



Handbook for Validated Awards

2024-25

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A Introduction and Background

A1 Introduction

The Open University's mission

The Open University (OU) was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. It has an international reputation for the quality of its teaching by supported open learning, for its research, and for offering a university education to many students who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to study. The OU's mission can be summarised thus: **The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas.**

A1.1 Institutional Approval and Validated Awards

OU validated awards are conferred under the OU's Royal Charter. They are of comparable standard to those made to students directly registered with the OU and other UK universities. They are available to approved partner institutions able to demonstrate their ability to quality assure their own provision in a validated relationship with the OU. Any organisation offering programmes of study at higher education level may seek to become approved by the OU and offer programmes leading to its validated awards.

The approval of an institution wishing to offer OU validated awards is required before programmes of study can be validated. Once an institution is approved, a legally binding institutional agreement is drawn up setting out the relationship between the OU and the institution and defining their responsibilities. Institutions may not market or recruit students to any validated programmes until they are in receipt of the legally binding institutional agreement.

A1.2 Authority for Institutional Approval and Reapproval

The authority for approving, and reapproving partner institutions, and validating and revalidating programmes, rests with the OU Senate and is exercised through the OU's Curriculum Partnership Committee (CuPC) for all decisions concerning Institutional Approval, Reapproval and Programme Validation and Revalidation.

A1.3 The principle of peer review

Institutional Approval and Reapproval, Validation and Revalidation processes are based on the principle of peer review delivered through a panel of suitably qualified and experienced academics and industry experts. Authority for all approval rests with CuPC. The approval process is complete once the conclusions have been considered at the committee and all conditions have been met by the partner institution.

Each panel must include an appropriate balance in its membership and operate in the context of the OU's requirements for Institutional Approval and Programme Validation as set out in this handbook.

A1.4 The supporting role of the OU

In addition to establishing the conditions for institutional and programme (re)approval, the OU supports the validation and revalidation processes and seeks to promote and maintain high academic standards by:

- Providing a framework of policies designed to foster the development of institutions as strong, cohesive and self-critical academic communities;
- Acting as a source of information and advice about good practice in respect of all matters relating to academic quality and standards;
- Providing a forum for debate on matters of academic and institutional development;
- Facilitating collaboration and interaction between the OU, institutions offering programmes leading to its awards, and national and international organisations, including professional bodies, employers and students;
- Appointing External Examiners for validated awards and attending all examination or assessment boards where awards are made in the OU's name or where progression is agreed.

A1.5 The powers of the OU

The assurance of the academic standards of the validated programmes offered as OU validated awards is a matter of prime importance to the OU. The OU will take any action it considers necessary under its Royal Charter to protect the quality of validated programmes of study and the standard of its validated awards.

A1.6 Quality Assurance and Compliance

As a UK University, the OU is subject to the requirements and expectations of UK Higher Education, as represented by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the expectations of the Office for Students (OfS) for Conditions for Registration, the Universities' primary regulator in England. The QAA publishes the 'UK Quality Code 2024 for Higher Education', guidance on academic credit, subject benchmark statements and a range of associated guidelines. For more information, see <https://www.qaa.ac.uk>.

The OU expects partner institutions to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the UK Quality Code and to take account of this in their institutional quality assurance arrangements, programme submissions and delivery of validated programmes.

The OfS publishes their expectations for Higher Education Institutions registered in England, and these expectations extend to any institution working in partnership with the OU. For more information, see [Advice and guidance - Office for Students](#).

The Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) [advice for higher education providers](#) informs providers about their consumer law obligations to undergraduate students, including advising them to:

- give students the clear, accurate and timely information that they need so they can make an informed decision about what and where to study.
- ensure that their terms and conditions are fair, for example, so they cannot make surprising changes to the course or costs.
- ensure that their complaint handling processes are accessible, clear and fair.

A1.7 Definitions of key processes for Institutional Approval and Validation

Institutional Approval

Institutional approval is the process through which an 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.

Programme Validation

Programme validation is the process whereby a judgement is reached about whether or not a programme of study designed to lead to an OU validated award, or the award of credit¹, meets the principles and requirements for that award. OU validated awards must be equivalent in standard to comparable awards throughout higher education in the United Kingdom.

Institutional Reapproval

Institutional Reapproval is the process whereby a partner institution is critically reviewed, reappraised and reconsidered for Institutional Reapproval. at intervals of typically not more than five years

Interim Review

An Interim Review may be required and instigated, where it is deemed necessary and at any point during the validation period. This is usually required following a change in the partner institution's circumstances or as a result of concerns raised in relation to the quality of the provision or the academic standards of the OU Validated Award.

Programme Revalidation

Programme revalidation is the process whereby a validated programme of study is critically appraised at intervals of not more than five years, and through which plans for change are considered.

Monitoring

Monitoring is the regular internal process by which an institution critically appraises the operation of each validated programme of study and ensures that appropriate standards are maintained. The OU requires annual Institutional and Programme Monitoring reports that evaluate the effectiveness of monitoring and other quality assurance arrangements.

OU validated awards

Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP) manages the approval and reapproval of institutions and the validation of their programmes on behalf of the OU. All communications should therefore be directed to OUVP at: ouvp-enquiries@open.ac.uk.

¹ This relates to those students who achieve an exit award within a programme of study.

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 partner institutions are required to comply with the ['Regulations for validated awards of The Open University'](#). Some institutions are approved to operate under [dual awards regulations](#).

Partner institutions are also responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the OU (see the QAA UK 2024 Quality Code) and are therefore required to align their programmes to the UK Quality Code in the same way.

A2.2 Approval of new awards

The Senate will take advice from CuPC before proposing the establishment of any new type of validated award to the OU Council.

The OU will consider proposals in the context of its Curriculum Strategy, and the whole range of OU validated awards and their relationship to each other and to the awards of other bodies. In particular, the OU will consider the:

- Characteristics and level of the proposed award, what would both distinguish it from existing awards and relate it to them, and the place of the award in the relevant national qualifications framework;
- Suitability of existing awards for the proposed programme of study;
- Likely demand for, and recognition of, the proposed award by institutions, students and employers.

B The Institutional Approval and Reapproval process

B1 Criteria for initial consideration

The OU selects partnerships against criteria that have been approved by its Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

All initial applications for a new partnership to be approved will require:

- A robust application detailing how the applicant institution meets the five Principles of OU Validation
- Mutual strategic benefit, including support from the associated Academic Faculty
- Evidence of good Organisational and Deliberative Structures, Governance and robust financial sustainability.
- Understanding of and compliance with the UK Higher Education Quality Assurance
- Framework and other regulatory bodies' requirements
- Satisfactory references (these will be requested from any previous or current UK HE partnerships where there is prior experience of delivering provision at Level 4 and above). Where these are not available references will be sought from other partners such as a PSRB.

Although the criteria for initial consideration of institutions wishing to be approved to offer Validated Awards are described here in broad terms, please note that fitness for purpose will be assessed based on the extent to which applicant institutions have developed the policies, structures and procedures necessary to meet the OU's principles for Institutional Approval set out in Section B2.

B1.1 Preconditions concerning financial security, legal standing, and administrative structure

The approval of an institution (as suitable for the conduct of programmes leading to awards of the OU) implies a commitment on the OU's part to ensuring that registered students will be able to complete their programmes.

The OU will seek assurances that the institution's financial status is sufficiently robust to honour its commitments to registered students, that the institution has appropriate

organisational structures to ensure the separation of financial and academic decision making, and that the institution is of appropriate legal status.

This assurance will be sought by undertaking a process of due diligence and the OU reserves the right to seek such information as it considers appropriate to provide reasonable assurance that the institution meets the above criteria.

As part of the approval process, the OU also undertakes an Administrative Audit of the institution.

Where an institution has a current or former relationship with another UK awarding institution for the validation of programmes, the OU will make enquiries of that awarding institution about the standing and effectiveness of the institution seeking Institutional Approval. The reasons for terminating their partnership (if applicable) will also be sought.

B1.2 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

See relevant sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024.

University policies can be found on the [Equality and Diversity website](#).

The OU expects its partners to have Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policies and Procedures (applicable to staff and students) that comply with The Equality Act 2010 and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (where applicable for their region).

Please see Section H for more information.

B1.3 Safeguarding (Student Welfare)

The OU requires all institutions wishing to be approved to offer Validated Awards, to declare whether anyone associated with the institution in any capacity (e.g., staff, student, governor, trustee, volunteer) currently or in the past, have any investigation or allegation against them (substantiated or otherwise) of abuse or neglect against a child or vulnerable adult. Partner institutions will also be required to report this information to the OU, as soon as they become aware of any such incidents (as per the contract between the OU and the partner organisation).

Data regarding safeguarding incidents should be reported on an annual basis to OUVF. A proforma will be sent to you annually, towards the end of the academic year, and we ask that you complete and return this to us by the date specified. Any follow-up queries regarding your submission will be sent to you directly by the OU's Safeguarding department and stored in line with the OU's data protection policy.

B1.4 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.

B1.5 Health and Safety

The OU expects its partner institutions to have Health and Safety policies and procedures, which includes Fire Safety, that are compliant with any local legislation and align with the expectations of the OU.

B2 The principles and process of Institutional Approval

The primary focus of Institutional Approval is to give assurance to the Open University (OU) that an institution is able to provide an appropriate context for the delivery of programmes of study that lead to higher education awards. Institutions seeking approval will be expected to provide evidence in order to demonstrate their alignment with the OU's Principles for Institutional Approval. These are:

1. Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic authority.
2. Appropriate academic organisation and the administrative structure to support it.
3. Provision of an appropriate learning environment.
4. Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement informed by the QAA Quality Code 2024, Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, and Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies.
5. Engagement with the wider and local academic community.

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

There should be a governance structure that protects and assures the integrity of academic decision making and actively encourages student engagement in academic governance.

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

Where the institution is a company, the owner, shareholders or trustees should not exercise direct authority for academic decision-making, since 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. Those involved are fully briefed about their role and the hierarchy of procedures are made clear.

Principle 2: Appropriate academic organisation and the administrative structure to ensure compliance

There should be an independent governing body of the institution that ensures there are adequate controls in place to safeguard institutional sustainability with effective systems for risk management and control.

There should be an organisational structure that is understood within the institution and assigns clear executive, administrative and academic responsibilities to individuals and groups to run the institution's programmes.

There should be an appropriate committee structure to support the delivery and assessment of HE programmes that includes effective student representation at all levels of the structure.

There should be a set of institutional policies, procedures, guidelines, a regulatory framework, and appropriate administrative structures in place to support the delivery of OU Validated Awards. All processes and policies involved in the student lifecycle, from recruitment, through to completion of students study, must comply with the Open University requirements which include, but are not limited to:

- The Open University Regulations for Validated Awards (see section D), and also with legislative, regulatory and statutory requirements including,
- Consumer Protection Law as it applies to Higher Education,
- The Office for Students Conditions of registrations,
- The QAA Quality Code 2024,
- The Office for the Independent Adjudicator Guidance, and other relevant regulatory and statutory requirements for HE providers .
- A periodic review cycle, within the institution that includes approval, for these policies should be established and documented. Such mechanisms should be informed by good practice in the UK Higher Education sector.

There should be a commitment to sharing good practice in teaching and learning and assessment both formally and informally across the institution.

The organisation should have effective systems and processes in place that are not reliant on individuals.

Principle 3: Provision of an appropriate learning environment

The institution should display a commitment to providing an open intellectual community that expects critical reflection and personal educational or professional development by both staff and students in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

The institution must be able to provide sufficient and appropriate facilities, academic learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

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

The institution should have a sufficient number, and appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience which should be in line with OfS Condition of Registration B2. It is expected that academic staff will have sufficient time allocated to teaching and assessment, and will be engaged in designing and delivering programmes will hold an academic qualification or have equivalent experience at the 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 appropriately assessed. The institution should support all students to achieve successful academic and professional/graduate outcomes.

Effective arrangements should be in place for ensuring that approved programmes of study reflect advances in their subject disciplines and in pedagogical practice.

The institution should design and/or deliver high-quality courses. Staff teaching on a programme should ideally have contributed to its design and be involved in student assessment.

The institution 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 the minimisation of disruption to the student experience.

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

Principle 4: Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement informed by the UK Quality Code (2024), Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, and Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies

There should be a system within the institution's academic organisation that defines the processes for academic quality assurance and identifies responsibility for decision-making. Procedures should take account of the QAA Quality Code (2024), OfS Conditions of Registration and any professional, statutory, or regulatory body requirements, including those of The Open University.

The institution's systems should ensure that:

- There are strategic mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting of institutional and programme monitoring and student performance data in line with OfS Condition B3 thresholds, to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently;
- Information and feedback generated from monitoring is assessed and analysed, and used to learn from, 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 exclusive to feedback from the governing body (Board of Trustees), teaching staff; students; External Examiners; external peers and employers; Academic Reviewers, statistical information such as student progression, retention and graduate outcomes; external data sets such as National Student Survey, 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 institution should ensure that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualification frameworks. The institution must be aware of and responsive to UK national and international standards for the subjects it offers, current practice in UK higher education and benchmarks, and (where appropriate) international expectations.

Institutions will need to demonstrate their use of the UK Quality Code (2024), OfS requirements, including conditions of registration and professional requirements as external reference points including apprenticeship standards if appropriate. Institutions should use one or more external expert(s) and employers, where relevant, as advisers to provide impartial, independent scrutiny on the review and development of all provision.

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

Effective teaching and learning should be informed through reflective practice and institutions should enable all academic staff to engage in relevant, timely and appropriate professional development and research that supports programmes development and enhancement, students' learning, and high-quality teaching.

B3 Stages in the approval process

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

The approval process involves scrutiny of the institution's formal documentation submission and culminates in the formal Institutional Approval event.

The OU's devolved model of Validation covered by this handbook requires applicant institutions to have a good understanding and/or experience of delivering Higher Education independently. In the event the OU chooses to withdraw from any stage within the process, the applicant institution will be informed, and the OU may be able to provide specific feedback where areas of development have been identified.

In the event of OU withdrawal, the applicant institution may not reapply for a period of at least 12 months following the decision not to proceed. This is to ensure that sufficient time has passed to allow the institution to review any feedback and implement any recommendations as necessary.

Following initial approval (Stage 1-5 outlined below) , institutions will be subject to periodic Institutional Reapprovals and Administrative Audits (See section B5). Together with Institutional Programme Monitoring (IPM) (see section E), these are key processes that the OU uses to satisfy itself that partner institutions continue to meet compliance, quality

standards and requirements, as well as maintain a suitable environment for the conduct of validated programmes.

Stage 1: Initial Enquiry and Application

The applicant institution contacts the OU for initial consideration with information about itself and the programmes for which it seeks validation, using the application form found in the 'Become a Partner' section of the [Validation Partnerships website](#).

Stage 1a: Initial Enquiry

An initial call may be arranged, and consideration of the proposal will be given to determine suitability, University strategic fit and capacity within the OU. Should all parties wish to proceed, the applicant institution will then be asked for further supporting documentary evidence to aid The OU in undertaking:

- due diligence review of the applicant institution,
- the risk assessment of the partner/partnership proposal,
- scrutiny of high level structures and organisational strategy,
- an assessment of the financial viability of the organisation.

A report on this review and information is submitted to OUVV's Senior Management Team (SMT) for approval to proceed to the next stage.

Stage 1b: Initial Visit

Following application, an Initial Visit may be undertaken by OUVV, either remotely or at the premises of the applicant institution. This enables a more detailed discussion about the partner, their experience, history and background, facilities, requirements and readiness to embark on an approval process.

Stage 2: Advisory Meeting

Following Stages 1a and b, an Advisory Meeting is arranged.

This second stage enables a more detailed discussion about the potential relationship and requirements on both sides of the partnership and discussions regarding potential timescales to proceed to the next stage.

The meeting is divided into three sections, the first dedicated to the Preliminary Administrative Audit (where required) and final Administrative Audit process and requirements, the second section a detailed discussion on the procedures and requirements

for Institutional Approval and the third dedicated to the process and requirements of Programme(s) Validation.

The OU may, at this stage, advise the applicant institution to seek the advice and expertise of independent Higher Education consultancy. This must be organised by the applicant institution and does not guarantee successful Institutional Approval.

The OU will determine at this stage if a Preliminary Administrative Audit and Facilitation Visit is required.

Stage 3: Preliminary Administrative Audit and Facilitation Visit (if required)

Following the completion of Stage 1 and 2 the OU may determine that a Preliminary Administrative Audit and Facilitation Visit is required.

These visits provide early scrutiny of the institution in order to provide developmental feedback prior to Stage 4: Administrative Audit and Stage 5: Institutional Approval.

Stage 3 involves desk-based scrutiny of the documentation for both the Preliminary Administrative Audit and Institutional Approval by experts within the OU and the Facilitation Visit Panel.

Stage 3a: Preliminary Administrative Audit

The Preliminary Administrative Audit ensures minimum compliance with the requirements of the OU, legislation and other regulatory bodies. It is expected that at this stage there may still be some policies and procedures in development, and feedback on these will be provided following the Preliminary Audit

The outcome of this Preliminary Administrative Audit, in all cases, is a report setting out any conditions that the applicant institution may be required to satisfy, prior to proceeding to the final event, as well as any further development work that may be required in order to prepare a full submission for the final Administrative Audit. A timetable for the next stage of the process will also be outlined.

Stage 3b: The Facilitation Visit

The Facilitation Visit will explore the applicant institution's readiness to proceed to the final event of Institutional Approval. An OU appointed review panel will provide advice about academic structures, processes and systems for the pursuit of approved status.

Central to considerations are the institution's processes for internal quality assurance and the ways in which these can be brought into alignment with the OU's processes. Where the institution is required to make major adjustments to its policies and procedures or infrastructure, a period of development will be necessary.

The outcome of this stage, in all cases, is a report setting out what further development work is required in order to prepare a full submission for OU approval and to set a timetable for the rest of the process. This report will be noted by Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC).

Format of Stage 3a and 3b

Dependant on the support needs of the Partner Institution and the review requirements, this may require online meetings or face to face visits to the Partner site (or a combination of both). Face to face visits normally take place over 1-2 days.

The institution must provide a draft of its submission for both the Preliminary Administrative Audit and Facilitation Visit, electronically at least six weeks prior to the visits.

The submission must include all the documents (whether finalised or in draft) that are required for the Administrative Audit ([see Stage 4](#)) and Institutional Approval ([see Stage 5](#)) and must include a Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and appendices. The OU provides a [self-evaluation document template](#) that the applicant institution should complete. This self-evaluation document will cover the following:

- Institutional mission, strategy and purpose
- The track record of the organisation in managing quality and standards
- The means by which the organisation sets and maintains academic standards
- How the organisation ensures and enhances academic quality

Stage 4: Administrative Audit

The purpose of the Administrative Audit, which must take place before Stage 5: Institutional Approval, and forms a part of the process to approve an institution as a partner, is to:

- Assess the operational and management infrastructure of the institution, including the support in place for students studying OU validated awards
- Assess the policies, procedures, and guidance documents for staff and students relevant to the OU award to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and Regulatory requirements
- Confirm that it is fit for the purpose of supporting OU validated programmes
- Conclude due diligence checks.

The Administrative Audit covers a wide range of administrative, financial and governance issues, including (but not limited to) financial viability, the student journey, health and safety, safeguarding, administrative staffing and processes, IT structures, support and security, and communications.

The Administrative Audit includes:

1. A desk-based scrutiny of the institution's submitted documentation by a team of expert readers within the OU
2. An online demonstration to assess the data security and compliance of the institution's virtual learning environment, website and student record system,
3. A visit to the institution by a team of OU auditors to test, clarify and confirm the information submitted in the documentation, confirm examination process and storage facilities and assess the appropriateness of site facilities particularly in relation to health and safety, security and safeguarding. Any outstanding due diligence of policies and procedures will also be explored at the visit.

Administrative Audit Documentation

Information will be requested from institutions to assist with the Administrative Audit and in preparation for the visit.

The information and documentation (which is discussed during the Advisory Visit) will be requested well in advance of the Administrative Audit date. proforma mapping document will be provided to the Institution detailing all of the required documentation required for the audit. Questionnaires and Compliance Statements will also need to be completed and submitted.

Submission documents should be submitted via Microsoft Teams and full instructions about how to do this will be provided. .

The OU should receive the submission no later than eleven weeks prior to the date of the Administrative Audit visit so that it can be considered and reviewed against relevant legislation by a team of Expert Readers before the visit takes place. Supplementary information may be needed after the documentation has been examined and this will be requested if required.

