprehensive Diploma Supplement**.** An exemplar Diploma Supplement can be found on the OUVP website. Students taking a single registerable module do not receive a diploma supplement, unless they go on to complete the full award.

G1.7 Data retention

The OU's requirement for the retention of award data is birth plus 120 years/indefinitely and this must be adhered to. Please note that award data should be cloud based and not be stored on paper, so that a student can ask for a record of learning at any time during their lifetime. See page 54 for further information.



H: Equity, access and welfare

H1 Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

The OU is innovative, responsive, and inclusive. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality education to all those who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Its commitment to equality and equity is embedded in everything it does. The OU celebrates diversity and the strengths it brings, and challenges under-representation and differences in outcomes to ensure inclusion.

All students should have an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background, demographic characteristics or current circumstances. Higher education providers have an ethical, moral, and legal obligation to ensure this happens in practice. The Inclusive Higher Education Framework and Toolkit Project launched by the QAA and University of Hull is a useful reference document framed with higher education in mind. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is 'anticipatory', within reason. This means partners have to anticipate, think about and try to predict what adjustments could be needed by students and staff with different types of disability, support and access requirements.

Public facing documentation and websites should be accessible by - 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'. Partners also need to include an accessibility statement on their website.

The OU expects its partners to have EDI policies and procedures (applicable to staff and students) that align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024, and those that comply with The Equality Act 2010 and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (where applicable for their region).

See relevant sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 and the Equality Act.

These policies should also comply with relevant equality legislation such as:

- England, Scotland, and Wales: The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
- Northern Ireland: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- International: the OU expects international partner institutions to operate within the relevant equality legislation of their country (and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)/ Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) Un.org.)

See also advice and guidance sections on the QAA website which covers 'Admissions, recruitment, and widening access', and 'Enabling student achievement'. You may also find the OU's policies helpful, available on the OU's EDI website.

The academic and student community

Student Support

In line with the OIA Good Practice Framework, UK higher education providers should adopt an inclusive, proactive, and student-centred approach to supporting students, underpinned by the core principles of accessibility, fairness, clarity, proportionality, and confidentiality. Providers are expected to remove barriers to learning through anticipatory reasonable adjustments and inclusive teaching practices, ensuring that systems, processes, and learning environments are easy to navigate and responsive to individual needs. This includes offering clear information about available support, engaging with students early (including pre entry and induction), and ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to make informed, consistent decisions. Institutions should also handle disability-related information sensitively, provide transparent reasoning for decisions, and maintain effective mechanisms for addressing concerns, complaints, and appeals where issues arise, using these insights to drive continuous improvement in the student experience.

Fitness to study/practice

Drawing on the OIA Good Practice Framework, UK higher education providers should implement fitness to study processes that are supportive, proportionate, and grounded in the overarching principles of accessibility, fairness, clarity, timeliness, independence, and confidentiality. Fitness to study should be viewed as a welfare focused process, distinct from disciplinary procedures, with the primary aim of safeguarding the health, safety, and wellbeing of the student and others while enabling students to continue their studies wherever possible. Providers should adopt a staged and flexible approach, beginning with early identification of concerns and informal support, and escalating to formal procedures only where necessary, ensuring decisions are transparent, evidence based, and clearly communicated. Effective practice includes working collaboratively with the student, considering reasonable adjustments or periods of interruption, and balancing individual needs with the requirements of the learning environment and academic standards. Institutions should also ensure staff are appropriately trained, maintain sensitive handling of personal information, and use outcomes from cases to inform continuous improvement in student support and wellbeing provision

Safeguarding (student welfare)

The partner institution is responsible for identifying and responding to any safeguarding concerns or incidents arising within its own organisation (this includes the identification and reporting of concerns as they arise across multiple campuses, sites, facilities and activities the institution owns, manages or uses). Such matters should be handled in accordance with the partner institution's own safeguarding policies, local procedures, applicable legal requirements and reported to external authorities where required.

The Open University requires all partners to declare whether anyone associated with the partner institution in any capacity (e.g., staff, student, governor, trustee, volunteer) currently or in the past, has any investigation or allegation against them (substantiated or otherwise) of abuse or neglect against a child, adult or adult at risk/protected adult.

During the partnership, if a safeguarding concern or incident arises involving an individual at the partner institution who is directly or indirectly associated with the partnership agreement (be that a member of staff, student or other representative), leading to a serious allegation and/or investigation being raised against them, due to concerns of potential abuse or neglect against a child, adult or adult at risk/protected adult, **partners must report this information to the Open University, as soon as they become aware of any such incidents. Please contact** safeguarding-ouvp@open.ac.uk **directly.**

The Open University will notify the partner of any safeguarding concerns or incidents that result in a serious allegation or investigation involving an individual associated with the partnership and based at the OU.

On an annual basis, partner institutions will be asked to provide safeguarding incident data to supportive oversight of safeguarding practices and arrangements. A proforma will be sent to each partner institution towards the end of each academic year. **It is important that each partner completes the proforma and returns this to OUVP by the date specified.**



Student mental health

Prioritising student mental health entails fostering a supportive and thriving academic environment. By implementing comprehensive mental health strategies, institutions can address the diverse needs of their student body, ensuring that every student has access to the necessary resources and support. This includes providing mental health services, promoting awareness and destigmatisation, and integrating mental wellbeing into the curriculum. Additionally, training staff to recognise and respond to mental health issues can create a more empathetic and responsive campus culture. Ultimately, prioritising student mental health not only enhances academic performance but also contributes to the overall wellbeing and success of students, preparing them for a balanced and fulfilling life beyond university.

