

## **PARTNER INSTITUTION - INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW GUIDANCE FOR PARTNER INSTITUTIONS AND PANEL MEMBERS**

### **SECTION 1: OVERVIEW**

#### **1. Introduction to Institutional Review**

- 1.1 Institutional review is the process by which partner institutions are reviewed at institutional level, usually every five years, to ensure that they remain suitable for the conduct of Higher Education (HE) programmes leading to an award of the University of Essex. The process is distinct from the periodic review of specific courses.
- 1.2 Institutional review typically comprises four key elements:
- i) A self-evaluation report prepared by the partner institution with supporting documentation.
  - ii) An evaluation report by the University on the operation of the academic partnership.
  - iii) An institutional review panel event convened to evaluate the above evidence, which should include a meeting with HE students studying on validated courses at the partner institution.
  - iv) An institutional review report and action plan agreed by the review panel.
- 1.3 The University may request to review students' work and to observe HE teaching at the partner institution, at the discretion of the Chair of the institutional review panel.
- 1.4 The areas explored during an institutional review event are set out in Section 2. The institutional review process does not include consideration of the financial basis of the partnership except where financial issues might impact on academic quality and standards, for example in terms of the provision of learning resources.

#### **2. Partner Institution's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting information**

- 2.1 The SER should provide an evaluative commentary on the period under review, reflecting on the institution's HE operational management and quality assurance mechanisms and demonstrating to the review panel how students continue to be provided with learning opportunities of an appropriate quality and standard. It is important that the report provides an honest appraisal of both aspects of good practice and areas for enhancement.
- 2.2 A selection of additional documentary evidence is provided to support the evaluative commentary and is cross-referenced within the SER. 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 Bodies (PSRBs) or other external review reports.

#### **3. University's Evaluation Report**

- 3.1 The University's Partnerships Team will prepare an evaluation report which summarises and reviews the operation and management of the academic partnership and which evaluates the effectiveness of the structures, procedures and mechanisms which support the academic quality and standards of awards delivered at or by the partner institution. The due diligence process may also be utilised by the University ahead of

the institutional review, to assess any changes that have occurred inside or outside the partner institution, that may impact on the partnership.

- 3.2 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 review panel. The draft report will be sent to the partner institution for comment prior to circulation.

#### **4. Institutional Review Panel**

4.1 The institutional panel will normally include the following:

- Dean of Partnerships (Chair)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) or nominee
- External academic with appropriate experience in partnership provision
- Academic Registrar or nominee
- Deputy Director of Academic Services (Quality and Development) or nominee
- At least one representative nominated by the partner institution (not present at meetings with students)
- A student representative (normally currently registered on a course within the partner institution, although a recent graduate may alternatively be appointed)
- A senior administrator from the Partnerships Team, Academic Services (Secretary)

4.2 The membership of the panel may be varied at the Chair's discretion. In the absence of one or more panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the review event should proceed is at the Chair's discretion.

4.3 Partner institution members of the institutional review panel are normally present for all the panel's discussions, except meetings with students and/or recent graduates of the institution under consideration.

#### **5. Institutional Review Event**

5.1 The institutional review panel will meet at the partner institution. The review event usually takes place over a full day. The review event will include a tour of relevant facilities, and panel members will normally meet with students and/or recent graduates of the partner institution. Where appropriate, for example when the HE portfolio includes a large amount of work-based learning, the panel may also meet with employer representatives.

5.2 The institutional review agenda will include one or more blocks of time in which the panel may discuss the partnership in detail with members of the senior management team of the partner institution, and in which members of the partner institution will have the opportunity to respond to points raised. The Chair is responsible for highlighting positive aspects of the partnership and raising issues in a constructive manner.

5.3 Towards the end of the event, the panel will meet to determine their conclusions and recommendations. The Chair will normally commence this meeting by summarising the issues and the partner institution's responses and s/he will conclude the meeting by agreeing the outcome of the event with the panel before inviting members of the partner institution back for verbal feedback. A unanimous decision of the panel is required for the conclusion of the institutional review event.

5.4 During the feedback session between the partner institution and the panel, the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the partner institution of any conditions

and/or recommendations that need to be addressed by the partner institution, the University or those to be considered jointly. The institutional review panel may not set further conditions or recommendations after the event. A deadline will be set by which conditions should be met and a response provided to the recommendations.

- 5.5 If, at any stage in the process, a panel member has serious cause for concern about any aspect of the partnership and/or the conduct of the review, this may be raised in confidence with the review panel Chair, who will determine the best course of action to resolve the issue, either as part of the review process or via a separate investigation or course of action as appropriate.

## 6. Institutional Review Outcome, Report and Action Plan

- 6.1 Following the institutional review event, the Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions and recommendations are circulated as soon as possible after the event. This will be followed by an institutional review report which will summarise the panel's discussions and conclusions and include details of any conditions and/or recommendations and will be accompanied by an action plan.

- 6.2 Normally, the outcome of the institutional review event is the recommendation for the institution to be re-approved as a partner institution of the University of Essex, which may be subject to conditions and/or recommendations, in which case the partner institution must provide the Chair with evidence, within agreed timescales, that the conditions have been met, and provide a response to any recommendations. The period of institutional re-approval will normally be for five years.

- **Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the institutional review panel, normally prior the commencement of the next academic year and before the institution can be re-approved as a partner institution of the University of Essex.
- **Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered, which may be after the commencement of the next academic year and following re-approval of the institution as a partner institution of the University of Essex.