The required submissions will fall into the following areas of scrutiny:

- Financial status, planning, other external funding arrangements
- Student life cycle, to include student handbook, admissions, complaints and appeals, Recognised Prior Learning, and examination and assessment processes
- Student Record System and Virtual Learning Environment

- Publicity (including compliance with Consumer Protection Law) in all published materials and online tools such as the institution's website)
- Health and Safety (including Fire Safety & Prevention)
- Safeguarding
- Prevent/Acts of terrorism and violent extremism prevention
- Information Rights - Data Retention, Data Protection and Freedom of Information
- Business continuity
- Recruitment strategy
- Public Interest Disclosure
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Administrative staffing structure
- Mandatory training
- Student recruitment

All policies and procedures must be compliant with relevant legislation such as:

- Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008
- Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013
- Unfair terms (Part 2 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015)
- Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005 – Recording of Fire Safety Arrangements
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation

Process

The institution will be provided with information about the audit once a date has been agreed; this will include details of the required documentation, draft agenda and the process which will be followed.

The audit will include discussions with Senior Managers of the Institution as well as relevant members of administrative staff responsible for the areas of scrutiny as detailed previously.

It should also include a tour of administrative areas, such as the examinations office and secure storage facilities, student recruitment and support team areas and offices, the Learning Resources Centre, as well as any on- site student accommodation and student facilities.

This will allow the OU team to become familiar with the operation of administrative processes, meet members of staff, and provide assurances for the support, suitability of facilities, and safety of students when onsite.

This audit visit is usually completed within one to two days. For larger institutions (e.g., with multiple sites and localities) this may take longer.

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

A separate online demonstration of the student record system and virtual learning environment will normally be arranged prior to the audit visit.

Outcomes

The auditors will agree a set of Conditions based on the outcome of the submission and subsequent discussions. Where good practice is identified, Commendations will also be made.

Where Conditions are set, a submission to address these Conditions must be received by the specified date and must be approved by the OU as satisfactorily met before Institutional Approval is granted.

The conclusions from the Administrative Audit will also be fed back to the panel who will be conducting the Institutional Approval.

Conditions for the Administrative Audit need to be fully cleared before the prospective partner institution may market any OU validated programmes or students are permitted to register for any OU validated programmes.

Follow-up

When required, a follow-up visit, meetings or demonstrations may be undertaken by the auditors to confirm that Conditions have been met. This provides an opportunity to examine areas that have been subject to Conditions and/or where development was being undertaken at the time of the Administrative Audit – for example, the introduction of new IT systems, buildings or facilities in development.

Changes to processes, policies, guidance documents or infrastructures as a result of changes within the institution or due to regulatory or legislative changes, should reported to the OU as soon as the change is known (if these are pre-contractual/contractual documents between the Institution and students, students need to be consulted and changes agreed). Documents revised as a result of changes should be submitted to the OU for review and approval.

As part of the Institutional and Programme Monitoring process, institutions are also expected to provide a statement of any substantial changes to their administrative systems, structures, policies and practices, or confirmation that they have not changed (if these are pre-contractual/contractual documents between the Institution and students, students need to be consulted and changes agreed).

The OU reserves the right to ask for audited accounts and conduct due diligence of the partner institutions at regular intervals as part of the University's review and assurance processes.

Stage 5: Institutional Approval

The final stage of Institutional Approval activity will be an approval visit to the institution by a panel of experts determined by the OU.

The institution must provide its submission for Institutional Approval electronically at least six weeks before the date of the final approval meeting. This should include a self-evaluation document. The OU provides a [self-evaluation document template](#) that the institution should complete. This self-evaluation document will cover the following:

- Institutional mission, strategy and purpose
- The track record of the organisation in managing quality and standards
- The means by which the organisation sets and maintains academic standards
- How the organisation ensures and enhances academic quality

More specifically, the OU will be looking at an institution's self-evaluation for analysis of:

- How well the institution has demonstrated its alignment with the five Principles for Institutional Approval
- How effectively the institution ensures that approved programmes of study are maintaining a satisfactory standard and are being taught, managed and operated satisfactorily in the light of, for example, the UK Quality Code 2024, Office for Students, Subject Benchmark Statements and Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements
- How effectively the institution ensures that approved programmes of study reflect advances in their subject disciplines and in pedagogical practice
- How the institution satisfies itself that new and existing work is adequately resourced
- What provision is made for the welfare of students and for enriching their experience of higher education.

Institutional Approval panel members are asked to review the institution's documentation before the meeting and identify the issues for the agenda. The panel will be asked for its feedback in advance (which will be shared with the institution), although this does not preclude other matters being raised during the meetings.

Institutional Approval Documentation

Information will be requested from institutions to assist with the Institution Approval and in preparation for the visit.

The information will be requested well in advance of the visit. The OU should receive it no later than six weeks before the date of the visit, so that it can be considered and interrogated before the visit takes place. Supplementary information may be needed after the initial documentation has been examined; this will be requested if required.

Submission documents should be submitted via Microsoft Teams and full instructions about how to do this will be provided. The final submission should be received no later than **six weeks** prior to the event. They should be sent in clearly annotated folders. Care should be taken to ensure document titles are short in length to enable them to be accessed easily.

Details of the required documents will be provided at the Advisory Visit but fall into the following areas of scrutiny:

- Provision of an appropriate learning environment:
 - Student guidance and support
 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy & assessment policy
 - Staff recruitment, training and development
 - Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic authority
 - Organogram diagrams for governance and management, organisational structure
 - Role descriptors for key senior posts
 - Appropriate academic organisational and the administrative structure to support it
 - Five-year strategic plan. This should include the mission and strategic vision, goals, measures of success and financial objectives.
- Academic Regulations that align to the OU template. This should include the following:
 - Admissions policy and procedure
 - Admissions Appeals and Complaints policy and procedure
 - Periods of registration

- Attendance requirements
- Assessment policy
- Academic Misconduct policy
- Extenuating circumstances policy
- Membership of Boards of Examiners
- Academic Appeals and Complaints policy and procedure
- Ethics policy and procedure
- Recognition of prior learning
- Terms of Reference & Organisational Chart for:
 - Governing Body of the Institution
 - Academic Board
 - Sub-committees e.g. Higher Education Committee
 - Quality Committee
 - Course Teams
 - Assessment boards
- Robust and rigorous Quality Assurance and enhancement informed by the UK Quality Code 2024, and requirements of the Office for Students
 - Risk registers.
 - Summary of quality processes relating to Higher Education. To include development, monitoring, approval and review of programmes.
 - Student feedback mechanisms.
 - Proposal for the briefing and induction of external examiners.
 - External examiner reports.
- Student Protection Plan (SPP);
 - We require all partner institutions to have their own risk assessment and SPP in place in the event of course closure, institutional closure or the end of a validation relationship with the OU. This is a requirement even if the institution does not have plans to register with the Office for Students, the OU's own principal regulator.
 - It must include course changes, withdrawal and site moves, detail the options for students to transfer to an alternative provider where the risk of whole institution failure is assessed as high or medium and explain any refund and compensation options.
 - Where the closure of the course is due to the partnership with the OU coming to an end, the wording must reflect the OU's own SPP: The OU will work with any validated partner institute whose relationship with us is being brought to an end

with the aim of ensuring that you are able to complete your qualification or a suitable alternative.

- All SPPs will be reviewed as part of the Institutional Approval.
- Recommendations and comments for further enhancement may be provided. SPPs should be reviewed on an annual basis. Any changes or updates made will need to be submitted to the OU. All SPPs need to be published on a partner institutions website.
- Office for Students Access and Participation Plans / Statements
- Relations with the wider academic community
 - QAA Quality Code mapping.
 - Reports from external agencies including Professional Statutory recognised Bodies (PSRBs').
- Sample validation documents:
 - Details of programmes to be validated.
 - Sample programme handbook.
 - Sample programme specification.
 - Sample programme review documentation.

During the Institutional Approval event, the Panel should have access to the following documents within the base room:

- Institutional documents
 - Examples of assessed student work if applicable.
 - Recent annual monitoring/IPM reports, if applicable.
 - Minutes and agendas for committee meetings to evidence the working practice of the governance structure.

A copy of the [Guidelines on Provision of Electronic Submission Documents for Institution Approval or Reapproval Events](#) can be found on the OUVF website.

The Institutional Approval Visit

In order to explore how an institution is proposing to meet, or is fulfilling, the requirements for Institutional Approval, the panel will meet the groups set out below.

The Institutional Approval panel will include external representation but will be chaired by a senior OU member of staff and will include a member of CuPC. The balance of membership will be weighted towards OU membership, and its composition will be decided on the basis of the requirements for expertise and experience.

An indication of typical issues for discussion is included, however other issues may also be explored, and the panel will often wish to explore the same issues with more than one group.

Meetings with senior management and Board of Trustees (or equivalent body)

Issues to be discussed with representatives from the governing body of the institution will typically include:

- Institutional mission, strategic planning and development
- Institutional management, policy making, and executive and academic structures
- Commitment to equal opportunities
- Staffing and staff appraisal and development
- Finance and resources.

Meetings with members of the academic board or board of studies

Issues to be discussed with those responsible for the standard and quality of programmes will cover:

- 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.

Meetings with those responsible for programme development and monitoring

Issues to be discussed with those responsible for programme development and monitoring², such as an academic standards committee, include:

- 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 (PDP)
- The role of external input and feedback from students and, where applicable, employers in programme development and enhancement.

² OUVF recognise that teaching staff are often responsible for programme development and monitoring; therefore this meeting and the teaching staff meeting can sometimes be combined.

Meetings with teaching staff

Issues to be explored with representatives of teaching staff will include:

- The staff experience of the institution's academic community
- Understanding and ownership of quality assurance processes
- Opportunities to contribute to programme development
- Staff development and research.

Meetings with students including student representatives

Issues to be explored with students will include:

- The student experience of the institution's learning environment including, where applicable, work placements
- 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 disability support (SEND)
- Adequacy of learning resources.

Meetings with employer representatives

When an institution will use apprenticeship delivery for some or all of its Higher Education programmes, it will be necessary to include a meeting with employer representatives. This may also be appropriate for delivery of Foundation Degrees. This would enable the Panel to explore how these relationships are managed to ensure the student experience.

Review of learning resources

The activity will also include a review of the teaching and learning resources and other facilities of the institution, including library, computing facilities and Virtual Learning Environment provision.

B4 Decisions arising from Institutional Approval meetings

The approval panel will agree its recommendation regarding Institutional Approval for consideration by the OU's CuPC and this will be reported to the institution at the end of the final meeting. Once a conclusion has been collectively agreed by the panel, panel members will not raise further issues or make substantive amendments to any conditions of approval or to recommendations to the institution. CuPC may, in the course of their considerations, decide to amend or add Conditions and Recommendations.

Final approval by CuPC will be subject to the satisfaction of any Conditions set at both the Administrative Audit and Institutional Approval. Final approval is also subject to the signed institutional agreement between the OU and the institution and in line with the Approval Letter issue from the Director.

Following recommendation of Institutional Approval, the institution can then seek validation for programmes leading to OU validated awards.

If, following Institutional Approval, programme approval is not achieved, or recruitment to approved programmes is not successful, approval status will be reviewed within one calendar year of the date of the final approval meeting. The partner institution will be required to meet its financial commitments to the OU for the duration of the agreement.

Approval

Where initial approval is recommended, this will normally be 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

A recommendation for approval may be conditional on further work by the institution to be completed before approval is confirmed. A condition is an activity fundamental to the quality of the programme and student experience which must be successfully completed and approved by the panel prior to students registering on the programme.

Institutions will be allowed up to two attempts to fulfil the conditions of approval (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.

Conditions for the Institutional Approval need to be fully cleared before the prospective partner institution may market any OU Validated Programmes or students are permitted to register for any OU validated programmes.

Recommendations to the institution

The panel may also make recommendations to assist institutional development. A recommendation is an activity/area for the institution to explore, which focusses on enhancement of the student experience or institutional environment. Recommendations can also be made at programme level at (re)validation.

Recommendations will be followed-up in the institution's annual monitoring/IPM reports to the OU.

Institutional Approval reports

A draft report on the outcomes of the approval visit will be sent to the institution for comment on matters of factual accuracy before being presented to the OU's CuPC.

Non-approval of an Institution

In circumstances where a conclusion to not recommend an institution for approval has been collectively agreed by the panel, the Chair will report the findings to the institution representatives at the end of the final meeting.

Within four weeks following the event, a report will be submitted to the institution that provides detailed feedback on areas for development and highlights the rationale behind the decision for non-approval. The institution will be required to meet its financial commitments to the OU to date.

Where an institution would like to reapply for Institutional Approval, then a period of 12 months will need to have elapsed before the proceedings can begin.

B5 Institutional Reapproval

An Institutional Reapproval is required in the academic year leading up to the expiry of the previous Institutional Approval, unless there are exceptional reasons for holding an earlier review, then an Interim Review (See B5.1) will be conducted. The process for an Institutional Reapproval is very similar to that for the Institutional Approval, including the holding of an Advisory Meeting ([see section B3 Stage 2](#)) and an Administrative Audit.

Administrative Audit

The Administrative Audit forms part of the process to reapprove an institution as a partner and must take place before the Institutional Reapproval. The process followed is the same as that outlined in [Stage 4](#). In addition, partners will be asked to complete a Partner Enquiry Form prior to the Administrative Audit so that due diligence checks may be carried out.

Institutional Reapproval

In addition to the evidence listed for an Institutional Approval, documentation for Institutional Reapprovals must include the following:

- Self-evaluation document for Institutional Reapproval (template available)
- A year's series of minutes and papers of key committees that evidence effective engagement with the OU's principles of Institutional Approval and with the UK Quality Code 2024, and that demonstrate a consistent attention to quality assurance and enhancement.
- An account of the institution's response to any issues arising from external examiners reports, the attendance of University representatives at Board of Examiners, Quality Assurance Committees, Academic Boards and Programme Committees at the institution in the year leading up to the Institutional Reapproval.
- An evaluation of the outcomes of all external reviews, including QAA/OfS engagements, accreditation, inspection, or reviews, either of the institution or of its OU validated provision.
- An evaluation of the outcomes of annual monitoring/institutional and programme monitoring in the last three years together with an institutional overview of these, including an account of how issues have been addressed.

The institution should also invite the representative student body to contribute towards the self-evaluation document or to write a separate document reflecting on arrangements for teaching and learning in respect of OU validated awards and the student experience. This

should be included in the papers. If the representative student body declines to contribute, this should be recorded.

An Administrative Audit is held as a part of the process. The Administrative Audit must be undertaken before the Institutional Reapproval and follows the process outlined in [Stage 4](#).

B5.1 Interim Review

An Interim Review may be triggered, outside of the Institutional Reapproval schedule, to consider 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.
- Wide re-structuring in terms of senior leadership and institutional governance.
- Unsatisfactory outcomes from annual monitoring/IPM submission.
- Significant changes to administrative staffing structure or processes that have an impact on the quality of the management and delivery of Higher Education
- Across the organisation, issues that have an impact on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment or the student experience.
- Issues that have the potential to impact on the future on 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

An Interim Review will usually require the Institution to submit documentation for review by the OU as well as a panel visit from the OU. Details would be provided to the Institution.

B5.2 Institutional Approval of overseas institutions and validation of non-English programmes

General principles

The approval of overseas institutions and of foreign providers located within the UK is subject to the same principles, regulations and requirements as all other institutions.

Institutions that are located outside the UK will need to provide written evidence that the partnership with the OU has the approval of the competent governmental authorities and is not contrary to any national laws. The institution will be responsible for consulting these authorities and securing any legal approvals at its own expense.

The OU will not normally consider approving an institution if its validated awards are unlikely to be recognised in the host country.

Institutions may seek validation of programmes that are designed to also lead to other awards, such as those leading to professional qualifications and US or European degrees and diplomas. Although dual awards are permitted by the OU, such programmes will only be considered for validation if they can meet in full the OU's requirements for validated awards.

All agreements between a partner institution and the OU shall be governed in accordance with UK law. All disputes arising from such agreements, or in relation to them, shall be subject to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the UK courts. Notwithstanding this requirement, in the event of a dispute, both the partner institution and the OU would be expected to negotiate in good faith and endeavour to resolve the matter amicably.

Any additional costs that the OU incurs in sustaining an overseas partnership must be met, directly or indirectly, by the partner institution. The OU will agree with each institution the financial arrangements to be set out in the agreement.

B5.3 Language of instruction and assessment

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

Where the programme (or any significant part of it) is to be delivered and assessed in a language other than English, whether overseas or in the UK, it will be necessary for evidence to be provided that there is a sufficient number of people fluent in the delivery language and English, with subject expertise at the appropriate level, with first-hand knowledge of the standards of UK degrees and from sufficiently diverse backgrounds to:

- Enable balanced initial validation and subsequent revalidation panels to be formed
- Provide a sufficient number of External Examiners over a number of years
- Deal with any student appeals.

It must also be established that there is a sufficiently large and experienced bilingual peer group to allow the OU to validate and monitor programmes.

English will be the language of communication between the OU and all institutions. English must be used for key documentation including institutional agreements, submissions for Institutional Approval and validation, definitive programme documents, annual monitoring/IPM, External Examiners' reports, registration and conferment records, and minutes of assessment boards deciding final awards. Institutional Approval, Institutional Reapproval, validation and revalidation panel discussions will be carried out in English.

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

Except where otherwise agreed, translation of materials will be the responsibility of the partner institution at its own expense. The partner institution must ensure that any translations are made faithfully and accurately by a competent and independent translator.

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

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

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

IELTS Score³	TOEFL iBT® Equivalent Score⁴	Cambridge English Scale Equivalent Score⁵
5.5	46-59	162
6.0	60-78	169
6.5	79-93	176

B5.4 Approval of new teaching facilities and sites

When a partner institution expands the number of teaching venues or additional sites and locations between their Institutional Reapproval visits, a site approval visit may be required. The OU must be consulted in advance of sites being used by validated students.

Partners should consult with their SQPM in the first instance and complete the OUVP Site Approval Questionnaire; this will then inform the review and approval approach taken by OUVP, dependant on the type of site and its utilisation. Format and costings for the site approval will then be shared by OUVP with the partner. Ahead of a site approval visit, partners may be required to submit updated policies such as Health & Safety, Business Continuity, Safeguarding and IT infrastructure, which will be submitted for review and

³ International English Language Testing System

⁴ 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/>

⁵ <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/461626-cambridge-english-qualifications-comparing-scores-to-ielts.pdf>

feedback from an OU Expert Reader. Where a site approval visit is not required, partners are asked to complete a Compliance Statement.

All site approvals require reporting by OUVF to CuPC. Following approval, the OUVF Approval and Validation Agreement will be amended accordingly.

C Procedures following Institutional Approval or Reapproval

C1 Institutional agreement

C1.1 Signing an agreement

Following Institutional Approval or Institutional Reapproval, a formal institutional agreement must be signed between the OU and the institution. This sets out the terms and conditions under which the OU agrees to confer partner institution status.

C1.2 OU requirements

The OU has these requirements regarding the approval and monitoring of partner institutions' publicity materials/publicly available information:

General requirements

Institutions cannot publish any co-branded publicity materials or produce any materials that imply in any way that they have been approved by the OU before the OU has confirmed their Institutional Approval via the formal approval letter from the Director.

Once they are formally approved by the OU, all institutions must publicise their relationship with the OU in all the relevant materials, whether in print or online.

Similarly, partner institutions cannot publicise a programme of study as being validated by the OU before validation has been confirmed via the formal programme approval letter. New programmes that are pending approval can be advertised as being 'subject to validation by The Open University' however, institutions cannot enrol students onto the programme until any conditions are met. Once conditions are met, any changes to content and delivery must follow the change process articulated in D6 of the Handbook for Validated Awards.

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

Compliance with the OU publicity requirements is a key element of the administrative audit and Institutional Reapproval processes. Our ongoing due diligence checks seek to ensure

that all publicly available material is compliant with Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements.

C1.3 Use of the OU logo and wording

Partner institutions 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 the Partnership Engagement Manager at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk. A general guide is that the OU logo should not be used on any Partner's own correspondence. Use of the logo in this manner, for example on letters, could be misleading to applicants and students as it gives the impression that the decision or content of the letter has been made or endorsed by the OU, whilst this is not the case.

Partner institutions 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."

Further guidance, as well as additional content regarding The Open University and its validated provision can be obtained from the Partnership Engagement Manager at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk.

C1.4 Sign-off and monitoring processes

To ensure the accuracy of all publicly available information referring to its validated provision the OU must be involved in the sign off of institution publicity, as detailed in the table below.

The table also includes details of the audits and checks carried out by the OU. Furthermore, it outlines the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the sign-off and monitoring processes, both at the OU and in the institutions.

