The UK Quality Code for Higher Education -
Advice and Guidance

Sector-Agreed **Principle 8** - Operating partnerships with other organisations

July 2025

Contents

About this Guidance

Context

This Advice and Guidance supports the [UK Quality Code](#) and is designed to unpack *Sector-Agreed Principle 8 - Operating partnerships with other organisations* and the Key Practices that sit under it. It has been produced by QAA in partnership with a writing group of sector experts and peer-reviewed by colleagues across UK higher education. This is in accordance with the ethos that the Quality Code remains a sector-agreed reference point, built on a shared understanding of what providers can expect of themselves and each other in the assurance and enhancement of quality and the maintenance of standards across post-secondary education throughout the UK. QAA would like to thank the writing group and peer readers for their invaluable contribution in developing this guidance.

An important contextual note relates to the diversity of higher education providers in the UK. Providers can be large universities, operating with significant infrastructure, or small specialist providers, operating on a significantly smaller scale, or any number of other different operating models. The Advice and Guidance is designed to be useful for all providers (and representatives from a range of providers formed the writing and peer review groups), but we recognise that, on occasion, the nomenclature used could suggest a larger provider's context. It is important that each reader interprets the Advice and Guidance in the context of their own operating environment and that all readers recognise that quality and homogeneity are not synonymous.

Scope

This Advice and Guidance encourages providers to reflect on their practice and processes in relation to the Sector-Agreed Principle. Following the Advice and Guidance is not mandatory, but illustrative of approaches that can help providers meet the relevant Principle. National regulators and QAA do not view the information in the Advice and Guidance as compliance indicators. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

The language we use

Where the word 'should' (or any other similarly directive language) appears in the Advice and Guidance this represents a shared understanding within the UK higher education community. On some occasions an institution can align with the Sector-Agreed Principle in a range of different ways, and in such cases an institution may have a different approach to that set out here. Ultimately, to be aligned with the Quality Code, an institution must be able to demonstrate how it meets the Sector-Agreed Principles in practice. No provider or individual should feel that the Advice and Guidance is prescriptive or impinges their autonomy or freedoms.

Structure

In response to sector demand, the Advice and Guidance aligns directly with the overarching Sector-Agreed Principles to provide clear navigation between the different elements. The guidance begins by unpacking the Principle in an operational context. It is then divided into subsections focusing on each Key Practice outlining practical considerations and approaches for providers to benchmark their own way of working. This features practical tips and experience shared by providers on operational practice. Finally, in each subsection there are tools to enable reflection on the guidance. These tools offer the opportunity to explore what 'good' might look like through reflective questions and practical scenarios that enable interrogation of current practice with a view to enhancing quality.

Commonly used terms

The following terms are used throughout this advice. Other terms which benefit from a precise definition are listed at the end of this document.

- **Students** - refers to all individuals studying towards a higher-level award regardless of demographic, mode of delivery, level of study, subject area, or geographic location.

- **Provider** - describes all types of organisations that provide higher level learning, including universities, colleges, institutes of learning, and employers. We also use 'institution' in some instances where 'provider' might not suit the context.

- **Student Representative Body** - a formal body or mechanism that represents and promotes the interests of students. This may be known as a students' union, a students' association, or guild, or by another bespoke name where these specific organisations do not exist.

Sector-Agreed **Principle 8** - Operating partnerships with other organisations

Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others.

Key Practices

a. Where academic provision is delivered through partnership, all partners agree, understand, communicate and take responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality.

b. Providers are aware that working in partnership with other organisations will involve different levels of risk. Due diligence processes are completed in accordance with each provider's approach to minimising risk, maintaining academic standards and enhancing quality.

c. Written agreements between partners are signed prior to the start of a programme or module and cover the lifecycle of the partnership, including details about closing a partnership.

d. Providers and their partners ensure compliance with the regulatory and legislative requirements of the countries in which they work and maintain an awareness of the cultural context in which they operate. Providers ensure students have information about the responsibilities of each partner and where to go for support throughout their studies.

e. Providers maintain accurate, up-to-date records of partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.

f. Partnerships are subject to ongoing scrutiny that includes periodic monitoring, evaluation and review to assure quality and facilitate enhancement.

Principle 8 covers the arrangements for maintaining standards and enhancing quality between two or more organisations to deliver aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and student support. It covers all types of arrangements involving students and/or awards which include those involving guaranteed progression, sharing of services or work-based learning. Partnership arrangements may apply to the delivery of whole programmes of study or to elements of programmes (including placements), individual modules, or self-contained components of study.

While the sector is mindful of the potential risks in partnership working, without doubt, it offers a wide range of mutual benefits and opportunities for students, institutions, and employers such as those listed below:

- more flexibility in pathways into and through further and higher levels of learning

- opportunity for innovations in teaching delivery methods and flexible of modes of study

- provision for off-campus working in a range of sites and contexts, including the workplace

- programmes enriched by the opportunity to study abroad at a range of awarding institutions

- curricula which offer learning related to contemporary working practices and the needs of both employers and employees

- continuing professional development, including skills development and in some cases the opportunity to obtain or part-qualify for professional accreditations

- opportunities for employer-related engagement and internships

- international cooperation and increased mobility for students and staff

- increased sustainability for Gaelic and Welsh-medium teaching and learning delivery.

Quality assurance and enhancement in operating partnerships with other organisations

This Principle recognises that partnership arrangements, wherever and however organised, should add direct value to the staff and student experience and widen learning opportunities without prejudice either to the academic standard of the award or the quality of the student learning and wider experience. The arrangements for assuring quality and standards should be as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as those for programmes provided by a single provider.

The assurance of quality and standards in partnership working can present challenges in managing the potential risks associated with the complexity of such arrangements. All partners within arrangements share a responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and maintaining the standards of the awards offered. However, it is the awarding body/bodies that are ultimately accountable and responsible for awards offered in their name.

Key Practice a

Communicating and taking responsibility for academic standards and quality

Key Practice a

Where academic provision is delivered through partnership, all partners agree, understand, communicate and take responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality.

Defining terms and expectations

It is essential for partners to establish a mutual understanding of what academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement mean in the context of the partnership. This supports the development of a comprehensive and robust policy and process framework that enables confident assurance and compliance with regulatory obligations. It also promotes a shared collaborative culture that fosters a positive learning experience for students and staff.

If the expectations about standards and quality assurance and enhancement differ between partners, an agreed approach needs to be secured to ensure all parties are confident that the quality arrangements within the partnership are rigorous, meet respective requirements and withstand scrutiny. Robust partnership agreements, further considered in Practice c, and operations manuals capture the expectations and requirements with agreement as to how they are implemented, monitored and evaluated.
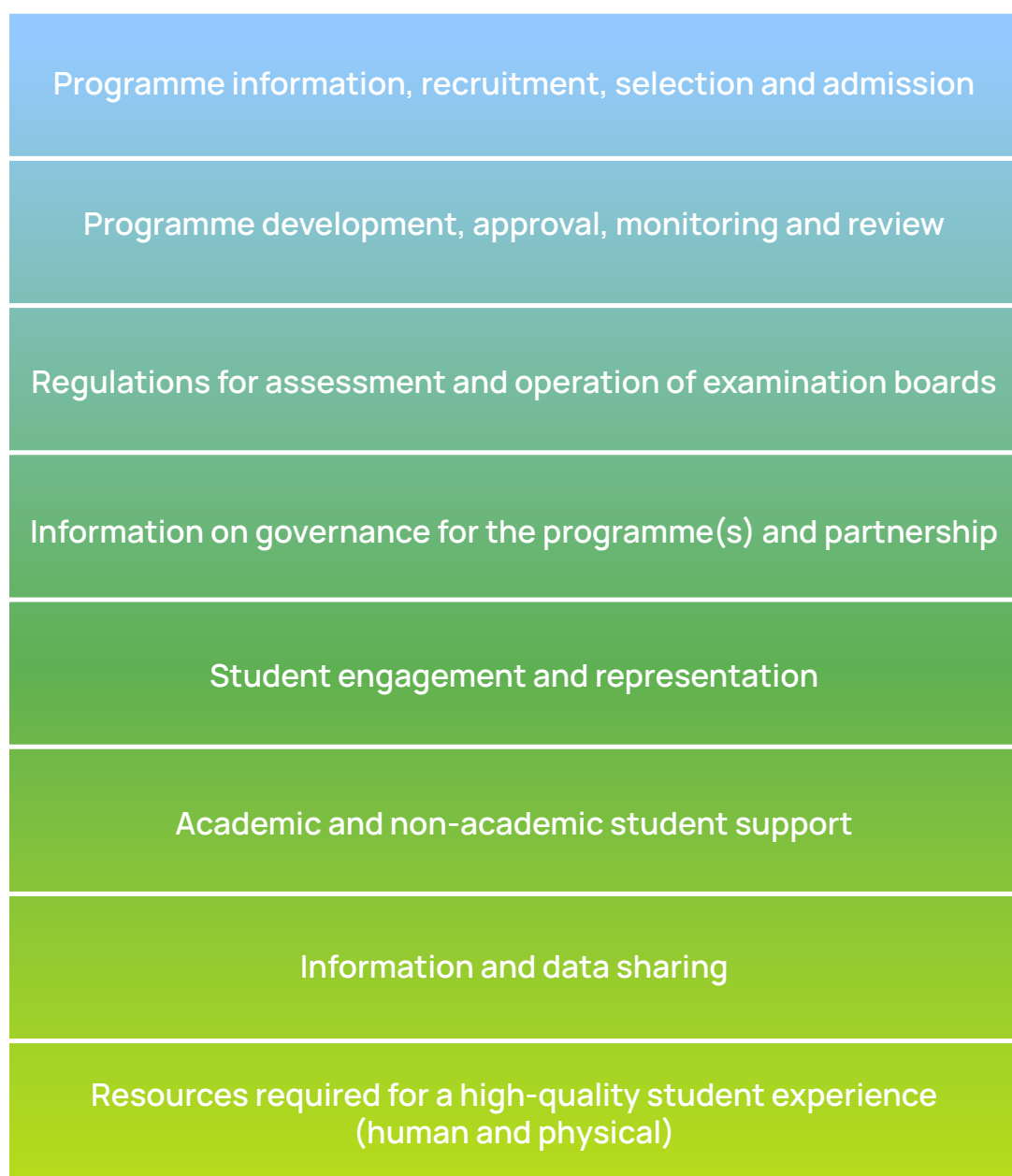
Agreeing a quality framework

Partners agree mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance and enhancement that are proportionate to the size, scope and model/type of partnership arrangement and reflect the size, maturity and experience of partners. The partner with ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of the award offered needs to be explicit in their definition of what a 'proportionate' approach to quality and 'effectiveness' are for the different types of partnerships, providers and education contexts in which they operate and ensure this is communicated to partners.

