



## Educational Partnerships – Annual Monitoring, Modifications and Periodic Review Policy

### Purpose

This policy outlines the requirements and expectations for annual monitoring for courses delivered in partnership, for the Modification of such courses, and for periodic review of Partnerships.

The revised [UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(3 May 2018\)](#) sets out the following Core Practices for providers working in partnership with other organisations:

- ‘Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them’
- ‘Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them’

This policy has been drawn up after due consideration of the QAA Quality Code and associated Advice and Guidance and is designed to ensure that the University College meets the above requirements and guidance.

### 1 Annual monitoring

- 1.1 The University College’s annual monitoring processes, as set out in the **Annual Course Monitoring: Policy and Procedure** should be followed for all units and courses delivered within an approved educational partnership.
- 1.2 A separate course monitoring report should be completed for each course delivered in partnership. It is expected that the report will be compiled by the appropriate staff at the Partner institution, with input from relevant University College staff. The relevant Link Tutor is responsible for ensuring that the required reports are completed and submitted. The Link Tutor should be available to offer advice and assistance as required – for example by acting as the ‘critical friend’ by reviewing a report prior to submission.
- 1.3 In addition to the above, a partnership-specific Link Tutor Annual Report should be completed by the Link Tutor, covering all AECC University College courses delivered at that Partner institution, and reporting on the partnership over the course of the academic year. The report will provide a brief overview of student recruitment, progression and awards, resources and facilities, academic and support issues arising during the year (particularly where (when applicable), these issues are common across AECC University College courses delivered in partnership at that institution), good practice and recommendations for any actions, as appropriate to the partnership. Within this process the performance of students provided with learning opportunities in the Partner institution should be compared with students on the same or similar courses at the University College. It is expected that the report will be compiled with input from relevant staff at the Partner who have oversight of the provision. The Link Tutor Annual Report will provide the University College with an evaluation of the relationship with the Partner, together with feedback on the partnership from an operational and strategic perspective, in order to ensure appropriate oversight.
- 1.4 The Link Tutor Annual Report will be considered by Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) at its October meeting, alongside other annual monitoring reports.
- 1.5 A summary of key issues and good practice arising from the annual monitoring of courses delivered in partnership will be included in the annual assurance report to Academic Board and the Board of Governors. This will focus on overarching issues of strategic concern or of significant concern for academic standards and quality.
- 1.6 The University reserves the right to visit the Partner institution should these processes raise concerns or queries, or should the same arise from other sources including for example, student feedback and complaints.

## 2 **Considering serious concerns**

- 2.1 If, in consideration of any data on the quality and standards of provision, whether through the above reporting process or highlighted at other times, the Link Tutor, Head of School, Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) or Academic Registrar perceive that the quality and/or standards of the award may be threatened and the partner organisation is unable or unwilling to take remedial action, the Chair of ASQC must be informed immediately.
- 2.2 Issues that may trigger such a concern include; highly critical external examiner report (particularly if the report highlights that previous concerns have not been addressed), high failure rates, concerns raised by a professional body; failings in either the administrative or academic arrangements of a course; evidence of concerns about assessment arrangements (for example, relating to marking standards or effectiveness of moderation); concerns regarding academic staffing, failings in standards that do not appear to have been rectified through normal processes, cohort size not sufficient to sustain quality of student experience or the Partner has repeatedly failed to provide the required monitoring information when due.
- 2.3 The Head of School, in consultation with those identifying the concern should prepare a report documenting the evidence leading to the concern, and forward this to the Chair of ASQC and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) by the Head of School.
- 2.4 If the Chair of ASQC and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) are in agreement that the concerns are significant, the Head of School should write to the Partner to clearly set out the areas of concern, what action is required from the Partner, and provide a deadline and an indication of how the action is to be evidenced. The Partner will be asked to develop an action plan in consultation with the Link Tutor, Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and the Head of School. There is no template or set deadline for this action plan as each case will be different, depending on the nature of the issues raised and the level of risk – the arrangements will be agreed in discussion with the Partner. The Head of School, Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and Chair of ASQC will consider the Partner institution response and action plan. This will either be accepted or further actions will be requested.
- 2.5 The action plan will be presented to ASQC for note.
- 2.6 If the concerns are considered to be so significant that the Head of School and the Chair of ASQC consider that the intake to the course should be suspended until the required actions have been addressed satisfactorily; for example where the programme does not have an acceptable teaching team in place, or where academic standards are at risk the arrangements regarding suspension as set out in section 5 will apply.
- 2.7 If the Head of School, Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and Chair of ASQC are not satisfied with the response from the partner, a decision will need to be made as to the termination of the agreement, as set out in section 5 of this document.