The OfS encourages higher education providers to:

- Take a whole-institution approach – there needs to be clear commitment from senior leaders and joined up thinking between academic staff and student services.
- Ensure they have robust, evidence-based policies in place to support students.
- Evaluate their own work and learn from others to make sure they're working in the most effective ways.
- Encourage students to declare mental health conditions, at any stage of their student journey.
- Identify gaps in outcomes between students with declared mental health conditions and their peers and, where relevant, develop ambitious, credible access and participation plans or access and participation statements to address these.
- Seek to understand their student population, including exploring barriers and challenges faced by groups of students who may be more at risk of poor mental health.
- Collaborate with other organisations.
- Put co-creation with students at the heart of their intervention planning.
- Develop and implement suicide prevention plans appropriate to the needs of their students.
- Engage with local suicide prevention partnerships and work in collaboration with associated networks.

Additional resources:

1. Office for Students (OfS): offers a range of general resources and links to support student mental health, including the Healthy Universities Network and guidance on using student analytics to improve wellbeing.
2. Student Minds: the UK's student mental health charity, providing resources, training, and support for students and staff. They also developed the University Mental Health Charter to promote best practices in mental health support.
3. Mind: their student mental health hub offers tips on coping with the challenges of student life, maintaining mental wellbeing, and finding support.
4. Advance HE: have produced a student needs framework.
5. Healthy Universities Network: as part of a global movement, the UK Healthy Universities Network supports its members to develop and implement 'whole university' approaches to health, wellbeing and sustainability.

Harassment and sexual misconduct

The OfS has established Condition E6 to address harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education institutions. This condition, effective from August 1, 2025, mandates that providers maintain a comprehensive source of information detailing policies and procedures related to incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct.

Further guidance is available from the OfS. The guidance covers incidents involving students, whether between students or between staff and students. Partners must take significant steps to protect students from conflicts of interest or abuse of power in intimate relationships between staff and students.

Partners must ensure that students can disclose information about harassment or sexual misconduct without restrictions, such as non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) Institutions must have clear, accessible policies that comply with minimum content requirements and principles.

Criminal convictions

The legal requirements for higher education (HE) providers regarding the publication of criminal conviction information can vary depending on the jurisdiction. However, there are some common principles and regulations that institutions should follow:

1. **Data protection laws:** HE providers must comply with data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the UK and EU. These laws require institutions to handle personal data responsibly and transparently, including criminal conviction information.
2. **Equality and non-discrimination:** institutions must ensure their policies do not discriminate against individuals with criminal convictions. This includes providing clear criteria for how criminal convictions are assessed and ensuring fair treatment in admissions and employment.
3. **Safeguarding:** HE providers have a duty to safeguard their students and staff. This may involve assessing criminal convictions to ensure the safety and well-being of the campus community.
4. **Transparency and fairness:** institutions should publish their criminal convictions policy to ensure transparency and fairness. This helps applicants understand the process and criteria used to assess their criminal convictions.

The prevent duty

The prevent duty aims to safeguard people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The government created two sets of statutory guidance to support the strategy, one of which is specifically for higher education bodies.

The University's Prevent Principles are available for reference.

Health and safety

The OU expects its partners to have health and safety policies and procedures (including fire safety) that comply with local legislation and align with the expectations of the OU.

Academic freedom and freedom of speech

Academic freedom and freedom of speech sit at the heart of the UK's higher education sector. Higher education institutions must take their responsibility to protect and promote both free speech and academic freedom seriously, and ensure these concepts are understood by the whole academic community.

Currently, the OfS regulates matters relating to free speech and academic freedom through the conditions of registration concerning management and governance (the 'E conditions') and the relevant public interest governance principles that underpin those conditions.



I: Student complaints and academic appeals procedure

Complaints and Academic Appeals procedures for students (you) approaching The Open University (us) who have exhausted all appropriate internal procedures at their own partner institution.

For students studying an OU validated programme in Northern Ireland, please see section 6 below for additional information.

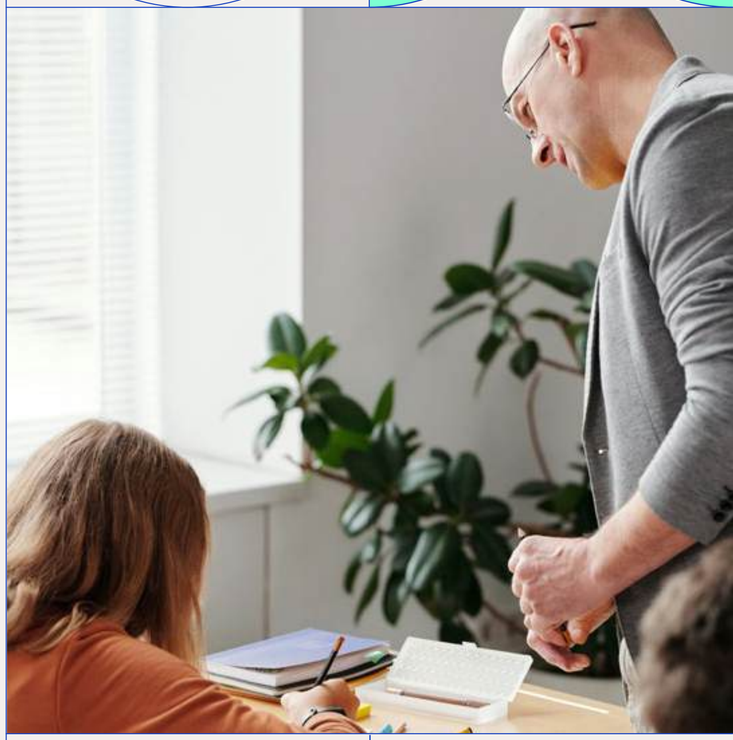
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The OU is committed to ensuring fairness and transparency in all its dealings. This commitment extends to the process of reviewing academic appeals and complaints that have been initially addressed by partner institutions.