These agreed mechanisms will consider any risk factors identified through initial and ongoing due diligence (see Practice b) and should also include any requirements from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and/or regulators.

To articulate the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance and enhancement, providers may consider the development of a quality and standards operating guide. This guide would be most effective when created collaboratively between partners before commencing delivery of any programmes. Templates for content are provided to staff to support this activity regardless of the mode of its delivery.

Figure 1 - Example of sections that may be included in a quality and standards guide for operating partnerships

Programme information, recruitment, selection and admission

Programme development, approval, monitoring and review

Regulations for assessment and operation of examination boards

Information on governance for the programme(s) and partnership

Student engagement and representation

Academic and non-academic student support

Information and data sharing

Resources required for a high-quality student experience (human and physical)

Communication

Managing updates

Quality frameworks and agreements underpin a shared understanding, transparency, mutual learning and strong connection. Even so, regular communication with the staff and students involved in the partnership arrangement is key. Robust, successful partnerships have clear processes for efficient dissemination of information regarding any changes to the agreed quality framework, and the subsequent implementation of those changes (for example, as a result of a periodic review/approval/reapproval/validation).

Onboarding

All partners require clarity regarding their defined roles and responsibilities with regards to maintaining and assuring standards and quality from the outset. All partners ensure that new staff are effectively onboarded to gain a thorough understanding of how the partnership operates and that contact information updated for all stakeholders. All partners regularly review the induction process to ensure it is up to date and remains relevant.

Communication mechanisms are monitored and revised to ensure this fundamental aspect of collaborative work is effective throughout the lifecycle of the arrangement.

Reflective questions

1. How do we know if staff are clear on the arrangements and their roles and responsibilities at the outset of an agreement?

2. How, and through which communication channels, is information and change disseminated and how does this support effective relationship building?

3. What consideration is given to the type, size and capacity of the partner when developing a quality assurance framework to ensure arrangements are proportionate?

4. How transparent is decision-making and is it clear who has responsibility for ensuring any decisions are recorded and communicated?

5. How effective is the onboarding process for staff for us and all our partners. Does it ensure that new staff are aware of how the partnership operates, what their responsibilities are and of the oversight arrangements and contractual obligations?

6. How are staff encouraged and given the opportunity to build effective working relationships with key staff at partner organisations?

7. To what extent are differences in approaches to communication considered when agreeing arrangements for jointly maintaining standards and enhancing quality?

8. How accessible is information pertaining to partnership arrangement to our partners not familiar with UK higher education or higher education more widely?

9. What are the mechanisms we use to be assured of our capacity and capability to undertake the partnership, and to meaningfully assess and respond potential risks?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Managing relationships and consistency in procedures

Context

In a well-established partnership with multiple programmes across various levels, an experienced member of staff (who was part of the original team that developed and secured approval for the partnership) has developed a close working relationship with the partner senior leadership and teams.

A concern has been reported to the team responsible for monitoring and evaluating quality (at the awarding provider) that this member of staff has not been using the recently revised and communicated rubrics for assessment for their module. The rubrics had been communicated to all partners. However, the member of staff believes these rubrics to be confusing for markers and students and has been very vocal about this.

Considerations

- How could internal and external communication channels and processes be strengthened to ensure partnership developments are dealt with in consistent, appropriate ways while still leveraging the knowledge and experience of this member of staff?

- How could this member of staff be reminded about the agreed responsibilities and processes as per the partnership agreement and policies, as well as with changes to working arrangements since the partnership's inception?

Scenario 2: Communicating monitoring and evaluation deadlines

Context

You are working with a small UK organisation to deliver academic programmes awarded by your institution. Due to its small size and limited resources, all key partnership responsibilities, day-to-day work and interactions with your institution are coordinated by a single designated contact at the partner provider. Yours is not the only partnership they work with.

The partner delivers a good educational experience for the students, and there aren't any major concerns about the partnership in terms of metrics, student satisfaction or external examiner feedback and partnership reviews. They also have a good relationship with your institution's academic link tutor.

However, the partner sometimes takes considerable time in sharing key information on the appointment of new staff who will contribute to meeting partnership expectations. This in turn is causing problems for the planning team at your institution. The partner contact argues that they are doing their best but that they find the expected processes and timelines challenging for their organisation and they state that their other partners are less demanding and more flexible.

Considerations

- How could you ensure your institution and the partner understand their responsibilities in meeting deadlines and why they are important?

- How can you support your contact to ensure effective communication and a good working relationship?

Key Practice b

Due diligence and risk

Key Practice b

Providers are aware that working in partnership with other organisations will involve different levels of risk. Due diligence processes are completed in accordance with each provider's approach to minimising risk, maintaining academic standards and enhancing quality.

Those seeking to establish or renew partnership arrangements have strategic due diligence processes embedded within their educational partnership approval processes. These processes enable the early detection of risk or factors which require mitigation as part of the approval process. Due diligence is a risk-based process that scrutinises factors which may adversely impact the partnership or a provider's/organisation's reputation.
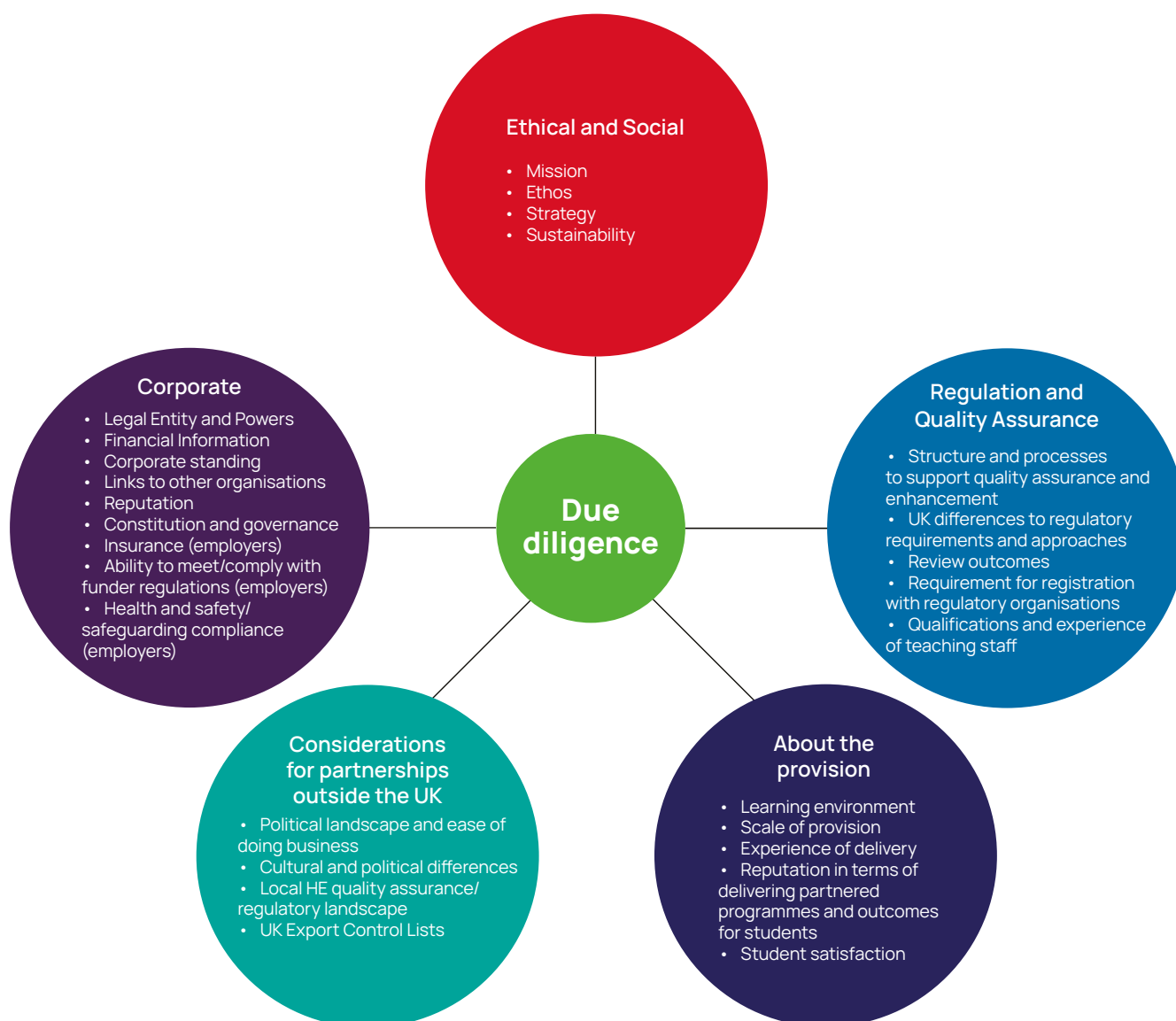
Who and when?

