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UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE



CELEBRATING  
**525 YEARS**  
1495 – 2020

# Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

SECTION 9: PARTNERSHIPS

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# SECTION 9: PARTNERSHIPS

## INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code is split into 12 themes, available online on the QAA website at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>. The *Partnerships* theme focuses on Universities and Higher Education Providers who collaborate or are partnered with other academic institutions or non-academic organisations. It is important that standards are appropriate within partner organisations to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment meet that of the degree-awarding institution. The Quality Code describes this theme as follows:

*Providers work in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including awarding bodies, other education providers, non-academic providers (or those whose purpose is not primarily education) and employers. When doing so, awarding bodies retain responsibility for the academic standards of their awards and for the quality of the student experience.*

*This Theme identifies the relevant Core practices for providers when considering the unique nature of partnership working. Other Themes will also be relevant to partnerships.*

In practice, this theme ensures that the quality and standards are maintained within the partnerships of any University to safeguard the quality of the degree conferred upon each student. This means both institutions should work collaboratively to ensure all policies and procedures are adhered to and, in cases where this is not possible or practical, offer alternative solutions for the students.

In defining key terms that will be used frequently in this section, the Quality Code notes the following:

**Provider and organisation:** Any body involved in the delivery of a partnership arrangement.

**Awarding organisation:** Refers to issues that are specifically relevant to the degree-awarding body. This term is used to distinguish responsibilities between the awarding organisation and any other organisation within the partnership. Organisations within the partnership, who are not the awarding organisation, can still consider the guidance for their own implementation as good practice.

**Partner:** The provider delivering aspects of teaching, learning, assessment or student support under delegated authority of the 'awarding organisation'.

**Partnership:** An arrangement between two or more organisations to deliver aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and student support. It refers to collaborative arrangements involving students and/or awards which include those involving guaranteed progression and sharing of services. Partnership arrangements may apply to the delivery of whole courses of study or to elements of courses, individual modules, or self-contained components of study.

## SECTION 9: PARTNERSHIPS

The Quality Code has three different sections: the expectations for standards; the expectations for quality; and the guiding principles. The relevant expectations for standards and quality are detailed below. The Guiding Principles are mapped to the University’s own policies, procedures and quality mechanisms. There are two separate sections for the University’s practices, detailing what the University does and has in place to support that expectation/principle, as well as the supporting documentation, which includes reference to supporting policy, procedure, website or other document.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STANDARDS & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES	EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student’s achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
<b>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b>		
<p>1. The awarding organisation will be accountable for assuring the overall quality and academic standards of the provision, regardless of the type of partnership.</p> <p>An awarding organisation is accountable for the quality and academic standards of its provision irrespective of the partnership arrangements. Procedures, systems and safeguards implemented for the</p>	<p>Through the University’s Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), all partnership provision is monitored and reviewed by means of regular reporting. This reporting includes UK-based and International, Transnational Education partnerships.</p> <p>For all major partnerships and any partnerships involving in-country delivery of part or all of a programme, proposers must submit relevant documentation to <a href="#">the University Partnerships Committee (UPC) and QAC</a>. The documentation requirements are outlined in the <i>Documentation Required from Prospective Partners for Proposals for Accreditations, Validations and Joint Degrees</i>. The information required includes: details of the institution, details of courses and/or programme provision, details of staff involved, outline of arrangements for student support and</p>	<p><a href="#">Quality Assurance and Academic Standards for Partnerships &amp; Collaborative Provision (Website)</a>  <a href="#">Documentation Required from Prospective Partners for Proposals for Accreditations, Validations and Joint Degrees, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">QE-TNE Scheme (Webpage)</a></p>

management of partnership arrangements should be in proportion to the level of risk to quality and academic standards posed by the arrangement.

experience, details of partner institution’s quality assurance processes, and a summary of the institutional financial position and procedures for resource allocation.