1.2 If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your case at a partner institution and have exhausted their internal procedures, you have the right to request a review of how your case was handled. This review process is designed to ensure that every student's concerns are heard and addressed appropriately.

1.3 As a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), we adhere to the principles and guidelines set out by this body. Our membership with the OIA means that our review process is aligned with best practice standards in higher education. It also provides an additional layer of assurance to our students, knowing that their complaints and appeals will be handled with utmost fairness and integrity.

The information on the following pages is an overview on how to submit a review request.



Definitions

Complaint –The OIA define a complaint as: "an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about

the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider". This would include concerns about services or facilities that have not met expected standards or were not provided when they were reasonably expected to be.

Academic appeal – The OIA define an academic appeal as "a challenge to or request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body that makes decisions on student progress, assessment and awards." This includes decisions about entry requirements, reasonable adjustments for teaching and assessment, progression rules, academic misconduct, assignment marks, module results, thesis submission and the award and classification of qualifications.

Review request – is where the student can request The Open University for a review of the process (of the formal stage carried out by a partner Institution) to make sure that appropriate procedures were followed, and that the decision was reasonable. The original complaint and/or academic appeal is not reconsidered at this stage unless there is new evidence to consider. Once the review is complete, the OU will write to the student setting out our decision.

New evidence – if new evidence is provided as part of the review request, the student must demonstrate that they were unable to provide this evidence as part of the original complaint and/or appeal.

Requesting Support

1.4 We understand that pursuing a complaint or appeal can be stressful and we encourage you to use the support services available through your partner institution.

1.5 If you require any reasonable adjustments to support you in submitting a review request for a complaint or academic appeal, you should contact the Student Casework Office. This includes adjustments needed to take account of a disability. The OU will consider such requests in line with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (England, Scotland and Wales), the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2004 (Northern Ireland), and any other relevant statutory duties.

2 OU REVIEW PROCEDURES

You can only request a review of your complaint or academic appeal if you have exhausted all of your partner institution's internal procedures and have been provided with a Completion of Internal Procedures letter. This may be in email form. This will include details on how to request a review by the **OUHow to request a review**

2.1 To request a review, you must:

For a complaint: write to the Student Casework Office (studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk) or submit a review form within **21 calendar days** of the date of the Completion of Internal Procedures letter from your partner institution.

For an academic appeal: write to the Secretary to the SAARP (Senate Academic Appeals Review Panel Secretary to the SAARP (SCO-SAARP@open.ac.uk)), within **21 calendar days** of the date of the Completion of Internal Procedures letter from your partner institution.

All academic appeal requests for the Secretary to the SAARP are received within the Student Casework Office.

Requests for a review should include the following:

a. Explain why the outcome to your complaint or academic appeal has not resolved the issue or why you think the decision has not been made in accordance with the relevant policies, procedures and regulations.

b. Set out one or more of the following reasons why you believe we should review your partner institution's decision:

- That relevant evidence has not been considered.
- That irrelevant evidence was considered.
- That any relevant regulations, policies, or procedures have not been applied correctly; or
- That the reasons for the decision were not fully and clearly communicated to you; or
- That there was bias, or the likelihood of bias in making the decision; or
- That the decision was made by a person or body without the necessary responsibility or authority; or
- That the procedure followed was not fair or adequate; or
- That the decision made was not fair or reasonable in all the circumstances.

- Where appropriate submit any new evidence which has not previously been submitted in support of your complaint or academic appeal. If you introduce new evidence or a new element of complaint or academic appeal at the review stage, you should provide a valid reason to explain why this could not have been provided earlier in the process.

2.3 Failure to meet these requirements could result in the request for review not being accepted.

2.4 The Student Casework Office will acknowledge the request for review within three days of its receipt. Within 10 days of the acknowledgment, a casework manager (complaints) or Secretary to the Panel (academic appeals) will write to advise you whether the review request has been accepted.

2.5 If it is not accepted, the OU will advise you of the reasons for that decision within a Completion of Procedures letter.

Complaint review considerations

2.6 Where a request for a review meets the requirements set out above, an OU Casework Manager, will carry out a review of your complaint, on behalf of the Vice Chancellor's Delegate.

The review will not reconsider your complaint but will look at all the matters raised on the grounds of your request for a review and determine whether the complaints process has been followed correctly. The casework manager will produce a report which will include:

- A summary of your complaint and grounds for review.
- The background to your complaint.
- A decision as to whether your complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld.
- An explanation of the reasons for the decision.
- Recommendations for resolution where appropriate.

2.7 The Vice Chancellor's Delegate will consider and approve the draft report. The OU will then send the student and partner institute a copy of the approved report within 15 calendar days of the date of the eligibility letter.

2.8 If your partners decision is upheld following the review, the OU will send you a Completion of Procedures letter together with a copy of the Vice Chancellor's Delegate's report.

2.9 If your partner institution's decision is partially upheld or not upheld following the review, we will send you and them a summary of recommendations to remedy the complaint, together with the Vice Chancellor's Delegate's report.

2.10 If the recommendations to remedy the complaint include an offer which requires you to respond to the terms of the offer to confirm acceptance, you will have 10 calendar days to accept the offer.

- The OU will issue you a Completion of Procedures letter following this.

Academic appeal review considerations

2.11 Where a request for a review meets the requirements set out in 2.1the Secretary will convene a Panel with no prior involvement with the concern, to conduct a review.