	Activity	OU requirements
1.	Annual Prospectuses	Partner institutions are required to check and confirm accuracy and compliance (CMA as well as OU brand and relationship descriptions) of all printed or online annual brochures and prospectuses to OUVP via OUVP-info@open.ac.uk . The OU will carry out regular spot checks to ensure accuracy and compliance of such prospectuses. Amendments may be required where necessary.
2.	Student Handbooks⁶	Student handbooks related to OU validated programmes must be published on publicly accessible web pages (where no password is required).
3.	Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University	An up-to-date version of the regulations must be made publicly available on institution websites (on a page where no password is required), with a link provided from each programme page. The OU will carry out regular spot checks to ensure that the most up-to-date version of the regulations is publicly available. Amendments may be required where necessary
4.	Programme Specifications	All programme specifications must be made readily available on your public facing website where no password is required to access the information. They should be clearly signposted if embedded in programme handbooks.
5.	Leaflets, external advertisements	We do not normally approve leaflets and external adverts prior to publication. However, these will be routinely checked during visits at the partner institution and any issues in relation to these will be reported to the particular partner institution.

⁶ See Section D1.10 on guidance on Student Handbooks

6.	Institution websites	<p>Partner institutions are required to check and confirm website content accuracy and compliance (with CMA and OU requirements) annually via OUVP-info@open.ac.uk.</p> <p>The OU will carry out regular spot checks to ensure accuracy and compliance. Amendments may be required.</p> <p>Partner institutions must inform the Partnership Engagement Manager at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk where significant changes are to be made to their website (e.g. web re-development or rebranding).</p>
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Please note: Institutions are required to keep a record of all the printed and electronic information produced to describe their validated programmes and their relationship with the OU. They must keep this information for the maximum period for which students might be registered on the relevant programmes.

Institutions are required to ensure that the above referenced publications are current and accurate and are sent to the Partnership Engagement Manager (PEM) in a timely manner before implementation e.g. a prospectus being published for September 2026 would need review from the PEM before being finalised for publication. Further discussions and advice can be held with the PEM.

The documentation listed in the above table should be made available on public facing areas for the student research and application stage ([CMA clauses 4.6-4.22 – consumer law advice for Higher Education Providers](#)). This forms part of the precontractual material information. Following publication, any amendments made to the contractual material information need to be considered carefully, as express agreement may need to be gained from applicants and current students. You must highlight the changes before the student signs a contract or (if they have already accepted an offer/signed contract) the opportunity to withdraw without penalty if they do not accept these changes.

C2 Information about the OU to students and staff

Information relating to validated provision and the nature of the institution's relationship with the OU, including the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University, and student handbooks, must be made available to students, staff and other interested parties. This will include details of the respective responsibilities of the institution and the OU.

The [Student's Guide to Studying on a Programme Validated by The Open University](#) aims to introduce students to the OU, as well as explain what being registered on a programme or single registerable module validated by the OU means to them.

An electronic copy of the guide must be circulated annually to all the students registered on a programme validated by the OU. In addition, the electronic version of the guide must be made available and clearly signposted on the institution's website.

Where programmes are delivered outside the United Kingdom clear information must be made available about the language of instruction and assessment. Such information must be published in both English and the language of the country where the institution is situated.

C2.1 Information about engagements with the QAA, Office for Students (OfS) and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

In respect of information about engagements with the QAA, OfS, PSRBs, and other external agencies, partner institutions are required to:

- Inform the OU in advance of all external audit, accreditation, inspection or review, either of the institution or that will include provision validated by the OU
- Provide draft self-evaluation documents in good time for the OU to consider and offer comment, where appropriate
- Copy to the OU all communications from the external agency or body following the review, including initial judgements or findings and draft reports
- Provide the OU with an opportunity to consider a draft action plan and to make comment, as appropriate
- Keep the OU informed of progress with the action plan and any further communication with the external agency or body
- Provide the OU with a copy of their Office for Students registration or refusal letter (including details of any conditions of registration) and copies of any other communications from Office for Students, including Access and Participation Plans.

C3 Relationships with University staff

Following approval, the OU will provide advice, guidance, academic support and oversight of quality and standards. This will be provided by Academic Reviewers, SQPMs, QPMs and other University representatives, who support the quality assurance and enhancement of validated provision.

All individuals have the right to work in an environment which is free from bullying and harassment. The OU is committed to providing a workplace in which all individuals are given the dignity and respect to which they are entitled. Anyone who believes that they have been subject to conduct which they regard as bullying and/or harassment should consult the [Open University's Bullying and Harassment Policy](#).

C3.1 Attendance of University representatives at key committees and boards

In addition to boards of examiners, at which decisions on OU awards are made, University representatives will attend a some or all of key committees and boards such as academic boards, programme committees or quality standing committees or their equivalents. The meetings to be attended by University representatives will usually be decided at planning meetings between the OU and the partner institutions.

The Institution will provide the OU with all papers and minutes of such committees in the year leading up to Institutional Reapproval.

Terms of reference of University representatives at key committees at partner institutions are to:

- Attend board and committee meetings of the institution as per prior agreement
- Observe the conduct of the boards and committees in accordance with the institutional procedures
- Provide a source of 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 institution and the OU to policies, procedures or circumstances which seem likely to impede the effective functioning of the boards and committees or the discharge of their responsibilities
- Report to the OU, including Institutional Reapproval panels.

The OU representative will prepare a checklist report, noting whether:

- The meeting was competent and quorate to conduct business in accordance with the institutional structure and procedures, and was conducted in accordance with its agreed terms of reference
- An appropriate officer took minutes
- Everyone was familiar with and understood the terms of reference for the meeting
- The agenda was appropriate and adequately supported by relevant documentation
- Members had appropriate opportunity to familiarise themselves with the documentation to participate in the decision-making process
- If applicable, minutes and follow-on action from previous meetings were dealt with
- There was evidence of appropriate record keeping
- All participating members present at the meeting were given an adequate and structured opportunity to contribute to discussion
- There are any other observations.

A copy of the report prepared by the OU representative on the conduct of meetings will be submitted simultaneously both to the institution and to the OU.

C4 Institutional post-approval changes

Arrangements approved at Institutional Approval or Reapproval are usually expected to remain in place for the duration of the approval period. Where material changes are required, for example: for enhancement purposes, to comply with external stakeholder requirements, or to address a concern, it is likely that the OU will undertake an Interim Review.

C4.1 Interim Reviews

See [section B5.1](#).

C4.2 Suspension of Registration

If the OU has concerns about an institution or a programme within it, it may decide to suspend student registrations. Concerns could be related to quality, academic standards, reputation, or financial matters. Partners will be required to refer to their Student Protection Plan to allow current students to continue and complete their studies or compensated if this is not possible). Where there are delays in a Partner meeting any conditions of Institutional Reapproval or administrative audit, new registrations may also be suspended.

C5 Exiting the Partnership

If a partner institution decides to exit from the validation arrangement with the OU, in accordance with the Validation Agreement, written notification should be submitted to the Director of OUVV and SQPM/QPM at the earliest opportunity. The institution should provide written notice, signed by the institution's Accountable Officer or equivalent and state a reason for the exit, along with any other relevant key information.

In any exit scenario the consideration to any existing students should be paramount. Both parties may agree for currently validated programmes to be taught-out over an agreed period. Alternatively, it may be possible for students to transfer their studies to another awarding body (e.g. if the institution obtains their own degree awarding powers). [For further information see section D8.11 Programme closure](#). The SQPM/QPM will work with the institution to ensure no students are disadvantaged and that communication with all relevant bodies (including students) is managed.

If the OU decides to withdraw from the partnership, it will be guided by section 18.

Termination of the Partnership Agreement.

Institutions should ensure that due consideration is given to the contents of their Student Protection Plan to mitigate any risks associated with exiting.

D Validation and Revalidation

D1 Principles for Validation and Revalidation

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

Validation and revalidation panel members will refer to the principles from the early stages of the process until the final approval event. The principles inform the agenda for events as well as the structure of (re)validation reports.

The principles relate to:

- 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.

D1.1 The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study

Rationale and aims

Validated programmes will reflect the mission, strategic direction, and academic goals of institutions, and they will 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 will be appropriate to the award to which they lead.

Learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes for the programme will be clearly identified and appropriate to the aims of the programme. They will include the development, to the level required for the award, of a body of knowledge and understanding appropriate to the field of study and reflecting academic, professional and occupational standards in that field as well as [subject benchmarks](#). The levels are defined in the [QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#) which are mandatory and partners in either Wales or Scotland need to align with the relevant national framework, the [SEEC Credit Level Descriptors](#) is also useful guidance.

Learning outcomes will also relate to the relevant external reference points and the requirements of any professional or statutory body requirements, and to European reference points as appropriate.

Generic transferable skills

Learning outcomes will incorporate generic transferable intellectual and practical abilities and skills, appropriate to the level of the proposed award.

External reference points

Learning outcomes will relate to the relevant external reference points, including the QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, and the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors.

Learning outcomes will relate to the requirements of any professional or statutory body requirements, apprenticeship standards – knowledge, skills and behaviours, and to European reference points as appropriate.

English Language Requirements

[See Section B5.3 Language of instruction and assessment.](#)

D1.2 The curriculum and structure of the programme of study

Curriculum design and content

Curriculum design and content of validated programmes will 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 will also take account of students' progression to employment, research or further study, and personal development.

The curriculum design and content will be informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements. Mechanisms will exist to maintain the necessary links. Partners should use external expertise such as employers and professional bodies, in their programme development process.

A programme must demonstrate balance in relation to academic and practical elements, to personal development and academic outcomes, and to breadth and depth in the curriculum. It must also demonstrate coherence to ensure that the overall experience of a student is logical and has an 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) and how it is integrated in the programme will be specified.

The curriculum must also specify any proposals for any dissertation or written projects, including approval of chosen topics and arrangements for supervision.

Programme structure

The programme documentation will indicate links with other programmes (e.g. common foundation year, common modular structure, top-up award) and opportunities for transfer and progression. Where 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 are to be clearly articulated (this may include the provision of programme specifications for the Foundation Degree feeding into the Top-up degree).

The documentation should include provision for exit awards. Exit awards must have their own learning outcomes articulated within the programme specification.

Adaptations will be made to the structure in order to meet the needs of students following different modes of study and with different backgrounds at entry or special educational needs and disabilities.

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

Where relevant, the structure will specify 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.

Provision for Work-based Learning (including placement) or study abroad

Where appropriate (and with reference to QAA Work-based Learning and Apprenticeships Guidance) provision for supervised work experience, community experience or experience abroad will be made, and the way that such elements fit with the rest of the programme must be clarified. 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. Work-based learning quality assurance documents should be included in the documentation submission for the (re)validation event. For example, but not limited to, handbooks or guides created for the employers, mentors, and students.

D1.3 Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning strategies for validated programmes will 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 the proposed programme.

The institution must have in place policies that will 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. These will 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 SQPM immediately of any changes in staffing levels on OU validated programmes. They must also inform their SQPM when they appoint a new member of staff on the OU validated programme and should send a copy of the CV along with the completed cover sheet (using the new staff proforma template). Partners must also inform their SQPM when staff at Partner Institutions take Industrial action and if this has any impact on students.

Staff must be properly and appropriately qualified and experienced, and their teaching must be informed by their active participation in research or relevant scholarly, professional or consultancy activities. It is expected that academic staff engaged in designing, leading and

delivering programmes will hold an academic qualification or have equivalent experience and can demonstrate a firm understanding of teaching and assessment at the level above which they are delivering on the validated programme/module. Where a (re)validation or Institutional (Re)approval has concerns over the qualifications and experience of staff delivering OU validated award/module, a condition may be implemented to ask an Institution to rectify this.

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 collecting student feedback, implementing changes and communicating them to students.

There must be an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the provision. There will be clear and effective arrangements for academic support and supervision, including the arrangement for student support and supervision during any work-based learning or study abroad, or for those studying individual modules for credit, where applicable.

Where 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 (PDP) is visible in the programme documentation (whether discrete or embedded).

D1.4 Principles related to programme management and monitoring

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

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

Institutions 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 acting upon any difficulties which may arise from changes to the staff team. There must be student representation at all levels of 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 wish to meet with students and hear their views. Student representatives must be given adequate induction to their role and support in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Mechanisms must be in place to ensure that recommendations for appropriate action are followed up to remedy any shortcomings identified as a result of these engagements.

Where programmes have employer links, such as in the case of foundation degrees and work-based learning, there will be mechanisms in place for obtaining and acting upon feedback from employers.

Engagement with External Examiners and consideration of External Examiners' reports constitute a key mechanism through which institutions routinely monitor the effectiveness of programmes.

Consideration may also be given to feedback received from engagement with the programme by the academic reviewer.

D1.5 Admissions and transfer

All validated programmes must have effective criteria and arrangements for admission that relate to the level of the programme, or 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 will also give guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

D1.6 Assessment regulations

All institutions were required to comply with [The Open University's regulations](#). Some institutions will be 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 the learning outcomes of the programme and achieved the standard required for the award. The assessment process must be undertaken by impartial internal and External Examiners, who are competent to make judgements about the performance of individual students both in relation to 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 Open University and should be clearly articulated in relevant documentation reviewed at (re)validation.

The assessment strategy

The assessment strategy will have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities. The assessment process will enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes. Criteria for success will be made clear to students and will relate to the intended learning outcomes.

The assessment strategy will provide evidence that the standards achieved by learners will meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant QAA Subject Benchmarks and the QAA Framework for HE Qualifications. As part of the validation process any QAA Subject Benchmarks and QAA Framework for HE Qualifications which are listed in the validation documents will be checked for consistency and accuracy purposes.

[For further guidance, see the Framework for Enhancing Assessment in Higher Education | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\).](#)

The assessment process

There must be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures. The arrangements proposed to ensure the validity and objectivity of the assessment process must be clear. Staffing arrangements for the programme must ensure continuity of the assessment process if members of staff leave, are absent or undertake industrial action.

Arrangements will be in place for the involvement of External Examiners in the assessment process. There will be criteria that enable internal and External Examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement. The criteria for assessment will be clearly specified and measures taken to ensure that they will be understood and applied by all the examiners involved.

The composition of the board of examiners will be in accordance with the OU requirements for boards of examiners set out in section F4 of this handbook. Where a complex scheme requires a tiered structure of assessment boards, there will be adequate arrangements for the examiners to take an overall view of each student's performance.

D1.7 Staffing, staff development and research

Both teaching and support staff must be adequate in number and appropriately qualified for the aims and learning outcomes of the programme to be fulfilled. Where the number is less than adequate, a firm undertaking that deficiencies will be made good and that key staff will be in place in time for the delivery of the programme, must be made. This applies equally to the staff involved in learning support services (including library and media services, computing, and information technology) as well as to technical and administrative support staff.

There should not be over-reliance on one or two staff members. The arrangements for staff deployment and development must ensure continuity of the teaching programme if particular staff are no longer available to the programme. Staff should be able to draw upon research, scholarship, or professional activity to inform their teaching, and there will be arrangements for supporting staff in these activities.

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

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

D1.8 Teaching and learning resources

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

If all of the necessary resources cannot be made available within the institution, appropriate arrangements must be in place to secure access to resources elsewhere (e.g. through collaboration with other institutions). The OU reserves the right to inspect all facilities used for delivery purposes. Any facilities acquired after the (re)validation process has taken place and where OU validated programmes will be taught and assessed will require inspection and approval prior to teaching and assessment taking place (see section B5.4 Approval of new teaching facilities and sites).

If all the required resources are not available at the start of the programme, an appropriate resource plan must be in place and articulate clearly the timeline for resources to be implemented, this must be made available to the (re)validation panel.

For distance learning programmes, the essential physical resources must include printed or online learning materials, and other media, and which are backed up by an efficient delivery system. These should also be available through an accessible format.

D1.9 Other resources for students

Opportunities should be available for students to interact within and across programmes to allow students to engage in collaborative activities.

The institution must make provision for student guidance and support relevant to the programme, for example induction, career services specific to the programme, personal tutoring, mental health and wellbeing, and support of students with disabilities.

D1.10 Information publicly available to students, their advisors, employers, and other stakeholders

All validated programmes must have a programme specification (including module descriptors) and must signpost student to all the relevant student facing information, which should also include content listed in [Appendix 3 \(Guidance on the Content of the Student Handbook\)](#). The programme specification should be clear and accurate, and – together with module/unit specifications, the student handbook and any relevant institutional regulations – should include all the programme-related regulations and procedures needed by applicants, students, staff and External Examiners. The student handbook, programme specification and regulations should be made available to potential students through a public facing part of the institutions' website – see the OUVP website for [guidance on the content of the student handbook](#).

D1.11 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

All regulations and procedures related to programme design (as well as admissions, delivery, staffing, assessment, learning resources, and guidance and support services) will give due regard to preventing discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity, and make provision for responding effectively to the different needs and circumstances of students.

Where permitted by local legislation, such policies and procedures should align with those of the OU, which can be found on the [OU's Equality and Diversity website](#). [See Section H for further information](#)

D2 Validation and Revalidation

Validation is the process by which the OU considers proposals of programmes of study leading to OU validated awards.

Validation will include analysis of the institution's internal quality assurance arrangements at programme and module level with the OU's validation requirements.

All proposals for validation or revalidation will be judged against the criteria for validation ([see Section D1](#)). The criteria inform the processes of validation and provide the basis for the agenda for validation events and for the structure of validation reports. The criteria, therefore, will assist institutional staff responsible for programme development and for validation submissions.

Where significant changes are proposed to a programme at revalidation stage, OUVF would normally consider this as a major change. Please refer to section D7 of the Handbook for validated Awards. This should also be raised with the SQPM at the earliest opportunity.

D2.1 Development of new programmes

Through an annual workload request in January to February, institutions are asked to indicate any validation plans, including major changes to programmes currently in validation, for the next academic year. All new programme proposals must allow sufficient time to complete the OU's approval process. The OU cannot guarantee that a proposal will be scheduled for validation if it is not included in the workload return.

Requests for new programme validations should be carefully considered. Once a validation has been included in a planning meeting, costs may be incurred if the event is subsequently cancelled.

The initial proposal, developed by a programme development team which must include a programme leader, should be completed by referring to the [SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education](#) and forwarded as a completed [template for Programme Descriptions](#) to the OU at least one month before the planning meeting. The programme description outlines the basic details of the proposal, including:

- A provisional title and programme content
- Target market and supporting market research
- Resource implications and consideration of financial viability
- Relevant subject benchmark statements and any other relevant aspects of the QAA Quality Code 2024

- Number of entry points expected per academic year
- The intention for any of the programme modules to be individually registerable.

Following submission of the initial proposal, your SQPM will confirm if the OU is able to consider a programme for validation and support the nominated programme of study. If there is not a programme leader within the discipline,

then an academic award should not proceed to validation until some permanent appointments have been made. A Validation Panel would need to be able to speak to appropriate members of the academic staff who will be delivering the proposed award.

A validation planning meeting will take place early in the new academic year. Part of this meeting will discuss plans for the validation of new programmes, the revalidation of existing ones and any other events such as the Institutional Reapproval or external review by public, statutory or regulatory bodies.

Core members of the planning meeting may include:

- Senior representative(s) of the programme development team(s)
- Institutional quality assurance person(s)
- Learning resource representative
- OU Senior Quality and Partnerships Manager (SQPM – the institution’s first point of contact).

D2.2 Outcomes of a (re)validation planning meeting

The following will be discussed at the (re)validation planning meeting:

- The proposed start date of the programme(s)
- Details of key personnel involved in the development of the proposal(s)
- Identification of an institutional officer responsible for ensuring that the process is recorded and, in particular, for demonstrating that account is taken of the panel members’ comments in finalising the proposal(s)
- Date for a preliminary (re)validation
- Composition of the preliminary (re)validation panel including an (optional) IPPM
- Date for a final (re)validation meeting
- Composition of the final (re)validation panel
- Provisional programme title(s), including modules, duration of programme, credits and start date

- Programme development timetable and management of the (re)validation process to include the consideration of such issues as:
 - Involvement of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and whether any additional (re)validation documentation is required
 - Nature and extent of external subject involvement during the programme development and (re)validation process
 - Identification of any specific issues on which external comment is required
 - Timetable of meetings of the programme development team
 - Timetable for circulation of papers to external panel members
 - Timescale and responsibility for an internal audit of the adequacy of learning resources
 - Programme delivery mapped against academic calendar for accelerated routes/multiple intakes within academic year
 - CMA implications if programmes are currently advertised and likely to change ([see section D7 of the Handbook for validated Awards for further information](#)).

