Partner Quality Framework

Buckinghamshire New University

Contents

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Introduction

Background and Context

1   In today's interconnected academic landscape, forming strategic partnerships with other educational providers offers numerous benefits. These collaborations can enhance the quality of education, expand research opportunities, and provide students and staff with diverse perspectives and experiences. By taking advantage of the strengths and resources of partner institutions, Buckinghamshire New University can achieve greater innovation, improve academic outcomes, widen participation, and increase its global reach.

2   A successful partnership is built on a shared vision and mutual goals. It is essential that both our university and our partners are aligned in their commitment to academic excellence, student success, and the advancement of knowledge. This shared vision fosters a collaborative environment where both parties can thrive and achieve their strategic objectives.

3   It is, however, important to recognise that partnerships also come with inherent risks. These risks can range from financial and legal issues to academic and reputational concerns. Therefore, it is crucial to implement a robust framework to manage and mitigate these risks effectively. By conducting thorough due diligence, establishing clear terms and conditions, and continuously monitoring and evaluating the partnership, we can ensure that our collaborations are both successful and sustainable.

4   This framework is designed to provide a comprehensive approach to approving, managing, and (where required) terminating academic partnerships, ensuring that they provide a high-quality academic experience and deliver value for money while safeguarding the interests of the university and its stakeholders.

Development of this Framework

5   Development of this Framework has been informed by the following:

- Independent Higher Education, 'Academic Partnerships in the UK – an IHE project: Final Report', July 2024.

- OfS, 'Subcontractual arrangements in higher education', *Insight 22*, September 2024.

- QAA, 'Quality for all: How to stay ahead of risks in franchise provision', *Quality Compass*, July 2024.

- QAA, 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024', June 2024

- Universities UK, GuildHE and the Committee of University Chairs, 'Franchise Governance Framework', July 2024.

The UK Higher Education Regulatory Landscape

6   Understanding the regulatory landscape is crucial for ensuring that academic partnerships comply with the relevant standards and guidelines. The following bodies play key roles in regulating and guiding higher education in the UK:

Office for Students (OfS)

7   The OfS is the independent regulator of higher education in England. Its regulatory framework aims to ensure that higher education providers deliver positive outcomes for students, including access, success, and progression[1]. The framework sets out the conditions of registration that providers must meet, covering areas such as quality, financial sustainability, and student protection.

8   Potential risks include non-compliance with the conditions of registration, which could lead to sanctions or loss of funding. Partnerships registered with the OfS must ensure they meet the OfS standards to avoid jeopardising their status (or that of the University as the Lead Provider and Awarding Body) and financial stability.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

9   The QAA publishes and maintains the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, which articulates the principles for securing academic standards and assuring quality[2]. The Quality Code provides a reference point for effective quality assurance practices and supports providers in delivering a high-quality student experience.

10   Failure to adhere to the Quality Code can result in compromised academic standards and reputational damage. Partnerships must ensure that their quality assurance processes align with the Code to maintain high standards and protect the university's reputation.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

11   The CMA has issued guidance to help higher education providers understand their responsibilities under consumer protection law when dealing with students[3]. This guidance ensures that providers meet their obligations and protect students' rights, covering areas such as information provision, terms and conditions, and complaint handling.

12   Non-compliance with consumer protection laws can lead to legal challenges and financial penalties. Partnerships must ensure transparent communication and fair terms to avoid breaching consumer protection regulations.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

13   The OIA publishes the *Good Practice Framework*, which sets out principles and operational guidance for handling complaints and academic appeals in higher

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[1] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/regulatory-resources/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/

[2] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers

education[4]. The framework aims to support providers in developing fair and effective processes, enhancing the student experience, and ensuring that complaints are handled impartially and transparently.

14   Ineffective handling of complaints and appeals can lead to student dissatisfaction and legal disputes. Partnerships must implement fair and transparent processes to manage complaints and appeals effectively.

Student Loans Company (SLC)

15   The SLC is a non-profit government-owned organisation that administers loans and grants to students in colleges and universities across the UK[5]. It works with various government bodies and partners to provide student finance services and ensure that students receive the financial support they need to access and succeed in higher education.

16   Potential risks include student loan fraud and mismanagement of funds. Partnerships must ensure robust financial controls and compliance with SLC guidelines to prevent fraud and ensure proper administration of student loans.

17   These regulatory bodies and their key publications provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring the quality, standards, and compliance of higher education provision in the UK. By adhering to these guidelines, Buckinghamshire New University can ensure that its academic partnerships are robust, compliant, and aligned with best practices.

Definitions / Terminology

18   The following table included key terms and their definitions as relevant to partnership activities:

Term	Definition
Partnership	A formal arrangement between two or more organisations to offer higher education, at least one of which is a degree-awarding body.
Taught Degree Awarding Powers	The legal authority granted to an institution to award taught degrees, such as bachelor's and master's degrees, the award of which is regulated by the Office for Students in England.
Lead Provider / Awarding Body	An organisation that holds the primary contract with commissioners for all services and subcontracts to other providers within the collaborative project. This body is authorised to confer academic degrees and qualifications, ensuring the academic standards and quality of the awards it grants.
Delivery Provider	An entity engaged by the lead provider to deliver specific services or components of the collaborative project. Delivery providers are

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[4] https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/good-practice-framework/
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company

Term	Definition
	responsible for executing tasks as outlined in the partnership agreement.
Due Diligence	The process of conducting thorough checks and assessments to evaluate the financial stability, legal compliance, academic standards, and reputation of a potential partner.
Approval / Validation Event	A formal event where academic and administrative staff review proposed programmes to ensure they meet required standards for implementation.
Quality Assurance	The systematic process of ensuring that academic programmes and services meet established standards and continuously improve.
Strategic Fit	The alignment of a potential partner's mission, values, and objectives with those of the University, ensuring mutual benefits and shared goals.

Types of partnership arrangement

19   The University recognises the following types of partnership arrangement:

a.   **Validation Partnership:** In a validation partnership, BNU approves and validates the academic programmes offered by another institution. The partner institution delivers the programme, but the degree is awarded by Buckinghamshire New University.

The University retains control over academic standards and quality assurance, ensuring that the validated programmes meet its criteria. The partner institution is responsible for the delivery and day-to-day management of the programme.

b.   **Franchise Partnership**: In a franchise partnership, BNU designs and owns the academic programme, but another institution delivers it. The partner institution teaches the programme, while the University retains overall responsibility for quality and standards.

The University provides the curriculum and assessment methods, while the partner institution handles the delivery. This arrangement allows the University to expand its reach and offer programmes in different locations.

c.   **Joint Venture Partnership:** A joint venture partnership involves BNU and another institution collaborating to create and deliver a new academic programme or initiative. Both institutions share resources, intellectual property, and investment.

Joint ventures are characterised by shared ownership and responsibility. Both partners contribute to the development and delivery of the programme, and they share the risks and benefits associated with the venture.

d.   **Sub-contractual Partnership:** In a sub-contractual partnership, BNU allows another organisation to deliver all or part of a higher education course on its

behalf. The University remains the lead provider and retains responsibility for the quality and standards of the provision.

The partner organisation delivers the course content, while the University oversees the quality assurance and compliance with regulatory standards. This arrangement can help the University offer specialised programmes and reach a wider audience.

Partnership Principles

20   Buckinghamshire New University is responsible for the quality and standards of provision awarded in its name. The following principles underscore the University's commitment to maintaining high academic standards and ensuring that all partnerships uphold these standards:

    a.   **Alignment with strategic goals:** All partnerships should align with the University's strategic goals and mission. Partnerships should contribute to academic excellence, research innovation, and student success.

    b.   **Rigorous selection criteria:** The University will implement stringent criteria for selecting new partners with whom to work, including academic reputation, quality, curriculum compatibility and cultural fit. Only institutions that meet these standards should be considered.

    c.   **Due Diligence:** The University will undertake thorough due diligence of potential partners, including background checks, risk assessments, and compliance checks. This process should identify and mitigate any potential risks before the partnership is formalised.

    d.   **Transparent agreements:** The University will establish clear and transparent partnership agreements that outline roles, responsibilities, expectations, and performance metrics. These agreements will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any changes in the partnership.

    e.   **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** The University will implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes to assess the performance and impact of all partnerships. Regular reporting and feedback mechanisms will ensure continuous improvement.

    f.   **Effective Risk Management:** The University recognises the inherent risks associated with partnership activities and will implement robust risk management strategies. This includes identifying potential risks, developing mitigation plans, plans for market exit (student protection plans), and ensuring compliance with legal, regulatory, and ethical standards.

    g.   **Mutual Benefit and Shared Vision:** The University will ensure that partnerships are based on mutual benefits and a shared vision. Both parties should be committed to achieving common goals and fostering a collaborative environment.

    h.   **Stakeholder Engagement:** The University will engage stakeholders, including students, academics and external reviewers, in the partnership process. Their input and feedback are crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of the partnership.

    i.   **Culture of collaboration:** Partnerships work best when they are built and managed in the spirit of collaboration, co-operation and communication. The University will establish clear mechanisms to address any issues that may arise during the partnership. These mechanisms will be fair, transparent, and effective

and will be based on open conversations and honesty between the University and its partners.

j. **Sustainable and ethical practices:** The University will promote sustainable and ethical practices in all partnerships. This includes ensuring that partnerships contribute positively to the community, adhere to ethical standards, and promote academic integrity.