2.12 The Chair of the Panel will decide whether to consider your review with or without a hearing.

2.13 If, on review of the information provided to them, the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that there are sufficient grounds without a hearing, the Chair can apply the decisions set out in 2.14-2.16. This may include referring your appeal back to your partner institution for reconsideration. Your partner institution will be given the reasons for the decision and, where appropriate, any recommendations for further consideration of your appeal.

2.14 If a hearing takes place the Panel can decide to take one or more of the following decisions:

a. to uphold (in whole or in part) or not uphold the original finding; and/or

b. in the case of an appeal against a decision concerning academic and/or research misconduct, to uphold (in whole or in part) or not uphold and confirm any penalty applied.

c. dismiss the appeal review, in whole or in part.

2.15 The panel must decide if the grounds for appeal in your review request are proven by the evidence. If it thinks it is, they must determine if these grounds create enough doubt on the appealed (original) decision, making it unreasonable for the partner institution to reply.

2.16 If grounds for appeal have been established by evidence, but the panel thinks those grounds would not have made a material difference to the decision of the partner institution, then the original decision shall stand.

2.17 Within 15 working days of the hearing, you will be sent the panel's decision. This will include a summary of your appeal, the background information to the decision, the verdict (upheld, partly upheld, or not upheld), the reasoning, and any suggested resolutions.

2.18 If your appeal is referred back to your partner institution for reconsideration. following a review by the Panel, their decision will be final. Your partner institution will inform the OU of this decision and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued.

3 TIMEFRAMES

3.1 The OU will make every reasonable effort to meet the time limits as stated in this procedure. For complex cases, additional time may be required to ensure a thorough review of a submission. We will notify you in writing if an exception to the standard time limit is needed, and we will keep you informed of when you can expect to receive an outcome response.

4 COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES

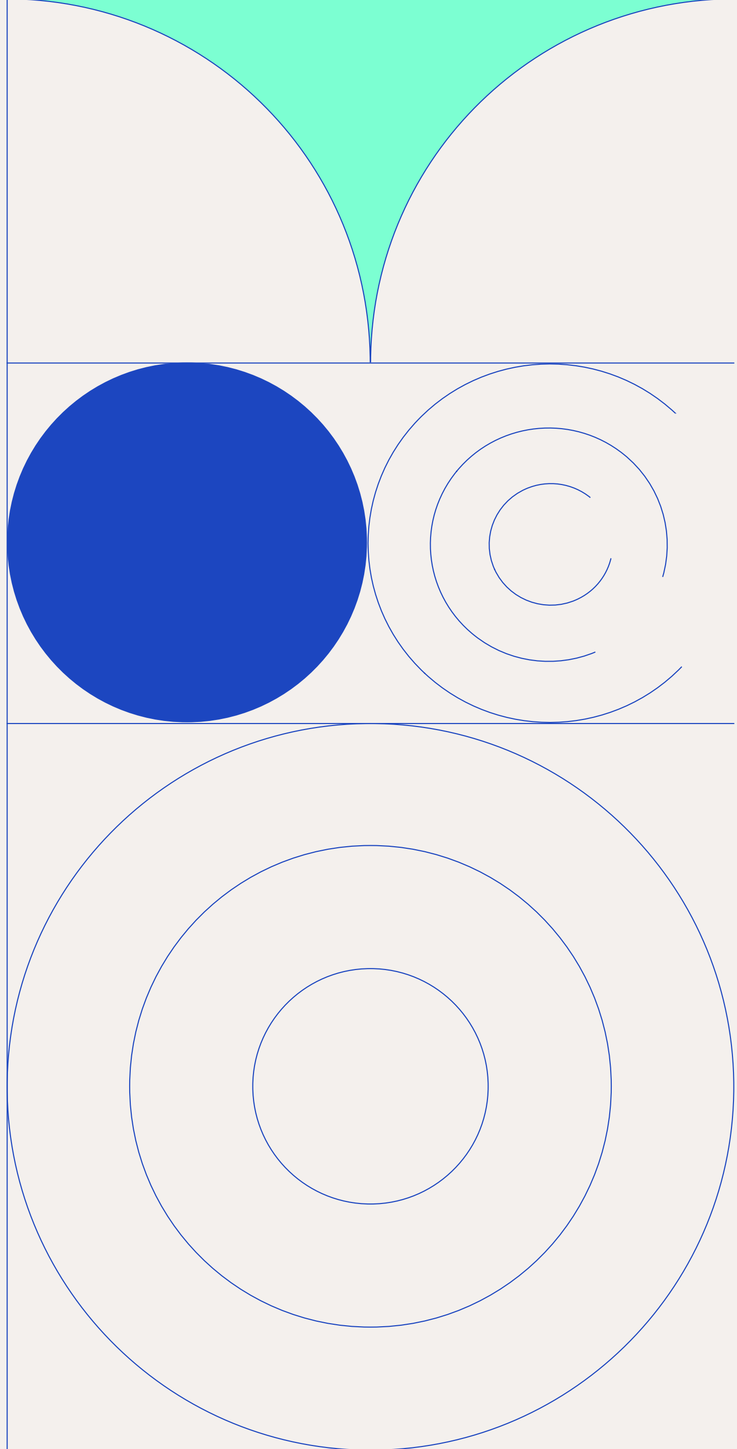
4.1 The Vice Chancellor's Delegate is the OU's final authority in relation to student complaints and academic appeals. If you think that a decision has not been made in accordance with our rules and procedures you may refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) for an independent review, as set out below in methods of appeal.

5 METHODS OF APPEAL

5.1 Once you have exhausted both your partner institution's procedures and that of the OU, you will be sent a Completion of Procedures letter.

5.2 If you are still unhappy with the outcome or how your complaint or academic appeal was handled, you can request an independent review by the **Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)**.