A formal record of the meeting with action points should be produced as soon as possible by the institution after the meeting.

The planning meeting will help inform whether a (re)validation is to be held in person or can be conducted remotely.

Following the planning meeting

Throughout the (re)validation process the institution must use the templates provided by the OU (actual documentation required will be discussed in the planning meetings). These documents must not be amended. They have been designed to minimise duplication and for ease of reference for all involved, particularly panel members and institutional staff. If necessary, additional supporting information may be provided as appendices.

For practice-based programmes, it is expected that the documentation will express the articulation, balance, and sequencing of theory and practice in the curriculum. This will be 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, institutions should ensure that they provide a separate rationale and learning outcomes for each route, in particular where the alternative routes branch out to quite distinct subject areas. The Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University recommend a minimum requirement of 25% subject specific credits for pathways.

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

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

The programme development team should produce the following draft documentation required for the preliminary (re)validation meeting:

- Programme specification
- Module specifications
 - If (re)validating a level 6 top-up programme, modules specification from the level 4 and level 5 of the associated foundation programmes should be provided
- Student handbook(s)⁷
- Background document with required appendices
- Critical appraisal (for revalidations) with required appendices
- Sample of assessment briefs for each level of the programme
- Regulatory framework, including:
 - Admissions policy and regulations for the programme
 - Staff development policy
 - Work-based learning policies and regulations including study abroad regulations
 - RPL Policy and procedures
- Work-based learning resources and quality assurance resources for example Handbooks developed for the employers and mentors (if relevant)
- Mapping against PSRB requirements (if relevant).

D2.3 The preliminary (re)validation meeting

It is strongly recommended that an institution will hold a preliminary (re)validation meeting. This meeting, organised by the institution, will be held with a panel that could include a Process Panel Member (PPM) and an Institutional Process Panel Member (IPPM). The meeting may be in person or conducted remotely. The institution will meet any associated costs and the institution should confirm to the OU who the IPPM for the preliminary event will

⁷ See [section D1.10 for further guidance on Student Handbooks](#).

be in advance of the event. The institution will be responsible for the expenses incurred for any travel and accommodation expenses incurred by the IPPM. The dates for preliminary and final (re)validation meetings will be separated by sufficient time to allow a response to issues identified at the preliminary stage. A minimum period of six weeks between these two events is required.

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, who will offer comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The process panel member will be a member of both the preliminary (re)validation meeting organised by the institution and a final (re)validation meeting organised by the OU.

Nomination of an IPPM by the institution

An existing institution is invited to identify one external panel member for the preliminary (re)validation panel who can also take part in the final (re)validation, subject to approval by the OU. The aim of this provision is to give an opportunity for institutions to have a nominee who can link between the preliminary and the final (re)validation meetings.

Approval of such institutional nominees to sit on final (re)validation panels will be subject to the submission of a CV to the SQPM. The nomination will be submitted at an early stage, ideally in advance of the planning meeting. The following criteria will be considered:

- The nominee will be someone with expertise relevant to the proposal
- Impartiality, i.e. the nominee will not have had formal links with the institution in the last five years as an External Examiner or a former member of staff, for example
- Prior experience of teaching on programmes at the same level or above
- Where appropriate, professional expertise from a relevant professional background
- Individuals who have been engaged by the institution as external consultants for the proposal should not be nominated as process panel members.

Following the meeting the PPM will be asked to confirm with the SQPM:

- That the programme documentation contains all specified requirements, including a complete and appropriate programme specification

- That appropriate learning resources to support the programme have been properly evaluated and that a strategy and plan to meet the needs of the programme are in place 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 should proceed to a final (re)validation meeting.

The partner institution 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, a decision will be taken by the OU on whether the final (re)validation meeting should be cancelled or deferred (depending upon the likely time needed to undertake the required work). The views of the institution, the SQPM and the PPM will be considered.

D2.4 Documentation for the final Re)Validation meeting

The submission for the final (re)validation meeting should include the institution's revised documentation, as listed under section D2.2 (following the planning meeting), as well as the preliminary summary report. Please refer to the [Guidelines on Document Submission for Programme \(Re\)validation](#) available on the OUVF website. The paperwork must include responses to any recommendations set at the preliminary meeting.

Institutions must provide documentation for consideration by panel members at least three weeks in advance of the final (re)validation meeting. This documentation includes the documents required for the preliminary event plus any other documents agreed with the SQPM. 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 will be set up and organised as agreed at the planning meeting. This would normally be scheduled to occur at the partner institution for 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 exceptionally panels may be larger or smaller dependent upon the spread of subject expertise. 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 members of the preliminary (re)validation meeting (PPM)
- The external member nominated by the 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 Institution)
- For programme revalidations one panel member from the previous event, if possible.

The Senior/Quality Partnership Manager will produce the report from the event.

Observers at final (re)validation meetings

Institutional agreements make provision for the staff of the proposing institution to observe the (re)validation process. The OU encourages observers nominated by the institution to overview 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. If, however, a situation should arise where the participation of an observer is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the Chair has the discretion to ask observers to leave until recalled. This action should only be necessary on rare occasions.

Observers will not normally be nominated from the senior management of the institution or from persons involved with the management or teaching of the programme under (re)validation.

Where an Institutional Reapproval and (Re)validation of a programme take place concurrently, observers may be invited subject to the agreement in advance of the Chair. In

such cases the observers would normally be nominated from external members of the academic board or its equivalent body, or from the governing body of the institution.

The agenda for the final (re)validation meeting is set by the SQPM in discussion with the partner institution. Core agenda items will 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 offers the 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 institution to support it and deliver a good student experience. It is not expected that the final (re)validation meeting will be concerned with matters of regulation unless there are specific professional accreditation regulations to be met. It also allows the panel the opportunity to scrutinise assessed student work if the programme has been (re)validated previously.

The final (re)validation panel reserves the right to assure itself of the adequacy of learning resources, and it will scrutinise them before giving final approval to the proposal.

At the end of the final meeting the panel will propose the outcome, and detail any commendations for good practice, conditions for approval and recommendations. This will be in the form of an oral report to the institution. The final approval decision will be made by the OU Committee, Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC). The period of (re)validation is in all cases subject to satisfactory annual monitoring/IPM.

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

D2.5 Possible outcomes of (re)validation

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

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. Where an institution fails to register students on a programme⁸ of study for two consecutive academic years its (re)validation will be required to undergo a short re-approval process before it can be offered again.

b. (Re)approval for a shorter period

(Re)approval may be granted for a shorter period, where there is a clear rationale such as the impact on the curriculum of the accreditation by a professional body that is due to take place in a shorter time period. In such cases revalidation of the programme will be necessary before the end of the specified period and partners may need to consider that this may impact on students completing their award and discuss with students accordingly.

c. Conditional (re)approval

(Re)approval may be made conditional upon the fulfilment of certain requirements, by a specified date(s). Institutions are responsible for ensuring that such 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.

Institutions will be 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 institution and a response will be required through the annual monitoring/IPM process (see Section E) for the programme. Recommendations focus on longer-term developments and areas

⁸ A programme in this context can also be defined as a Foundation Degree and directly associated Level 6 Top-up award.

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.

f. Retrospective validation

Programmes leading to validated awards must be approved prior to commencement. Retrospective approval may be recommended only in exceptional cases where the proposed programme has already been in operation under approval arrangements other than those of the OU, with full external assessment, including external examining, in place, and when there are no outstanding conditions of approval requiring significant changes. This will require detailed conversation with OUVF.

Following (re)validation and before the start of the programme, a definitive student handbook must be lodged with the OU. A copy (or access to an online version) of the handbook must be issued to each student registered on the (re)validated programme(s) before they start their studies.

Whenever approved changes are made to the programme (see section D7 for approval process), a replacement handbook must be provided to both the OU and to students. If the student handbook contains pre-contractual information that might affect students, students will need to be consulted and active consent obtained.

The OU holds the definitive documents of all its validated programmes, which act as a comprehensive programme archive, facilitating the gathering of information on programme development.

Student handbooks must be available for public scrutiny including being accessed through the institution's intranet without password protection.

The approved student handbook will always be a 'snapshot in time' and some detailed information may be expected to change during the lifetime of the programme. Such changes in the detail of these policies are not modifications to the programme. However, it is essential that such changes are made to the document and that both students and the OU are made aware of them. If the student handbook contains pre-contractual information that might affect students, students will need to be consulted and active consent obtained. The OU must be

advised of any significant changes to personnel, organisational structure, or policy for interim approval.

The OU may trigger an earlier revalidation process within an approval period if quality assurance issues identify a high risk.

D2.6 Correspondence events

A correspondence event follows the same rigor and scrutiny as a full (re)validation event and requires a quorate panel (as described in section D2.4). Complete documentation is required and panel meetings with representatives and students from partner institutions are ordinarily conducted online. The outcomes are the same as for a revalidation i.e., a recommendation of either approval or not, which may be with or without conditions and recommendations.

A minimum of six months should be allowed for this process, although it can, dependent on the circumstances, take longer, and partner institutions will incur a financial charge by the OU.

A correspondence event is appropriate for institutions who have had a programme validated but have not recruited to this programme for a period of two years. If partner institutions then wish to recruit for the remainder of the approval period they would need to reassure the OU that the programme is still current and appropriate resources are still in place.

A correspondence event may also be used to consider approval of registerable modules within an already validated programme of study.

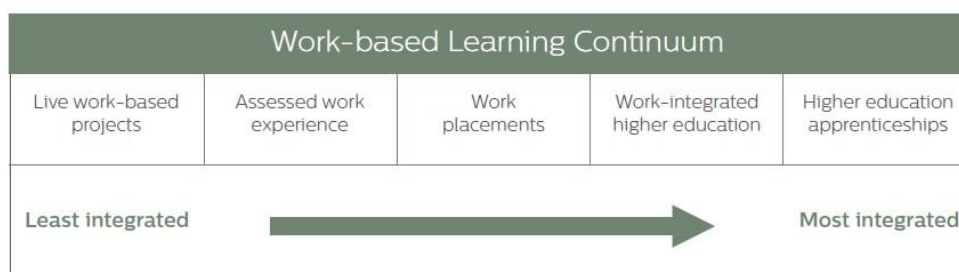
D3 Work-based Learning

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

While work-based learning brings benefit to students, education organisations and employers, it does bring with it challenges, particularly in terms of ensuring quality and standards potentially across a range of different partners with different expectations. Where work-based learning counts towards credit and credit-bearing awards, the education organisation must have the responsibility for setting and maintaining oversight of quality and standards.

Partners may also wish 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 Approval of foundation degrees

Those 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. Proposals should 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 Approval of awards leading to Higher or Degree Apprenticeships

It is acknowledged that validated institutions of the OU will require the validation of Foundation Degrees, Undergraduate Degrees and Masters Qualifications for Higher and Degree apprenticeships.

Institutions may wish to have specialist / specifically designed qualifications validated in order to deliver against an apprenticeship standard. These could be fully integrated or partially integrated.

When putting forward a degree apprenticeship for approval, institutions need to have completed the process of applying for a place on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR) for that programme. It is important to note that partners must agree in advance of development and delivery of the programme who will undertake the role of the End Point Assessor, or End Point Assessor Organisation, for any validated fully integrated degree apprenticeship. Where it is agreed that the OU will be the End Point Assessor Organisation, partners should note that they must adhere to the IFATE Quality Assurance Standards, and this will incur additional fees.

Conversely, institutions may seek to use existing validated qualifications to deliver against an apprenticeship standard. In these circumstances, apprenticeship students may be studying alongside non-apprenticeship students and how parity of experience is ensured, would be a key consideration.

In all models, the responsibility of the OU will lie with the Higher Education qualification element of the apprenticeship, the wider apprenticeship responsibility of delivery against the apprenticeship standard, being that of the partner and employer.

However, the student experience will clearly be a matter of concern to the OU and therefore any factors impacting this (including the wider apprenticeship) could, if necessary, fall within their remit.

Subject to approval at validation, direct entry to the Level 6 CMDA degree apprenticeship is possible. If students wish to apply using the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Level 5 apprenticeship this can only be accepted as part of the evidence to support a Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) claim. Alongside the CMI Level 5 award, a potential student should provide evidence of previous academic study and other activity such as

management or supervision experience beyond the CMI Level 5 apprenticeship study. Cases of direct entry should also consider that it may be necessary for students entering CMDA at L6 to study longer than an academic year to have enough time to develop a robust portfolio to take them to the assessment 'gateway'.

The latest 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 wish to refer to the guidance published by [ASET Good Practice Guide to Successful Work Based Learning for Apprenticeships in Higher Education](#).

D3.3 Procedure for use of existing validated awards for Apprenticeship delivery

Institutions should submit the following which will be considered under a major change process. The programme specification template has been updated to include apprenticeship specific requirements and partner templates now also include an apprenticeship specific background document.

- A covering rationale of the proposal articulating any amendments required to the award. A re-validation may be required if the amendments are significant. Your Senior Quality and Partnership Manager will be able to offer guidance
- Background document for degree apprenticeships
- Revised programme specification ensuring information is clear to existing applicant students on apprenticeship and non-apprenticeship routes
- Work-based learning quality assurance documents. For example, but not limited to, handbooks or guides created for the employers, mentors and apprentices
- Confirmation that apprenticeship students will be tracked separately from the rest of the cohort. OUVF will require an institution to report on apprenticeship students separately in annual monitoring/IPM in the same way that part time students are considered.

D3.4 Approval of specific awards for apprenticeship delivery

The approval process will mirror that of any other award, with the following amendments.

Additional documentation will be required for both the preliminary and final validation event which should include:

- Work-based learning quality assurance resources, for example, Handbooks developed for the employers and mentors
- A statement on the planned End Point Assessment quality assurance processes.

Programme documentation templates have now been updated to include apprenticeship specific requirements and programme teams completing these should be mindful to ensure that all apprenticeship specific requirements within these are completed.

Preliminary and final validation meetings:

- Employers (either prospective or current) seeking apprenticeships should be present to give their views at both meetings. At the final event the Panel could either speak with them as a discrete group, or in conjunction with the programme team.
- Panels will be directed to undertake additional scrutiny of how the work-based learning elements will be delivered, monitored and assessed and how they are integrated within the award.
- Panels will also be directed to explore how the apprenticeship will impact upon the student experience, with particular attention focused on the workload for students and how the notional hours of study required for the award can be covered.
- End point assessment will be an additional area of interest to panels, especially for awards following a fully integrated assessment plan.
- The composition of a validation Panel will include practice expertise in the relevant field as well as academic.

As with all validated programmes, partner institutions are responsible for summative assessments which contribute to the academic award, and this cannot be delegated.

D4 Approval of blended, flexible, and distributed learning courses and programmes

The OU allows (re)validations to be undertaken for learning modes other than purely face-2-face delivery.

The (re)validation process detailed in section D2 concentrates on programmes with a traditional classroom-based delivery. If an institution wishes to move away from this delivery method, the (re)validation panel will be required to consider additional requirements to meet the additional 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 other than 100% face-2-face.

The practice of blended, flexible and distributed learning has developed in many different forms in recent years so that the description is routinely applied to a wide spectrum of activities and delivery models. However, all models have synergies and can be described at one level as a process through which knowledge and skills are acquired through distributed information and instruction.

Programmes to be offered by blended, flexible and distributed means should be designed so that the academic standards of the awards are consistent with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024 and meet the requirements of the OU.

A partner institution wishing to submit a blended, flexible or distance learning programme for (re)validation will be expected to make this clear in the template for programme descriptions and in the planning meeting discussions with the SQPM. It is acknowledged that an institution may wish to use delivery methods combining face-2-face and distance learning methods). The anticipated division of the methods should also be clear in the template for programme descriptions and specifications. The partner institution will be required to submit the programme documentation set out in section D2.2 making clear reference to the delivery methods which are to be used.

In addition to the standard documentation, the partner institution should be able to provide the (re)validation panel with a cross section of online information for each level of the programme which clearly shows the panel the following:

- What the students will see while studying each module
- How the students and tutors will interact with the online material, and how feedback on assessment will be provided to students
- How the online material links in with the classroom delivery (if relevant)

- The additional support systems which will be in place to assist students working with a distance learning delivery (including pastoral and IT support).

As well as ensuring the programme content, the (re)validation panel will also be ensuring the support systems both for tutors delivering the programme, and students receiving the programme.

It is acknowledged that one of the benefits of providing distance learning delivery is that it allows the programme to retain currency and adjust quickly.

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, with clear learning outcomes. They can be studied at any level, undergraduate or postgraduate, but must be part of a full programme of study that is validated by the OU and is consistent with the registerable awards set out in the Regulations for Validated Awards (section 3).

Study on a registerable module will need to comply with any normal curriculum prerequisites in place for that programme. Capstone, research, or dissertation modules cannot be offered as registerable modules. Additionally, placement or work-based learning modules may not be offered as registerable modules.

It is expected that module students will normally study alongside programme students, although this is not a requirement. This must be clarified in the approval paperwork submitted. In either case, equivalent support and access to resources should be provided to all students.

D5.2 Approval of Single Registerable Modules

Registerable modules will be 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 will also need 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 this 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 have a clear understanding of the intentions, and should include:

- Whether the modules will be taught full-time or part-time
- Mode of delivery - face to face, online, blended learning etc
- 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

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

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

Students will receive a certificate, in pdf form, from the OU setting out the details of the study, including 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”), where this meets all requirements of the programme specification (credits, learning outcomes, admissions criteria etc). Additionally, registerable modules may be counted for classification purposes within an OU validated programme at the institution in which they are offered, provided they meet the requirements of the programme and the institution’s RPL policy. They will also stand as credits for transfer to other institutions in line with the RPL policy of that institution.

The Regulations for Validated Awards will apply to students on registerable modules without variance.

D6 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 that includes a number of elements:

- 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 they 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 will need 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 amount of teaching as standard programmes but are scheduled to complete in shorter periods (for example a common model is to use 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 per year rather than 120. There must be a clear rationale for any elements of blended learning or work placement incorporated into the programme. When designing the programme and assessments, the additional challenges students may face on an accelerated programme should be considered. Many students on accelerated degrees may be particularly driven to succeed, have a good work ethic, and may be keen to complete their studies with a good degree and return to the workplace. However, this may be hindered by the increased workload, reduced time for reflection and other external influences.

Student support and guidance

The partner institution will need to provide assurance that students on the accelerated programme will receive the same level of support as students on traditional modes of delivery including access to tutorial and peer support; pastoral advice and guidance and financial assistance.

Staffing

The partner institution must provide assurance that students on accelerated programmes will have access to teaching staff through the duration of their studies including periods normally considered as holidays. The 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 due to the concentrated teaching load.

Access to facilities and resources

It is expected that students on accelerated programmes will have access to study facilities, learning resources and ICT services throughout the calendar year including periods normally considered vacations. Students who study on an accelerated route, may require access to learning resources outside of the traditional working day, therefore greater consideration of their needs should be demonstrated within the development and approval of accelerated degrees.

Arrangements for assessment

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

Programme admissions

The admissions criteria must ensure that only those students with the sufficient motivation and aptitude to cope with accelerated study will be admitted onto the programme. For example, this may be assured by the inclusion of compulsory interviews as part of the admissions process, or the programme could be tailored specifically for mature professionals with significant relevant work experience. Institutions 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 and Recognition of Prior Learning and for tracking students. The OU will expect partner institutions to track and monitor student outcomes for accelerated degree programmes so that any issues regarding parity of experience with traditional modes of delivery can be identified and addressed.

Programme transfer

The partner institution 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 is not suitable for them.

D7 Changes to programmes of study and CMA Compliance

Introduction

Changes to approved programmes of study may be made in between formal revalidation events, however the partner institution should consider and mitigate the impact that any changes may have on (prospective) students. For further information regarding your obligations when making changes to any advertised or published information, please read [Consumer Law advice for higher education providers](#). The Office for Students have also recently published an [Insight brief Protecting students as consumers which partners should consult and refer to](#).

The OU expects partner institutions to review and adapt approved programmes in response to the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation and in accordance with their commitment to continuous improvement. Where it is deemed necessary to make changes, this must be managed appropriately as per the obligations under Consumer Law (for example obtaining student agreement to the changes where necessary) as well as following a separate OU process to determine the academic scrutiny required to confirm the proposed changes.

The OU distinguishes 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 that these changes might have on students as determined by Consumer Law advice and CMA guidance. The process below sets out the governance process for each of the OU categories. 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 student originally signed up for and therefore it is up to the partner institution to 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 construe minor changes to programmes of study as those which do not change either singly or incrementally the basis on which the validation of the programme was made. They will usually not involve any significant change to the programme specification and do not change the nature of the programme.