Approach to Risk

21 **Council Oversight:** Council sets the overall risk tolerance for partnership activities. This includes determining the acceptable level of risk and ensuring that appropriate risk management strategies are in place. Council regularly reviews the Institutional Risk Register to monitor the risk levels associated with partnership activities and make informed decisions on risk tolerance.

22 **Due Diligence and Initial Risk Assessment:** As part of the partner approval process (and at reapproval), due diligence activities are conducted to identify the initial risk level for each potential partner. This includes evaluating financial stability, legal and statutory compliance, academic standards, and reputation. This will help identify potential risks and areas of concern that may impact the partnership.

23 **Risk Mitigation Actions:** Based on the initial risk assessment, actions are proposed to mitigate identified risks. These actions may include additional oversight, support measures and control mechanisms, and specific conditions for partnership approval. The proposed risk mitigation actions will then be implemented to ensure that risks are managed effectively from the outset.

24 **Risk Distribution and Categorisation:** The University will seek to spread the level of risk across its partnerships to avoid over-concentration of risk in any single partnership. This involves diversifying the sizes of partnerships and programmes delivered to achieve a balanced risked profile (below).

25 **Risk Monitoring and Management:** The University Collaborative Committee (UCC) is responsible for closely monitoring the risks associated with each partner. This includes regular reviews of partner performance, compliance, and risk indicators. The UCC provides regular reports to Council on the status of partnership risks and any emerging issues.

26 **Risk Response:** The University will step in when identified risks become issues. This may involve implementing additional support measures, conducting audits, or taking corrective actions to address the issues. Significant risks or issues that cannot be resolved at the UCC level are escalated to the Council for further review and decision-making.

Partnership Categories

27 Partnerships are categorised as Small, Medium, and Large based on the overall number of students and the associated risk level. This helps tailor risk management strategies to the specific needs and characteristics of each partnership.

Category	Definition	Risk Level	Expectations
Small	Partners with 0-299 students enrolled in programmes validated or franchised by Buckinghamshire New University or by another lead provider.	Low risk due to the smaller number of students. The cap at under 300 students mirrors the DfE cap for registration with the OfS.	Maintain accurate records, adhere to quality standards, and comply with all regulatory requirements. Regular reporting and monitoring are essential, but the University will recognize the more limited capacity for the provider in respect of systems.
Medium	Partners with 300-499 students enrolled in programmes validated or franchised by Buckinghamshire New University or with another provider.	Moderate risk due to the larger number of students. Unless exempt, they will be required to be registered with the OfS.	Provide more detailed data and reporting compared to small partners. Demonstrate robust quality assurance processes and ensure that all standards are met. Regular audits and reviews will be conducted to monitor compliance and performance.
Large	Partners with 500 or more students enrolled in programmes validated or franchised by Buckinghamshire New University or with another provider.	High risk due to the significant number of students. Unless exempt, they will be required to be registered with the OfS and to participate in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).	Provide comprehensive data and reporting on a regular basis. Have well-established quality assurance mechanisms and demonstrate a high level of compliance with all standards and regulations. Frequent audits, reviews, and site visits will be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance and quality.

28 By categorising partnerships based on size, the University can effectively manage the associated risks and ensure that each partner meets the required standards for data, quality, and compliance. This framework supports a tailored and proportionate approach to partnership management, ensuring that all partners contribute to the University's mission and strategic goals, while recognising the more limited systems for smaller providers.

Governance arrangements

29   Effective governance is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of academic partnerships. Buckinghamshire New University has established a comprehensive governance structure to oversee and manage its partnership activity. The key components of this governance structure are as follows:

30   **Council (Governing Body):** The Council provides oversight to ensure that all partnerships are managed effectively and that risks are appropriately mitigated. It is responsible for agreeing and monitoring the University's partnership strategy, including the approval and reapproval of individual partners, and establishing its appetite for risk. It ensures that the partnership strategy aligns with the University's overall mission and strategic goals.

31   **University Strategy Group (USG):** The USG, comprising the executive team, is responsible for working within the established partnership framework. It will occasionally seek approval from the Council for any partnership possibilities that fall outside the framework. The USG makes strategic decisions regarding partnerships and ensures that they align with the University's objectives and risk management strategies.

32   **Pro Vice-Chancellor: External Collaborations:** The Pro-Vice Chancellor, a member of the USG, is specifically responsible for partnerships at the University. This role involves overseeing the development, implementation, and management of academic partnerships. The Pro-Vice Chancellor provides leadership and direction to ensure that partnerships contribute to the University's strategic goals and academic excellence.

33   **University Collaborations Committee (UCC):** The UCC is chaired by the PVC and is responsible for the effective implementation and monitoring of the partnership strategy. It ensures that all partnership activities align with the strategic plan and associated number targets. The UCC monitors the quality and standards of provision awarded in the University's name, ensuring that all partnerships uphold the University's academic standards. It provides regular reports to the Council and USG on the status and performance of partnerships, including any risks and mitigation strategies.

34   This governance structure ensures that Buckinghamshire New University's partnership strategy is managed effectively, with clear roles and responsibilities for each component. By maintaining strong oversight and accountability, the University can ensure that its partnerships are successful, sustainable, and aligned with its strategic goals.

Relationship Management

35   Effective relationship management is crucial for fostering strong, collaborative partnerships that drive mutual success. Regular meetings should be scheduled to review the partnership's progress, discuss any issues, and ensure alignment on goals and expectations. The exact nature of the arrangements will vary depending on the size and scope of the partnership.

Key Governance Mechanisms

36   **Strategic Boards:** These are responsible for setting the long-term direction of the partnership, defining its vision and objectives, and overseeing major strategic decisions. Strategic Boards focus on growth, expansion, and market positioning. They are typically composed of senior leaders from both the University and the partner provider, ensuring alignment on strategic goals and fostering high-level collaboration.

37   **Operations Boards:** These handle the day-to-day management of the partnership, ensuring that processes are efficient, risks are mitigated, and performance targets are met. They focus on implementing strategies and ensuring that daily operations align with strategic goals. Composition of Operations Boards include operational managers and key staff from both parties who are directly involved in the partnership's activities.

Regular Communication Processes

38   **Keep In Touch Events (KITE meetings)**. These are held throughout the year to update partners on changes to key processes, share best practices, and discuss ongoing projects. KITE sessions foster a sense of community and collaboration among partners. Their format may include workshops, seminars, networking sessions, and informal gatherings to encourage open dialogue and strengthen relationships.

39   **Email updates:** Regular email updates provide timely information and digests to key partner contacts. Content should include highlights of recent activities, upcoming events, changes to policies and procedures, and any other relevant information that supports the partnership.

40   The External Collaborations Team will maintain an up-to-date register of partner key contacts to whom regular communications and digests will be sent.

Conflict Resolution and Escalation Procedures

41   All parties are encouraged to identify and address potential issues early. Open communication channels should be established to discuss concerns before they escalate.

42   Partners should first attempt to resolve conflicts informally through direct communication and negotiation. This approach fosters a collaborative environment and helps maintain trust.

43   If informal resolution is unsuccessful, mediation or arbitration can be employed to facilitate discussions and reach a mutually acceptable solution.

44   If conflicts cannot be resolved through mediation or arbitration, the issue should be escalated to the Pro Vice-Chancellor: External Collaborations, or finally to the Vice-Chancellor for resolution.

Other roles and responsibilities

45   See Roles and Responsibilities.

Partnership Lifecycle

Approval of a new partnership

46   Approval of a new partner for the University is a five-stage process which is expected to take 15-20 weeks overall.

Stage One: Initial Consideration of a New Collaborative Relationship (Indicative Weeks 1-2)

47   The purpose of this stage is to conduct initial investigations to assess the strategic value of the potential partner. This involves evaluating the partner's alignment with the University's mission, values, and strategic objectives. This will be initiated by the Pro Vice-Chancellor and completed with the relevant Dean(s) of College.