Undertaking due diligence enables partners to take proportionate and reasonable care to ensure that they are not exposed to unnecessary or unmitigated risk. This process should be carried out as a formal step in the initial stages of relationships with other organisations and the process should be periodically reviewed. Due diligence checks continue as part of regular monitoring and evaluation activity.

Due diligence may be undertaken by any of the organisations involved with a proposed partnership to ensure that their interests are protected before proceeding with a new initiative, at agreed key points throughout the partnership lifecycle and as part of the renewal process of an existing arrangement. Partners agree to notify each other of any material changes which may require a review of the initial due diligence check.

Additional checks

Enhanced due diligence checks may be required for international partners and nations or new providers/partners with little or no established delivery experience; these may also be required on an ongoing basis as part of annual monitoring processes to mitigate any emerging risks. Additional checks for those organisations providing work-based placements may include annual checks and ongoing checks on insurance and other compliance requirements. Other ongoing monitoring may be required, particularly where there are multiple student entry points across the year rather than a more traditional academic calendar in place and/or where a non-UK academic calendar has been adopted.

Figure 2 - Areas for consideration in due diligence processes

Ethical and Social

- Mission
- Ethos
- Strategy
- Sustainability

Corporate

- Legal Entity and Powers
- Financial Information
- Corporate standing
- Links to other organisations
- Reputation
- Constitution and governance
- Insurance (employers)
- Ability to meet/comply with funder regulations (employers)
- Health and safety/ safeguarding compliance (employers)

Due diligence

Regulation and Quality Assurance

- Structure and processes to support quality assurance and enhancement
- UK differences to regulatory requirements and approaches
- Review outcomes
- Requirement for registration with regulatory organisations
- Qualifications and experience of teaching staff

Considerations for partnerships outside the UK

- Political landscape and ease of doing business
- Cultural and political differences
- Local HE quality assurance/ regulatory landscape
- UK Export Control Lists

About the provision

- Learning environment
- Scale of provision
- Experience of delivery
- Reputation in terms of delivering partnered programmes and outcomes for students
- Student satisfaction

[Download the presentation-friendly diagram here](#)

Proportionate due diligence

Due diligence processes outline how and in what depth the exercise will be undertaken and may require non-disclosure agreements whereby any shared confidential information is deleted if a partnership does not come to fruition. Processes will depend on the type of arrangement and the perceived level of risk in working with the partner, possibly adopting a phased approach in relation to the types of arrangement approved with higher-risk partners. Providers may utilise a risk matrix (see example below) to determine the breadth and depth of due diligence required.

Mitigating risks

It is worth noting some arrangements may proceed even if risks are identified through the due diligence process as mitigating measures can be agreed and stipulated in the partnership agreement and implemented at the outset and throughout the partnership arrangement.

Providers might wish to establish within their own context what level of risk they attribute to different types of partnership arrangements. Figure 2 illustrates an example of a simple continuum approach that could be utilised and usefully shared across an institution.

Figure 3 - Continuum of risk (to note this is an example of how a continuum of risk might look)

(depending on level)
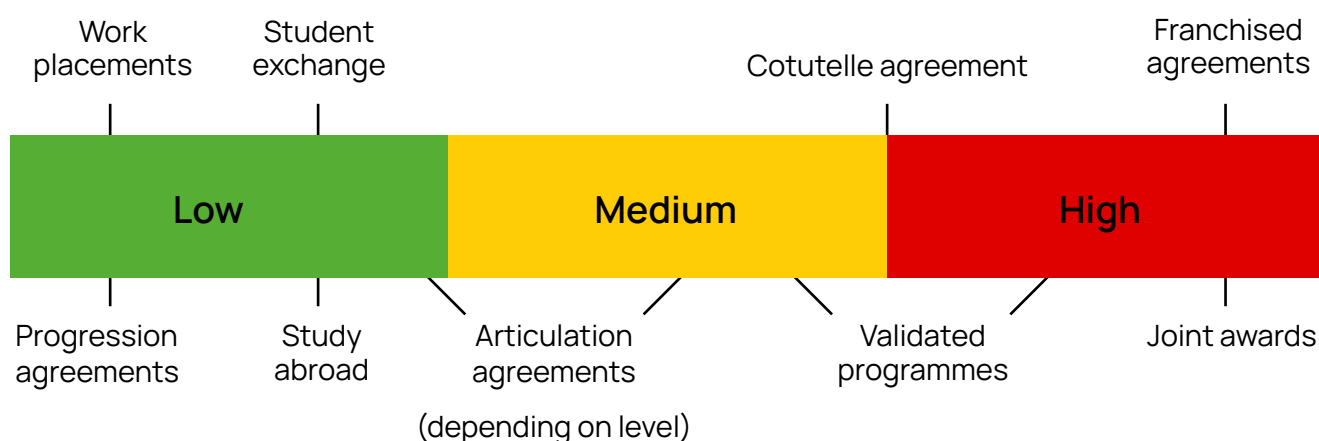
The worked example below (Table 1) outlines the breadth and depth of approval required for sign-off in arrangements deemed riskier (as determined by the provider). This matrix approach would be easily accessible and held by the quality team responsible for managing the quality and standards relating to partnership arrangements.

Table 1: Illustrative example of how a larger provider might establish a risk matrix for ensuring correct procedures in signing off partnerships.

The definitions used in this example align with those found in the Terminology section of this advice. They are not legal definitions but are used widely in the UK higher education sector.

Type of arrangement	Key Features	Indicative Risk Level*	Potential approval authority**
Progression agreements	An arrangement between two providers that recognises a specific programme for the purposes of being eligible to apply to a named programme at the other partner institution - it does not guarantee entry and usual selection and admission processes apply. These types of arrangement can apply to different levels of a programme.	Low	Academic department level

* Depending on the partner

** Depending on scale and risk and there may be scope to revise the approval authority depending on the nature of the arrangement/partner.

Work placements	An arrangement that specifies a defined period of time where a student works at an employer as part of their academic programme, gaining practical experience in their field of study, typically integrated into their degree, and assessed.	Low	Academic department/ central unit level
Student exchange	Agreements with international providers to permit the exchange of undergraduate or postgraduate students for a period of study. Sometimes integrated into their degree and assessed.	Low	Academic department/ central unit level
Cotutelle arrangement	An arrangement established by means of bilateral agreements, legally binding, signed by two universities, located in two different countries or across the UK. It relates to a specific doctoral degree candidate. Usually resulting in the award of a double doctoral degree, once the terms of the executed cotutelle agreement are completed and the doctoral dissertation is defended successfully.	Medium	Committee
Articulation agreement	An agreement between two providers that explains how earned credit will transfer from a named programme at one provider to guarantee entry to another specific programme at a different provider. It can encompass entry and credit arrangements.	Low/Med.	Faculty/Committee
Study abroad	These agreements are negotiated to recruit undergraduate or postgraduate students on a short-term, non-graduating basis. Arrangements can support incoming and outgoing movement.	Low	Faculty/Committee

* Depending on the partner

** Depending on scale and risk and there may be scope to revise the approval authority depending on the nature of the arrangement/partner

Validated programmes	Typically, a delivery partner designs, develops and delivers a programme. The programme is recognised and awarded by the lead partner who retains responsibility for quality assurance and awards offered in its name.	Med/High	Committee/Senate
Franchised/ subcontracted arrangement	A degree-awarding body agrees to authorise another organisation to deliver (and sometimes assess) part or all of one (or more) of its own approved programmes. Often, the degree-awarding body retains direct responsibility for the programme content, teaching and assessment strategy, assessment regime and quality assurance.	High	Committee/Senate
Joint/awards	A joint degree is a programme of study leading to an award which is jointly owned, developed and delivered by more than one provider and leads to a single award granted by each partner.	High	Committee/Senate

* Depending on the partner

** Depending on scale and risk and there may be scope to revise the approval authority depending on the nature of the arrangement/partner

Reflective questions

1. How are exit strategies built into our approval processes - if ongoing due diligence shows an unacceptable level of risk during the lifecycle of the partnership?

2. What are the considerations regarding a proposed partner's legal capacity/ awarding powers to enter into the agreement, for example for joint/dual awards?

3. What are the requirements regarding corporate and individual tax affairs? What are the partners' requirements?

4. What are the additional requirements for transnational education such as export control considerations and flying faculty?

5. What are the mitigating measures that could be adopted to reduce the level of risk for a specific partnership arrangement?

6. What changes during the lifecycle of a partnership arrangement trigger a due diligence review by our institution?

7. Do we have any arrangements that have due diligence reviews built in?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Phasing an approach to due diligence

Context

A regional college with foundation degree awarding powers has been approached by a local private training organisation (set up in the last three years) to design and deliver Level 4 and 5 programmes for the local community.

The regional college requires the standard due diligence documents but decided as part of its mitigation to take a phased approach towards the approval of the partner's input into programme design and delivery. This was due to the recent establishment of the partner (a private training organisation). The approach is reflected in a memorandum of understanding/agreement (MOU/A).

The college considers what might be covered by the MOU/A as outlined in the phases below. This approach allows for due diligence scrutiny to be undertaken at each phase as the partner organisation becomes more established.

Phase 1

The college approves the training organisation as a venue for delivery of its programme with teaching undertaken by college staff only following a site visit and other relevant due diligence checks.

Phase 2

The college approves the training organisation for the delivery of a co-teaching model located in the private training organisation.

Phase 3

The college approves the training organisation for the delivery of validated provision following the necessary due diligence checks.

Considerations

What might the due diligence checks consist of at each phase?

- Would the partnership arrangement need amending at each completed phase?

- What would the college need to request from the organisation to satisfy its due diligence process and what mitigating measures may be required to manage any potential risks?

Scenario 2: Developing international provision that is subject to export control

Context

A university wishes to develop a new international campus to deliver postgraduate taught degree programmes in Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security. The university currently has no other partners and long-term plans include to offer PhD programmes in these areas.