[A Transnational Education Action Group was established in response to the Financial Recovery Plan which oversees the development of new international partnerships, prior to consideration at IAG, UPC and QAC.](#)

Transnational Education (TNE) Approval Procedures note that “*the UoA shall only enter into collaborative partnership arrangements if confident of the Delivery Partner’s abilities to provide the quality of infrastructure to maintain the standards of our degree provision*” and, ~~further, that, when~~ [resources allow](#), “the due diligence process ~~should~~ **must always** include a Quality Assurance Committee Panel visit as stipulated in Annex B of Senate Paper 18:17”.

This Senate paper, which is subsumed within the TNE approval procedures, itself states: “*the UoA is responsible for the academic standards of awards. The standards achieved by students who are successful in completing programmes by Delivery Partners shall be equivalent to the standards achieved by students who are successful on equivalent programmes at the UoA.*”

All partnership agreements and subsequent delivery with the partners, normally adhere to the University of Aberdeen policies, procedures and regulations. Where adjustments need to be made, these are agreed through QAC, and any relevant partnership formal committees (e.g. [University International Partnerships Committee \(UIPC\)](#), [International Advisory Group \(IAG\) the University of Aberdeen](#), South China Normal University Joint Institute Academic Committee).

The University is part of the QAA Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK TNE Scheme, joining in 2021. By registering for the QAA QE-TNE Scheme, the University is investing in the quality of our students’ academic experience and demonstrating our commitment to the advancement of UK higher education delivered overseas. [Additionally,](#)

	<p><a href="#">the Joint Institute Implementation Group for SCNU meets once every two months and reports to UPC to ensure the successful management and operation of the Institute.</a></p>	
<p>2. The awarding organisation will have in place appropriate governance to authorise and oversee the development and closure of partnership arrangements and to monitor their effective operation.</p> <p>The awarding organisation will manage the development of partnerships to ensure that there is oversight of the partnership from inception through to closure. Formal procedures may set out requirements for differential arrangements dependant on the type of partnership and the level of risk. All aspects of a partnership should be subject to monitoring and evaluation to ensure their effective operation and to establish areas for development or the timely need for closure of the partnership.</p>	<p>The procedures for the establishment, governance and termination of an agreement with a delivery partner are set out in the Collaborative Provision Delivery Partners Principles and Procedures document.</p> <p>For quality related matters, all partnerships (domestic and international) report to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). Formalised partnership reporting mechanisms are monitored by QAC on behalf of the University Education Committee (UEC) and Senate. As part of the Partnership Agreement, the requirement to submit an annual QA/QE report is articulated. The annual report is submitted and considered for approval by QAC.</p> <p>The University has in place an International Advisory Group (IAG) which reports to the <a href="#">International University Partnerships Committee (UIPC)</a>. These two groups together oversee the initiation, development/renewal, and termination of such partnerships with regular reporting thereon (on <a href="#">both an annual and a quarterly</a> basis) to the <a href="#">UIPC</a>. <a href="#">UIPC</a> itself reports to the <a href="#">Policy and Resources Committee Senior Management Team</a> and, through that, to Court.</p> <p>In addition, the IAG is responsible for approving the routine renewal of international partnership agreements and contracts where there is no material change in contractual terms, failure to deliver agreed objectives, or change in risk appetite and risk assessment.</p>	<p><a href="#">International Advisory Group (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">International Partnerships Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">University Partnerships Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">University Partnerships Committee (UPC)   StaffNet   The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</a>  <a href="#">Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Management of a Partnership (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Collaborative Provision Delivery Partners Principles and Procedures (Document)</a>.</p>
<p>3. Due diligence enquiries are completed and legally binding written agreements are signed prior to the commencement of student registration - due diligence</p>	<p>The University is required to have a formal, legally binding agreement in place before any student-related partnership can commence. Such agreements must be signed on behalf of the University Court by its authorised signatories, as well as by the authorised signatories of the partner. Once the agreement is signed, it will be held on the University's Register of Partnerships and Collaborative Provision, which is available to the public.</p>	<p><a href="#">Setting Up a Partnership (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Management of a Partnership (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Quality and Standards for Partnerships &amp; Collaborative Provision, Agreements (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Current Partnership Register (Webpage)</a></p>

enquiries are refreshed periodically and before agreements are renewed.