48   **Prospective Partner Questionnaire (PPQ):** The PPQ gathers essential information about the potential partner, including their background and type of provision, and why they are interested in partnering with the University and in what way.

49   **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** An MoU will be drafted by the University's legal team in collaboration with the partner to outline the preliminary terms and intentions of the partnership, establishing a foundation for future discussions.

50   **Review of the PPQ:** The completed PPQ form will be reviewed by among others the Pro Vice-Chancellor: External Collaborations, the Vice-Chancellor, and relevant Dean(s) of College. The review will focus on the partner's suitability, strategic fit, and potential benefits to the University and its students. A final decision on whether to proceed will be taken by the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor.

Stage Two: Due Diligence and Approval of the Partnership (Indicative Weeks 3-10)

51   During this stage, **initial due diligence** will be conducted by the Due Diligence Team to establish key organisational and academic information about the partner, reducing the risk of academic failure. Components will include:

   a.   **Financial Health:** Basic financial checks to ensure the partner is solvent and financially stable.

   b.   **Legal Compliance:** Initial legal checks to confirm the partner's compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

   c.   **Academic Standards:** Preliminary review of the partner's academic offerings and quality assurance processes.

   d.   **Reputation:** Basic assessment of the partner's reputation in the sector and previous collaboration experience.

52   **Business Case Development:** The Dean of the relevant College will develop a comprehensive business case that includes risk investigations, academic considerations, student experience, regulatory compliance, university and partner

capacity, and financial considerations (including indirect costs). The Business Case will be submitted for initial approval by the University Collaborations Committee.

53 **Full Due Diligence:** A thorough due diligence process will be undertaken by the Due Diligence Team comprehensively to assess the partner's capabilities and risks. This will include detailed evaluations across multiple areas to ensure the partner meets all necessary criteria for a successful partnership. Components will include:

   a. **Company Information:** Detailed review of the partner's organisational structure, history, and governance. This will include identifying any conflicts of interest or areas of undue influence.

   b. **Academic Standards:** Comprehensive evaluation of the partner's academic offerings, its course promotion and recruitment practices, staffing arrangements (including academic staff qualifications), quality assurance and learning and teaching processes, and accreditation status. This will consider OfS registration status and reports from external bodies, e.g. OfS, QAA, Ofsted.

   c. **Regulatory Compliance:** In-depth legal checks to ensure full compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and statutory requirements.

   d. **Financial Health:** Detailed financial audits to assess the partner's long-term financial stability. This will include consideration of the potential costs to be incurred in the event of financial difficulties at the partner requiring the University to take on course delivery.

   e. **Legal Arrangements:** Thorough review of legal agreements, contracts, compliance with legal policies and practices, and potential liabilities.

   f. **Ethical Standards:** Evaluation of the partner's adherence to ethical standards and practices. This will explicitly include consideration of:

      i. how any tuition fees to be passed to the delivery partner will be used to support the student experience,

      ii. processes to ensure students will be recruited in a fair, honest and transparent way.

   g. **Reputation:** Extensive assessment of the partner's reputation, including feedback from previous and/or current collaborations, and industry and sector standing.

   h. **Other Relevant Factors:** Any additional factors that may impact the partnership's success.

54 **Site Visits:** Site visits will be undertaken to all delivery locations to assess facilities and infrastructure to ensure their suitability. Visits will be undertaken by a team, including representatives from the academic area(s) concerned, Quality Assurance, and Estates / Facilities Management. These visits will culminate in a Site Visit Report.

55 **Provider Review by UCC:** The University Collaborative Committee will review the findings from the Due Diligence and Site Visits undertaken. If the partner meets all criteria, the UCC will recommend them for full approval

56   **Formal approval by Council:** Council will review the recommendation from the UCC and formally approve the partnership. Approval will be for a defined period which will be for a maximum term of six years, at the end of which it will be subject to renewal.

Stage Three: Functional Stage (Indicative Weeks 11-14)

57   The purpose of the functional stage is to ensure that the specific programmes to be offered in collaboration with the partner are thoroughly evaluated and approved, aligning with the University's strategic objectives and academic standards.

58   A partnership cannot progress to Stage Three until it has been formally recommended for approval by the UCC and any decisions reached during this stage are provisional pending full approval by Council (60 above).

59   **Business Case for Specific Programmes:** The Dean(s) of the College will initiate development of a detailed business case for each specific programme to be offered in collaboration with the partner, and with the involvement of internal stakeholders (e.g. learning resources and DTS). This will include market analysis, financial projections, academic benefits, and additional resource need by the partner for each programme. Business Cases will be reviewed by the Portfolio Planning Group (PPG) to ensure it aligns with the University's strategic objectives and academic standards.

60   **Programme Approval Event (Franchise or Validated):** During this stage, an approval event will be organised by the Quality Assurance Team during which the proposed programmes will be reviewed. If the programme(s) meet the required standards, specified in the approval criteria, the programme will be formally approved for delivery by the partner and set up on the University's student records system. For further information on the programme approval process please see the *Programme Approval and Amendment Procedure*.

Stage Four: Operational Stage (Indicative Weeks 15-20)

61   The purpose of the operations stage is to establish and maintain effective operational procedures, roles, and responsibilities for managing the partnership, ensuring ongoing monitoring and relationship building to support the partnership's success.

62   **Relationship Manager:** A Relationship Manager will be appointed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor in discussion with the relevant Dean to oversee the partnership and act as the primary point of contact.

63   **Operations Manual Developed:** A comprehensive operations manual will be developed that outlines the procedures, roles, and responsibilities at both BNU and the partner for managing the partnership. This will include guidelines for academic delivery, quality assurance, and administrative processes and will ensure smooth operation and accountability. The Operations Manual will be drawn up by the External Collaborations Team with input from relevant academic staff, Quality Assurance, and other PSE staff involved with delivery of the programme(s).

64   **Data Access and Sharing Arrangements:** The Relationship Manager in collaboration with the University's Data Protection Officer and Legal Team will establish clear data access and sharing arrangements to ensure compliance with data protection regulations and to facilitate effective collaboration. The agreement will outline the types

of data to be shared, the purposes of sharing, and the security measures in place to protect the data.

65   **Onboarding of Key Staff:** Key staff members from both Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) and the partner institution will be onboarded. This will involve introducing staff to the partnership's objectives, operational procedures, and each other to foster strong working relationships. Onboarding activities may include orientation sessions, joint training programmes, and regular meetings to discuss roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Stage Five: Ongoing Monitoring (Ongoing)

66   **Ongoing Monitoring through UCC:** Once established, ongoing monitoring will be overseen by UCC with regular reports on progress provided by the Relationships Manager.

67   **Relationships Building:** Ongoing relationship building will be managed through the Collaborative Relationships Team (on page 11).

Ongoing management of partnership activity

Admissions and Recruitment

68   The University's *Admissions Policy* applies to all programmes, including those delivered at partner providers. Partners are expected to adhere to the spirit of this policy, ensuring consistency and fairness in the admissions process.

69   Some partners may be permitted to manage their own admissions processes. However, these partners must ensure that their processes align with the University's policy and standards. Applications and enrolments with partners are approved by the University in collaboration with academic partners, ensuring oversight and consistency.

70   Admissions are normally made by prospective students via the partner institution. The process for application should be proportionate to the size of the partner and the level of risk. Larger partners are expected to use the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for the admissions process, as this provides an additional level of mitigation against fraudulent applications.

71   The University may verify the accuracy of information provided by an applicant to a partner. The University reserves the right to withdraw or reject any application found to contain misleading or false information. The University may share information with the UCAS verification team for further investigation, ensuring the integrity of the admissions process.

72   The use of **recruitment agents** in collaborative provision is recognised as a potential area of risk and should be avoided wherever possible. Where a partner wishes to engage agents in marketing, student recruitment, or related activities, prior written approval must be obtained from the University. Under no circumstances may partners or any agents acting on their behalf offer incentives to prospective students for enrolment onto BNU programmes. The University will maintain a central, up-to-date

register of approved agents, and partners must provide full details of any agents engaged for verification and monitoring purposes.

Registration and data

73   Partners must maintain accurate and timely records for all applicants, current students, and graduates. This includes personal information, details of their academic progress, and any changes in status.

