

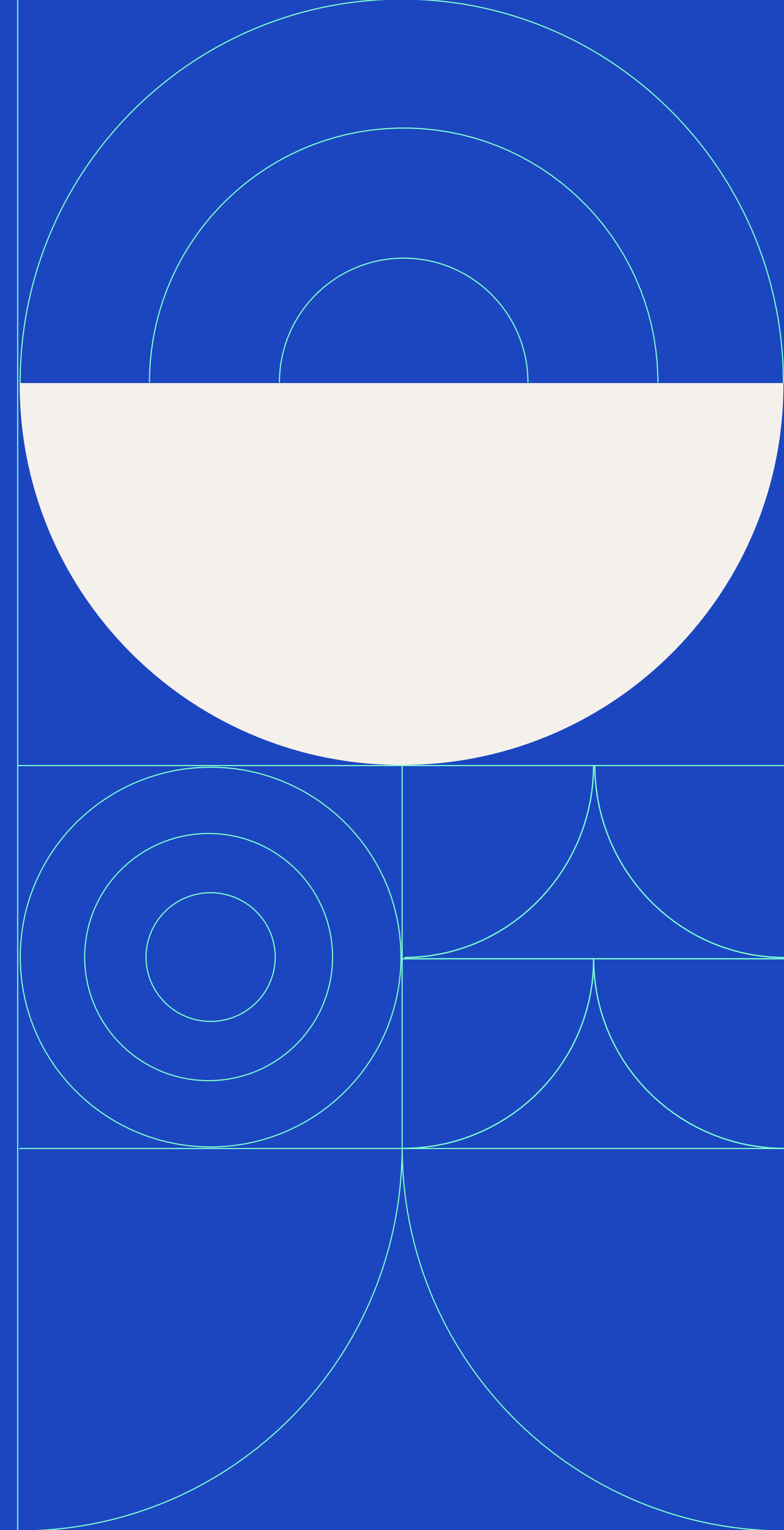
Validation Handbook

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A: Introduction and background

A1 Introduction

The Open University

The Open University (OU) was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. It is recognised internationally for pioneering open learning, for the quality of its teaching, for its research, and for offering university education to students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to study. The OU's mission can be summarised as: **The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas.**

OU validated awards are conferred under the OU's Royal Charter. They meet the same standards as equivalent awards taken by students directly registered with the OU and/or other UK universities. They are available to approved partners who have demonstrated their ability to quality assure their programmes, with the OU validating the awards. Organisations that offer programmes at higher education level may want to be approved by the OU so that they can provide OU validated awards.

It is very important to the OU that the academic standards of validated programmes offered through the OU validated awards model meets our criteria and is of a high quality. The OU will take any action it considers necessary under its Royal Charter status to protect the quality of validated programmes and accompanying awards.

Any organisation that wishes to become a partner and offer OU validated awards has to be approved as a partner before programmes of study can be validated.

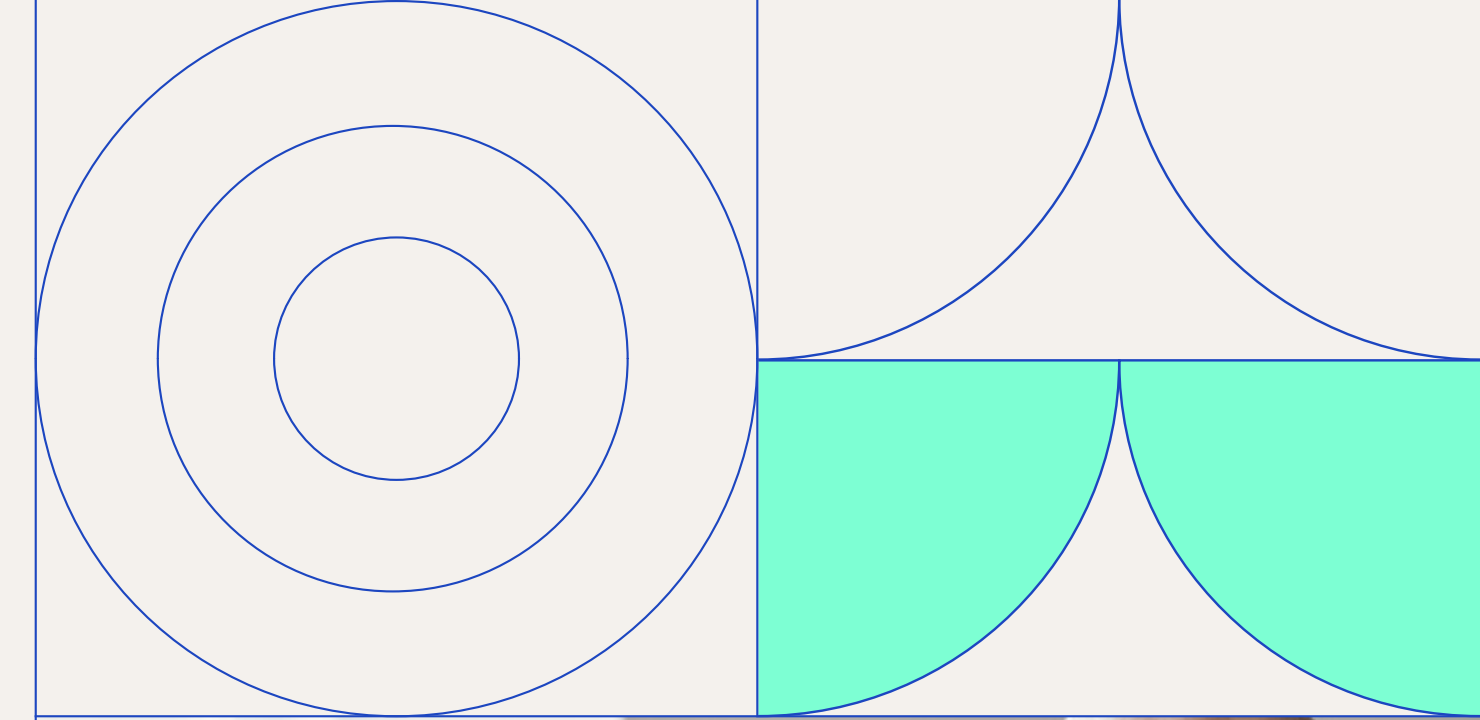
Once a partner is approved, a legally binding partnership agreement is drawn up, setting out the relationship between the OU and the approved institution, and defining their responsibilities. Partners may not market or recruit students to any programmes until they are in receipt of the legally binding agreement.

The authority for approving and reapproving partners, and validating and revalidating programmes, rests with the OU Senate and is exercised through the OU's Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

This handbook outlines the processes and procedures required to set up and operate a successful validated awards partnership and has been created to act as a useful reference tool for partners, OUVF and academic staff.

The handbook ensures partners are clear on roles and responsibilities. It also ensures everyone is confident that the correct processes are in place and that students will have a high-quality learning experience.

Sometimes it will become necessary to update information. When this occurs, OUVF will produce an amended copy, issue it to partners for distribution and communicate the date from which it is to be applied.



A2: What are OU validated awards?

A2.1 The nature of OU validated awards

OU validated awards are designed to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Frameworks of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) or where relevant the Scottish Framework (SCQF). See the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#) for details.

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

Partners are responsible for ensuring programmes meet the OU's academic quality and standards. Therefore, partners must also align their programmes with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 and the Office for Students'

regulatory framework. Additionally, if they are registered with the Office for Students, they must abide by their conditions of registration.

A2.2 Approval of new awards

There is a list of the programmes the OU is permitted to validate, under the title [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#). The OU Senate takes advice from the Curriculum Partnerships Committee before proposing any new type of validated award to the OU Council.

The OU considers proposals within the context of its curriculum strategy, the range of existing OU validated awards and how they relate to each other, and to the awards offered by other bodies.



The supporting role of the OU

The Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP) manages all partnerships, ensuring everything is delivered and managed in accordance with the terms of agreement. It ensures contractual obligations are fulfilled and that associated activities are coordinated effectively. The (Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager (S/QPM) supports partners throughout approval/reapproval and on a day-to-day basis.

The OU is a firm believer in the power of collaboration. Our OUVP team is dedicated to ensuring that all provisions offered through our partnerships are seamlessly delivered and managed. We are here to support you every step of the way.

Promoting high academic standards

We are committed to helping our partners achieve and maintain the highest academic standards. Here’s how we support you:

Assessing readiness:
We work closely with partners to ensure they meet regulatory and legislative requirements, deliver high-quality academic standards and provide an exceptional student experience.

Advice and information:
We offer expert guidance on best practices in academic quality, standards and policy design, ensuring you have the support you need to excel.

Facilitating collaboration:
We foster collaboration between the OU, our partners, professional bodies, employers and students, creating a vibrant and interconnected academic community.

External Examiners:
We appoint external examiners for validated awards and attend examination and/or assessment boards, ensuring the integrity and quality of your programmes.

Ongoing support and oversight

Our commitment to your success doesn't end with approval. The OU provides continuous advice, guidance, academic support, and oversight of quality and standards. Our team of academic reviewers (see [page 11](#)), (senior) quality and partnerships managers, (senior) quality and compliance managers and other university representatives are dedicated to enhancing your validated provision, ensuring you have the resources and support needed to thrive.

Commitment to a respectful environment

We are committed to creating a respectful and inclusive environment where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. The OU values dignity and respect for all individuals. If you ever feel you have been subjected to bullying or harassment, our [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#) is in place to support you.

It strives to promote and maintain high academic standards by:

- Assessing each partner's readiness, putting appropriate support in place to ensure partners comply with regulatory and legislative requirements, are delivering good quality academic standards and providing a good student experience
- Providing a framework of policies designed to foster the development of partners as strong, cohesive and self-critical academic communities
- Acting as a source of information and advice about good practice concerning all matters related to academic quality and standards
- Facilitating collaboration and interaction between the OU, partners and national and international organisations, including professional bodies, employers and students
- Appointing external examiners for validated awards and attending all examination and/or assessment boards where awards are made in the OU's name or where progression is agreed (for validated programmes only).



Following approval, the OU provides advice, guidance, academic support and oversight of quality and standards. This is provided by academic reviewers, S/QPMs, and other university representatives whose remit is to support the quality assurance and enhancement of validated provision.

OU representatives attend examination board meetings when decisions on OU awards are due to be made. They also attend some or all key committees and board meetings – academic boards, programme committees, quality standing committees or equivalent meetings, for example. The OU normally agrees with partners at the planning stage which meetings OU representatives will attend.

Partners need to provide the OU with all committee papers and minutes in the year leading up to the partnership reapproval process, as well as supplying minutes of all academic board meetings via the OU’s annual Institutional and Programme Monitoring exercise.

Observation of key committees

OU representatives will attend key committees and boards, such as academic boards, programme committees, or quality standing committees. Partners are asked to share all key dates, relevant papers and minutes.

Role of OU representatives

Our representatives at key committees will:

- ▶ attend committee meetings as agreed
- ▶ observe the conduct of boards and committees, ensuring adherence to institutional procedures
- ▶ offer advice on interpreting and applying OU policies and guidance from the UK Quality Code 2024
- ▶ alert the institution and the OU to any potential issues that may impede the effective functioning of boards and committees
- ▶ report to the OU, including partnership redevelopment and approval process panels.



Academic reviewers

Our academic reviewers, the OU's faculty representatives, play a crucial support role for partners. They engage with programme teams and students at least once a year, providing valuable feedback and insights. Academic reviewers submit a summary of their engagements over the year. It is expected that academic reviewers engage with students at least once a year, including feedback about any meetings in their reports. More information on the [academic reviewer role](#) can be found on the OUVF website.

B: The partnership development and approval process, and reapproval process

B1 The principles of partner approval

When partners seek approval and current partners seek reapproval, they need to provide evidence that demonstrates their alignment with the OU's principles for approval. They also need to comply with the QAA Quality Code 2024, Office for Students' conditions of registration, the Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies and four nations funding/legislation requirements. Partners receive support to work towards and demonstrate alignment with the OU's principles for approval. These are:

1. Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance.
2. Appropriate academic organisation and the administrative structure to support it and ensure compliance.
3. Provision of an appropriate learning environment.
4. Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement.
5. Engagement with the wider academic and local community.

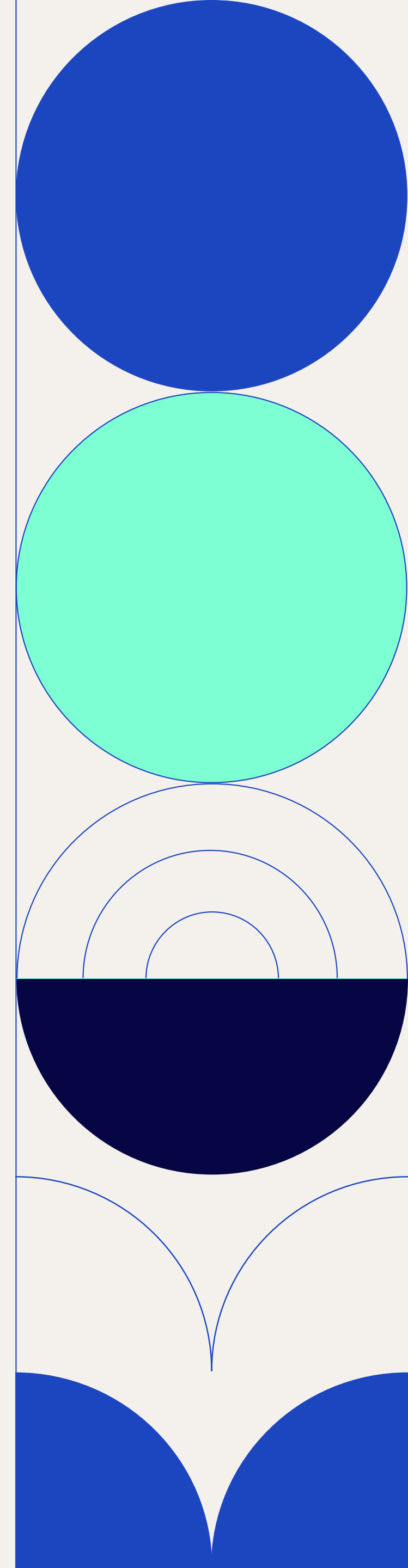
Principle 1: Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance

There should be a governance structure that enables a strategic approach to protecting and assuring the integrity of academic decision-making (which typically covers student admissions, subject curriculum, student assessment, the monitoring and evaluation academic standards and academic quality) and actively encourages student engagement in academic governance.

There should be an independent body (usually called the Academic Board – see [Appendix 4](#) – The role of the academic board) within the organisation with a clear remit for academic development, quality assurance and academic decision-making. This body must be independent of all arrangements the organisation has for commercial and/or financial activity. Academic governance can be distinguished from matters of corporate governance – relating to, for example, finance and estates – which are the responsibility of the governing body.

Where the partner is a company, the owner, shareholders and/or trustees should not exercise direct authority for academic decision-making, as this could lead to role conflict and jeopardise the stability of the academic environment.

The respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different individuals and bodies should be clearly defined. Those involved need to be fully briefed about their role and the hierarchy of procedures made clear.



Principle 2: Appropriate academic organisation and an administrative structure to support it and ensure compliance

The partner should have an independent governing body that ensures adequate controls are in place to safeguard institutional sustainability, with effective systems for risk management and control.

Within the partner organisation, there should be an organisational structure that is understood and assigns clear executive, administrative and academic responsibilities to individuals and groups to run OU validated programmes.

There should be an appropriate committee structure, one that supports the delivery and assessment of higher education programmes. It should include student representation at all levels and mirror the student/local community.

There should be a set of partner policies, procedures and guidelines, a regulatory framework, and appropriate administrative structures in place to support the delivery of OU validated awards. All processes and policies involved

in the student lifecycle, from recruitment through to completion of students' study, must comply with the OU's requirements. These include, but are not limited to:

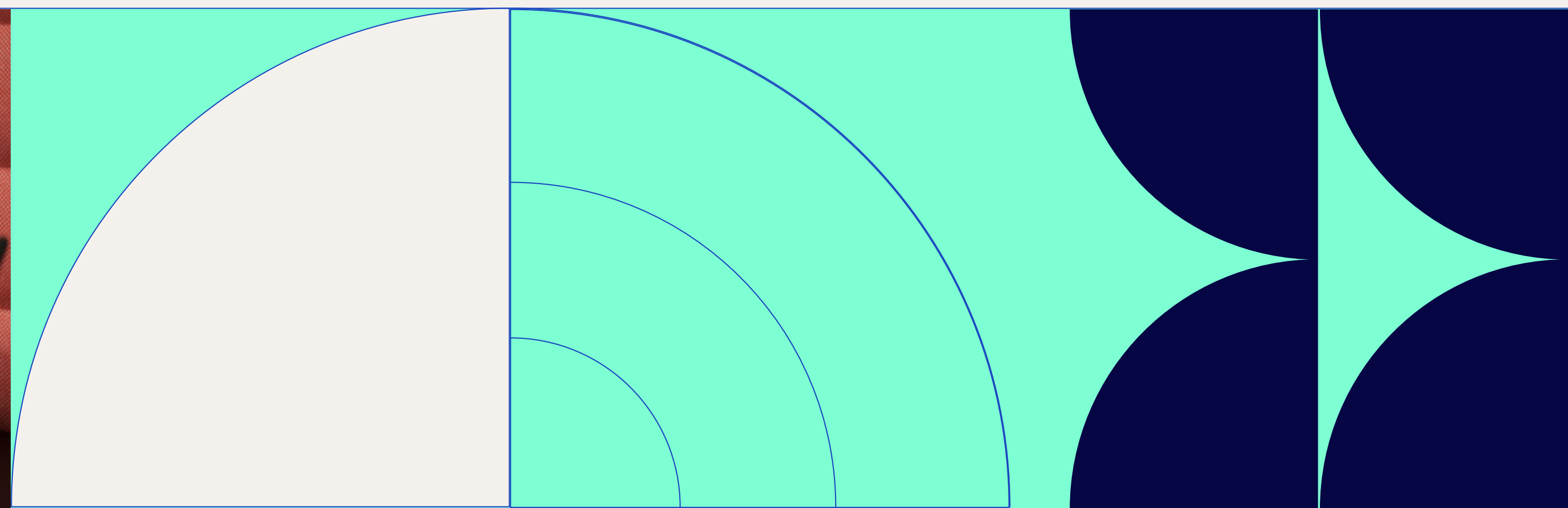
- ▶ The OU regulations for validated awards, and also with legislative, regulatory and statutory requirements including:
 - Consumer protection law, as it applies to higher education
 - The Office for Students' conditions of registrations (for England only providers and those registered with the OfS)
 - The QAA Quality Code 2024
 - The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education guidance, and other relevant regulatory and statutory requirements for higher education providers
- ▶ An established and clearly documented quality and compliance review cycle that is undertaken regularly. All mechanisms should be informed by the UK higher education sector practices.

There should be a commitment to sharing good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, both formally and informally, across the partner's organisation.

The partner's organisation should have effective systems and processes in place. They should not rely on individuals.

The QAA defines [transnational education \(TNE\)](#) as '**the delivery of higher education level awards by recognised UK degree-awarding bodies in a country, or to students, other than where the awarding provider is based**'.

Transnational education gives students around the world better access to high-quality education, although the OU recognises that there may be different/additional partner requirements to ensure compliance with in-country legislation. This is discussed during the partnership development and approval process (PDAP)/partnership reapproval process (PRP).





Principle 3: Provision of an appropriate learning environment

The partner should display a commitment to fostering an open intellectual community that expects staff and students to engage in critical reflection and personal educational or professional development, in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 (see [page 116](#)).

The partner must provide sufficient and appropriate facilities, academic learning resources and student support services, enabling it to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

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

The partner should have enough qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience, which should be in line with OfS Condition of Registration B2.

Academic staff need to have sufficient time allocated to teaching and assessment. They also need to be engaged in designing and delivering programmes, hold an academic qualification or have equivalent experience a level above that which they are teaching and assessing.

All teaching staff should have a shared understanding of the learning outcomes of the programme they teach on, and the strategies for ensuring that these are properly achieved and assessed. The partner should support all students to achieve successful academic and professional/graduate outcomes.

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

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

The partner should have a commitment to continuity of the teaching, learning and assessment of a programme(s)

in the event of staff absence or departure and ensuring minimal disruption to the student experience.

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

The partner should ensure a consistent, coherent and evidence-informed strategic approach to the collection, storage and management of data employed across the organisation.

Where appropriate, partners should have a strategic approach to environmental sustainability, which should be echoed in curriculum design and refer to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Principle 4: Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement

Partners must demonstrate their adherence to the UK QAA Quality Code 2024 and the Office for Students requirements, including conditions of registration and professional standards. This also encompasses the use of external reference points, such as apprenticeship standards, where applicable.

To ensure impartial and independent scrutiny of the design, review and development of all provision, partners should, where appropriate, engage one or more external experts and employers as advisers. The partner's academic organisation should have a system for defining the processes for academic quality assurance and for identifying who has responsibility for decision-making.

The partner's systems should ensure that:

- ▶ There are strategic mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting institutional and programme monitoring and student performance data in line with OfS Condition B3 thresholds, ensuring processes are applied and operated systematically and consistently
- ▶ Information and feedback generated from monitoring is assessed and analysed, and then used to learn from and improve processes, policies, the student experience and teaching, learning and assessment methods
- ▶ Outcomes, actions and impact from monitoring and evaluation are communicated to staff, students and external stakeholders.

Mechanisms for institutional and programme evaluation should be informed by (but not exclusive to) feedback from the governing body (board of trustees), teaching staff, students, external examiners, external peers and employers, academic reviewers, and statistical information such as student progression, retention and graduate outcomes, as well as external data sets such as National Student Surveys, external quality reviews, previous monitoring exercises, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, employers and The Open University.

Principle 5: Engagement with the wider academic and local community

The partner should ensure that the threshold standards for its qualifications comply with the relevant national qualification frameworks. The partner must be aware of and responsive to national (UK) and international standards, current practice in UK higher education and benchmarks, and (where appropriate) international expectations.

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

Teaching and learning should be informed by reflective practice. Partners should enable all academic staff to engage in relevant, timely and appropriate professional development and research that supports programme development and enhancement, students' learning and high-quality teaching.





B2 Stages in the approval process

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

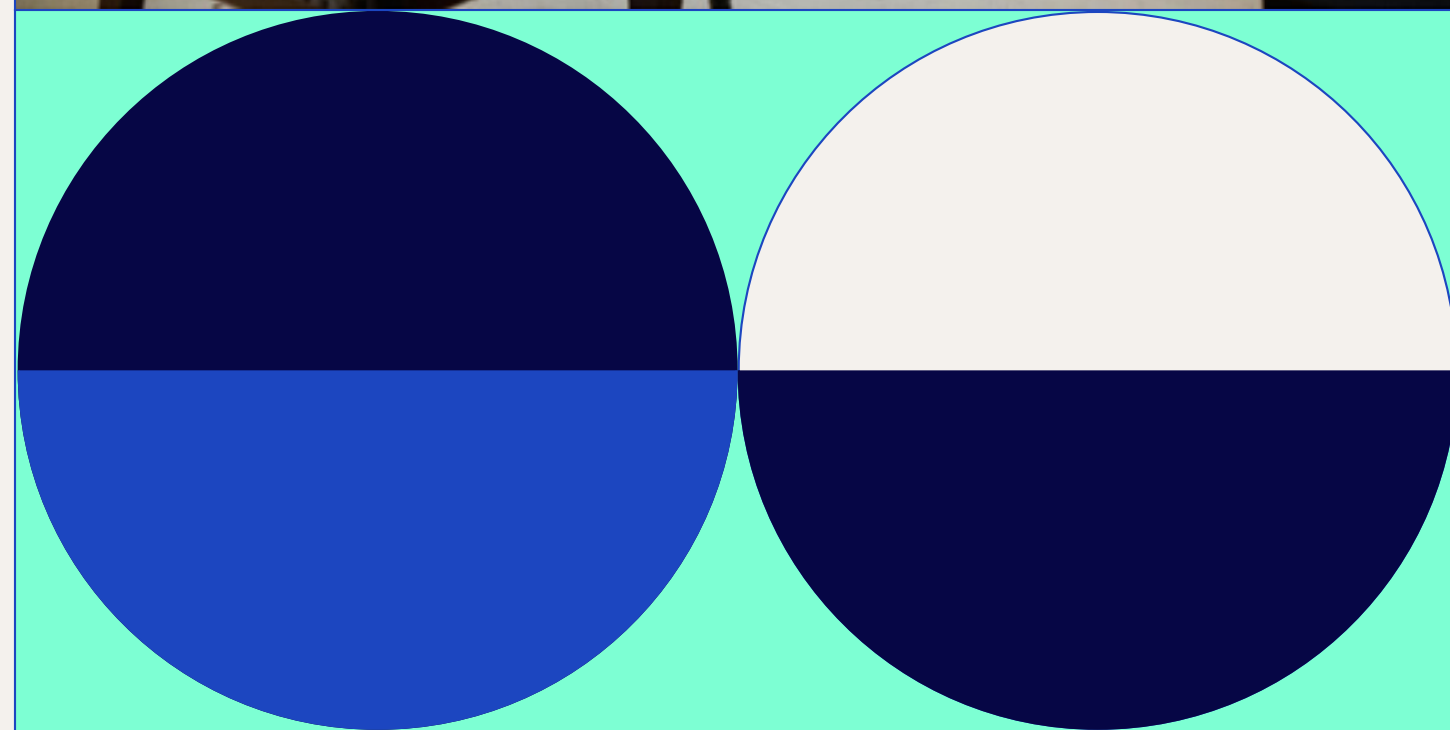
The approval of a partner—as suitable to design and deliver programmes leading to OU awards—also signifies the OU’s commitment to ensuring that all registered students are supported to complete their programmes successfully. To ensure this commitment is upheld, the OU reserves the right to request or obtain any information it deems necessary to confirm that a partner continues to meet the principles of approval. This assurance is sought through a structured process of due diligence, during which the OU may seek any evidence it considers appropriate to provide reasonable assurance of compliance and adherence. When a partner has a current or former relationship with another UK awarding institution for the validation of programmes, the OU will ask the awarding institution about the standing and effectiveness of the partner seeking partnership development and approval process. If the partnership was terminated, the OU will also ask why.

Partners that want to continue offering OU validated awards after the initial period of approval will be subject to periodic partnership reapprovals and policy compliance reviews. Together with institutional and programme monitoring, these are key processes used by the OU to ensure partners continue to meet the quality and compliance requirements of an approved validated partner of the OU.

Both parties can agree to withdraw from any phase in the process or choose to amend phases if it benefits the partner or if more development time is required.

Should the OU choose to withdraw from any stage in the approval process, the partner will be informed. The OU may provide specific feedback of areas of development that have been identified.

Should the OU withdraw from the approval, the partner may not reapply for a period of at least 12 months following the decision not to proceed. This is to ensure that sufficient time has passed to allow the prospective partner to review any feedback and implement the recommendations.



Stage 1: Initial enquiry and application phase

Anyone who wants more information about a validation partnership or any other partnership of collaborative arrangement should visit the OUVV website – it will provide all the information you need. There is also an application form in the ‘Become a partner’ section of the [Validation Partnerships website](#).

This application form does not commit you to becoming a partner – it facilitates an initial conversation about partnering with the OU, shaped by your interests.

An initial call may be arranged to discuss the proposal and determine suitability and strategic fit. Should all parties wish to proceed, the partner/enquirer will then be asked

for further supporting documentary evidence to help the OU undertake the following:

- ▶ A due diligence review of the partner
- ▶ Risk assessment of the partner/ partnership proposal
- ▶ Scrutiny of high-level structures and organisational strategy
- ▶ An assessment of the financial viability of the organisation.

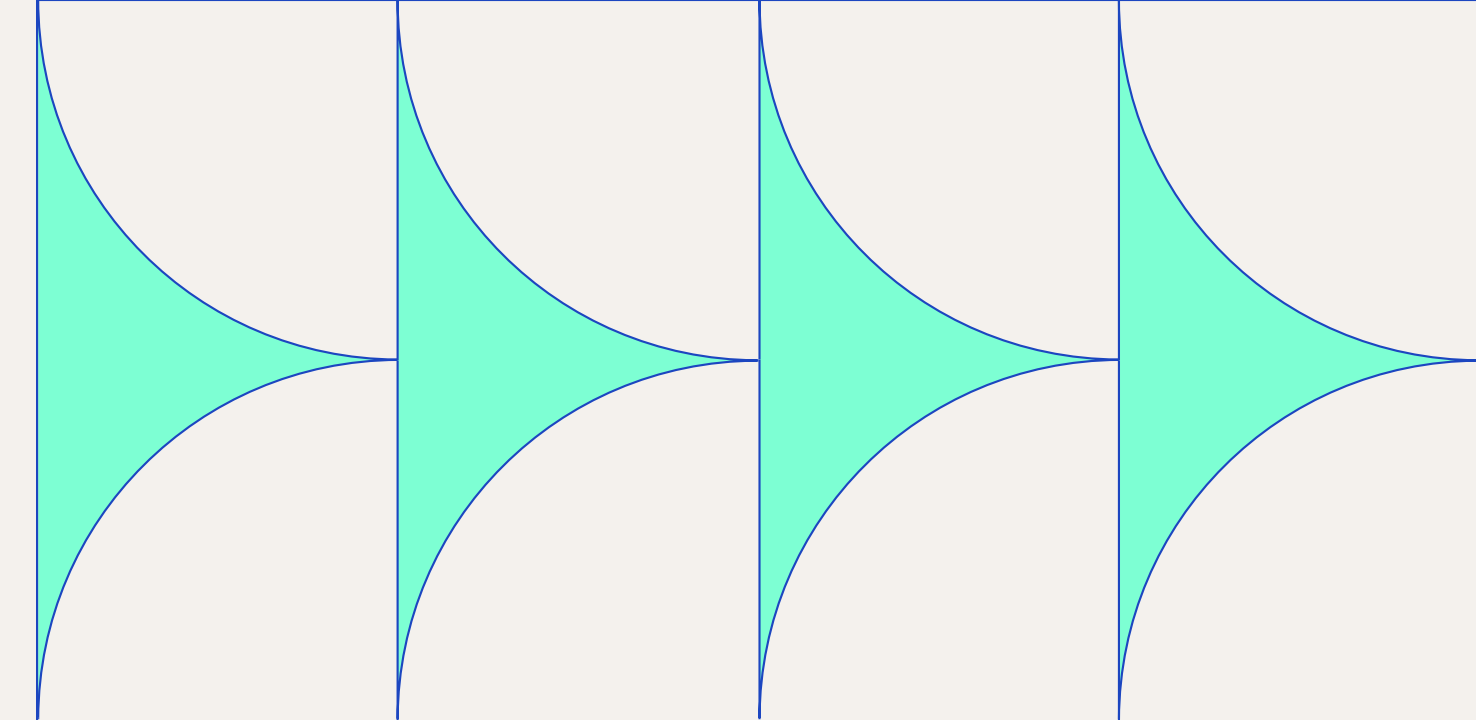
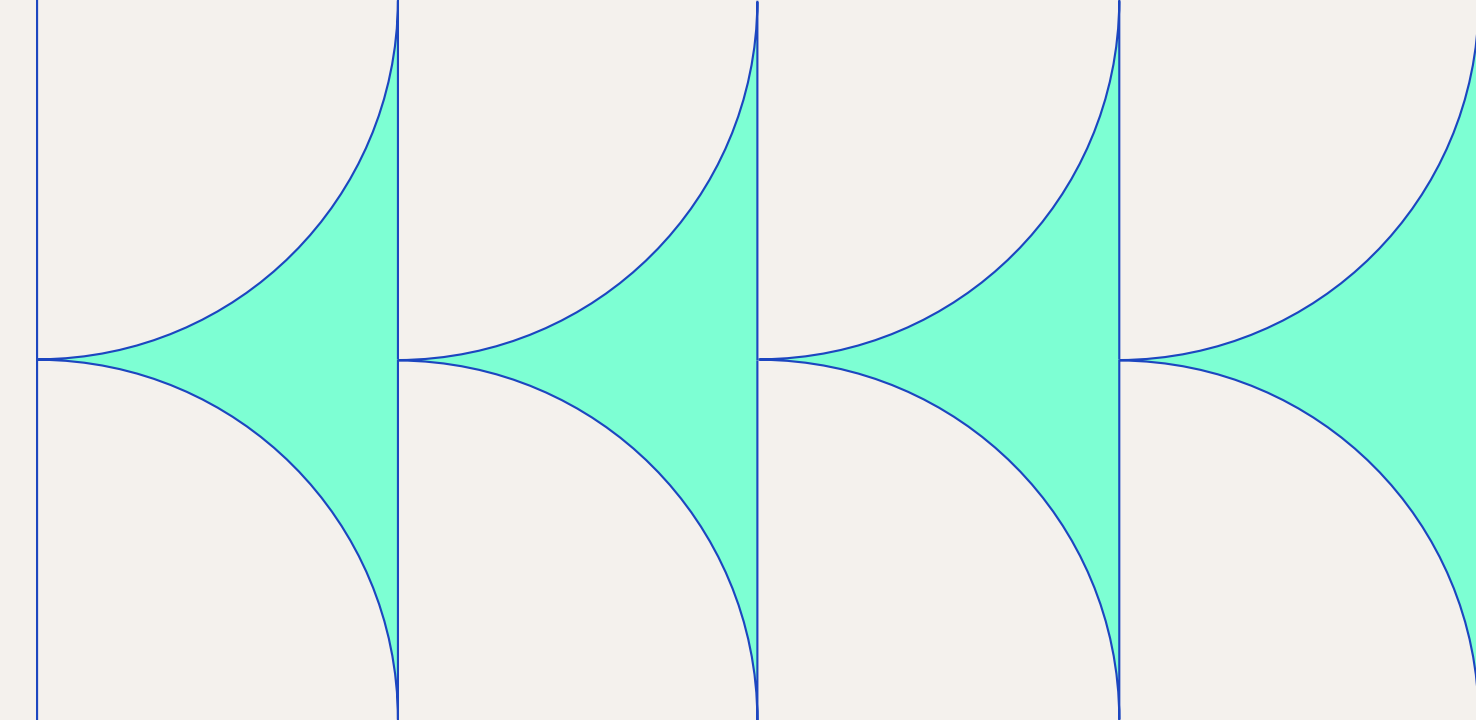
Following an application, OUVV might call an initial meeting, either remotely or at the partner’s premises. This enables a more detailed discussion about the

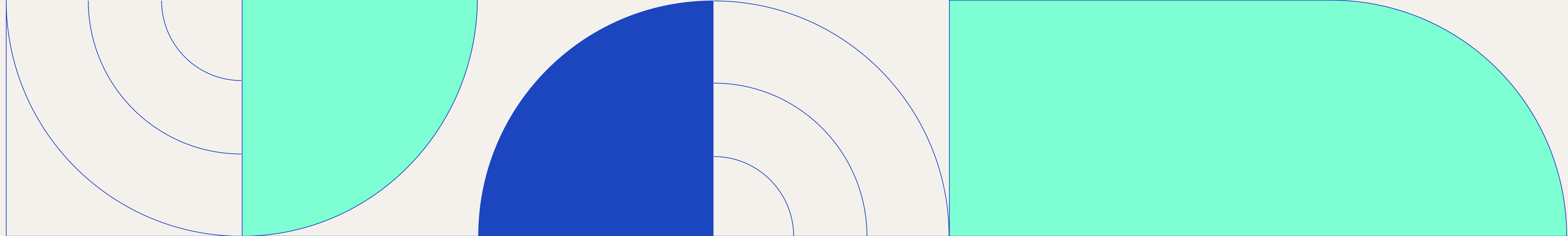
partner, their experience, history and background, facilities, requirements and readiness to embark on an approval process.

During this period, the OU will also undertake desk-based research and enhanced due diligence, using documentary evidence supplied by the partner.

A report from this phase is submitted to OUVV’s Senior Management Team for approval to proceed to the next phase.

Initial predicted fees will also be discussed with the partner at this stage.





Stage 2: Discovery phase

An OU team will be appointed to support partners through the approval process.

There will be detailed discussions around the requirements of the partner compliance review (see [page 20](#)), and the requirements for partnership development and approval process (see [page 18](#)). The process and requirements of programme validation will also be covered (see [page 39](#)).

The OU will also work with the partner to assess your capabilities and to determine a bespoke partnership development plan (PDP). This document will evidence how the partner will be supported by the OU towards successful partnership approval and programme validation. It will be tailored to the needs of the partner, determining where development is required and timescales for the approval journey.

The OU may recommend that the partner works with an independent higher education consultant and/or programme subject expert to support them in the approval process. If necessary, this relationship will continue on an ongoing basis.

Face-to-face meetings include a tour of the academic spaces as well as administrative areas, such as the examinations office, secure storage facilities, student recruitment and support team areas and offices, the Learning Resource Centre, plus any on-site student accommodation and student facilities.

This will allow the OU team to become familiar with the partner's academic delivery and how administrative processes operate, meet members of staff and provide assurances to the OU team for the support, suitability of facilities and safety of students when on-site.

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

Once the PDP is clarified, further discussion about fees for the support for the approval process may be required.

Stage 3: Partner development and approval process

There will be a series of meetings during this phase, attended by the S/QPM, (Senior) Quality and Compliance Manager and a representative of OUVF Senior Management Team. The meetings can be held remotely and/or at the partner's premises.

These meetings enable more detailed discussion about the relationship and requirements on both sides of the partnership, as well as discussions about potential timescales to proceed to the next stage.



Quality assurance and compliance

As a four nations UK university, the OU is subject to the requirements and expectations of UK higher education, as determined by all relevant regulatory bodies in the UK.

The OU expects partners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the UK Quality Code, as published by the Quality Assurance Agency. This code provides guidance on academic credit, subject benchmark statements and a range of other associated guidelines. Partners need to take account of this in their quality assurance arrangements, programme submissions and delivery of validated programmes.

The OU requires partners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the Office for Students' (OfS) conditions of registration. OfS is the primary regulator of higher education in England, and its conditions apply to any organisation working in partnership with the OU. Local context will be considered where applicable.

We expect all partners to adhere to local legislation and requirements, as well as any specific UK requirements that could impact on the OU's reputation or degree awarding powers.