Some examples of minor changes are:

- Change of module title
- Replacement of a module in a pathway with another OU-approved module where this does not change 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 AMR/IPM. Partner institutions should consult with their External Examiner(s), Academic Reviewer and SQPM regarding these changes. External Examiner approval is required for any minor change in assessment. The partner institution should be mindful of Consumer Law advice and determine any obligations to receiving student agreement, this should then be reported along with evidence (where deemed necessary) to the OU via the AMR/IPM submissions.

D7.2 Moderate changes to programmes

The OU indicate that moderate changes may concern minor curriculum adjustments, or teaching and assessment matters, but are of a type and extent that are unlikely to conflict with the decisions of the original validation panel.

- 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 OUVV's Quality Management Group. Partner institutions are also expected to consult with their Academic Reviewer, External Examiner(s) and SQPM. The partner institution should be mindful of Consumer Law advice and determine any obligations to receiving student agreement, this should then be reported along with evidence (where deemed necessary) to the OU alongside the documentation they submit to the OU requesting the moderate change. These changes are approved by OUVV's Quality Management Group, and on annual basis to 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, or the way it is taught or assessed, and is of a type that would probably have been a topic of some discussion when the programme was validated.

Some examples of major changes are:

- Change title of degree
- Introduction of new modules or pathways within a programme changes of syllabus content which significantly affect learning outcomes so that it becomes a new module or pathway
- Significant changes to assessment (changes to core project/dissertation/capstone and/or change in overall assessment strategy) or other programme relations
- Significant changes to learning outcomes and change to programme learning outcomes
- Significant changes to programme delivery/mode of study
- Restructure of a level of study or movement of modules to a different level of study
- Introduction or addition of any validated programme modules as individually registerable for credit (single registerable modules)

These changes are approved by The OU's Curriculum Partnerships Committee. Partner institutions are also expected to consult with their Academic Reviewer, External Examiner(s) and SQPM.

The partner institution should be mindful of Consumer Law advice and determine any obligations to receiving student agreement, this should then be reported along with evidence (where deemed necessary) to the OU alongside the documentation they submit to the OU requesting the Major change.

Major changes will be scrutinised by a panel of external subject experts as part of the major change process. These changes are approved by The OU's Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

D7.4 Process for approval of changes to programmes

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

Where experience of running a programme, developments in the subject area or advice from External Examiners leads to minor changes, these must be approved in accordance with the agreed procedures of the partner institution, and in consultation with the OU. The SQPM

may wish to consult the Academic Reviewer before allowing minor changes to be implemented. The OU expects that programme teams will make full use of the ability to make minor changes in the interests of keeping programmes relevant and up-to-date, and in response to the outcomes of quality monitoring. The institution must provide a brief account of such changes and document the approval process for these changes (including evidence of where any required student consultation and consent for the changes to take place has been obtained) in the subsequent annual monitoring report/institutional programme monitoring report ([see section E](#)) for the programme in question.

Moderate changes to a programme will require formal approval by the OU. The request should be submitted at least 6 months prior to the date on which the change is expected to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes will depend on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided, alongside evidence of student consultation and consent for the changes to take place. In most cases, consultation with external advisors will be required. The SQPM will decide the level of academic scrutiny required and then obtain approval from the Quality Management Group. CuPC will be informed of the changes made under this category on an annual basis.

Major changes to a programme will require formal approval by the OU. Proposals for changes should be submitted as part of the Annual Workload Request. If this is not possible for any reason the request should be submitted at least 6 months prior to the date on which the change is expected to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes will depend on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided. In most cases, consultation with external advisors will be required alongside evidence of student consultation and consent for the changes to take place.

Major changes are generally approved by correspondence ([see section D6.3](#)). The documentation required to support the change should be discussed with the SQPM. The SQPM will send the proposal for changes electronically to a panel of usually three academics, one of whom will usually be an OU academic reviewer and one of whom will usually have been a panel member during the most recent (re)validation. The outcomes will be the same as for a (re)validation event, i.e. a recommendation of either approval or not, which may be with or without conditions and recommendations.

Where 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 a number of smaller changes made to the programme during the approval period could also lead to a full programme revalidation. Changes affecting the assessment or progression of students must receive the explicit written consent of the approved External

Examiners for the programme. All changes must be requested to the OU by submitting the change form '[Programme/Moderate-Change-Form](#)' to your SQPM. Guidelines on how to complete the form are also available for your assistance on the [OUVP website](#).

All changes will be incorporated into definitive programme handbooks which must be sent to the OU before the start of the academic session to which they will apply.

It is essential that plans for how the changes, if approved, will be communicated to students are included in documentation submitted as part of the change process.

The form to be used to indicate that a change is required can be found on the OUVP website. This should be submitted to your SQPM in the first instance.

D8 Other validation and revalidation issues

D8.1 Approval of study below HE 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 of which the pre-Level 4 study forms part.

Study below Level 4 does not constitute a qualification in itself and carries credit at Level 0; it should be described in terms of student learning hours.

Students will 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 will be provided with a transcript by the partner institution. The transcript will state that such students have 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 institution must make sure that the Regulations for Validated Awards and the student handbook include the following:

- The options available to students who fail pre-Level 4 study, and indicate 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 suitably reflect the length of time the skills gained at the latter are likely to remain current with the former
- In the case of foundation degrees, the time limit within which students may progress from pre-Level 4 study to HE Level 4 should reflect the length of time the skills gained at the former are current in the latter.

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 will agree procedures for joint validation with PSRBs where this is appropriate. A major objective of such agreements is to minimise duplication of effort.

D8.3 Dual approval

Where a programme is approved or recognised by a Professional or Statutory Body or another authority, the institution must ensure that the body concerned is informed of proposals for validation and of the outcome.

D8.4 Approval of programmes offered in new subject areas

The OU will consider the approval of programmes offered in areas not previously offered in the subject of study leading to higher education awards (or where a partner institution has diversified its provision and wishes to launch into new subject areas). It will be the responsibility of the institution submitting proposals to establish a case for their consideration. In making such proposals factors to be considered should include whether:

- There is sufficient intellectual depth within the subject itself 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 refereed journals
- There is a formally constituted body of practitioners or people employed in the area
- In the sciences, technology and health studies areas, a well-accepted scientific or medical basis exists for the theories embodied in the study
- When practice is involved, a reasoned causal explanation for the techniques involved and the evidence of scientific study and assessment of the results of practice are 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.

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

D8.5 Approval of programmes offered in collaboration between institutions

The QAA Quality Guide Advice and Guidance 2018: Partnerships, specifically deals with these arrangements.

Any collaboration (for example joint or dual degree arrangements) in respect of the delivery and assessment of a validated programme requires explicit approval by the OU.

The OU will seek assurances, through the validation and revalidation procedures, that the collaborative programme fulfils the OU's educational principles, and that the collaborating institution provides a suitable learning environment for students undertaking programmes leading to OU validated awards. However, it should be noted that serial arrangements are not permitted.

The OU requires programmes to be delivered through collaborative arrangements to be validated, approved and revalidated in accordance with the requirements set out in this Handbook, and subject to the same criteria as a programme offered by a single institution.

Particular attention will be paid to the appropriateness of the higher education learning environment provided for students in each institution, to the suitability of the staff to teach the approved curriculum, and to the arrangements made for the staff to collaborate on programme planning, delivery and the exchange of good practice.

The details of the proposed arrangements and locus of responsibility must be set down in a memorandum of co-operation in accordance with the paragraph below and be approved as part of the validation or revalidation process for each programme.

D8.6 Programmes with multiple intakes per academic year

Special consideration needs to be given to those programmes or single registerable modules which plan two or more intakes per academic year. The following should 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, 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.

D8.7 Memorandum of co-operation

A memorandum of co-operation must be agreed for each joint programme, the purposes of which are:

- To define the means by which the academic standards of the programme will be maintained
- To ensure that collaborative arrangements are clearly set out and operate smoothly, and that clear channels of authority, accountability and executive action are identified.

A memorandum of co-operation must specify:

- The name of the programme and the qualifications to be conferred
- The names of the institutions or bodies which are parties to the agreed memorandum
- The allocation of authority for the oversight and maintenance of quality assurance, and procedures for resolving any differences which might arise in respect of the programme between the collaborating institutions
- Procedures and responsibilities for the initial validation, approval and subsequent revalidation of the programme, including provision for the implementation of changes to the programme required by validation, revalidation and annual monitoring/IPM in the collaborating institutions
- Procedures and responsibilities in respect of programme management and monitoring and if these are to be divided between institutions, the details of each institution's procedures and responsibilities will be specified
- Assessment and examination arrangements where these involve collaboration between institutions
- Procedures for agreeing all necessary financial arrangements and the provision of resources, both physical and human
- Responsibility for communication of all necessary reports and other information to the OU

- Responsibilities in respect of all administrative arrangements, including student registration, the location and general welfare of students, decisions relating to student progression and assessment, and the nomination, appointment and remuneration of External Examiners.

The memorandum of co-operation must be signed and dated on behalf of each institution or body by the Principal, Director or designated representative.

D8.8 Approval of programmes validated by other validating universities

The OU will require an OU approved institution wishing to transfer a programme to the OU from another validating body 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
- The arrangements to be made in respect of students already following the programme.

D8.9 The charge for validation and revalidation

Fees invoiced by the OU for the validation of a new programme or included in the annual fee for revalidation of an existing programme, are non-refundable in the event that the programme is not approved.

D8.10 Procedures for appeals against panel judgements

The OU cannot consider appeals against panel judgements on programme approval but may consider complaints about the relevant process and conduct leading to a judgement.

Complaints should be made to the Deputy Director Partnerships, Vocational Qualifications and Quality, in the first instance.

D8.11 Programme closure

If the decision is made that a programme will cease to recruit students, the OU should be informed without delay. The OU will require the institution to confirm the means by which quality and standards will be maintained for any students remaining on the programme; or that students are enabled to transfer to a suitable alternative programme elsewhere to

complete their qualification. A decision to cease student recruitment to a programme will apply to recruitment to any level of that programme. The institution, working together with the OU, is responsible for the teach-out of all students (in line with the Student Protection Plan that all partners are required to have in place) on the programme that is closing until such a time that there are no remaining students actively registered, and until all student awards have been conferred. Please consult with the Senior Quality and Partnerships Manager if the programme is due for revalidation during the teach-out period.

D8.12 Student Debtors

As part of the requirement for delivering HE qualifications or programmes, all Validated partners are expected to observe and uphold the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) or equivalent guidance in this area.

The CMA guidance makes it clear that partners cannot withhold certain services or prevent progression of students if they owe certain debts to the 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 which 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 debt status.

The CMA has also previously investigated the fairness of terms allowing an HE provider to impose academic sanctions against students in a blanket and disproportionate fashion for non-payment of non-tuition fee debts and considered these to be potentially unfair.

Therefore, Validated Partners need to ensure they are aware of CMA Guidance, and any changes or updates to this guidance, and that Validated Partners have policies, processes and procedures in place that align with CMA requirements.

D8.13 Degree outcomes statements

It is best practice that Partners should publish a degree outcomes statement for level 6 provision analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review. This review should help assure providers that they meet the Expectations of the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 that relate to protecting the value of qualifications and, for providers in England, the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards (B4 and B5).

Partners may find that they struggle to publish a degree outcome statement where cohorts are small or there is little validated provision at level 6, or where level 6 provision is still in its

infancy. Partners are encouraged to continue to publish this information and discuss with their SQPM if they require further guidance.

Degree outcomes statements are short public documents signed off by governing boards that:

1. Review trends over several years for those offering level 6 provision
2. Bring together regulations and policies that protect degree standards
3. Outline actions and progress

Once signed off by the partners Governing Body they are required to be published on the partners website and updated on an annual basis. Further information can be found at the [UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment \(UKSCQA\) website](#).

D8.14 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 that learners gain the skills that employers want, and employers can be confident that learners have the knowledge, skills and behaviours for a particular specialist role.

The qualifications last between 1 and 2 years full-time, with part-time and distance learning options available.

HTQs are available across the digital sector, health and science, and construction.

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

Partner Institutions are asked to discuss the requirements for validating a HTQ programme with their SQPM in the first instance.

Partner Institutions will need to apply to IfATE for HTQ accreditation separately to the Validation process: [Higher Technical Qualifications / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#).

E Institutional and Programme Monitoring

Annual Monitoring (AM)

AM is the legacy process to Institutional and Programme Monitoring (IPM) which is in the process of a staged roll-out.

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 Institutional and Programme Monitoring?

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

One key element of this framework is the Institutional and Programme Monitoring process.

Institutional and Programme Monitoring is designed to:

- Ensure that partner institutions demonstrate how they meet these responsibilities.
- Enable partner institutions to reflect on issues arising from programme and institutional level reports and evaluate the effectiveness of their quality assurance and enhancement arrangements.

Reports should consist of:

- An institutional overview that includes responses to recommendations resulting from Institutional Approval/Reapproval, and reflection on institutional quality management activities, external reviews, student feedback, staff development and resourcing
- Progress records and reflection on action plans set in previous reports, as well as a forward-looking plan resulting from reflection and issues identified during the academic year
- Details of changes made to key policies, procedures, or institutional structures since the latest administrative audit or the latest institutional and programme monitoring

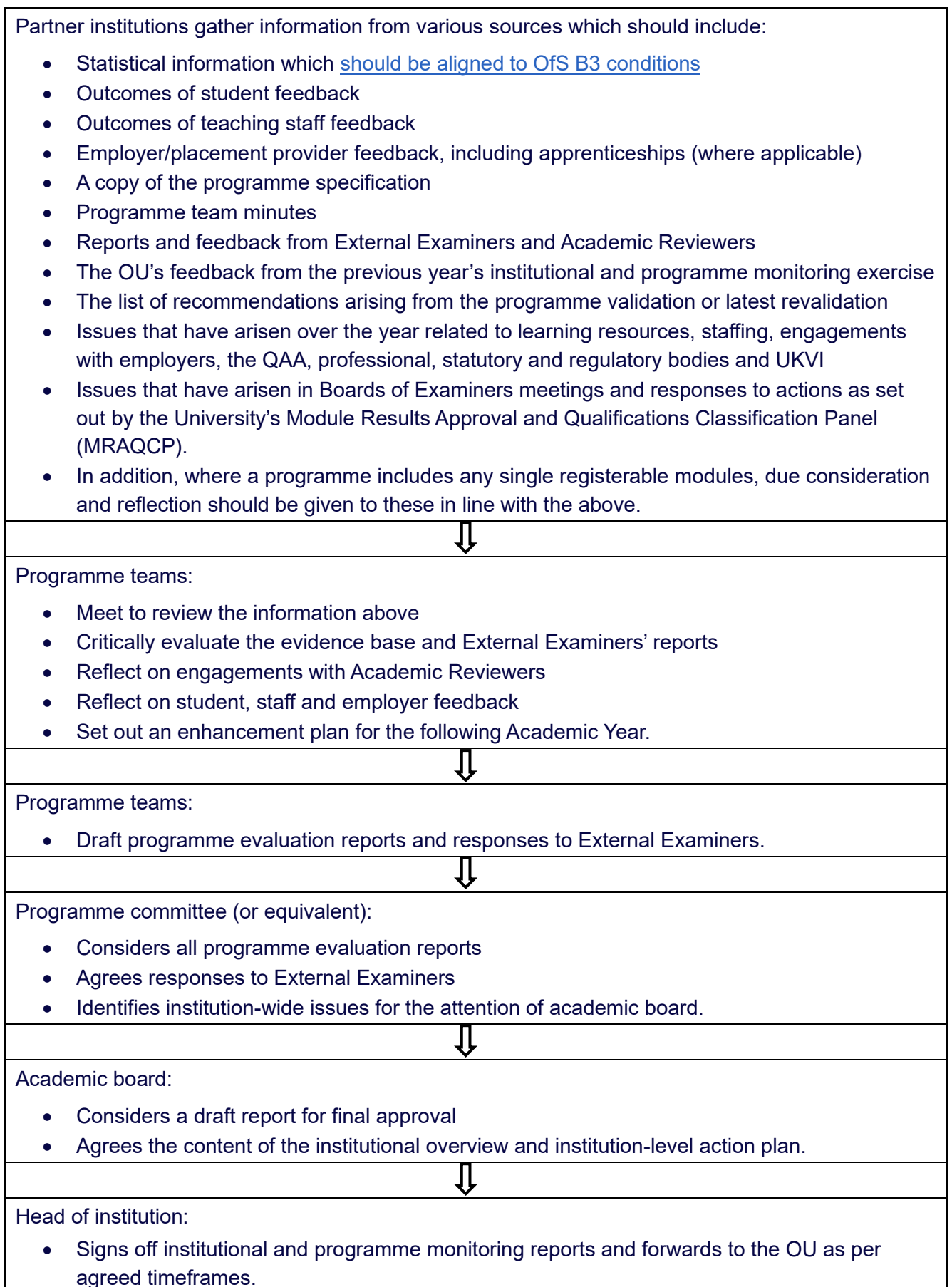
cycle (see Policy Updates Section on the Institutional Overview template) and how students were consulted, and agreement sought

- A written statement confirming that the Institutional and Programme Monitoring process has been comprehensively and satisfactorily carried out, and that programmes have been taught, managed and operated in accordance with the procedures agreed at validation
- Programme evaluation reports reflecting on information as detailed in Figure E1 below
- Relevant attachments as specified in the Institutional Overview and Programme Monitoring templates.

It is important that the requirements outlined in this section are met in full. The Institutional and Programme Monitoring templates should be used for both reflection on the previous year's activity as well as action planning for the year ahead. Evidence to support these should include the good practice shown in Figure E1.

The OU has standard [templates for the institutional overview and programme evaluations](#) which are available on the OUVF website. These templates are reviewed annually.

Figure E1: Flowchart showing good practice



E2 Institutional Overview

The academic standards committee or academic board must agree the content of the institutional overview, which must include:

- Details of the progress made to date on recommendations from a partners Institutional Approval or latest Institutional Reapproval
- Details of progress and reflection on action taken towards issues identified in the previous year's reporting
- Identification of cross-institution themes and issues
- An evaluation of student feedback practice and outcomes across the institution
- An evaluation of personal development planning (PDP) policy and practice across the institution (particularly considering employability and degree outcomes)
- An evaluation of how appeals, complaints, disciplinary matters and plagiarism have been dealt with; including cases dealt with formally, informally and by mediation (this should also indicate whether any particular student categories – such as, for example, students with disabilities or from ethnic minorities – are making a disproportionately high number of complaints or appeals)
- Identification of significant achievements and good practice that will be disseminated across the institution and how these will be disseminated
- An evaluation of how the institution engages with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 including, where applicable, an updated mapping of institutional policies and practices against the Code and details of any measures taken as a result of the mapping
- Details of action taken in relation to any OfS, QAA or other external reviews, including UKVI applications, during the year
- An account of staff development priorities and activities
- An institutional enhancement agenda for the following year.

E3 Programme Monitoring

Programmes should be monitored and critically reviewed throughout each academic year. Each programme team must complete a programme evaluation report for submission to the institution and the OU. Each programme report forms a part of the overall institutional and programme monitoring to the OU, as outlined in Section E1.

In addition, where a programme includes any single registerable modules, due consideration and reflection should be given to these as part of the submissions.

Programmes are reviewed to:

- Contribute to their enhancement
- Contribute to the maintenance of academic quality and standards
- Consider assessment procedures
- Monitor the quality of students' learning experience
- Evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements
- Record issues to be addressed and determine actions
- Identify and disseminate good practice
- Ensure ongoing, appropriate levels of qualified staffing, expertise and resources.

Programme Monitoring focuses on the following key areas:

E3.1 Student Recruitment (Submission A)

Institutions must submit programme statistics on student recruitment in the format prescribed. Programme statistics should be provided separately for part-time and full-time student cohorts, degree apprenticeship students, for accelerated programmes students and students on single registerable modules.

E3.2 Progression and Achievement (Submission B)

Institutions must submit programme statistics on student continuation, completion and progression in the format prescribed which reflect OfS B3 thresholds. Data on appeals and complaints should be included in the report and institutions should evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of these procedures and reflect on their outcomes for the purpose of enhancement. Monitoring and evaluation of appeals and complaints should include cases dealt with formally, informally and by mediation.

Internal systems, such as student records, should identify whether any student categories (by age, disability, ethnicity and gender as a minimum) make a disproportionately high number of complaints or appeals. Any emerging patterns should be monitored in other areas such as student retention and achievement.