74   **Data Protection:** Student information must be retained in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. For overseas partners, similar standards must be adhered to, ensuring the protection of personal data. Partners must implement robust data security measures to protect student information from unauthorised access, loss, or misuse.

75   **Withdrawals and Interruptions of Study:** Partners are required to provide regular reports and documentation on student withdrawals and interruptions of study. This information must be accurate and submitted in a timely manner to ensure the validity of the University's statutory returns.

76   Partners must inform the University of the withdrawal of one of its students *within 10 working days* of the date of withdrawal. Interruption of study is not automatic, and the request must be approved by the University prior to the student being permitted to interrupt. Further information is specified in the University's *Interruption, Withdrawal and Transfer Procedure*.

77   **Attendance and engagement:** Partners must monitor students' attendance and engagement with their programmes in line with the University's *Attendance and Engagement Policy*. Proactive action should be taken where concerns are identified to support student success and retention, and to assure the University of compliance with SLC requirements.

78   **Academic progress:** Partners must maintain accurate records of students' academic progress, including periods of study, module marks, and personal data. These records should be updated regularly and made available to Buckinghamshire New University as required to support the assessment process. Partners should implement systems and processes to track and report on students' academic performance, ensuring that any issues are identified and addressed promptly.

79   **Statutory Reporting:** Partners must comply with all statutory returns and reporting requirements. This includes submitting necessary data to relevant regulatory bodies and ensuring that all information is accurate and complete. They should maintain transparency in their reporting processes, providing the University with access to relevant data and documentation as required.

80   **Student Loans Eligibility:** UK partners must ensure students' eligibility for any public funding sought, particularly tuition fees and maintenance payments provided by the Student Loans Company. This includes ensuring compliance with SLC guidelines. Partners must pay attention to SLC liability points and, where necessary, proactively use 'tactical interruption' temporarily to pause returning a student to the SLC to reduce the risk of misuse of public funding. This involves monitoring students' status and taking appropriate action to prevent fraudulent claims or misuse of funds.

Operational Planning and Implementation

81 **Partner Programme Calendar:** Partners are required to work out full year calendars for each cohort annually. This includes detailed scheduling of teaching periods, reassessment periods, and any other significant academic activities. The calendars must be submitted to the University for approval at least six months before the start of the academic year for all cohorts planned to start that academic year.

82 **Reassessment Periods:** These must be clearly defined and scheduled to ensure that students have sufficient opportunities to complete any outstanding assessment (i.e. reassessment required) and for assessment to be approved by a Board of Examiners prior to the start of the next stage of the programme. These periods should be communicated to students well in advance.

Academic Quality

83 Ensuring academic quality is paramount for maintaining the integrity and excellence of academic programmes. Buckinghamshire New University requires its partners to adhere to the following principles regarding assessments, Boards of Examiners, external examining, and annual monitoring:

84 **Assessment arrangements:** Assessment arrangements must align with the requirements of the University's *Assessment and Feedback Policy*. Exact arrangements are to be agreed during the partner programme approval process, including assessment setting and moderation arrangements. These will be set out in the Partner Operations Manual. Partners are generally expected to localise assessment briefs to their context. This ensures relevance and appropriateness for their students.

85 Partners are expected to mark and moderate their own work. In some cases, especially for Small or inexperienced providers, the University may undertake moderation directly. Partnership Tutors will also undertake sample moderation activities to ensure the effectiveness of moderation. All marks are provisional until confirmed by a Board of Examiners following internal and external moderation.

86 **Boards of Examiners:** At least once per year, a Board of Examiners will meet to consider student performance on each programme and confirm marks, progression, and award decisions. All decisions will be made in accordance with the regulations specified in the relevant programme specification.

87 Partner academics responsible for the delivery of the programme are expected to attend the Board of Examiners meetings along with the Partner Link Tutor. The external examiner should also be present.

88 Arrangements for Boards of Examiners will be agreed during the programme approval phase and will be confirmed in the Partner Operations Manual. Full details are set out in the *Board of Examiners Procedure*.

89 **External Examining:** External examining is a key mechanism for upholding academic standards in UK higher education. External examiners provide impartial and independent advice, ensuring that students are assessed fairly and transparently.

They help to assess whether students meet the threshold academic standards set out in the UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications.

90   An external examiner must be appointed for each partner offering a programme. Due to workload considerations, the same external examiner should not normally be appointed to both a partner franchise programme and the programme run directly by the University. All external examiners are appointed directly by the University, but this will be done in consultation with the partner.

91   Once appointed, the partner must provide the external examiner with access to assessment and marking materials, student work, and the VLE as appropriate.

92   A report will be produced annually for each partner iteration of a programme. Reports must be produced on the template provided. A copy of the report will be provided to the partner to be considered as part of annual monitoring activities. The partnership tutor is expected to liaise with the partner programme leader in responding to the external examiner's report.

93   **Annual Monitoring:** Annual monitoring is intended to be a self-evaluative process where the programme leader considers the performance of the programme in the preceding academic year.

94   The Partner Programme Leader is expected to complete a Self-Evaluation and Improvement Plan (SIP) for presentation to the University. The SIP should be completed in conjunction with the Partnership tutor and must be honest, drawing on accurate data. The SIP template is closely linked to the OfS Conditions of Registration to ensure ongoing adherence. The full process is set out in the *Annual Monitoring* procedure.

Staffing arrangements

95   Ensuring that partner institutions have sufficient and appropriately qualified staff is essential for delivering or supporting a high-quality academic experience. Buckinghamshire New University requires all partners to have robust staffing arrangements in place to provide a high-quality academic experience for its students. This includes academic staff to teach on its programmes, as well as professional service employees (PSEs), technical, and other support staff.

96   **Responsibilities for employment and management of partner staff:** The partner is responsible for matters relating to the employment and management of staff on University programmes. This includes hiring, performance management, and professional development. The University is concerned with the quality of teaching on its programmes. This includes ensuring that teaching meets the required standards and supports student success.

97   **Approval of academic staff:** All academic staff must be approved by the University before they can teach on one of its programmes. An initial list of staff accompanied by CVs and Partner Staff Approval Forms should be approved for each programme as part of initial partner approval arrangements; this can then be supplemented in the intervening period through the Partner Staff Approval Panel. CVs and other documentation will be managed in accordance with GDPR requirements.

98 **Academic staff qualifications and experience:** Academic staff must be appropriately qualified, normally to at least one level above the programme upon which they will be teaching, e.g. holding a master's qualification (Level 7) to teach on a degree programme (Level 6). Ideally, staff should also possess a recognised higher education teaching qualification and/or Advance HE Fellowship (Fellow or higher). It is expected that academic staff will maintain their currency in their discipline area through regular participation in research, scholarly, or knowledge exchange activities.

99 Collectively, each programme team must demonstrate appropriate pedagogic experience to take account of the latest developments in learning, teaching, and assessment. Where programmes are accredited by an external body, such as a Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body (PSRB), the programme team must also meet and maintain any additional PSRB requirements.

100 **Register of approved academic staff:** The University will maintain a Register of staff approved to teach on each programme at each partner provider. This will be populated as part of initial programme approval and updated when new staff are appointed.

101 Other staff do not require formal approval or registration but must be sufficient in capacity to support the student numbers being proposed. The partner should update the University when key appointments change to ensure arrangements are not compromised.

102 **Staff Development:** The University expects partner providers to have in place an appropriate staff development policy to support the continuous development of each member of academic staff. This policy should aim to maintain and enhance the currency of their knowledge and experience.

103 **Observation of teaching:** The Partnership tutor at the University, or other appropriate University colleagues, will undertake observation of teaching as part of their regular visits to partner premises or as part of other monitoring arrangements. Observations will be reported upon in the Visit Report, providing valuable insights into the quality of teaching and any areas for improvement.

Partner staff roles and responsibilities

104 **Academic Staff:** Academic staff are responsible for delivering lectures, seminars, tutorials, and other scheduled teaching activities. They should be experts in their field and possess strong pedagogic skills. They will also guide and support students with any research or individual projects, ensuring a high-quality output.

105 One senior member of academic staff, typically a senior lecturer or higher, will be appointed as the **programme leader** to oversee the academic management of that programme, working with the Partnership tutor to ensure alignment with University standards and policies.

106 **Professional Service Employees (PSEs):** PSEs are likely to include:

   a. **Admissions Officers**, to manage the admissions process ensuring compliance with University standards and policies.

   b. **Registry Officers**, to manage the marking and moderation process.

c. **Quality Assurance co-ordinators**, to ensure that academic activities meet the required quality standards and regulatory requirements.

d. **Library staff**, to manage library resources and support students in finding, accessing and using library resources.

e. **Student Support Advisors**, to provide academic and pastoral support to students, helping them navigate their studies and any challenges they may face, e.g. guidance on academic writing.