In addition, to the standard due diligence processes, consideration of export control requirements needs to be included due to the planned subject areas of provision. This requirement relates to 'items' (goods, software and technology) leaving the UK.

Both export control restrictions and exemptions apply when a UK institution offers STEM-based programmes where there are concerns about its use in weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or military programmes of concern of an embargoed destination (MEND) in the following situations:

- through an international campus

- to international-based students by electronic means.

Requirements also state that when providing STEM-based programmes, providers must ensure any training, advanced study, continued professional development, or individual research projects comply with export controls and are not undertaken in support of a WMD/military programme.

And that, care must also be taken if research is:

- undertaken as part of an applied or work-based programme, such as an engineering doctorate

- through a split-site programme of study involving a non-UK based component

Considerations

- How would you explain these requirements to key stakeholders?

- How might you outline the risks to senior management/approval committees?

- What resistance/challenges might you receive and how would you respond?

- What other regulatory requirements should be considered?

Key Practice c

Agreements

Key Practice c

Written agreements between partners are signed prior to the start of a programme or module and cover the lifecycle of the partnership, including details about closing a partnership.

Written agreements provide all partners with legal certainty in terms of their obligations, rights and duties, and how long the agreement will bind them. In the situation where one, both or all partners decide to close the partnership early, the agreement clearly outlines the steps required to progress the closure and how students are protected if closure were to happen.

These agreements provide assurance that all partners mutually understand respective academic regulatory and workplace (as appropriate) requirements and agree to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations in securing academic standards and delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.

Written agreements are developed which are proportionate to the scale and nature of the arrangement. They define the rights, responsibilities and delegated powers of all partners, with acceptance that partners will act in accordance with the agreed approach to managing standards and assuring quality (see Practice a) - this will usually reflect the awarding institution's regulations and procedures (as the body that confers the awards). They use clear and specific language to avoid misunderstandings, with well-defined lines of communication.

Considerations when drafting an agreement

Meeting everyone's needs

When designing written agreements, it is crucial to consider the specific needs and characteristics of different provider types and partnership arrangements to ensure the success and sustainability of the partnership.

Signatories

Agreements are signed by the relevant authorised signatory within the organisation before the activity to which they relate commences. This will vary depending on the nature of the provision, and there should be a clear policy on who is authorised to sign.

Using MOUs

In addition to the legally binding agreements that enshrine new partnership arrangements as highlighted within this section, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU's) are also often utilised over the course of partnership development. Therse are typically not legally binding and are documents that set out an intention and commitment to further explore partnership activity between the relevant parties. The use of MOU's is more prevalent in certain delivery contexts that

others and MOU's are usually signed at the early stage of partnership development. Each provider type operates within unique regulatory frameworks, educational goals, and resource capabilities. By tailoring written agreements to address these distinct requirements, partners can achieve better alignment, compliance and mutual benefit, ultimately enhancing the educational experience and outcomes for all stakeholders.

Table 2 - Consideration of requirements and responsibilities when drafting an agreement

Finance and Legal	Partnership Management	Regulatory Requirements	Programme Delivery and Support
The financial arrangement between partners (including if the partnership is suspended or terminated early).	The period covered by the agreement.	Mechanisms to assure the accuracy of marketing, publicity and other promotional materials.	Responsibility for recruitment and marketing, including social media.
Ownership of intellectual property rights for programme/s or module/s.	Responsibility for recruitment, development and oversight of teaching staff.	Allocation of responsibility for the overview, maintenance and enhancement of quality and academic standards, including the arrangements for moderation, monitoring and periodic review.	Responsibility for the recruitment, admissions and enrolment and induction of students (including the use of agents for recruitment).
What insurance and/or other indemnity is required to be in place to safeguard the interests of all partners.	Responsibility for recruitment, development and oversight of support staff.	Reporting arrangements for regulatory datasets.	Allocation of responsibility for the overview, maintenance and enhancement of quality and academic standards, including the arrangements for moderation, monitoring and periodic review.
Which aspects of UK legislation the partner institution is expected to adhere to (for example, bribery, data protection, equality and diversity, freedom of information, consumer protection, health, and safety, and so on).	Maintaining student records and the production of transcripts.	Meeting professional, statutory regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.	Which aspects of UK legislation the partner institution is expected to adhere to (for example, bribery, data protection, equality and diversity, freedom of information, consumer protection, health and safety, and so on)
Which legal system governs the agreement, where a dispute happens or if arbitration or mediation is necessary.	Partnership monitoring and evaluation schedule.	Making regulatory data returns.	Handling of academic and non-academic concerns, complaints, appeals and misconduct.
Any specific clauses that are needed within the agreement to comply with legislation in one or both countries, and institutions may wish to seek specialist legal advice on these.	Coordination of the partnership arrangement.	Responsibility for seeking local government or quality body approval.	Setting formative assessments, reviewing, marking moderation and feedback.

Key

◼ For all agreements regardless of award type   ◼ For agreements with partners involving work-based learning

◼ For agreements with partners international   ◼ Specific UK nation regulatory requirements

Relevant aspects of health and safety and employment law where a student/learner or apprentice is to enter the workplace.	Arrangements for suspension or termination, including financial arrangements, and which party is responsible for enabling students to complete their studies and for communicating this to students.	Responsibility for meeting and coordinating regulatory requirements.	Securing standards of assessments carried out in a language other than English.
Insurance considerations for placements.	How differences between the partners will be resolved in the event of a dispute, including which agreement prevails where there is more than one.	Requirement to register with regulatory bodies (with reference to OfS requirement for franchised partners planning to teach over 300 students to register with OfS*) *for degree awarding bodies operating in England	The nomination approval and payment of external examiners.
Compliance with tax authorities/treaties, whereby the partner organisation is in a different country/jurisdiction.	Language considerations - any implications for quality oversight if documents are not in English.		Assignment of Academic Lead and Work-place supervisor.
Which is the governing law of the agreement/s? Consideration is given as to which jurisdiction has primacy if disputes arise. If the agreement is bilingual which version is definitive.	Monitoring of placements.		Language requirements in relation to delivery and support arrangements.
What is considered 'force majeure' and what happens in such circumstances (for example, students can't travel due to Covid restrictions).	Monitoring of placements when the local language is to be used during placements associated documentation.		How student representation and training for student representatives and staff will work. Acknowledging possible restrictions around representative structure and cultural expectations.
			Acknowledgement of possible restrictions around student and staff representative structures and cultural expectations. Procedures for the selection of placement sites. Responsibility for careers and employability information.
			Responsibility for access to learning and wider support resources across the arrangement.
			Responsibility for dealing with concerns, complaints and appeals.

Key

For all agreements regardless of award type	For agreements with partners involving work-based learning
For agreements with partners international	Specific UK nation regulatory requirements

Reflective questions

1. How are we assured that the details of the agreement are clear, understood and reflect what was formally approved following clear and open discussion?

2. What is the communication plan alongside the agreement to facilitate and ensure regular and transparent dialogue between all partners - how is this evaluated for effectiveness?

3. What are the mechanisms to ensure that the agreements are reviewed by an independent party for clarity? Are we satisfied that someone new to working within the partnership can understand the agreement and their role in fulfilling expectations?

4. Where it has been agreed that a partner will deliver or assess in a language other than English, how does the agreement describe the agreed methods in place to assure academic standards (for example, use of bilingual external examiners)?

5. Where does the agreement make clear the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation and how does it set out clearly the responsibilities of all partners?

6. How does the agreement make clear the processes for conflict resolution, trouble shooting and early identification of potential problems?

7. How will potential changes to the partnership agreement be agreed and enacted during the lifecycle of the partnership? What are the timescales for these to be implemented?

8. Do stakeholders understand the planned lifecycle of the partnership? How do we know?

9. What is the exit strategy that clearly outlines the process for closing a partnership - for terminating against the planned lifecycle and in event of a partner wishing to facilitate an early exit?

10. Does the agreed exit strategy outline plans to teach out a programme affected by any early exit? How are students protected and staff informed?

Reflective questions to drive enhancement

1. How do all partners keep up to date with developments that might drive enhancement and require changes to the agreement?

2. How does the agreement, and the communication that underpins it, enable partners to share and learn from good practice within the partnership and is there a mechanism to update the agreement to reflect the good practice?

3. How do you benchmark the contents of written agreements against best practice in the sector (for example, via the Association of University Legal Practitioners (AULP) or through discussion with sector colleagues working in the same area or relevant professional networks)?

Scenarios

Changes to an agreement not embedded or enacted

Context

A longstanding partnership agreement with an international partner organisation was amended in the previous year. It now states that the awarding body must be consulted about the recruitment of academic teaching staff. This change was added as a result of scheduled monitoring and evaluation, which found the standard of teaching was below that expected. It transpires that the international partner organisation has recently undertaken recruitment of teaching staff to a programme without collaborating with the awarding body.

When the awarding body challenged the recruitment exercise, the partner delivery programme team stated they were unaware of any changes to the agreement.

Considerations

- What documentation would you look at before you take any action?
- Who should you approach, why and in what order?
- What are the range of potential outcomes?
- What risks need to be managed in each?

Key Practice d

Compliance, legislation and regulation; understanding cultural contexts

Key Practice d

Providers and their partners ensure compliance with the regulatory and legislative requirements of the countries in which they work and maintain an awareness of the cultural context in which they operate. Providers ensure students have information about the responsibilities of each partner and where to go for support throughout their studies.

For providers working in partnership, there are specific considerations that need to be planned, built into agreements and implemented to ensure successful management of the partnership.