Programme teams should evaluate how the data compares with previous years, the HESA data and any other relevant comparative data, and reflect and comment on it under each heading of the programme evaluation report. The data, together with data on student feedback, may be used as evidence of:

- Maintaining standards
- Adequate learning resources

- Meeting intended learning outcomes
- Student satisfaction.

E3.3 Reflection and Feedback (Submission C)

Programme teams are required to reflect on the following areas, providing detailed analysis and appropriate actions to address any arising issues.

Programme Reviews by the OU and External Bodies

Programme teams should include details of actions taken to progress the following areas:

- Feedback received from the OU about the previous cycle's programme monitoring report
- Recommendations made at the latest validation or revalidation
- Issues following engagements with OfS, QAA, Ofsted and other Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, including local accreditation bodies for overseas partners.

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 institution. 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. The response to the External Examiner's report should be submitted separately to the OU by the Programme Team, as part of Submission C.

Feedback from OU Academic Reviewers

Academic Reviewers, who are the OU's Faculty representatives, submit a summary of their engagements over the year. Where comments relating to particular programmes are submitted, these 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 OUV website.

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.

Employer and Workplace Feedback, as appropriate

Include employers' feedback in the programme evaluation, particularly in the case of 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. Where 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.

Student Feedback

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

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.

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

Learning Resources, Student Support and Staffing

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 that this reflects all staff appointed since the last monitoring cycle or the latest validation or revalidation activity, together with an evaluation of the consequences of staff turnover. The relevant Academic Reviewer is asked to comment on

the appropriateness of staff appointed and CVs should be submitted to OUVF throughout the year after any new academic appointment. The OU should be informed of any changes to the staff team, even if these changes are temporary.

Programme Specification

Programme teams must ensure that the programme specification and information to be published are up to date. The following areas should also be checked to ensure that:

- The programme description and reading list are up to date
- The teaching methods, coursework requirements and assessment arrangements for the academic year in question are clearly stated
- Minor changes arising from the monitoring process (refer to section D7 for major, moderate and minor changes) are made and reported to the OU and appropriate consultation and active consent with student has taken place
- Any changes made following programme evaluations are publicised.

Proposals for Enhancement

Examples of enhancement include:

- Presenting proposals for the programme's future enhancement and solutions for any problems that need to be addressed
- Identifying good practice that might be incorporated into other programmes and providing a timescale for implementation
- Reporting on preparation for forthcoming events or interactions with QAA and other professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; or any actions arising from them
- Reference to any programme amendments that are proposed for approval during the coming year (giving due consideration to any CMA implications and impact on students these changes may incur).

Programme teams must also ensure that any major or moderate changes approved by the OU are detailed and reflected upon with regards to their impact on the programme and student experience, and considering CMA requirements and students as consumers. In addition, Programme teams are required to report on activity that has taken place to progress any recommendations made at (re)validation.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Programme teams are expected to evidence how the programme continues to support the intended learning outcomes, from the narratives provided throughout the report. These might include feedback from external sources such as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory

Bodies or employers, student evaluation, graduates' feedback, comments from External Examiners, student progression and achievement data, and employment and destination data.

E3.4 Action Plans

Institutions must provide an action plan that addresses all issues (including CMA implications and active consent from students) arising from a programme evaluation. Both strengths and weaknesses should be included. The action plan should include the timescale and responsibility for each action and cross-referencing the section.

umber of the report where the action was originally identified. Action plans should be updated with each submission, where appropriate.

E4 The Institutional and Programme Monitoring Cycle

E4.1 Submission Deadlines

Institutions are required to submit their Institutional and Programme Monitoring reports on the dates agreed with their respective S/QPMs. Submission dates are confirmed in the Institutional and Programme Monitoring letter sent to all institutions. The submission deadlines are typically set as below:

- Institutional Overview: within eight weeks following the end of the Academic Year
- Programme Evaluation; Submission A: Within eight weeks following each registration deadline
- Programme Evaluation; Submission B: Within two weeks of each progression and awarding Board of Examiners
- Programme Evaluation; Submission C: Submitted alongside the Institutional Overview.

The above windows may vary depending on institution-specific attributes including size, recruitment patterns and academic calendar structures. Institutions should note that these dates may also be subject to change by the OU.

E4.2 OU Feedback on Institutional Reporting

Once submitted, institutional reports are considered by the OU via designated S/QPMs, who will return their comments to the institution for their attention. Such comments may refer to:

- Commendations on practices, achievements, positive feedback and other aspects of programme delivery and management
- Immediate Actions: Issues arising from the reports where further information or immediate resolution is required
- Actions to be taken throughout the current Academic Year and reported on next year's Institutional and Programme Monitoring cycle
- Actions identified in the previous Institutional and Programme Monitoring cycle that are not fully resolved. Such items are classified as immediate actions by default
- Other reportable items, e.g., risks, mitigating actions, etc. identified by the OU that have not been addressed in the institutional reporting.

Please note that institutions are required to address immediate actions within a specified timeframe and re-submit their updated reports for further consideration by the OU. This process may repeat until all immediate actions are satisfactorily addressed. A letter of completion of the current cycle will be sent to institutions once all immediate actions at both institutional overview and programme evaluation reports have been addressed.

Institutional and Programme Monitoring is reported to OUV's Annual Monitoring Review Group (AMRG) who report to the University's CuPC. Institutions should retain documentation associated with Institutional and Programme Monitoring so that the OU or outside agencies can review it, if necessary, in the context of a Re-validation, Institutional Review or relevant accreditation review.

F Assessment and External Examiners

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, to minimise the potential for plagiarism or other forms of unfair practice and to encourage academic integrity.

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

The institution's arrangements for quality assuring assessment constitute a key area that the OU will monitor closely following initial approval of a partner institution.

F1.2 Examiners' judgement

Assessment must be carried out by competent and impartial examiners, and by methods which enable them to assess students fairly. In order to achieve this end, 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. Their particular role is to ensure that justice is done to the individual student and that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained. This will include confirmation of assessments before they are issued to students.

Within the constraints imposed by the requirements of section F1.1, 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 Open University and good practice in higher education. Their academic judgements cannot, in themselves, be questioned or overturned.

The OU's requirements related to the remit and powers of boards of examiners for validated awards are further detailed 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, which provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and readiness for a programme of study and identifies possible learning problems or study needs.
- b. Formative assessment, which is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and informs development but does not count towards the students' final grades.
- c. Summative assessment, which provides 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. Such 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) and 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 are still required 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 undertaking Single Registerable Modules, all assessments must meet the pass mark for the module. 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 Open University.

The Regulations for Validated Awards for The Open University also apply to students on single registerable modules.

In addition, 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. It is expected that assessment regulations governing different programmes will be as consistent as possible across the institution. Assessment regulations specific to a programme of study will be 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 will be assessed for an award. They will relate the assessment requirements to the general educational aims and learning outcomes for OU validated awards, to the programme specification, and to 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 are expected to identify which assessment elements are to be achieved in order for the module to be passed ([see section 15 of the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University](#)).

Institutions are expected to review the continuing fitness for purpose of programme assessment regulations on a frequent basis and amend these as necessary. Review of assessment regulations may be undertaken following discussion with the SQPM, 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 D6 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 institutions are expected to keep them under review and monitor their effectiveness. The general underlying principles are that the amount and timing of assessment should ensure that intended learning outcomes are assessed, and that they enable effective measurement of student achievement. The scheduling of assessment must be such that students have adequate time to reflect on learning before being assessed, and that they can benefit from feedback. Assessment must be designed to minimise plagiarism and encourage academic integrity.

F1.6 Examination Centres

If a partner institution intends to use a third-party examination centre they must notify their SQPM six months in advance of the examination date. If the centre is not affiliated with the British Council, a decision will be made by the OU regarding the approval of the centre.

F1.7 Staff development and training related to assessment

The OU expects that institutions will 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. It is also expected that administrative staff will be given training in order to understand the assessment regulations and manage the administrative aspects of the assessment process effectively.

Good practice would be to ensure the following areas are considered:

- Understand the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment
- Ensure effective ways to evaluate the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved
- Ensure effective ways to engage with students to enable and promote dialogue about, and reflective use, of feedback
- Are aware 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 will be subject to both Regulations for Validated Awards of the Open University and regulations specific to that programme, and so students must be made aware of the detailed requirements of both sets of regulations.

The institution must ensure that the assessment requirements for programmes of study that are made known to students include the type, volume, weighting and timings of assessments. Such 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.

F1.9 Feedback to students on performance

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their own performance. The OU requires institutions to provide constructive and timely feedback to students on assessed work in order to promote effective learning and facilitate improvement. There is a need for adequate marking time to be available for staff to ensure this.

Feedback should be based on clear assessment criteria and should provide students with an understanding of the way the mark was derived, and the extent to which learning outcomes have been met.

As noted in section F1.5 above, the scheduling of assessment must be such that it ensures that students can benefit from the feedback, as in the case of summative assessment following formative assessment.

F1.10 Assessment arrangements for students with impairments

If a student is unable to be assessed by the methods specified in the assessment regulations, the OU expects institutions to try to accommodate that student by making special arrangements for examination or assessment.

The External Examiner may agree a variation in the methods as appropriate bearing in mind the learning outcomes of the programme and the need to assess the student on equal terms with other students.

The institution must have procedures in place for approving any special arrangements in advance of a student's first assessment. Institutions are expected to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate students' needs, while having regard to any applicable legislation.

Failure to implement any special arrangements which have been formally agreed may be grounds for an appeal (section H of the Regulations for Validated Awards of the Open University).

F1.11 Identification of all elements of assessment

Assessment regulations must cover all assessments which formally contribute to progression or final award recommendations, at whatever point in the programme they are undertaken. The regulations on assessment must identify all the elements that will 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 Open University define when and how each of the assessment elements will be assessed by internal examiners, and the role of External Examiners in moderating assessment.

F1.12 Processes for internal moderation of marks

The OU expects that institutions have transparent and fair mechanisms for internal marking and moderation of marks. The QAA Quality Code points out that the use of clear assessment criteria and, where appropriate, marking schemes are key factors in assuring that marking is carried out fairly and consistently.

Assessment regulations must specify arrangements for second marking by internal examiners and other measures used to ensure that the first marking is fair and consistent with the marking scheme and to ensure comparability of assessment across a cohort. Institutions are required to establish procedures whereby marks generated by a first marker (or marking team) are scrutinised to verify the appropriateness of the marking and also bring a second judgment, particularly in relation to very good and very poor performance.

In accordance with good practice, institutions are asked to consult the Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU and their associated policies in considering the following:

- How borderline marks or grades are defined and treated. Only in exceptional circumstances may the Board of Examiners consider borderline cases (See the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University, Section 19.5.)
- In the assessment of larger groups of students, the criteria for sampling of assessment for the purposes of moderation. This includes the determination of the size of the sample to be drawn from each group of assessed work
- The circumstances that warrant the second marking of the whole batch of scripts as a consequence of any significant discrepancies between the first and second marking
- The method of reconciliation of the first and second marking where applicable. Where two markers cannot agree a final mark, a third marker (if this stage is included in the 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 the marks of the sample 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 should normally include all summative work for an agreed selection of students from a given cohort, based on the marks agreed by internal examiners.

Where students are undertaking single registerable modules, these must be included as part of the sample to the external examiner in addition to 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, for which clear achievement criteria must be stated. These will be 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 will only be 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 set out clearly any specific assessment requirements that must be met in relation to professional bodies or accreditation requirements relevant to the programme of study.

Programme regulations must set out clearly any assessments under the regulatory framework of another awarding body which contribute to the award.

F1.17 Programme regulations on progression and attendance

Partner institution programme regulations must set out the way(s) in which students progress through the programme and identify the elements that are compulsory or optional.

Where attendance is compulsory for certain elements, the regulations must give details of the attendance requirements to be met by students.

The regulations must give details of 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 defines misconduct in respect of assessment, in particular what constitutes cheating or plagiarism. The institutions' regulations must also set out penalties and provide for procedures to be followed in cases where these offences are suspected or alleged.

F1.19 Procedures for dealing with academic misconduct

Boards of Examiners should be responsible for confirming decisions in relation to suspected cases of misconduct which 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 that institutions have detailed procedures for investigating and documenting alleged misconduct in assessment within the following broad guidelines:

- Where a case of misconduct is suspected the Board of Examiners should not come to a decision on the candidate's result until the facts have been established. The institution should establish a process via a formal panel that will allow all evidence to be collated and documented before a case is reported to the Board of Examiners
- Where a case of misconduct has been established, the Academic Misconduct panel or equivalent should judge 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 be given 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 permitted to be reassessed
- All such cases should be treated seriously and should be reported to the Board of Examiners and passed to the Academic Board for their information
- Where evidence becomes available subsequent to 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. Institutions must establish procedures that allow an institution-wide overview, that includes the AMBeR Tariff.

F1.20 Reassessment and resits

Within section 17 of the Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU guidance is provided on options for the repeat of study, which includes 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 shall 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. retake a module
- d. take a replacement assessment
- e. take 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 shall not be allowed to be reassessed for that module or element nor retake it in order to improve marks.

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

Where programme regulations permit, the Board of Examiners may determine that 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 for the award of a Professional Doctorate who fail in their first attempt to satisfy their examination panel in the viva voce assessment for the award may be permitted, at the discretion of the examination panel, to resubmit for re-examination once only. Programme regulations will be required to make clear the conditions under which resubmission and re-examination for the viva voce component of the Doctorate will be permitted and, where appropriate, the circumstances under which the award of a Master's Degree or Postgraduate Diploma may be recommended⁹.

F1.22 Provisions for compensation

Within the Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU, the conditions for the application of compensation at stage level is detailed.

⁹ From 2022, Doctorates are managed by the OU Graduate School.

Assessment regulations and/or module specifications must make clear any provision for compensation 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 OU provides information on procedures for extenuating circumstances.

F1.24 Aegrotat

An Aegrotat award may be recommended, where it is available, when the Board of Examiners does not have enough evidence of the student's performance to recommend the award for which the student was a candidate or a lower award specified in the programme regulations, but is satisfied that, but for illness or other valid cause, the student would have reached the standard required.

Before a recommendation of an Aegrotat 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

In addition to procedures included within the Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU, partner institutions must produce regulations or codes of practice which set out arrangements for the conduct of assessments including:

- respective student and staff responsibilities. This should include, for example: any requirements for staff to mark and return annotated work in a timely manner, or requirements for students to retain material for a specified period;

- invigilation requirements setting out, for example, the minimum ratio of invigilators to candidates 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 return of drafts sent to External Examiners and originals sent for secure printing;
- arrangements to ensure that students taking an assessment are the same as those against whose names the marks are recorded by, for example, checking against (photo) identification;
- special arrangements that may be necessary for the assessment of materials based on work placements or periods of study abroad, where such 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 institution, until the last opportunity for appeal has passed;
- The procedures and arrangements above will be monitored by the OU at Institutional Approval and Reapproval through administrative audits. In addition, institutions are required to report any significant changes to such processes in their annual monitoring or institutional and programme monitoring report.

F1.27 Academic Appeals and complaints procedures

Academic appeals and complaints procedures

All institutions should have clear and well-publicised academic appeal and complaints policies and procedures that follow the guidance set out in the [Office for the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\) Good Practice Framework](#). This includes ensuring that all information in line with the [OIA's ten key principles](#): accessible, clear, fair, independent, confidential, inclusive, flexible, proportionate, timely and improve the student experience.

Every institution should have a clearly defined stage two internal process for both academic appeals and complaints and a stage three escalation to the Open University. These stages should be:

- Stage one – Informal internal consideration
- Stage two – Formal internal consideration
- Stage three – Referral to Open University review

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

- how they can submit an appeal and/or complaint
- the role of an advocate and how a student to can be supported during the process
- group appeals/complaints
- confidentiality
- how feedback from stakeholders helps improve policy and procedures

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 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 route of appeal should be made clear to the students.

It should be explained to the student how their academic appeal will be investigated and by who as well as the involvement of the Academic Board or Board of Examiners.

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 institutions considers to be a complaint and give examples to assist the student. The institution should also consider whether administrative appeals are covered under their complaints policy and procedure.

The 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.

Timeframes

It is important for students to be aware of the timeframes involved in each process. The OIA good practice framework states that each process should be completed within 90 calendar days of from the start of the formal stage. This means that the stage two formal process and the stage three OU review process needs to be complete within 90 calendar days.

Institutions need to be mindful that the stage three OU review process can take up to 56 working days (as the student is given 28 working days to contact the OU following the outcome from Stage two and this time is included as part of the OU review process), therefore the institution will have 34 working days to carry out and complete their stage two formal process.

The Partner institution will have 24 calendar days to carry out and complete their stage two formal process.

The student will then be given 28 calendar days to contact the OU following the outcome from stage two.

The stage three OU review process can take up to 28 working days.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a table outlining these timescales in more detail.

OU review process

If students have exhausted all institutional procedures (stages one and two), they have the right to submit a review to the OU. The OU will conduct this review following the procedure set out in Appendix 1.

Institutions should ensure that the OU review stage is referred to in their policy and procedures with signposting to the procedure in Appendix 1.

The institution concerned has a right to be heard and to present its case in relation to any formal appeal or complaint made against it to the OU. In such cases an institution is expected to:

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

Report to OU

As part of institutional and programme monitoring, institutions are required to provide an annual report containing an analysis of how cases of academic appeals and complaints have been dealt with, including the nature and outcomes of such cases. The OU reserves the right to require a further report from the Academic Board if it has reason to believe that the standard of a validated award may be at risk or that the Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU may 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 that includes information on:

- general requirements related to appeals and complaints 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 appeal procedures.

F1.28 Staff at Partner institutions studying OU awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalised procedures for the consideration of assessments for staff within their own institution undertaking OU validated provision. The procedure should be as follows:

- a. The OU should be made aware at the beginning of each academic year if there are members of staff enrolled on OU validated provision
- 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 that 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 would not be permitted to be a member of the Examination Board for an award for which they are studying.

- g. A declaration document should be produced that employees and their line-manager sign to confirm that they do not have access to beneficial assignment or examination material in relation to the award. The document should also state that employees and their line-managers 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 through 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 OUVF 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 UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment \(UKSCQA\)](#).

F2.1 Institutions' 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 for 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 Boards of Examiners
- managing Boards of Examiners
- ensuring that reports of External Examiners are formally considered and, where necessary, that appropriate action is taken
- sending External Examiners a response setting out the action taken following receipt of reports
- providing the OU with an account of the responses made to the issues raised by External Examiners in the Institutional and Programme Monitoring
- making External Examiners' reports available, in full, to students, with the sole exception of any confidential reports made directly to the head of 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 institution; institutions should include this advice in their guidance to External Examiners.

It is the partner institution's responsibility to manage the working relationship 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 and keeps under review the regulations and procedures related to external examining.

The role of the External Examiner 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 its partner institutions to give a high priority to responding to their advice and feedback.

F2.3 The rights and responsibilities of External Examiners

The OU appoints External Examiners for two main reasons: to benefit from direct experience of relevant standards in other universities, and; to subject its examining methods and processes to external assessment.

The role of External Examiners appointed by the OU for a validated programme or group of modules is to ensure that justice is done to the individual student and that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained. In order to carry out these responsibilities, External Examiners must:

- be able to judge students impartially on the basis of the work submitted for assessment without being influenced by previous association with the programme, the staff or any of the students
- be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers undertaking comparable programmes of higher education 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 together with 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 levels of the award in such a way as to enable the External Examiners to judge whether students have fulfilled the aims and learning outcomes of the programme and reached the required standard. This activity should include alternative assessments and adjustments made for students with declared disabilities or impairments, in order to ensure that all students will be 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, in order to ensure that 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 such revisions as they consider necessary
- have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners where this is within the regulations for the programme and 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 the assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved programme regulations
- attend the meetings of the Board of Examiners at which decisions on recommendations for award are made and ensure that those recommendations have been reached by means 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 at risk the standard of the OU's validated award.

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 assessment and the recommendation of an award, including progression from one stage of the programme to the next.

Programme regulations related to external examining will take into account the operation of any tiered Boards of Examiners 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 Non-attendance at Boards of Examiners meetings

A Board of Examiners which does not include approved External Examiners 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 will not be valid without the written endorsement of the External Examiners. [See also Section F5 on the role of the OU's representative.](#)

All External Examiners are required to attend relevant Board of Examiners meetings including any resit boards, and it must not be assumed that a board can be held without the presence of the External Examiner. Where unplanned circumstances prevent attendance and an External Examiner is the sole examiner, the institution and the OU should be informed so that a decision can be made regarding the postponement of the board. Where an External Examiner is a member 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 meeting of the Board of Examiners so that the External Examiner's comments can be formally considered and recorded.

