

University of Suffolk

PROCEDURE FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

1. Introduction to the institutional review process

- 1.1 Institutional review is the process by which University of Suffolk partner institutions are reviewed at institutional level to ensure that they remain suitable for the conduct of higher education programmes leading to University of Suffolk awards. It also provides an opportunity for both the University and the partner to reflect on whether the partnership continues to operate effectively and whether there is scope for future enhancement of collaborative working. The institutional review process is informed by the principles of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and in particular the advice and guidance on partnerships.
- 1.2 Institutional review normally takes place every five years during the final year of the existing period of institutional approval, and is the basis for institutional re-approval with effect from the following academic year. The review process can be brought forward at the discretion of the Chair of Senate or at the request of the partner concerned, for example where there is a particular concern about the quality and/or academic standards of provision or where the partner is making significant changes to structure or strategy that would benefit from detailed scrutiny.
- 1.3 The institutional review process is distinct from course re-approval and does not consider course specific issues, except where they are used as evidence of a symptomatic issue or where they provide examples of good practice to be expanded or disseminated. The institutional review process also does not include consideration of the financial basis of a partnership (which falls under the remit of the University of Suffolk Executive and Board) except where financial issues might impact on quality and academic standards, for example in relation to the provision of resources to support the student learning experience.
- 1.4 The process usually involves an institutional review event where a panel of internal and external experts meet to discuss and re-approve the partner institution based on:
- their prior consideration of a standard set of institutional review documentation, including a self-evaluation document (and supporting evidence) compiled by the partner and an evaluative report prepared by the University on the operation of the partnership; and
 - meetings with staff at the partner and with students registered (or previously registered) on University of Suffolk validated or franchised courses.
- 1.5 The purpose of institutional review is:
- a) to provide assurance that the partner institution is, and will continue to be, suitable for the conduct of higher education programmes leading to University of Suffolk awards,

including the provision of a learning experience for students of an appropriate quality and academic standard, and the provision of student support services appropriate to the partner's context and students (for partner FE colleges, the extent to which the college is able to engender an HE ethos within a largely FE setting is an important element in this)

- b) to ensure continuing adherence to relevant University regulations, policies and procedures within the partner, including those relating to management of the student lifecycle and quality assurance and enhancement
- c) to ensure that arrangements for the strategic and operational management of the partnership (by both the University and the partner) continue to operate effectively and efficiently, and that any risks are appropriately managed
- d) to identify good practice for wider dissemination across the University and other partner institutions
- e) to consider areas for future development and enhancement within the partner institution
- f) to reflect on the future development of the partnership and mechanisms for continuing to enhance collaborative working.

2. The University of Suffolk's evaluative report

- 2.1 The University of Suffolk will prepare an evaluative report on the operation and management of the collaborative partnership, including reflection on current and anticipated risks and associated control measures. The report will reflect on the effectiveness of the structures, procedures and mechanisms in place to ensure the quality and academic standard of validated or franchised courses delivered by the partner. This includes reflection on the extent to which the University has provided adequate support and guidance to the partner to facilitate effective collaborative working.
- 2.2 The report will reflect the views of a range of University staff involved in the day-to-day operation of the partnership, and will identify key themes for consideration by the institutional review panel. The draft report will be sent to the partner institution for comment prior to circulation, and will be finalised at least two weeks prior to the deadline for the partner's self evaluation document so that it can inform the final stages of their evaluation process.

3. The partner self-evaluation document (SED)

- 3.1 The partner institution's SED should provide an evaluative commentary on the period under review, reflecting on the partner's strategic and operational management of HE provision and the effectiveness of partnership working with the University. A key element of the process is demonstrating to the review panel how the partner institution continues to ensure that students are provided with learning opportunities of an appropriate quality and academic standard. It is important that the report provides an honest appraisal of both aspects of good practice and areas for enhancement. A SED template is available

on the [approval, monitoring and review of partnership activity](#) pages on the University website.