International regulations

Partnerships will need to comply with the relevant laws and regulations of the countries in which they operate. In practice, this typically means that the partnership will need to comply with whichever are the more demanding requirements between the UK and the country of delivery. Providers are advised to be aware that exceptions may need to be approved with regard to academic regulations to manage any conflict between internal regulations and in-country legal requirements. Other factors to be considered include cultural and language differences, as well as differences in academic practices, such as assessment grading.

Differences within the UK

The regulatory requirements between the four nations of the UK can differ. It is important that both UK-based and international partners understand differences that are relevant to the partnership. This includes partnerships between providers in different nations within the UK.

Keeping staff and students informed

In working with partners (including employers), providers agree responsibilities for all aspects of the partnership, ensure that staff are aware of these, and communicate them effectively to students. Student support arrangements need to take account of the characteristics of the partnership and of the students studying within it, especially as these may differ from those required in other parts of the provider's activity. Sometimes cultural differences may require careful navigation for staff and students.

Regulatory and legislative requirements

UK transnational education

When UK qualifications are delivered outside the UK, the degree awarded may be treated as a foreign qualification in that country. As part of the due diligence process (see Practice B) and in developing the agreement, all partners need to have a clear understanding of the relevant rules for recognition of foreign qualifications delivered through transnational education (TNE) arrangements.

National requirements

Providers understand and then establish the types of partnership arrangements that are permitted in the countries in which they work or want to work. There may be stipulations around the mode of delivery (such as online). There may be requirements regarding staff qualifications or the proportion of teaching that must be provided by the non-local partner. Definitive information should be available from the local quality authority or government, while UK-relevant guidance may be available from relevant UK organisations such as QAA, the British Council or Universities UK International (UUKI).

Professional registration

Recognition of qualifications for professional registration may differ between countries. Providers are advised to be clear about professional registration requirements in the country of delivery. These requirements need to be understood by all partners and included in the formal agreement. If UK accreditation is desired, advice can be sought from UK national regulatory bodies or professional bodies before establishing an equivalent programme internationally.

Operational considerations

As well as educational regulatory and legislative requirements, staffing and other operational aspects of the partnership need to be considered. When working with employers who operate in countries internationally, employment law from the countries of all partners needs be taken into account, as well as the need to obtain visas or work permits for staff from the UK provider and for students travelling international from their home country.

All partners will plan how to comply with local quality oversight procedures and prepare for requirements around the provision of data or published information. Early consultation with host country regulators and quality agencies will be beneficial to expediting the approval of the partnership (particularly if new) and associated programme/s. Partners also need to understand requirements and expectations associated with work-based learning.

Providers and partners should also be aware of specific regulatory requirements when working with providers across different UK nations that may affect quality arrangements. In addition, regulatory requirements for those working with organisations to deliver lower-level awards or teacher training may fall under the purview of inspectorates such as Ofsted and Estyn, the Regulated Qualifications Framework for England and Northern Ireland, the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, or the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Differences in funding arrangements may impact the financial viability of partnerships.

Programme structure and approval

There can be varied expectations regarding the length and structure of an award in different countries. Many have a framework for higher education qualifications and/or participate in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). Four-year undergraduate degrees are the norm in many countries, as may be two-year postgraduate master's qualifications. Others differentiate significantly between academic and professional qualifications. The nature of research degrees also varies and may include taught elements or formal exams. Arrangements involving joint, double or dual degrees would take account of any such differences in order to meet the requirements of both awarding bodies.

Providers and partners are advised to confirm the information required for external programme approval and clarify responsibilities for liaison with the relevant approval bodies (as outlined in Practices a, b and c). When considering a partnership, it is important that all partners factor in the time that may be needed for all levels of programme approval, both initial approval and subsequent modifications. For example, there may be restrictions on the number of times a programme can be modified or long processes that can affect the provider's ability to synchronise changes where a programme is run with several partners.

Providers consider approval and quality procedures for joint, double and dual degrees and how these might differ from procedures for other partnership arrangements, including articulations. For joint, double and dual degrees there may be two or more sets of requirements that must be met (institutional and/or national). The quality framework for the partnership can outline the applicable regulations when there are conflicting requirements.

All partners require confirmation regarding regulations on the titles of awards and the information that is supplied on transcripts. In some countries it is a requirement that awards must have the same title as those for programmes delivered at the awarding organisation; in other cases, they must be aligned with a national register in the country of delivery.

Providers are reminded to consider the variety of partnership arrangements they operate and how the different types of programmes associated with them are structured and approved. For example, consider:

- any additional regulatory requirements such as Ofsted, professional qualifications, or professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation

- the assessment structure of work-based learning programmes and how they align to academic regulations

- the motivations of those studying in work-based programmes and how they are best supported to achieve success within their own context .

Admissions, credit transfer and student mobility

Where recruitment and admissions are delegated to a delivery partner, the awarding body retains appropriate oversight. Awarding bodies may decide to retain the right to conduct checks on admissions processes and to review procedures to ensure they are transparent and fair and adhere to regulatory requirements. It may be appropriate for the awarding body to check non-standard admissions and applications for advanced standing / recognition of prior learning (RPL). (Please also see Advice and Guidance relating to Principle 9.)
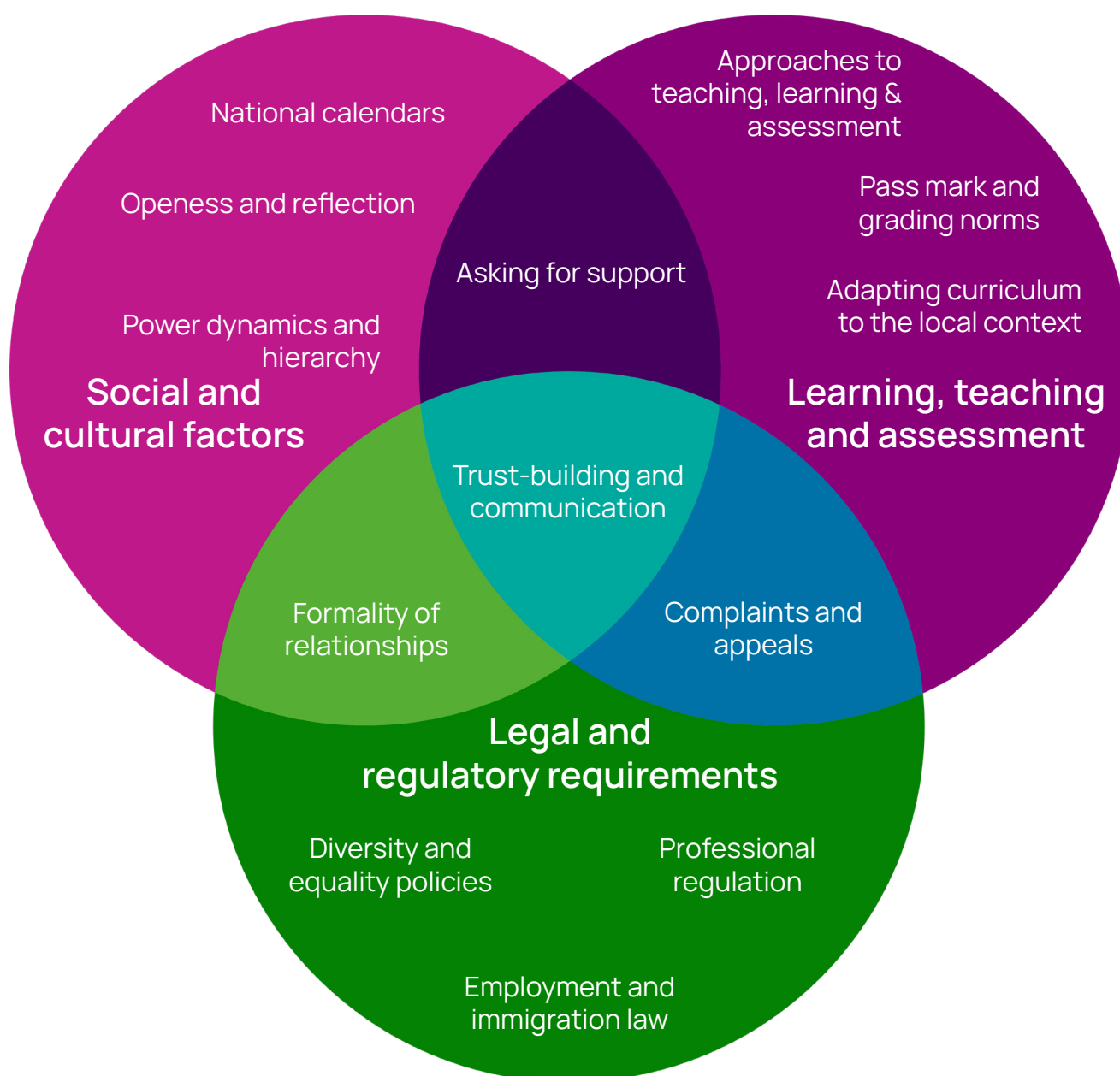
UK providers are advised to be aware how credit transfer and RPL operate where they have partnerships (including UK nations). In some jurisdictions, RPL is uncommon and may not be accepted. Whether in the UK or internationally, this is an important consideration when seeking approval for a 'top-up' or articulation arrangement (see Terminology). Providers need to be clear in the partnership agreement on the process, timing of review and the actions to be taken of students who do not meet the required entry standard.

Cultural context

Time spent understanding the cultural context of partners and developing a strong relationship will pay dividends in the operation of a partnership arrangement.

Figure 4 (below) depicts considerations for developing cultural awareness when working in partnership with international institutions.

Figure 4 - Considerations for developing cultural awareness

National calendars

Openess and reflection

Power dynamics and hierarchy

Social and cultural factors

Asking for support

Approaches to teaching, learning & assessment

Pass mark and grading norms

Adapting curriculum to the local context

Learning, teaching and assessment

Trust-building and communication

Formality of relationships

Complaints and appeals

Legal and regulatory requirements

Diversity and equality policies

Professional regulation

Employment and immigration law

Social and cultural factors

- National calendars: these vary, academic calendars will need to take account of local holidays.