- 6.3 The Panel may also give **Commendations** which allow the panel a chance to congratulate the partner institution on aspects of exceptional practice. Other areas of good practice that the panel would like to highlight may be included in the report, rather than listed as a commendation.

- 6.4 The institutional review report and action plan will be submitted to the University's Partnerships Education Committee to request the Committee's recommendation to Senate on the continuation of the partnership, subject to any conditions contained in the report being met.

- 6.5 The institution should make a formal response to the institutional review report by the agreed deadline(s), providing evidence of how conditions have been met and addressing any recommendations made. An updated action plan should be included in the response. The Chair will review the response and decide whether the conditions have been met, in liaison with other panel members where necessary. The University's Partnerships Education Committee will monitor subsequent progress of any conditions and recommendations and will report to the University's Education Committee when the conditions have been met.

## **SECTION 2: AREAS TO BE EXPLORED BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PANEL DURING THE EVENT**

These questions are provided as a guide only and are intended to be neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. However, Panel members may find it useful to refer to these questions when reading the institutional review documentation as a prompt for possible lines of enquiry.

### **1. HE Strategy and Operational Management Structures**

- Have the recommendations made at the last review or since approval/validation been met?
- Does the partner institution have a clearly articulated HE strategy?
- How does the HE strategy align with the University's Strategic Plan and Education Strategy.<sup>1</sup>
- Do institutional strategic aims for Higher Education (HE) continue to be appropriate and relevant?
- Are there clear plans for course provision over the next 5 years?
- Does the partner institution have appropriate internal mechanisms for the operational management and quality assurance of HE provision?
- Are relevant internal HE committees operating effectively?
- Are key staffing roles clear, and are there effective lines of communication between the partner institution and the University?
- Do institutional HE policies and procedures align with the University's policies and procedures and are they operating effectively?
- Are effective internal academic development, approval, monitoring and review procedures in place?
- Has the partner institution been responsive to feedback from the University on previous annual review of courses and institutions?
- Is feedback from external examiners being dealt with appropriately?
- How is this feedback shared with students?
- Is there evidence of appropriate engagement with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education?<sup>2</sup>

### **2. HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy**

- Does the institution employ a suitable variety of teaching and learning methods to meet the needs of a diverse range of students?
- How are these perceived by students?
- Does the institution make appropriate use of formative assessment, in order to support the development of students' abilities?
- Do staff provide thorough and timely feedback on students' work?
- Are external examiners generally satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process?

### **3. Learning Resources**

- Is adequate teaching and learning accommodation available?
- Are learners supported by appropriate and accessible library resources?
- Do students have access to adequate equipment (including ICT)?
- Are appropriate arrangements in place to manage and support the use of virtual learning environments?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/strategy/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

- Are staff provided with adequate training in this respect?

#### **4. Admissions, Enrolment and Induction**

- Are admissions procedures fair and transparent, including those for dealing with Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L)?
- Are entry criteria for HE courses clear and appropriate?
- Are there well-designed arrangements for student induction?
- Are students satisfied with the enrolment and induction process?

#### **5. Student Retention, Progression and Achievement**

- Are levels of student retention, progression and achievement satisfactory?
- Where issues have been identified, have these been adequately addressed?
- Does graduate destination data suggest that the partner institution is preparing students well for their future careers?

#### **6. HE Staffing and Staff Development**

- Are academic staff appropriately qualified and experienced?
- Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?
- Are appropriate contingency plans in place to deal with any medium or long term staff absence?
- Are adequate staff development opportunities available to support staff in terms of their professional development?
- How is staff performance monitored and reviewed?
- Does the institution operate a system of peer observation?
- Are there adequate opportunities for scholarly activity?

#### **7. Student Support**

- Are students provided with an appropriate level of academic support?
- Are arrangements in place to ensure that any additional needs of students are identified and reasonable adjustments are put in place to meet them?
- Are arrangements for tutorial support clear and generally understood by staff and students?
- Are appropriate arrangements in place to provide careers guidance?
- Is there an equality and diversity policy in place, including details of how the needs of disabled students are addressed?

#### **8. Student Representation and Feedback**

- Are appropriate arrangements in place to gain feedback from students?
- Are students represented on relevant committees?
- Do the outcomes of student satisfaction surveys (internal and external) demonstrate that students are happy with their learning experiences?
- Where lower levels of satisfaction have been identified, have these been dealt with in a robust manner?
- How does the partner institution report back to students on action taken in response to their feedback?

## **9. Employer Engagement, Work Placements and Work-based Learning**

- Have employers been involved in the ongoing development of HE provision within the partner institution?
- Are responsibilities and arrangements for the identification, management and supervision of work placements and work-based learning opportunities systematic and clear?
- How does the institution ensure that students gain experience that is appropriate to their programme and level of study?
- How are placement providers briefed and supported?
- Are Learning Agreements and Placement Handbooks in place to define the responsibilities of the employers, students, mentors and/or academic tutors?

## **10. Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information**

- What mechanisms does the institution employ to ensure the accuracy and completeness of published information (for example on its website or in HE publicity material)?
- Are effective mechanisms in place to liaise with the University regarding publicity material?
- Are student and course handbooks and other information provided for students clear and complete? How is this audited?
- Are programme specifications published to students in full?
- Are External Examiner reports made available to students?