- 3.2 It is expected that most of the documentary evidence to support the evaluative commentary will already be available within the institution, and that the SED will summarise the Risk-Based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME) data provided since the previous institutional review. The evaluation should draw upon a wide range of evidence including statistical data, feedback from students, employers and external examiners and any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) or other external review reports.
- 3.3 The SED should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) in an agreed electronic format at least four weeks in advance of the institutional review event.

4. The institutional review panel

- 4.1 The institutional review panel includes a range of representatives who are able to judge whether the partnership is operating effectively and whether the partner institution continues to offer HE provision of a suitable quality and academic standard, within the context of relevant internal and external reference points. Within the panel as a whole there should be sufficient understanding of the management of collaborative provision to enable the panel to make a sound judgement. Panel membership is subject to approval by the Chair of the Quality Committee.
- 4.2 Panel membership typically comprises:
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
 - one external representative with appropriate experience of collaborative provision
 - at least one member of University of Suffolk academic staff
 - Academic Registrar or nominee
 - Head of Quality Enhancement or nominee
 - one representative from Library and Learning Services
 - one representative from the Partnerships team
 - one representative from the University of Suffolk Students' Union
 - one senior representative from the partner institution under review.
- 4.3 The institutional review panel will be serviced by a member of the Validation and Exams team or a senior University administrator.
- 4.4 A briefing pack containing relevant documentation is sent to members of the institutional review panel in hard copy at least three weeks in advance of the event, and will typically contain:
- a list of panel members
 - an agenda for the review event
 - a summary of the institutional review process

- guidance notes for panel members
 - the University's evaluative report
 - the partner's self-evaluation document
 - travel information for relevant panel members
 - fee claim forms/guidance for external panel members.
- 4.5 All other supporting documentation from the partner is provided electronically.
- 4.6 The member of the panel from the partner institution under review is present for all the panel's discussions, except the meeting with students.
- 4.7 A checklist setting out guidance for institutional review panel members and an additional guide for student representatives is available on the [approval, monitoring and review of partnership activity](#) pages on the University website. These are sent out to all panel members with the review documentation.
- 4.8 In the absence of any panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the review event should proceed is at the Chair's discretion. Normally, at least half of the panel should be present, including the Chair and the external academic representative.

Criteria for the appointment of external panel members

- 4.9 The external panel member is identified and appointed by the University and should be able to demonstrate:
- a) appropriate competence and experience and continuing active involvement in the delivery and/or management of higher education within the university sector
 - b) knowledge and understanding of relevant external reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
 - c) experience in the management of higher education provision delivered in partnership with others.
- 4.10 The appointment as an external panel member of anyone in the following categories or circumstances is not permissible:
- a) a member of the governing body of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions
 - b) a current employee of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions
 - c) a current or former external examiner appointed to a course at the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions, unless a period of five years has elapsed since the appointment ended
 - d) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff at the partner institution under review
 - e) anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative activities with a member of staff at the partner institution under review

- f) former staff or students of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions, unless a period of five years has elapsed since their employment ended or they completed their studies.

5. The institutional review event

- 5.1 An institutional review event normally takes place at the partner institution under review, with the agenda scheduled for a full day. In addition to private meetings of the review panel, a meeting with partner staff and with students registered or previously registered on validated or franchised courses within the partner both form a key part of the event. Where appropriate, the panel may also meet with a range of employers. Normally, a tour of facilities and specialist resources is included (for example library, IT facilities, laboratory or other specialist facilities and HE social spaces). An example of a typical agenda for a review event is available on the [approval, monitoring and review of partnership activity](#) pages on the University website.
- 5.2 During a private meeting of the panel at the start of the institutional review event, the Chair will:
- explain the purpose and nature of the event
 - invite panel members to introduce themselves
 - confirm the day's agenda
 - explain the institutional review process, the responsibilities of the panel and the possible outcomes of the event.
- 5.3 The Chair will then invite panel members to identify lines of enquiry suggested by the documentation, in order to enable the Chair to construct agendas for the panel's meetings with students, partner staff and (where relevant) employers, and to identify any particular questions relevant to the tour of facilities and resources.
- 5.4 The Chair is responsible for highlighting positive aspects of the partnership and for ensuring that issues are raised in a critical but constructive manner in order to enhance the delivery of higher education provision within the partner institution. A successful institutional review event will be characterised by constructive dialogue, structured around the partner and the University's own self-evaluation. The review panel should conduct its discussions in the spirit of being a 'critical friend', but should also be aware of its role in judging whether, and the extent to which, the partner continues to offer high quality learning experiences for students that meet internal and external expectations in terms of academic standards. In particular, the panel would expect to be assured that institutional level issues identified through RiME processes have been adequately addressed.