- Openness and reflection: Support may be needed to enable all partners to understand the benefits of these types of activities. Consider how to stimulate willingness to engage in open reflection in the way that UK quality systems promote that is comfortable for partners.

- Power dynamics and hierarchy: Discussions to be held when the partnership opportunity is identified that enable students or junior staff to raise concerns which may represent a different approach to the expected way of learning and working and take time to embed.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment: All partners to agree the approach to learning, teaching and assessment that enables students and staff to be comfortable in studying, delivering and supporting the programme. All partners will encounter approaches and practices that are unfamiliar to cultural norms and therefore time and effort will need to be applied to embed the agreed approach.

- Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment may involve methods that involve more interaction or reliance on digital dissemination that delivery partners and students may be unfamiliar with. For example, students and staff may require additional guidance about independent learning or groupwork. Or, staff may require training or guidance around the systematic moderation of assessment and the use of external examiners.

- Pass marks and grading norms: If utilising the UK grading system and 'typical' pass marks, providers are reminded that these are not common around the world. Staff and students may require additional support and guidance to understand what constitutes a 'good' mark within this system. Clear assessment criteria and marking rubrics may be helpful in this context as they offer a mechanism to achieve consistency and ensure fairness . (See Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees)

- Adapting curriculum to the local context: Where possible, it is helpful to adapt module content, assessment topics and/or supporting materials to make learning more meaningful.

Legal and regulatory requirements

- Diversity and equality policies: The way in which diversity and equality philosophy is implemented will need to adapt to the local legislative and cultural context while maintaining an inclusive educational environment.

- Professional registration: The requirements for professional registration may differ from those in the UK and local requirements will normally need to be met if graduates are to secure employment.

- Employment and immigration law: This will normally vary from that in the UK and staff may have different levels of protection than would be expected in the UK. Providers should consider if international partners can be reasonably expected to adopt UK standards of practice.

Cross-cutting factors

- Asking for support: Developing trust and effective communication mechanisms should help with reluctance by staff or students to ask for help which might be viewed as a sign of weakness or failure.

- Complaints and appeals: Expectations regarding grounds for appeal may vary and, in some countries, there may be separate regulations that cover certain kinds of complaint. All partners need to understand these and be able to communicate them to students, as well as ensuring alignment with legal and regulatory requirements in the UK and the country of delivery.

- Formality of relationships: Relationships between staff at different levels and between students and staff may be more formal than in the UK it will be important that these relationships are understood and that effective communication and trust is developed throughout the lifecycle of the partnership arrangement that enables effective operation regardless of different cultures and ways of working.

Language

Delivery in English presents practical challenges for students and staff whose first language is not English. The following points are useful to consider:

- How additional English language support is provided to students and if it is an integral part of the programme, and how this support aligns to English language requirements for study.

- When teachers use English as a second language, procedures outline how competence is assured and where support can be provided.

- Whether English is the only language used in the learning environment or if there are situations where it is appropriate for teaching staff to use a local language.

- Which support services are provided in English and which in a local language.

- When a partnership programme is recruiting international students who are not fluent in the local language, how to mitigate issues relating to access to support services, inclusion in group work, placement experience, and so on.

- Whether a minimum language entry requirement for the local language is appropriate, especially for international students, noting that this may be specified by in-country government requirements.

- When delivery in a language other than English is permitted by the awarding institution and the host country; what additional consideration needs to be given to managing quality and communication (see the scenario below).

- Consider and agree who is responsible for undertaking and paying for translation required to operate the partnership and support the student learning experience when a local language is required in communication (written and oral).

Information for students

To ensure accurate information is provided about the programme, all partners reserve the right to approve promotional materials and branding that are used in their name. Providers are advised to establish procedures that facilitate the checking of marketing materials (in all languages used) and includes information presented via social media. Awarding bodies ensure accuracy with regards to the stated title, level, status and any related professional body accreditation/ endorsement of the award.

Across the partnership arrangement it is important that students understand who to contact for support and how to raise any issues affecting the quality of their experience.

In partnerships, students will often be offered access to various online resources from a combination of partners. Partnership agreements need to outline the access arrangements to resources, as well as to take account of potential complications and stipulate that this information is communicated to students and staff.

Partners develop policies regarding student mobility and how academic credit and/or marks achieved at another organisation are incorporated onto the student record. Students are clear about which partner holds their record and/or portfolios and where they can gain answers to any questions about it.

Student support in partnerships

Sharing responsibilities

It is common to delegate or share responsibility for student support (both academic and pastoral) to the delivery partner. In such cases, the awarding body has oversight of the planning and operation of student support which includes regular monitoring and evaluation of the scope and effectiveness of support activities.

When developing the arrangement, partners consider and agree whether it is reasonable to require a partner to replicate the support mechanisms of the awarding body or if they can use their own to provide an equivalent level of support. If teaching is shared, it may be appropriate for students to access support services at either institution.

Addressing concerns

Regarding concerns, complaints or appeals, the awarding provider retains ultimate responsibility for the quality of the student experience. In the case of dual, double or joint degrees, the partnership agreement should include provisions that make clear who will handle different categories of concern, complaint or appeal. Generally, for apprenticeships and placements the academic curriculum provider will be responsible for academic concerns complaints and appeals and the placement provider for those related to the workplace.

For programmes delivered outside the UK, cultural and legal differences may affect expectations relating to support services. All partners must be satisfied that students will have access to support that will enable a high-quality student experience. Clear information is provided to students about how to access support services and how to make a concern, complaint or appeal.

If a degree is delivered jointly, there should be clarity about which aspects of provision may be complained about to which partner. Where only one partner has degree awarding powers, students would normally retain the right to escalate a complaint to the awarding body if they are not satisfied.

For apprenticeships or other employer-based provision, it is particularly important to be clear about the boundaries between the employer's own policies for discipline, fitness to practise and grievances, and those of the education provider. The expectations for student support from the employer and the education provider should be clear and communicated effectively to students.

Reflective questions

1. What adaptations might be necessary for effective student engagement mechanisms to work in different cultural contexts?

2. How have the challenges that impact staff working in all partner organisations (and across countries) been identified, collated and considered? What are they, and how is this considered, evaluated and communicated?

3. How can trust and effective communication channels be developed between partners to encourage open and honest discussions about the arrangement or programme?

4. How can the curriculum be adapted to better relate to the local context while maintaining academic standards and the distinctive character of the awarding institution's education?

5. What are the practical challenges of running a programme in a language other than English while maintaining effective quality oversight? Equally, how are the challenges addressed regarding delivering a programme in English for students whose first language is not English?

6. How do quality procedures satisfy, assure and enhance the quality of the student experience when studying on a programme that is part of a partnership arrangement? How is this evaluated and compared between different modes of delivery?

7. To what extent should an awarding institution's regulations allow for variation in practice in the academic and non-academic student support services provided by partners? How are the threshold standards that must be met defined?

8. Is it clear in the partnership arrangements where responsibility lies for student discipline, complaints, fitness to practise and appeals? How does each partner keep themselves informed of ongoing cases and learn from their experience?

9. What procedures are in place to ensure all partners have oversight of promotional materials that use partners' name and branding in both English and other languages (where applicable)?

10. Are the institutional agreements and procedures able to adapt to changes of circumstances in partnerships? What are the contingency plans for partnerships that end early or are not renewed?

Scenarios

Offering degrees in a language other than English

Context

This scenario illustrates the range of issues involved in offering degrees (or part of a degree) in a language other than English that will need to be considered by a UK awarding institution when working with an international partner.

A UK awarding institution investigated offering degrees taught in a non-English language with a partner who had access to experienced teaching staff and a track record of delivery of programmes in the local language.

The awarding institution recognised that a decision to offer UK degrees taught in a language other than English would encounter regulatory issues in the host country of the partnership to be investigated and resolved. In this case, approvals were likely to be required from city/ region/national levels in the host country both to run the programme and to ensure that the degree would be recognised in the country.

An initial checklist for implementing UK degrees to meet the UK Quality Code was drawn up, including:

- bilingual programme director and key support staff

- bilingual external examiners

- bilingual faculty able to oversee all subject areas (for example second marking)

- bilingual staff able to monitor and approve marketing materials

- appropriate and sufficient local language library books and journals

- virtual learning environment and other learning resources in the local language

- maintenance of bilingual programme documentation as well as other student-related processes (for example, academic appeals, student feedback surveys)

- a new procedures manual for the operation of partnerships as the existing one assumed that English would be the language of delivery and assessment.

The awarding institution and the partner discussed in depth who should be responsible for which activities in the checklist and drafted an agreement about this.

Checks of the institution's academic regulations found that these would need to be changed to permit degrees which were taught and assessed in a language other than English. Issues were also identified about how to conduct appeals and resolve complaints if those involved were not fluent in English. This raised policy questions which would need to be considered by the awarding institution's governing body and Academic Board.

The awarding institution drafted a business case to decide whether the costs and time involved to meet quality assurance requirements justified making the decision to offer a non-English language degree.

Considerations

- How is/should the language of instruction be detailed on the certificate and transcript provided?

- In addition to the business case, are there other considerations that the awarding body needs to think about?

- Who reviews the business case and how and by whom is final approval determined?

Key Practice e

Recording partnership arrangements

Key Practice e

Providers maintain accurate, up-to-date records of partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.

Providers operating partnership arrangements with other organisations maintain a repository of key information about their partners and the arrangements. This repository helps to facilitate good management of the partnership arrangement and quality assurance of partnerships and offers a framework for quality assurance activities, including monitoring, approval, and review. It also provides a definitive source of information for accurate, publishable information about the partnership arrangement. Providers may wish to maintain an internal record of partnerships and hold a separate public record.