Non-attendance by an External Examiner without good reason and pre-approval by OUVF would usually constitute grounds for the termination of appointment.

F2.5 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 following criteria. These must be considered by institutions nominating External Examiners and will be adopted by the OU during scrutiny of nominations by appraisers and in approval:

- An 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 will undertake checks to ensure that these criteria are met to its satisfaction
- Knowledge and understanding of current UK sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
- Fluency in English and, where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, 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 judgments)
- Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
- Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- Sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- 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
- Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- Familiarity with the standard to be expected of students to achieve the award that is to be assessed
- Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience
- Meeting applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

F2.6 Other considerations when nominating External Examiners

It is expected that External Examiners will be drawn from a variety of institutional and professional contexts and traditions in order that the programme benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. Phasing of appointments to the team is a way of ensuring continuity. There should be appropriate balance and expertise in the team of External Examiners, including for example:

- Examining experience
- Academic and professional practitioners

- The range of academic perspectives
- Members from different types of institution of higher education.

If someone without external examining experience is appointed, it is expected that they will be appointed to join a more experienced team and/or with 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 the numbers of External Examiners to arrange this internally.

Ideally, there should not be an External Examiner within a programme area from the same institution which has provided examiners for that programme area during the past five years.

F2.7 Conflicts of interest

An External Examiner must be independent of the module on which they serve. 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 influence significantly 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 that 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 including the OU appointment, for taught programmes/modules at any point in time.

A proposed External Examiner should not have been an examiner on a cognate programme in the institution.

F2.8 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)
- Open University Residential School staff
- Visiting members of academic staff
- Part-time members of OU academic staff holding dual appointments.

F2.9 Nomination of individuals retired from their academic or professional posts

It is the OU's expectation that External Examiner nominations should be submitted on behalf of individuals who have 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 the nomination provided that a robust case can be made for that person's continuing academic or professional currency for the duration of the proposed appointment.

F2.10 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 will organise the appraisal of External Examiner nominations. In all cases the OU retains responsibility for approving and appointing External Examiners for its validated awards.

In making recommendations for the appointment of External Examiners for a programme or modules, appraisers will be seeking to ensure that the External Examiners will be competent and impartial.

Institutions must ensure that nominations ideally arrive at least six months before duties of the examiner are expected to be taken up. A nomination should be made on the appropriate application form and include the nominee's current and detailed curriculum vitae. The nominee's curriculum vitae should be submitted electronically. In considering nominations, institutions are asked to ensure the Board of Examiners as a whole maintains an appropriate balance and diversity in order to ensure that students are fairly assessed.

At any stage a nomination may be rejected by the OU, in which case an institution may be asked to provide a new nomination, or the OU may appoint an External Examiner of its choosing. In addition, further details or clarification may be requested from the nominating institution at any point.

F2.11 Approval and appointment of External Examiners

All External Examiner appointments are made by the OU. The OU will follow its 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 as the OU.

F2.12 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) with which they are to be associated in order to deal with any subsequent review of decisions.

The duration of an External Examiner's appointment will normally be for four years, with an exceptional extension of up to one year to ensure continuity. This must include 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 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 that they are still eligible to externally examine the programmes for which they have been appointed (see F2.5 – F2.9). If an External Examiner takes on additional external examining duties during the period of their tenure, the SQPM 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.

F2.13 Requests for extension of approval of External Examiners

The nomination process is also used for proposals to extend the period of approval of existing External Examiners or to extend their duties to other related programmes such as a new pathway or a top-up award. Requests for the extension of the period of approval are not generally encouraged, but can be considered in extenuating circumstances, in which case a clear rationale for the request must be provided on the **F5D nomination form** found in the [‘External Examiners’ section of the OUVF website](#).

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

F2.14 Notification of decisions

External Examiners will be appointed by the OU. The OU will send an offer of appointment to the approved nominee. Once a contract acceptance form has been returned by the examiner and any right to work check completed, the OU will send an approval letter to the head of the partner institution, copied to the institutional primary contact.

The OU will write to all newly appointed External Examiners providing them with a copy of the most recent validation report for the programme(s)/modules to which they have been appointed, together with some briefing material. The OU will also provide an official briefing which will consist 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 that they are expected to provide to External Examiners.

F2.15 Payment of fees

The OU will be responsible for the payment of External Examiner fees and expenses.

F2.16 Termination of approval of External Examiners

All termination of External Examiner appointments must be undertaken by the OU. If a partner institution wishes to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner, the OU must approve the termination and be informed in advance of the grounds for 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 the appointment of an External Examiner at any time, subject to approved University procedures, for failure by the External Examiner to fulfil their obligations, for example failure 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 without good reason
- a new conflict of interest that cannot be resolved (e.g. due to change of the External Examiner's position subsequent to the appointment)
- discontinuation of the programme.

F2.17 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 who is to act in this capacity will be 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 institutions which use a tiered exam board system holding subject then award and progression boards
- by institutions which have a large provision and wish to be able to oversee Exam Board decisions at Faculty/School level.

The Chief External Examiner should work closely with the partner institution and OUV, approaching their role with flexibility to ensure they create additional value for the individual programme/subject level External Examiners and institution programme teams.

The following guidance on the role of Chief External Examiners gives some ideas on how their role may be developed. We anticipate that following the appointment of a Chief External Examiner, discussions will be held with the partner institution and the SQPM to formalise key areas of activity.

Guidance on the role of Chief External Examiners

- Be able to review a sample of student work across the programmes from selected modules
- **As a last resort**, be able to confirm grades for External Examiners who are not able to be physically present (this normally depends on the External Examiner having contacted the Chief External Examiner with a written report confirming they have seen the work and agree with the grades and have provided 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 without previous experience of external examining
- Identify where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice across the faculty provision

F2.18 External Examiners' reports

External Examiners are required to submit a report following each Board of Examiners to the Academic Board of the partner institution and to the OU on the conduct of the assessments just concluded and on the standards being set and achieved including:

- whether the standards set are appropriate for the award by reference to any agreed subject benchmarks, qualifications framework, programme specification or other relevant information
- the quality of the students' work, and their knowledge and skills in relation to their peers on comparable programmes
- the strengths and weaknesses of students
- 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, relation to stated objectives and learning outcomes of the programme, and marking
- good practice and innovation related to learning, teaching and assessment
- opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students
- where 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, operation of Examination Boards, 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 institution.

It is expected that such reports will be received no later than one month following the final meeting of the Board of Examiners 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 institution to judge whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next revalidation. Institutions are required 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 Institutional and Programme Monitoring/Annual Monitoring process.

Partner institutions are required under their institutional agreement to provide the OU with an annual report for approved programmes which includes an account of the responses made to the issues raised by External Examiners. Where an External Examiner's report raises issues, which call into 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 deficiencies. The OU will need to provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report received, outlining any actions they will be taking or require the partner institution to take as a result.

Institutions must make External Examiners' reports available in full to students, with the sole exception of any confidential report made directly to the head of the institution.

If External Examiners' reports are either too brief or too broadly phrased to provide an agenda for enhancement, the OU will be responsible for taking appropriate action to ensure that more comprehensive reports are submitted.

Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systemic failings with the academic standards of a programme or programmes and has exhausted all published

applicable internal procedures, including the submission of 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 will provide External Examiners with a briefing and induction. This section offers guidance for institutions on local briefing and induction of new External Examiners. It is recommended that each institution should develop 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 will receive information on their role, some of which will be detailed in the appointment letter. [Links to the relevant documentation are also available on the OUVV website.](#)

The OU's briefing will include:

- Term of appointment, with provision for termination on either side. This should indicate the required notice from the External Examiner and give possible circumstances for termination by the institution related to non-fulfilment of responsibilities, such as no provision of the required report and non-attendance at the Board of Examiners without compelling 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 will be 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 institution's written briefing should include:

- A comprehensive list of institutional contacts, administrative and academic, with an indication of who to contact about what. This will vary according to where responsibility for different aspects of the relationship with External Examiners is handled in the institution
- The programme handbook, incorporating the programme specification, which will include 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
- 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 of assessments which are usually negotiated with the External Examiners, in accordance with the OU's expectations as set out in section F2.3
- provision of marking schemes and the internally moderated list of marks for the cohort being assessed
- arrangements for attendance at boards of examiners and any other visits, for example observation of practice, indicating timing and who to contact
- External Examiner involvement in resit examinations, appeals, cases of cheating and plagiarism.

F3.3 Induction meetings

It is recommended that new External Examiners are invited to meet with colleagues at the institution to clarify their role and responsibilities, to meet staff and, if desired, students. This will also provide an 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 OU, 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 institution at the start of the academic year and forwarded to the OU. The OU will send a representative to attend all final award and progression boards of examiners, and institutions must advise the OU of any subsequent change to the dates.

Dates should be agreed (with External Examiners) at the earliest opportunity – normally at an annual meeting - for the coming year and not changed thereafter 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 will commonly involve agreed delegation to designated 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. The board may, at the time when it first meets to decide its recommendations, agree arrangements for delegating that responsibility to a sub-group, which must include at least one External Examiner. Such delegation will not be appropriate for all reassessments or deferred assessments and 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 that the institution's Academic Board or equivalent ensures that arrangements are made to appoint a Secretary to each Board of Examiners and that 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 will 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)**, confidential and members should be reminded to take appropriate care in their use and storage of them;
- **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 trends in student performance or marking practice which 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 of results, extenuating circumstances, and academic misconduct;
- **reports from any subsidiary boards**, including any reports on extenuating circumstances or student misconduct.

Mark sheets will normally be tabled at the meeting and under no circumstances should members remove them afterwards.

Where recommendations for conferment of awards are to be made the Board of Examiners may need appropriate results information from previous assessments in order that it may see overall outcomes and profiles.

The OU requires that institutions have systems in place for verifying that marks are accurately recorded 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 which is to be submitted 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 and 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. On any matter which the External Examiners has declared a matter of principle, the decision of the External Examiners shall either be accepted as final by the Board of Examiners or shall be referred to the Academic Board. Disagreements between External Examiners shall be referred to the Academic Board or the OU, as appropriate.

F4.6 Use of Chair's action

If circumstances mean a Board of Examiners has been unable 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.

F5 Role of University representatives attending Boards of Examiners at partner institutions

F5.1 Guiding principles

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

The primary role of OU representatives is to provide support for Boards of Examiners or their committees in the continued assurance of academic standards. Attendance at Boards of Examiners will also provide for the OU an important window on the assessment process for its validated awards. The OU representative will not participate in making academic judgements but will be able to bring their own knowledge and experience of the assessment process to the discussion of outcomes. OU representatives will respect the autonomy of the institution as it derives from the institutional agreement but will also have concern for the OU's obligations and national requirements.

F5.2 Terms of reference

The purpose of attendance at Progression and Award Boards is to confirm:

- that the regulations of the OU 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 will attend meetings of the institution's Boards of Examiners or their committees to:

- observe the conduct of the Board of Examiners in accordance with the institution's own procedures
- provide a source of 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 institution and/or the OU to policies, procedures or circumstances which seem 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 Institutional Reapproval panels.

F5.3 Reports from University representatives attending Boards of Examiners

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

- Action from the previous meeting o Issues raised at the previous meeting, including those raised by the External Examiner(s) have been addressed.
- Conduct of assessment o 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 have been 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 to be considered (see also QAA Quality Code and OUVF Handbook for Validated Awards, Section F2)
- classification bands were properly observed
- students on borderlines 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 pleas of mitigation entered by the due date have been considered in a fair and equitable manner and in accordance with approved regulations
- consequences of academic misconduct and other breaches of assessment regulations were discussed and dealt with appropriately and fairly, applying the approved regulations
- entitlements and arrangements for re-assessment have been confirmed.

F5.5 Conduct of the meeting

- The meeting was competent (and quorate) to conduct the business and was conducted in accordance with its terms of reference.
- Mark sheets were available for each level within each award and 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 that 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 the publication of assessment results and the provision of follow-up support for failing students.
- The confidentiality of marks was secured (by collection of the mark sheets and deletion of all electronic copies).

A copy of the feedback reports prepared by University representatives on the conduct of assessment and or meetings will be submitted simultaneously both to the 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 Open University's Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP).

This panel has the authority of the OU Senate to ratify the recommendations of all Examination Award Boards (EAB) after satisfying itself that the recommendations have been determined with due regard to the approved regulations, that the correct procedures have been followed and that the appropriate academic standards have been upheld. This Panel has the authority of the OU Senate to overrule any result recommendation which is contrary to approved regulations. In practice, the Panel would normally refer the concern back to the partner institution in the first instance to arrange for the EAB to reconsider the results.

Results must not be issued to students until they have been ratified and formal notice has been received from the OU that they can be released.

To ensure that MRAQCP can discharge its responsibilities we require our partner institutions to provide key information following examination boards. Additionally, examination board dates must be confirmed well in advance and the recommendation is 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](mailto:ouvp-examboards@open.ac.uk) within two working days of the Examination Board. Failure to supply the required paperwork in a timely fashion may result in extra delays in the approval of the results. Once the paperwork has been submitted, it will be checked against the exam board report from the (S)QPM and dealt with by MRAQCP within 7 working days of receipt. Where MRAQCP raise concerns regarding the Exam Board paperwork, the partner institution will be asked for further clarification. If an immediate response is required a deadline of 6 weeks will be given. If MRAQCP are not satisfied with the response, further action may be necessary.

F7 Graduation Ceremonies

There is no option for individual students to attend OU graduation ceremonies unless this has been explicitly agreed with the individual partner institutions or within the contract.

Should institutions hold local ceremonies for their graduating students there are no Open University stipulations regarding academic dress that need to be followed. Representatives from The Open University are able to attend partner graduation ceremonies; please contact your SQPM when dates are known.

It should be made clear that students studying single registerable modules are not invited to attend Graduation.

G Registration

G1 Student registration

G1.1 Student registration with the OU

Partner institutions are required 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 OUVV website.

Institutions should nominate specific registration contacts who will have access to the OUVV Valencia registration portal. Each registration contact will be provided with log-in and password details. A direct line or mobile phone number will be required for each contact to enable multi-factor authentication at log-in.

There are two main registration sessions, commencing on 1 September and 1 March each year. Institutions who register students outside of the above main registration periods should [notify OUVV-Admin@open.ac.uk](mailto:notify_OUVV-Admin@open.ac.uk).

Students' personal data to be submitted to the OU includes full name, gender, date of birth, residential address, contact phone number and email address. It should also include details of the institution; the programme of study and the award being sought. Students should be informed that all information provided to the OU and held on computer files are subject to the institution's registration with the Data Protection Registrar, which allows for access by or disclosure to the OU for registration and conferment of awards.

Full instructions and templates relating to the registration process are sent to individual institutions, on an annual basis.

G1.2 Maintenance of student records

Please ensure that full legal names of students are given at registration. Institutions should also advise students that they need to notify the Institution of any change to their name, prior to conferment. An award certificate will not be amended or reissued in a different name if a change of name is notified after the date the qualification is conferred, except in the case of an error by The Open University or by the Institution, or if a valid request is made under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

Throughout the year, Institutions are also required to perform regular maintenance activities to ensure that student records are accurate at all times. The student maintenance session

will be available all year. The maintenance session gives access to all current student records. Within the maintenance session, institutions should update changes to student names and contact details. The maintenance session should also be used for withdrawing and deferring students. All 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 will undertake an audit of partner institutions' student records annually.

G1.3 Maximum period of registration

Students will remain registered with the OU for three years beyond the expected duration of the validated provision and partner institutions should ensure that 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, it will be necessary to reregister.

[All institutions are required to comply with The Open University's regulations](#). Some institutions will have been approved to operate under **dual awards regulations**.

G1.4 Staff member registration on OU Validated Awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalized procedures for the consideration of assessments for staff within their own institutions undertaking OU validated provision before registering staff members on OU Validated Awards. [The full procedures are in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards, Section F1.28](#).

G1.5 Student Transcripts

As the Validating Institution, the OU has a responsibility to ensure that adequate backup is in place in the event of a Partner Institution no longer being able to issue replacement records of study. In order to meet these requirements, Partner Institutions are required to provide OUVF with transcripts for all students (completing, progressing and those 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 OUVF website. The

transcripts should be provided by the end of November each year. An annual request for this data will be sent out with detailed guidance.

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

G1.6 Student Diploma Supplements

Partner Institutions should ensure that all students completing an award are issued with a comprehensive **Diploma Supplement**. [An exemplar Diploma Supplement can be found on the OUVV website.](#)

Students who are undertaking a single registerable module will not receive a diploma supplement unless they go on to complete the full award.

H Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

H1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The OU is innovative, responsive, and inclusive. We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality education to all those who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Our commitment to equality and equity is embedded in everything that we do. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, and we challenge under-representation and differences in outcomes to ensure inclusion.

The OU expects its partners to have Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policies and procedures (applicable to staff and students) that align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 and Sector Agreed Principles.

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 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'. Additionally, you may find the OU's policies helpful, [available on the OU's EDI website](#).

Statement by the Director of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at The OU:

"Equity is one of our five strategic goals and is a crucial part of the OU's vision, resilience and reimagination. Representation and inclusion by people with a wide range of attributes, skills, characteristics and lived experiences brings diversity of thought and fosters a genuine sense of belonging for every colleague and student. You may be wondering what we mean by equity and how it differs from the concept of equality. Where equality treats everyone the same, equity means acknowledging that different individuals or groups might require different resources and needs. Equity levels the playing field to ensure that everyone has an equal chance of inclusion, to opportunities, to contribute and to succeed."

Appendix 1: Student Complaints and Academic Appeals Procedure

Appeals and complaints procedures for students (you) approaching The Open University (we) having exhausted all appropriate internal procedures at their own institution.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We are committed to ensuring fairness and transparency in all our dealings. This commitment extends to our process for reviewing complaints and appeals that have been initially addressed by our 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.
- 1.4 All complaints, administrative appeals, and academic appeals are dealt with in accordance with The Open University's [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#). The below information is an overview on how to submit a review request. For further information on the **stage three OU review process**, what support is available to you, and how the OU would consider your case, please refer to The Open University's **Complaints and Appeals Procedure** found on the Open University's website: [Student Policies and Regulations](#).

Definitions

Complaint – covers concerns about services or facilities that have not met expected standards or were not provided when they were reasonably expected to be. The OIA describes 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”.

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.

Administrative Appeals – an administrative appeal is a request to review a non-academic decision related to a student’s learning access or experience. This includes decisions about registration, fees, financial aid, special arrangements, and non-academic adjustments. Administrative appeals from students at partner institutions are handled under our **Complaints Procedure**.

Review Request – is where the student can appeal to 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 appeal is not reconsidered at this stage unless there is new evidence to consider. Once the review is complete, we 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

- 1.5 We understand that pursuing a complaint or appeal can be stressful and we encourage you to use the support services available through your Institution.
- 1.6 You should contact the [Student Casework Office](#) if you wish to discuss any reasonable adjustments you may need in raising a review request for a complaint or appeal to take into account your disability, in order to comply with its obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#) in England, Scotland and Wales, the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2004](#), or any other statutory duty or obligation.

2 OUR REVIEW PROCEDURES

- 2.1 You can only request a review of your complaint (including administrative appeals) or academic appeal if you have exhausted all of your institution’s internal procedures. Upon completing your institution’s internal procedures, you will be given a Completion of Internal Procedures or Final Decision Letter. This may also be an email form. This will provide you with details on how to submit a review to us.

How to request a review

- 2.2 To submit a review request, you must:

For a Complaint: write to the [Student Casework Office](#) or submit a review form within 28 calendar days of the date of the Completion of Internal Procedures or Final Decision Letter from your institution.

For Academic Appeal: write to the [Secretary to the SAARP](#) (Senate Academic Appeals Review Panel), within 28 calendar days of the date of the Decision Letter from your institution:

- a. Explain why the outcome to your complaint or academic appeal has not resolved the issue or why you consider the decision has not been made in accordance with the relevant policies, procedures and regulations.
 - b. Set out one or more of the following grounds on which you believe we should review your institution's decision:
 - that relevant evidence has not been taken into account; or
 - that irrelevant evidence was taken into account; or
 - 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.
 - c. Submit any new evidence which has not previously been submitted in support of your complaint. If you introduce new evidence or a new element of complaint or academic appeal at the Review stage, to be eligible for further consideration 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 will result in the request for review not being accepted.
- 2.4 The Student Casework Office will acknowledge the request for review within **3** working days of its receipt. Within **10** working days of the acknowledgment, a Casework Manager (complaints) or Secretary to the Panel (academic appeals) will write to advise you whether or not the review request has been accepted.
- 2.5 If it is not accepted, we will advise you of the reasons for that decision within a Completion of Procedures letter (please see 'Methods of appeal' for details of escalation to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator).