The Competition and Markets Authority's [Higher education: consumer law advice for providers](#) outlines providers' consumer law obligations to undergraduate students, including advising them to:

- Give students clear, accurate and timely information so they can make informed decisions about what and where to study
- Ensure terms and conditions are fair – for example, not making unexpected changes to a course or costs
- Ensure complaint handling processes are accessible, clear and fair.

This process consists of two elements a partner compliance review and a panel approval visit.

Partner compliance review

The purpose of the partner compliance review is to:

- Assess the partner's operational and management infrastructure, including the support in place for students studying OU validated awards
- Assess the relevant policies, procedures and guidance documents for staff and students to ensure compliance with legislation and regulatory requirements
- That the partner's financial status is sufficiently robust to honour its commitments to registered students, that the partner has appropriate organisational structures to ensure the separation of financial and academic decision-making, and that the partner is of appropriate legal status.

Partner compliance review includes:

- Review of the partner's submitted documentation to ensure it complies with regulation and legislation. This review is carried out by OU subject matter experts
- An online demonstration to assess the partner's data security and compliance of the partners virtual learning environment, website and student record system
- A series of meetings, either face-to-face or virtual, where OU representatives collaborate with the partner to ensure policies meet the compliance criteria, to confirm examination processes and storage facilities, and assess the appropriateness of site facilities (particularly in relation to health and safety, security and safeguarding). Any outstanding due diligence regarding policies and procedures will also be explored as part of the approval event.

Where agreed, the partner will receive additional support for policies that require development or enhancement to ensure legal and regulatory compliance and alignment with OU regulatory frameworks.

Partner compliance review documentation

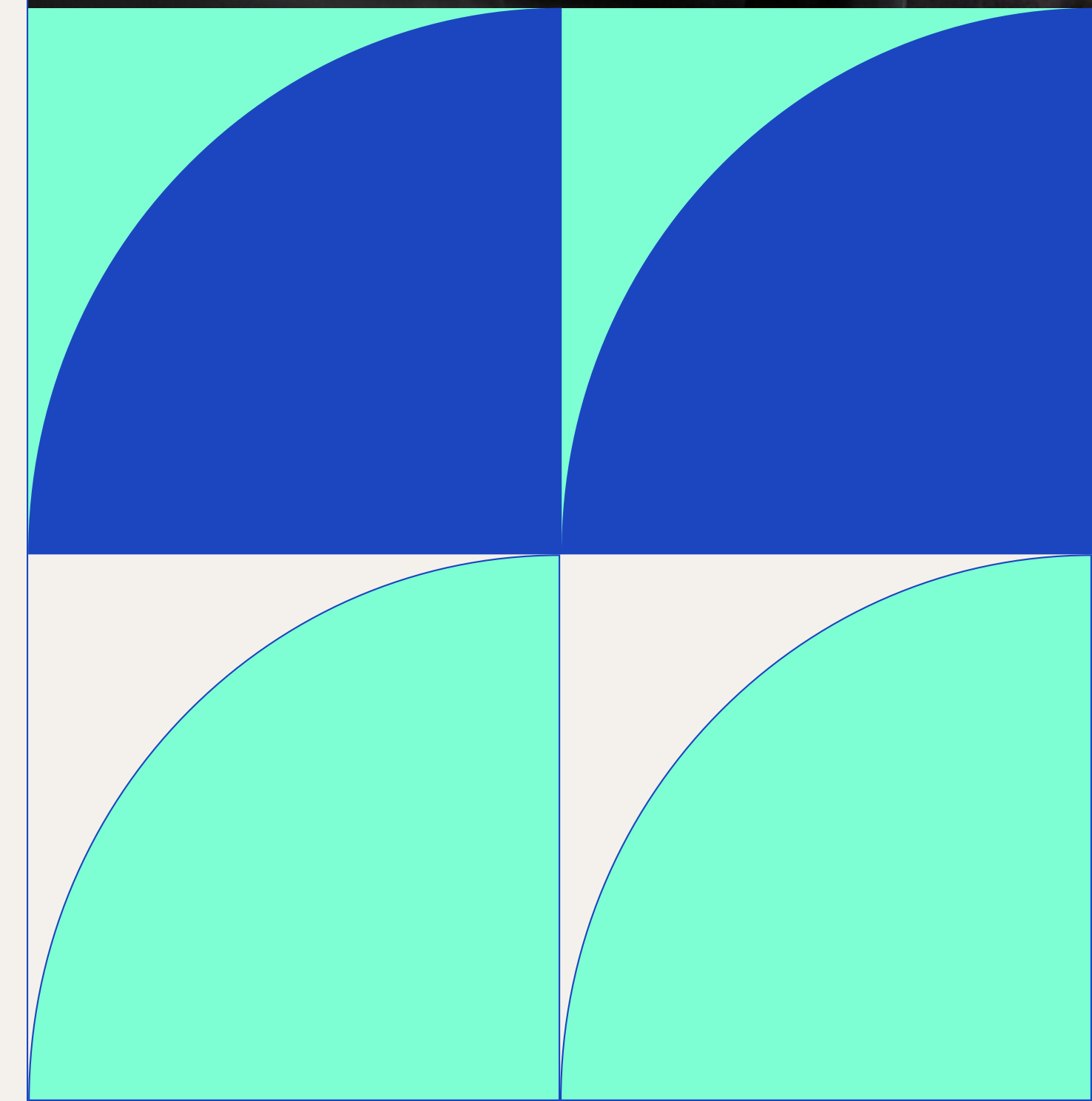
The partner will need to provide information for the partner compliance review.

The partner will receive a proforma mapping document detailing all the documentation required for the review. Questionnaires and compliance statements may also need to be completed and submitted. The submission requirements are discussed with the partner and agreed in advance.

Submission documents are submitted via MS Teams (where possible). Full instructions are provided on how to do this. The submission should also include the mapping form, detailing which policy, or page within a policy, the partner needs to refer to for each area of scrutiny.

The OU should receive the submission by the date agreed for each policy or area of scrutiny so that it can be considered and reviewed before any review and support meetings take place. Supplementary information may be needed after the documentation has been examined – if so, it will be requested.

All policies and procedures must comply with relevant legislation as detailed within the guidance and proforma mapping document.



Partner compliance review meetings

The partner will be provided with information about policy compliance review meetings, including details of the required documentation, draft agenda and process.

The policy review meetings include discussions with the partner's senior managers, as well as members of administrative staff responsible for those policy/process areas. These meetings enable the OU team to gain a clear understanding of how administrative processes operate, to meet key personnel, and to obtain assurances regarding the adequacy of student support, the suitability of facilities, and the safety of students while on-site.

A separate online demonstration of the student record system and virtual learning environment will also be required.

The OU works with partners to ensure that a compliant suite of higher education policies and procedures are in place.

Conditions may be set regarding reviewed policies and procedures. Those conditions may need to be met before approval can be granted and students can be registered and/or may be set as post approval conditions (see [page 25](#)).

Partner approval visit

Partnership development and approval process and reapproval, validation and revalidation processes are based on the principle of peer review, conducted by a panel of suitably qualified and experienced academics and industry experts. Approval authority rests with the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. The approval process is complete once the committee has considered the review's conclusions, and the partner has met all the conditions.

Each panel includes an appropriate balance of expertise in its membership and the panel operates in the context of the OU's requirements for partnership development and approval process and programme validation as set out in this handbook.

For the final stage of the partnership development and approval process, a panel of experts (appointed by the OU) visits the partner's site.

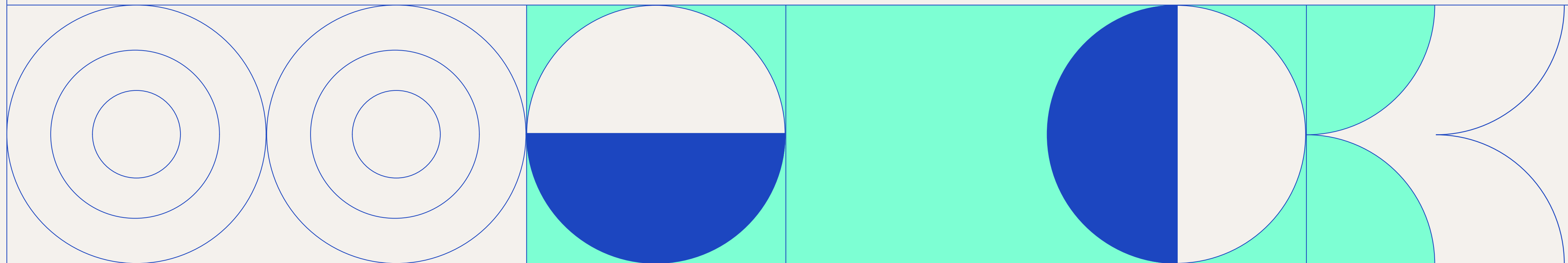
The partner must provide an electronic submission of documentation, as specified by the OU, before the final approval meeting.

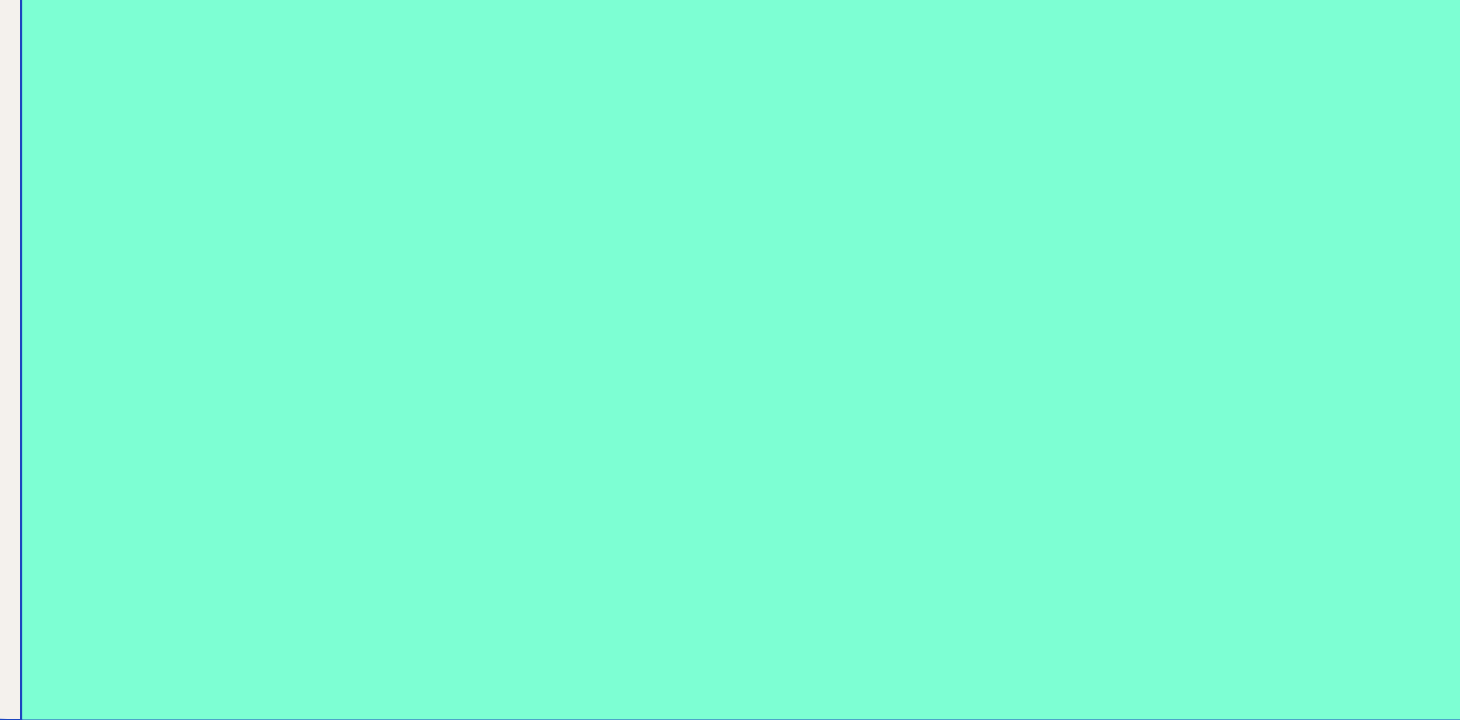
Partnership development and approval process panel members review the submitted documentation before the meeting, identifying areas of questioning that will be included in the agenda. The panel gives its feedback to the partner in advance of the meeting, although this does

not preclude other matters being raised during meetings.

Part of the process is ensuring that the partner's policies confirm the examination process and storage facilities, as well as assessing the appropriateness of site facilities, particularly in relation to health and safety, security and safeguarding.

The approval panel may also explore matters related to the partner compliance review.





Approval of new or additional teaching facilities and sites

If a partner changes sites or locations or wishes to add sites or locations that have not been approved as part of the partnership development and approval process or partnership reapproval process, a site approval visit may be necessary. The OU must be consulted in advance of any sites or locations being used to deliver teaching or services to OU validated students.

Partners should consult with their S/QPM in the first instance and complete the OUVV site approval questionnaire. This will inform the review and approval approach taken by OUVV, based on the type of location or site and its utilisation. OUVV will then let the partner know the format (and fees, if applicable) for the site approval. The partner may need to submit updated policies for key areas that apply to the site/ location before the site approval visit – health and safety, business continuity, safeguarding and IT infrastructure, for example. These will be submitted for review and feedback from the relevant OU subject matter expert. If a site approval visit is not required, partners will need to complete a compliance statement.

All location and site approvals require reporting by OUVV to the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. Following approval, the OUVV approval and validation agreement is amended accordingly.

Documentation

Information will be requested for the partnership development and approval process and in preparation for the visit.

Submission documents should be submitted by an agreed submission date prior to the event, so that it can be considered and reviewed before the final visit takes place. Full guidance on submission requirements is provided by the S/QPM or (Senior) Quality and Compliance Manager. Details of the required documents are provided via guidance and a mapping form in advance of submission and discussed during the discovery phase.

The partnership development and approval process panel

In order to explore how a partner proposes to meet the requirements for approval, or is already fulfilling them, the panel will meet the groups set out below.

An indication of areas for discussion is included below, however, other lines of questioning may also be explored, and – our experience is that the panel will often wish to discuss similar areas with more than one group. Typically, the panel will meet with those specified below plus employers.



Nomination of a PPM

OUVP will nominate a suitable panel member to work as a Process Panel Member (PPM). The aim of this provision is to give an opportunity for partners to have a nominee who can act as a critical friend to ask challenging questions, offer different perspectives, and critique work in a way that is both honest and supportive as well as providing support in preparation for the final event.

The following criteria will be considered when appointing the PPM:

- The nominee will be someone who is familiar with HE requirements as well as OU validation requirements and held a senior, quality-related post
- Impartiality, i.e. the nominee will not have had formal links with the partner in the last five years as an External Examiner or a former member of staff, for example
- Where appropriate, professional expertise from a relevant professional background
- Individuals who have been engaged by the partner as external consultants for the institution will not be nominated as a PPM.

Meetings with senior management and board of trustees (or equivalent body)

Representatives from the partner's governing body typically discusses topics such as:

- Institutional mission, strategic planning and development
- Institutional management, policy making, executive and academic structures (including the separation of academic decision-making and the role of the governing body)
- Commitment to equal opportunities
- Staffing, staff appraisal and development
- Finance and resources.

Meetings with members of the academic board or board of studies

Those responsible for the standard and quality of programmes will discuss:

- The role and remit of the Academic Board
- Academic responsibilities and quality assurance
- Institutional level policies and regulations

- External examining arrangements
- Institutional assessment policy
- Research and staff development
- Appeals, complaints and disciplinary procedures
- Monitoring and oversight of student continuation, completion and progression data
- The student experience.

Meetings with those responsible for programme development and monitoring¹

Themes discussed with those responsible for programme development and monitoring (an academic standards committee, for example) include:

- Arrangements for programme design, internal approval and monitoring
- Provision for equal opportunities
- Employer links and provision for student placements, where applicable
- Provision for personal development planning
- The role of external input and feedback from students and, where applicable, employers in programme development and enhancement.

¹ OUVP recognise that teaching staff are often responsible for programme development and monitoring. Therefore, this meeting and the teaching staff meeting, can sometimes be combined.

Meetings with teaching staff

Topics explored with representatives of teaching staff include:

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

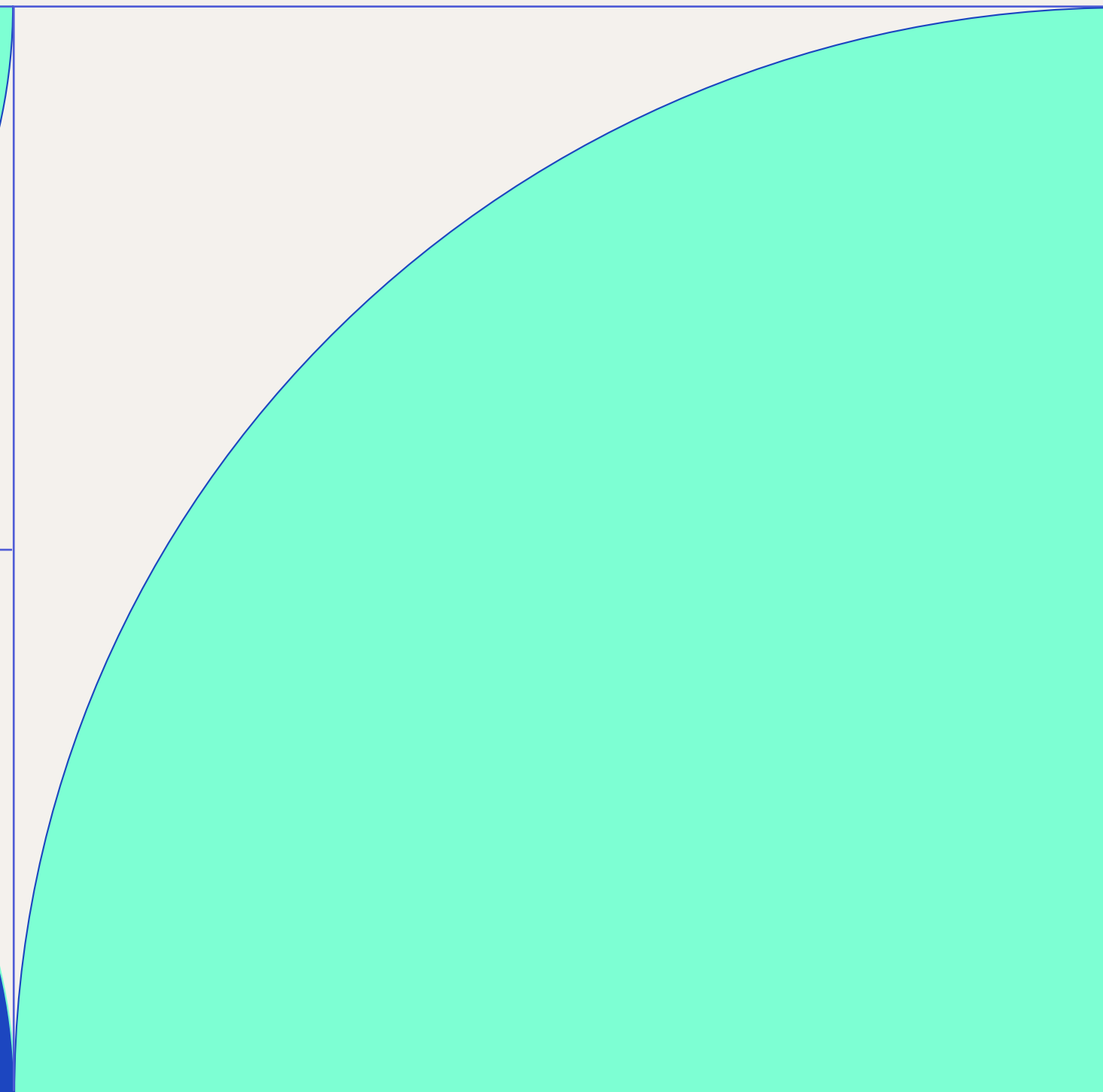
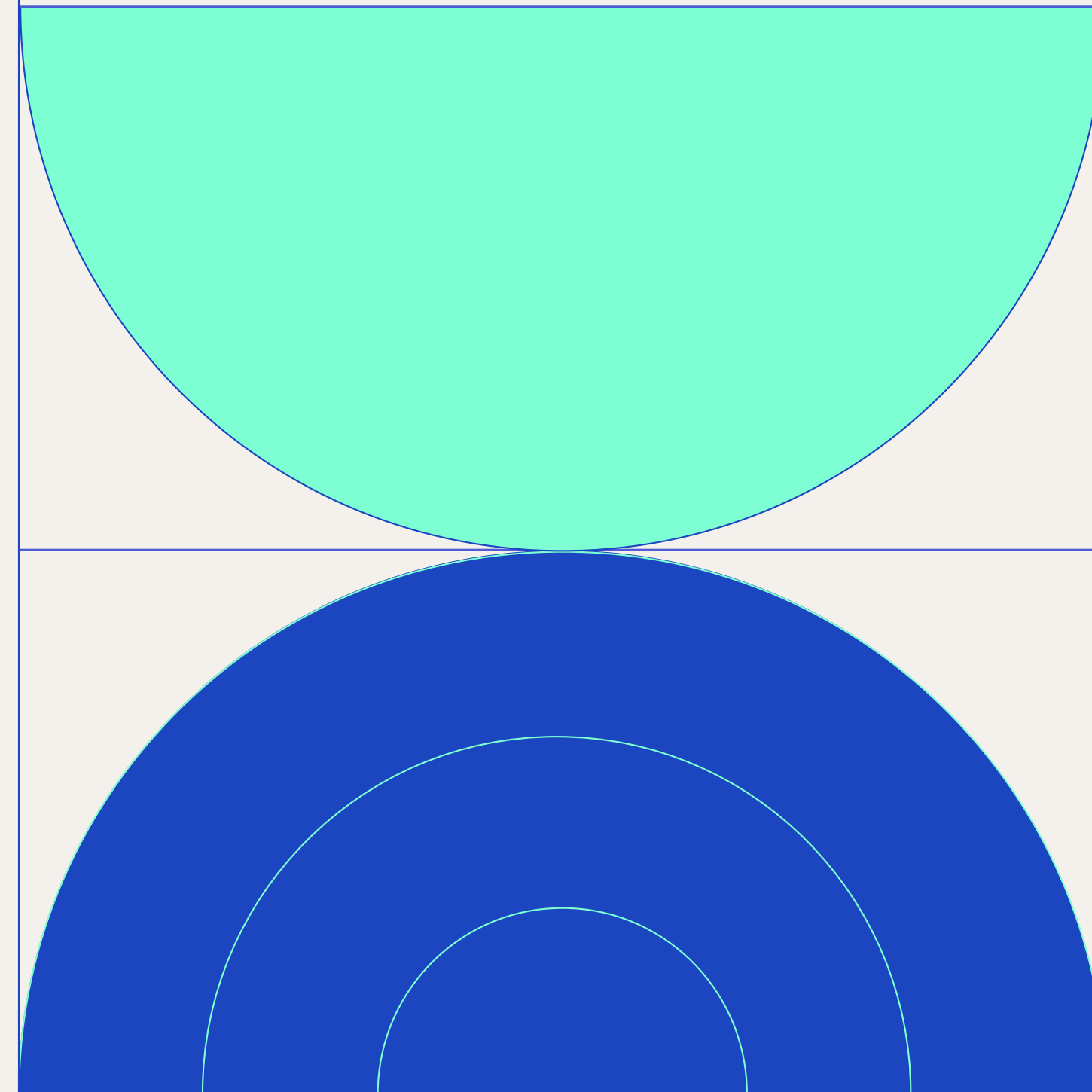
Meetings with students, including student representatives

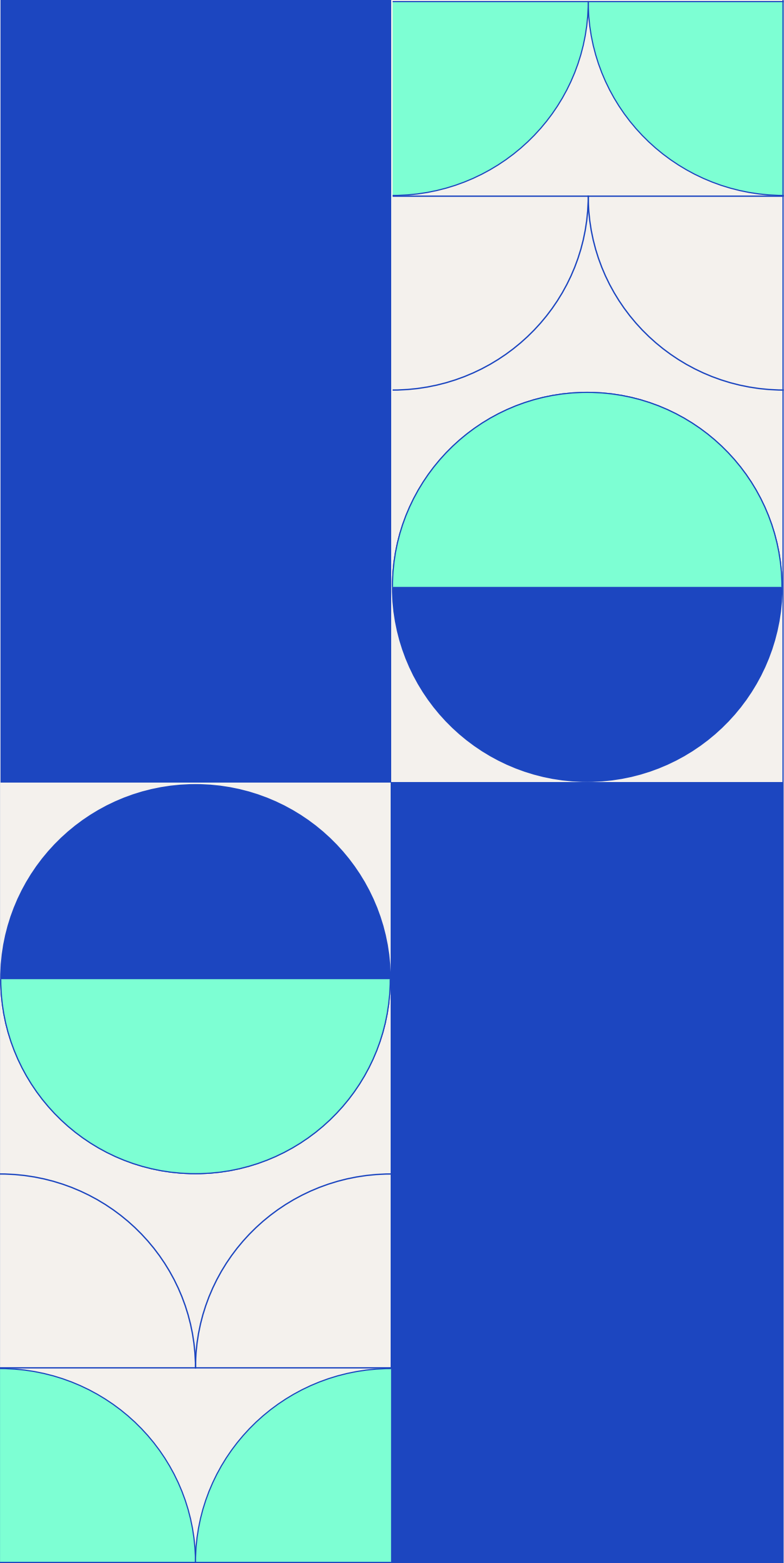
Areas explored with students include:

- ▶ The student experience of the partner's learning environment, including work placements (where applicable)
- ▶ Student representation within the committee structures and the opportunities for feedback to staff
- ▶ Adequacy of student support, including support for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support.

Meetings with employer representatives

If a partner wishes to utilise apprenticeship delivery for some or all its higher education programmes, it will need to meet with employer representatives. This may also be appropriate for the delivery of foundation degrees. Doing this enables the panel to explore how these relationships are managed to ensure the student experience is positive.





B3: Decisions arising from partnership development and approval process

The approval panel agrees its recommendations for consideration by the OU’s Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC), with a draft copy reported to the partner at the end of the final meeting. Once the panel has agreed its conclusion, panel members will not raise further issues or make substantive amendments to any conditions of approval or to its recommendations to the partner. However, when considering the recommendations, CuPC may decide to amend or add conditions and recommendations.

Conditions may be set regarding reviewed policies and procedures, and they may need to be met before approval can be granted and students can be registered and/ or may be set as post approval conditions.

A draft report on the approval outcomes are sent to the partner for comment on matters of factual accuracy before being presented to the OU’s CuPC.

Potential outcomes from the partnership development approval process

All outcomes of the partnership development and approval process are presented to the OU’s CuPC.

Approval

Where initial approval is recommended, it is normally for a full period of five years. However, the OU reserves the right to instigate an interim review at any time during the initial period of approval.

Conditions of approval

A recommendation for approval may be conditional on the partner carrying out further work that has to be completed before approval is confirmed. A condition is an activity fundamental to the quality or compliance of the partner, programme and/or student experience.

Conditions may be pre-approval conditions (which must be met before approval can be granted) or post-approval conditions (which must be met by an agreed timeframe after initial approval was granted).

All pre-approval conditions for the partnership development and approval process need to be fully cleared before the partner can advertise that they are a partner of the OU or advertise and market any OU validated programmes. Any programmes still to be validated by the OU cannot be advertised or recruited to until the OU has validated and approved them (see [page 39](#)).

Non-approval of an institution

If the panel decides it will not recommend a partner for approval, the chair reports the findings to the institution's representatives at the end of the final meeting.

Within four weeks of that event, a report is submitted to the institution, providing detailed feedback on areas for development and highlighting the rationale behind the non-approval decision. The partner is required to meet its financial commitments to the OU to date.

If a partner wants to reapply to the partnership development and approval process, it has to wait 12 months before proceedings can begin again.

Recommendations (for enhancement purposes)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, defines enhancement as the systematic process by which higher education institutions improve the quality of their educational offerings, and the support provided to students' learning.

The approval panel may also make recommendations to support a partner's organisational or process development and enhancement.

A recommendation is an activity/area for the partner to (consider and) explore, with the aim of enhancing the student experience or institutional environment. Recommendations can also be made at programme level at (re)validation.

Recommendations are followed up in monitoring processes and reports to the OU.

Follow-up

When required, a follow-up visit, meetings or demonstrations take place. This gives the opportunity to examine areas that have been subject to conditions and/or where development was occurring at the time of the review – the introduction of new IT systems or the development of buildings or facilities, for example.

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

The OU will undertake regular due diligence.





B4 The partnership reapproval process

Partnership reapproval is required in the academic year before the most recent approval/reapproval period expires. If there are exceptional reasons for holding an earlier review, then an interim review ([see C4.1](#)) is conducted.

The reapproval consists of a partner compliance review and (re)approval panel visit, with formal outcomes submitted for approval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee (as per the partnership development and approval process see [page 12](#))

However, the documentation required for submission and review by the OU is determined by the OU on a partner-by-partner basis. The OU reviews the period since the last approval/reapproval, considering areas such as:

- Documentation and policies that have not been reviewed/updated via monitoring processes or since the last re/approval
- Any areas of concern flagged by the OU or the partner through regular partnership management and oversight processes and meetings

- Any regular themes/patterns/trends identified in monitoring processes and reports
- Any outstanding actions or recommendations that have not been addressed or considered by the partner
- Any compliance concerns or discrepancies noted – through website spot checks, for example
- Discrepancies raised in exam board meetings
- Any risks or issues currently under review or monitoring
- Significant changes in staff, structures, organisation, etc.

Partnership approval and (re)approval by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee is subject to the satisfaction of any conditions set at both the partner compliance review and by the (re)approval panel. Final approval is also subject to the signed contractual agreement between the OU and the partner and in line with the approval letter issue from the director.

- Following the partnership development and approval process, partners can then seek approval for programmes leading to OU validated awards
- If programme approval is not achieved or recruitment to approved programmes is not successful, approval status will be reviewed within one calendar year of the date of the final approval meeting. The partner will be required to meet its financial commitments to the OU for the duration of the agreement.

Additional considerations for approval of non-UK partners and validation of non-English programmes

General principles

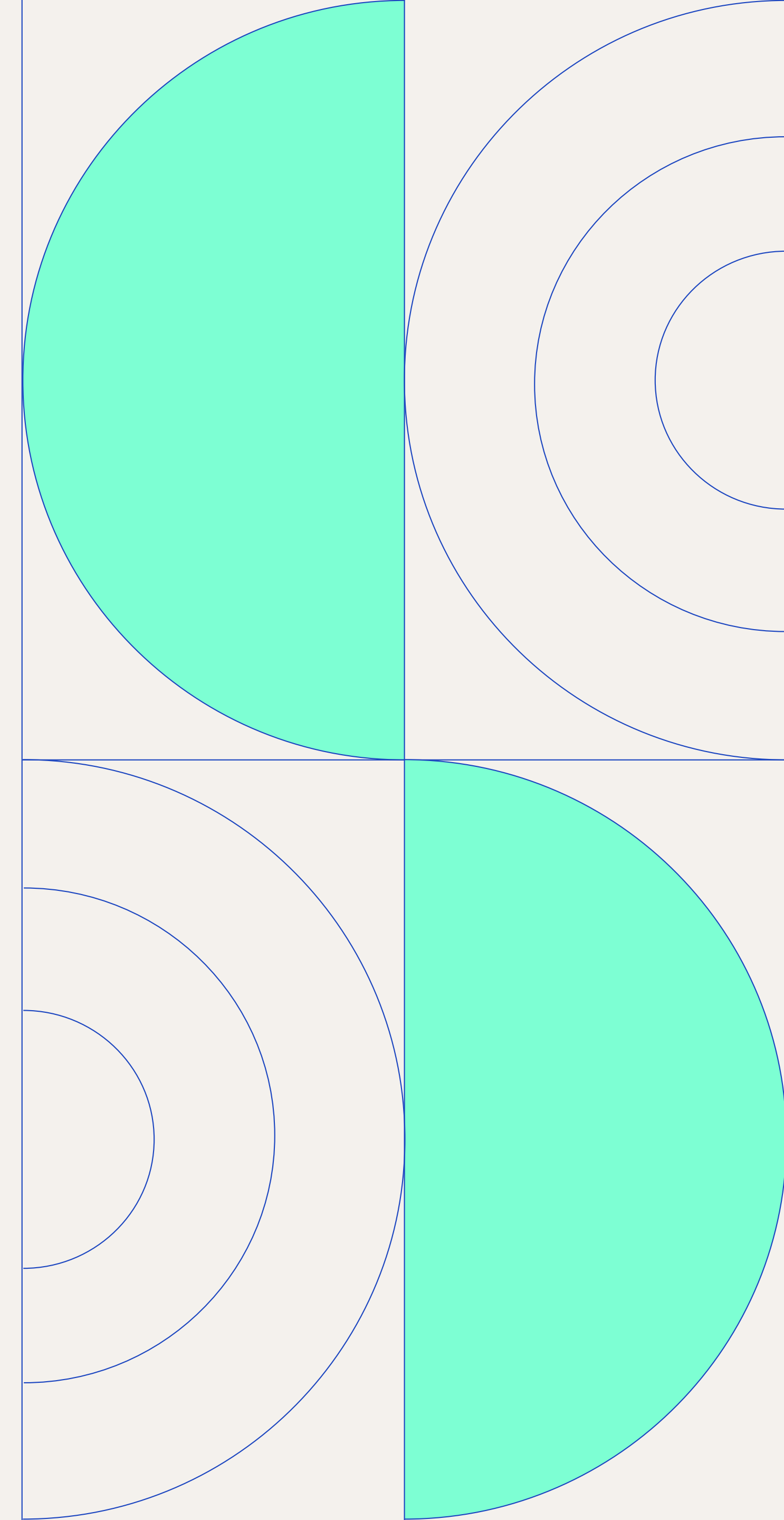
For our partners located outside the UK, we kindly ask that you provide written evidence showing that our partnership has the approval of the relevant governmental authorities and complies with national laws. We understand that this process

involves consulting with these authorities and securing any necessary legal approvals, and we appreciate your efforts in managing this at your own expense.

To ensure the best outcomes for our collaborations, the OU typically approves institutions whose validated awards are recognised in the host country. We encourage non-UK partners to seek validation for programmes that may also lead to other awards, such as professional qualifications or US and European degrees and diplomas. While we do permit dual awards, it's important that these programmes fully meet the OU's requirements for validated awards.

All agreements between our partners and the OU are governed by UK law. In the event of any disputes, we will rely on the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the UK courts. However, we are committed to resolving any issues amicably and in good faith, through open and constructive negotiations.

We also want to ensure transparency regarding any additional costs the OU may incur in maintaining an overseas partnership. The partner will cover these costs, either directly or indirectly. We work closely with individual institutions to agree the financial arrangements, which are then clearly outlined in the agreement.



Language of instruction and assessment

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

If a programme (or a significant part of it) is to be delivered and assessed in a language other than English, overseas or in the UK, evidence must be provided that enough people at the partner organisation are fluent in the delivery language and English, that they have subject expertise at an appropriate level, have first-hand knowledge of the standards of UK degrees and are from sufficiently diverse backgrounds to:

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

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

English will be the language of communication between the OU and all partners. English must be used for key documentation including institutional agreements, submissions for partnership approval and validation, definitive programme documents, annual monitoring/ institutional and programme monitoring, external examiners’ reports, registration and conferment records, and minutes of assessment boards deciding final awards. Partnership approval, partnership reapproval, validation and revalidation panel discussions will be carried out in English.

Partners need to provide the OU with English translations of programme handbooks and any advertising, publicity

and public information relating to OU validated programmes. The OU may require translations of other institutional documents, assessment strategy, marked student scripts, records and student transcripts.

Except where otherwise agreed, translation of materials is the partner’s responsibility and at their own expense. The partner must ensure translations are made faithfully and accurately by a competent and independent translator.

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

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

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

IELTS Score ¹	TOEFL iBT® Equivalent Score ²	Cambridge English Scale Equivalent Score ⁴³
5.5	46–59	162
6.0	60–78	169
6.5	79–93	176

² International English Language Testing System
³ Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet Based Test; <https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/scores>; <https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/scores-admissions/compare/admissions/compare/>
⁴ <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/461626-cambridge-english-qualifications-comparing-scores-to-ielts.pdf>

C: Contract and publicity

C1 Institutional agreement

Signing a contractual agreement following re/approval

Following the partnership development and approval process or the partnership reapproval process, and confirmation that all pre-approval conditions have been met, a formal agreement must be signed between the OU and the institution. This sets out the terms and conditions under which the OU agrees to validate programmes and confer OU awards to the institution's students. The contract aligns with the period of approval granted, the approval letter and certificate of accreditation.

C2 OU requirements regarding partner publicity materials

Partners cannot publish any co-branded publicity materials or produce any materials that imply in any way that they have been approved by the OU before the OU has confirmed their (re)approval via the formal (re)approval letter from the director.

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

Similarly, partners cannot publicise a programme of study as being validated by the OU before validation has been confirmed via the formal

programme approval letter. Any new programmes that are pending approval can be advertised as being 'subject to validation by The Open University'. However, partners cannot enrol students onto the programme until conditions have been met. Once conditions are met, any changes to content and delivery must follow the change process articulated in D7 of the Handbook for Validated Awards.

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

Compliance with the OU publicity requirements is a key element of the policy compliance review and (re)approval processes. Our ongoing due diligence checks seek to ensure that all publicly available material complies with Competition and Markets Authority requirements.

C2.1 Use of the OU logo and wording

Partners of the OU are allowed to use the OU logo in accordance with the OU brand guidelines. This does not include use of the OU crest – it cannot be used to promote the partnership. Brand guidelines and a high-resolution logo can be obtained from OUVF at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk. A general guide is that the OU logo should not be used on any of the partner's own correspondence. Using the logo in this manner, (on letters, for example) could be misleading, giving

applicants and students the impression that the decision or contents of the letter has been made or endorsed by the OU, when it is not the case.

Validated partners must use the following wording to describe their relationship with the OU:

"[Institution] is approved by The Open University as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards."

Or:

"[Institution] is a partner institution of The Open University."