107 **Technical Staff:** Technical staff may include:

a. **IT support technicians**, to maintain and support the partner's technical infrastructure, including its VLE and other software used in delivery of academic programmes.

b. **Workshop or laboratory technicians**, to support practical and laboratory-based learning, ensuring that equipment and facilities are maintained and available for safe student us.

108 **Other Support Staff:** Other roles are likely to include:

a. **Careers Advisors**, to assist students with career planning.

b. **Pastoral Support Advisors**, to provide support for students' personal and emotional well-being, helping them to manage stress and other challenges.

c. **Counsellors**, to offer professional counselling services to support students' mental health and well-being.

Student Feedback and Evaluation

109 Buckinghamshire New University recognises the importance of student engagement and the value of feedback in enhancing the quality of academic programmes.

110 **End of module feedback:** Partners are expected to collect feedback from students at the end of each module. This feedback should cover various aspects of the module, including content, delivery, and assessment. The feedback collected should be reflected upon and used as part of a continuous improvement process to enhance the quality of the module and overall student experience.

111 **Programme Committee Meetings (PCMs):** Partners must put in place mechanisms for programme teams to meet with student representatives during the academic year. These meetings provide an opportunity for students to share additional feedback about their experience which can lead to improvement. It is good practice for the University Partnership Tutor to attend these meetings. Where possible, meetings should be coordinated around partnership tutor visits to ensure that feedback is integrated into the review process.

112 **National Student Survey (NSS):** UK partners are expected to promote engagement with the National Student Survey (NSS) among eligible students. The NSS provides valuable insights into the student experience and helps identify areas for improvement. Partners should encourage students to participate in the NSS and ensure they understand the importance of their feedback in shaping the quality of education.

Resources to support learning and teaching

113 Partners are required to ensure that they have appropriate resources in place to support the delivery of the University's programmes. This includes, but is not limited to, adequate teaching facilities, learning materials, and support services that meet the standards set by the University. The expectations for resources will be proportional to the size of the partner provider.

114 It is the responsibility of the partners to provide evidence of their resource capabilities during the initial due diligence process and throughout the duration of the partnership. This evidence should demonstrate that the resources are sufficient to deliver high-quality education and support to all students.

115 **Teaching Facilities:** All partners must ensure that teaching facilities are equipped to support effective learning and teaching. This includes:

   a. **Classroom environment:** Classrooms should be spacious, well-lit and equipped with comfortable seating and desks.

   b. **Technology:** Classrooms should be equipped with modern technology, including projectors or smartboards, computers, and internet access, to facilitate interactive and multimedia learning.

   c. **Accessibility:** Teaching facilities must be accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, and comply with relevant accessibility standards.

   d. **Safety and Comfort:** Facilities should be safe, clean and conducive to learning, with appropriate heating, cooling, and ventilation systems.

116 **Learning Resources:** Partners must ensure that they have comprehensive library resources available, including access to relevant academic journals, books, and digital resources. These resources should be easily accessible to all students and staff involved in the partnership. These should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving needs of the programmes and the students.

117 **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE):** Wherever feasible, partners are expected to use the University's VLE. This ensures consistent access to learning and assessment materials, facilitates quality assurance processes, and supports compliance with regulatory requirements, including the Office for Students (OfS) Condition B4, which mandates providers to retain appropriate records of students' assessed work for a period of five years after the end of a course.

118 It is recognised, however, that some partners—particularly those working with multiple awarding bodies—may need to use their own VLE. In such cases, the partner must ensure that their VLE is robust, user-friendly, and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. It must include features such as course management, communication tools, and access to digital learning materials. The partner must also provide appropriate access for BNU staff to support marking, moderation, and audit activities, and demonstrate that their system meets the University's expectations for data retention and quality assurance.

119 **Educational Software:** Partners must provide access to any necessary educational software that supports the curriculum and enhances the learning experience. This includes software for data analysis, research, and other academic activities. Partners should ensure that the software is up-to-date and that students and staff are trained in its use. For small partners, the University may offer shared access to its educational software resources.

120 **Careers and Employability Support:** Partners must support students' career success by providing resources and opportunities that enhance their employability. This may include:

    a. **Career Services:** Offering career counselling, job placement services, and workshops on resume writing, interview skills, and job search strategies.

    b. **Industry Connections:** Facilitating connections with local businesses and industries to provide internships, work placements, and networking opportunities.

    c. **Career Pathways:** Developing clear career pathways and providing guidance on the skills and qualifications needed for various professions.

    d. **Alumni Networks:** Encouraging the development of alumni networks to support current students with mentorship and career advice.

121 The University will conduct periodic audits and evaluations to verify that partners maintain the required resources. Partners are expected to cooperate fully with these audits and provide any necessary documentation or access to facilities. In cases where resource deficiencies are identified, partners must take immediate corrective actions to address the issues. Failure to maintain appropriate resources may result in the suspension or termination of the partnership.

122 The University is committed to supporting partners in meeting these requirements and will provide guidance and assistance as needed. However, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring adequate resources lies with the partners. The level of support provided by the University will be proportional to the size and capacity of the partner, ensuring that smaller partners receive the necessary assistance to meet resource requirements. For small partners, this may include access to the University's own VLE, library resources, and educational software, as well as additional support in developing career services and industry connections. This decision will be subject to licencing restrictions in each case.

Visits and Audits

Partnership Tutor Visits

123 **Purpose:** Partnership Tutors will conduct regular visits to partner institutions to provide support, monitor progress, and ensure compliance with University standards.

124 **Activities:**

- **Observation of Teaching:** Tutors may observe teaching sessions to ensure instructional practices meet the University's standards. At the end of the session, they will provide constructive feedback for improvement.

- **Student Meetings:** Tutors will meet with students to gather feedback on their experiences, address any concerns, and ensure their needs are being met.

- **Review of Resources:** Tutors will review the availability and quality of teaching facilities, learning materials, and support services to ensure they meet the required standards.

- **Programme Committees:** Attendance at programme committee meetings to participate in discussions, review programme progress, and ensure alignment with University objectives.

- **Staff Meetings:** Meetings with academic and administrative staff to discuss any issues, share best practices, and provide guidance on University policies and procedures.

- **Documentation Review:** Examination of key documents such as attendance records, admissions documentation, and assessment records to ensure compliance with University standards.

- **Support and Guidance:** Providing support and guidance to partners on various aspects of programme delivery, including curriculum development, assessment practices, and student support.

125 **Frequency:**

- **Small and Medium UK Partners:** One scheduled visit per term per programme

- **Large UK Partners:** One to two scheduled visits per term per programme

- **International Partners:** At least one visit per academic year, with additional virtual support as needed.

Focused Review Visits

126 **Purpose:** Focused reviews will be conducted on an *ad hoc* basis to provide targeted oversight and support on specific aspects of the partnership.

127 **Types of Reviews:**

- **Specific Issues Reviews:** Addressing particular areas of concern or interest, such as student support services, assessment practices (including academic integrity), or resource allocation.

- **Thematic Reviews:** These may be instigated at the request of UCC to conduct reviews based on specific themes, such as EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) practices, technology integration, or curriculum development.

- **Progress Reviews:** Providing follow-up on previous visits or audits to ensure recommended actions have been implemented and issues resolved.

Audits

128 **Purpose:** The University will conduct audits to ensure that partners maintain the required standards and resources.

129 **Types of Audits:**

- **Announced Audits:** Scheduled audits with prior notice to the partner, allowing for preparation and coordination.

- **Unannounced Audits:** Unscheduled audits conducted without prior notice to ensure ongoing compliance and identify and immediate issues or gaps.

130 **Coverage:** Audits will cover areas such as attendance records, admissions documentation, student records, and other compliance-related aspects.

131 **Frequency:**

- **Small UK Partners:** One announced audit every two years.

- **Medium and Large UK Partners:** One announced audit per academic year.

- **International Partners:** Announced audits at least once every two academic years, with unannounced audits as feasible.

Reporting and Follow-Up

132 Following each visit, focused review, or audit, a detailed report will be provided to the partner, outlining findings, recommendations, and any required actions. Partners are expected to address any identified issues promptly and provide evidence of corrective actions taken.

133 The University will use the findings from visits and audits to inform continuous improvement efforts, ensuring that all partnerships contribute positively to the University's strategic goals and maintain high standards of quality and inclusivity.