5.3 You must request an independent review of your complaint to the OIA within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. (Please note that this may be amended subject to the OIA consultation taking place at the time of publishing the OUVP Handbook for Validated Awards 26-27). Guidance on this process can be found on the **OIA's website** and will also be included in the Completion of Procedures letter. Please note, the OIA typically only reviews cases after the provider's internal procedures have been completed and a Completion of Procedures letter has been issued. This procedure does not apply to complaints from applicants or people making enquiries.



Timeframes for consideration of a complaint or academic appeal

STAGE	STAGE REFERENCE	MANAGED BY	TIME TAKEN
Stage one	**Informal/Early Resolution stage**	Managed by **Partner**	To be determined by partner policy/process
Stage two	**Formal stage** Investigation/formal process conducted by the partner, followed by the issuing of a Completion of Internal Procedures (COIP) letter to the student	Managed by **Partner**	**41 calendar days** from date complaint received
	Student requests a review by the OU	Managed by **Student**	Student has **21 calendar days** from the date on the COIP to request a review by the OU
Stage 3	**Review stage** Review process is conducted by the OU, followed by the issuing of a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter to the student	Managed by **the OU**	**28 calendar days** from receipt of review request

It should be noted that if an academic appeal review is referred to a panel for a hearing, then the total length of this process will probably exceed the timelines stated above.

6 OU Validated Provision in Northern Ireland

6.1 This section provides information for students studying Open University (OU) validated awards in Northern Ireland.

6.2 Complaints and academic appeals procedures for OU validated provision in Northern Ireland must align with the following:

- The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP).
- The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework.

In Northern Ireland, students may be signposted to NIPSO for independent external review once internal procedures are complete.

Students studying OU validated awards also retain the right to request a review by the OU as the awarding body (Stage 3).

6.3 In line with NIPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) there should be a three-stage process for student complaints and academic appeals.

References in the table align with NIPSO guidance and may differ from information contained in other areas of the OU Handbook for Validated Awards for partner institutions based outside of Northern Ireland.



STAGE	STAGE REFERENCE	MANAGED BY	ALIGN WITH NIPSO GUIDANCE (CURRENT TIMEFRAMES LISTED BELOW)
Stage one	**Frontline response / Early Resolution stage**	Managed by **College**	**5 working days** from date complaint received
Stage two	**Investigation / Formal stage** Followed by the issuing of Completion of Procedures letter to the student	Managed by **College**	**20 working days** from date complaint received The **COP must be issued within 2 weeks** of the day the complaints procedure is completed.
Stage three Signposting to NIPSO	**Independent external review**	Managed by **Student**	Currently **within 6 months** of date on COP
	Student has the option to request a review by the OU	Managed by **Student**	**21 days** from date on COP Letter
Stage three Open University Awarding Body review (for OU NI Validated Awards)	**Review stage** Review process is conducted by the OU, followed by the issuing of a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter to the student	Managed by the **OU**	**28 calendar days** from receipt of review request

6.4 Stage 1: Frontline response / Early resolution

Frontline response must be completed within 5 working days, although in practice it should be possible to respond to complaints sooner where complaints are managed by appropriately trained staff operating an effective MCHP focused on resolution.

6.5 Stage 2: Investigation / Formal Stage

An Investigation / Formal Stage aims to explore the complaint in more depth and establish all the relevant facts. The aim is to resolve the complaint where possible in 20 working days, or to give the student a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position of the organisation. Wherever possible, complaints should be investigated by someone not involved in the complaint (for example, a line manager or a manager from a different area/department).

The Completion of Procedures Letter must be issued within two weeks of the completion of the procedure.

Following completion of internal procedures, partners must clearly communicate the available escalation routes.

6.6 Stage 3: Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

Students may refer the matter to NIPSO where they remain dissatisfied after internal procedures are complete.

It is important to make clear to the student within the COP letter:

- Their right to ask NIPSO to consider the complaint.
- The time limit for doing so (normally within 6 months.)
- How to contact NIPSO.

6.7 Student Request for Review by the Open University (for OU NI Validated Awards)

A student may also refer the matter to the OU where they remain dissatisfied after internal procedures are complete. This must be requested within **21 calendar days** from the date on the Completion of Procedures Letter.

Stage 3: Open University Awarding Body review (for OU NI Validated Awards)

The OU review (stage three) will be received and managed by the relevant team within the OU, please refer to section F1.27 for further details on the process.



Appendix 1: Guidance on student information and handbook content

This appendix provides guidance on the information that should be made available to applicants and students studying on OU validated provision. It explains which information must be publicly accessible, which information may be provided through student-facing channels such as handbooks or virtual learning environments, and where material and pre-contract information should be published. Partners must ensure that all material and pre-contractual information is publicly accessible (e.g. website).

If a handbook contains any material or pre-contractual information, then:

- That handbook must be publicly accessible, OR
- o The material or pre-contractual information must be duplicated elsewhere in a public format (e.g. website).

If the handbook only contains student-facing content (e.g. welcome notes, staff contacts, induction info), it does not need to be public.

Material and/or pre-contractual information (must be publicly accessible)

Material information: Information that could influence a student's decision to accept an offer (e.g. fees, assessment regulations, placement obligations). Must be publicly accessible.

Pre-contractual information: Information that must be provided before a student enters into a contract (e.g. terms and conditions, cancellation rights). Must be in a durable medium.

Durable medium: A format that allows the student to store and access the information unchanged (e.g. PDF, printed document, downloadable file).

Further guidance can be found in the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) publication UK higher education providers: advice on consumer protection law, particularly the sections relating to material information, pre-contract information and durable media.

Required for pre-contractual info.

• **Policies and procedures**

– Admissions.