Partner institutions should use the following wording to describe validated programmes/modules:

"Programmes/modules in [XYZ] subject(s) have been developed and will be delivered by [organisation]. They have been validated through a process of external peer review by The Open University as being of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to The Open University validated awards of [full title of award(s)]."

Or:

"[Title of programme/This award] is validated by The Open University."

C3 Key information partners must ensure is accurate and accessible

The following documentation should be made available on public facing platforms and locations at the student research and application stage ([CMA clauses 4.6–4.22 – UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law](#)). This forms part of the precontractual material information (this list is not exhaustive).

Key information requirements

1. Course details:

- ▶ **Programme specifications:** detailed descriptions of the course content, structure, learning outcomes, and assessment methods
- ▶ **Course duration:** course length and any significant milestones
- ▶ **Course location:** where the course will be delivered (e.g., campus, online)
- ▶ Where programmes are delivered outside the United Kingdom, clear information must be made available about the language of instruction and assessment. Such information must be published in both English and the language of the country where the partner is situated.

2. Fees and financial information:

- ▶ **Tuition fees:** clear information about the cost of the course, including any additional fees
- ▶ **Payment terms:** details on how and when fees should be paid
- ▶ **Additional costs:** information on any extra costs students might incur (e.g., materials, field trips).

3. Entry requirements:

- ▶ **Academic qualifications:** the qualifications needed to be eligible for the course
- ▶ **Other requirements:** any additional criteria, such as work experience or language proficiency.

4. Course delivery and assessment:

- ▶ **Teaching methods:** information on how the course will be delivered (e.g., lectures, seminars, online)
- ▶ **Assessment methods:** details on how students will be evaluated (e.g., exams, coursework).

5. Student support services:

- ▶ **Academic support:** information on tutoring, mentoring, and other academic support services
- ▶ **Welfare services:** details on health, counselling, and other student welfare services.

6. Terms and conditions:

- ▶ **Cancellation and withdrawal:** policies on how students can cancel or withdraw from the course and any associated costs
- ▶ **Complaints and appeals:** procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals.

7. Regulatory compliance:

- ▶ **Accreditation:** information on the accreditation status of the course and the institution
- ▶ **Legal requirements:** any legal obligations or rights that apply to the student and the institution.

Following publication, any amendments made to the information must be carefully considered, as they may require express agreement from applicants and current students. You must highlight the changes

before the student signs a contract or if they have already accepted an offer/ signed contract, the opportunity to withdraw without penalty if they do not accept the changes.

The table below includes details of the checks carried out by the OU on some key information provided by partners. It also outlines the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the sign-off and

monitoring processes, both at the OU and at the partner.

Activity		Partner responsibilities
1.	Marketing	Partners must regularly check and confirm accuracy and compliance (compliance with consumer law as well as compliance with OU brand and relationship descriptions) of all printed or online annual brochures and prospectuses to OUVF via regular partner monitoring processes The OU will carry out regular spot checks to ensure accuracy and compliance.
2.	Student Handbooks ¹	Student handbooks related to OU validated programmes must be accessible to all students. They must also be published on publicly accessible web pages (where no password is required) if they contain pre-contractual information. Appendix 3 has more guidance on students’ handbooks and content of student information, should partners not wish to formally publish a student handbook. If the student handbook contains pre-contractual information and that pre-contractual information needs to be changed or updated, students must be consulted and active consent obtained for any changes made. Whenever approved changes are made to the programme (see Section D7 for approval process), require amendment to the programme handbook or student handbook, the OU and students must be given a replacement handbook.
	The Student’s Guide	The Student’s Guide to Studying on a Programme Validated by The Open University aims to introduce students to the OU, as well as explain what being registered on a programme or single registerable module validated by the OU means to them. An electronic copy of the guide must be circulated annually to all students registered on a programme validated by the OU. In addition, the electronic version of the guide must be made available and clearly signposted on the partner’s website.

¹ See Section D1.10 on guidance on Student Handbooks

Activity		Partner responsibilities
3.	Regulations for validated awards of The Open University	An up-to-date version of the regulations must be made publicly available on partner websites (on a page that does not require a password), with a link provided to each programme page. The OU carries out regular spot checks to ensure that the most up-to-date version of the regulations is publicly available. Amendments may be required where necessary.
4.	Programme specifications	All programme specifications must be made readily available on your public facing website where passwords are not required to access the information. They should be clearly signposted if embedded in programme handbooks. Programme specifications should be sent to your S/QPM on an annual basis.
5.	Leaflets, external advertisements	We do not normally approve leaflets and external adverts prior to publication. However, these may be checked during visits and any issues will be reported to the relevant partner institution.
6.	Institution websites	Partners are required to check and confirm website content accuracy and compliance with consumer law, as per OU requirements via regular partner monitoring processes The OU carries out regular spot checks to ensure accuracy and compliance. Amendments may be required. Partners must inform OUVF at OUVP-info@open.ac.uk when significant changes are to be made to their website (e.g. web re-development or rebranding).

Please note: Partners must keep a record of all the printed and electronic information produced to describe their validated programmes and their relationship with the OU. They must keep this information for the maximum period for which students might be registered on the relevant programmes.

Degree outcomes statements

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

Partners may struggle to publish a degree outcome statement if cohorts are small or there is little validated provision at Level 6, or of Level 6 provision is still in its infancy. Partners are encouraged to keep publishing this information and discuss with your S/QPM if you require further guidance.

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

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

Once signed off by the partner's governing body, they must be published on the partner's website and updated annually. Further information can be found at the [UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment \(UKSCQA\) website](#).



C4 Post-approval and post-validation changes

Validation provision arrangements (approved or reapproved) are usually expected to remain in place for the duration of the (re)approval period. If material changes are required (for enhancement purposes, to comply with external stakeholder requirements, or to address a concern, for example), the OU will usually undertake an interim review. Partners are asked to consult [Section D7](#) for information on minor, moderate and major changes and the CMA implications.

The OU must be advised of any significant changes to personnel, organisational structure, or the OU may initiate an earlier revalidation process within the approval period if quality assurance issues indicate a risk. Partners must inform their S/QPM immediately of any changes in staffing levels on OU validated programmes. You must also inform your S/QPM when you appoint a new member of staff on the OU validated programme, sending a copy of their CV with the completed cover sheet (using the new staff proforma template). Partners must also inform their S/QPM when staff at partner institutions take industrial action and if this has any impact on students.

C4.1 Interim partner review

An interim review may be triggered, outside of the partnership development and (re)approval process schedule, to consider any wider concerns at institutional level. Although not an exhaustive list, this event will arise if there are:

- changes to the legal ownership or status of the partner institution
- wide re-structuring in terms of senior leadership and institutional governance
- unsatisfactory outcomes from annual monitoring/ institutional and programme monitoring submission
- significant changes to administrative staffing structure or processes that have an impact on the quality of the management and delivery of higher education
- organisation-wide issues that impact on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and/or the student experience
- issues that could impact on future academic standards
- a lack of senior leadership and support for the delivery of higher education validated programmes
- limited oversight and coordination of quality assurance across validated programmes
- repeated problems with the preparation and/or management of examination boards
- issues identified by regulators or by professional, regulatory and statutory bodies.

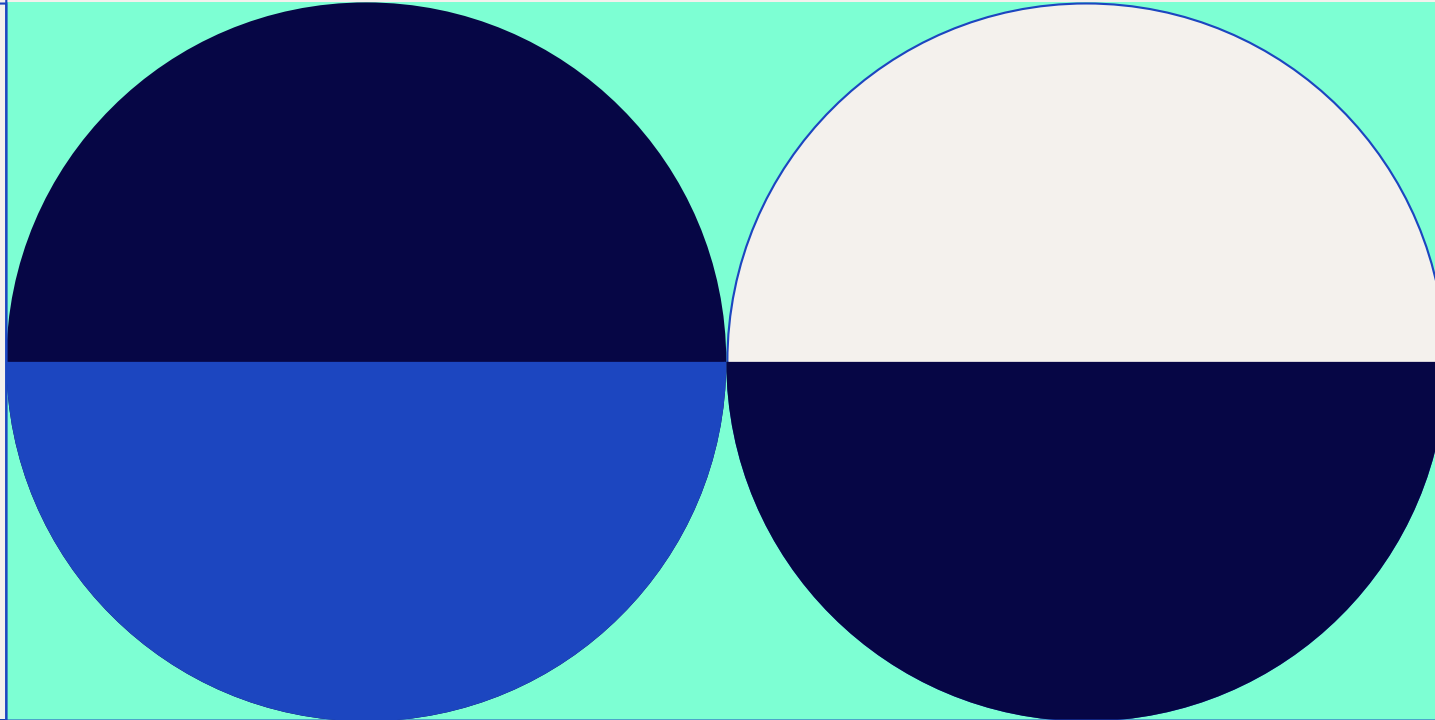
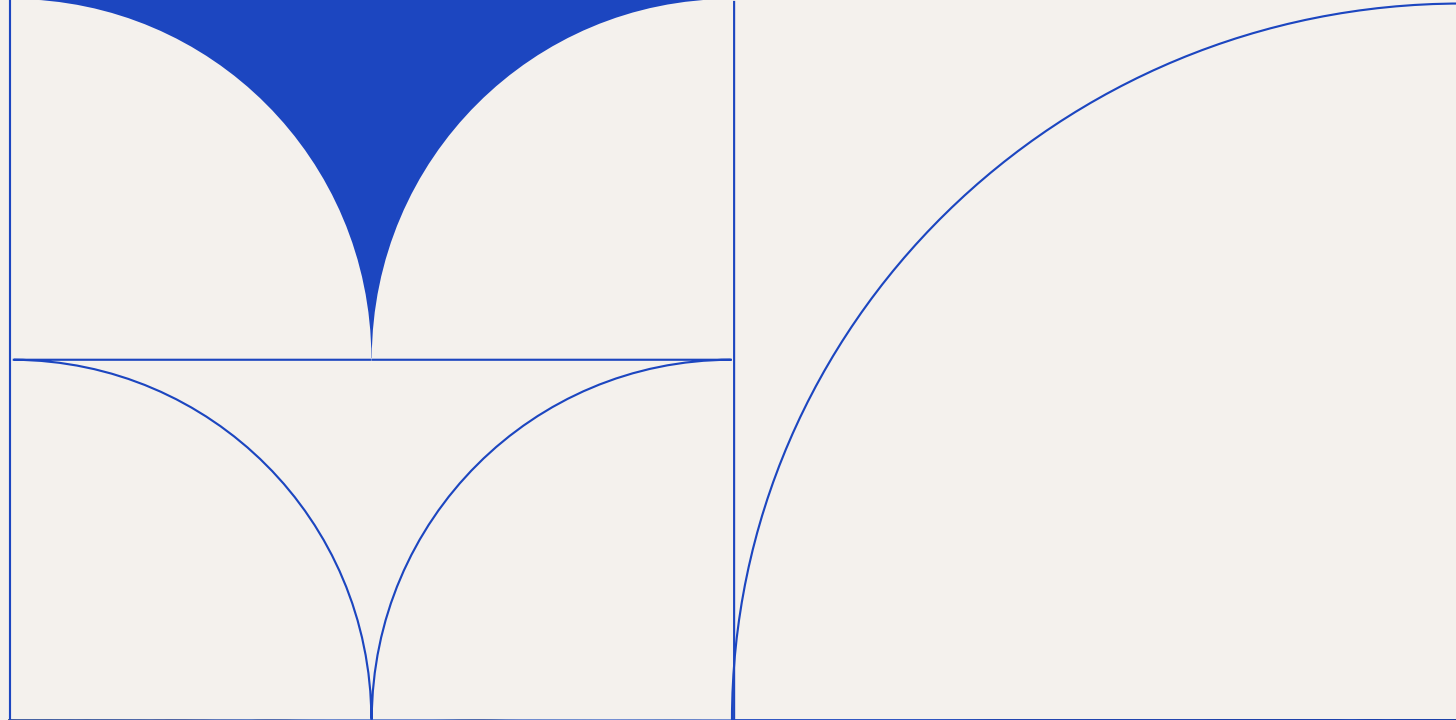
An interim review usually requires the partner to submit documentation for review by the OU, plus a panel visit from the OU. Details are provided to the partner ahead of the review.

C4.2 Suspension of registration

If the OU has concerns about a partner or a programme, it may decide to suspend student registrations. Concerns could be related to quality, academic standards, reputation and/or financial matters. Partners will need to refer to their Student Protection Plan to ensure that current students can continue and complete their studies, or be compensated if this is not possible. If there are delays in a partner meeting any conditions of partner development reapproval or policy compliance review, new registrations may also be suspended. (See 'Reportable events' below).

Reportable events

Any changes that occur to the partnership or a validated programme and/or impact on a student need to be communicated to the OU. Whilst OfS provides guidance on requirements for reportable events, the OU's responsibility (and any partners that are OfS registered) is to decide whether a particular event or matter constitutes a reportable event and should be reported. If a partner believes a reportable event has occurred or may occur, it should discuss with their S/QPM in the first instance.



Engagement with external regulatory and quality bodies

In respect of information about engagements with external regulatory bodies and other external agencies, partners are required to:

- Inform the OU in advance of all external audits, accreditations, inspections or reviews, whether they are of the partner or of the provision validated by the OU
- Provide draft self-evaluation documents in good time for the OU to consider and offer comment, where appropriate
- Give the OU copies of all communications from the external agency or body following a review, including initial judgements or findings and draft reports
- Provide the OU with the opportunity to consider a draft action plan and to make comment, as appropriate
- Keep the OU informed of the progress of the action plan and any further communication with the external agency or body
- Provide the OU with a copy of their Office for Students (OfS) registration or refusal letter (including details of any conditions of registration) and copies of any other communications from OfS, including access and participation plans
- Nominate an accountable officer. The accountable officer is a person (normally the head of the provider) who reports to the OfS on behalf of the provider. For providers with specific course designation, the accountable officer is the head of the legal entity in receipt of designation). [Regulatory advice 10: Accountable officers. Guidance for providers on the responsibilities of accountable officers](#)
- If OfS registered, continue to comply with OfS conditions of registration and the public interest governance principles (and terms and conditions attached to financial support received from the OfS and UK Research and Innovation), reporting on them where necessary
- Declare all reportable events to the partner's S/QPM (and to the OfS, if OfS registered) when they occur
- Understand the legal and regulatory frameworks governing freedom of speech and academic freedom.

C5 Exiting the partnership

If the institution decides to exit from the validation arrangement with the OU, written notification should be submitted to the Director of OUVF and S/QPM at the earliest opportunity, in accordance with the validation agreement. The institution should provide written notice, signed by the institution's accountable officer or equivalent, and state the reason for the exit, along with any other relevant key information.

In any exit scenario, consideration must be given to any existing students – that is of paramount importance. Both parties may agree that currently validated programmes should be taught out over an agreed period. Alternatively, it may be possible for students to transfer their studies to another awarding body (e.g. if the institution obtains their own degree awarding capabilities).

The S/QPM will work with the institution to ensure no students are disadvantaged and that communication with all relevant bodies (including students) is managed.

If the OU decides to withdraw from the partnership, it will be guided by Section 18 of the validation agreement.

Partners should ensure that due consideration is given to the contents of their student protection plan to mitigate any risks associated with exiting. (See [Page 35, 'Reportable events'](#)).

When a validated partner is planning to exit, the following considerations are essential to ensure compliance with CMA guidelines and to protect students' interests:

1. Transparency and communication:

- a. Clearly communicate the exit plan to all stakeholders, including students, staff, and prospective applicants.
- b. Provide detailed information on how the exit will affect current and future students, including any changes to course delivery, assessment methods, and support services.

2. Continuity of education:

- a. Ensure students can complete their courses without disruption. This may involve transferring students to other validated programmes or institutions.
- b. Provide clear guidance on the process for transferring credits and qualifications.

3. Financial implications:

- a. Inform students about any changes to tuition fees, payment terms, and additional costs resulting from the exit.
- b. Ensure students are aware of their rights regarding refunds or compensation if the exit affects their studies.

4. Legal and regulatory compliance:

- a. Ensure all legal obligations and rights are upheld during the exit process.

- b. Maintain accreditation and regulatory compliance throughout the transition period.

5. Support services:

- a. Continue providing academic and welfare support services to students during the transition.
- b. Offer additional support to help students navigate the changes and address any concerns.

6. Documentation and records:

- a. Keep accurate records of all communications and decisions related to the exit.
- b. Ensure all publicly accessible information is updated to reflect the changes.

Partners may also need to pay attention to student protection directions ([Condition C4 OfS conditions](#)). These are regulatory measures implemented by the Office for Students (OfS) in the UK. These directions allow OfS to intervene quickly and effectively when there is a significant risk that a higher education provider may cease operations. The primary goal is to safeguard the interests of current and future students, ensuring they can continue their education without disruption, where the OfS thinks there is a material risk that a provider will, or will be required by law to, fully or substantially cease the provision of higher education in England (which is referred to as a "Market Exit Risk").

In the event that the OfS issues a student protection direction, the OU and its partners are prepared to:

- Develop and implement a market exit plan within the timescales specified by the OfS;
- Put in place and/or implement any student protection measures specified by the OfS, including:
 - Teach-out arrangements
 - Student transfer support
 - Exit awards and unit certification
 - Information, advice and guidance for students
 - Robust complaints handling
 - Refunds and compensation for disrupted study
 - Archiving arrangements to ensure future access to academic records
- Take any additional actions required by the OfS to ensure the effective and expedient implementation of the market exit plan or student protection measures.

All reportable events, including those that may trigger a market exit risk, are escalated to the OU’s accountable officer via the University Secretary’s Office, which liaises with the OfS as required. This ensures timely and transparent communication with the regulator.

The OUVF Handbook for Validated Awards provides guidance to partners on the development and implementation of student protection plans, which must be in place for all partners, regardless of OfS registration status. These plans must be tailored to the institution’s specific risks and include provisions for course closure, institutional closure, and the end of a validation relationship with the OU.

C6 Compliance responsibilities for partners

Partners are responsible for maintaining compliance across all aspects of their provision. These responsibilities form part of the OU’s expectations for all partners.

C6.1 Compliant processes

Partners must implement and maintain robust and complaint processes to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and services. This includes adherence to all contractual obligations, legislative and regulatory requirements, and the standards set out in this handbook.

C6.2 Feedback and compliance confirmation

Partners must consider and address feedback provided by the university regarding compliance or quality improvements. Confirmation of actions taken must be provided in a timely manner, either by a set date if requested or through annual reporting.

C6.3 Use of submission systems

Partners must use the designated platform specified by the University for the submission of documentation, including policies, submissions for PRP, annual monitoring reports, and feedback exchanges, unless otherwise agreed in writing.

C6.4 Annual policy monitoring

Partners must confirm annually that all policies and procedures are compliant. Any changes must be communicated to the University with updated copies. The University must hold the most up-to-date information on programmes and policies.

Compliance responsibilities for validated partners

As set out in Clause 3 of the validation agreement, the

handbook forms part of the agreement. The table below highlights key operational compliance responsibilities.

Compliance area	Handbook reference (and specific clause, where applicable)
General quality and compliance	A1.6, B5, C6, E1–E4
Compliance with legislation	B5, H, Clause 20
Regulatory compliance	B5, C2, Clause 20
Quality assurance processes	A1.6, D1, E1–E4
Feedback and compliance confirmation	C4, C6.2, E4.2
Data submissions and reporting	E3.2, E4.1, Clause 15
Use of submission systems	C2, C6.3, E4.1
Annual partner monitoring	C6.4, E1, E2, E3, Clause 15
Student registration information	G1, Clause 14 and 19
Data protection and retention	F1.10, F1.11, Schedule 1
Consumer protection law	C2, Clause 19
Student protection plans	C5, Clause 6.12

Updates to responsibilities

The OU may update these from time to time to reflect changes in regulatory or operational requirements. Updates will be communicated in writing. Partners must ensure compliance with any such updates. Failure to comply may constitute a material breach of the agreement and may result in suspension of student registrations or termination of the agreement.



D: Validation and Revalidation

D1 Validation and revalidation process

Validation is the process by which the OU considers and approves proposals of programmes of study leading to OU validated awards. Revalidation is the reapproval of the programme(s). Programmes may be validated as face-to-face delivery, online or distance learning and partners should consult page 58 of the OUVF Handbook for Validated Awards for more information on offering awards via flexible/distance learning.

Validation can take place concurrently with the partnership development and approval process or at a mutually agreed time following that process.

Validation includes analysis of the partner's internal quality assurance arrangements at programme and module level and how that meets with the OU's validation requirements.

All proposals for validation or revalidation will be assessed against the validation criteria. The criteria inform the validation processes and provide the basis for the agenda for validation events and the structure of validation reports. Therefore, the criteria assists the institutional staff responsible for programme development and for validation submissions.

A planning meeting with your S/QPM will take place early in the new academic year. Part of this meeting will focus on plans for the validation of new programmes, the revalidation of existing ones and any other events, such as the partnership reapproval process or external review by public, statutory or regulatory bodies.

Transfer of programmes validated by other validating universities

If a partner institution wants to transfer a programme to the OU from another validating body, the OU will require it to undergo a full validation.

As part of this validation process, discussions will include:

- Ownership and management of the intellectual property
- The possibility of transferring external examiners from the original validating body to the OU
- The arrangements to be made in respect of students already following the programme.

The charge for validation and revalidation

Charges are discussed with prospective partners as part of the discovery phase and with current partners annually and when new programmes are discussed.

Documentation

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

For practice-based programmes, it is expected that the documentation expresses the articulation, balance, and sequencing of theory and practice in the curriculum. This is reflected in the intended learning outcomes of practical/performance work and how they will be assessed.

Where the (re)validation of distinctive pathways within a programme are required, partners should ensure that they provide a separate rationale and learning outcomes for each route, particularly if the alternative routes branch out to quite distinct subject areas. The [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#) recommend a minimum

requirement of 25% subject specific credits for pathways, with specialism in the subject at Levels 5 and 6.

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

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

The programme development team should produce the draft documentation required for the preliminary (re)validation meeting: Please refer to the [Guidelines on Document Submission for Programme \(Re\)validation](#) available on the OUP website.

The preliminary (re)validation meeting

We advise all partners to hold a preliminary (re)validation meeting. This meeting is organised by the partner and is held with a panel that could include a process panel member (PPM) The meeting may be in person or conducted remotely.

The purpose of the preliminary (re)validation meeting is to confirm that the programme proposal is fit for purpose and may proceed to final stage (re)validation. The PPM will be asked to provide a summary of key findings/discussions to the OU on completion of the meeting. This also provides an opportunity to iron out any issues with the documentation.

Nomination of an OU representative as a PPM

The OU may nominate a representative as a process panel member (PPM), someone who can make comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The PPM will be a member of both the preliminary (re)validation meeting organised by the partner and a final (re)validation meeting organised by the OU.

Following the meeting, the PPM and S/QPM will discuss the preliminary meeting and will be asked to confirm the following:

- ▶ That the programme documentation contains all specified requirements, including a complete and appropriate programme specification
- ▶ That appropriate learning resources that support the programme have been properly evaluated and that a strategy and plan are in place to meet the needs of the programme and have full institutional support

- ▶ That the proposal demonstrates how the programme is aligned with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024 and the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies where appropriate
- ▶ That the regulations for the programme meet the OU's requirements for validated awards and are in accordance with the regulatory framework
- ▶ That the proposal should proceed to a final (re)validation meeting.

The partner is required to produce a summary report of the preliminary (re)validation. The report should summarise:

- ▶ Issues that have arisen and how they have been resolved
- ▶ Outstanding issues, together with proposals for their resolution.

The report will be received as part of the documentation for the final (re)validation meeting.

If the outcome of the preliminary (re)validation meeting is that the proposal needs further work before it can proceed, the OU will decide whether the final (re)validation meeting should be cancelled or deferred (depending upon the time needed to undertake the required work). The views of the partner institution, the S/QPM and the PPM will be considered.

During the initial private panel meeting (held before the final panel meeting) the PPM should ensure that they summarise their initial feedback and inform the Panel and Chair of any key themes/issues that were found.



Documentation for the final (re)validation meeting

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

Partners must provide documentation for consideration by panel members at least three weeks in advance of the final (re)validation meeting. This includes the documents required for the preliminary event plus any other documents agreed with the S/QPM. This deadline is important and must be adhered to so that panel members have sufficient time to give it due consideration.

Final (re)validation meeting

The OU arranges the final (re)validation event. It is set up and organised as agreed at the planning meeting. It is normally scheduled to take place at the partner's premises or online and lasts a whole or half day, depending on the complexity of the proposal and the nature of the issues identified during the programme development and preliminary (re)validation phases.

The final (re)validation panel will have a chair and at least three panel members, although in exceptional circumstances, panels may be larger or smaller, dependent upon the spread of subject expertise. Its composition will include an OU academic member of staff (who may undertake the role of the chair) and external panel members as appropriate:

- The external member(s) nominated by the OU who may have been a member(s) of the preliminary (re)validation meeting (PPM)
- The external member nominated by the partner institution who may also have been a member of the preliminary (re)validation (IPPM)
- Other external subject specialists (which may include one member of academic staff from another OU collaborative partner)
- For programme revalidations one panel member from the previous event, if possible.

The (Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager will produce the report from the event.



Observers at final (re)validation meetings

Institutional agreements make provision for the partner's staff to observe the (re)validation process. The OU encourages observers nominated by the partner to have overview of the (re)validation process and, as appropriate, attend any meetings, except those with students.

Observers are not decision-making members of the panel but are encouraged to assist the panel by contributing factual information and intervening if the panel appears to be making incorrect assumptions. However, if a situation arises where an observer's participation is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the chair can ask observers to leave until recalled. This action should only happen on rare occasions.

Observers are not normally nominated from the partner's senior management or from persons involved with the management or teaching of the programme under (re) validation.

If a partner development reapproval process and (re) validation of a programme is taking place concurrently, observers may be invited, subject to the chair's agreement in advance. In such cases, the observers are normally nominated from external members of the academic board or its equivalent body, or from the partner institution's governing body.

The agenda for the final (re)validation meeting is set by the S/QPM in discussion with the partner. Core agenda items include:

- Meeting with the Senior Management Team
- Meeting with the Programme Team
- Meeting with a representative group of students

- Tour of facilities (including a demonstration of the Virtual Learning Environment)
- Private panel meetings
- Meeting with employer representatives (where the programme encompasses work-based learning or is aligned to an apprenticeship).

The final (re)validation meeting is an opportunity for the panel and the programme team to discuss the process of programme design and related academic requirements, and for the panel to resolve any outstanding matters relating to the academic rigour of the proposal and the ability of the partner to support it and deliver a good student experience. It also allows the panel the opportunity to scrutinise assessed student work if the programme has been (re)validated previously. The final (re)validation meeting does not deal with regulation matters, unless there are specific professional accreditation regulations to be met.

The final (re)validation panel reserves the right to assess itself of the adequacy of learning resources, scrutinising them before giving its final approval.

At the end of the final meeting, the panel proposes the outcome, detailing any commendations for good practice, conditions for approval and recommendations. This takes the form of an oral report to the partner. The final approval decision is made by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. In all cases, the period of (re)validation is subject to satisfactory annual monitoring/institutional and programme monitoring.

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

Possible outcomes of (re)validation

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

a. Full-term (re)approval

A programme, and any registerable modules within, may be (re)approved for a specified period of not more than five years, subject to revalidation before the end of the (re)approval period. If a partner fails to register students on a programme of study for two consecutive academic years, (re)validation will be required, with a short re-approval process before it is offered again.

b. (Re)approval for a shorter period

(Re)approval may be granted for a shorter period, if the validation panel thinks there is a clear rationale – this may be to align with professional body accreditation approval lengths or to ensure currency of the programme. In such cases, revalidation of the programme is required before the end of the specified period and partners need to consider whether this will impact on students completing their award and discuss with students accordingly.

c. Conditional (re)approval

(Re)approval may be conditional, with the partner having to fulfil certain requirements, by a specified date(s). Partners are responsible for ensuring conditions are met, in accordance with the terms of the requirements set out in the validation report. Students may not be enrolled until the panel has confirmed that a formal (re)approval letter may be issued.

Partners are allowed up to two attempts at fulfilling the conditions of (re) validation (an initial response to the conditions, plus a resubmission if the panel requests further work to be undertaken). A third submission will only be allowed at the invitation of the OU.

d. Recommendations

The panel may make recommendations for ongoing follow-up by the partner institution and a response will be required through the annual monitoring/institutional and programme monitoring process (see [Section E](#)) for the programme. Recommendations focus on longer-term developments and areas of enhancement. Recommendations do not have to be addressed before students can register for an OU validated award.

e. Non-approval

The panel may decide not to recommend (re)approval of the programme or any of the registerable modules. The panel will not be able to recommend approval of registerable modules unless approval is also recommended for the overall programme.

f. Retrospective validation

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

Following (re)validation and before the start of the programme, a definitive set of documentation must be lodged with the OU. This includes a programme specification, module descriptors and student programme handbook (see [Appendix 3](#) for more information). A copy of the programme handbook (or access to an online version) must be issued to each student registered on the (re)validated programme(s) before they start their studies.



Correspondence events

A correspondence event follows the same rigour and scrutiny as a full (re)validation event and requires a quorate panel (as described in [Section D1](#)). Complete documentation is required and panel meetings with representatives and students from partner institutions are usually conducted online. The outcomes are the same as for a revalidation i.e., a recommendation of either approval or not, which may be with or without conditions and recommendations.

A minimum of six months should be allowed for this process, although individual circumstances might mean that it takes longer, with partner institutions incurring a financial charge by the OU.

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

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

Current partners – development of new programmes

In January/February the OU sends out its annual workload request, asking partner institutions to indicate any validation plans for the next academic year, including major changes to programmes currently in validation. All new programme proposals must allow sufficient time for completion of the OU's validation process. The OU cannot guarantee that a proposal will be scheduled for validation if it is not included in the workload return.

Partners are also advised to review the information provided in Section 8.4 and consult with their S/QPM if the proposed programme falls within a subject area that is either new to the partner or not currently validated by the OU. This includes entirely new subject areas or existing subjects being offered by the partner for the first time.

Requests for new programme validations will be carefully considered by the OU. If a validation is included in a planning meeting, costs may be incurred if the event is subsequently cancelled.

Current partners – development of existing programmes

The workload return sent in January to February (as indicated in the section above) also lists the programmes due for revalidation. The partner must confirm that they plan to revalidate these programmes (or enter teach out) for the new academic year. A date for the revalidation event will be discussed and agreed at the planning meeting attended by the partner institution and S/QPM.

Partners are also asked to consider the information in Section 8.4 and liaise with their S/QPM if the programme(s) is/are offered in new subject areas that the OU does not currently validate, or it is/they are a new subject area being offered by the partner and currently not in validation.

Future partners – development of new programmes

Partners are asked to stipulate on the application form the programmes they are seeking validation for and discuss it further with the OU during the discovery phase and discovery meeting. The OU and partner then decide a mutually agreeable time to schedule the validation in for.

Partners are also asked to consider the information in Section 8.4 and liaise with their S/QPM if the programme(s) is/are offered in new subject areas that the OU does not currently validate, or it is/they are a new subject area being offered by the partner and currently not in validation.

Thereafter, the following should be observed:

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

The programme description outlines the basic details of the proposal, including:

- A provisional title and programme content
- Target market and supporting market research
- Resource implications and consideration of financial viability

- Relevant subject benchmark statements, FHEQ and any other relevant aspects of the QAA Quality Code 2024
- Number of entry points expected per academic year
- The intention for any of the programme modules to be individually registerable.

Following submission of the initial proposal, your S/QPM will confirm if the OU is able to consider a programme for validation and support the nominated programme of study. If there is not a programme leader within the discipline, then an academic award should not proceed to validation until some permanent appointments have been made. In this instance, a validation panel needs to speak to appropriate members of the academic staff who will be delivering the proposed award.

Thereafter the process as outlined in [Section D1](#) above will be followed.

D2 Criteria for validation and revalidation

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

The principles relate to:

- The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study
- The curriculum and structure of the programme of study
- Teaching and learning
- Programme management and monitoring
- Admissions and transfer
- Assessment regulations
- Staffing, staff development and research
- Teaching and learning resources

- Other resources for students
- Information publicly available to students, their advisors, employers and other stakeholders
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Arrangements for any work-based learning aspects of the programme
- Approval of the embedded academic element of any apprenticeship programmes
- How the curriculum meets external reference points and how these are embedded, including (but not limited to) the Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ), QAA Subject Benchmarks statements and characteristics statements, QAA Quality Code 2024, OfS conditions of registrations and OfS strategy, Ofsted, and any PSRB requirements.



D2.1 The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study

Rationale and aims

Validated programmes reflect the mission, strategic direction, and academic goals of partners, and fulfill a demonstrable market demand.

They must stimulate an enquiring, analytical and creative approach, encouraging independent judgement and critical self-awareness.

The aims of a validated programme are appropriate to the award.

Learning outcomes

The programme's intended learning outcomes must be clearly defined and aligned with the overall aims of the programme. They should demonstrate the development – at the appropriate level for the award – of a body of knowledge and understanding relevant to the field of study. These outcomes must reflect academic, professional, and occupational standards, as well as [Subject Benchmark Statements](#).

The required levels are defined in the [QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#), which are mandatory. Partners in Wales or Scotland must also align with the relevant national qualifications' frameworks. The [SEEC Credit Level Descriptors](#) provide additional useful guidance.

Learning outcomes should also align with relevant external reference points, including the requirements of any professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies, and, where appropriate, European reference frameworks.

Generic transferable skills

Learning outcomes must incorporate a range of generic, transferable intellectual and practical skills that are appropriate to the level of the proposed award. These skills should support students' academic development and enhance their employability across a variety of contexts. Intellectual skills may include critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, and the ability to construct and communicate arguments effectively. Practical and transferable skills may encompass communication, teamwork, digital literacy, time management, and independent learning.

The inclusion of these skills ensures that graduates are equipped not only with subject-specific knowledge but also with the broader capabilities required for lifelong learning, professional adaptability, and active citizenship. These outcomes should be clearly articulated and aligned with the relevant qualification level descriptors, such as those found in the QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and other national or sector reference points

English language requirements

See [Page 29, Language of instruction](#).

D2.2 The curriculum and structure of the programme of study

Curriculum design and content

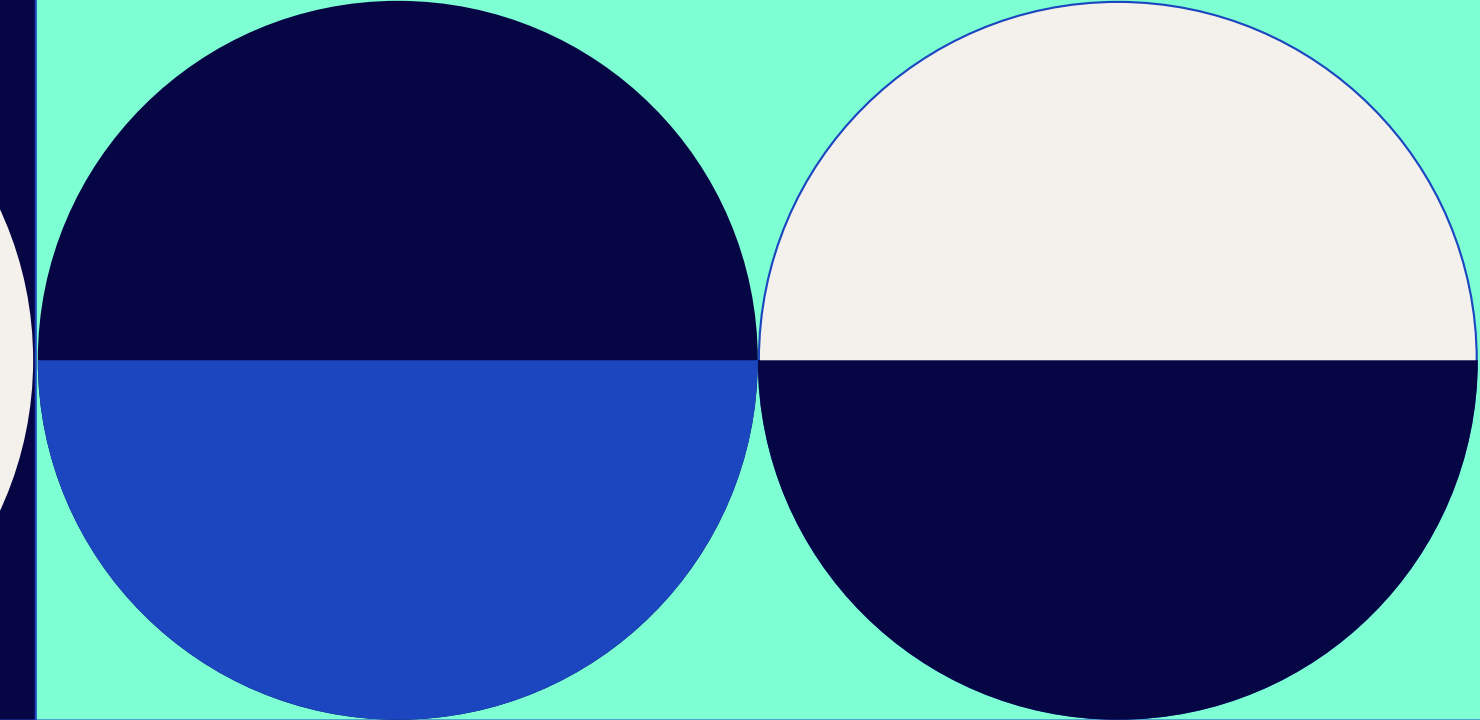
Curriculum design and the content of validated programmes enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical and professional skills, and key transferable skills. Curriculum design also needs to take account of students' progression to employment, research or further study, and personal development.

The curriculum design and content need to be informed by any new developments in teaching and learning techniques, current research and scholarship, Generative AI and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements. Partners should use external expertise – employers and professional bodies, for example – in their programme development process.

Programmes must demonstrate an appropriate balance between academic and practical components, personal development and academic achievement, as well as breadth and depth within the curriculum. They must also exhibit coherence, ensuring that the overall student experience is logically structured and underpinned by intellectual integrity. Where relevant, the role of practical project work or work-

based learning (as defined by QAA in Work-based Learning and Apprenticeships information) needs to be specified and how it is integrated in the programme (see [Section D3](#) work-based learning).

Where relevant, curriculum design should also address themes of environmental sustainability, drawing on the relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). Consideration should also be given to the [Inner Development Goals \(IDG\) Framework](#), which focuses on the personal and societal capabilities needed to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, [Advance HE](#) and the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#) emphasise the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), highlighting the critical role of higher education institutions – and their graduates – in leading the transition to a more sustainable future and supporting society in living within the planet's ecological limits. The curriculum must also specify any proposals for dissertations or written projects, including approval of chosen topics and arrangements for supervision. Partners may also find it useful to refer to the [OU resources available](#).



