

University of Essex Partnerships Team

Institutional Review of Existing Partner Institutions

1. Introduction

Institutional review is the process by which partner institutions are reviewed at institutional level, usually every five years, to ensure that they remain suitable for the conduct of Higher Education (HE) programmes leading to an award of the University of Essex. The process is distinct from the periodic review of specific courses.

Institutional review typically comprises four key elements:

- i) A self-evaluation report prepared by the partner institution
- ii) An evaluation report by the University on the operation of the academic partnership
- iii) An institutional review panel event convened to evaluate the above evidence, which should include a meeting with HE students studying on validated courses at the partner institution
- iv) An institutional review report and action plan agreed by the review panel.

The University reserves the right to inspect students' work and to observe HE teaching at the partner institution, at the discretion of the Chair of the institutional review panel.

The institutional review process does not include consideration of the financial basis of the partnership except where financial issues might impact on academic quality and standards, for example in terms of the provision of learning resources.

2. Partner Institution's Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The SER should provide an evaluative commentary on the period under review, reflecting on the institution's HE operational management and quality assurance mechanisms and demonstrating to the review panel how students continue to be provided with learning opportunities of an appropriate quality and standard. It is important that the report provides an honest appraisal of both aspects of good practice and areas for enhancement.

It is expected that most of the documentary evidence to support the evaluative commentary will already be available within the institution, and that the SER will summarise the annual review data provided over the previous five years. The most recent institutional annual review report should be included as an appendix to the SER, and should be cross-referenced as a source of evidence (ideally via the use of hyperlinks) in order to avoid duplication of material.

The evaluation should draw upon a wide range of evidence including statistical data, feedback from students, employers and external examiners and any relevant PSRB or other external review reports, and should be completed using the 'Institutional Review Self-Evaluation Report' template available on the [Partnerships Team webpage](#).

Guidance notes for institutional review panel members provide further information on the type of questions the panel may ask, and therefore the range of information the panel will be expecting to find in the self-evaluation report.

The self evaluation report should be submitted to the Partnerships Team in an agreed electronic format at least six weeks in advance of the institutional review event. A briefing

pack containing relevant documentation is sent to members of the institutional review panel three weeks in advance of the event. Any panel members requiring additional information or wishing to submit preliminary feedback to the panel on the documentation prior to the event are welcome to contact the review panel secretary.

3. University's Evaluation Report

The Partnerships Team will prepare an evaluation report which summarises and reviews the operation and management of the academic partnership and which evaluates the effectiveness of the structures, procedures and mechanisms which support the academic quality and standards of awards delivered at or by the partner institution. The due diligence process will also be utilised by the University ahead of the institutional review, to assess any changes that have occurred inside or outside the partner institution, that may impact on the partnership and to ensure continued alignment of strategic aims between the two institutions.

The report will reflect the views of a range of University staff involved in the day-to-day operation of the partnership, and will identify key themes for consideration by the review panel. The draft report will be sent to the partner institution for comment prior to circulation.

The report will include the previous institutional validation or review report and action plan.

4. Consultation with students, recent graduates and, where relevant, employers

Members of the University's academic and senior administrative staff will consult with a sample of students and/or recent graduates drawn from the whole HE student body at the partner institution. Where appropriate, staff might also meet with a range of employers. This will typically form part of the institutional review event, and any themes emerging from the discussions will be considered by the review panel.

The partner institution should ensure that the panel is able to meet with a representative sample of students from a range of subject areas and levels of study, including a mix of full-time and part-time students.

5. Institutional review panel

Panel membership will be approved by the Dean of Partnerships on behalf of the Partnerships Education Committee and will typically comprise:

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

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

Guidance notes for institutional review panel members are issued in advance of the institutional review event.

6. Institutional review event

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

The Chair will commence by:

- explaining the purpose of the event;
- introducing panel members;
- confirming the agenda;
- explaining institutional review procedures and the responsibilities of the panel;
- identifying any collective or individual issues raised by panel members in relation to the review documentation.

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

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

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

During the feedback session, the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the partner institution of any conditions and/or recommendations for the partner institution and/or the University and/or the University and the partner institution jointly to action or to consider. A deadline will be set by which conditions and/or recommendations should be met and/or a response provided. The Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions and recommendations are circulated as soon as possible after the event.

Conditions are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the review panel, normally prior to the commencement of the next academic year

Recommendations are those issues on which action is to be considered, possibly after the commencement of the next academic year

The panel may also identify *commendations*, providing an opportunity to highlight aspects of good practice.

If, at any stage in the process, a panel member has serious cause for concern about any aspect of the partnership and/or the conduct of the review, this may be raised in confidence with the review panel chair or, if more appropriate, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), who

will determine the best course of action to resolve the issue, either as part of the review process or via a separate investigation or course of action as appropriate.

7. Institutional review report and action plan

The secretary to the review panel will prepare an institutional review report and action plan, which will be circulated to panel members for confirmation. The action plan may contain matters for the partner institution and/or the University and/or the partner institution and the University jointly to action or to consider. Action will be monitored by the Partnership Quality and Development Committee (or equivalent operational group), and overseen by the Partnerships Education Committee.

The Partnership Education Committee considers the institutional review report and action plan and makes a recommendation to Senate on the continuation of the partnership, subject to any conditions contained in the report being met.

8. Responding to conditions and recommendations

The institution should make a formal response to the institutional review report by the agreed deadline(s), evidencing how specific conditions have been met and addressing any recommendations. An updated action plan should be included in the response, produced in liaison with the Partnerships Team where any conditions or recommendations are jointly incumbent upon the partner institution and the University. This response should be submitted to the review panel secretary for onward submission to the review panel chair. The Chair will review the response and decide whether the conditions have been met, in liaison with other panel members where necessary. The Partnerships Education Committee will monitor subsequent progress against any conditions and recommendations and will report to the Education Committee when the conditions have been met.

Document review information

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