Identifying key information for an internal record

Providers identify the key information to retain about each partnership. A proportionate and risk-based approach to record keeping means that different partnership types may have variable levels of information held.

A well-managed, single source of truth repository is held internally by all partners regarding current, prospective and former collaborative partnerships. This is underpinned by additional supporting records/documentation for each partnership, transparently available for reference. It may be useful to consider including the following information on partners:

- partner organisation name

- partner registered address, including country

- lead contact and senior contact details

- original approval date and committee responsible for approval

- period of validity, for example contractual period or appropriate expiry/renewal point

- the type of partnership agreement (based on the provider's classification/typology or similar)

- location/addresses of delivery, for example campus addresses, work-placements, online, and so on

- curriculum information (for example, the titles of any awards/modules approved for delivery)

- schedule of quality assurance reviews and formal reporting requirements (in accordance with agreed quality assurance procedures) and the associated outcomes and who has ultimate responsibility for this.

Record management

Having designated and clearly articulated responsibility for maintaining partner records can assist with version control and ongoing accuracy. Records should be kept up to date on an agreed schedule. Archived versions may be useful for reference and auditing purposes.

Where a significant change occurs to a partnership, such as a change in arrangement type, change in organisation ownership, updated mode(s) of delivery and so on, records will require updating earlier than the agreed schedule to ensure their accuracy.

Regular, systematic audits of partnership records are held to ensure accuracy of the information. These audits are overseen and reported into relevant governance structures for accountability.

Partnership record management approaches are captured in procedural guidance to facilitate strong record keeping, including information on roles and responsibilities. Providers will need to decide how long they retain archives of partnership records.

Location of information for internal use

Partnership records for internal use may be held in a single place, for example within a central repository, or in multiple locations across teams/people who share responsibility for partnership management. If information is held in multiple locations, providers should consider version control and information management risks. All partners understand where the definitive documentation is located for all partnership information, and this is the only documentation that is used for reporting and publication purposes.

Publishing partnership information for a public record

It is helpful for prospective students, partners, regulatory agencies, employers, and other higher education providers, to be able to see a list of approved collaborative partnerships. Transparency of this information can help others to confirm the details and authenticity of a partnership.

The following information might be published:

- partner organisation name

- type of partnership arrangement

- associated curriculum (for example, programme of study or standalone modules)

- status of the partnership or period the arrangement is valid for.

The location of this information may vary and could reside on a public webpage and any published information is displayed in an accessible format and follows Plain English guidelines. If referring to types of partnership arrangements, it may be useful to provide definitions of these to aid the understanding of prospective and registered students and others viewing this information.

Reflective questions

1. How does a prospective student/learner, employer, prospective partners, regulator, or other external agency find out information about our partnership arrangements?

2. Are staff aware of where they can find out about all partnerships that are currently active?

3. Who is responsible for the internal record of partnerships?

4. How often do we check the internal record of partnerships is accurate and up to date?

5. How do we ensure that the public information about partnerships is accurate and up to date?

6. How can we be confident that the public record of partnerships contains all the necessary information?

7. How can we be sure that the public record is clear to those who have English as a second language or who are non-expert in higher education?

8. How do we ensure a proportionate risk-based approach is used to determine the information held on different partnerships?

9. Are any partnership records duplicated across multiple sources?

10. What information is proportionate to hold and publish for work-based learning partnership arrangements?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Missing partnership information

Context

A key member of staff at a delivery partner unexpectedly leaves their role. They were the contact for the awarding provider and was responsible for communicating regular updates, data and information related to the partnership. An internal audit in the university has identified gaps in the information held regarding the partnership in their central records.

Considerations

- What happens next?

- Who should the provider contact?

- How might this be mitigated in the future?

Scenario 2: Partners publish conflicting information about the same arrangement

Context

A prospective student is researching a programme of study at a delivery partner organisation. When investigating the awarding institution, they notice that the partnership is no longer listed on the awarding providers website.

They raise an enquiry with the delivery partner; the admissions officer at the delivery partner is unaware of any changes to the status of the partnership arrangement.

Considerations

- What happens next?

- What should the prospective student do?

- What should the admissions officer do?

Key Practice f

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Key Practice f

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Partnerships are subject to ongoing scrutiny that includes periodic monitoring, evaluation and review to assure quality and facilitate enhancement.

Providers ensure that all aspects of their partnership arrangements are regularly monitored, evaluated and reviewed to assure quality, ensure the partnership is managed effectively, to encourage enhancement and sharing of good practice. Effective monitoring and evaluation can facilitate a shared understanding of quality and standards and the student experience between staff, students and providers across the arrangement. It enables the development of a culture of accountability, transparency and two-way learning, where all partners understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to monitoring and review.

All partners agree and communicate a process for monitoring and evaluation that enables the identification of areas of risk and provides a structured opportunity to raise concerns about the arrangement. Scheduled review points provide an opportunity to check progress against plans, and to set new objectives for the partnership.

A benefit of a mutually agreed approach to monitoring and evaluation processes is that it ensures regular communication between partners and facilitates open dialogue about any changes that may impact the arrangement (such as changes to organisational structures, policies, curriculum structures).

Providers may want to consider the cycle of monitoring and evaluation as set out in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 - A cyclical model of monitoring and evaluation
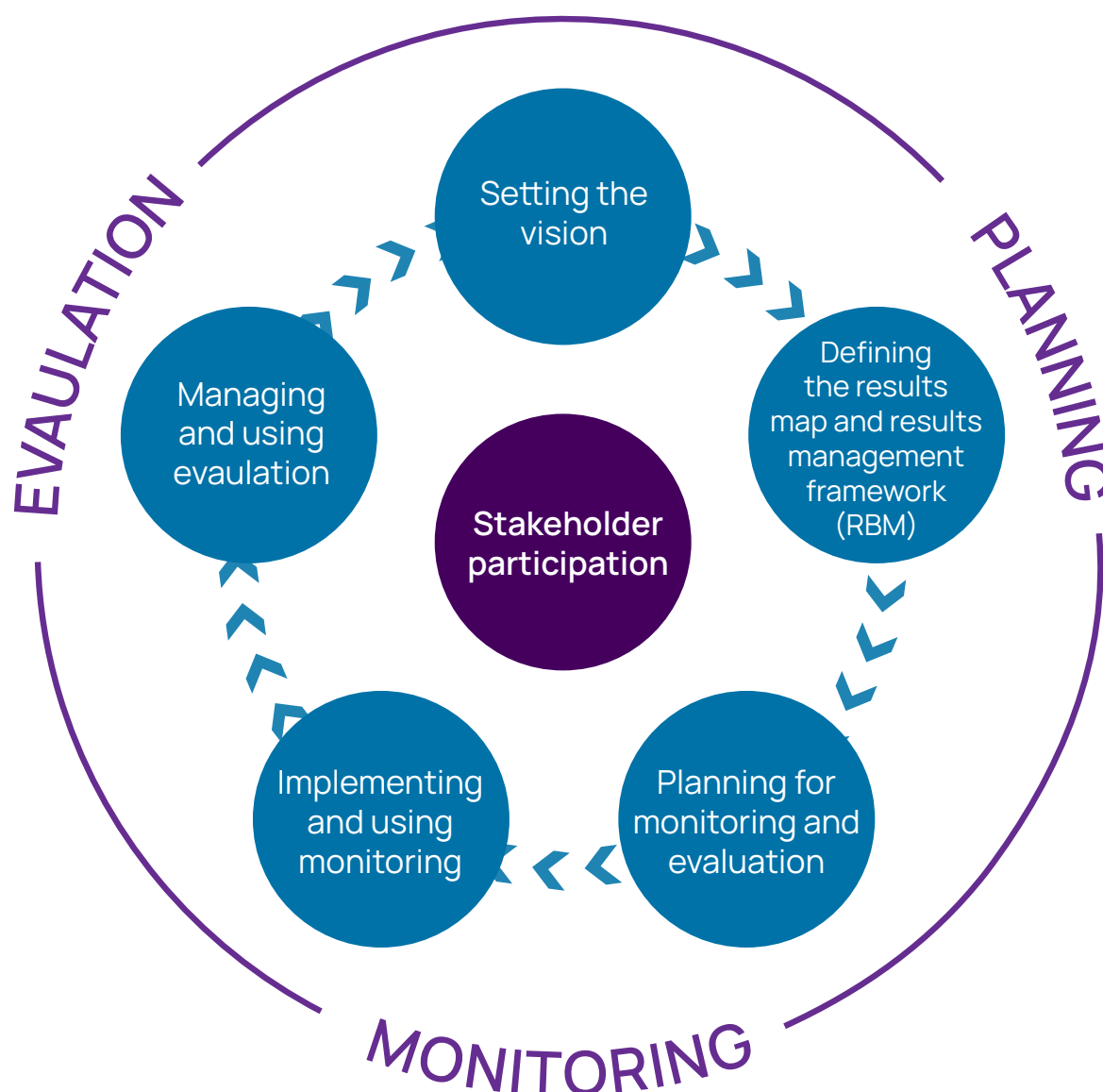
Agreeing a monitoring and evaluation processes

When a partnership is established, it is helpful to set out an agreed approach to a regular (ad hoc) or cyclical monitoring and evaluation review schedule that is proportionate to the perceived level of risk (see Practices, a, b and c), and separate from the scheduled periodic review/reapproval of academic programmes delivered by the partner. This regular review process offers an opportunity for all partners to consider if the arrangement continues to meet its strategic aims, to undertake renewed due diligence, provide an informed context for contract renewal and to address and mitigate emerging risks.

Designing and reviewing monitoring and evaluation processes

When designing and reviewing the monitoring and evaluation policies and processes, providers check that these remain applicable and appropriate to all partners and locations of delivery. 'Standard' university processes might require modification or adaption for specific types of provision regarding additional requirements from national quality agencies, regulatory or accrediting bodies.