Student casework

134 Buckinghamshire New University requires its partners to adhere to the following principles regarding academic misconduct, academic appeals, student complaints, and student conduct / discipline.

135 **Academic Appeals:** Academic appeals must be made directly to the University by students in accordance with the University's *Academic Appeals Procedure*. However, students are expected to raise questions with the partner locally, such as querying why a particular decision has been made, before submitting an appeal. Partner staff are expected to uphold the Board of Examiner's decision and not simply encourage students to appeal. This ensures that appeals are made on legitimate grounds.

136 **Academic Misconduct:** Partners must adhere to the University's *Academic Integrity* policy when considering cases of academic misconduct. This includes following the established procedures and guidelines. The University expects all partners to promote academic integrity through their activities in accordance with the principles set out in the policy.

137 Partners are expected to investigate suspected cases of academic misconduct thoroughly, complete paperwork in full, and attach appropriate evidence to support each claim.

138 **Exceptional / Mitigating Circumstances:** Claims for exceptional circumstances must adhere to the *Mitigating Circumstances Procedure* and be submitted directly to the University. The University will review each claim thoroughly, considering the evidence provided and the impact on the student's ability to meet academic requirements.

139 **Student Complaints:** Partners are expected to manage student complaints using their own procedures in the first instance. These procedures should align with the OIA Good Practice Framework principles. UK partners are encouraged to register with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) to ensure adherence to best practices. If students remain dissatisfied at the end of the partner's internal procedure, they may escalate relevant complaints to the University as the awarding body. The University can only respond to complaints that relate directly to the student's academic experience on one of its programmes.

140 **Student Discipline:** Concerns about partner student behaviour should be managed using the partner's own processes. This includes addressing any disciplinary issues in accordance with established procedures. Any decision that relates to the temporary or permanent exclusion of a student registered on one of the University's programmes must be ratified by the University. Full documentation must be provided to support the decision.

141 All cases should be dealt with in a timely manner, ensuring that students are made aware of decisions before commencing the next stage of their studies where appropriate. This helps to minimise disruption to the student's academic progress.

142 The University expects all decisions to be based on the 'balance of probabilities' which is the standard of proof used in civil law cases. Decisions should be accompanied by evidence supporting the case.

143 Guidance can be sought from the Academic Registry, to ensure proper handling of academic appeal, academic misconduct and mitigating circumstances casework. The Office of the Dean of Students can advise on the handling of Student Complaints and Student Disciplinary processes.

Certification and transcripts

144 Buckinghamshire New University is committed to ensuring that all partner students receive formal recognition of their academic achievements. The University has sole responsibility for the issuance of certificates and transcripts for its awards.

145 **Award Certificate:** An Award Certificate is a formal statement of a student's overall result of their course and, where relevant, the classification of that award. BNU provides formal certification of the programmes it awards, including those taught at partner providers. Certificates are produced in accordance with sector guidelines to ensure consistency and quality.

146 **Transcript:** A Transcript details a student's academic journey, including the modules taken, grades obtained, and credits awarded at each Level of study. Partner students will receive an interim transcript at the end of each academic year, and a final transcript upon their completion, or at the termination of their registration with the University. The transcript will include the name and location of the partner provider, the language of instruction, and the mode of attendance.

147   Certificates and final transcripts will be withheld from students who have a tuition fee debt to the University.

148   Certificates and final transcripts will be sent by the University to the partner responsible for all eligible students. Partner providers are responsible for checking the student's full name prior to production of the relevant document.

149   The University will only make changes to a Certificate once printed where the University has made an error, or where a student has provided documentary evidence for a legal name change following gender reassignment. For further information, see the *Certificates and Transcripts Procedure*.

150   If a Partner Institution changes its name, a student enrolled at the time will graduate under the new name for the partner. The Partner will be responsible for confirming their full registered name for the purposes of certificate production.

Graduation and Award Ceremonies

151   Arrangements for Partner Graduation and Award Ceremonies will be confirmed during the approval of the Partnership and drafting of the Operations Manual.

152   Typically, Medium and Large Partners will be expected to manage their own ceremonies, and a representative of the University will attend to confirm awards.

153   Students at Small Partners will be eligible to participate in the University's Graduation and Award Ceremonies, which are held annually in September in High Wycombe.

Changes to Partnership arrangements

154   Effective management of partnership programmes requires clear procedures for adding programmes, making amendments, suspending or withdrawing provision, and adding new sites or changing delivery locations.

155   In all cases Council will be updated on changes through periodic reports from the UCC including where applicable the reasons for the changes and the measures taken to address any issues identified.

Addition of a programme to an existing partnership

156   Partners wishing to add a new programme to an existing partnership must submit a formal request outlining the proposed programme, its objectives, and the expected benefits for students and the partnership.

157   The new programme will generally follow the programme approval process set out in the *Programme Approval and Amendment procedure*. This comprises a three stage process (New programme proposal, Curriculum development, formal approval).

158   The request will be reviewed and approved for development by the Programme Planning Group (PPG), the relevant College(s), and UCC. The programme will then follow the stages outlined in the Programme Approval and Amendment procedure. Once approved through a formal Programme Approval Event, the new programme will be integrated into the partnership's offerings and communicated to all stakeholders.

159   The process for approving franchising of a University programme to a partner will be similar, but the approval event will focus instead on the ability of the partner and the expertise of partner staff to deliver the programme as validated.

Amendment to a programme for an existing partnership

160   Programme leaders are responsible for ensuring the continuing coherence and adherence of their provision to national frameworks and subject requirements, as set out in the University's *Programme Approval and Amendment Procedure*.

161   For validated provision, the Partner Programme Leader is responsible for making amendments through the process as outlined.

162   For franchise provision, the Partner Programme Leader may instead request changes via the BNU Programme Leader. Changes to franchised programmes will apply to all partners delivering that programme and proposed changes will be discussed with them.

Addition of an intake for an existing programme

163   Partners must provide a minimum notice period of six months for any new student intakes. This notice period is essential to allow the University to adequately prepare and allocate resources.

164   Partners are not permitted to add extra intakes outside of the agreed schedule to compensate for failing to meet initial targets. Such actions create unplanned work for University staff and can have long-term impacts on resource allocation and programme quality.

Suspension or withdrawal of a programme from a partnership agreement

165   Suspension of a programme involves temporarily halting new student intakes for a specified period of time. Recruitment of new cohorts will be paused, while continuing students will be unaffected. Suspension of a programme may not exceed two academic years, after which the programme must be reviewed for re-opening or withdrawal.

166   Withdrawal of a programme involves permanently removing a programme from the partnership agreement or, if validated provision, from the University's academic portfolio. Following approval of withdrawal, recruitment of all future cohorts will be cancelled and 'teach out' arrangements for existing students will commence. At all times, the University and the partner must ensure that students will be protected. For further information please see the University's *Teach Out Policy*.

Partner-requested suspension or withdrawal

167   Partners may request the suspension or withdrawal of a programme by following the process set out in the *Programme Suspension and / or Closure Policy*.

168   Suspension or withdrawal should be requested no later than 12 weeks prior to the intended suspension date to allow for adequate planning and communication of the decision and for applicants to make alternative study arrangements.

169   Following approval of withdrawal, the Partnership Agreement will be updated to remove the programme.

University-imposed suspension or withdrawal

170   The University may impose a suspension or withdrawal of a programme due to financial problems, student complaints, issues related to quality and standards, or other irregularities identified. See also *University Intervention to Protect Standards* section, below. The University will notify the partner of the decision and provide a detailed explanation of the reasons.

171   The decision will be reviewed by the University Strategy Group, the UCC, PPG, and relevant Colleges to ensure the decision is justified and necessary. The University must ensure that current students can complete their studies within their remaining period of registration. See the University's *Teach Out Policy*.

172   Final approval for University-imposed suspension or withdrawal will be given by UCC.

Addition of a new site or change of location of delivery

173   Partners may from time to time wish to add a new site from which to offer a programme or change the location of delivery to a new site. Both require formal approval.

174   The partner must submit a formal request detailing the new site and how it will be used in respect of delivery of one or more of the University's programmes.

175   A site visit will be conducted to assess the facilities, infrastructure, and resources available at the new location to ensure it meets academic standards and strategic objectives. See 54 above.

176   Final approval for the new site or delivery location is given by UCC. Once approved, the new site will be integrated into the partnership's operations and communicated to all stakeholders. The partnership Agreement will be updated accordingly.

177   Council will be updated on new sites or changes of delivery locations through periodic reports from the UCC, including site visit findings and the expected impact on the partnership.