– Recognition of prior learning.

– Complaints and academic appeals.

– Data protection and retention.

– Disciplinary/behaviour.

– Equality and diversity (including disability statement, equal opportunities statement.)

– Safeguarding (including criminal convictions) and Prevent policy.

– Fees, withdrawal, cancellation, non-completion, debt, refund and compensation.

- **Terms and conditions** (Including cancellation rights. Any surprising or important terms should be highlighted.
- **Student Protection Plan.**
- **OU Regulations for Validated Awards (populated.)**
- **Assessment and progression regulations** (see below for more detail.)
- **Degree classification rules** – including assessment weightings for the overall scheme and within specific modules, and the rules for awarding honours, distinction, merit, and pass**.**
- **Exit awards and progression opportunities.**

- **Programme Information:**

– Programme specifications (structure, aims, learning outcomes), which should be linked to: teaching methods, assessment strategy, programme structure (including information on exit awards), curriculum map.

– **Professional body recognition/ accreditation** – where a programme leads to professional body recognition (e.g. engineering, teaching, social work) or accreditation, this should be clearly set out.

– **Delivery mode (online, in-person, blended.)**

– **Attendance requirements** (what is the expectation to attend, how this is communicated on website, part time/full time.)

– **Entry requirements.**

– **Placement or/or study abroad obligations** (if appliable) should be publicly accessible if the opportunity is promoted as part of the offer, the placement/study abroad is compulsory or credit-bearing, The student has responsibilities or obligations (e.g. arranging their own placement). (Information to be provided: rationale, criteria and approval processes for suitable placements, responsibility for finding and arranging placement, supervision arrangements, student responsibilities, supporting and feedback arrangements.)

– **Tuition fees** and additional costs (e.g. field trips, equipment), including refunds and payment details, any annual increases including the metric used to calculate increase such as inflation or flat %). Equipment required to be provided by the student.

– **Website accessibility, privacy notices.**

When modules within a programme are offered as single registerable modules, information for module-only students should also be developed, setting out:

- The details of the delivery model, especially when delivery will be shared with students studying on the full programme.
- Information on the student support arrangements, advice and guidance services and any other relevant services available for students to access.
- Technical support arrangements.
- Access to resources such as the library, virtual learning environment, and campus.
- Access to the student's union, a student card and student discounts.

Student-facing content (that can be in non-public facing handbook, VLE, etc.)

Information intended to support students during their studies (e.g. welcome notes, staff contacts, induction info). Does not need to be public.

- Welcome and introduction.
- Introduction to the Institution and programme – background, history, philosophy.
- Academic calendar.
- Staff contact details – (list of programme leader(s) and academic staff, their contact details and availability arrangements and list of support staff (technical and administrative.)
- Name, position and institution of the external examiner(s) involved in the programme.
- Opportunities available to students on completion of the programme (employment, further academic study, etc).
- Induction arrangements.
- Study skills and tutoring (including role of personal tutor.)
- Careers guidance at both institutional and programme level.
- Counselling and student welfare.
- Support for students with disabilities.
- Financial advice and support.
- Guide to the virtual learning environment.
- Opportunities for personal development planning.
- Placement support (If optional or advisory, it's student-facing. If it affects course delivery or is credit-bearing, it becomes material/pre-contractual and must be public.)
- Dissertation/project support.
- Feedback mechanisms.
- Facilities and services – library/e-learning resources, catering, computing facilities, technical support and helpdesk, catering services, multimedia.
- Health and safety and security.
- Workshop, laboratory, studio or study areas and other specialist accommodation available to support the programme.
- How results are communicated, brief explanation on the role of assessment boards, external examiners and OU ratification of results.
- Student participation and evaluation.
- Arrangements for student feedback and how the partner institution uses it.
- Student representation on committees.
- Registered student organisations.
- Academic and professional organisations.
- General reading list (i.e. not module specific), including electronic resources.

Assessment and progression regulations – further guidance

Clear explanation of the rules governing the assessment matters in a clear and succinct format that is accessible to students should be provided (Regulations for validated awards of The Open University). This information should be conveyed in an accessible and jargon-free language.

Information provided to students on assessment and progression should normally include:

1. Identification of all elements of assessment, including type, volume weighting and timings of assessment.
2. Minimum pass marks for modules.
3. Rules governing extension to submission deadlines.
4. Penalties for late submission or non-submission of work.
5. Process for requesting deferral of modules.
6. Assessment of work-based learning, where applicable.
7. Assessment of presentations and performance, where applicable.
8. Definitions and consequences of academic misconduct, including plagiarism.
9. Mechanisms for provision of feedback to students on performance, and the role of formative and summative assessment.
10. Acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation.
11. Progression regulations.
12. Board of examiners (membership, roles, etc.)
13. Reassessment and re-sits.
14. Extenuating circumstances- Extenuating Circumstances Policy (extensions and deferrals, etc.)
15. Appeals and complaints procedures.
16. Provision for disabled students and reasonable adjustment (policy.)

Summary table: publication and access requirements

Partners are not required to provide information through a single student handbook. Information may be distributed across websites, programme documentation, virtual learning environments and other student-facing channels, provided it remains accessible, accurate and appropriately maintained.