Meeting between the panel and students

- 5.5 The meeting with students should normally involve both full-time and part-time students from a range of subject areas, a range of levels of study, and from a variety of awards, normally up to a maximum of ten (with the approval of the review panel Chair required if

this maximum is to be exceeded). Former students who have recently graduated from validated or franchised courses at the partner may also be included.

- 5.6 The agenda for the panel's meeting with students will typically include:
- introductions of all present, noting the course / mode / level of study of each student
 - students' general perceptions of their learning experience at the partner institution
 - general perceptions of changes they might wish to be made to enhance their experience of studying at the partner
 - perceptions of learning, teaching and assessment activities
 - experiences of work-based learning (where relevant)
 - general course organisation, communication and management
 - perceptions of available facilities and resources, including teaching accommodation, library resources, IT resources, the online learning environment (OLE), social spaces for HE students and (where relevant) residential accommodation
 - perceptions of student support services.
- 5.7 Guidance for students involved in this meeting is available on the [approval, monitoring and review of partnership activity](#) pages on the University website.

Meeting between the panel and partner staff

- 5.8 The meeting with partner staff should include relevant members of the senior management team (for example those with responsibility for HE provision in general, quality assurance, learning resources and student support), academic staff representatives, student support staff representatives and key administrative staff involved in supporting the partnership. There should normally be a maximum of ten participants, with the approval of the review panel Chair required if this maximum is to be exceeded.
- 5.9 For the meeting with partner staff, the Chair is encouraged to group issues and questions raised so that discussions follow a focused sequence, normally covering the key areas discussed in the SED, namely:
- strategic objectives in relation to HE
 - internal governance structures and how these ensure the effective management of quality and standards (feeding into the University's governance structures as appropriate)
 - management structures, staffing and staff development
 - recruitment and admission of students
 - learning, teaching and assessment
 - student progression, retention, achievement and graduate destinations
 - student support systems
 - how the student voice is heard and employed within the partner institution to secure ongoing enhancement, and levels of student satisfaction
 - employer engagement

- facilities and resources
- operation of quality assurance and enhancement processes
- published information for students and other stakeholders.

5.10 The Chair will normally identify a panel member to lead questioning in each specific area. There may be some areas where the panel has identified no issues and has no questions. The agenda for the meeting with partner staff may be revised in the light of the meeting with students (where relevant) and/or the tour of facilities and resources.

5.11 The Chair will normally commence the meeting with partner staff by:

- explaining the purpose and nature of the institutional review event
- inviting all present to introduce themselves
- explaining the institutional review process, the responsibilities of the panel and the possible outcomes of the event
- outlining the agenda for the meeting and inviting relevant panel members to lead on particular lines of enquiry.

Meeting between the panel and employers (where relevant)

5.12 Where a meeting with employers or industry representatives is included on the agenda, this can be used to explore the extent to which employers are involved in course design, development and delivery within the partner institution. It can also be useful to gain an employer perspective on whether partner students are provided with opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and expertise necessary to meet industry needs and succeed in their future careers.

5.13 Where employers are involved in providing work-based learning opportunities for students, the meeting will also provide an opportunity for the panel to explore whether these are delivered and managed effectively in accordance with the expectations of the University's [Work-Based and Placement Learning Framework](#).