Programme structure

The programme documentation indicates links with other programmes (e.g. common foundation year, common modular structure, top-up award) and opportunities for transfer and progression. When a foundation degree is put forward for validation, a clear progression route must be articulated within the documentation. For a top-up degree, entry routes and pre-requisites must be clearly articulated (this may include the provision of programme specifications for the foundation degree feeding into the top-up degree).

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

The structure of the programme will be adapted to accommodate students following different modes of study, as well as those with diverse entry backgrounds or special educational needs and disabilities.

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

Where relevant, the structure specifies the distinction between the honours route and routes leading to other awards within the same scheme, such as Diploma of Higher Education and unclassified/ordinary degrees.

D2.3 Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning strategies for validated programmes need to be appropriate to the aims, learning outcomes and diversity of the student intake.

There must be adequate levels of staffing with appropriate experience to support programmes.

The partner must have policies in place to ensure continuity of the teaching and assessment of programmes and ensure contingency in the event of the departure or prolonged absence of members of staff. This must include policies for staff recruitment, deployment and development, and for the development, availability and sharing of teaching, learning and assessment materials. Partners must inform their S/QPM immediately of any changes in staffing levels on OU validated programmes. They must also inform their S/QPM when they appoint a new member of staff on the OU validated programme, sending a copy of their CV with the completed cover sheet (using the new staff proforma template). Partners must also inform their S/QPM when staff at partner institutions take industrial action and if this has any impact on students.

Staff must be properly and appropriately qualified and experienced, and their teaching must be informed by active participation in research or relevant scholarly, professional or consultancy activities. It is expected that academic staff engaged in designing, leading and delivering programmes hold an academic qualification or have equivalent experience. They also need to demonstrate a firm understanding of teaching and assessment at a level above the one being delivered on the validated programme/module. If a (re)validation panel has concerns over the qualifications and experience of staff delivering OU validated award/module, a condition may be implemented asking a partner to rectify the situation.

The ability to use and understand AI and Generative AI is fast becoming an essential skill for all staff. This is an evolving 'discipline' and like most organisations, OU partners must be committed to ensuring that their approach to using AI and Generative AI is responsible, ethical, and legal. Partners must understand the needs

of staff, students and the wider community, helping them develop their understanding of how to use this technology and enabling them to utilise it to its full potential.

There must be effective engagement with and participation by students, including the opportunity to serve on committees at all levels as appropriate. Mechanisms will be in place for student engagement and collecting student feedback, implementing changes and communicating them to students in a transparent way.

There must be a clearly defined and coherent strategy for academic support, including written guidance, that is tailored to the characteristics and needs of the student population (the student profile). This includes consideration of factors such as level and mode of study, prior educational background, and any specific support requirements. The strategy should also align with the overall aims of the provision—that is, the educational goals and intended outcomes of the programme, such as preparing students for professional practice, academic progression, or personal development. Effective arrangements must be in place for academic support and supervision, including for students undertaking work-based learning, studying abroad, or taking individual modules for credit. These arrangements must be communicated to students in a transparent and accessible manner. If common teaching with other programmes is proposed, there should be a clear strategy setting out how this common teaching will be managed.

Panels need to be able to assess that personal development planning is visible in the programme documentation (whether discrete or embedded).

D2.4 Principles related to programme management and monitoring

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

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

Partners should adopt a consistent, coherent, and evidence-informed strategic approach to the collection, storage, and management of student data. Key data sets should include information on student applications, completion and attainment rates, demographic profiles, employment outcomes, student satisfaction, and widening participation

efforts. This data should be actively used to enhance student outcomes and address performance gaps – for example, in areas such as employment opportunities, progression to further study, and skills development. Oversight of these areas should rest with the partner’s academic board and be reported through the OU’s partner monitoring processes. The OU’s requirement for data retention of award data is birth plus 120 years/indefinitely.

The Office for Students (OfS) explicitly states in its **Supplementary guidance: Retention of assessed work**:

“A provider should retain ‘appropriate records’ of assessed students’ work, including for students who are no longer registered on a course, for a period of five years after the end date of a course.”

This expectation is tied to regulatory conditions B4 (Assessment and Awards) and B5 (Sector-recognised Standards). The rationale is that assessed work serves as primary evidence for evaluating whether students have been assessed effectively

and whether awards are credible.

Key points from the guidance:

- The five-year retention period starts after the official end date of the course/ qualification, not the date a student leaves.
- Providers are not expected to retain all assessed work – only what is deemed “appropriate,” which may include sampling.
- The OfS may request access to assessed work within this five-year window as part of its risk-based monitoring.
- Providers can make contextual judgments about what to retain but must document their rationale.

Relevant extracts from the guidance:

“Providers are autonomous institutions and should interpret and implement the guidance as they consider appropriate for their own context. This means that a provider has latitude to judge what

may constitute ‘appropriate records’ for retention and should not understand this to mean ‘all records for all students in all contexts’.”

“A provider should document the evidence and analysis that has informed its decisions about the assessed work it will retain, and the reasons for this, in order to demonstrate why it considers that judgement to be reasonable.”

You can view the full guidance here: [OfS Supplementary guidance: Retention of assessed work](#)

GDPR Considerations

Data minimisation: Retain only what is necessary.

Legal defensibility: Five-year retention aligns with the UK statute of limitations for breach of contract (six years).

Security: Records must be stored securely with restricted access.

Recommended approach for validated partners

Given the above, we recommend that our partners adopt the following approach:

- For students registered on full qualifications: Retain appropriate records of assessed work for five years after the official end date of the course.
- For students registered on standalone modules: Retain appropriate records of assessed work for five years after the module completion date.

This approach aligns with OfS guidance, reflects possible registration models, and avoids the impracticality of retaining large volumes of records or maintaining unnecessarily lengthy retention periods.

- **Retention period:**
Assessed work must be retained for **five years** after the official end date of the course or module (depending on student registration type).
- **Responsibility:**
The **partner institution** is responsible for the retention, secure storage, and management of assessed work.
- **Scope:**
Applies to **all work that contributes to final marks and award decisions (summative assessments)**, whether submitted digitally or in physical format, across all campuses and delivery modes.
- **Sampling:**
Where full retention is not feasible, partners must:

- **Define a sampling strategy** appropriate to their context.

- **Document the rationale** for the sample selected.
- Ensure the sample is **representative across grade bands** and sufficient to support internal and external quality assurance.

- **Storage:**
 - **Digital work** should be stored securely on platforms such as **Moodle, Blackboard, or equivalent virtual learning environments**.
 - **Physical artefacts** (e.g., artwork, models) should be documented via **photographic or video evidence**.

- **Contextual documentation:**
Partners must retain supporting materials such as:
 - **Assessment briefs**
 - **Marking schemes**
 - **Moderation records**
 - **Feedback templates**
- **Policy basis:**
Retention practices should be governed by the partner’s **Records Management Policy and Retention Schedule** and must be compliant with **GDPR (or any equivalent data protection legislation relevant to the partner’s location)** and **OfS regulatory conditions B4 and B5**.

This should be adhered to. Please note that award data should not be stored on paper, but be cloud based, so that a student can ask for a record of their learning at any time during their lifetime.

Partners must have mechanisms in place to ensure the effectiveness of arrangements for collecting and acting

upon feedback from students and staff, and for identifying and addressing any difficulties arising from changes to the staff team. There must be student representation at all levels of the partner institutions’ governance committee structure where issues concerning students, learning support, and physical and staffing resources are discussed. There must be at least one student representative on each of the groups or committees dealing with programme-level matters. It should always be explicitly clear that students have been consulted in preparation for programme (re) validations, and (re)validation panels will want to meet with students and hear their views. Student representatives must be given adequate induction to their role and support in fulfilling their responsibilities.

A partner must have processes in place to ensure that recommendations for action are followed up and remedy any shortcomings identified.

When programmes have employer links – foundation degrees and work-based learning, for example – partners will have processes in place for obtaining and acting upon feedback from employers.

Partners routinely monitor programme effectiveness by engaging with external examiners and considering the content of their reports.

The academic reviewer’s feedback, based on their engagement with the programme, may also be taken into account during the evaluation process.



D2.5 Admissions and transfer

Partners must ensure that their admissions policy contains comprehensive details about their transfer policies and procedures. They must make this information publicly available, such as on their website. Transparency helps students understand their options and the processes involved in transferring to a different programme or institution.

All validated programmes must have effective criteria and arrangements for admission related to the level of the programme/module, its learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessment. For further guidance see [QAA 2024, Principle 9](#).

See the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#) for more information. The regulations also give guidance on recognition of prior learning.

D2.6 Assessment regulations

All partners must comply with the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#). Some partners are approved to operate under [dual awards regulations](#).

The purpose of assessment is to encourage effective learning and enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled a programme's learning outcomes and achieved the standard required for the award. The assessment process must be undertaken by impartial internal and external examiners. External examiners must have the ability and competence to make judgements about the performance of individual students regarding the assessment criteria and learning outcomes and to students on other, comparable programmes.

All programme/module assessment regulations must be in line with the regulations for validated awards of the OU and should be clearly articulated in relevant documentation reviewed at (re)validation.

The assessment strategy

The assessment strategy must have an effective formative role in enhancing student skills and abilities. The assessment process enables learners to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended outcomes. It must be clear to students what the success criteria is and it must relate to the intended learning outcomes.

The assessment strategy provides evidence that the standards achieved by learners meets the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant QAA subject benchmarks and the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. As part of the validation process, any QAA subject benchmarks and QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications listed in the validation documents will be checked for consistency and accuracy.

For further guidance, see the [Framework for Enhancing Assessment in Higher Education | Advance HE](#).

The assessment process

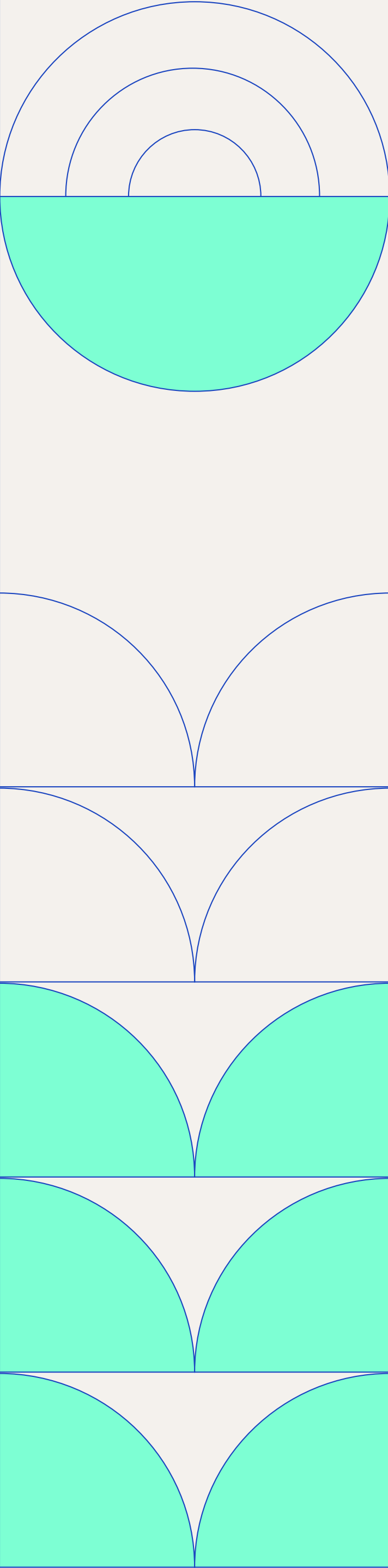
The OU must be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures. It is crucial that students and staff acknowledge when GenAI tools are used. There needs

to be transparency in the assessment process in line with the guidance outlined in [Section F1.19](#) of the OUVF Handbook for Validated Awards – Procedures for dealing with academic misconduct. The proposed arrangements to ensure the validity and objectivity of the assessment process must be clear. Programme staffing arrangements must ensure continuity of the assessment process if members of staff leave, are absent or undertake industrial action.

Arrangements need to be in place for the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process. This includes criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement. The criteria for assessment needs to be clearly specified and measures taken to ensure that they are understood and applied by all the external examiners.

The composition of the board of examiners needs to be in accordance with the OU requirements for boards of examiners, as set out in [Section F4](#) of this handbook. When a complex scheme requires a tiered structure of assessment boards, adequate arrangements need to be in place for the examiners to have oversight of each student's performance.





D2.7 Staffing, staff development and research

There needs to be sufficient teaching and support staff, and they need to be appropriately qualified so that the programme’s aims and learning outcomes can be fulfilled. If staff numbers are inadequate, plans need to be in place to address the situation so that key staff are in place in time for delivery of the programme. This applies to learning support services staff (including library and media services, computing, and information technology) and technical and administrative support staff.

There should not be an over-reliance on one or two staff members. Arrangements for staff deployment and development must ensure continuity of the teaching programme if certain staff members become unavailable to the programme. Staff should be able to draw upon research, scholarship, and/or professional activity to inform their teaching, and arrangements must be in place for supporting staff in these activities.

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

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

D2.8 Teaching and learning resources

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

If the partner does not have all the necessary resources, appropriate arrangements must be in place to secure access to resources elsewhere (e.g. through collaboration with other institutions). The OU reserves the right to inspect all facilities used for delivery purposes. Any facilities acquired after the (re)validation process that will be used for teaching and assessment of OU validated programmes will need inspecting and approval prior to the teaching and assessment taking place (see [Page 22, Approval of new teaching facilities and sites](#)).

If none of the required resources are available at the start of the programme, an appropriate resource plan must be in place, articulating the

implementation timeline. This must be made available to the (re)validation panel.

For distance learning programmes, essential physical resources must include printed or online learning materials, as well as other media formats. These resources should be supported by an efficient delivery system to ensure timely and reliable access. Additionally, all materials must be provided in accessible formats to accommodate diverse learner needs.

D2.9 Other resources for students

Students should be able to engage in collaborative activities within and across programmes.

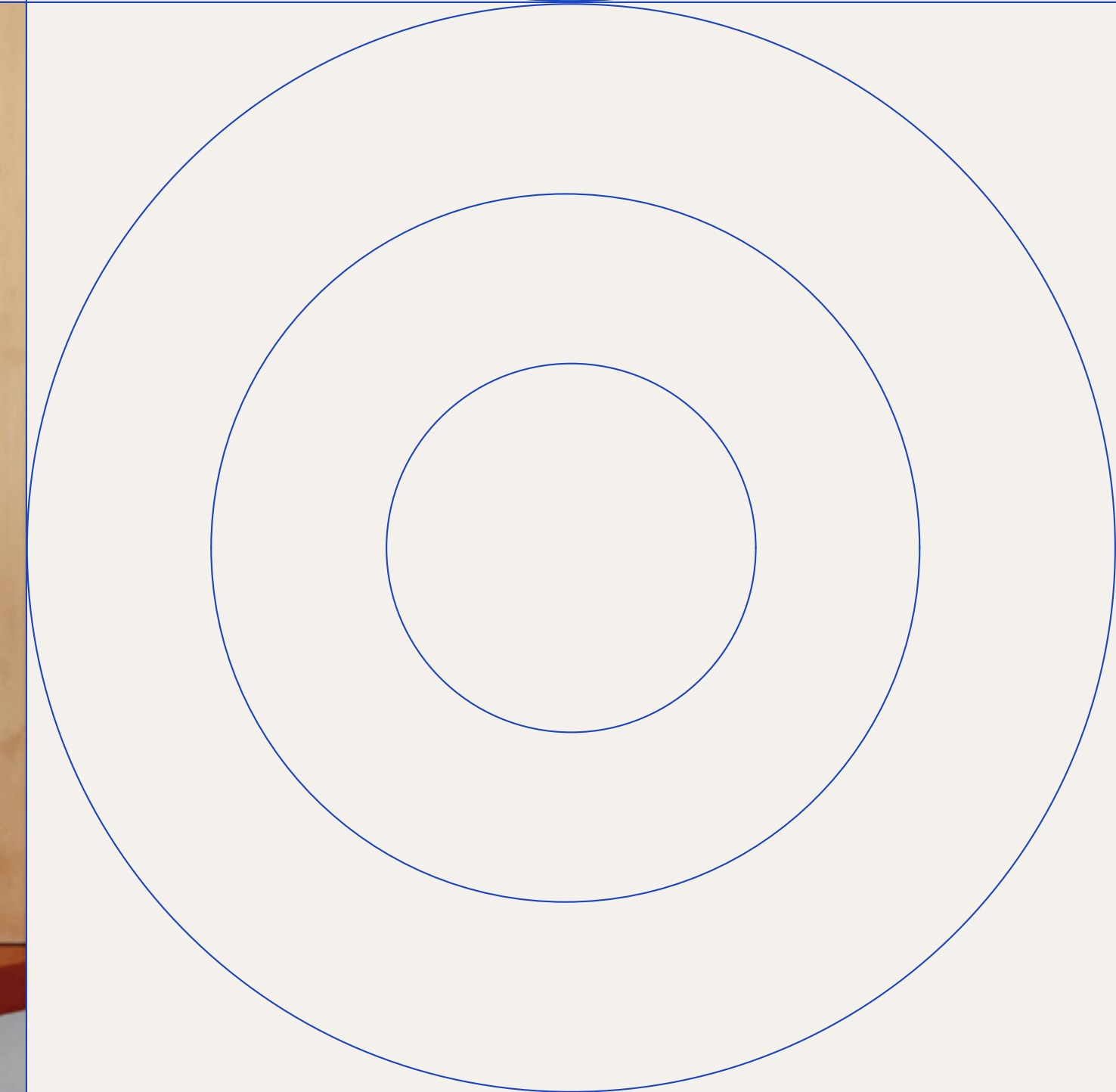
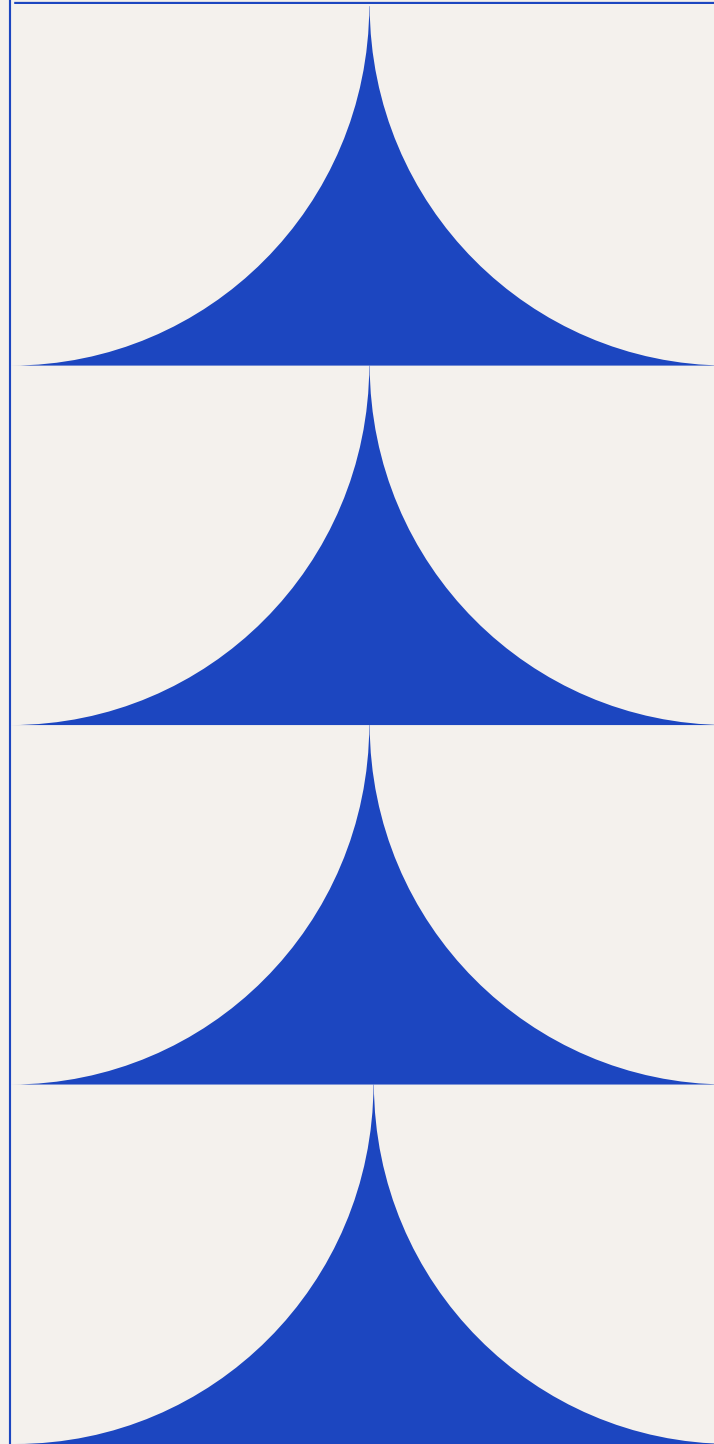
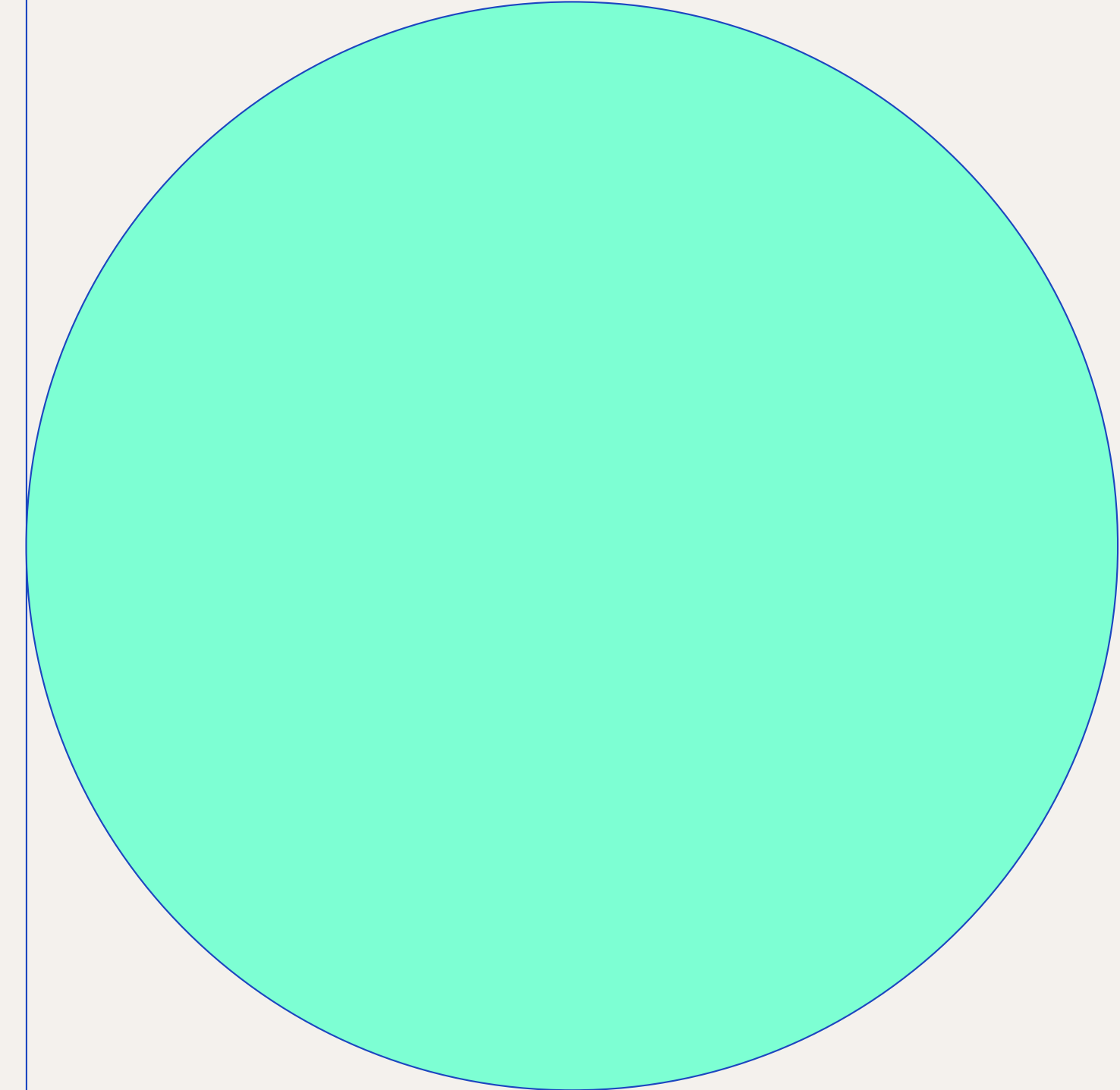
The partner must make relevant student guidance and support available – induction, programme-specific career services, personal tutoring, mental health and wellbeing, and support for students with disabilities, for example.

D2.10 Information publicly available to students, their advisors, employers, and other stakeholders

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

D2.11 Equality, diversity and inclusion

All regulations and procedures related to programme design (as well as admissions, delivery, staffing, assessment, learning resources (including programme specifications and module descriptors), and guidance and support services) must aim to prevent discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. They need to enable the partner to respond effectively to students' different needs and circumstances. Where permitted by local legislation, the policies and procedures should align with the OU's, which can be found on the [OU's Equality and Diversity website](#). See [Section H](#) of this handbook for further information.



D3 Additional guidance on (re)validation of programmes that include work-based learning

Where appropriate (and with reference to QAA work-based learning and apprenticeships guidance) provision must be made for supervised work experience, community experience or experience abroad and clarification is needed on how these elements fit with the rest of the programme. As part of the validation and revalidation process, partners must demonstrate in their programme documentation (and during the validation

event) that they are fully aware of and can adhere to all professional body requirements. Work-based learning quality assurance documents should be included in the documentation submission for the (re)validation event – for example, but not limited to, handbooks or guides for employers, mentors, and students.

Work-based learning for higher education courses describes courses that bring together higher education providers and work organisations to create learning opportunities. This needs to be considered in conjunction with other

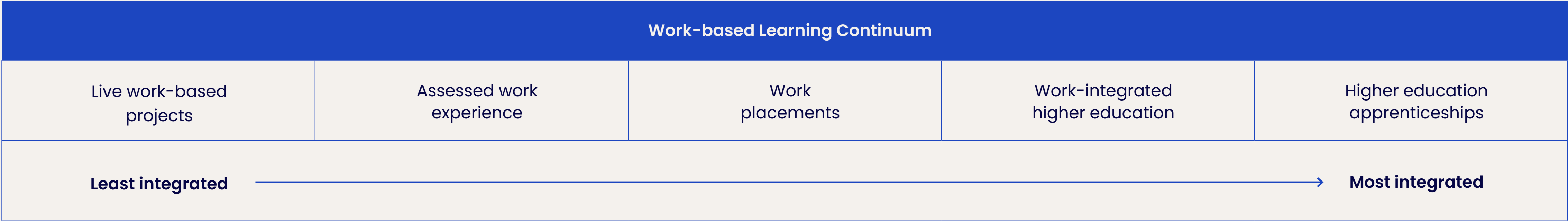
regulatory requirements, including providers’ academic regulations, funding body requirements and the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies’ (PSRB) rules and regulations.

While work-based learning benefits students, education organisations and employers, it also brings challenges, particularly in terms of ensuring quality and standards across what could be a range of different partners with different expectations. When work-based learning counts towards credit and credit-bearing awards, the education organisation

must have responsibility for setting and maintaining oversight of quality and standards.

Partners may also want to refer to the guidance laid out in the [Advance HE framework for embedding employability in higher education](#), [ASET-Good-Practice-Guide-to-Successful-Work-Based-Learning-for-Apprenticeships-in-Higher-Education](#), and [Good-Practice-Guide-for-Managing-Health-Safety-and-Welfare-for-Student-Placements](#).

Figure 1: Work-based learning continuum



D3.1 (Re)validation of foundation degrees

Those involved in the design and validation of foundation degrees are advised to use the [QAA's foundation degree characteristics statement](#) as an external reference point.

All proposals for validation or revalidation of a foundation degree should comply with the following expectations and contain evidence of:

- ▶ systematic and formalised arrangements for maintaining effective links with employers and practitioners in the relevant field
- ▶ inclusion of at least 25% (60 credits) of work-based/related learning across the programme. Please see Figure 1 above taken from the QAA work-based learning advice and guidance document
- ▶ formally agreed progression routes to specified honours degrees, together with arrangements for approved bridging units.

D3.2 (Re)validation of awards leading to higher or degree apprenticeships

OU partner institutions require the validation of foundation degrees, undergraduate degrees and masters qualifications for higher and degree apprenticeships.

Partner institutions may want to have specialist/ specifically designed qualifications validated in order to deliver against an apprenticeship standard. Due to the complex changing environment, partners must speak to their S/QPM when considering developing/revising an apprenticeship. When putting an apprenticeship

forward for approval, partners need to have evidence that they have completed the process of applying for a place on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register for that programme. During initial discussions, agreement must be reached on responsibility for end point assessment. Partners may want to use existing validated qualifications to deliver against an apprenticeship standard. In these circumstances, apprenticeship students may be studying alongside non-apprenticeship students, so consideration needs to be given on how parity of experience will be achieved.

In all models, the OU's responsibility lies with the higher education qualification element of the apprenticeship. The wider apprenticeship responsibility of delivery against the apprenticeship standard lies with the partner and employer.

However, the student experience is clearly of concern to the OU, so any factors impacting it (including the wider apprenticeship) could fall within its remit, if necessary.

The latest DfE, OfS and QAA guidance – Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current Approaches, and the QAA Degree Apprenticeship Characteristics Statement – should be used to inform the development of awards for apprenticeship delivery. Partners may also refer to guidance published by [ASET Good Practice Guide to Successful Work Based Learning for Apprenticeships in Higher Education](#).

When a partner institution wants to use an existing or new validated award for apprenticeship delivery, the partner is guided by

the S/QPM on the process and documentation required for submission.

Higher technical qualifications

Higher technical qualifications (HTQs) are Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, such as foundation degrees, higher national certificates and higher national diplomas. They are an option for young people starting their career and for adults looking to upskill or retrain.

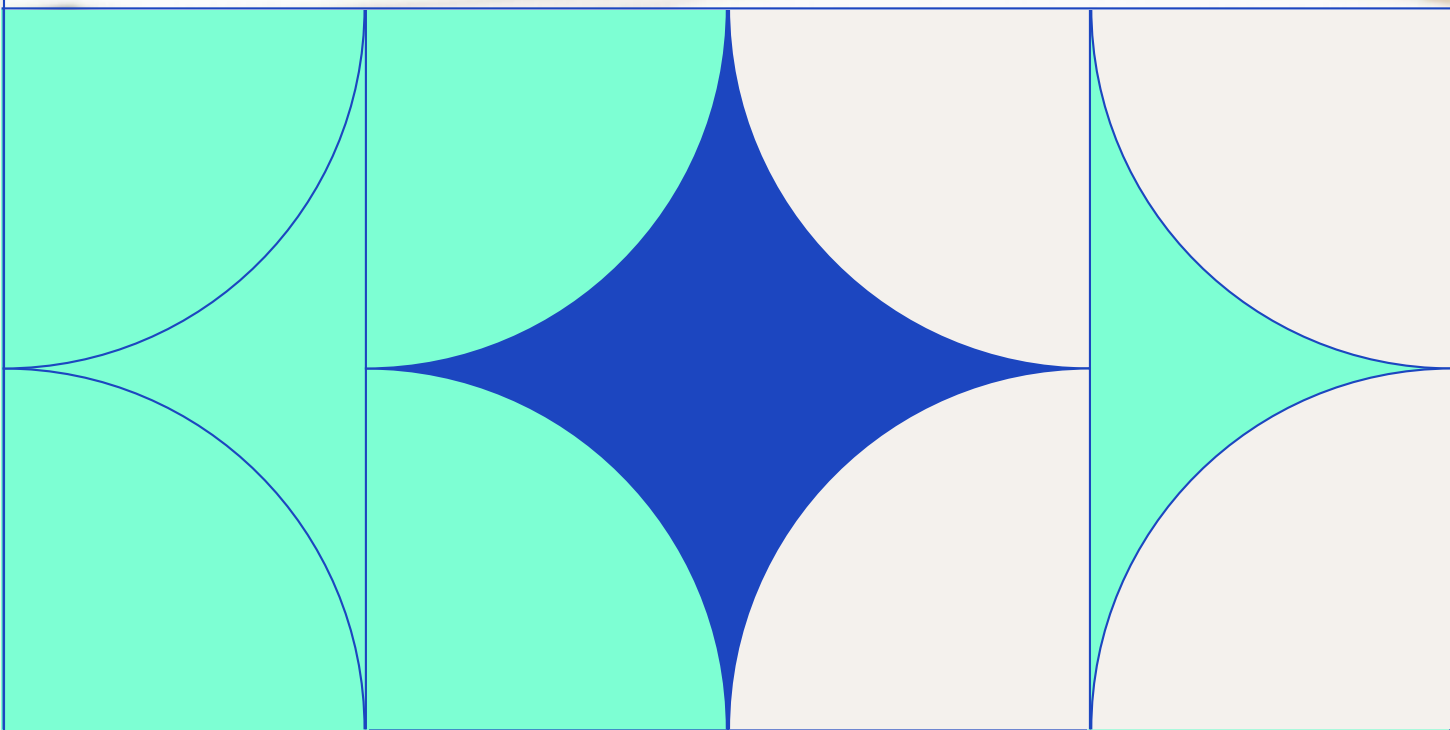
HTQs have been approved against employer developed standards, also known as occupational standards. This ensures learners gain the skills that employers want, and employers can feel confident that learners have the knowledge, skills and behaviours for a particular specialist role.

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

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

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

Partner institutions are asked to discuss the requirements for validating a HTQ programme with their S/QPM in the first instance.



D4 (Re)validation of blended, flexible, and distributed learning courses and programmes

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

The (re)validation process, detailed on [page 39](#), concentrates on programmes with a traditional classroom-based delivery. If a partner wants to move away from this delivery method, the (re)validation panel needs to consider additional requirements to meet the extra level of scrutiny for programmes delivered using distance learning elements. Whilst a definition is provided on blended, flexible and distributed below, the term ‘distance learning’ is used in this section to cover all forms of delivery that are not 100% face-to-face.

Blended, flexible and distributed learning have evolved in recent years and now take many different forms, encompassing a wide spectrum of activities and delivery models. However, all the models have synergies and can be viewed as a process for acquiring knowledge and skills through distributed information and instruction.

Programmes offered on a blended, flexible and distributed basis should be designed so that the academic standards of the awards are consistent with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024, as well as meeting the OU’s requirements.

If a partner institution wants to submit a blended, flexible or distance learning programme for (re)validation, they should make it clear in the template for programme descriptions and in the planning meeting discussions with the S/QPM. We recognise that a partner institution may wish to use delivery methods that combine face-to-face with distance learning methods. It should be clear in the template for programme descriptions and specifications which methods will be

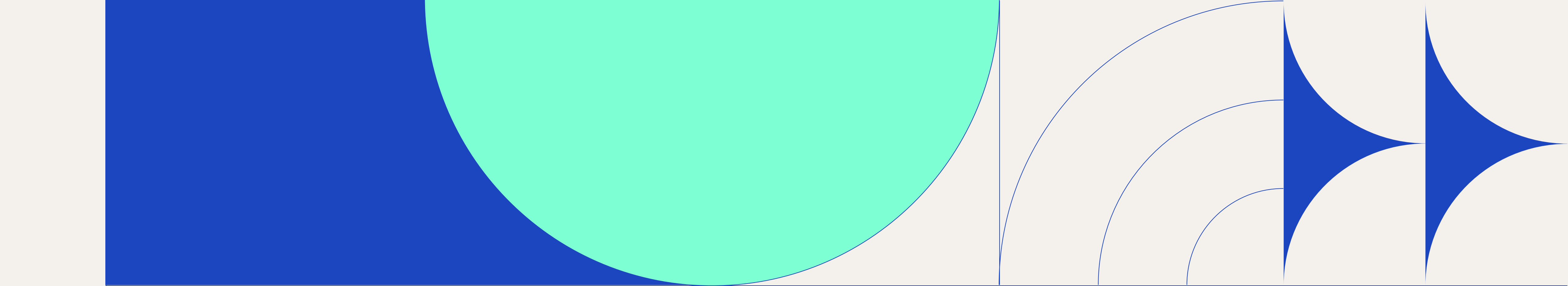
used where. The partner institution needs to submit the programme documentation set out in [Section D2.2](#), making clear reference to the planned delivery methods.

In addition to the standard documentation, the partner institution needs to provide the (re)validation panel with a cross section of online information for each level of the programme, demonstrating:

- ▶ What students will see while studying each module
- ▶ How the students and tutors will interact with the online material, and how assessment feedback will be provided to students
- ▶ How the online material links in with the classroom delivery (if relevant)
- ▶ Any additional support systems which will be in place to assist students working with a distance learning delivery (including pastoral and IT support).

As well as assuring the programme content, the (re)validation panel also ensures the support systems for tutors delivering the programme, and students receiving the programme are appropriate.

One of the benefits of providing distance learning delivery is that it helps programmes retain currency and adjust quickly.



D5 Single registerable modules

D5.1 Development of single registerable modules

Single registerable modules are small, credit-bearing, taught modules of study, usually between 10 and 30 credits. They have clear learning outcomes, can be studied at any level (undergraduate or postgraduate) and must be part of a full programme of study validated by the OU and consistent with the registerable awards set out in the regulations for validated awards (section 3).

Study on a registerable module must comply with any normal curriculum prerequisites in place for that programme. Capstone, research, or dissertation modules cannot be offered as registerable modules.

Nor can placement or work-based learning modules.

Module students normally study alongside programme students. However, this is not a requirement, although the approach must be clarified when the approval paperwork is submitted. Either way, equivalent support and access to resources should be provided to all students.

D5.2 (Re)validation of single registerable modules

Registerable modules are considered for approval as part of a normal (re)validation process, through a correspondence event or a major change process where the related programme has already been validated. There also needs to be some initial scrutiny of the institutional arrangements in place for this delivery model.

Registerable modules may be delivered face-to-face, blended or online, provided it meets the approved module aims. Any variances between the programme and the registerable modules must be set out in sufficient detail for the (re)validation panel

to clearly understand the intentions. This includes:

- Whether the modules will be taught full-time or part-time
- Mode of delivery – face to face, online, blended learning etc..
- Pattern of delivery: whether each module will be delivered over a longer or shorter period than the same module delivered within the programme
- Any other variances to the teaching and/or assessment schemes.

D5.3 Award of credit for single registerable modules

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

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

Students receive a certificate from the OU, in PDF form, setting out the details of the study. This includes the credit value upon successful completion of a registerable module.