Summary table: student information requirements

Type of information	Publicly accessible?	Where it can be hosted
Fees, refunds, compensation	Yes	Website, durable medium
Assessment regulations & progression rules	Yes	Website, programme spec, handbook
Programme specifications	Yes	Website, programme documentation
Placement obligations (credit-bearing/mandatory)	Yes	Website, WBL handbook
Entry requirements	Yes	Website
Delivery mode & attendance requirements	Yes	Website, programme spec
Professional body accreditation	Yes	Website, programme documentation
Student protection plan	Yes	Website
OU regulations	Yes	Website, linked documents
Welcome notes, staff contacts	No	VLE, student handbook
Induction info	No	VLE, student handbook
Study skills, tutoring, academic support	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Careers guidance	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Welfare and pastoral support	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Placement support (optional/advisory)	No	VLE, student handbook
Facilities and services	No	VLE, student handbook
External examiner details	No	VLE, student handbook
General reading list	No	VLE, student handbook

Responsibility for public accessibility:

- It is the partner institution's responsibility to ensure that material and pre-contractual information is publicly accessible.
- The relevant team at the partner institution should ensure that programme-specific content is accurate and aligned with approved documents.
- OUVP will review submitted documents for compliance during approval/reapproval and may also review information through Annual Review processes, website reviews and other quality assurance activities.

Appendix 2: Glossary

The glossary over the next slides briefly explains some of our most frequently used terms.

You may also wish to refer to the glossary that the Office for Students (OfS) provides on its website – Glossary: OfS or the glossary that Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provides on its website – Glossary: QAA (2022)

Terminology	Description
Accelerated degree	A degree which takes a shorter time to complete than a degree which follows the standard time frame.
Access and participation plan (APP)	Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. **They include:** - The provider's ambition for change; - What it plans to do to achieve that change; - The targets it has set; - The investment it will make to deliver the plan. The OfS monitors access and participation plans to make sure the providers honour the commitments they make to students in these plans and take action if they do not (OfS 2021).
Annual Review	Annual Review replaces previous Institutional and Programme Monitoring (IPM) arrangements. The Annual Review process forms part of the validating institution's quality assurance framework and provides a proportionate, risk based approach to monitoring academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. It replaces previous Institutional and Programme Monitoring (IPM) arrangements. Annual Review is underpinned by ongoing engagement, live data monitoring, and targeted reflection where appropriate, ensuring alignment with regulatory expectations and sector best practice.

Terminology	Description
Approval	The process through which the University determines whether an institution is suitable to become, or remain, an approved validation partner for the delivery of programmes leading to OU validated awards.
Approval letter/ **reapproval letter**	The formal letter by which the OU confirms to an institution that it has been (re)approved by the OU as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards.
Awarding body	A body with the authority to award academic qualifications, given to it by statute, royal charter, or under license from another body.
Bridging unit/ programme	A unit or programme of study designed and approved to prepare students who have successfully achieved an award, such as a Foundation Degree, for direct entry to an advanced stage of another programme, usually at a higher level.
Certificate (for validated award)	An official document recording achievement of a specific award.
Completion of internal procedures/final decision Letter	This is idocumentary evidence that should be issued to students at the end of their partner Institutions complaints or appeals procedures.

Terminology	Description
Completion of procedures letter	This is documentary evidence that the OU should issue to students once they have exhausted both their partner institution's complaints or appeals procedures and that of the OU.
Conferment	When the qualification is awarded (also referred to as certification).
Credit	A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level. See also 'credit level', 'credit value', 'credit accumulation' and 'transfer schemes'. (**Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements**, QAA, 2021). There is broad agreement amongst institutions in England that one credit represents 10 notional hours of successful learning.
Credit level descriptor	There is broad agreement amongst institutions in England that one credit represents 10 notional hours of successful learning.
Curriculum map	A map of the outcomes of units of study against the intended outcomes for the programme as a whole, to ensure overall completeness and coherence.
Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC)	The OU committee that has oversight of policy and regulations relating to partnerships for taught provision, including validated provision, leading to an OU award. CuPC approves and monitors the validation of partner institutions and awards offered by them.

Terminology	Description
Degree apprenticeship	An award which encompasses both academic study and workplace study, leading to a full bachelor's degree or master's degree.
Diploma supplement	A formal, verifiable and comprehensive record of the learning and achievement of a student on completion of a higher education qualification.
Dual award (or double award)	The granting of separate awards for the same programme by two awarding institutions who have jointly delivered the programme
Durable Medium	of study leading to them. (QAA 2012)
Education committee	Higher level OU committee responsible to the Senate for strategy and policy relating to curriculum, assessment and qualifications (including validated provision), teaching and learning and the student experience.
Exiting	When a partner institution exits from the validation arrangement with the OU. The decision to withdraw may come from either the partner institution or the OU.

Terminology	Description
Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications	A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. The QAA publishes the following frameworks: The Framework for Higher Education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS). (QAA 2021)
Institutional agreement	The formal agreement between the OU and the partner institution, which sets out the responsibilities of each party.
Institutional and Programme Monitoring	The former monitoring process used for validated provision. This is now replaced by Annual Review (see glossary above)
Interim Review	An activity to review the institution or its programmes between scheduled visits. The period of validation or institutional approval is in all cases subject to satisfactory outcomes from annual review. If there is an unsatisfactory outcome or other cause for concern, an interim review may be required to look at specific concerns within a programme or at institutional level.
Learning Outcome	What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning. (QAA 2022)

Terminology	Description
Level (or qualification level)	One of a series of defined points on a qualifications framework that are numbered in ascending order. Qualifications within the same level share characteristics and require similar achievement. Qualification levels in different frameworks can be compared. Qualification levels are distinct from credit levels. (QAA 2014)
Material Information	Information that may influence a student's decision to apply for, accept an offer of, or continue studying on a programme.
Medr	The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales, responsible for the regulation, oversight and strategic development of tertiary education and research in Wales
Minimum entry standards	The minimum academic entry standards required of any student to register with the institution and the OU, as set out in the OU's Handbook.
Module or unit	A self-contained, formally structured, unit of study with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some institutions use the word 'course' to refer to individual modules. (QAA 2018) See also 'single registerable module' on page 110.