Monitoring Arrangements for Partnership Activity

178   The University will continuously monitor and evaluate each partnership to ensure compliance with academic standards and quality processes.

Partnership Review

179   **Objective:** The partnership review process aims to evaluate the performance, compliance, and strategic alignment of the partnership. It ensures that both parties are meeting their commitments and identifies areas for improvement.

180   **Frequency:** Partnership reviews are conducted periodically, typically after five years. The exact nature of the review is determined on a risk-based approach, considering the nature, scale, and location of the partner.

181 **Review Panel:** The review is undertaken by a Review Panel comprised of experienced University staff, an external academic familiar with partnership activity, and a student representative. This ensures a comprehensive and balanced assessment.

182 **Components:** The review will include an evaluation of academic standards, facilities and resources, student satisfaction, financial health, compliance with regulatory requirements, and overall performance.

183 **Due Diligence Reassessment:** The process also includes a reassessment of the due diligence checks to safeguard against changes in the risk profile. This ensures that any new risks or changes in the partner's circumstances are identified and addressed.

184 **Stakeholder Involvement:** Input will be gathered from key stakeholders, including teaching and a managerial staff, students, partnership tutors and BNU registry staff, to provide a comprehensive assessment of the partnership.

185 **Review Report:** A detailed report is prepared summarising the findings of the partnership review. The report will include recommendations for improvement and will identify any issues that need to be addressed.

186 **Action Plan:** The partner will be expected to respond to the review findings and develop an action plan to implement necessary changes and enhancements to the partnership.

Renewal of Partnership Agreement

187 **Duration:** Each partnership agreement has a maximum term of six years. At the end of this term, a formal decision must be made regarding the renewal of this agreement.

188 **Partnership Review Outcome:** The decision to renew the partnership agreement is informed by the outcome of the partnership review (above). The review provides a comprehensive assessment of the partnership's performance and alignment with strategic goals.

189 **Other Relevant Factors:** In addition to the partnership review, other relevant factors are considered in the renewal decision. These may include:

- **Strategic Alignment:** The partnership's ongoing alignment with the University's long-term strategic objectives and mission, especially where these have changed during the partnership term.

- **Market Demand:** The demand for the programmes offered through the partnership and their relevance to current and future market needs. This will include potential competition with the University's plans for its own provision.

- **Financial Viability:** The financial health and sustainability of the partnership, including revenue generation and cost management.

- **Regulatory Compliance:** The partner's compliance with regulatory requirements and any changes in the regulatory environment.

- **Risk Assessment:** An updated risk assessment to identify any new or emerging risks associated with the partnership.

190 **Recommendation:** Based on the comprehensive evaluation, a recommendation will be made either to:

    a. **Renew under Current Terms:** Continue the partnership with the existing terms and conditions.

    b. **Renew with Revised Terms:** Modify the terms of the partnership to address identified issues or enhance collaboration.

    c. **Renew for a Specific Period:** Extend the partnership for a defined period (up to a maximum of two additional years) to allow for further evaluation and improvement.

    d. **Not to Renew (Termination):** Terminate the partnership if it no longer aligns with the University's strategic objectives or fails to meet required standards. See below for the Termination process.

191 **Committee review and approval:** UCC reviews the partnership review report, other relevant factors, and recommendations. The UCC makes a formal decision regarding the renewal of the partnership.

192 **Oversight:** Council receives regular updates on partnership reviews and renewal decisions, ensuring effective oversight of partnership activities.

University Intervention to Protect Standards

193 The University may intervene if it perceives that academic standards are at risk. This includes situations where there are concerns about a partner's ability to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

194 In such circumstances, the University may implement protective measures, such as increased oversight, additional support, temporary suspension of the partnership or individual programmes offered (i.e. a ban on student recruitment), or stepping in directly to address identified issues and protect student interests.

195 In cases where issues cannot be resolved, the University may decide to terminate the partnership. This decision will be made in accordance with the agreed termination procedures and will prioritise the protection of students.

Termination of a Partnership

196 Clear and well-defined termination procedures are essential to ensure an orderly exit from a partnership while protecting the interests of students.

197 **Agreed processes from the outset:** Clear termination procedures must be agreed upon at the outset of the partnership. These procedures should outline the steps to be taken to ensure an orderly exit and the protection of students. Termination procedures should prioritise the protection of students, ensuring they can complete their programmes or transition smoothly to alternative arrangements.

198 **Student Protection Plan (SPP):** Medium and Large UK Providers must have in force and publish a Student Protection Plan approved by the Office for Students. This plan is designed to preserve the continuity and quality of study for all students whenever a

risk to their continued study arises, e.g. market exit. The provider must take all reasonable steps to implement the provisions of its SPP if the events set out in the plan occur. The Plan must include an assessment of the risks to the continuation of study, the likelihood of these risks materialising, and the severity of the impact on students. This ensures that the provider is prepared to address any issues that may affect other students; ability to complete their studies. A copy of the SPP, where available, must be provided as part of the Partner Approval Process.

199 **No-Fault Termination:** No-fault termination allows either party to end the partnership without needing to prove any specific cause or fault. This type of termination can be beneficial in situations where the partnership is no longer mutually beneficial or strategic, even if neither partner has breached the agreement.

200 Either party can initiate a no-fault termination by providing written notice to the other party. To allow for an orderly transition and minimise disruption to students and applicants, either party must give 12 months' notice of termination.

201 The terms of the No-fault termination will be documented in a formal agreement signed by both parties. This agreement should also set out clear procedures for settling financial accounts and obligations between the parties, and for communicating the decision to students and other stakeholders.

202 **Other Grounds for Termination:** A partnership may also be terminated on one or more of the following grounds:

   a. **Non-Compliance / Breach of Contract:** Failure to comply with the terms of the partnership agreement, including academic standards, quality assurance, and regulatory requirements.

   b. **Financial Instability:** Evidence of financial instability or insolvency that may jeopardise the partnership's sustainability.

   c. **Reputational Damage:** Actions or behaviours by the partner that cause significant reputational damage to Buckinghamshire New University.

   d. **Poor Performance:** Persistent poor performance in delivering academic programmes, including low student satisfaction, poor academic outcomes, and failure to meet agreed targets.

   e. **Legal and Ethical Violations:** Breaches of legal or ethical standards, including issues related to academic integrity, data protection, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

203 Depending on the precise nature of the other grounds for termination, it may not be possible to give 12 months' notice of termination.

204 All terminations must be approved by UCC. A record will be maintained of the termination process and any actions taken to protect students.

205 **Exit Strategy:** An exit strategy must be agreed with the partner in all circumstances. This should cover the following:
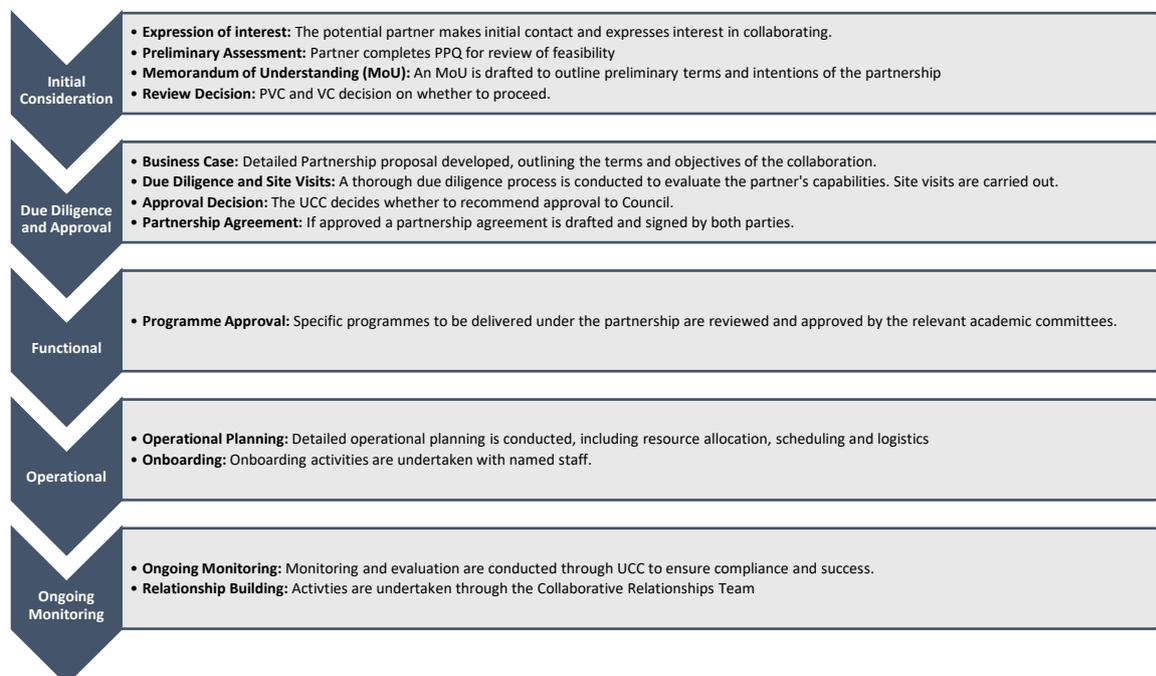
a. **Notification and Communication:**

   i. Formal written notification of the termination to all relevant parties, including the partner, students, staff, external examiners, and regulatory bodies.