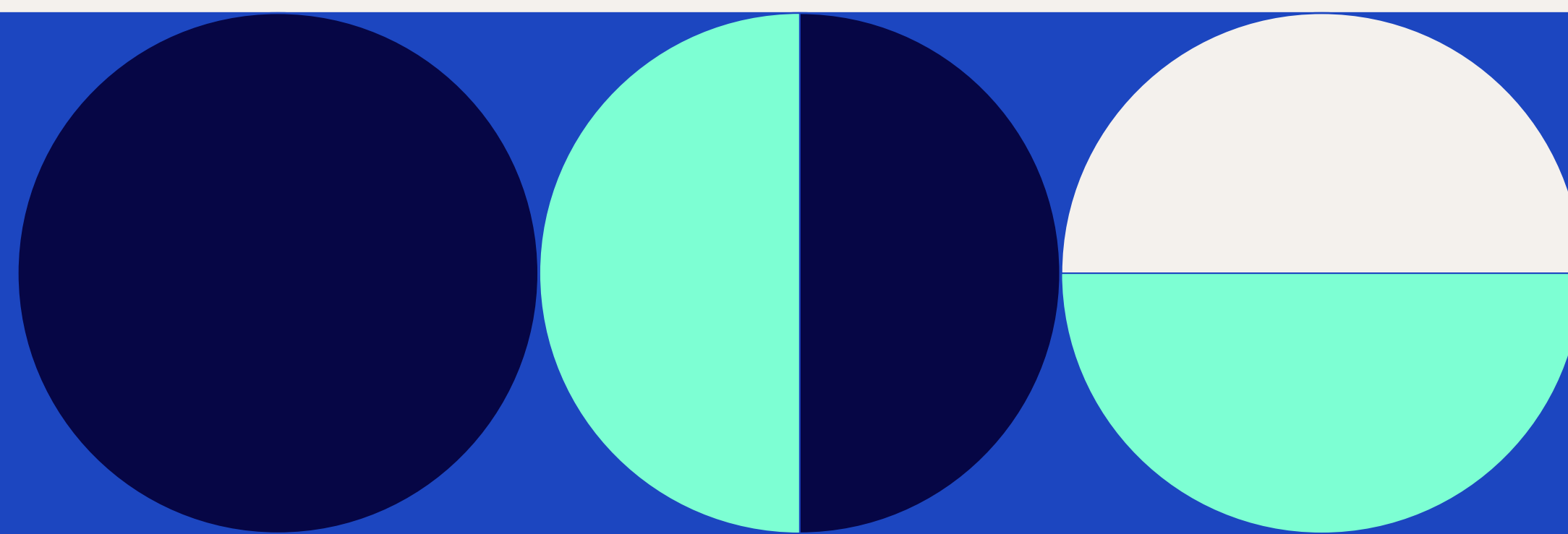
An OU validated award can be made up of cognate registerable modules (also known as “stacking”) if it meets all the requirements of the programme specification (credits, learning outcomes, admissions criteria etc). Registerable modules may also be counted for classification purposes within an OU validated programme at the partner institution in which they are offered, provided they meet the programme requirements and the institution’s Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy. They also stand as credits for transfer to other institutions in line with the RPL policy of that institution.

The regulations for validated awards apply to students on registerable modules.

D6 (Re)validation of accelerated degrees

The OU will consider proposals for the validation of ‘accelerated’ degrees in its partner institutions. It has broadly adopted the Office for Students definition of accelerated degrees. This includes the following:

- ▶ They are structured differently to traditional degrees
- ▶ They deliver the same number of credits (360) as a three-year degree
- ▶ They offer the same number of teaching weeks as a three-year degree, but are scheduled so they are (or can be) completed in a shorter period. They reduce the overall duration of the course by utilising the traditional summer holiday for teaching and learning
- ▶ They effectively reduce full-time study time to two years and part-time study to four years.



An OU (re)validation panel will be guided to consider additional requirements for the approval of degrees in an accelerated mode of delivery. These include:

Programme design and structure

The programme documentation needs to evidence how the timing and sequencing of levels, modules, pathways, and intakes within the programme will work in an accelerated context. Accelerated programmes should offer the same number of teaching hours as standard programmes, but scheduled to complete in shorter periods (for example a common model uses the summer holiday period as a third semester or fourth term). Accelerated degrees also have the same credits as a traditional degree (360) but normally deliver 180 credits per year rather than 120 credits. There must be a clear rationale for any blended learning or work placement elements incorporated into the programme. When designing the programme and assessments, consideration needs to be given to any additional challenges students may face on an accelerated programme. Many students on accelerated degrees are driven to succeed, have a good work ethic, and are keen to complete their studies with a good degree and return to the workplace. However, the increased workload, reduced time for reflection and other external influences can be problematic and hinder progress.

Student support and guidance

The partner institution needs to demonstrate that students on the accelerated programme receive the same level of support as students on traditional modes of delivery, including access to tutorial and peer support, pastoral advice and guidance, IT and financial assistance.

Staffing

The partner institution must provide assurance that students on accelerated programmes have access to teaching staff through the duration of their studies, including periods normally considered as holidays. The partner institution must also ensure that appropriate staffing levels are maintained throughout the validation period, staff workloads are appropriately managed, and that staff have sufficient time for staff development and research despite the concentrated teaching load.

Access to facilities and resources

Students on accelerated programmes need access to study facilities, learning resources and IT services throughout the calendar year, including periods normally considered as holidays. Students who study on an accelerated route may also require access to learning resources outside of the traditional working day. Given these factors, the development and approval of accelerated degrees needs to demonstrate greater consideration of student needs.

Assessment arrangements

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

Programme admissions

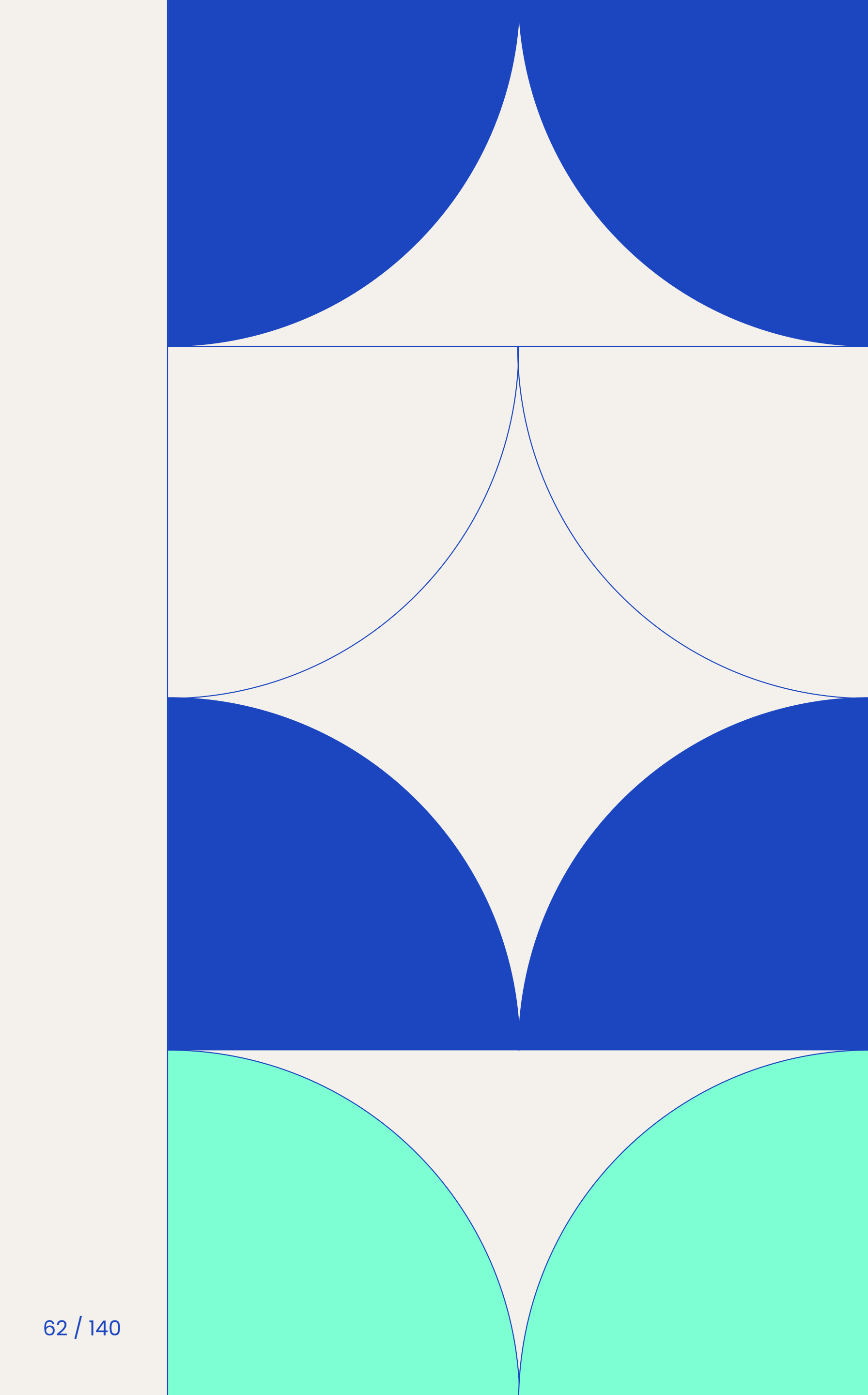
The admissions criteria must ensure that only students with sufficient motivation and aptitude to cope with accelerated study are admitted onto the programme. For example, the admissions process might include compulsory interviews, or the programme could be specifically tailored to mature professionals with significant relevant work experience. Partners may also choose to introduce different admissions points onto the programme.

Administrative systems

Accelerated degree programmes may require additional administrative systems for the operation of credits, recognition of prior learning and to track students' progress. The OU expects partners to track and monitor student outcomes on accelerated degree programmes so that issues regarding parity of experience with traditional modes of delivery are identified and addressed.

Programme transfer

The partner should consider embedding arrangements for students on accelerated programmes to transfer onto traditional programmes within the same subject area if they find the fast-track option does not work for them.



D7 Changes to validated programmes and compliance with consumer law

Introduction

We expect validation arrangements (approved and reapproved) to remain in place for the duration of the (re) approval period. If material changes are required (for enhancement purposes, to comply with external stakeholder requirements, or to address a concern, for example), the OU usually undertakes an interim review.

Changes can be made to approved programmes of study in between formal revalidation events, but the partner needs to consider and mitigate the impact any changes will have on students. For more information on your obligations when making changes to any advertised or published information, please read [UK higher education providers - advice on consumer protection law](#). The OfS has also recently published an insight brief [Protecting students as consumers](#) which partners should consult and refer to.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) provides guidance to ensure that higher education providers comply with consumer protection law. This guidance is crucial for protecting students' rights and ensuring they receive accurate and transparent information about their courses and any potential changes.

The OU expects partners to review and adapt approved programmes based on monitoring and evaluation outcomes, in line with their commitment to continuous improvement. If changes are necessary, they must be managed appropriately in accordance with consumer law obligations (such as obtaining student agreement where necessary). Additionally,

a separate OU process must be followed to determine the academic scrutiny required to confirm the proposed changes.

Impact of changes on students

- **Consultation and agreement:** when making changes to validated programmes, partners must consult with students and where necessary, obtain their agreement.
- **Notification of changes:** students should be notified of any changes to their programmes in a timely manner, and the impact of the changes should be clearly communicated.

The OU distinguishes changes into three categories: minor changes, moderate changes, and major changes. These categories relate only to academic validation requirements and do not correspond or relate to the impact these changes might have on students as determined by consumer law advice or CMA guidance. We have detailed the governance process for each of the OU categories below. Please note: what might be considered a minor change to the academic integrity of a programme of study, as determined by the OU, may be considered a “major” change to the (pre) contractual information the student originally signed up for. Therefore, the partner must determine the consumer law impact and complete the necessary consultation/mitigation prior to making any changes to OU validated and/or advertised programmes.

D7.1 Minor changes to programmes

The OU interprets minor changes to programmes of study as those which do not singly or incrementally change the basis on which the validation of the programme was made. They do not usually involve any significant change to the programme specification and do not change the nature of the programme.

Examples of minor changes:

- Change of module title
- Replacement of a module in a pathway with another OU-approved module without changing the overall learning outcomes for the pathway
- Minor changes to teaching or delivery methods
- Minor change in assessment approved by the external examiner (changes to low-weighted assessment components).

These changes are reported via regular partner monitoring processes. Partner institutions should consult with their external examiner(s), academic reviewer and S/QPM regarding the changes. External examiner approval is required for any minor change in assessment. The partner institution should be mindful of consumer law advice and determine any obligations regarding student agreement. This should then be reported, with evidence (where deemed necessary), to the OU via the annual monitoring/ institutional and programme monitoring submissions.



D7.2 Moderate changes to programmes

The OU indicates that moderate changes are changes such as minor curriculum adjustments, or teaching and assessment matters. They are unlikely to conflict with the decisions of the original validation panel.

Examples of moderate changes:

- Change of programme title (without changing curriculum)
- Change of pathway title (without changing curriculum)
- Change to an exit award title (without changing curriculum)
- Change to module learning outcomes (not overly significant)
- Moderate change in assessment (changes to heavily weighted assessment components)
- Change to teaching and learning strategy
- Change to the number of intakes per year.

These changes are approved by OUVF's quality management group. Partner institutions also need to consult with their academic reviewer, external examiner(s) and S/QPM.

The partner institution should be mindful of consumer law advice and determine any obligations regarding student agreement.

This should then be reported to the OU, with evidence (where deemed necessary), at the same time as the documentation requesting the moderate change. These changes are approved by OUVF's quality management group, and on an annual basis to Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC).

D7.3 Major changes to programmes

A change categorised as 'major' by the OU is one that materially and significantly alters the curriculum content, the method of teaching, or the approach to assessment. It is typically the kind of change that would likely have been a topic of discussion during the programme's validation process.

Examples of major changes:

- Changing the title of the degree
- Introducing new modules or pathways within a programme, or changing the syllabus content in a way that significantly affect learning outcomes so that it becomes a new module or pathway
- Significant changes to assessment (changes to core project/dissertation/capstone and/or change in overall assessment strategy) and relationship to other programmes
- Significant changes to modular learning outcomes and to programme learning outcomes

- Significant changes to programme delivery/mode of study
- Restructuring the level of study or moving modules to a different level of study
- Introducing or adding any validated programme modules to be individually registerable for credit (single registerable modules)

These changes are approved by the OU's CuPC. Partner institutions are also expected to consult with their academic reviewer, external examiner(s) and S/QPM.

The partner institution should be mindful of consumer law advice and determine any obligations regarding student agreement. This should then be reported to the OU, with evidence (where deemed necessary), at the same time as the documentation requesting the major change.

Major changes are scrutinised by a panel of external subject experts as part of the major change process. These changes are approved by the OU's CuPC.

D7.4 Process for approval of changes to programmes

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

When minor changes arise from programme management experience, subject area developments, or external examiner advice, they must be approved following the partner institution’s agreed procedures and in consultation with the OU. The S/QPM may want to consult the academic reviewer before allowing minor changes to be implemented. The OU expects programme teams to make full use of the opportunity to make minor changes in the interests of keeping programmes relevant and up-to-date, and in response to the quality monitoring outcomes. The partner institution must provide a brief account of any changes and document the approval process for the changes (including evidence of student consultation and consent) in the subsequent institutional and programme monitoring report (see [Section E](#)).

Moderate changes to a programme require formal OU approval. The request should be submitted at least six months prior to the date on which the change is due to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes depends on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided, alongside evidence of student consultation and consent. In most cases, consultation with external advisors is required. The S/QPM decides the level of academic

scrutiny required and then obtains approval from the quality management group. Curriculum Partnerships Committee is informed of the changes made under this category on an annual basis.

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

Major changes are generally approved by correspondence. The documentation required to support the change should be discussed with the S/QPM. The S/QPM sends the proposal for changes electronically to a panel. The panel usually comprises three academics, with two of them usually being an OU academic reviewer and a panel member from the most recent (re) validation. The outcomes are the same as for a (re)validation event, ie a recommendation of approval or not, with or without conditions and recommendations.

If the changes being proposed are of such a magnitude that the programme specification

requires significant revision, a full programme revalidation will be required. It is also possible that a number of smaller changes made to the programme during the approval period could lead to a full programme revalidation. Changes affecting the assessment or progression of students must have the explicit written consent of the programme’s approved external examiners. All changes must be requested by submitting the change form ‘[Programme/Moderate-Change-Form](#)’ to your S/QPM at the OU.

All changes are incorporated into definitive programme handbooks, which must be sent to the OU before the start of the relevant academic session.

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

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

Student debtors

One of the requirements for delivering higher education qualifications or programmes is that all validated partners observe and uphold the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) guidance (or equivalent guidance) in this area.

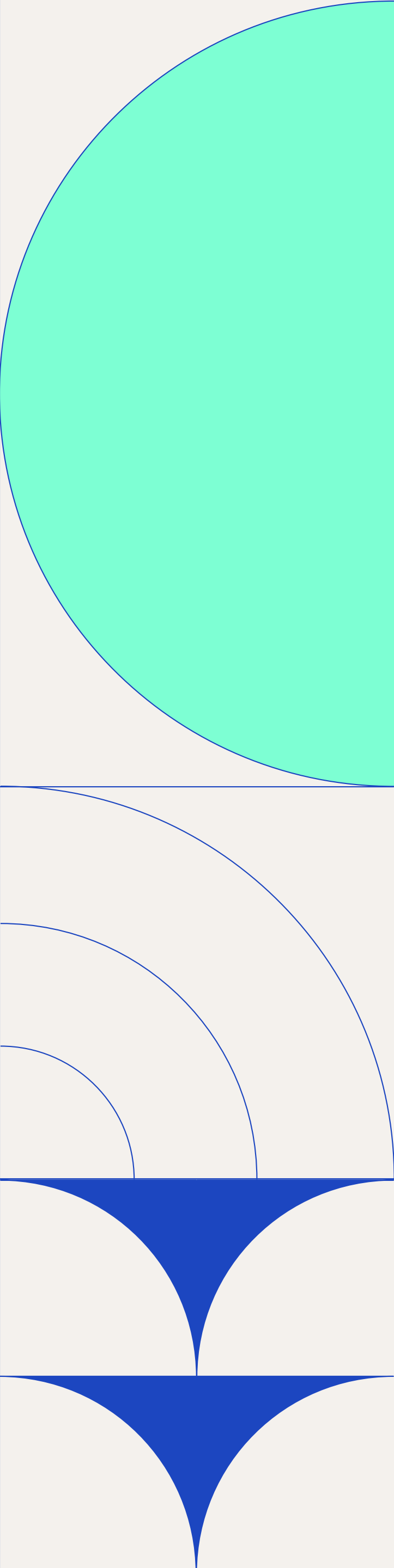
The CMA guidance makes it clear that partners cannot withhold certain services or prevent students' progression if they owe certain debts to the partner institution they are studying at. Please see [Consumer law advice for higher education providers](#) for further guidance.

Validated partners cannot withhold services that have been paid for, nor can they use sanctions that are disproportionate to a student's conduct.

Partner institutions should also ensure that examination boards routinely consider progression and award decisions for all students, regardless of student debt status.

The CMA has previously investigated the fairness of terms that enable a HE provider to impose academic sanctions against students for non-payment of non-tuition fee debts. It found that applying such sanctions in a blanket and disproportionate manner may be considered unfair. Therefore, validated partners must ensure they are familiar with CMA guidance, including any updates or changes. They should also have appropriate policies, processes, and procedures in place that align with CMA requirements.





D8 Other validation and revalidation considerations

D8.1 Recognition of study below higher education Level 4

The OU does not validate study below Level 4.

However, study below Level 4 can either be incorporated as part of the degree at the time of initial programme validation event or introduced later.

Students must register from the outset for the whole qualification, including the pre-Level 4 part.

Study below Level 4 is not a standalone qualification – it carries credit at Level 0 and should be described in terms of student learning hours.

Students either pass or fail below Level 4.

Students who pass pre-Level 4 are deemed to be at the appropriate level to commence Level 4 study and must be guaranteed progression to Level 4 of the relevant named award.

Students who pass pre-Level 4 study but leave without progressing are provided with a transcript by the partner institution. The transcript states that the student has

completed a course that would have enabled them to meet the admissions criteria for Level 4 of the relevant degree programme had they chosen to continue.

The partner must make sure that the regulations for validated awards and the student handbook (or virtual learning environment) include the following:

- The options available to students who fail pre-Level 4 study, indicating arrangements for resits and progression
- The options available to students who pass pre-Level 4 study but do not wish to progress immediately
- The time limit within which students must progress to HE Level 4 after completion of pre-Level 4 study should reflect the length of time the skills gained at the latter are likely to remain current with the former
- In the case of foundation degrees, the time limit within which students may progress from pre-Level 4 study to HE Level 4 should reflect the length of time the skills gained at the former are current in the latter.

D8.2 Validation of programmes approved by other authorities

The OU values the fact that many Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) accept that programmes leading to OU validated awards fulfil their requirements for professional accreditation.

The OU agrees procedures for joint validation with PSRBs where appropriate. A major objective of such agreements is to minimise duplication of effort.

D8.3 Dual approval

When a programme is approved or recognised by a professional or statutory body or another authority, the partner must ensure that the body concerned is informed of validation proposals and outcomes.

D8.4 Approval of programmes offered in new subject areas

The OU will consider approving programmes in new subject areas not previously offered for higher education awards, or where a partner institution has expanded its offerings and seeks to introduce new subjects.

The partner submitting the proposal is responsible for establishing a case for the OUs consideration. When making a proposal, factors consider include whether:

- ▶ There is sufficient intellectual depth within the subject to provide the challenges demanded by degree level study
- ▶ A body of scholarship and sufficient subject expertise exists in the area
- ▶ Published research in the area is available in refereed journals
- ▶ There is a formally constituted body of practitioners or people employed in the area
- ▶ In the sciences, technology and health studies areas, that a widely recognised scientific or medical basis exists for the theories embodied in the study

- ▶ When practice is involved, a well-founded causal explanation of the techniques used, along with evidence from scientific studies and assessments of the practice results, is available
- ▶ Those proposing the programme are appropriately qualified in established areas of study
- ▶ Qualifications are available at sub-degree levels
- ▶ Well-established qualifications are available in closely associated areas of study.

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



D8.5 Approval of programmes offered in collaboration between institutions

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

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

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

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

D8.6 Programmes with multiple intakes per academic year

Special consideration needs to be given to programmes or single registerable modules that plan two or more intakes per academic year. The following need to be addressed within the submission documents:

- ▶ How each intake will be ensured an equivalent experience
- ▶ Access to resources
- ▶ Adequacy of staffing levels
- ▶ Implications for external examiner workload
- ▶ Arrangements for exam boards, resubmissions, and retakes aligned with an academic calendar for the programme
- ▶ Compliance with OU regulations for validated awards.

Further information on the implications of multiple intakes will form part of your workload discussion with your S/QPM.



E: Institutional and programme monitoring

Annual monitoring (AM)

AM is the predecessor to institutional and programme monitoring (IPM), which is currently being rolled out in stages.

Any partner institutions who are still under the AM process should not use the guidance within this section. They are advised to liaise with their S/QPM for further information and support, if needed.

E1 What is institutional and programme monitoring?

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

A key element of this framework is the IPM process, which is designed to:

- Ensure partner institutions demonstrate how they meet these responsibilities

- Enable partner institutions to reflect on issues arising from programme and institutional level reports and evaluate the effectiveness of their quality assurance and enhancement arrangements.

Reports should consist of:

- An institutional overview that addresses responses to outstanding recommendations and post-approval conditions from partnership approval/reapproval reflection on institutional quality management activities, external reviews, student feedback, staff development and resourcing
- Progress and reflection on action plans set in previous reports, as well as a forward-looking plan resulting from reflection and issues identified during the academic year
- Changes made to key policies, procedures, or partner institutional structures since the latest partnership compliance review or the latest institutional and programme monitoring cycle (see the policy updates section on the institutional overview template), and how students were consulted, and agreement sought

- A written statement confirming that the IPM process has been comprehensively and satisfactorily carried out, and that programmes have been taught, managed and operated in accordance with the procedures agreed at validation

- Programme evaluation reports reflecting on information as detailed in Figure E1 below
- Relevant attachments as specified in the Institutional overview and programme monitoring templates.

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

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

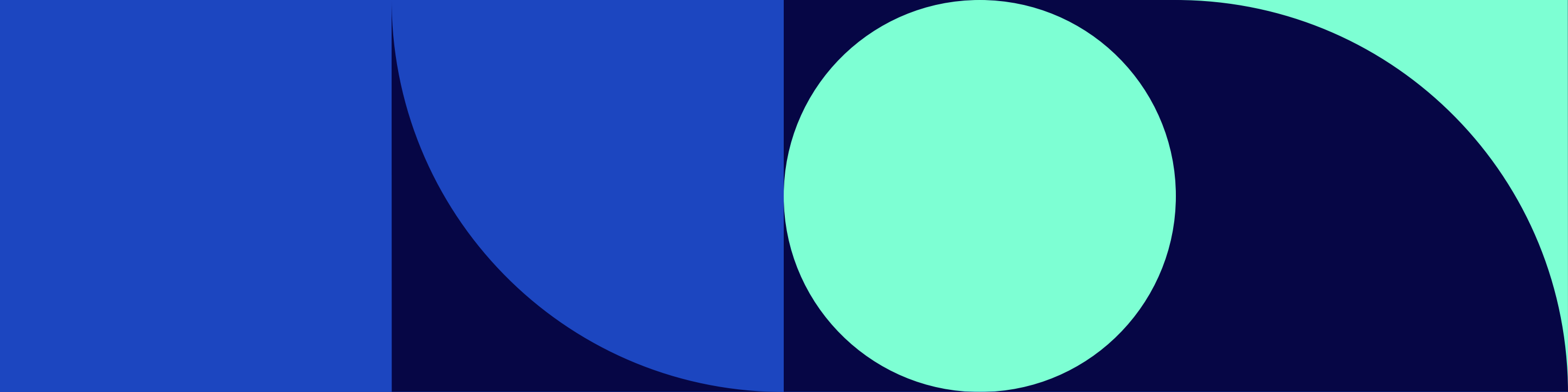
Figure E1: Flowchart showing good practice



E2 Institutional overview

A partner's academic standards committee or academic board must agree the content of the institutional overview, including summaries, reflections and critical analysis of areas such as:

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



E3 Programme monitoring

Partners must ensure that their programmes are monitored and critically reviewed throughout each academic year. Key evaluation information is requested as part of the partner monitoring process.

When a programme includes single registerable modules, due consideration and reflection should be given to them as part of the submissions.

Partners should ensure their programmes are reviewed to:

- Contribute to their enhancement
- Contribute to the maintenance of academic quality and standards
- Consider assessment procedures
- Monitor the quality of students' learning experience
- Evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements
- Record issues to be addressed and determine actions
- Identify and disseminate good practice

- Ensure ongoing, appropriate levels of qualified staffing, expertise and resources.

Programme monitoring focuses on the following key areas:

E3.1 Student recruitment (Submission A)

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

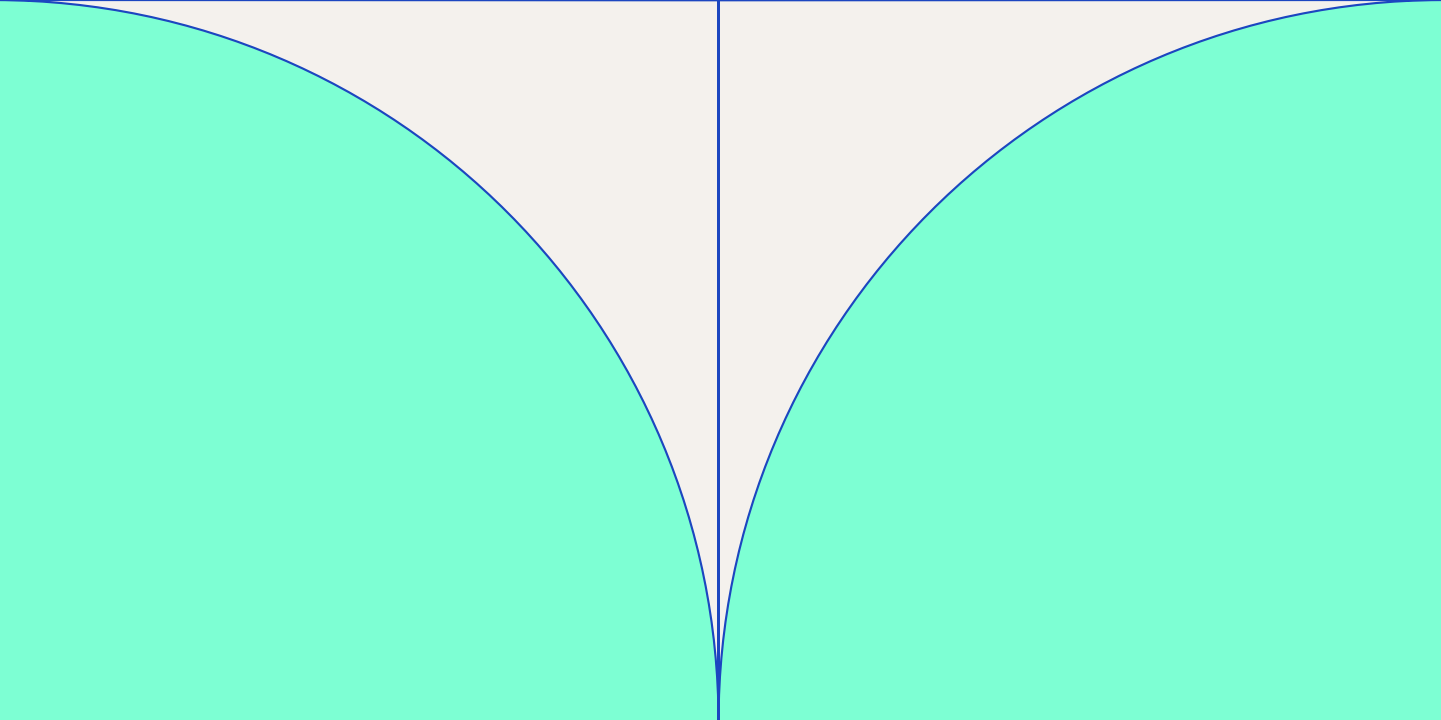
E3.2 Progression and achievement (Submission B)

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

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

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

- Maintaining standards
- Adequate learning resources
- Meeting intended learning outcomes
- Student satisfaction.



E3.3 Reflection and feedback (Submission C)

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

Programme reviews by the OU and external bodies

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

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

Feedback from external examiners

Programme teams are required to consider comments and issues raised by external examiners as detailed in the external examiner reports submitted to the partner. These should be clearly identified and a response to the external examiner report must be produced, reflecting on the report's contents, and detailing any actions generated to address the external examiner's comments. The response to the external examiner's report should be submitted separately to the OU by the programme team, as part of Submission C.

Feedback from OU academic reviewers

Academic reviewers, who are the OU's faculty representatives, submit a summary of their engagements over the year. When comments are submitted regarding particular programmes, they should also be considered. It is expected that academic reviewers will engage with students at least once a year and will include feedback about these meetings in their reports. More information on what the [Academic Reviewer role](#) consists of can be found on the OUVF website.

Staff feedback

The programme team should reflect upon the success of the programme and consider whether amendments are desirable in the areas of:

- Curriculum design, content and organisation
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Student progression and achievement
- Student support and guidance
- Learning resources, including staffing and staff development
- Quality management and enhancement.

Employer and workplace feedback, as appropriate

Include employers' feedback in the programme evaluation, particularly for foundation degrees or degree apprenticeships. It is evidence of the achievement of intended learning outcomes and can inform the review of programme specifications, teaching methods and assessment strategies. When a programme includes student placement or work enrichment activities, include an account of the effectiveness of the arrangements in place and whether they can be enhanced, using student and employer feedback. In the case of foundation degrees, include an account of the continuous involvement of employers in the programme design and assessment.

Student feedback

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

Feedback should be evaluated in the following areas:

- ▶ Teaching quality
- ▶ Learning resources
- ▶ Assessment and feedback to students on assessment
- ▶ Student support and guidance
- ▶ Personal development planning opportunities.

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



Learning resources, student support and staffing

Comment on the adequacy of learning support and physical and staffing resources. Evidence could include student evaluation, feedback from meetings involving student representatives, minutes of teaching and learning committees, programme committees (or equivalent), external examiners' reports, student progression and achievement data, and reports from professional accrediting bodies or the OfS, or QAA and programme validation or revalidation reports.

Include a staff list and ensure it reflects all staff appointed since the last monitoring cycle or the latest validation or revalidation activity, together with an evaluation of the consequences of staff turnover. The relevant academic reviewer needs to comment on the appropriateness of staff appointed and CVs of any new academic appointments should be submitted to OUVF throughout the year. The OU should be informed of any changes to the staff team, even if the changes are temporary.

Programme specification

Partners must confirm that the programme specifications and information to be published are up to date.

The following areas should also be checked by partners to ensure that:

- The programme description and reading list are up to date

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

Proposals for enhancement

Examples of enhancement include:

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

Partners must ensure that any major or moderate changes approved by the OU are thoroughly detailed and assessed for their impact on the programme and student experience, while also considering CMA requirements and the perspective of students as consumers. Programme teams also need to report on activity that has taken place to progress any recommendations made at (re)validation.

Intended learning outcomes

Partners are expected to review mechanisms and processes to ensure the programme continues to support the intended learning outcomes. They should critically reflect on this. This might include feedback from external sources such as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies or employers, student evaluation, graduates' feedback, comments from external examiners, student progression and achievement data, and employment and destination data.

Action plans

Partners must provide an action plan that addresses all issues (including CMA implications and active consent from students) arising from any evaluation or monitoring reviews. Both strengths and weaknesses should be included. The action plan should include the timescale and responsibility for each action.



E4 The Institutional and programme monitoring cycle

E4.1 Submission deadlines

Institutions are required to submit their institutional and programme monitoring reports on the dates agreed with their respective S/QPM. Submission dates are confirmed in the institutional and programme monitoring letter sent to all partner institutions.

The submission deadlines are typically set as below:

- ▶ Institutional overview: within eight weeks following the end of the academic year
- ▶ Programme evaluation; Submission A: within eight weeks of each registration deadline
- ▶ Programme evaluation; Submission B: within two weeks of each progression and award board of examiners
- ▶ Programme evaluation; Submission C: submitted alongside the institutional overview.

The above timescales may vary depending on partner-specific attributes including size, recruitment patterns and academic calendar structures and may need to be discussed with your S/QPM. Partners should note that the OU may also change these dates.

E4.2 OU Feedback on institutional reporting

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

Such comments may refer to:

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

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

Institutional and programme monitoring is reported to OUV's Annual Monitoring Review Group (AMRG) which reports to the university's Curriculum Partnerships Committee. Partners should retain documentation associated with institutional and programme monitoring so that the OU or outside agencies can review it, if necessary, in the context of a re-validation, the partnership development and reapproval process, or relevant accreditation review.

F: Assessment regulations and the external examiner process for validated partners

F1 Assessment regulations for validated awards

F1.1 Definition and purpose of assessment

Assessment is the means by which a student's ability, progress and achievement are measured against agreed criteria. It provides the basis on which decisions can be made about a student's learning needs and whether a student is ready to proceed or to qualify for an award. It also enables students to obtain feedback on their learning and helps them improve their performance. As such it must be an integrated aspect of a programme's teaching and learning strategy.

The purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the intended aims and learning outcomes of the programme of study, and achieved the standard required for the award they seek. The OU therefore requires that students are assessed in accordance with those aims and learning outcomes.

Assessment should be designed in a way that promotes effective learning, minimises the potential for plagiarism or other forms of unfair practice and encourages academic integrity.

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

A partner's arrangements for quality assuring assessment integrity are a key focus for the OU and monitors this closely following initial approval of a partner institution.

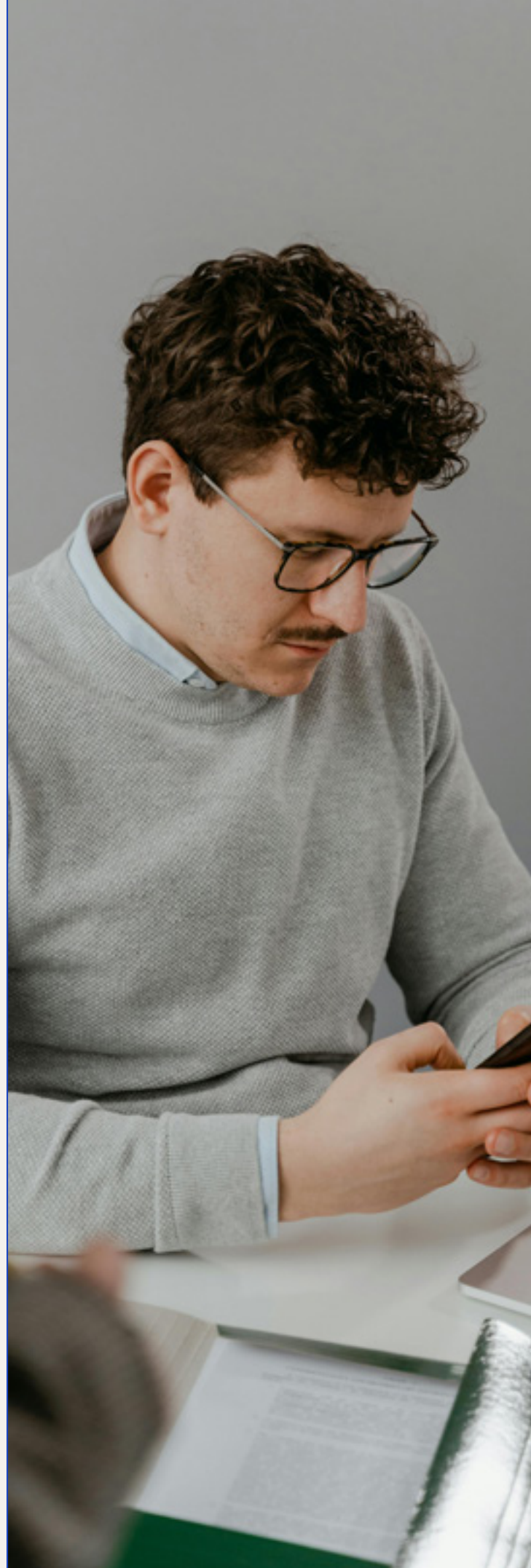
F1.2 Examiners' judgement

Assessment must be carried out by competent and impartial examiners, using methods that enable them to assess students fairly. In order to achieve this, the OU requires external examiners to review assessment that contributes towards an OU validated award, and to be involved whenever there

is progression from one level to the next in a validated programme. The external examiner role is to ensure that the individual student has a good learning experience and that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained. A key part of an external examiner's role includes confirmation of assessments topics and standards before they are issued to students.

Within the constraints imposed by the requirements of [Section F4](#), boards of examiners have discretion in reaching decisions on the awards to be recommended for individual learners. They are responsible for interpreting the regulations for validated awards of the OU and good practice in higher education. Their academic judgements cannot be questioned or overturned.

The OU's requirements related to the remit and powers of boards of examiners for validated awards are detailed further in [Section F4](#).



F1.3 Types and methods of assessment

Most assessment is likely to fall into one or more of the following categories:

- a.** Diagnostic assessment, providing an indicator of a learner's aptitude and readiness for a programme of study and identifying possible learning problems or study needs.
- b.** Formative assessment, designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development but does not count towards the students' final grades.
- c.** Summative assessment, providing a measure of a learner's achievement in relation to the intended learning outcomes of a programme of study, through formal grading which counts towards the final award.

A variety of assessment methods should be used. Each method may involve more than one of the three types of assessment defined above. The OU requires that the methods and types of assessment encourage and support effective student learning and relate closely to the learning outcomes and subject matter of the programme of study. The learning should be consistent with agreed subject benchmarks where available.

Programme assessment strategies must include compulsory forms of assessment that aim to ensure the integrity of the award (i.e. examinations, presentations, etc.). The module specifications should clearly state whether module grades are determined by a threshold score (40% at Levels 4, 5 and 6 and 50% at level 7) for each weighted assessment component (multiple assessment) or a

straight average of all the assessment tasks (single component assessment).

For single component assessment, students still need to demonstrate all the module learning outcomes and achieve an overall weighted average score of at least 40% at undergraduate level or 50% at postgraduate level. Approval of single component assessment strategies may also be subject to professional body requirements and are not normally permitted at Level 6.

For students taking single registerable modules, all assessments must meet module pass marks. Component compensation (also known as 'in module' compensation) is not permitted for registerable modules.



F1.4 Regulations on assessment

All new student cohorts on programmes leading to an OU validated award are subject to the regulations for validated awards of the OU.

The regulations for validated awards for the OU also apply to students on single registerable modules.

Each programme of study leading to a validated award must have assessment regulations covering all the matters set out in the sections below, in accordance with the OU's requirements and expectations. Assessment regulations governing different programmes need to be as consistent as possible across the partner institution. Assessment regulations specific to a programme of study are validated at the point of programme approval and subsequent revalidations.