Terminology	Description
Office for Students (OfS)	The independent regulator of higher education in England. Their aim is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. Their work covers all students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, national or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning. (OfS 2021)
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)	The independent body that reviews student complaints about higher education providers in England and Wales. Students studying on OU validated programmes may be eligible to refer complaints to the OIA once all internal complaints or appeals procedures have been exhausted.
Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP)	Office within The Open University responsible for validating awards for academic institutions, professional bodies, companies and other organisations.
Partner	This term a partner typically refers to an organization or institution that collaborates with the Open University to deliver educational programmes, or other initiatives (prospectively or currently). This covers an institution or organisation that is seeking, has entered into, or maintains a validation arrangement with the University for the delivery of programmes leading to OU validated awards. This is not a legal term, and a partnership is not full established until a legally binding validation agreement has been signed between both parties.

Terminology	Description
Partnership approval	The process (Partnership Development and Approval process) through which an institution is judged by a group of external peers to meet the principles set out in this handbook and to provide a satisfactory environment for the conduct of programmes leading to OU validated awards.
Partnership Development and Approval Process (PDAP)/Partnership Reapproval Process (PRP)	Partnership Development and Approval/Reapproval Process is the process through which a partner institution and its underpinning administrative and operational processes and procedures are judged to meet all the principles set out in Section B2 of this handbook and to provide a satisfactory environment for the presentation of programmes leading to OU validated awards. Approval of a partner institution is a prerequisite for the approval of any programme of study and it follows that, where institutional approval is withdrawn, programme approval is also suspended or withdrawn.
Partner Compliance Review	The process by which the OU assesses the administrative infrastructure of an institution to confirm that it is fit for the purpose of supporting validated programmes. It covers a wide range of administrative, financial and governance issues, including financial viability, planning, administrative staffing and processes, IT, structure, and communications.
Pre-contract Information	Information that must be provided to prospective students before they enter into a contractual relationship with the institution. This includes information required under consumer protection legislation and may include programme information, fees, terms and conditions, and cancellation rights.

Terminology	Description
Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB)	Organisations that set the benchmark standards for, and regulate the standards of entry into, particular profession(s) and are authorised to accredit, approve or recognise specific programmes leading to the relevant professional qualification(s) for which they may have a statutory or regulatory responsibility.
Programme (of study)	An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies. (QAA 2018)
Programme revalidation (programme reapproval)	The process whereby an existing programme of study is critically appraised at intervals of not more than five years, in order to confirm that it continues to meet the OU's requirements for validation.
Programme specification	Published statements about the intended learning outcomes of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement. (QAA 2018).
Programme validation	See "Validation".
Quality assurance	The systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the Expectations set out in the Quality Code, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Terminology	Description
Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Its purpose is to uphold quality and standards in UK universities and colleges.
(Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager (S/QPM)	Member of staff of the OU who is responsible for managing the partnership with the institution.
Student Information	Information provided to applicants and students about OU validated provision. This may be delivered through websites, programme documentation, student handbooks, virtual learning environments or other student-facing channels. Student information may include material information, pre-contract information, programme information, academic regulations, student support arrangements and institutional policies.
(UK) Quality Code for Higher Education (2024)	A set of documents published by the QAA which set out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet and gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Providers use it to design their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. This was updated in June 2024. The Quality Code 2024 is currently in a transition phase of implementation and partner institutions should consult the QAA website for further information for which edition to use for which nation.

Terminology	Description
Quality enhancement	Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.
Recognition/ accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (RPL/AP(E)L)	(RPL) Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences. Once recognised through this process, prior learning can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications and/or personal and career development. This term is used mainly in relation to the Scottish higher education system, with the term accreditation of prior learning normally being used in the rest of the UK.
Registration	The process by which a partner institution registers its students with the OU for a validated award.
Revalidation	The process whereby an existing programme of study is critically appraised by the OU at intervals of not more than five years, in order to confirm that it continues to meet the OU's requirements for validation (see "programme revalidation").
Single Registerable Module	A module (see above) that is available to be studied for credit without registering onto a full programme of study. These must be part of a validated programme. All single registerable modules must be a minimum of 10 credits.

Terminology	Description
Stacking	Where an OU validated award can be made up of cognate registerable modules. This must meet all requirements of the programme specification (credits, learning outcomes, admissions criteria etc.).
Student Protection Plans (SPP)	Student protection plans set out what students can expect to happen should a course, campus, or institution close. The purpose of a plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies or can be compensated if this is not possible. The OU require all partner institutions to have a student protection plan in place (regardless of whether they are OfS registered). The OfS has further information on the content of Student Protection Plans, which all partner institutions should consult when formulating their own SPP. **Condition C3: Student protection plan – Office for Students**
Subject Benchmark Statements (QAA)	A published statement (part of the Quality Code, Part A) that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in specific subject areas and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity. The statements are consistent with the relevant generic qualification descriptors. (QAA 2022)
Transcript	The transcript provides a comprehensive verifiable record of students' learning while they are studying, a formative statement that should help students to monitor their progress and plan their further academic development.
Transnational Education (TNE)	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) defines Transnational Education (TNE) as the delivery of higher education qualifications by UK degree-awarding bodies in a country other than where the awarding institution is based.

Terminology	Description
Validated award	An award of the OU conferred upon students, following the successful completion of an approved programme.
Validated programmes	Programmes that have been validated through a process of external peer review by the OU as being of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to OU validated awards.
Validation	The formal process through which the University determines whether a proposed new programme of study meets its requirements for approval as an OU validated programme.
Work-based learning (workplace learning)	Learning that takes place, in part or as a whole, in the context of employment.



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