## 3 **Modifications to courses**

- 3.1 All courses must be taught as approved by the University College and information published to students must be drawn from the approved documentation only.
- 3.2 Any proposed modifications to courses or units delivered through partners must be taken forward in accordance with the University College's Framework/Course and Unit Modifications Policy and Procedures policy.
- 3.3 In the event that the relevant University College School proposes modifications to a course / unit which requires implementation at the Partner. In such circumstances transition arrangements for implementation at the partner will be considered as part of the process for considering the course or unit modification.
- 3.4 It is the responsibility of the Link Tutor to communicate the approved changes to the Partner.
- 3.5 In the case of Validated Provision i.e where a course designed, delivered and assessed by a partner institution has been approved to lead to an award of the University College, the partner may propose a course or unit modification. Course and unit modifications will normally be

discussed with the relevant School to ensure that the alterations are appropriate and then be processed through the University College's standard course/unit modification procedures, with input from the Link Tutor.

- 3.6 In line with the Course Modifications Policy, the Link Tutor, in discussion with the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) should make an initial decision as to whether any proposed change is a major change to the course which requires a review/re-approval (see Course Approval and Review Policy and Procedure), or a minor change which requires a modification. Where the changes proposed are major this may have implications for the approval of the Partner relationship. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) should be consulted for advice.
- 3.7 Depending on the nature of the modifications it may be appropriate to refresh due diligence at this point. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) should be consulted for advice.
- 3.8 It may be the case that modifications necessitate amendments to the contract governing the partnership delivery, or the drawing up of a supplementary Schedule to the contract. Where this applies the relevant Head of School should discuss and agree the proposed amendments with the Executive Director of Administration and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance). (Where there are financial implications the Director of Finance should be consulted). The amendments will need to be considered and approved by the Partner.
- 3.9 Amendments may also be required to the Partnership Operations Handbook appended to the contract (see section 12 of the **Policy for the Consideration and Approval of Educational Partnerships**). Such amendments will be determined by the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and Academic Registrar in consultation with the relevant Head of School and the partner institution). The amended Partnership Operations Handbook will be appended to the contract.
- 3.10 Any amendment to the contract or supplementary schedule will require sign off by the Principal and the approved signatory at the Partner institution. (See section 11 of the **Policy for the Consideration and Approval of Educational Partnerships**).

#### 4 **Periodic Review of Educational Partnerships**

- 4.1 In addition to the monitoring and review processes set out above, educational partnerships are subject to regular periodic review. The purpose of the periodic review is focussed on the effective management of and arrangements for the partnership, and the relationship with the University College, to ensure that the standards of AECC University College awards delivered by/with a partner institution are being met and maintained, and that there is effective management and delivery of a high quality student learning experience. This is distinct from periodic review of a specific course delivered in partnership, although the two processes may be linked.
- 4.2 The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will keep a record of partner institution review dates and will determine the programme of reviews, in consultation with Heads of Schools and the Chair of ASQC.
- 4.3 The maximum period of time between reviews should be 6 years but the scheduling of each review within that timeframe will take account of the following:
  - The timing of periodic reviews for associated course delivered at or with the partner
  - The outcome of annual quality assurance monitoring processes, as set out above.
  - The outcome of external quality assurance processes, such as QAA or relevant national quality assurance agency institutional reviews, or Professional body accreditation.
  - Changes in the circumstances of the partner institution, such as concerns about the financial viability of the partner institution, or significant changes in the ownership, management structures or mission of the partner institution.
  - Changes in the Partnership arrangement, such as: plans to expand the range of courses offered or to cease to offer a particular award.
- 4.4 The Link Tutor(s) must ensure that the Partner institution is informed about what the review will involve.