Concluding meeting of the panel

5.14 The Chair will normally commence the final private meeting of the review panel by asking each of the panel members to give a view on whether the partner institution should be:

- a) re-approved at an institutional level outright for a given period of time (normally five years) with no conditions, requirements or recommendations (in which case no further action by the partner is required)
- b) re-approved for a given period of time (normally five years) with conditions and/or requirements and/or recommendations (in which case the partner, in conjunction with the University where relevant, must provide evidence that the conditions and/or requirements have been met and must respond to any recommendations within the agreed timescales)
- c) in exceptional circumstances, not re-approved (in which case the partner institution will need to work closely with the University to address the panel's concerns prior to

engaging in a further institutional review, or in very exceptional circumstances phase out and withdraw academic provision in accordance with the terms of the Collaboration Agreement and the associated Student Protection Plan). The panel should make provisions to ensure that the interests of current students and applicants are protected while the partnership is either subject to a further review or phased out and withdrawn, extending the current period of institutional validation accordingly (and possibly conditionally) to cover the transitional phase.

- 5.15 A unanimous decision of the panel is normally required for the conclusion of the review event, but in the event that an individual panel member disagrees with the majority decision, then the Chair of the panel will make the final decision.
- 5.16 Where the panel decides to re-approve the partner institution, they will proceed to identify and formulate commendations, conditions, requirements and/or recommendations, giving due consideration to clarity of wording.
- Commendations allow the panel a chance to congratulate the partner institution on aspects of exemplary practice (i.e. practice that significantly exceeds normal expectations).
 - Conditions are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel before the start of the next academic year.
 - Requirements are those issues that must be addressed by an agreed date after the start of the next academic year to the satisfaction of the Quality Committee (note: requirements should only be used in exceptional circumstances where the issue cannot reasonably be addressed prior to the start of the next academic year)
 - Recommendations are those issues where action is desirable and should be considered with a response provided.
- 5.17 Partner staff are then invited to return to receive feedback. The Chair will explain the overall outcome of the event and will notify partner staff of any conditions, requirements, recommendations and/or commendations. A deadline will be identified (typically six to eight weeks after the event) by which any conditions must be met and recommendations responded to, and the Chair will identify whether the partner's response will be considered by correspondence or, in exceptional circumstances, by a conditions meeting.
- 5.18 The Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions, requirements and/or recommendations are circulated to the partner institution within five working days of the event.

6. Institutional review report and action plan

- 6.1 The Secretary to the review panel will prepare an institutional review report and action plan in liaison with the Chair. This will be circulated to all panel members for confirmation before the final version is sent to the partner institution, normally within four weeks of the review event. The report summarises the panel's discussions and provides an official record of the outcome and any associated commendations, conditions, requirements and/or recommendations. The report and action plan may contain matters for the partner, the University or both institutions to action or consider.
- 6.2 The report and action plan will be submitted to Senate, via the Quality Committee, for approval of the continuation of the partnership for the recommended period of time, subject to any conditions and/or requirements being met by agreed deadlines. The Quality Committee will be responsible for monitoring subsequent progress against the report and action plan, reporting to Senate accordingly.
- 6.3 The partner institution should make a formal response to the institutional review report by the agreed deadline(s). The formal response should include an updated action plan summarising how each condition and/or requirement has been met and how each recommendation has been considered, with reference to any new or amended documents and any other appropriate evidence. This response should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) prior to the conditions deadline for onward submission to the review panel Chair.
- 6.4 The response to conditions, requirements and/or recommendations is normally approved by the panel Chair, acting under the delegated authority of Senate and drawing on the advice of other panel members as appropriate. Exceptionally, a conditions meeting will be arranged at the time of the institutional review to ensure that all conditions have been met and that recommendations have been considered, with membership as agreed by the panel Chair.
- 6.5 If any condition has not been met or further evidence is required, the Chair will request additional documentation to address the outstanding issues. If the conditions cannot be met, the matter should be referred back to Senate to determine whether to request that the partner undertake further work and proceed to a further institutional review.
- 6.6 The partner's subsequent response to any requirements should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) by the agreed deadline(s) for onward submission to the panel Chair for approval. Responses are monitored through the Quality Committee, reporting to Senate accordingly.