The assessment regulations for a programme of study must state the basis on which students are assessed for an award. The assessment regulations for a programme of study must specify the criteria on which students will be assessed for an award. These regulations should align the assessment requirements with the general educational aims and learning outcomes for OU validated awards, the programme specification, and any special assessment requirements associated with the award. Assessment procedures must state clear criteria for marking and grading assessments, including learning outcomes-based assessment and assessment of employability skills. In order to support this, the module specifications need to identify which assessment elements must be achieved for the module to be passed (see Section 15 of the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#)).

Partners are expected to review the programme assessment regulations on a frequent basis to ensure they are still fit for purpose, and amend them as necessary. A review of assessment regulations can take place following discussion with the S/QPM, through the annual programme evaluation (as part of the institutional and programme monitoring process), engagement with external examiners, and preparations for revalidation. Any changes of a significant nature need to be approved by the OU (please see [Section D6](#) for more information).

F1.5 Scheduling, timing and volume of assessment

The scheduling, amount and weighting of assessment types must be appropriate to the level of the award, the programme of study and the delivery mode. These issues are considered at validation and revalidation, but partners should keep them under review and monitor their effectiveness. A fundamental principle of assessment is that the quantity and timing of assessments should ensure the evaluation of intended learning outcomes and facilitate the effective measurement of student achievement. Assessment scheduling must leave adequate time for students to reflect on their learning before being assessed, and so that they can benefit from feedback. Assessment must also be designed to minimise plagiarism and encourage academic integrity.

F1.6 Examination centres

If a partner intends to use a third-party examination centre, they must notify their S/QPM six months in advance of the examination date. If the centre is not affiliated with the British Council, the OU will make a decision regarding centre approval.

F1.7 Staff development and training related to assessment

The OU expects partners to provide any necessary support and training to members of academic staff involved in the assessment of students to ensure that they fully understand the application of assessment criteria. Partners also need to give administrative staff training so they understand the assessment regulations and can manage the administrative aspects of the assessment process effectively.

Good practice ensures the following are considered:

- ▶ Understand the assessment theory, practice and implementation, including the different purposes of formative and summative assessment
- ▶ Ensure effective ways of measuring the achievement of learning outcomes
- ▶ Ensure effective ways of engaging with students to enable and promote dialogue about, and reflective use of, feedback
- ▶ Awareness of the importance of designing assessments that minimise opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of unacceptable academic practice
- ▶ Have opportunities to learn about new approaches to assessment and devise new methods, as well as the best way to operate existing methods
- ▶ Develop awareness of assessment implications for a diverse range of students, including cultural diversity, differences in learning methods and the need for inclusivity
- ▶ Have other training opportunities related to the interpretation of regulations, chairing assessment meetings, and record-keeping at boards of examiners.





F1.8 Assessment guidelines to students

The assessment of an individual programme of study is subject to both regulations for validated awards of the OU and regulations specific to that programme, meaning students must be made aware of the detailed requirements of both sets of regulations.

The partner must ensure the assessment requirements for programmes of study that are made known to students include the type, volume, weighting and timings of assessments. This information should be given to students at the beginning of each study phase, before any assessment is taken. Assessment regulations for each programme must be included in the student handbook (or virtual learning environment).

F1.9 Feedback to students on performance

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their own performance. The OU requires partners to provide constructive and timely feedback to students on assessed work to promote effective learning and facilitate improvement. Academic staff need to be given adequate marking time for this to happen.

Feedback should be based on clear assessment criteria, giving students a good understanding of how their mark was derived, and how well learning outcomes have been met.

As noted in [Section F1.5](#) above, the scheduling of assessments must ensure that students can benefit from feedback, particularly in cases where summative assessment follows formative assessment.

F1.10 Assessment arrangements for students with impairments

If a student cannot be assessed by the methods specified in the assessment regulations, the OU expects partners to take steps to accommodate their needs by making special arrangements for examination or assessment.

The external examiner may agree a variation in the methods used, keeping in mind the programme's learning outcomes and the need to assess all students on equal terms.

The partner must have procedures in place for approving any special arrangements in advance of a student's first assessment. Partners must ensure reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate students' needs, and need to be mindful of any relevant legislation.

Failure to implement any special arrangements that have been formally agreed may be grounds for an appeal ([Section H](#) of the regulations for validated awards of the OU).

F1.11 Identification of all elements of assessment

Assessment regulations must cover all assessments which formally contribute to progression or final award recommendations, at the point in the programme that they are taken. Assessment regulations must identify all the elements to be assessed, including any assessed supervised work experience.

Regulations and module specifications must specify which or how many elements must be passed to obtain an award and what weighting each carry in the assessments.

The minimum and maximum number of elements to be attempted must be identified in the regulations and module specifications.

Regulations for validated awards of the OU define when and how each of the assessment elements are assessed by internal examiners, and the role of external examiners in moderating assessment.

F1.12 Processes for internal moderation of marks

The OU expects partners to have transparent and fair mechanisms for internal marking and moderation of marks. The QAA Quality Code states that clear assessment criteria and, where appropriate, marking schemes are key factors in assuring that marking is conducted fairly and consistently.

Assessment regulations must specify arrangements for second marking by internal examiners and other measures used to ensure the first round of marking is fair and consistent with the marking scheme, and to ensure

comparability of assessment across a cohort. Partner institutions must establish procedures to ensure that marks generated by a first marker (or marking team) are scrutinised to verify the appropriateness of the marking and to provide a second judgment, especially for very good/poor performances

In accordance with good practice, partners are asked to consult the regulations for validated awards of the OU and associated policies when considering the following:

- ▶ How borderline marks or grades are defined and treated. The board of examiners can consider borderline only in exceptional circumstances (See the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#), Section 19.5.)
- ▶ When assessing larger groups of students, a partner must define the criteria for sampling of assessment for the purposes of moderation. This includes the size of the sample to be drawn from each group of assessed work
- ▶ The circumstances that warrant the third marking of a whole batch of scripts due to significant discrepancies between the first and second markings
- ▶ The method of reconciliation of the first and second marking where applicable. If two markers cannot agree a final mark, a third marker (if this stage is included in the partner institution's assessment policy), the board of examiners or a subsidiary committee, will determine a final mark in consultation with external examiners
- ▶ In order to ensure consistency and fairness to students, how amendments to sample marks as a result of internal moderation must be applied to the rest of the cohort.

F1.13 External moderation of marks

Following internal moderation, all assessment that contributes towards an award must be moderated by external examiners, and advice provided to internal examiners as appropriate. The sample selected for external moderation normally includes all summative work for an agreed selection of students from a given cohort, based on the marks agreed by internal examiners.

When students are taking single registerable modules, these must form part of the sample to the external examiner, as well as the sample for programme students on the same module.

F1.14 Provision for exit awards

Programme specifications must make provision for exit awards at intermediate levels, and clear achievement criteria must be stated. These are approved by the OU at validation and revalidation.

Exit awards can only be classified as pass or fail. A distinction or merit cannot be given for an exit award.

Similarly, awards of credit for those on single registerable modules are only classified as pass or fail.

F1.15 Penalties for late or non-submission of work

The regulations for validated awards of the OU set out the consequences and penalties incurred for late or non-submission of material for assessment. This information must be widely available to students.

F1.16 Identification of requirements from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Programme regulations must clearly set out specific assessment requirements that have to be met in relation to professional bodies, or accreditation requirements relevant to the programme of study.

Programme regulations must clearly set out assessments under the regulatory framework of another awarding body that counts to the award.

F1.17 Programme regulations on progression and attendance

Partner institution programme regulations must set out the way(s) students' progress through the programme and identify the compulsory and optional elements.

When attendance is compulsory for certain elements, regulations must detail the attendance requirements students have to meet.

Regulations must detail any formal arrangements designed to monitor students' progress and warn students of possible failure.

Regulations must specify the provision for exclusion from the programme on academic grounds.

F1.18 Definitions of academic misconduct

The regulations for validated awards of the OU define misconduct in respect of assessment. In particular, it defines what constitutes cheating or plagiarism. The partner institutions' regulations must also set out penalties and provide procedures for when these offences are suspected or alleged.



F1.19 Procedures for dealing with academic misconduct

Boards of examiners should be responsible for confirming any decisions related to suspected cases of misconduct that have been reported to the exam board via an academic misconduct panel or equivalent. As part of the regulations for validated awards of the OU, the OU requires partner institutions to have detailed procedures for investigating and documenting alleged misconduct in assessment within the following broad guidelines:

- When a case of misconduct is suspected, the board of examiners should make a decision on the candidate's result until the facts have been established. The partner should establish a process that allows all evidence to be collated and documented by a formal panel before a case is reported to the board of examiners
- When a case of misconduct has been established, the academic misconduct panel or equivalent should decide the significance of the academic misdemeanour and exercise its discretion as appropriate to the case. If it is established that a student has attempted to gain an unfair advantage, the panel should have the authority to rule that the student has failed part or all of the assessments, and the authority to determine whether or not the student should be allowed a reassessment
- All such cases should be treated seriously and should be reported to the board of examiners and passed to the academic board to note

- When evidence becomes available, following the recommendation of the board of examiners, it should be possible for the matter to be reopened
- Procedures dealing with misconduct must be applied consistently across the validated provision. Partners must establish procedures that allow an institution-wide overview, including the AMBeR Tariff.

F1.20 Reassessment and resits

Within Section 17 of the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#), guidance is provided on options for the repeat of study, including partial and full repeat of a stage.

Boards of examiners have discretion to interpret regulations for reassessment on a case-by-case basis. This is subject to the requirements of the OU's principle that a validated award is only made when a candidate has fulfilled the programme's learning outcomes and achieved the required standard.

Regulations make it clear that boards of examiners should not unreasonably withhold permission for a student to be reassessed in accordance with the regulations.

The reassessment section of the regulations provides guidance to boards of examiners and students on the circumstances under which consideration will be made for:

- a. compensation
- b. resit failed assessment

- c. retaking a module
- d. taking a replacement assessment
- e. taking an alternative replacement module (only in specific circumstances)

Reassessment regulations also specify the criteria for the capping of marks for reassessed elements. Students who have already passed a module or assessed elements within a module are not allowed to be reassessed for that module or element, nor can they retake it in order to improve marks.

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

If programme regulations permit it, the board of examiners may decide the candidate has achieved the level required for a lower award and may offer the candidate the choice of accepting the lower award immediately or resitting for the higher award.



F1.21 Reassessment regulations specific to professional doctorates

Candidates studying for a professional doctorate award who fail to satisfy their examination panel in their first attempt in the viva voce award assessment may be permitted, at the discretion of the examination panel, to resubmit for re-examination once only. Programme regulations need to make clear the conditions under which resubmission and re-examination for the viva voce component of the doctorate is permitted and, where appropriate, the circumstances under which the award of a master’s degree or postgraduate diploma may be recommended.¹

F1.22 Provisions for compensation

Within the regulations for validated awards of the OU, conditions for the application of compensation at stage level – that is, within a specific year or level of study – are clearly outlined.

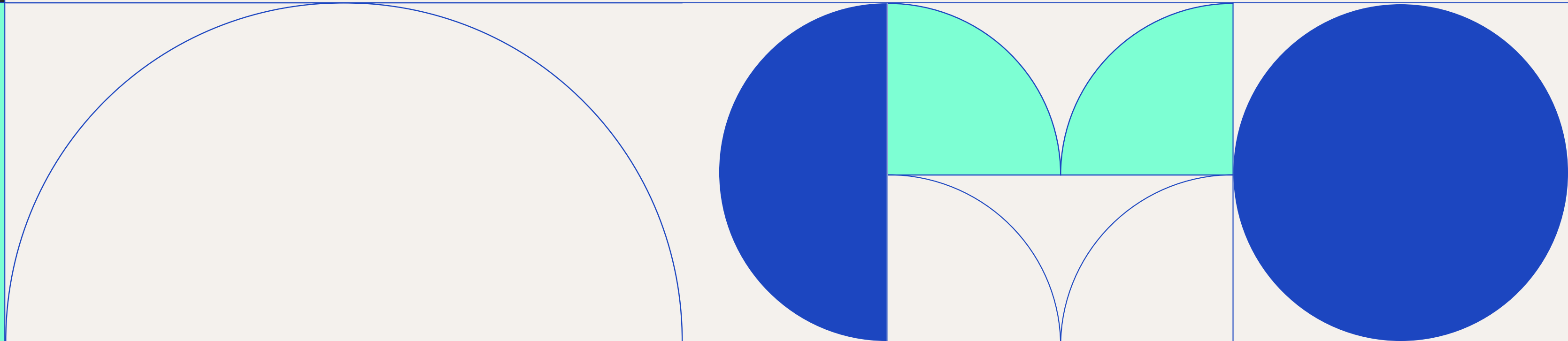
¹ From 2022, Doctrates are managed by the OU Graduate School

Assessment regulations and/or module specifications must make clear any compensation provision for failure in assessment and identify any elements that may under no circumstances be the subject of compensation for failure. Compensation should not be applied to an element:

- ▶ that forms a substantial proportion of the assessment for the award
- ▶ that is central to the fulfilment of programme aims
- ▶ that is specifically precluded from compensation by programme regulations
- ▶ that is being studied as a single registerable module.

F1.23 Extenuating circumstances

Section F of the [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#) provides information on procedures for extenuating circumstances.





F1.24 Aegrotat

If available, an Aegrotat award may be recommended when the board of examiners does not have enough evidence of the student’s performance to recommend the relevant award or a lower award specified in the programme regulations, but is satisfied that the student would have reached the required standard had it not been for illness or some other valid reason.

Before an Aegrotat recommendation is submitted to the OU, the student or their next of kin must have signified willingness to accept the award and understand that this implies waiving the right to be reassessed.

F1.25 Provision for viva voce examination

Section 16 of the regulations for validated awards of the OU provides information on provision for viva voce examination.

F1.26 Procedures for the conduct of assessment

As well as procedures in the regulations for validated awards of the OU, partner institutions must produce regulations or codes of practice that set out arrangements for the conduct of assessments including:

- Respective student and staff responsibilities. This should include any requirements for staff to mark and return annotated work in a timely manner, for example, or requirements for students to retain material for a specified period
- Invigilation requirements setting out the minimum ratio of invigilators to candidates, for example, and the duties of invigilators for collection and handling of scripts
- Arrangements to ensure the security of assessment papers and other forms

of assessment, such as arrangements for tracking and returning drafts sent to external examiners and originals sent for secure printing

- Arrangements to ensure students taking an assessment are the same as those against whose names the marks are recorded by – by checking against (photo) identification, for example
- Special arrangements that may be necessary for the assessment of materials based on work placements or periods of study abroad, when the assessment cannot be conducted by an overseas partner
- Arrangements for recording and publishing assessment decisions, communicating results to students and clarifying when results will be ratified if they are provisional

- Arrangements for the retention of assessed materials (in line with the [guidance from the OfS](#)), whether by students or the partner, until the last opportunity for appeal has passed
- The procedures and arrangements above are monitored by the OU at partnership development approval and reapproval through the policy compliance review. Partners are also required to report any significant changes to processes in their annual monitoring or institutional and programme monitoring report.

F1.27 Validated partner academic appeals and complaints procedures

Academic appeals and complaints procedures

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

Every partner should have a clearly defined process for academic appeals and complaints, with a stage for escalation to the OU.

These stages should be:

- **Stage one** – Informal internal consideration (by the partner)
- **Stage two** – Formal internal consideration (by the partner)
- **Stage three** – Referral/escalation to OU review.

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

- How they can submit an appeal and/or complaint
- The role of an advocate and how a student can be supported during the process
- Group appeals/complaints
- Confidentiality
- How feedback from stakeholders helps improve policy and procedures.



Academic appeals

The OIA defines an academic appeal as “**a challenge to or request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body that makes decisions on student progress, assessment and awards.**” This may include a request to change marks or progress decisions, or final award classifications.

An academic appeal policy and procedure should set out the grounds on which an appeal will be accepted, including information on not accepting appeals against academic judgement. Students have the right to appeal the outcome of other internal procedures, such as academic misconduct and fitness to study/practice decisions. Therefore, the appeal route should be made clear to the students.

It should be explained to the student how their academic appeal will be investigated and by who, as well as the involvement of the academic board or board of examiners.

Complaints

The OIA defines a complaint as “**an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider**”.

The complaints policy and procedure should set out what the partner considers is a complaint and give examples to help the student. The partner should also consider whether administrative appeals are covered under their complaints policy and procedure.

The complaints policy and procedure should explain how students can make complaints about staff or other students and whether they are dealt with under the complaints policy or another specific policy, such as harassment and bullying policy.

Timeframes

It is important that students are aware of the timeframes involved in each process: **The OIA good practice framework states that each process should be completed within 90 calendar days from the start of the formal stage.**

This means the stage two formal process and the stage three OU review process need to be completed within 90 calendar days.

- **Stage one** – Informal internal consideration (by the partner)
- **Stage two** – Formal internal consideration (by the partner) – 24 calendar days to carry out and complete
- Partner issues ‘Completion of Internal Procedures’ letter to student
- Student time given in which to then contact the OU – 28 calendar days
- **Stage three** – Formal referral/escalation to OU review – 28 working days/38 calendar days to carry out and complete.

Please refer to [Appendix 1](#) for a table outlining these timescales in more detail.

OU escalation/review stage

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

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

The partner institution has the right to be heard and to present its case regarding any formal appeal or complaint made against it to the OU.

In such cases a partner is expected to:

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

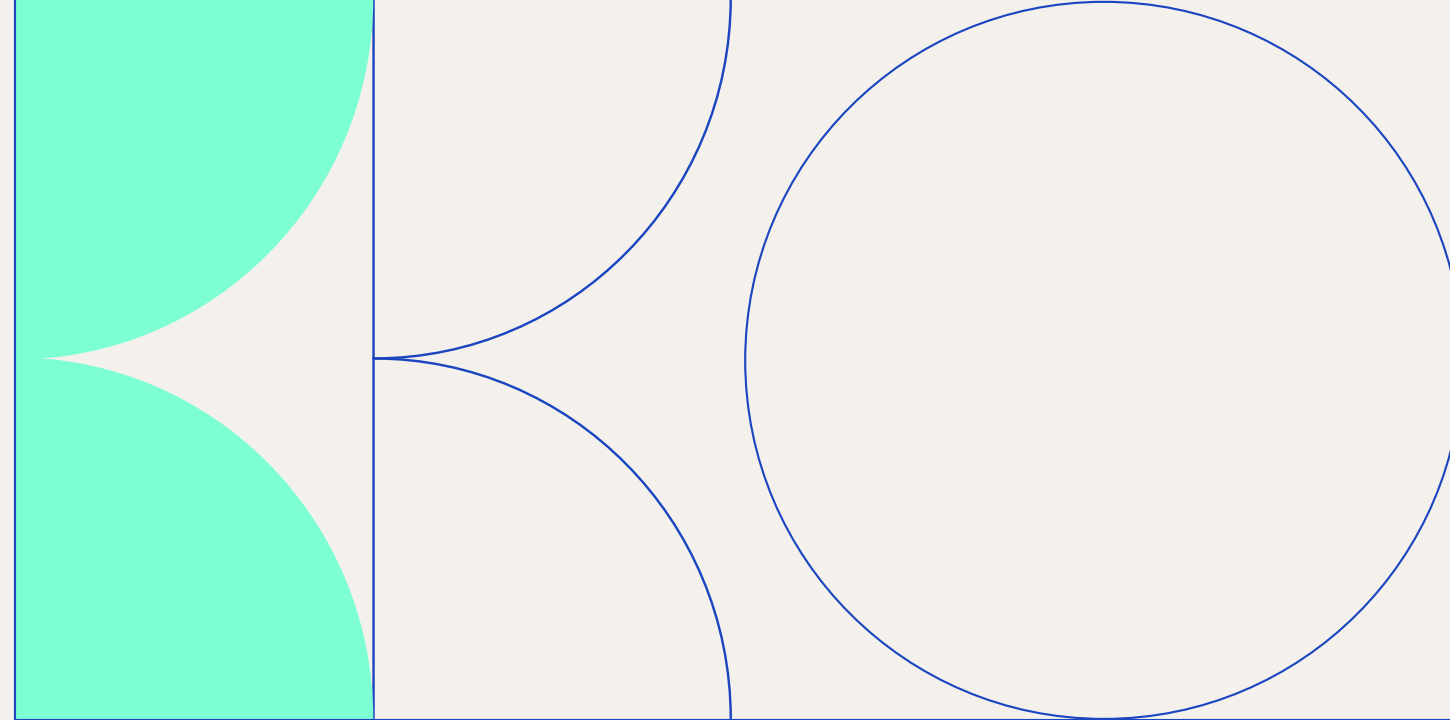


Report to OU

As part of institutional and programme monitoring, partner institutions need to provide an annual report containing an analysis of how cases of academic appeals and complaints have been dealt with, including the nature and outcomes of such cases. The OU reserves the right to require a further report from the academic board if it has reason to believe that the standard of a validated award is at risk or that the regulations for validated awards of the OU might have been breached. The OU will intervene directly if concerns remain after all institutional procedures have been exhausted.

The regulations for validated awards of the OU, [Section H](#), provides information on academic appeals and complaints, including information on:

- ▶ General requirements related to appeals and complaints procedures
- ▶ Grounds for appeal
- ▶ Consideration of appeals by the academic board or its appointed sub-committee
- ▶ Procedures of the appeals committee or equivalent
- ▶ Consequences of established cases of procedural irregularity
- ▶ Action following completion of complaint or appeal procedures.



F1.28 Staff at partner institutions studying their OU validated awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalised procedures for assessing any of their own staff that are taking any OU validated provision.

The procedure should be as follows:

- a. The OU should be made aware at the beginning of each academic year if any members of staff have enrolled on OU validated provision
- b. The external examiner for the programme(s) in question should be made aware of any employees taking the award
- c. All summative assessments taken by employees must form part of the sample sent to the external examiner
- d. Funding bodies should be made explicitly aware of any employees taking an award as part of an apprenticeship framework to ensure they meet the funding eligibility criteria
- e. Minutes from the academic board, or equivalent meeting, where any changes to procedures are approved to safeguard the integrity of the award should be forwarded to the OU, along with the amended procedures
- f. An employee cannot be a member of the examination board for an award they are working towards

- g. A declaration document should be produced for the employees and their line manager to sign, confirming that they do not have access to beneficial assignment or examination material in relation to the award. The document should also state that the employee and their line-manager are responsible for informing the examination board and university if this situation changes during the course of their studies so appropriate action can be taken. Copies of the declaration form should be sent to the OU when registering employees for the award.

F2 Regulations relating to external examiners

See relevant sections of the QAA Quality Code 2024.

The following are available on the OUVF website and QAA website respectively:

- [Guide for External Examiners of OU Validated Awards](#)
- [External Examiner Report Template](#)
- [Application forms for appointment/extension of appointment of External Examiners](#)
- [External Examining principles UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment \(UKSCQA\)](#)

F2.1 Validated partners responsibilities related to external examiners

Partner institutions are responsible for:

- ▶ nominating external examiners
- ▶ providing external examiners with briefing and induction (in addition to OU briefing)
- ▶ seeking approval from the external examiners for the assessment briefs at the start of each academic year
- ▶ ensuring external examiners are sent samples of student work in a timely manner (at least five working days) in advance of any boards of examiners
- ▶ managing boards of examiners
- ▶ ensuring external examiner reports are formally considered and appropriate action is taken, where necessary
- ▶ providing external examiners with a response detailing the actions taken after receiving their reports

- ▶ providing the OU with an account of the responses made to the issues raised by external examiners in the institutional and programme monitoring
- ▶ making external examiners’ reports available to students in full, with the sole exception of any confidential reports made directly to the head of the partner institution
- ▶ including the name, position, and institution of their external examiners in module or programme information provided to students. External examiners must refer any direct correspondence from students back to the partner institution. Partner institutions should include this advice in their guidance to external examiners.

It is the partner institution’s responsibility to manage the working relationship with external examiners.

F2.2 The OU’s responsibilities related to external examiners

External examiners are appointed by and report to the OU. The terms under which they engage with the partner institution and the programmes to which they are appointed are those determined by the OU.

The OU sets the regulations and procedures related to external examining and keeps them under review.

The external examiner role is critical to the OU’s confidence in the quality and standards of its validated provision. The OU places great value on the external examiner system and requires partner institutions to make responding to their advice and feedback a top priority.

F2.3 The rights and responsibilities of external examiners of OU validated programmes

The OU appoints external examiners for two main reasons: to benefit from their direct experience of relevant standards in other universities, and so that its examining methods and processes to external assessment.

The role of external examiners appointed by the OU for a validated programme or group of modules is to ensure that each student has a positive learning experience, and that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained.

In order to carry out their responsibilities, external examiners must:

- ▶ Be able to assess students impartially, on the basis of the work submitted for assessment, without being influenced by their previous association with the programme, the staff or any other students
- ▶ Be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers taking comparable higher education programmes in the UK, and in the light of subject benchmarks and qualification descriptors, as appropriate
- ▶ Moderate and approve the final draft of each examination paper or end-of-module component, using with the related marking scheme or notes for the guidance of markers. This activity should include scrutinising the form and content of examination papers, coursework and other assessments

(including assessment drafted for resit/retake opportunities), for all award levels in a way that enables the external examiners to determine whether students have fulfilled the programme's aims and learning outcomes and reached the required standard. This activity should include alternative assessments and adjustments made for students with declared disabilities or impairments, to ensure all students are assessed fairly in relation to the programme syllabus and regulations

- ▶ Be consulted about and agree to any proposed changes to the approved assessment regulations or assessment strategy which will directly affect students currently on a programme
- ▶ Have access to all assessed work, and see samples of the work of students proposed for each category of award and for failure, to ensure assessment criteria have been interpreted correctly and that there is parity of assessment across the cohort
- ▶ Consider the reliability of the mode of monitoring the marks of module assessments and the final end-of-module component (e.g. examination) and report to the board of examiners on any revisions they consider necessary
- ▶ Have the right to moderate the marks awarded by internal examiners where it is within the

programme regulations and if does not bias the overall assessment or cause unfairness to individual candidates

- ▶ After consultation with the partner have the right to meet students and, where appropriate, conduct a viva voce examination of any candidate
- ▶ Ensure that assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved programme regulations
- ▶ Attend board of examiners meetings where decisions on recommendations for award are made, ensuring that the recommendations have been reached in accordance with the OU's requirements and normal practice in UK higher education
- ▶ Participate as required in any review of decisions about individual students' awards taken during the examiner's period of office
- ▶ Report back to the OU and the partner institution on student performance and academic standards, as well as on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them
- ▶ Report in confidence to the OU's vice-chancellor on any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments which put the standard of the OU's validated award at risk.

Within the terms of programme regulations, it is for external examiners to decide in detail how to fulfil the responsibilities described above. The OU requires programme regulations for validated awards to describe the nature and methods of assessment and show how external examiners will be involved in assessment. External examiners should be involved in all assessments and the recommendation of an award, including progression from one stage of the programme to the next.

Programme regulations related to external examining must take into account how any tiered boards of examiners operate, where applicable. As noted in [Section F4](#), terms of reference of subsidiary boards need to be approved by the OU, normally at validation and revalidation.

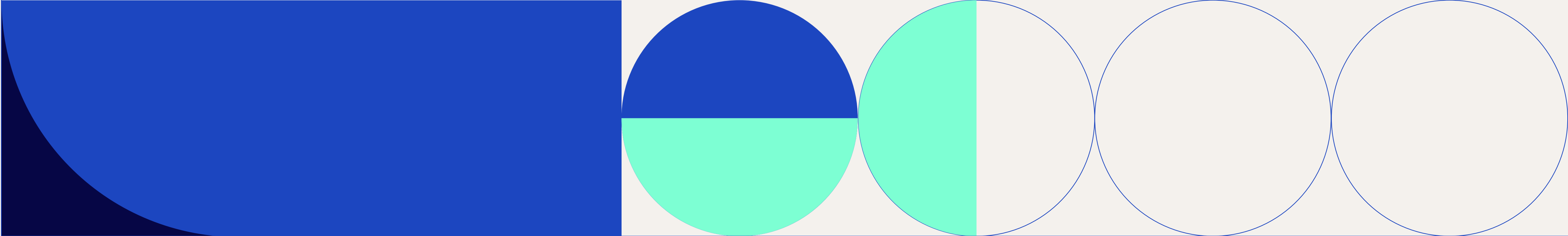
F2.4 Criteria for the appointment of external examiners

An external examiner should be a senior member of another university or have appropriate standing, expertise and experience to maintain academic standards in the context of UK higher education as a whole, as indicated by accepted attainments and standing.

The OU will only approve external examiner nominations if the nominee can show appropriate evidence of the criteria below. These must be considered by partner institutions when nominating external examiners to the OU. They are adopted by the OU when scrutinising nominations by appraisers for approval. The external examiner must:

- ▶ Be resident in the UK and have the right to work in the UK. As part of the appointment process, the OU undertakes checks to ensure these criteria are met to our satisfaction
- ▶ Possess knowledge and understanding of the current UK sector-agreed reference points for maintaining academic standards and ensuring and enhancing quality
- ▶ Be fluent in English. When programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, they must have fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information required to make their assessments)

- ▶ Have competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof
- ▶ Possess relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- ▶ Have sufficient standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the discipline to command the respect of academic peers and, where appropriate, professional peers
- ▶ Have competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject, and operating assessment procedures in assessing students in the subject area concerned
- ▶ Are aware of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula
- ▶ Are familiar with the standard expected of students to achieve the award being assessed
- ▶ Possess the competence and experience necessary to enhance the student learning experience
- ▶ Meet applicable criteria set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.



F2.5 Other considerations when nominating external examiners

External examiners should be selected from a variety of institutional and professional contexts and traditions, ensuring the programme benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. There should be appropriate balance and expertise in the team of external examiners, including:

- ▶ Examining experience
- ▶ Academic and professional practitioners
- ▶ The range of academic perspectives
- ▶ Members from different types of institution of higher education.

If someone is appointed who doesn't have external examining experience, they should join a more experienced team and/or with the agreement that a more experienced external examiner from within the same institution (to which they are being appointed) will act as a mentor. It may also be possible to arrange mentoring across institutions for those who do not have a sufficient number of external examiners to arrange this internally. Ensuring continuity within the external examiner team is key to when managing external examiner appointments. One way of ensuring continuity is to phase appointments.

Ideally, a programme area should not appoint an external examiner from any institution that has supplied examiners for that area within the preceding five years.

F2.6 Conflicts of interest

An External Examiner must be independent of the module on which they serve.

The OU will not approve the appointment of anyone who:

- ▶ Is a member of a governing body or committee of the OU or one of its collaborative partner institutions, or a current employee of the OU or its collaborative partners
- ▶ Is a member of a governing body or committee of the partner institution or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the partner institution or its collaborative partners
- ▶ Has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the programme of study or related single registerable module(s)
- ▶ Is required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study or related single registerable module(s)

- ▶ Is, or knows they will be, in a position to significantly influence the future of students on the programme of study or related single registerable module(s)
- ▶ Is currently, or has recently been, involved in substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme or module(s) in question
- ▶ Is a former member of staff or student of the OU unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
- ▶ Is a former member of staff or student of the partner institution, unless a period of five years has elapsed, and all students taught by or with the external examiner have completed their programme(s)
- ▶ Would replace an external examiner from the same department in the same institution
- ▶ Is from the same department of the same institution as another member of that team of external examiners
- ▶ Is a consultant to the module/programme team, or if they contributed to writing the teaching materials. (In exceptional circumstances, the OU may approve the appointment of a person who contributed to the

module/programme as external examiner, provided this is not when the module is first presented, and that there is no other eligible person available to serve.)

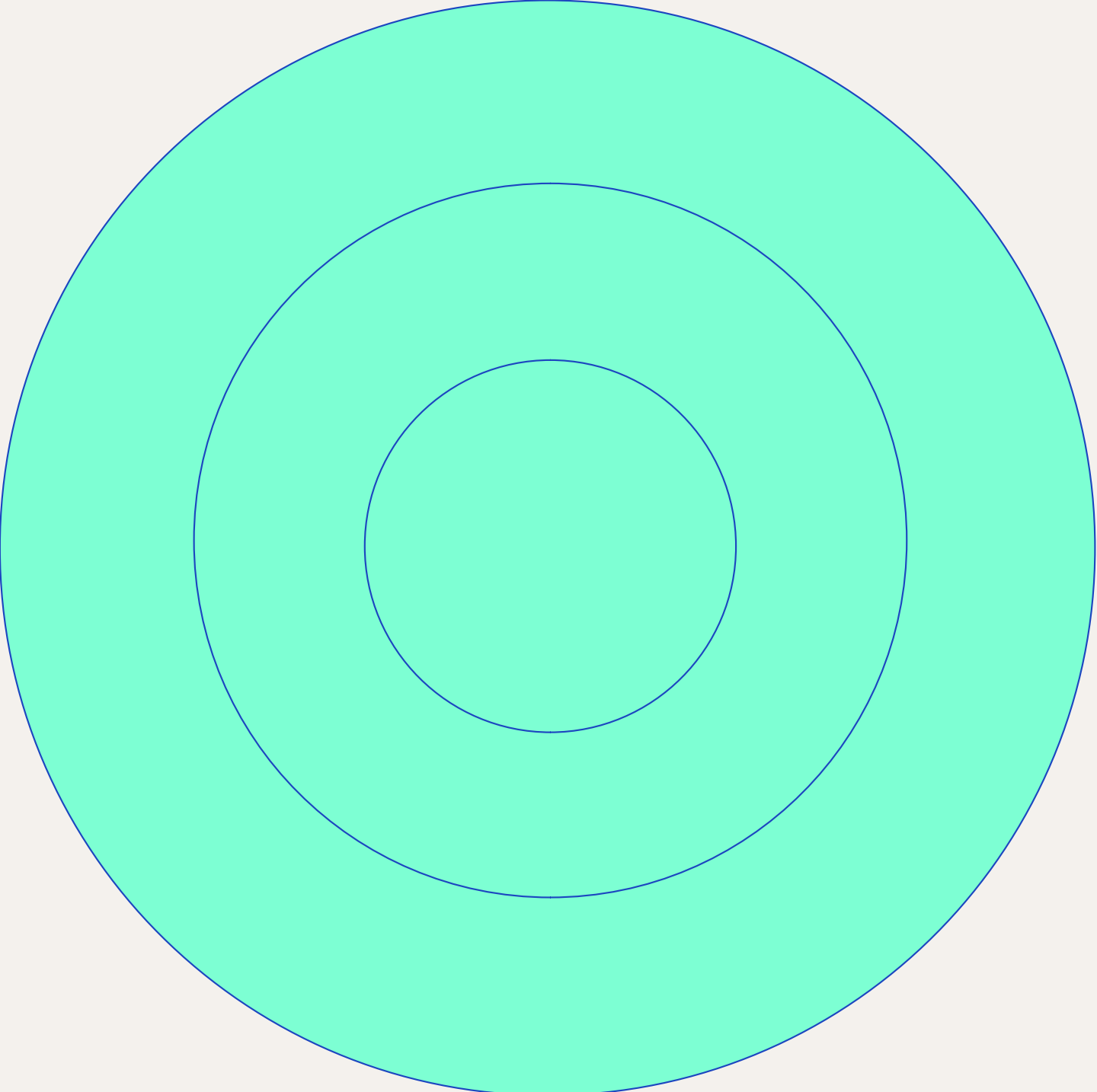
- Has had further engagement with the partner institution beyond their external examiner responsibilities (unless approved by the OU).

There must not be a reciprocal external examining arrangement involving cognate programmes in two institutions.

A proposed external examiner should not have been appointed to examine at another OU partner institution within the past five years.

Examiners should not have too heavy a workload in respect of external examining duties. An examiner should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes/modules at any point in time, including the OU appointment.

A proposed external examiner should not have been an examiner on a cognate programme within the partner institution.





F2.7 Nomination of OU staff as external examiners

The following categories of people are not eligible for appointment as external examiners on any validated award:

- ▶ All salaried staff of the OU (including associate lecturers)
- ▶ OU residential school staff
- ▶ Visiting members of academic staff
- ▶ Part-time members of OU academic staff holding dual appointments.

F2.8 Nomination of individuals retired from their academic or professional posts

The OU expects external examiner nominations to be individuals who hold current substantive academic or professional posts. However, retirees can be considered provided they have retired recently and still have an affiliation with a UK institution of higher education. The OU will consider such nominations provided a robust case can be made for that person's continuing academic or professional currency for the duration of the proposed appointment.

F2.9 The nomination process

The OU has standard forms for the nomination of external examiners, which can be downloaded from the OUVF website in the [Supporting information: external examiners](#) section.

The OU organises the appraisal of external examiner nominations. In all cases, the OU retains responsibility for approving and appointing external examiners for its validated awards.

When recommending individuals as external examiners for a programme or modules, appraisers seek to ensure that the external examiners will be competent and impartial.

Partners must ensure nominations arrive at least six months before the examiner assumes their duties. A nomination should be made on the appropriate application form and include the nominee's current and detailed CV. The nominee's CV should be submitted electronically. When considering nominations, partners are asked to ensure there remains an appropriate balance and diversity on the board of examiners to ensure students are fairly assessed.

A nomination may be rejected by the OU at any stage. When that happens, a partner may be asked to provide a new nomination or the OU may appoint an external examiner of our choosing. And further details or clarification may be requested from the nominating partner at any point.

F2.10 Approval and appointment of external examiners

All external examiner appointments are made by the OU. The OU follows our approval process before making any appointment. External examiners formally report to the OU but are asked to send copies of their reports to the partner institution as well.

F2.11 External examiners' term of office

New examiners should take up their appointments on or before the retirement of their predecessors. External examiners should remain available after the last assessments (including resit boards) they are associated with in order to deal with any subsequent review decisions.

External examiner appointments normally last four years, although in exceptional circumstances, extensions can be granted of up to one year to ensure continuity. This includes any time already served as an external advisor or assessor on the same module or programme if the programme was validated with a different university prior to OU validation. And it is not dependent on the frequency of presentation of the programme or module.

An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances, but only after a period of five years or more has elapsed since their last appointment.

If external examiners change jobs, a revised CV must be submitted to the OU to ensure they are still eligible to externally examine their appointed programmes (see F2.5–F2.9). If an external examiner takes on additional external examining duties during the period of their tenure, the S/QPM must be informed.

If an external examiner retires whilst in appointment, they will remain as the external examiner for the remainder of the academic year and up to two years following retirement. If the external examiner continues to have an affiliation with a UK institution of higher education, they can remain in post for the full duration of their contract.

F2.12 Requests for extension of approval of external examiners

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

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

F2.13 Notification of decisions

External examiners are appointed by the OU, with the OU sending an offer of appointment to the approved nominee. Once the examiner has returned their contract acceptance form and any right to work checks are completed, the OU sends an approval letter to the head of the partner institution, copied to the institutional primary contact.

The OU writes to all newly appointed external examiners, providing them with a copy of the most recent validation report for the programme(s)/modules they have been appointed to, together with some briefing material. The OU also provides an official briefing, which consists mainly of clarification regarding the OU's expectations, reporting lines, and the relationship between examiners, partner institutions, and the OU. As noted in [Section F3](#), partner institutions are required to supplement this material with a range of institution-specific induction and briefing material for external examiners.

F2.14 Payment of fees

The OU is responsible for paying external examiner fees and expenses.

F2.15 Termination of approval of external examiners

The OU retains responsibility for terminating external examiner appointments. If a partner institution wishes to terminate an external examiner's appointment, the OU has to be informed of the grounds for termination and approve the termination. A reasonable minimum period of notice should apply. If possible, termination should occur at a natural point in the assessment cycle, such as after the last meeting of the board of examiners at the end of the academic year.

If an external examiner resigns, the OU should be informed immediately.

The OU reserves the right to terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time, subject to approved university procedures – if the external examiner has failed to fulfil their obligations, for example, or failed to produce reports in a timely manner or to an appropriate standard.

Other circumstances that may constitute grounds for termination include:

- Failure to attend a board of examiners meeting without good reason
- A new conflict of interest has arisen that cannot be resolved (e.g. due to the external examiner's position changing post appointment)
- Discontinuation of the programme.

F2.16 Chief external examiners

The OU may appoint a chief external examiner should the approved board of examiners' arrangements require it. The approval of the appointment of a chief external examiner is subject to the criteria set out in [Section F2.5](#).