## Periodic Review process

- 4.5 It is important as part of the Periodic Review process to consider whether a Partnership continues to be appropriate to the University College's vision, mission and strategy, is financially viable, and remains reliable in terms of financial, legal, academic and reputational factors. Therefore a further due diligence and risk assessment exercise should be conducted. The Head of the relevant School will normally take the lead in coordinating the required documentation, and presenting this to Senior Management Group (SMG) for consideration. (The Head of School may delegate this to an appropriate senior colleague if required). (See the Due diligence and risk assessment section of the **Policy for the Consideration and Approval of Educational Partnerships**).
- 4.6 SMG will consider the business case, due diligence, financial viability and assurances that the proposed partnership does not expose this institution to unnecessary risk. SMG may give initial approval to continue the partnership, ask the School or the proposed partner to provide more information, or it could reject the proposal outright. If it rejects the proposal, the Principal, as Chair of SMG, will inform the proposed partner and arrange for the commencement of discussions to formally close the partnership (including arrangements for support for students) and notify the Office for Students, in line with arrangements set out in the relevant partnership contract.
- 4.7 If SMG approves the continuation of the partnership as a business case the academic periodic review process may proceed.
- 4.8 The Periodic Review process for partners will involve a Panel convened by the University College (approved by ASQC). The Review Panel will normally consist of:
- Chair –nominated member of senior academic staff, normally an academic member of ASQC
  - Two Internal panel members—with good knowledge of quality assurance policies and processes and relevant external reference points.
  - The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), or nominee, who will act as secretary for the review.

Additional panel members may be appointed as appropriate to the nature of the partnership, in discussion between the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), the Chair of ASQC, and the Head of School. This may include the appointment of one or more external advisors, in accordance with the External Advisor Policy.

- 4.9 The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) in discussion with the Link Tutor, and the Panel Chair will be responsible for liaising with the Partner institution and AECC University College staff involved in the visit to agree the date of visit (normally one day) and the arrangements for the Panel meeting.
- 4.10 The relevant Course Administrator will be responsible for making travel and hotel arrangements for overseas visits, and all other practical arrangements necessary for the Panel meeting.
- 4.11 The costs incurred in attending the meeting will normally be met by the Partner.
- 4.12 The following documents are required for the Panel:
- Self-evaluation document, prepared by the Partner Institution, to provide a brief overview of the partnership and an evaluation of the operation of the partnership since it was first approved or since the last review.
  - Course specification and unit(s)
  - Partnership Operations Handbook
  - Course Handbook
  - Annual monitoring reports and Link Tutor reports
  - External examiner reports and responses
  - Relevant student performance data
  - External quality assurance reports, (if appropriate, -QAA Review etc)
  - Professional body accreditation reports (if appropriate).
  - Updated due diligence report.
  - Copy of the relevant Partner contract

- 4.13 The venue for the Panel meeting will be determined in discussion between the Chair of ASQC, the relevant Head of School and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), but will normally be the Partner institution. The agenda for the visit is likely to include:
- A meeting with the Head and/or other senior member of the partner institution;
  - Tour of Facilities (IT Labs, Library, teaching, etc)
  - Discussion with staff from the partner institution involved in the delivery and management of the collaborative course(s) and the academic link tutor about:
    - Recruitment, Admissions & Marketing
    - Resources and Staffing
    - Quality management and enhancement processes
    - Student support
    - Information supplied to students
    - Student engagement.
  - A discussion with students
- 4.14 The Partner Institution is responsible for deciding which of its staff members should be present for these discussions.
- 4.15 The Link Tutor will normally attend the Panel meetings with the Partner staff.