The awarding organisation and, where relevant, the partner should conduct a range of due diligence enquiries appropriate to the type of partnership, the detailed arrangements and the identified level of risk. Legally-binding written agreements, where required, which set out the rights and obligations of all parties, should be finalised and signed before students register on the associated provision. Where relevant, the written agreements will include appropriate student protection plan (or equivalent) clauses.

For international and TNE, the TNE approval procedures state:  
*“Considerations of financial and reputational risk and the undertaking of thorough due diligence along with legal advice are essential to any project that progresses beyond initial consideration. We will only consider engaging with high quality partners so as to protect our reputation, our brand and the quality of our student experience. Human rights, ethical issues, financial risk and income growth potential, geographical location in relation to other partners and in terms of priority markets, are all carefully considered.”*

The procedures require substantial due diligence and provide detailed guidance thereon in a specific appendix which states: *“The level of due diligence carried out is determined by the scale of risk in a project as assessed by total project size, country of operation, partner organisation and potential financial and legal liabilities. Due diligence could range from, for example, independent investigations by third parties and advice from lawyers and other partners through to very detailed reporting on a particular individual or issue through intensive, but discreet, analysis conducted by external specialist investigators. It should always include, wherever possible, discussions with others already working with the proposed partner as well as with others working in the same region on similar initiatives, locally-based alumni and in-country British trade and consular colleagues.”*

The renewal of agreements via the IAG and UJPC requires the completion of full proformas as if for a new application and thus requires refreshment of any previous due diligence. [The QAC renewals process includes a separate form which is completed by Schools proposing the renewal.](#)

The procedures require a draft legal agreement with a potential partner from the outset of project consideration and state that all progressing initiatives should have in place a *“Suitable and legally checked agreement (‘contract’) in place between all parties and which mirrors earlier agreements for existing transnational initiatives as much as possible”*.