The chief external examiner role can be useful in a variety of situations. For example:

- For partners which use a tiered exam board system
- By partners who have a large provision and wish to oversee exam board decisions at faculty/school level.

The chief external examiner should work closely with the partner institution and OUVF, approaching their role with flexibility to ensure they create additional value for the individual programme/subject level external examiners and institution programme teams.

The following guidance on the role of chief external examiners gives some ideas on how their role may be developed. OUVF anticipate that following the appointment of a chief external examiner, discussions are held with the partner institution and the S/QPM to formalise key areas of activity.

Guidance on the role of chief external examiners

- Be able to review a sample of student work from selected modules across the programmes
- As a last resort, confirm grades if external examiners cannot be physically present (this normally means the external examiner contacting the chief external examiner with a written report, confirming they have seen the work and agree with the grades, and providing the chief external examiner with their comments)
- Be able to make observations on the conduct of the exam boards
- Discuss the effectiveness of the team of external examiners with registry
- Mentor any new external examiners who aren't experienced in external examining
- Identify where there are disparities, areas of concern or good practice across the faculty provision.

F2.17 External examiners' reports

Following each board of examiners meeting, external examiners must submit a report to the partner institution's academic board and the OU, detailing the conduct of the assessments which have just concluded, and the standards being set and achieved. This includes:

- Whether the standards set are appropriate for the award by referring to any agreed subject benchmarks, qualifications frameworks, programme specifications or other relevant information
- The quality of the students' work and their knowledge and skills in relation to their peers on comparable programmes
- Students' strengths and weaknesses
- The quality of teaching and learning, as indicated by student performance
- The quality of the curriculum, course materials and learning resources
- The quality and fairness of the assessments, in particular their design and structure, how they relate to the programme's stated objectives and learning outcomes, and the marking
- Good practice and innovative learning, teaching and assessment
- Opportunities to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities
- When the programme has specific work-related learning outcomes (e.g. foundation degrees), the assessment and achievement of these outcomes, including employers' involvement, where relevant

- The administration of the assessments, how examination boards operate, briefing of external examiners, access of external examiners to essential materials, etc
- Whether any issues identified in previous external examiners' reports have been addressed by the partner.

These reports should be received no later than one month following the board of examiners' final meeting at which progression and awards are decided. Reports must be received in the relevant academic year for payment to be made. The OU has a [template for the submission of reports](#) which external examiners must use.

The purpose of the report is to enable the OU and the partner to decide whether the programme is meeting its stated objectives and to make any necessary improvements, either immediately or at the next revalidation. Partners need to give detailed written feedback to external examiners on action taken in response to their reports, and provide an update to the OU via the institutional and programme monitoring/annual monitoring process.

Under their institutional agreement, partner institutions are required to provide the OU with an annual report for approved programmes, including an account of responses to the issues raised by external examiners. If an external examiner's report raises issues that question the quality of the programme or the standard of the award, the OU requires an immediate account of the measures being put in place to consider the issues, and identify and rectify any deficiencies.

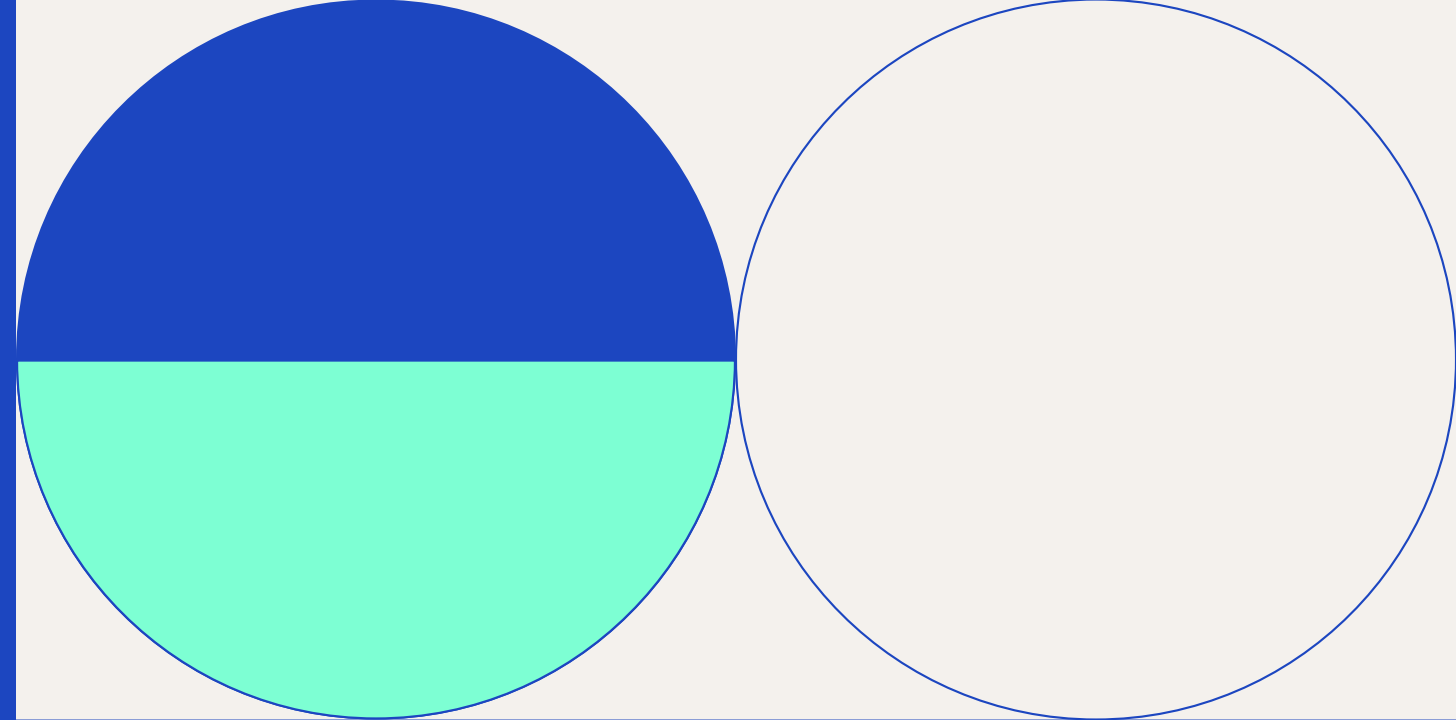
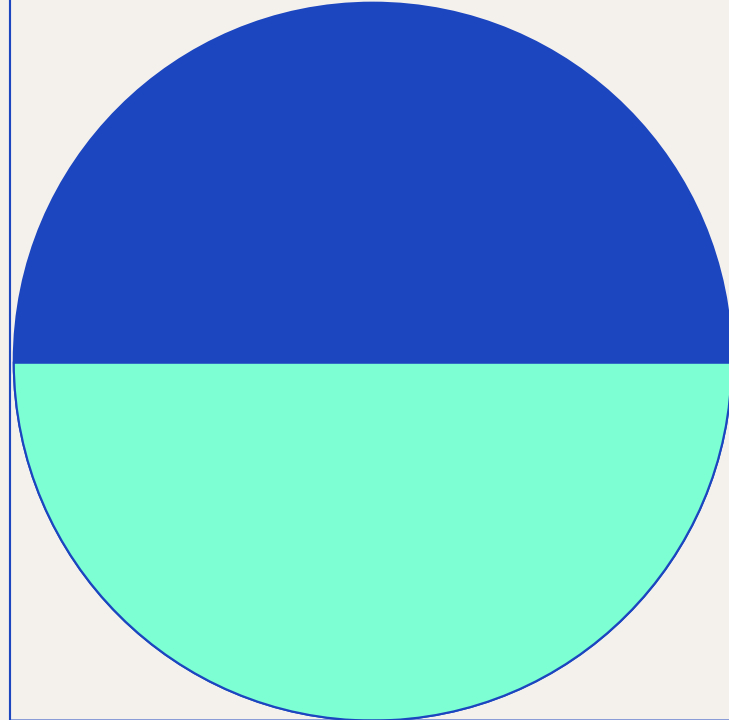
The OU has to provide a considered and timely response to any confidential report it receives, outlining any actions we will be taking or require the partner institution to take as a result.

Partner institutions must make external examiners' reports available in full to students, with the sole exception of confidential reports made directly to the head of the institution.

If external examiners' reports are too brief or too broadly phrased to provide an agenda for quality enhancement opportunities, the OU is responsible for taking appropriate action to ensure that more comprehensive reports are submitted in future.

If an external examiner has serious concerns about systemic failings regarding the academic standards of a programme or programmes, and they have exhausted all published applicable internal procedures (including submitting a confidential report to the head of the institution) they may invoke the [QAA's Access to Higher Education Concerns Scheme](#) and/or inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body.

The report presented at the end of an external examiner's term of office should include a brief retrospective on their experience and perceptions of the programme/module throughout their association with it.



F3 External examiner briefing

F3.1 Introduction

The OU provides external examiners with a briefing and induction. This section gives partner institutions guidance on local briefing and induction of new external examiners. The OU recommends that each partner institution develops a set of briefing documents for their external examiners to supplement the regulations set out in [Section F2](#), to give a range of further institution-specific information. The OU requirements must be included in the briefing.

F3.2 Briefing to external examiners

External examiners receive information on their role, some of which is detailed in the appointment letter. Links to the [relevant documentation](#) are also available on the OUVF website.

The OU’s briefing includes:

- Term of appointment, with provision for termination on either side. This indicates the required notice period if the external examiner chooses to terminate their position. And it outlines reasons why the partner institution might terminate the relationship – non-fulfilment of responsibilities, such as not providing the required report or not attending the board of examiners meetings without good reason, or changes in circumstances affecting the criteria of appointment
- Information about the membership and remit of the external examining team for the programme, identifying a chief external examiner who is responsible for the preparation of summaries of external examiners’ findings for publication, if relevant
- Arrangements for the submission of reports
- Arrangement for payment of fees and expenses.

The partner institution’s written briefing should include:

- A comprehensive list of institutional contacts (administrative and academic), indicating who to contact about what. This varies according to who in the partner institution is allocated responsibility for different aspects of the relationship with external examiners
- The programme handbook, incorporating the programme specification (including any programme-specific assessment regulations) marking schemes and assessment criteria (both generic and module-specific), as appropriate
- Information about any single registerable module(s) within the programme, including the relevant student handbook (or on the virtual learning environment)
- Information about internal moderation arrangements.

Arrangements relating to moderation of assessment

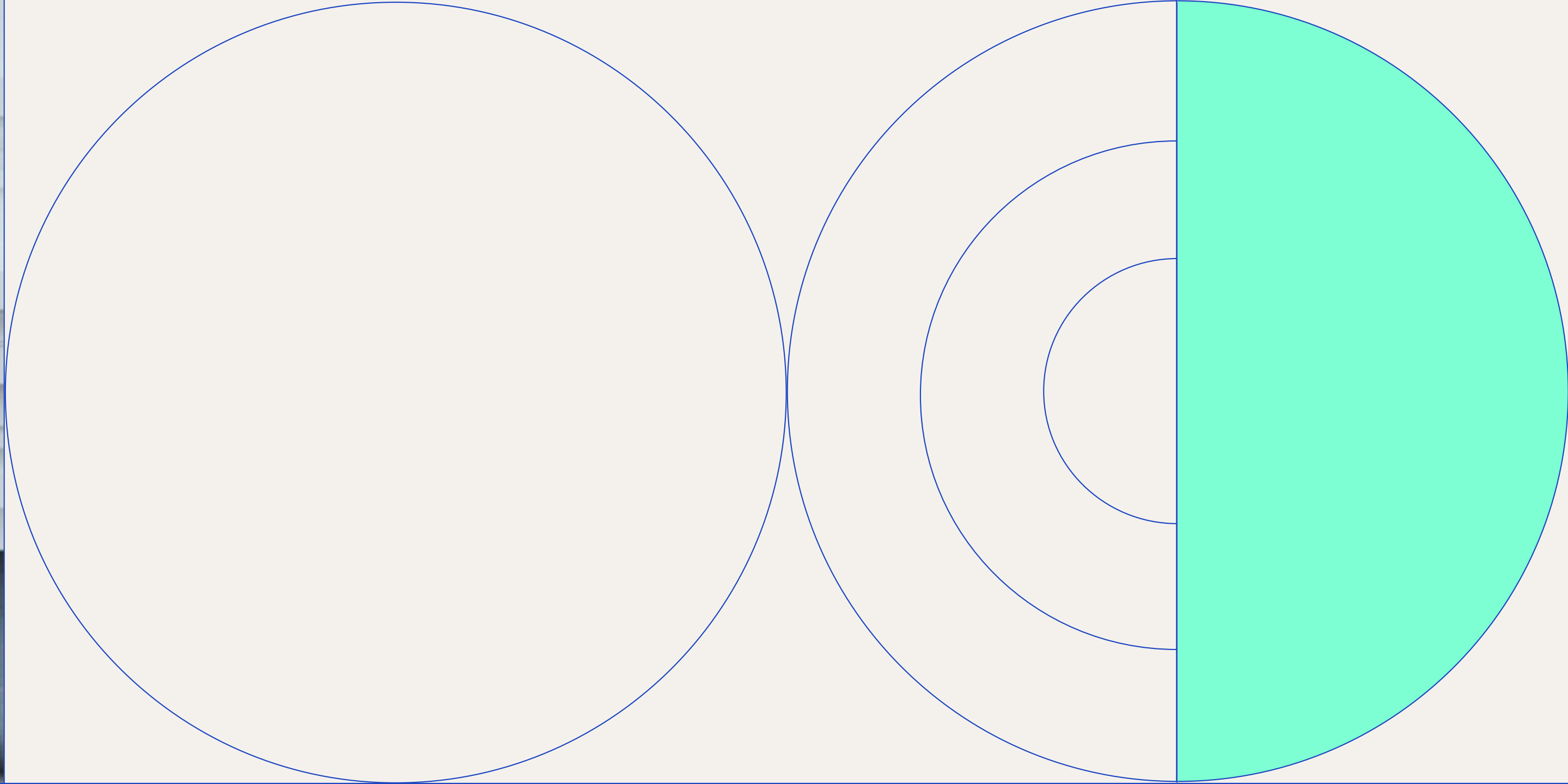
The head of department or programme leader is usually responsible for:

- Arranging external examiners' scrutiny of assessment-setting
- Arrangements for sampling assessments, (as typically negotiated with external examiners), should align with the OU's expectations as outlined in [Section F2.3](#). Provision of marking schemes and the internally moderated list of marks for the cohort being assessed
- Arrangements for attendance at boards of examiners and any other visits (observation of practice, for example), indicating timing and who to contact
- External examiner involvement in resit examinations, appeals, cases of cheating and plagiarism.

F3.3 Induction meetings

The OU recommends that new external examiners are invited to meet with colleagues at the partner institution to clarify their role and responsibilities, to get to know staff and, if available, students. This is a good opportunity to discuss interactions during the academic year, such as dates of visits and sampling of assessments.





F4 Board of examiners requirements

F4.1 Appointment of boards of examiners

The [Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#), Section G, provides information on the appointment, membership and authority of the boards of examiners.

F4.2 Timing of boards of examiners

The OU requires that dates for formal meetings of boards of examiners are scheduled by the partner at the start of the academic year and forwarded to the

OU. The OU sends a representative to all final award and progression boards of examiners meetings, and partners must advise the OU of any date changes. In some cases, a senior member of the OU's academic staff assumes the position of chair at boards of examiners meetings. This is confirmed with the partner at the start of each academic year and is detailed in the partnership development plan.

Dates should be agreed (with external examiners) at the earliest opportunity – normally at an annual meeting – for the coming year and not changed, except by agreement of all parties involved. Dates

for other events, such as approval of draft papers or assignment/project titles, should be fixed at the same time and arrangements made for the involvement of external examiners as appropriate. Arrangements and dates should also be established for dealing with any reassessments. These arrangements commonly involve assigned members and officers of the board working with the appropriate external examiners.

F4.3 Delegation of responsibility for reassessments

The approved board of examiners is responsible for the reassessment or deferred assessment of students. When it first meets to decide its recommendations, the board may agree arrangements for delegating that responsibility to a sub-group. That sub-group must include at least one external examiner. Delegation is not appropriate for all reassessments or deferred assessments, so the board must be satisfied that it is appropriate in the particular circumstances before agreeing to delegate responsibility.



F4.4 Documentation for boards of examiners and record keeping

The OU requires the partner institution's academic board or equivalent to ensure that arrangements are made to appoint a secretary to each board of examiners and that the partner institution keeps detailed and accurate records of each board of examiners' procedures and decisions, including the circumstances under which academic discretion is exercised.

The registrar (or equivalent) or a nominee – acting with the authority of the secretary to the academic board – should normally be appointed as secretary.

Documentation for boards of examiners typically include:

- **An agenda** that is circulated to all board members in advance of the meeting and includes a reminder to members of the need to maintain appropriate confidentiality
- **Minutes of previous meeting(s)**, which are confidential and members should be reminded to take appropriate care in how they use and store them (and data)
- **Mark sheets** that contain all assessment components completed by students (regardless of the students' debt status with the partner institution), together with information about pass marks for each component (the university may wish to see these in advance of the meeting)
- **Statistical analysis of marks** sufficient to allow the identification of any student performance or marking practice trends that warrant the board's attention

- **The regulations for the programme** as approved by the OU
- **The OU's regulations** on issues such as the treatment of borderline cases, rounding up of results, extenuating circumstances, and academic misconduct
- **Reports from any subsidiary boards**, including reports on extenuating circumstances or student misconduct.

Mark sheets are normally be tabled at the meeting. Under no circumstances should members remove them afterwards.

When recommendations for conferment of awards are to be made, the board of examiners may need appropriate results information from previous assessments to ascertain overall outcomes and profiles.

The OU requires partner institutions to have systems in place for verifying that marks are recorded accurately, to avoid transcript errors.

Recommendations regarding conferment or classification of awards or credit for single registerable modules should be recorded by the secretary (on the documentation for submission to the OU) as they are agreed.

The list should be read over and confirmed by the board before being signed off by the external examiners, before the meeting is closed.

F4.5 Powers of external examiners

No recommendation for the conferment of a validated award of the OU may be made without the written consent of the approved external examiners. Any matter which the external examiners has declared a matter of principle, the board of examiners either accepts the external examiner's decision as final or it is referred to the academic board. Disagreements between external examiners are referred to the academic board or the OU, as appropriate.

External examiners attendance at board of examiners meetings

If a board of examiners does not include approved external examiners, it is not authorised to assess students for an award or to recommend the conferment of an award upon a student. Recommendations to the OU for the conferment of an award are not valid without the written endorsement of the external examiners. See also [Section F5](#) on the role of the OU's representative.

All external examiners must attend relevant board of examiners meetings, including any resit boards – do not assume that a board can be held without the presence of the external examiners. If unforeseen circumstances prevent attendance and an external examiner is the sole examiner, the partner institution and the OU should be informed so that a decision can be made regarding the postponement of the board. If an external examiner is one of a pair or team of examiners, they should also inform fellow examiners of their absence.

In the event of non-attendance, external examiners must indicate this in their written report at paragraph 9, 'The administration of the assessments, operation of examination boards...' and confirm that they were fully involved in the moderation of assessment and the external examining process. The written report should be submitted in advance of the board of examiners meeting so that the external examiner's comments can be formally considered and recorded.

If an external examiner does not attend and without good reason and without pre-approval by OUVF, it usually constitutes grounds for the termination of appointment.

F4.6 Use of chair's action

If circumstances mean a board of examiners has not been able to make a final decision, it is possible to use chair's action to confirm decisions following a board, except for confirming final award recommendations. However, this should only be used in exceptional circumstances and in agreement with the OU representative.

F5 Role of university representatives attending board of examiners meetings at partner institutions

F5.1 Guiding principles

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

The primary role of OU representatives is to support boards of examiners or their committees in the continued assurance of academic standards. Attendance at boards of examiners also gives the OU oversight of the assessment process for its validated awards. The OU representative does not participate in making academic decisions/assessments but can bring their own knowledge and experience of the assessment process to the discussion of outcomes. OU representatives respect the partner institutions' autonomy (as detailed in the institutional agreement) but does need to take the OU's obligations and national requirements into account.

F5.2 Terms of reference

The purpose of attendance at progression and award boards is to confirm:

- That the OU's regulations have been properly observed
- That the assessment and qualification processes have been implemented with appropriate quality assurance and control procedures
- That there is confidence that the precisely detailed cohort of students have met the threshold (academic) standards required for eligibility for the identified award of credit and/or qualifications.

University representatives attend meetings of the partner institution's boards of examiners or their committees to:

- Observe the conduct of the board of examiners, ensuring its in accordance with the partner institution's own procedures
- Provide advice on the interpretation and application of university policies and of guidance offered by QAA in the UK Quality Code 2024 and elsewhere
- Alert the partner institution and/or the OU to policies, procedures or circumstances

which are likely to impede the effective functioning of the board or the discharge of their responsibilities by internal or external examiners

- Provide feedback to the OU which will be included in briefing for partnership reapproval panels.

F5.3 Reports from university representatives attending boards of examiners meetings

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

- Action from the previous meeting of issues raised at the previous meeting, including those raised by the external examiner(s) have been addressed.
- The assessments have been moderated internally in accordance with approved regulations.
 - The assessments have been moderated externally in accordance with approved regulations
 - Approved procedures for dealing with students with particular needs have been applied.

F5.4 Decision-making

Progression decisions and award recommendations should be reached in accordance with the OU's requirements and normal practice in UK higher education. Specifically, that:

- ▶ The external examiners have reviewed a sample of work selected according to the Handbook for Validated Award requirements, and any consequent adjustments to marking scales or marks of complete cohorts have been entered in the schedules for consideration (see also QAA Quality Code and OUPV Handbook for Validated Awards, Section F2)
- ▶ Classification bands were properly observed
- ▶ Borderline students were given appropriate consideration
- ▶ Arrangements have been made for who will deal with academic appeals
- ▶ The application of compensation procedures was consistent with agreed regulations

- ▶ Any mitigation pleas entered before the due date have been considered in a fair and equitable manner and in accordance with approved regulations
- ▶ Instances of academic misconduct and other assessment regulation violations have been addressed and/or will be resolved in accordance with the established guidelines, ensuring fairness and appropriateness throughout the process
- ▶ Entitlements and arrangements for re-assessment have been confirmed.

F5.5 Conduct of the meeting

- ▶ The meeting must be properly constituted, with the required number of members present (quorate), and must operate within the scope of its terms of reference
- ▶ Mark sheets were available at each level within each award, the sheets were easy to read and understand, and additional data was provided to aid decision-making, where appropriate

- ▶ An appropriate officer made a record of the board of examiners' decisions
- ▶ Everyone present was familiar with and understood the regulations for the programme/award, and any general institutional regulations impacting on the programme and the criteria for progression or award
- ▶ External examiners were present and made an oral report to the board
- ▶ Approved procedures for dealing with students with impairments, such as dyslexia and other disabilities, had been applied
- ▶ Consequences of academic misconduct and other breaches of assessment regulations were discussed and dealt with appropriately and fairly, applying the appropriate regulations
- ▶ Partner institutions should ensure examination boards routinely consider progression and award decisions for all students, regardless of debt status

- ▶ Progression decisions were confirmed by the board and awards signed off by the external examiners
- ▶ If the meeting did not consider all students registered for the award, clarification was provided on what arrangements were in place to deal with progress and or reassessment of the remaining students
- ▶ Arrangements were in place for publishing assessment results and the provision of follow-up support for failing students
- ▶ Marks were kept secure and confidential (by collecting mark sheets and deleting all electronic copies).

A copy of the feedback reports prepared by university representatives on assessment and/or meetings is conducted should be submitted simultaneously to the partner institution and to the OU, within two working days.

F6 Examination boards: requirements for the approval of awards

All awards (including credit for completed single registerable modules) recommended by partner institution examination boards are ratified by the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval.

This panel has the authority of the OU Senate to ratify the recommendations of all examination award boards after satisfying itself that the recommendations have been determined with due regard to the approved regulations, that the correct procedures have been followed and that the appropriate academic standards have been upheld. The panel has the authority of the OU Senate to overrule any result recommendations that confirm with approved regulations. In practice, the panel normally refers any concerns back to the partner institution in the first instance, to arrange for the examination award board to reconsider the results.

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

To ensure the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval can discharge its responsibilities, the OU requires partner institutions to provide key information following board of

examiners meetings. Additionally, examination board dates must be confirmed well in advance – we recommend that the dates for the following year's boards are set at the previous board.

Partner Institutions are requested to provide the following document:

- Award recommendation list signed as indicated.

The documents should be sent to ouvp-examboards@open.ac.uk within two working days of the examination board. Failure to supply the required paperwork in a timely fashion may delay the approval of the results. Once the paperwork has been submitted, it is checked against the exam board report from the S/QPM and dealt with by the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval within seven working days of receipt. If the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval raises concerns regarding the exam board paperwork, the partner institution is asked for further clarification. If an immediate response is required, a six-week deadline is given. If the relevant university authority responsible for conferring awards on behalf of the OU, for approval is not satisfied with the response, further action may be necessary.



F7 Graduation ceremonies

OU representatives always want to attend partner graduation ceremonies – we are incredibly proud of our students and can't wait to celebrate their achievements with them. Please contact your S/QPM when dates are known.

Please note, individual students from validated programmes/validated partner institution cannot attend OU graduation ceremonies as they are only for students directly registered with the OU and receiving OU awards. They can only attend if it has been explicitly agreed with the individual partner institutions or within the contract.

If you want to hold local ceremonies for your graduating students, the OU does not stipulate an academic dress code. However, it should be made clear that students studying single registerable modules are not invited to attend graduation.



G: Registration for students on validated programmes

G1 Student registration

G1.1 Student registration with the OU

Partner institutions need to register students enrolled on validated programmes or approved single registerable modules with the OU. Guidelines related to student registration are published every year and can be downloaded from the OUVF website.

Partners should nominate specific registration contacts. They will have access to the OUVF partnership portal. Each registration contact is provided with log-in and password details.

There are two main registration sessions, commencing on 1 September and 1 March each year. Partner institutions who

register students outside of the above main registration periods should notify OUVP-Admin@open.ac.uk.

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

Full instructions relating to the student registration process are sent to individual partners.



G1.2 Maintenance of student records

Please ensure that full legal names of students are given at registration. Partner institutions should also advise students that they need to notify the partner of any change to their name, prior to conferment. An award certificate will not be amended or reissued in a different name if the partner is notified of a name change after the date the qualification is conferred, unless the OU or the partner institution has made an error, or if a valid request is made under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

Partners are also required to perform regular maintenance activities throughout the year to ensure student records are accurate at all times. The student maintenance session is available all year round. The maintenance session gives access to all current student records. Partners should update any changes to student names and contact details in the maintenance session. The maintenance session should also be used for withdrawing and deferring students. Any students withdrawing from a programme should be presented to the relevant examination board and a check made for any exit awards due.

During registration sessions, the maintenance session can also be used to:

- ▶ Transfer students to another validated award
- ▶ Re-register students on a higher award
- ▶ Second register students on unrelated awards or single registerable module(s)
- ▶ Concurrently register a student on an additional award or single registerable module(s).

The OU undertakes an annual audit of partner institutions' student records.

G1.3 Maximum period of registration

Students remain registered with the OU for three years beyond the expected duration of the validated provision – partner institutions must ensure student contractual documentation is kept for this time. This policy applies to both full-time and part-time modes of study. If a student wishes to complete a programme of study after this period, they need to reregister.

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

G1.4 Staff member registration on OU validated awards

The OU requires partner institutions to have formalised procedures for the consideration of assessments for any of their staff who are taking OU validated provision before registering staff members on OU validated awards. The full procedures are in [Section F1.28](#).

G1.5 Student transcripts

As the validating institution, the OU is responsible for ensuring there is adequate backup should a partner institution not be able to issue replacement records of study. To meet these requirements, partner institutions must provide OUVP with transcripts for all students (completing, progressing and on single registerable modules) on an annual basis. These transcripts should conform to section 4.3 of the exemplar [Diploma Supplement](#) which can be found on the OUVP website. The transcripts should be provided by the end of November each year. An annual request for this data is sent out with detailed guidance.

Transfer of student records is via a secure file transfer system

and the files received are securely and confidentially stored. Details of the secure file transfer system are provided with the annual request.

G1.6 Student diploma supplements

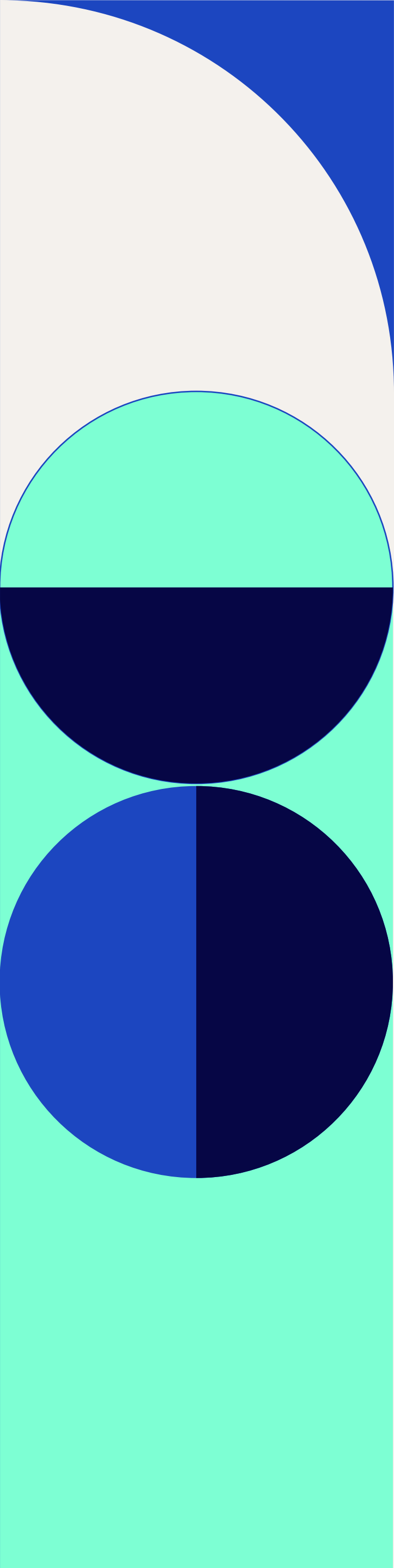
Partner institutions must ensure all students completing an award are issued with a comprehensive Diploma Supplement. [An exemplar Diploma Supplement](#) can be found on the OUVP website.

Students taking a single registerable module do not receive a diploma supplement, unless they go on to complete the full award.

G1.7 Data retention

The OU's requirement for the retention of award data is birth plus 120 years/indefinitely and this should be adhered to. Please note that award data should be cloud based and not be stored on paper, so that a student can ask for a record of learning at any time during their lifetime. See [page 51](#) for further information.





H: Equity, access and welfare

H1 Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

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

All students should have an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background, demographic characteristics or current circumstances. Higher education providers have an ethical, moral, and legal obligation to ensure this happens in practice. The Inclusive Higher Education Framework and Toolkit Project launched by the QAA and University of Hull is a useful reference document framed with higher education in mind. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is ‘anticipatory’, within reason. This means partners have to anticipate, think about and try to predict what adjustments could be needed by students and staff with different types of disability, support and access requirements.

Public facing documentation and websites should be accessible by – ‘perceivable, operable, understandable and robust’. Partners also need to include an accessibility statement on their website.

The OU expects its partners to have EDI policies and procedures (applicable to staff and students) that align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024, and those that comply with The Equality Act 2010 and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (where applicable for their region).

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

These policies should also comply with relevant equality legislation such as:

- England, Scotland, and Wales: [The Equality Act 2010](#) and [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#)
- Northern Ireland: [Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#)
- International: the OU expects international partner institutions to operate within the relevant equality legislation of their country (and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)/ Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) Un.org).

See also [advice and guidance sections on the QAA website](#) which covers ‘Admissions, recruitment, and widening access’, and ‘Enabling student achievement’. You may also find the OU’s policies helpful, available on the [OU’s EDI website](#).

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

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



The academic and student community

Safeguarding (student welfare)

The OU requires all partners who want to be approved to offer validated awards to declare whether anyone associated with the partner institution in any capacity (e.g., staff, student, governor, trustee, volunteer) currently or in the past, have any investigation or allegation against them (substantiated or otherwise) of abuse or neglect against a child or vulnerable adult. Partners also need to report this information to the OU, as soon as they

become aware of any such incidents (as per the contract between the OU and the partner organisation).

The partner agrees to report any safeguarding concerns or incidents that arise during their partnership with the OU to appropriate external authorities, in accordance with the law and local safeguarding procedures.

If a safeguarding concern or incident arises involving an individual at the partner who is directly or indirectly associated with the partnership agreement (be that a member

of staff, student or other representative), leading to a serious allegation and/or investigation being raised against them, due to concerns of potential abuse or neglect against a child or vulnerable adult, the partner must inform the OU designated safeguarding lead without delay.

Additionally, the OU will notify the partner of any safeguarding concerns that result in a serious allegation or investigation involving an individual associated with the partnership and based at the OU.

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



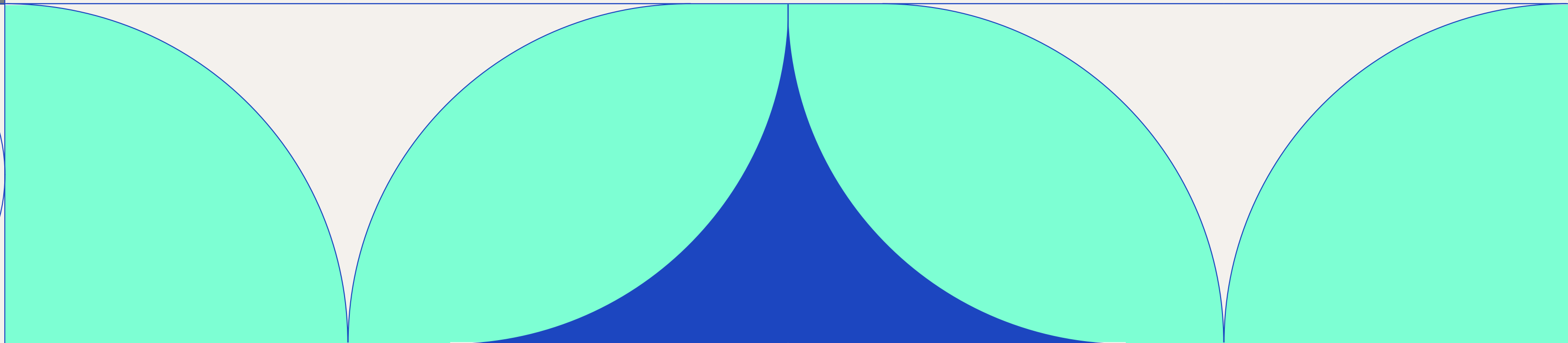
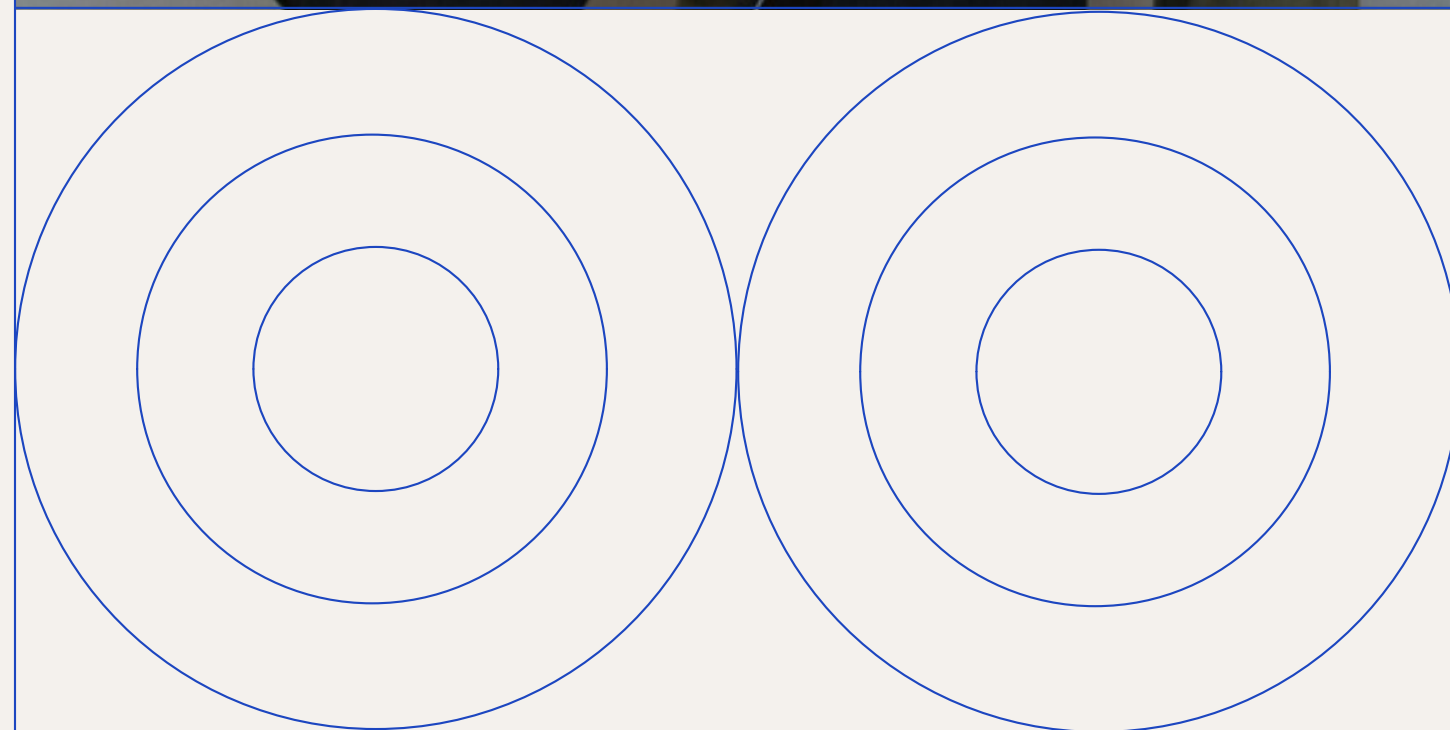
Student mental health

Prioritising student mental health entails fostering a supportive and thriving academic environment. By implementing comprehensive mental health strategies, institutions can address the diverse needs of their student body, ensuring that every student has access to the necessary resources and support. This includes providing mental health services, promoting awareness and destigmatisation, and integrating mental well-being into the curriculum. Additionally, training staff to recognise and respond to mental health issues can create a more empathetic and responsive campus culture. Ultimately, prioritising student mental health not only enhances academic performance but also contributes to the overall well-being and success of students, preparing them for a balanced and fulfilling life beyond university.

The OfS encourages higher education providers to:

- Take a whole-institution approach – there needs to be clear commitment from senior leaders and joined up thinking between academic staff and student services
- Ensure they have robust, evidence-based policies in place to support students

- Evaluate their own work and learn from others to make sure they're working in the most effective ways
- Encourage students to declare mental health conditions, at any stage of their student journey
- Identify gaps in outcomes between students with declared mental health conditions and their peers and, where relevant, develop ambitious, credible access and participation plans or access and participation statements to address these
- Seek to understand their student population, including exploring barriers and challenges faced by groups of students who may be more at risk of poor mental health
- Collaborate with other organisations
- Put co-creation with students at the heart of their intervention planning
- Develop and implement suicide prevention plans appropriate to the needs of their students
- Engage with local suicide prevention partnerships and work in collaboration with associated networks.



1. **Office for Students (OfS):** offers a range of general resources and links to support student mental health, including the Healthy Universities Network and guidance on using student analytics to improve wellbeing.
2. **Student Minds:** the UK's student mental health charity, providing resources, training, and support for students and staff. They also developed the University Mental Health Charter to promote best practices in mental health support.
3. **Mind:** their student mental health hub offers tips on coping with the challenges of student life, maintaining mental wellbeing, and finding support.
4. **Advance HE:** have produced a student needs framework.
5. **Healthy Universities Network:** as part of a global movement, the UK Healthy Universities Network supports its members to develop and implement 'whole university' approaches to health, wellbeing and sustainability.