Complaint review considerations

- 2.6 Where a request for a review meets the requirements set out above, a Casework Manager, that has not had prior involvement in the concern, will carry out a review of your complaint or appeal, on behalf of the Vice Chancellor's Delegate. The review will not reconsider your complaint or appeal but will look at all of the matters raised in the grounds of your review and determine whether the complaints and administrative appeals process has been followed correctly. The Casework Manager will produce a report which will include:
- A summary of your complaint or appeal and grounds for review
 - The background to your complaint or appeal
 - A decision as to whether your complaint or appeal 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. We will then send you and the Senior Authority a copy of the approved report within 15 working days of the date of the eligibility letter.
- 2.8 If the Senior Authority's decision is confirmed following the review, we will send you a Completion of Procedures letter together with a copy of the Vice Chancellor's Delegate's report.
- 2.9 If the Senior Authority's decision is not confirmed following the review, we will send you a summary of recommendations to remedy the complaint or appeal, 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 working days to accept the offer.
- 2.11 We will send you a Completion of Procedures letter following this.

Academic appeal review considerations

- 2.12 If your request for a review does meet the requirements in paragraph 2.2, the Secretary will convene a Panel with no prior involvement with the concern, to conduct a review.
- 2.13 The Chair of the Panel will decide whether to consider your review with or without a hearing. The review will be conducted in accordance with the procedure set out in [The Open University Student Complaints and Appeals procedure \(page 46\)](#).
- 2.14 If, before the hearing takes place, the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that there are sufficient grounds without a hearing, the Chair may decide to refer your appeal back to your institution for reconsideration. Your institution will be given the reasons for the decision and, where appropriate, any recommendations for the further consideration of your appeal.
- 2.15 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; and/or
 - c. dismiss the appeal review, in whole or in part.
- 2.16 The Panel must decide if the appeal grounds in your review request are likely proven by the evidence. If so, they must determine if these grounds create enough doubt on the appealed (original) decision, making it unreasonable for Partner Institution to reply.
- 2.17 If grounds for appeal have been established by evidence, but in the opinion of the Panel, those grounds would not have made a material difference to the decision of the Partner Institution, then the original decision shall stand.

- 2.18 Within 15 working days of the hearing, you will be sent the Panel's decision. This will include a summary of your appeal, the decision background, the verdict (upheld, partly upheld, or not upheld), the reasoning, and any suggested resolutions.
- 2.19 If your appeal is referred back to your institution, the reconsideration should be completed within 15 working days. The decision of this reconsideration following a review by the Panel will be final and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued 28 working days after the reconsideration is complete.

TIMEFRAMES

- 3.1 We 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.

COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES

- 4.1 The Vice Chancellor's Delegate is The Open University's final authority in relation to student complaints and academic appeals. If you consider 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 institution's procedures and that of The Open University, you will be sent a Completion of Procedures letter with 28 working days.
- 5.2 If you are still unhappy with the outcome or how your complaint or academic appeal was handled, you can apply for an independent review by the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education \(OIA\)](#).
- 5.3 You must refer your complaint to the OIA within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. 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. They do not consider complaints referred by applicants or enquiries.

Timeframes for Consideration of a Complaint or Academic Appeal

Stages	Action	Timeframe	Who is Responsible
Stage One - Informal	Follow Partner process as published in policy and procedures.	Follow Partner timeframe as published in policy and procedures.	Partner Process
Student	Submit formal complaint/academic appeal.	Follow Partner timeframe as published in policy and procedures.	Partner Process
Stage Two – Formal	Follow Partner process as published in policy and procedures. Issue COIP.	24 calendar days from receipt of formal complaint/academic appeal.	Partner Process
Student	Request OU Review	28 calendar days from receipt of COIP.	Partner Process
Stage Three – OU Review	Follow OU process as published in policy and procedures. Issue COP.	28 working days from receipt of student review request.	OU Process

Stage 2 and Stage 3 completed within approx. 90 calendar days

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 likely exceed 90 calendar days, in line with the process outlined in 2.12-2.19.

Appendix 2: Requirements for Programme Documentation

Background document

The background document for validation and revalidation proposals will provide the context and rationale for the proposal, describing how it has involved consultation with all stakeholders including students, staff, employers and other external input. It will be produced specifically to facilitate the (re)validation process and to assist a panel that may not be familiar with the institution or the background to the proposal. It should be reflective and analytical. It will be treated as a confidential document. The OU has identified minimum requirements for background documentation. The [Background Document for Validation Submission](#) is available on the OUVF website.

Critical appraisal (for revalidation proposals)

In the case of revalidations, the background document should also incorporate a critical appraisal of the success of the programme and its development in practice. The institution will draw on existing evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of their mechanisms for managing and enhancing the programme.

The revalidation submission should include the rationale of any proposed modifications to the programme, such as the addition or replacement of new modules or pathways. This will take account of developments in the subject area that have taken place since the last (re)validation. The critical appraisal should also be informed by feedback from students, External Examiners and other relevant external stakeholders during the approval period.

The [Background and Critical Appraisal template](#) is available on the OUVF website.

Student handbook

A draft student handbook should describe details of all aspects of the proposed programme in accessible and student-friendly language. It will include a programme specification, details of all modules that comprise the programme, as well as regulations and resources for student support (which should be in line with published CMA requirements).

Where modules within a programme are offered as single registerable modules, a student handbook for module-only students should also be developed setting out the arrangements for delivery of their provision.

The OU has identified minimum content for student handbooks, and the guidance document can be found in Appendix 3.

Programme specification and curriculum map

The programme specification should provide a concise description of the programme's aims and intended learning outcomes and the means by which these will be achieved and demonstrated. The specification will help students to understand how the teaching and learning methods enable the outcomes to be achieved and how the assessment methods enable achievement to be demonstrated. An indication will be given of the relationship between the programme and its study elements and any subsequent professional qualification or career path.

The expectations regarding student achievement and attributes described by the learning outcomes must be appropriate to the level of the award within the QAA Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Learning outcomes must also reflect the detailed statements of graduate attributes set out in QAA subject benchmark statements that are relevant to the programme/award.

The programme specification is a publicly available document and must be accessible to students, teaching staff, assessors, External Examiners, employers, and the wider community. The OU has a programme specification template that all institutions must use, and which is available on the OUVF website.

Institutions should map the learning outcomes set out in modules specifications against the intended learning outcomes for the programme as outlined in the programme specification, to ensure overall completeness and coherence. The curriculum map is included in the Programme Specification template.

Validated programmes delivered in other languages must have a programme specification both in English and in the language of delivery.

Module specifications

For the purposes of (re)validation, module specifications should be submitted as a separate document. As the (re)validation process is generally an iterative process, having the module specifications as one document makes updating easier.

There is a [module specification template](#) for module specifications that institutions must use and is available on the OUVF website.

For programmes being used to deliver against English apprenticeship standards or frameworks, the following additional information / documentation should be submitted:

- Clarity regarding the range of delivery modes to be used. Will apprenticeship students and non-apprenticeship students be eligible to register for the award for example?
- Apprenticeship standard (approved for delivery) which the proposed award maps to.

- Mapping of the academic award to this standard which should be appended to the programme specification.
- The approved assessment plan and details of how the academic award links to this.
- End Point Assessment details and how this will or will not link to the degree element.
- An example commitment statement that will be used.
- Work-based learning quality assurance resources. For example, Handbooks developed for the employers, mentors, practice tutors, etc.

Regulatory framework and institutional policies

In addition to the student handbook, the institution's regulations (Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University) and policies should be provided as separate documents. This includes any documents included in the student handbook either by means of a simple reference or a general statement, which includes a reference to where the full document can be found. It is accepted that this may lead to some duplication of information.

Material on institution-wide strategies and policies and procedures should be the same for all programmes considered for validation.

The policy and regulatory framework required for (re)validation submissions will typically comprise:

Admissions policy and regulations for the programme: These will be in accordance with the OU's [Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University](#). OU's Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University.

Assessment/progression policy and regulations: These will be in accordance with the OU's [Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University](#).

Staff development policy: This will be the institution's staff development policy setting out how it operates at programme level. This should include information on:

- Staff appraisal
- Peer review or teaching
- Induction and mentoring of new staff
- Support to visiting and part-time staff
- Opportunities for internal staff development or CPD workshops
- Opportunities for research/scholarship activities
- Staff involvement in subject networks.

Placement learning policies and regulations/study abroad regulations:

This should cover:

- The role of supervisors/mentors
- Criteria for approval of placements
- Student support and information
- Student responsibilities and feedback
- Monitoring and evaluation of placement/study abroad opportunities.

Apprenticeship regulations for the (re) validation of programmes being used to deliver against English apprenticeship standards or frameworks.

This should cover:

- The role of mentors, practice tutors, work-based learning tutors etc
- Independent learner record and commitment statement
- Student support and information for the workplace
- Student responsibilities and feedback
- Employer responsibilities and feedback
- Monitoring and evaluation of work-based learning
- Complaints and appeals processes for apprenticeship students.

Equality and diversity policies (covering both staffing and student matters): [The OU's expectations regarding equality and diversity are set out in Section H.](#)

The OU expects institutions to have established internal procedures for formal approval of programme documentation. Submission documentation will be prepared by institutions in advance of preliminary (re)validation meetings and reviewed to take account of external input as part of the (re)validation process.

Process Panel Member

The OU may nominate an academic representative (the process panel member (PPM)), who will offer comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The PPM will be a member of both the preliminary validation meeting organised by the institution and the final validation meeting organised by the OU and the important criterion is that the person nominated has specialist expertise relevant to the proposal.

The institution is invited to identify one external panel member – an institutional process panel member (IPPM) – for the preliminary validation panel who may also take part in the final validation, subject to approval by the OU. The aim of this is to give an opportunity for institutions to have a 'critical friend' involved in the process of considering whether the programme is ready to be (re)validated and who can link between the preliminary and the final validation meetings.

Approval of IPPMs to sit on final validation panels will be subject to the submission of a CV to the SQPM. The nomination should be submitted at an early stage, ideally in advance of the planning meeting. The following criteria will be taken into account:

- Expertise relevant to the proposal
- Impartiality – for example, the nominee will not have had formal links with the institution in the last five years as an external examiner or a former member of staff
- Prior experience of teaching on programmes at the same level or above
- Where appropriate, professional expertise from a relevant professional background
- Individuals who have been engaged by the institution as external consultants for the proposal should not be nominated as process panel members.

Panel members will be asked to provide initial comments on (re)validation documentation including issues for consideration and further information needed, a summary of which will be shared with the institution. The OU encourages observers nominated by the institution to overview the (re)validation process and, as appropriate, attend any meetings, except those with students.

Observers will not be decision-making members of the panel but are encouraged to assist the panel by contributing factual information if requested. If, however, a situation should arise where the participation of observers is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the Chair has the discretion to ask observers to leave until recalled.

Observers will be a member of the partner institutions academic staff but may not be members of the senior management of the institution or persons involved in the management or teaching of the programme under validation or revalidation. Observers may be invited when an Institutional Reapproval and (Re)validation of a programme take place concurrently, subject to the prior agreement of the Chair of the panel. When this happens, observers are normally external members of the institution's Academic Board or its equivalent, or from the institution's Governing Body. Observers are not permitted at Institutional Approvals or Institutional Reapproval meetings when these do not include the concurrent (Re)validation of a programme.

Appendix 3: Guidance on the Content of Student Handbooks

Although The Open University considers it best practice to provide essential information to students in a single student handbook, we recognise that partner institutions may wish to present information to students through different media or online formats.

The OU expects partners to provide specific set of information which should be available to students in a clear, accessible and student-friendly language.

Students should be clearly signposted to relevant institutional policy documents or referred to relevant Virtual Learning Environment or web links.

The OU is happy to accept a variety of documents which together provide students with the required information. This could be, for example, a generic college HE handbook supplemented with programme specific information.

Documentation that should be **publicly available** and **easily accessible**, and **up to date**, include:

1. Admissions policies and procedures
2. Complaints and Appeals policy and procedures
3. Data Protection and Retention policy and procedures
4. Disciplinary/Behaviour policy
5. Equality and Diversity policy and procedures
6. Safeguarding and Prevent policy and procedures
7. Student Protection Plan
8. Validated Partner Academic Regulations
9. The structure of the course with programme specifications available
10. Fees, including refunds and payment details, any annual increases (including the metric used to calculate increase such as inflation or flat %)
11. Terms and Conditions, which should be made available on the public facing website prior to prospective students' acceptance of an offer. Any surprising or important terms should be highlighted
12. Website accessibility.

Where a student handbook covers a set of related awards or modes of study, any special features must be clearly stated for each variation. For example, learning outcomes for validated exit awards should be specified in a positive language.

Where modules within a programme are offered as **single registerable modules**, a student handbook for module-only students should also be developed setting out:

- the detail of the delivery model especially where the 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 that is 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 will be available to those on module-only study.

Programme specifications (item 7 below) will be subject to close scrutiny by validation panels, and they may initially be stand-alone working documents that will be incorporated later in the final text once they have been approved by final validation panel. [Institutions are to use the University's template for programme specifications](#), which is designed to be a **concise** description of the programme that is accessible to students, employers and other stakeholders.

The minimum content that must be made available to students, in handbooks or otherwise are as follows:

1. **Welcome and introduction** (institution and department)
2. **Academic calendar** (including term, assessment and exam board dates)
3. **List of programme leader(s) and academic staff, their contact details and availability arrangements**
4. **List of support staff** (technical and administrative)
5. **Name, position and institution of the External Examiner(s) involved in the programme**
6. **Introduction to the programme**
 - i. Background, history, philosophy
 - ii. Where a programme leads to professional body recognition (e.g. engineering, teaching, social work) or accreditation, this should be clearly set out in the definitive student handbook
 - iii. Attendance requirements
 - iv. Opportunities available to students on completion of the programme (employment, further academic study, etc).
7. **Programme specification**
 - i. Overview/factual information
 - ii. Programme aims and objectives
 - iii. Learning outcomes, which should be linked to:
 - a teaching methods
 - b assessment strategy
 - c programme structure (including information on exit awards)

d. curriculum map.

8. Student support, guidance and advice

- i. Induction arrangements
- ii. Personal tutoring
- iii. Study skills
- iv. Careers advice
- v. Counselling
- vi. Role of personal tutor
- vii. Careers guidance at both institutional and programme level
- viii. Counselling and student welfare
- ix. Support for students with disabilities
- x. Financial advice and support
- xi. Guide to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

9. Opportunities for personal development planning

10. Opportunities and support for study abroad (if applicable)

- i. Rationale
- ii. Criteria and approval processes for suitable placements
- iii. Responsibility for finding and arranging placement
- iv. Supervision arrangements
- v. Student responsibilities
- vi. Supporting and feedback arrangements.

11. Work placement information (if applicable)

- i. Rationale
- ii. Criteria and approval processes for suitable placements
- iii. Responsibility for finding and arranging placement
- iv. Supervision arrangements
- v. Student responsibilities
- vi. Supporting and feedback arrangements.

12. Facilities and Services

- i. Library/ e-learning resources
- ii. Computing facilities
- iii. Technical support and helpdesk
- iv. Catering Services
- v. Multimedia
- vi. Workshop, laboratory, studio or study areas and other specialist accommodation available to support the programme
- vii. Equipment required to be provided by the student.

13. Assessment and progression regulations

Student handbooks should provide a clear explanation of the rules governing the assessment matters in a clear and succinct format that is accessible to students ([Regulations for Validated Awards of the Open University](#)). This information should be conveyed in an accessible and jargon-free language. Some institutions may prefer to publish these regulations separately from student handbooks, in which case they must be circulated to all students. Where appropriate, the student handbook should refer students to any web links where the regulations can be found.

Guidelines to students on progression and assessment should cover:

- i. Identification of all elements of assessment, including type, volume weighting and timings of assessment
- ii. Minimum pass marks for modules
- iii. Rules governing extension to submission deadlines
- iv. Penalties for late submission or non-submission of work
- v. Process for requesting deferral of modules
- vi. Assessment of work-based learning, where applicable
- vii. Assessment of presentations and performance, where applicable
- viii. Definitions and consequences of academic misconduct, including plagiarism
- ix. Mechanisms for provision of feedback to students on performance, and the role of formative and summative assessment
- x. Acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation
- xi. Progression regulations
- xii. Reassessment and re-sits
- xiii. Extenuating circumstances
- xiv. Appeals and complaints procedures
- xv. Provision for students with special needs.

14. Dissertations and projects

- i. Support arrangements
- ii. In the case of dissertations, explicit criteria for viva-voce.

15. Determination of results

- i. Assessment weightings for the overall scheme and within specific modules.
- ii. How results are communicated
- iii. Rules for determining degree classification, and for the award of honours, distinction, merit and pass as applicable
- iv. Brief explanation on the role of assessment boards and External Examiners and MRAQCP.

16. Other institutional policies and regulations

Some of the information below may be given in the form of general brief statements (ideally with links included) that refer students to separate generic institutional policy documents.

- i. Disability statement
- ii. Safeguarding
- iii. Prevent
- iv. Grounds and procedures for appeals
- v. Equal opportunities statement
- vi. Data protection
- vii. Health and safety issues.

17. Other institutional policies and regulations

18. Student participation and evaluation

- i. Arrangements for student feedback and how the institution uses it
- ii. Student representation on committees
- iii. Registered student organisations
- iv. Academic and professional organisations.

19. General reading list (i.e. not module specific), including electronic resources.

Appendix 4: Glossary

The glossary below briefly explains some of our most frequently used terms.

You may also wish to refer to [the glossary that the Office for Students provides on its website – Glossary: Office for Students](#) – or [the glossary that Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\) provides on its website](#) (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)	<p>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.</p> <p>They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The OfS monitors access and participation plans to make sure that the providers honour the commitments they make to students in these plans and take action if they do not. (OfS 2021).</p>
Administrative Audit	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.
Approval	The process by which an institution without its own degree awarding powers is given authority by the OU to provide programmes of study leading to validated awards.

Approval Letter/Re-approval letter	The formal letter by which the OU confirms to an institution that it has been (re)approved by The Open University 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 documentary evidence that should be issued to students at the end of their Institutions complaints or appeals procedures.
Completion of Procedures Letter	This is documentary evidence that the Open University should issue to students once they have exhausted both their institution's complaints or appeals procedures and that of The Open University.
Conferment	When the qualification is awarded (also referred to as certification).
Credit	<p>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).</p> <p>There is broad agreement amongst institutions in England that one credit represents 10 notional hours of successful learning.</p>

Credit level descriptor	A statement of the generic characteristics of learning at a specific credit level, used as a reference point for those designing programmes of study. (QAA 2021)
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 Open University committee. CuPC is responsible to the Education Committee for 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.
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 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.
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 continued monitoring process that replaced annual monitoring and which is in a staged roll-out for partners.
Institutional Approval	The 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.
Institutional Reapproval	The process by which an institution is critically reviewed for the purposes of confirming that it continues to meet the OU's requirements.
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 monitoring/IPM. 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)
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)
Memorandum of co-operation	Where a programme is jointly developed or delivered, or involves significant input from an external body, respective responsibilities should be set out in a memorandum of co-operation. The purpose of this is to define the means by which the academic standards of the programme will be maintained, to ensure that the collaborative arrangements are clearly set out and operate smoothly, and that clear channels of authority, accountability and executive action are identified.
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' below.
Module Results Approval and Qualification Panel (MRAQCP)	Module Results Approval and Qualification Panel (MRAQCP) – the panel that ratifies the recommendations of all Examination Award Boards when satisfied that the approved regulations and correct procedures have been followed and appropriate academic standards upheld.
Office for Students (OfS)	The Office for Students (OfS) are 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)

Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP)	Office within The Open University responsible for validating awards for academic institutions, professional bodies, companies and other organisations.
Partner institution	see “Approval” above.
Preliminary Administrative Audit	A mock Administrative Audit where policies and processes that have been, and are, in development will be reviewed. (See above.) Required for those institutions where additional support is deemed necessary.
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 (review)	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.
Quality Assurance Agency or 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.
(UK) Quality Code for Higher Education (2024)	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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)	<p>(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.</p>
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.
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)	<p>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.</p> <p>The OU require all partner institutions to have a student protection plan in place (regardless of whether they are OfS registered).</p>
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.
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 Open University validated awards.
Validation	The formal process whereby a new programme of study is critically appraised by the OU, in order to establish if it meets its requirements for validation.
Work-based learning (workplace learning)	Learning that takes place, in part or as a whole, in the context of employment.

The Open University Validation Partnerships

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Revised August 2024

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