#### **Outcome of the review**

- 4.16 The Panel will agree its conclusions and formulate outcomes. The outcomes should include aspects of good practice and strengths of the provision as well as a judgment on approval as outlined below. The Panel will determine an appropriate deadline for response to recommendations.
- 4.17 The outcome from the Periodic Review Panel will take one of the following forms:
- i to recommend unconditional continuation of the partnership subject to normal periodic review;
  - ii to recommend approval of continuation subject to conditions and/or recommendations and subject to normal periodic review;
  - iii to recommend approval of continuation for a limited period only with or without conditions and/or recommendations, after which a review will be held;
  - iv to recommend that approval be withheld, as a result of significant concerns which the Panel considers incapable of remedy.

Conditions are requirements that must be met within a set timeframe, upon which the approval of the activity is conditional. The response to the conditions must be confirmed as having been met prior to final approval of the activity i.e. before the activity can commence operating.

Recommendations are longer term advisory points for consideration. It is not a requirement that they are met, but it is expected that they will be considered and that comment or a commitment to action as appropriate will be included in the response, and through the relevant annual monitoring for the activity.

- 4.18 Following the institutional visit, the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will produce a report outlining the Panel's conclusions. Once this has been approved by the Panel it will be submitted to the relevant Head of School and the designated contact at the Partner Institution for checking for factual accuracy.
- 4.19 Approval of the continuation of the course delivered in partnership rests with Academic Board, on the recommendation of the Periodic Review Panel acting on behalf of ASQC.
- 4.20 In the event that the recommendation is to withhold approval the procedure for terminating a Partnership in section 5 below should be followed.
- 4.21 The Partner Institution, working with the relevant Head of School and Link Tutor will be required to prepare a response to the report, detailing the actions to be taken to address any conditions and recommendations. The response should be submitted to the Panel by the deadline set.

- 4.22 Once it has been confirmed that the conditions have been satisfactorily met, approval is confirmed by the Chair and communicated to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance).
- 4.23 The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will ensure that the outcomes are reported to ASQC for note, and that the final outcome is communicated to all relevant staff and to the Partner. The Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) will update the register of approved partnerships.

### **Written contract**

- 4.24 The formal written contract for the Educational Partnership will be reviewed, refreshed and re-signed as part of the periodic review process. (See section 11 of the Policy for the Consideration and Approval of Educational Partnerships).

## **5 Suspensions and/or Termination**

### **Suspension**

- 5.1 Should significant concerns be raised about a Partnership, and discussions with the Partner have failed to resolve the issue, it may be necessary for the intake to a course or courses delivered with that Partner to be suspended.
- 5.2 A recommendation to suspend a Partnership should be reached in discussion between the relevant Head of School, the members of the University Executive, and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), based on the available evidence. Discussions should normally also take place with the Partner institution in advance of the final recommendation.
- 5.3 The recommendation to suspend a Partnership will be submitted to Academic Board for consideration and final approval. The decision will be drawn to the attention of the Board of Governors.
- 5.4 Once the decision has been approved the Chair of ASQC and Head of School, working with the Academic Registrar, and other relevant colleagues, will determine the practical arrangements for suspending the intake, in discussion with the Partner. As suspending the partnership is a contractual issue official notification of suspension should be sent to the Partner by the Principal. The letter will include information regarding the means of reactivating to the course following the completion of the required improvements. This may be through a satisfactory report from the School, or a formal re approval of the course to be delivered in partnership. A refreshed due diligence risk assessment may be required.
- 5.5 There may be cases where the University College needs to arrange alternative delivery for current students. The University College will act with sensitivity so that prospective students are notified in reasonable time of any suspension or alternative arrangements, and will act in accordance with the Student Protection Plan and arrangements set out in the relevant contract governing the Educational Partnership.