<p>4. Provision delivered through partnership arrangements will be subject to quality procedures that are at least as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those used for the provision delivered by the awarding organisation.</p> <p>The partnership agreement will include information on the quality procedures for the provision, if, and how, they differ from those used for the provision delivered by the awarding organisation. They do not need to be the same procedures but they must be as rigorous, secure and open to security as those of the awarding organisation. There may be additional quality procedures and safeguards depending on the nature of the partnership and the level of risk identified.</p>	<p>All quality-related aspects of partnerships activity are overseen by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). <del>On each meeting agenda, there is a standing item covering TNE and Partnerships, to ensure that this strategically important area of business is given sufficient time for scrutiny, discussion and information.</del> Partnership agreements require submission of an annual QA/QE focused report for discussion and approval at QAC. <u>This is done at a dedicated meeting of QAC, where the focus is solely on partnership annual report submissions.</u> Outcomes of this consideration are subsequently communicated to the Partner by way of a formal response.</p> <p>Schools which have collaborative partners assisting in the delivery of <u>teaching and learning education</u> for a particular programme include details of this provision through their Annual Programme Review. Where issues of note are identified, these are discussed at QAC.</p> <p>Where the University has embarked on a new partnership or new collaborative provision, <u>and when resources allow</u>, a QA review of the provision takes <u>place</u> following the first year of operation. This allows a wholesale review of all provision being delivered by or with that particular partner, and any enhancements that have been identified across the review.</p> <p>Detailed processes and procedures are in place (explained fully in the Principles and Procedures document) for the creation of adequate safeguards to ensure that issues that might compromise academic standards or the quality of learning opportunities are identified in a timely manner. Consideration of strategic alignment, finances and the business case for any new partnership proposed, must be conducted separately from consideration of the academic proposal, approval of academic provision and scrutiny of processes for the management of quality and standards.</p>	<p><a href="#">Quality Assurance and Academic Standards for Partnerships &amp; Collaborative Provision (Website)</a>  <a href="#">Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Collaborative Provision Delivery Partners Principles and Procedures (Document)</a></p>
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<p>5. Awarding organisations that make arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with others, retain the authority and responsibility for awarding certificates and records of study in relation to student achievement.</p> <p>The award of a UK higher education qualification is a highly-valued and much sought-after achievement; it is important that the award of certificates is protected and secure to ensure that this status can be maintained. Consequently, the awarding organisation will maintain records of study and achievement for students who achieve a qualification and will issue certificates to each individual student.</p>	<p>Where we have arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with others as an awarding organisation, we have in place <del>(see weblink – Award Certificates and Transcripts for Partnerships)</del>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arrangements for the awarding of certificates and records of study in relation to student achievement</li> <li>- Records for students registered as part of any partnership are maintained to the same levels as those for non-partnership students.</li> <li>- All awards and transcripts articulate clearly the nature of the partnership, the parts of the programme delivered by the University of Aberdeen</li> <li>- For Joint Degrees, the format of the certification is agreed by both partners</li> </ul> <p><u>Please refer to the weblink – Award Certificates and Transcripts for Partnerships for further information.</u></p>	<p><a href="#">Award Certificates and Transcripts for Partnerships (Webpages)</a>  <a href="#">Types of Partnerships (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Conduct of Examiners’ Meetings, AQH (Document)</a>  <a href="#">Conduct of Examiners’ Meetings (abdn.ac.uk)</a>  <a href="#">Number, Composition and Purpose of Examiners’ Meetings, AQH (Document)</a></p>
<p>6. All awarding organisations maintain accurate, up-to-date records of all partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.</p> <p>The governance procedures will establish the types of partnership arrangements where a formal agreement will be required; this will normally depend on the level of risk to quality and academic standards posed by the</p>	<p>The Academic Services Team in Registry maintains a list of partnerships and reports to the Quality Assurance Committee annually, and the <del>Internationa</del><a href="#">University</a> Partnerships Committee.</p> <p>Detailed records relating to partner organisations are held as part of the Intuem Database (<a href="#">Internal</a>) maintained by Research and Innovation. This Database is updated as required when Partner institution details change.</p>	<p><a href="#">Current Partnerships Register (Webpage)</a>  Inteum Database (<a href="#">Internal</a>), <i>partnership agreements maintained by Research &amp; Innovation</i></p>



<p>arrangement. Records of the partnership arrangements should be maintained and kept upto-date with any changes following review or evaluation of the partnership or other relevant changes, such as financial arrangements or change of key personnel.</p>		
<p><b>7. Awarding organisations monitor and evaluate their partnership arrangements to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are achieving their stated outcomes and that academic standards and quality are being maintained.</b> Awarding organisations will monitor and evaluate all aspects of their partnership arrangements on a continuous basis. This will include the contract between the partners (where this is required), due diligence data and the arrangements for delivery, assessment and student support (as appropriate to the partnership arrangement) to ensure that the student learning experience is of an appropriate quality and that published information/material is accurate.</p>	<p>The University monitors and evaluates all aspects of partnership arrangements through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), <u>which</u> is responsible for ensuring academic standards and outcomes</li> <li>- Schools, <u>which</u> are responsible for the monitoring and review of their own partnerships and for reporting to the Quality Assurance Committee on an annual basis-</li> <li>- <u>International University</u> Partnerships Committee, and associated partnership-specific sub-committees, <u>which</u> are responsible for partnership contracts, due diligence data, delivery arrangements, student learning experience, and receive assurance from QAC re academic standards and outcomes</li> </ul>	<p>TNE Approval Guidelines  <a href="#">Partnerships and Collaborative Provision (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">International Partnerships Committee (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">University Partnerships Committee (Webpage)</a></p>