Where two or more degree-awarding bodies offer joint, dual/double or multiple awards, they will share responsibility for the monitoring and review of programmes. It is common practice for the monitoring and evaluation processes of one of the partners to be used, with reports shared across both partners. The roles and responsibilities of all partners for monitoring and evaluation should be stated in the formal partnership agreement and communicated to all staff involved in implementing them.

Establishing benchmarks and key performance indicators enables providers to understand and compare where the performance of their partnership provision sits in relation to similar providers across the sector and identify areas of best practice.

Agreed data sets are collected and used as part of the ongoing monitoring of the student experience and student outcomes. It is important that requests for data are governed by data-sharing agreements and that all partners can access reporting tools to promote accuracy and ensure reporting requirements can be met.

Embedding the use of data as part of core governance processes enables performance to be tracked over time and, where relevant, for comparisons to be made across in-house provision and partnership provision. Partners agree how and through what mechanisms they will consider performance data (such as student progression, retention rates and graduate outcomes) to assess the partnership's effectiveness.

Monitoring and evaluation activity supports the sharing of good practice between partners and activities relating to teaching, learning and assessment and the wider student experience will actively involve discussion with students and staff to enable partners to identify and agree enhancement initiatives.

External review

Partners may agree an additional external review process to add further credibility to the evaluation of the partnership. Engaging external peer reviewers (such as external subject advisers or employers) to assess the partnership arrangement from an objective standpoint will offer added assurance regarding the effectiveness of the arrangement, areas for improvement and areas for enhancement.

Reflective questions

1. How do we use the ongoing monitoring of the partnership to identify and address areas of risk to quality? What is the follow up?

2. What data and performance indicators are we using to evaluate the partnership's success (e.g., student progression, satisfaction, and outcomes)?

3. Are all relevant groups and actors involved in overseeing the quality of provision?

4. How do we ensure that periodic reviews and evaluations are thorough, impartial, and lead to actionable insights?

1. How do we use the ongoing monitoring of the partnership to identify and address areas of risk to quality? What is the follow up?

2. What data and performance indicators are we using to evaluate the partnership's success (e.g., student progression, satisfaction, and outcomes)?

3. Are all relevant groups and actors involved in overseeing the quality of provision?

4. How do we ensure that periodic reviews and evaluations are thorough, impartial, and lead to actionable insights?

5. What steps are taken if the partnership is found to be underperforming? Is there a clear action plan for improvement?

6. Have clear points of contacts been established between the lead and delivery provider?

7. What measures do you have in place to ensure delivery providers are meeting expected thresholds related to student outcomes?

8. Are there agreed quality assurance mechanisms in place with the delivery provider that are regularly reviewed?

9. Is there an agreed risk register in operation for each partner organisation?

10. Do any policies or procedures need adjusting for the effective monitoring of all types of partnerships?

Reflective questions to drive enhancement

1. How can we ensure the partnership makes a lasting and positive impact on both institutions and the wider community? How can we share good practice across all our partners?

2. How can we engage more effectively with external partners (for example, industry, professional bodies, accrediting agencies) to bring fresh insights into the quality and enhancement of our partnership?

3. How can we be more competitive and tailor our monitoring and evaluation effectively to encourage different types of partnership working? How might we compare similar collaborations at leading institutions globally?

4. How are we using feedback from students, faculty and external stakeholders to drive enhancement in the partnership?

5. What would an enhanced version of this partnership look like in five years?

Scenarios

Data considerations for monitoring the quality of a partnership arrangement

Context

You have an established partnership with a private pathway provider to deliver your international foundation provision and wish to undertake a scheduled full review of the partnership lifecycle with a view toward contract renewal.

Considerations

- How would you use data to inform a review of the partnership after five years of operation? What considerations should you make in terms of data transfer and analysis of students when on the programme and when they progress to their chosen degree?

- Who would you need to involve in assessing the quality of the provision?

- How are your partners involved in the review process beyond requests for information and data?

Terminology

Arrangement
Refers to the type of partnership.

Contract or agreement
The legally binding document that is developed, agreed and signed by all partners.

Collaborative arrangements
Arrangements that lead to entry or contribute to academic credit or a qualification of a degree-awarding body, delivered, supported or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation.

Delivery provider
Usually relevant to validation and franchise arrangements and refers to the organisation that delivers the teaching, learning and assessment.

Awarding/lead provider
Usually relevant to validation and franchise arrangements and typically refers to the organisation that grants the award or qualification.

Partnership arrangements
All formal arrangements (in the UK or international) where a provider works with others to design and/or deliver programmes and/or to award qualifications. The processes providers will need to follow to assure high quality will vary considerably depending on the type of partnership and the risks involved.

Transnational education (TNE)
All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of programmes of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the students are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a state different from the state in which it operates or may operate independently of any national education system.

Types of partnership arrangement

Whereby a provider works with others to design and/or deliver programmes and/or to award qualifications.

Title of arrangement	Explanation
Franchised/ subcontracted arrangement	A degree-awarding body agrees to authorise another organisation to deliver (and sometimes assess) part or all of one (or more) of its own approved programmes. Often, the degree-awarding body retains direct responsibility for the programme content, teaching and assessment strategy, assessment regime and quality assurance. Students normally have a direct contractual relationship with the degree-awarding body.
Validation arrangement	Typically, a delivery partner designs, develops and delivers a programme. The programme is recognised and awarded by the lead partner who retains responsibility for quality assurance and awards offered in its name. Students are usually registered with the partner organisation. However, in some cases they may be registered with the awarding body.
Dual award	A dual award relates to a formal partnership whereby two programmes or study lead to an award that is recognised separately by the partners. The total volume of learning is typically greater than that required for any one award alone but less than completing the individual programmes independently in sequence. The agreement between partners specifies how credit and learning from each institution are recognised toward the requirements of both awards. Students are normally registered with all awarding institutions and, upon successful completion, receive separate degree certificates from each, alongside a single transcript or academic record endorsed by all partners. Key point: Two awards - 2 certificates, independently conferred; one coordinated programme; one transcript endorsed by all partners.

Double (multiple) award	A double (multiple) award relates to a partnership where a programme of study leads to two (or more) awards are recognised separately by partners.
	The total volume of learning is typically greater than that required for any one award alone but less than completing the individual programmes independently in sequence.
	The programme is delivered by all partners and the credit for the entire programme is counted towards the final award.
	A student will receive 2 (or more) certificates and 2 (or more) transcripts. Students/learners will likely be registered with all partners.
	Key Point: Full credit/volume of learning recognition by each partner; multiple certificates and transcripts.
Joint award	A joint degree is a programme of study leading to an award which is jointly owned, developed and delivered by more than one provider and leads to a single award granted by each partner.
	Students/learners will usually be registered to both (or more partners). They will receive one certificate and one transcript jointly owned and endorsed by all partners.
	Key point: One award, jointly owned; one certificate and transcript.
Cotutelle arrangement	A cotutelle is an arrangement established by means of bilateral agreements, legally binding, signed by two universities, located in two different countries or across the UK. It relates to a specific doctoral degree candidate.
	Usually resulting in the award of a double doctoral degree, once the terms of the executed cotutelle agreement are completed and the doctoral dissertation is defended successfully.

Types of collaborative arrangement

Provision leading or contributing to academic credit or a qualification of a degree-awarding body, delivered, supported or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation.

Title of arrangement	Explanation
Articulation agreement	An agreement between two providers that explains how earned credit will transfer from a named programme at one provider to guarantee entry to another specific programme at a different provider. It can encompass entry and credit arrangements.
Progression agreement	An arrangement between two providers that recognises a specific programme for the purposes of being eligible to apply to a named programme at the other partner institution - it does not guarantee entry and usual selection and admission processes apply. These types of arrangement can apply to different levels of a programme.
Degree/graduate apprenticeship arrangement	The formal arrangement between an apprentice, the training provider (which might be the awarding body) and employer. It may also include the end point assessment organisation (where separate). It defines the expectations and responsibilities of all partners to ensure achievement of the full occupational competence for the apprentice. The arrangement will enable the apprentice to fulfil requirements of on-the-job training and spend at least 20% of their working hours completing learning environment-based learning with a college, higher education provider or training provider which leads to a nationally recognised award. Apprentices will be registered (typically as part-time students) with the provider delivering the learning (training) component.
Work placements	An arrangement that specifies a defined period of time where a student works at an employer as part of their academic programme, gaining practical experience in their field of study, typically integrated into their degree, and assessed.
Student exchange	Agreements with international providers to permit the exchange of undergraduate or postgraduate students for a period of study. Sometimes integrated into their degree and assessed.
Study abroad	These agreements are negotiated to recruit undergraduate or postgraduate students on a short-term, non-graduating basis. Arrangements can support incoming and outgoing movement.

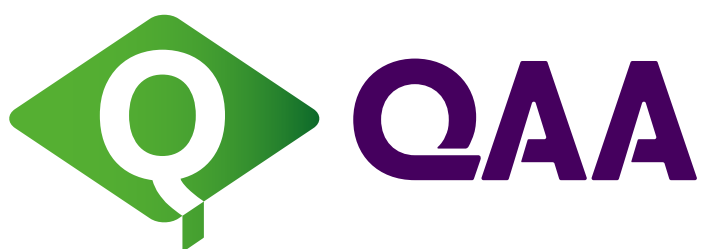| Exceptional collaborative arrangements	An arrangement whereby an English registered provider without degree awarding powers subcontracts delivery of Pearson Higher National products to a third party while retaining responsibility for registration of the student, certification and oversight of quality assurance.
Branch campus	Students are registered with the UK degree-awarding body and study at one of its campuses located within or outside the UK. The campus may be established in partnership with a local organisation as this may be required by law in the delivery country.

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