### **Termination**

- 5.6 The procedure to terminate an educational partnership may be initiated on the recommendation of a Periodic Review Panel, following a periodic review of the partnership (see above), by the Chair of ASQC in the light of serious concerns regarding academic standards, by the relevant School, AECC University College senior management or by the Partner institution. The reasons for seeking termination of the partnership may include:
- non-viability of the course(s) in terms of enrolment, retention and cost
  - issues relating to academic quality and standards identified through the internal monitoring and review processes or by external accrediting bodies
  - failure to address serious concerns (section 2 of this document)
  - changes in the potential level of risk
  - changes in corporate strategy and mission
  - a change in status or ownership of the Partner organisation.
- 5.7 A recommendation to terminate a Partnership will be reached in discussion between the relevant Head of School, the members of the University Executive, Senior Management Group (with regard

to the financial implications of the decision), the Chair of the relevant Periodic Review Panel (where applicable – see section 4 above) and the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), based on the available evidence. Discussions should normally also take place with the Partner institution in advance of the final recommendation.

- 5.8 The recommendation to terminate a Partnership, with appropriate evidence, will be submitted to Academic Board for consideration and final approval. Academic Board’s decision will be drawn to the attention of the Board of Governors.
- 5.9 The procedure to be followed to terminate an arrangement should be specified in the contract, including the required notice period, and provision for requiring immediate termination in the event of a major breach of the agreement. The notice period for termination will be set out in the agreement. The agreement will also establish full details of the procedures and consequences of termination.
- 5.10 Where the decision to terminate a partnership also involves the closure of a course/courses both institutions will consider the position of applicants and enrolled students, to minimise the impact on their studies is minimised. Ultimate responsibility will lie with the University College, as required under the Quality Code. The final details of the arrangements to be followed will be agreed between the Vice-Principal, the Head of Finance, the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and the relevant Head of School in discussion with relevant Partner staff.
- 5.11 Termination/closure must be carefully managed to ensure that academic standards and the quality of the experience are maintained for remaining students, including students who interrupt their programme or repeat a year. This will include the preparation of:
- a ‘Teach-Out Plan’ setting out the position and expectations arising from this, respective responsibilities of both parties (including responsibility for key quality assurance matters, such as the appointment of external examiners) and clear timescales. The Teach-Out plan will be prepared by the Head of School in discussion with the Link Tutor, Registry, the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and relevant staff at the Partner institution. The Director of Finance will be involved where there are financial aspects to the plan. The teach-out plan will be monitored by the Head of School and through ASQC until all students have completed or left the course.
  - a communication plan agreed with the Partner institution which clearly sets out how and what staff and students are told about the closure of the partnership to ensure a consistent message and to minimise damage to the reputation of both parties
- 5.12 The partner organisation must continue to meet all financial obligations to the University as previously agreed.
- 5.13 During the Teach-Out phase, the University College’s normal quality assurance and enhancement processes will continue to apply.
- 5.14 The Link Tutor should ensure ongoing communication with the Partner institution during the Teach-Out phase and that a full record of all communications is kept.
- 5.15 An agreement which has expired and no longer has any students is automatically terminated and no further work is required.

Version:	1.1 Amended in the light of revisions to University College Committee structure, and to amend titles.
Approved by:	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Reference source	UK Quality Code. Equivalent policies at other UK HEIs, including: University of Suffolk, Newcastle University, Staffordshire University, University of Cardiff, LSBU
Date approved	11 March 2020
Effective from	12 March 2020
Review date	Nov 2023
Target	Link Tutors for educational partnerships, Heads of School, ASQC members, relevant staff at all approved educational partners
Policy location	SIP/public website

Equality Impact	No direct impact – any issues specific to a partnership would be considered as part of the review processes and meetings established under this policy
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