Harassment and sexual misconduct

The OfS has established **Condition E6** to address harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education institutions. This condition, effective from August 1, 2025, mandates that providers maintain a comprehensive source of information detailing policies and procedures related to incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct.

Further guidance is available from the **OfS**. The guidance covers incidents involving students, whether between students or between staff and students. Partners must take significant steps to protect students from conflicts of interest or abuse of power in intimate relationships between staff and students.

Partners must ensure that students can disclose information about harassment or sexual misconduct without restrictions, such as non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) Institutions must have clear, accessible policies that comply with minimum content requirements and principles.

Criminal convictions

The legal requirements for higher education (HE) providers regarding the publication of criminal conviction information can vary depending on the jurisdiction. However, there are some common principles and regulations that institutions should follow:

1. **Data protection laws:** HE providers must comply with data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the UK and EU. These laws require institutions to handle personal data responsibly and transparently, including criminal conviction information
2. **Equality and non-discrimination:** institutions must ensure their policies do not discriminate against individuals with criminal convictions. This includes providing clear criteria for how criminal convictions are assessed and ensuring fair treatment in admissions and employment
3. **Safeguarding:** HE providers have a duty to safeguard their students and staff. This may involve assessing criminal

convictions to ensure the safety and well-being of the campus community.

4. **Transparency and fairness:** institutions should publish their criminal convictions policy to ensure transparency and fairness. This helps applicants understand the process and criteria used to assess their criminal convictions.

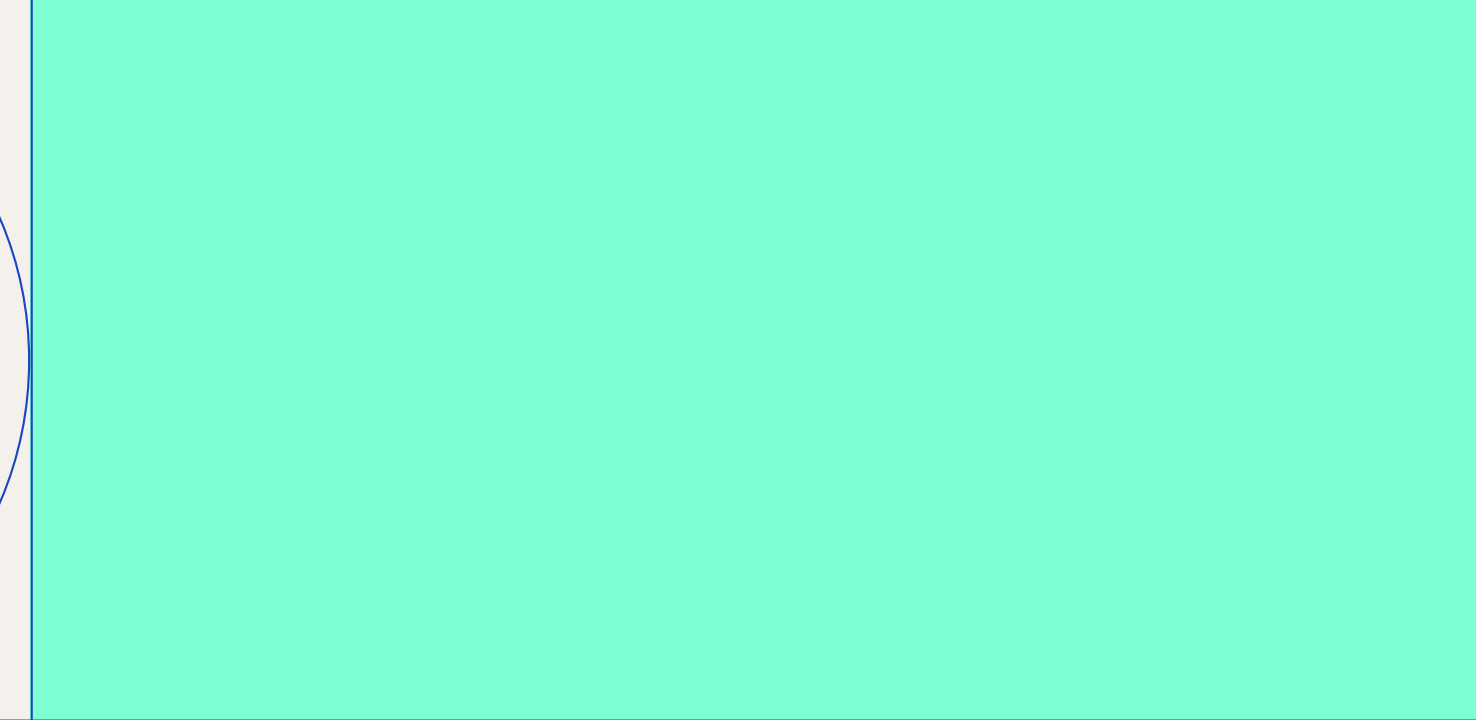
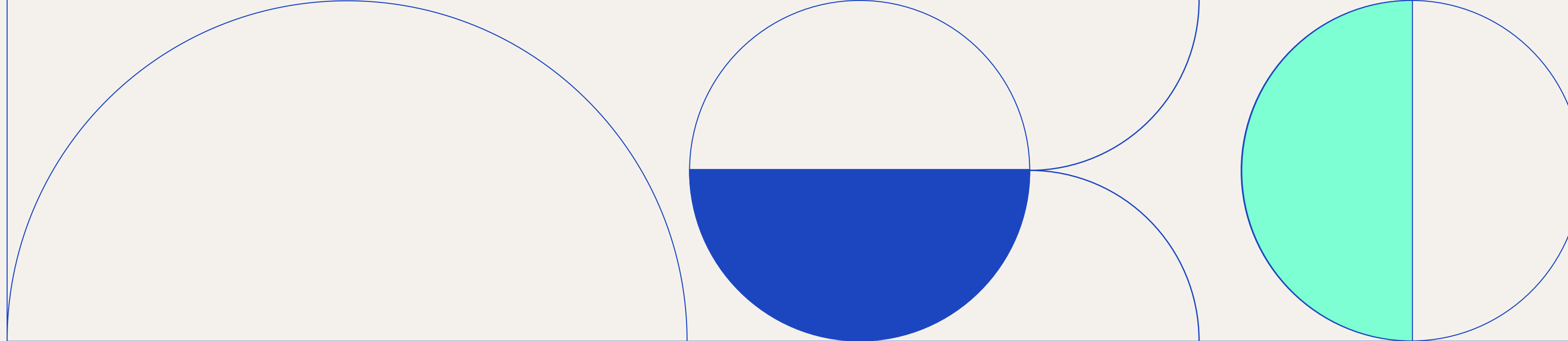
The prevent duty

The prevent duty aims to safeguard people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The government created two sets of statutory guidance to support the strategy, one of which is specifically for **higher education bodies**.

The University's **Prevent Principles** are available for reference.

Health and safety

The OU expects its partners to have health and safety policies and procedures (including fire safety) that comply with local legislation and align with the expectations of the OU.



Academic freedom and freedom of speech

[Academic freedom and freedom of speech](#) sit at the heart of the UK's higher education sector. Higher education institutions must take their responsibility to protect and promote both free speech and academic freedom seriously, and ensure these concepts are understood by the whole academic community.

Currently, the OfS regulates matters relating to free speech and academic freedom through the [conditions of registration](#) concerning management and governance (the 'E conditions') and the relevant [public interest governance principles](#) that underpin those conditions. Their principles are outlined below:

Principle VII on freedom of speech states:

'The governing body takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured within the provider.'

Principle I on academic freedom states:

'Academic staff at an English higher education provider have freedom within the law:

- To question and test received wisdom
- To put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the provider.



Appendix 1: Student complaints and academic appeals procedure

Appeals and complaints procedures for students (you) approaching The Open University (us) who have exhausted all appropriate internal procedures at their own partner institution.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** We are committed to ensuring fairness and transparency in all our dealings. This commitment extends to our process for reviewing complaints and appeals that have been initially addressed by our partner institutions.
- 1.2** If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your case at a partner institution and have exhausted their internal procedures, you have the right to request a review of how your case was handled. This review process is designed to ensure that every student's concerns are heard and addressed appropriately.
- 1.3** As a member of the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#), we adhere to the principles and guidelines set out by this body. Our membership with the OIA means that our review process is aligned with best practice standards in higher education. It also provides an additional layer of assurance to our students, knowing that their complaints and appeals will be handled with utmost fairness and integrity.
- 1.4** All complaints, administrative appeals, and academic appeals are dealt with in accordance with The Open University's [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#). The information below

is an overview on how to submit a review request. For further information on the stage three OU review process, what support is available to you, and how the OU would consider your case, please refer to The Open University's Complaints and Appeals Procedure found on the Open University's website: [Student Policies and Regulations](#).

Definitions

Complaint – covers concerns about services or facilities that have not met expected standards or were not provided when they were reasonably expected to be. The OIA describes a complaint as: “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider”.

Academic appeal – the OIA define an academic appeal as “a challenge to or request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body that makes decisions on student progress, assessment and awards.” This includes decisions about entry requirements, reasonable adjustments for teaching and assessment, progression rules, academic misconduct, assignment marks, module results, thesis submission and the award and classification of qualifications.

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

Review request – is where the student can appeal to The Open University for a review of the process (of the formal stage carried out by a partner Institution) to make sure that appropriate procedures were followed, and that the decision was reasonable. The original complaint and/or appeal is not reconsidered at this stage unless there is new evidence to consider. Once the review is complete, we will write to the student setting out our decision.

New evidence – if new evidence is provided as part of the review request, the student must demonstrate that they were unable to provide this evidence as part of the original complaint and/or appeal.

Requesting Support

- 1.5** We understand that pursuing a complaint or appeal can be stressful and we encourage you to use the support services available through your partner institution.

- 1.6** You should contact the [Student Casework Office](#) if you wish to discuss any reasonable adjustments you may need in raising a review request for a complaint or appeal to take into account your disability, in order to comply with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales, the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2004](#), or any other statutory duty or obligation.

2 OU REVIEW PROCEDURES

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

How to request a review

2.2 To submit a review request, you must:

For a complaint: write to the [Student Casework Office](#) or submit a review form within 28 calendar days of the date of the Completion of Internal Procedures or final decision letter/decision letter from your partner institution.

For academic appeal: write to the [Secretary to the SAARP](#) (Senate Academic Appeals Review Panel), within 28 calendar days of the date of the decision letter from your partner institution:

- a. Explain why the outcome to your complaint or academic appeal has not resolved the issue or why you think the decision has not been made in accordance with the relevant policies, procedures and regulations.
- b. Set out one or more of the following reasons why you believe we should review your partner institution’s decision:
 - That relevant evidence has not been taken into account; or
 - That irrelevant evidence was taken into account; or
 - That any relevant regulations, policies, or procedures have not been applied correctly; or

- That the reasons for the decision were not fully and clearly communicated to you; or
- That there was bias, or the likelihood of bias in making the decision; or
- That the decision was made by a person or body without the necessary responsibility or authority; or
- That the procedure followed was not fair or adequate; or
- That the decision made was not fair or reasonable in all the circumstances.
- c. Submit any new evidence which has not previously been submitted in support of your complaint. If you introduce new evidence or a new element of complaint or academic appeal at the review stage, you should provide a valid reason to explain why this could not have been provided earlier in the process, to be eligible for further consideration.

2.3 Failure to meet these requirements will result in the request for review not being accepted.

2.4 The Student Casework Office will acknowledge the request for review

within three working days of its receipt. Within 10 working days of the acknowledgment, a casework manager (complaints) or Secretary to the Panel (academic appeals) will write to advise you whether or not the review request has been accepted.

2.5 If it is not accepted, we will advise you of the reasons for that decision within a Completion of Procedures letter (please see ‘Methods of appeal’ for details of escalation to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator).

Complaint review considerations

2.6 Where a request for a review meets the requirements set out above, a Casework Manager, that has not had prior involvement in the concern, will carry out a review of your complaint or appeal, on behalf of the Vice Chancellor’s Delegate. The review will not reconsider your complaint or appeal but will look at all of the matters raised in the grounds of your review and determine whether the complaints and administrative appeals process has been followed correctly. The casework manager will produce a report which will include:

- A summary of your complaint or appeal and grounds for review
- The background to your complaint or appeal

- A decision as to whether your complaint or appeal is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld
- An explanation of the reasons for the decision
- Recommendations for resolution where appropriate

2.7 The Vice Chancellor’s Delegate will consider and approve the draft report. We will then send you and the senior authority at the partner institute a copy of the approved report within 15 working days of the date of the eligibility letter.

2.8 If the senior authority’s decision is confirmed following the review, we will send you a Completion of Procedures letter together with a copy of the Vice Chancellor’s Delegate’s report.

2.9 If the senior authority’s decision is not confirmed following the review, we will send you a summary of recommendations to remedy the complaint or appeal, together with the Vice Chancellor’s Delegate’s report.

2.10 If the recommendations to remedy the complaint include an offer which requires you to respond to the terms of the offer to confirm acceptance, you will have 10 working days to accept the offer.

2.11 We will send you a Completion of Procedures letter following this.

Academic appeal review considerations

2.12 If your request for a review does meet the requirements in paragraph 2.2, the Secretary will convene a Panel with no prior involvement with the concern, to conduct a review.

2.13 The Chair of the Panel will decide whether to consider your review with or without a hearing. The review will be conducted in accordance with the procedure set out in [The Open University Student Complaints and Appeals procedure](#) (page 46).

2.14 If, before the hearing takes place, the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that there are sufficient grounds without a hearing, the Chair may decide to refer your appeal back to your partner institution for reconsideration. Your partner institution will be given the reasons for the decision and, where appropriate, any recommendations for the further consideration of your appeal.

2.15 If a hearing takes place the Panel can decide to take one or more of the following decisions:

- a.** to uphold (in whole or in part) or not uphold the original finding; and/or
- b.** in the case of an appeal against a decision concerning academic

and/or research misconduct, to uphold (in whole or in part) or not uphold and confirm any penalty applied.

- c.** dismiss the appeal review, in whole or in part.

2.16 The panel must decide if the grounds for appeal in your review request are proven by the evidence. If it thinks it is, they must determine if these grounds create enough doubt on the appealed (original) decision, making it unreasonable for the partner institution to reply.

2.17 If grounds for appeal have been established by evidence, but the panel thinks those grounds would not have made a material difference to the decision of the partner institution, then the original decision shall stand.

2.18 Within 15 working days of the hearing, you will be sent the panel's decision. This will include a summary of your appeal, the background information to the decision, the verdict (upheld, partly upheld, or not upheld), the reasoning, and any suggested resolutions.

2.19 If your appeal is referred back to your partner institution, the reconsideration should be completed within 15 working days. The decision of this

reconsideration following a review by the Panel will be final and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued 28 working days after the reconsideration is complete.

TIMEFRAMES

3.1 We will make every reasonable effort to meet the time limits as stated in this procedure. For complex cases, additional time may be required to ensure a thorough review of a submission. We will notify you in writing if an exception to the standard time limit is needed, and we will keep you informed of when you can expect to receive an outcome response.

COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES

4.1 The Vice Chancellor's Delegate is The OU's final authority in relation to student complaints and academic appeals. If you think that a decision has not been made in accordance with our rules and procedures you may refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) for an independent review, as set out below in methods of appeal.

METHODS OF APPEAL

5.1 Once you have exhausted both your partner institution's procedures and that of The Open University, you will be sent a Completion of Procedures letter with 28 working days.

5.2 If you are still unhappy with the outcome or how your complaint or academic appeal was handled, you can apply for an independent review by the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education \(OIA\)](#).

5.3 You must refer your complaint to the OIA within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. Guidance on this process can be found on the [OIA's website](#) and will also be included in the Completion of Procedures letter. Please note, the OIA typically only reviews cases after the provider's internal procedures have been completed and a Completion of Procedures letter has been issued. They do not consider complaints referred by applicants or enquiries.

Timeframes for consideration of a complaint or academic appeal

Stages	Action	Timeframe
Stage one – informal Partner manages process with student	Follow partner process as published in policy and procedures.	Follow partner timeframe as published in policy and procedures.
Student	If not satisfied with above outcome Submit formal complaint/academic appeal.	Follow partner timeframe as published in policy and procedures.
Stage two – formal	Partner reviews formal complaint/appeal (process as published in policy and procedures). When completed, Completion of Internal Procedures/final decision letter issued to student.	Process completed within 24 calendar days from receipt of formal complaint/academic appeal from student.
Student	If not satisfied with above outcome Students can then write to the OU to request OU review	Student must write to the OU within 28 calendar days from receipt of letter from stage above
Stage three – OU review	Follow OU process as outlined earlier above. The OU will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter.	Process completed within 28 working days (38 calendar days) from receipt of student review request.

It should be noted that if an academic appeal review is referred to a panel for a hearing, then the total length of this process will probably exceed the timelines stated above, in line with the process outlined in 2.12–2.19.

Appendix 2: Requirements for programme documentation

Background document

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

Critical appraisal (for revalidation proposals)

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

The revalidation submission should include the rationale of any proposed modifications to the programme, such as the addition or replacement of new modules or pathways.

This takes account of subject area developments that have taken place since the last (re)validation. The critical appraisal should also be informed by feedback from students, external examiners and other relevant external stakeholders during the approval period.

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

Student handbook

A draft student handbook should describe details of all aspects of the proposed programme in accessible and student-friendly language. It needs to include a programme specification, details of all modules in the programme, as well as regulations and resources for student support (which should be in line with published CMA requirements see [page 62](#)).

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

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

Programme specification and curriculum map

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

The expectations around student achievement and attributes outlined in the learning outcomes must be appropriate to the level of the award within the QAA Qualifications and Credit Framework.

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

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

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

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

Module specifications

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

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

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

- Clarity regarding the range of delivery modes to be used. Will apprenticeship students and non-apprenticeship students be eligible to register for the award for example?
- Apprenticeship standard (approved for delivery) which the proposed award maps to.
- Mapping of the academic award to this standard which should be appended to the programme specification.
- The approved assessment plan and details of how the academic award links to this.
- End-point assessment details and how this will or will not link to the degree element.
- An example commitment statement that will be used.
- Work-based learning quality assurance resources. For example, handbooks developed for the employers, mentors, practice tutors, etc.

Regulatory framework and institutional policies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Placement learning policies and regulations/study abroad regulations:

This should cover:

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

Apprenticeship regulations for the (re) validation of programmes being used to

deliver against English apprenticeship standards or frameworks.

This should cover:

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

Equality and diversity policies (covering both staffing and student matters):

The OU's expectations regarding equality and diversity are set out in [Section H](#) of this handbook.

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

Process panel member

The OU may nominate an academic representative (the process panel member (PPM)). They must have specialist expertise in the proposal area and their role is to make comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The PPM attends the preliminary validation meeting organised by the partner and the final validation meeting organised by the OU.

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

Approval of the IPPMs to sit on final validation panels is subject to the submission of a CV to the S/QPM. The nomination should be submitted at an early stage, in advance of the planning meeting.

The following criteria will be taken into account:

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

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

Observers are not decision-making members of the panel but they are encouraged to assist the panel by contributing factual information when requested. However, if a situation arises where the participation of observers is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the chair has the discretion to ask observers to leave until recalled.

Observers are from the partner institution’s academic staff but may not be members of the institution’s senior management or persons involved in the management or teaching of the programme under validation or revalidation. Observers may be invited when a partnership reapproval and (re)validation of a programme takes place concurrently, subject to the prior agreement of the panel chair. When this happens, observers are normally external members of the partner institution’s academic board or its equivalent, or from the partner institution’s governing body. Observers are not permitted at the partnership development approval or partnership development reapproval meetings when they do not include the concurrent (re)validation of a programme.

Appendix 3: Guidance on the content of student handbooks

To ensure partners provide students with clear, accessible, and compliant information, while avoiding the inclusion of pre-contractual or material information in documents that are not publicly accessible, please follow the guidance below.

- Partners must ensure that all material and pre-contractual information is publicly accessible (e.g. website).
- If a handbook contains any material or pre-contractual information, then:
- That handbook must be publicly accessible, OR
- The material or pre-contractual information must be duplicated elsewhere in a public format (e.g. website).
- If the handbook only contains student-facing content (e.g. welcome notes, staff contacts, induction info), it does not need to be public.

Material and/or pre-contractual information (must be publicly accessible)

Material information: Information that could influence a student's decision to accept an offer (e.g. fees, assessment regulations, placement obligations). Must be publicly accessible.

Pre-contractual information: Information that must be provided before a student enters into a contract (e.g. terms and conditions, cancellation rights). Must be in

a durable medium.

Durable medium: A format that allows the student to store and access the information unchanged (e.g. PDF, printed document, downloadable file). Required for pre-contractual info.

• Policies and procedures

- Admissions
- RPL
- Complaints and academic appeals
- Data protection and retention
- Disciplinary/behaviour
- Equality and diversity (including disability statement, equal opportunities statement)
- Safeguarding (including criminal convictions) and Prevent policy
- Fees, withdrawal, cancellation, non-completion, debt, refund and compensation

- **Terms and conditions** (Including cancellation rights. Any surprising or important terms should be highlighted)

• Student Protection Plan

• OU Regulations for Validated Awards (populated)

- **Assessment and progression regulations** (see below for more detail)

- **Degree classification rules** – including assessment weightings for the overall scheme and within specific modules, and the rules for awarding honours, distinction, merit, and pass.
- **Exit awards and progression opportunities**
- **Programme Information**
 - **Programme specifications** (structure, aims, learning outcomes), which should be linked to: teaching methods, assessment strategy, programme structure (including information on exit awards), curriculum map.
 - **Professional body recognition/ accreditation** – where a programme leads to professional body recognition (e.g. engineering, teaching, social work) or accreditation, this should be clearly set out
 - **Delivery mode (online, in-person, blended)**
 - **Attendance requirements** (what is the expectation to attend, how this is communicated on website, part time/ full time)
 - **Entry requirements**
 - **Placement or/or study abroad obligations** (if applicable) should publicly accessible if the opportunity is promoted as part of the offer,

the placement/study abroad is compulsory or credit-bearing, The student has responsibilities or obligations (e.g. arranging their own placement). (Information to be provided: rationale, criteria and approval processes for suitable placements, responsibility for finding and arranging placement, supervision arrangements, student responsibilities, supporting and feedback arrangements).

- **Tuition fees and additional costs** (e.g. field trips, equipment), including refunds and payment details, any annual increases including the metric used to calculate increase such as inflation or flat %). Equipment required to be provided by the student.

– Website accessibility, privacy notices

When modules within a programme are offered as single registerable modules, information for module-only students should also be developed, setting out:

- The details of the delivery model, especially when delivery will be shared with students studying on the full programme
- Information on the student support arrangements, advice and guidance services and any other relevant services available for students to access
- Technical support arrangements

- Access to resources such as the library, virtual learning environment, and campus
- Access to the student's union, a student card and student discounts

Student-facing content (can be in non-public facing handbook, VLE, etc.)

Student-facing content: Information intended to support students during their studies (e.g. welcome notes, staff contacts, induction info). Does not need to be public.

- Welcome and introduction
 - Introduction to the Institution and programme – background, history, philosophy
- Academic calendar
- Staff contact details–(list of programme leader(s) and academic staff, their contact details and availability arrangements and list of support staff (technical and administrative)
- Name, position and institution of the external examiner(s) involved in the programme
- Opportunities available to students on completion of the programme (employment, further academic study, etc).
- Induction arrangements

- Study skills and tutoring (including role of personal tutor)
- Careers guidance at both institutional and programme level
- Counselling and student welfare
- Support for students with disabilities
- Financial advice and support
- Guide to the virtual learning environment.
- Opportunities for personal development planning
- Placement support (If optional or advisory, it's student-facing. If it affects course delivery or is credit-bearing, it becomes material/pre-contractual and must be public).
- Dissertation/project support
- Feedback mechanisms
- Facilities and services – library/e-learning resources, catering, computing facilities, technical support and helpdesk, catering services, multimedia
- Health and safety and security
- Workshop, laboratory, studio or study areas and other specialist accommodation available to support the programme
- How results are communicated, brief explanation on the role of assessment

boards, external examiners and OU ratification of results.

- Student participation and evaluation
 - Arrangements for student feedback and how the partner institution uses it
 - Student representation on committees
 - Registered student organisations
 - Academic and professional organisations.
- General reading list (i.e. not module specific), including electronic resources.

Assessment and progression regulations – further guidance

Clear explanation of the rules governing the assessment matters in a clear and succinct format that is accessible to students should be provided ([Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#)). This information should be conveyed in an accessible and jargon-free language.

Guidelines to students on progression and assessment should cover:

1. Identification of all elements of assessment, including type, volume weighting and timings of assessment
2. Minimum pass marks for modules

3. Rules governing extension to submission deadlines
4. Penalties for late submission or non-submission of work
5. Process for requesting deferral of modules
6. Assessment of work-based learning, where applicable
7. Assessment of presentations and performance, where applicable
8. Definitions and consequences of academic misconduct, including plagiarism
9. Mechanisms for provision of feedback to students on performance, and the role of formative and summative assessment
10. Acceptable forms of academic referencing and citation
11. Progression regulations
12. Board of examiners (membership, roles, etc.)
13. Reassessment and re-sits
14. Extenuating circumstances- Extenuating Circumstances Policy (extensions and deferrals, etc.)
15. Appeals and complaints procedures
16. Provision for students with special needs and reasonable adjustment (policy)

Summary table: student information requirements

Type of information	Publicly accessible?	Where it can be hosted
Fees, refunds, compensation	Yes	Website, durable medium
Assessment regulations & progression rules	Yes	Website, programme spec, handbook
Programme specifications	Yes	Website, programme documentation
Placement obligations (credit-bearing/mandatory)	Yes	Website, WBL handbook
Entry requirements	Yes	Website
Delivery mode & attendance requirements	Yes	Website, programme spec
Professional body accreditation	Yes	Website, programme documentation
Student protection plan	Yes	Website
OU regulations	Yes	Website, linked documents
Welcome notes, staff contacts	No	VLE, student handbook
Induction info	No	VLE, student handbook
Study skills, tutoring, academic support	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Careers guidance	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Welfare and pastoral support	No	VLE, handbook, separate policy if requested
Placement support (optional/advisory)	No	VLE, student handbook
Facilities and services	No	VLE, student handbook
External examiner details	No	VLE, student handbook
General reading list	No	VLE, student handbook

Responsibility for public accessibility:

- It is the partner institution’s responsibility to ensure that material and pre-contractual information is publicly accessible.
- The programme team should ensure that programme-specific content is accurate and aligned with approved documents.
- OUVF will review submitted documents for compliance during approval/reapproval.

Appendix 4: The role of the academic board

The role of the academic board (or equivalent)

This section should be read in conjunction with Principle 1 of the principles of validation: independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic governance.

The academic board is the academic body of an institution. It has the power to lay down proper procedures for instructions, research and examination and to regulate and promote the academic life of the institution. The academic board plays a crucial role in the governance and academic oversight of higher education. It acts as a central body, ensuring the academic integrity and excellence of the institution and supporting its mission and strategic goals. By fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment, the board helps to create a thriving academic community.

The role of the academic board is to approve academic policies, oversee academic standards and quality of the academic activity, and authorise the institution's awards. The board should also have oversight of the university's academic strategy and alignment with the (partner's) overall strategic plan, as well as ensuring compliance with external regulatory bodies and quality assurance standards. The board may also receive regular reports from sub-committees and task groups as necessary.

The academic board should meet regularly through the academic year. It is responsible for providing assurance to the senior leadership team and the board of governors that a partner is effective in terms of academic governance arrangements, the student experience, and setting and maintaining standards.

The parameters in which the academic board operates should be enshrined in its constitution and terms of reference (which should stipulate such matters as quoracy, circulation of papers and frequency of meetings, minute taker etc.)

Best practice involves the academic board conducting a review of the board's effectiveness and governance arrangements on an annual basis.

Governance and strategic oversight

- **Academic strategy:** the academic board considers, approves, and keeps the institution's academic strategy under review, aligning it with the university's strategic plan and monitoring progress against academic objectives
- **Policy and procedures:** it has strategic oversight of academic and student-related policies and procedures, ensuring they meet regulatory requirements and support the institution's goals.

Quality assurance and standards

- **Programme approval and review:** the board approves, regulates, and periodically reviews the scope and content of taught and research degree programmes, diplomas, certificates, and component courses. This ensures that

academic offerings meet high standards of quality and relevance.

- **Award authorisation:** it authorises the award of academic qualifications to students who have fulfilled the necessary conditions.
- **Examiners and assessment:** the board monitors the appointment, removal, and suspension of examiners, maintaining an overview of the quality of academic programmes.

Academic and research

- **Research promotion:** the academic board monitors and promotes research activities, including securing research grants and supporting the work of the institution's research centres.
- **Freedom of speech:** it ensures the institution's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech, regularly reviewing related policies and practices.

Communication and collaboration

- **Internal communication:** the board facilitates communication within the institution, ensuring that academic policies and decisions are effectively communicated to all stakeholders.

- **external relationships:** It oversees the institution's responses to external regulatory bodies, quality assurance agencies, and professional bodies, ensuring compliance and fostering positive relationships.

Student experience and outcomes

- **Student policies:** the board determines policies related to student admissions, progression, and withdrawal, ensuring that these processes are fair and transparent.
- **Quality enhancement:** It is committed to maintaining and enhancing the quality of the student experience, ensuring that academic provision meets the needs and expectations of students.

Student progression

- **Reviewing progression policies:** setting and reviewing policies related to student progression to ensure they are fair and transparent.
- **Monitoring progression rates:** analysing data on student progression rates to identify any issues and implement improvements.
- **Approving progression decisions:** making decisions on whether students can progress to the next stage of their studies based on their academic performance.

Student complaints and appeals

- **Academic appeals:** reviewing appeals related to academic decisions, such as grades, progression, and awards. The board ensures that appeals are handled fairly and in accordance with institutional policies.
- **Complaints:** addressing specific concerns about the provision of courses or related academic services. The board ensures that complaints are investigated thoroughly and resolved appropriately.
- **Policy development:** developing and maintaining policies for handling complaints and appeals, ensuring they are accessible and transparent for all students.

Additional areas of focus for each meeting

- **Curriculum development:** regularly reviewing and updating the curriculum to ensure it meets current academic and industry standards.
- **Student wellbeing and safety:** overseeing any risks to student wellbeing and safety, ensuring a supportive and secure learning environment.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** promoting diversity and inclusion within the academic community, ensuring equal opportunities for all students and staff.
- **Technology and innovation:** exploring and integrating new technologies and innovative practices to enhance teaching, learning, and research.

For more information on the role of governance and the role of the academic board in HE partners are asked to review the following information:

[Committee of University Chairs – academic – Governance](#)

[Advance HE Academic Governance Framework](#)

[Advance HE – Academic Governance Insight Guide](#)

[Governance Briefing Note: 4 Academic governance and quality | Advance HE](#)

[Governing bodies – Office for Students](#)

Appendix 5: Glossary

The glossary over the next slides briefly explains some of our most frequently used terms.

You may also wish to refer to the glossary that the Office for Students (OfS) provides on its website – [Glossary: OfS](#) or the glossary that Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provides on its website – [Glossary: QAA](#) (2022)

Terminology	Description
Accelerated degree	A degree which takes a shorter time to complete than a degree which follows the standard time frame.
Access and participation plan (APP)	Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. They include: ▶ The provider’s ambition for change; ▶ What it plans to do to achieve that change; ▶ The targets it has set; ▶ The investment it will make to deliver the plan. The OfS monitors access and participation plans to make sure the providers honour the commitments they make to students in these plans and take action if they do not (OfS 2021).
Approval	The process by which an institution without its own degree awarding powers is given authority by the OU to provide programmes of study leading to validated awards.
Approval letter/ reapproval letter	The formal letter by which the OU confirms to an institution that it has been (re)approved by the OU as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards.

Terminology	Description
Awarding body	A body with the authority to award academic qualifications, given to it by statute, royal charter, or under license from another body.
Bridging unit/ programme	A unit or programme of study designed and approved to prepare students who have successfully achieved an award, such as a Foundation Degree, for direct entry to an advanced stage of another programme, usually at a higher level.
Certificate (for validated award)	An official document recording achievement of a specific award.
Completion of internal procedures/final decision Letter	This is documentary evidence that should be issued to students at the end of their partner Institutions complaints or appeals procedures.
Completion of procedures letter	This is documentary evidence that the OU should issue to students once they have exhausted both their partner institution’s complaints or appeals procedures and that of the OU.
Conferment	When the qualification is awarded (also referred to as certification).

Terminology	Description
Credit	A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level. See also ‘credit level’, ‘credit value’, ‘credit accumulation’ and ‘transfer schemes’. (Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements, QAA, 2021). There is broad agreement amongst institutions in England that one credit represents 10 notional hours of successful learning.
Credit level descriptor	A statement of the generic characteristics of learning at a specific credit level, used as a reference point for those designing programmes of study. (QAA 2021)
Curriculum map	A map of the outcomes of units of study against the intended outcomes for the programme as a whole, to ensure overall completeness and coherence.
Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC)	The OU committee that has oversight of policy and regulations relating to partnerships for taught provision, including validated provision, leading to an OU award. CuPC approves and monitors the validation of partner institutions and awards offered by them.
Degree apprenticeship	An award which encompasses both academic study and workplace study, leading to a full bachelor’s degree or master’s degree.

Terminology	Description
Diploma supplement	A formal, verifiable and comprehensive record of the learning and achievement of a student on completion of a higher education qualification.
Dual award (or double award)	The granting of separate awards for the same programme by two awarding institutions who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. (QAA 2012)
Education committee	Higher level OU committee responsible to the Senate for strategy and policy relating to curriculum, assessment and qualifications (including validated provision), teaching and learning and the student experience.
Exiting	When a partner institution exits from the validation arrangement with the OU. The decision to withdraw may come from either the partner institution or the OU.
Frameworks for higher education qualifications	A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. The QAA publishes the following frameworks: The Framework for Higher Education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS). (QAA 2021)

Terminology	Description
Institutional agreement	The formal agreement between the OU and the partner institution, which sets out the responsibilities of each party.
Institutional and programme monitoring	The continued monitoring process that replaced annual monitoring. It is in a staged roll-out for partners.
Interim review	An activity to review the institution or its programmes between scheduled visits. The period of validation or institutional approval is in all cases subject to satisfactory outcomes from annual monitoring/ IPM. If there is an unsatisfactory outcome or other cause for concern, an interim review may be required to look at specific concerns within a programme or at institutional level.
Learning outcome	What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning. (QAA 2022)
Level (or qualification level)	One of a series of defined points on a qualifications framework that are numbered in ascending order. Qualifications within the same level share characteristics and require similar achievement. Qualification levels in different frameworks can be compared. Qualification levels are distinct from credit levels. (QAA 2014)

Terminology	Description
Minimum entry standards	The minimum academic entry standards required of any student to register with the institution and the OU, as set out in the OU's Handbook.
Module or unit	A self-contained, formally structured, unit of study with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some institutions use the word 'course' to refer to individual modules. (QAA 2018) See also 'single registerable module' on page 138.
Office for Students (OfS)	The independent regulator of higher education in England. Their aim is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. Their work covers all students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, national or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning. (OfS 2021)
Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP)	Office within The Open University responsible for validating awards for academic institutions, professional bodies, companies and other organisations.

Terminology	Description
Partner	This term a partner typically refers to an organization or institution that collaborates with the Open University to deliver educational programs, or other initiatives (prospectively or currently). This is not a legal term, and a partnership is not full established until a legally binding validation agreement has been signed between both parties.
Partnership approval	The process (Partnership Development and Approval process) through which an institution is judged by a group of external peers to meet the principles set out in this handbook and to provide a satisfactory environment for the conduct of programmes leading to OU validated awards.
Partnership development and approval process (PDAP)/partnership reapproval process (PRP)	Partnership development and approval/reapproval process is the process through which a partner institution and its underpinning administrative and operational processes and procedures are judged to meet all the principles set out in Section B2 of this handbook and to provide a satisfactory environment for the presentation of programmes leading to OU validated awards. Approval of a partner institution is a prerequisite for the approval of any programme of study and it follows that, where institutional approval is withdrawn, programme approval is also suspended or withdrawn.
Partnership development plan	A plan detailing the support tools, arrangements and mechanisms agreed with an institution to enable them to successfully develop and deliver validated awards

Terminology	Description
Policy compliance review	The process by which the OU assesses the administrative infrastructure of an institution to confirm that it is fit for the purpose of supporting validated programmes. It covers a wide range of administrative, financial and governance issues, including financial viability, planning, administrative staffing and processes, IT, structure, and communications.
Preliminary policy compliance review	A mock policy compliance review where policies and processes that have been, and are, in development will be reviewed (see above).
Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB)	Organisations that set the benchmark standards for, and regulate the standards of entry into, particular profession(s) and are authorised to accredit, approve or recognise specific programmes leading to the relevant professional qualification(s) for which they may have a statutory or regulatory responsibility.
Programme (of study)	An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies. (QAA 2018)
Programme revalidation (review)	The process whereby an existing programme of study is critically appraised at intervals of not more than five years, in order to confirm that it continues to meet the OU's requirements for validation.
Programme specification	Published statements about the intended learning outcomes of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement. (QAA 2018).

Terminology	Description
Programme validation	See “Validation”.
Quality assurance	The systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the Expectations set out in the Quality Code, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.
Quality assurance agency (QAA)	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Its purpose is to uphold quality and standards in UK universities and colleges.
(Senior) Quality and Partnerships Manager (S/QPM)	Member of staff of the OU who is responsible for managing the partnership with the institution.
(UK) Quality Code for Higher Education (2024)	A set of documents published by the QAA which set out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet and gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Providers use it to design their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. This was updated in June 2024. The Quality Code 2024 is currently in a transition phase of implementation and partner institutions should consult the QAA website for further information for which edition to use for which nation.

Terminology	Description
Quality enhancement	Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. It is used as a technical term in QAA’s audit and review processes.
Recognition/ accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (RPL/AP(E)L)	(RPL) Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences. Once recognised through this process, prior learning can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications and/or personal and career development. This term is used mainly in relation to the Scottish higher education system, with the term accreditation of prior learning normally being used in the rest of the UK.
Registration	The process by which a partner institution registers its students with the OU for a validated award.
Revalidation	The process whereby an existing programme of study is critically appraised by the OU at intervals of not more than five years, in order to confirm that it continues to meet the OU’s requirements for validation (see “programme revalidation”).
Single registerable module	A module (see above) that is available to be studied for credit without registering onto a full programme of study. These must be part of a validated programme. All single registerable modules must be a minimum of 10 credits.

Terminology	Description
Stacking	Where an OU validated award can be made up of cognate registerable modules. This must meet all requirements of the programme specification (credits, learning outcomes, admissions criteria etc.).
Student Protection Plans (SPP)	Student protection plans set out what students can expect to happen should a course, campus, or institution close. The purpose of a plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies or can be compensated if this is not possible. The OU require all partner institutions to have a student protection plan in place (regardless of whether they are OfS registered). The OfS has further information on the content of Student Protection Plans, which all partner institutions should consult when formulating their own SPP. Condition C3: Student protection plan – Office for Students
Subject Benchmark Statements (QAA)	A published statement (part of the Quality Code, Part A) that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in specific subject areas, and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity. The statements are consistent with the relevant generic qualification descriptors. (QAA 2022)
Transcript	The transcript provides a comprehensive verifiable record of students’ learning while they are studying, a formative statement that should help students to monitor their progress and plan their further academic development.

Terminology	Description
Transnational education (TNE)	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) defines Transnational Education (TNE) as the delivery of higher education qualifications by UK degree-awarding bodies in a country other than where the awarding institution is based.
Validated award	An award of the OU conferred upon students, following the successful completion of an approved programme.
Validated programmes	Programmes that have been validated through a process of external peer review by the OU as being of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to OU validated awards.
Validation	The formal process whereby a new programme of study is critically appraised by the OU, in order to establish if it meets its requirements for validation.
Work-based learning (workplace learning)	Learning that takes place, in part or as a whole, in the context of employment.

Open University Validation Partnerships

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