   ii. A communication plan to inform all stakeholders about the termination, the reasons behind it and the steps being taken to ensure a smooth transition.

b. **Student Protection:**

   i. Teach-Out Plan to ensure that all current students can complete their programmes or transition smoothly to alternative arrangements. This should include support services available and any financial implications. See the University's *Teach Out Procedure*.

   ii. Identification of alternative institutions or programmes where students can transfer to complete their studies.

c. **Financial and Legal Considerations:**

   i. Settlement of Accounts to ensure that all financial accounts and obligations between the University and the partner are settled. This should include details on outstanding payments, refunds, and any financial penalties or compensations.

   ii. Legal Compliance Review to ensure that the termination complies with all relevant laws and regulations.

d. **Operational Transition:**

   i. A plan for the transfer of responsibilities from the partner, including details on the transfer of academic records, student data (including assessment records), and any physical or digital assets.

   ii. Details of support to be provided to staff impacted by the termination, including information on redeployment opportunities, severance packages, and career counselling.

206 **Monitoring:** Once approved, UCC will monitor implementation of the exit strategy to ensure that all steps are being followed, and issues are addressed properly.

Information for Students and Applicants

207 **Promotional Activity and Marketing Materials:** The University is committed to ensuring that all promotional activities and marketing materials accurately represent its programmes, including those delivered under partnership arrangements. All promotional content must adhere to the University's brand guidelines and receive approval from the University prior to publication. Partners are required to collaborate closely with the University in the creation and dissemination of public information.

208 **Applicant Information:** Information provided to applicants must be comprehensive, accurate, and reflective of the University's standards. This includes details about programme offerings, entry requirements, application procedures, and any other relevant information. The University holds responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of this information and expects partners to uphold these standards.

209 **Induction:** All students must be provided with an induction to their programme of study. This induction should typically include:

- An overview of the programme structure and content

- Key academic and administrative contacts

- Information on support services available to students

- Details on assessment methods and academic expectations

- Guidance on using the University's online learning platforms and resources

210 The induction should also be used as an opportunity for the partner to brief students on the relationship with the University, including its status as the degree-awarding body.

211 **Programme Specification:** Partners are required to publish the version of the programme specification provided by the University as the definitive record. This specification must be accessible to students via the partner course webpage. The programme specification should be detailed and precise, outlining the structure, content, and assessment methods of each programme.

212 **Programme Handbooks:** Programme handbooks serve as essential resources for students, providing comprehensive information about their courses, policies, and support services. All handbooks must follow the University's brand guidelines and be approved by the University before distribution. Partners must ensure that handbooks are accurate and up-to-date.

213 **Compliance and Accountability:** The University takes the accuracy and completeness of information very seriously. Any deliberate misrepresentation of the partnership or the relationship with the University will be considered a breach of contract and may result in the termination of the partnership. Partners must act promptly to remove any incorrect information, including improper or unauthorized use of the University's logo or brand, upon request.

Appendices

Partner Approval Process Diagram

Initial Consideration	• **Expression of interest:** The potential partner makes initial contact and expresses interest in collaborating. • **Preliminary Assessment:** Partner completes PPQ for review of feasibility • **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** An MoU is drafted to outline preliminary terms and intentions of the partnership • **Review Decision:** PVC and VC decision on whether to proceed.
Due Diligence and Approval	• **Business Case:** Detailed Partnership proposal developed, outlining the terms and objectives of the collaboration. • **Due Diligence and Site Visits:** A thorough due diligence process is conducted to evaluate the partner's capabilities. Site visits are carried out. • **Approval Decision:** The UCC decides whether to recommend approval to Council. • **Partnership Agreement:** If approved a partnership agreement is drafted and signed by both parties.
Functional	• **Programme Approval:** Specific programmes to be delivered under the partnership are reviewed and approved by the relevant academic committees.
Operational	• **Operational Planning:** Detailed operational planning is conducted, including resource allocation, scheduling and logistics • **Onboarding:** Onboarding activities are undertaken with named staff.
Ongoing Monitoring	• **Ongoing Monitoring:** Monitoring and evaluation are conducted through UCC to ensure compliance and success. • **Relationship Building:** Activties are undertaken through the Collaborative Relationships Team

Visits and Audits Overview

Activity	Description	Frequency	Participants
Partnership Tutor Visits	Support, monitor progress, ensure compliance.	- Small UK: Termly - Medium UK: Termly - Large UK: Monthly - International: Annually, with virtual support as needed	Partnership Tutors
Focused Reviews	Ad hoc reviews for specific issues or follow-up, including thematic reviews.	As needed	Led by senior academic or PSE staff, with Partnership Tutors, PSE, Academic Staff
Audits	Ensure standards and resources meet sector and University	- Small UK: Every two years - Medium UK: Annually	Led by senior academic or PSE staff, with relevant PSE, Academic Staff

	compliance requirements.	- Large UK: Annually - International: Every two years, with unannounced audits as feasible	

Common legal documents to support partnership activity

Document Name	Description and Purpose
Articulation Agreement	Specifies the terms under which students from one institution can transfer credits to another institution, facilitating smooth transitions and recognition of prior learning.
Data Sharing Agreement	Ensures that any personal data exchanged between the University and its partners is handled in compliance with data protection laws, specifying the purposes of data sharing and the responsibilities of each party.
Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	A non-binding agreement outlining the general principles of the partnership, including the roles and responsibilities of each party. It serves as a preliminary document to establish mutual intentions before formal agreements are made.
Partnership Agreement	A legally binding contract that details the specific terms and conditions of the partnership, including governance, financial arrangements, quality assurance, and termination clauses. It ensures both parties are clear on their obligations.
Quality Assurance Agreement	Sets out the quality assurance processes and standards that the partner must adhere to, including regular monitoring, evaluation, and reporting to ensure the academic integrity of the programmes offered.
Service Level Agreement	Defines the standards of service expected from the partner, including performance metrics, reporting requirements, and penalties for non-compliance. It helps manage expectations and ensures consistent service quality.

Other documents to support partnerships

Document Name	Description and Purpose
Course Delivery Schedule (CDS)	A timetable outlining the delivery of courses, including key dates for admissions, assessments, marking and moderation, Boards, reassessment and other academic activities. It ensures that both the University and its partners are aligned on the timing and logistics of course delivery. The Partner Lead Academic is

Document Name	Description and Purpose
	responsible for completing the CDS, working with the Partnership Tutor and relevant Registry Officer.
Operations Manual	A comprehensive guide detailing the procedures and processes for managing partnership activities. It includes information on governance, quality assurance, financial management, and operational protocols to ensure smooth and effective collaboration.
Partner Programme Calendar (PPC)	A calendar outlining important dates and deadlines for the academic year, including term dates, assessment periods, and holidays. It helps students and staff stay organised and ensures that all parties are aware of key academic milestones. It will also be used in setup of the programme on the University's Student Record System. Calendars must adhere as much as possible to the BNU calendar to ensure efficient processing of students and must follow the structure of the programme shown in the programme specification.
Partner Programme Handbook	A handbook provided to students that includes detailed information about their programme, including course content, assessment methods, and support services. It ensures students have access to all necessary information to succeed in their studies. The Handbook must be completed / updated annually by the Partner Programme Lead.
Partner Register	A record of all approved partners, including details of their status, programmes offered, and any relevant agreements. It helps the University keep track of its partnerships and ensures transparency and accountability.
Partner Staff Approval Form (PSAF)	A form used to request approval for new partner academic staff members. It includes information about the staff member's qualifications, experience, and the modules they will be teaching, ensuring they meet the University's standards. Forms must be accompanied by an up-to-date CV.
Partner Staff Approval Register	A register of all partner staff who have been approved to teach or assess on University programmes. It includes details of their qualifications, experience, and the specific modules they are authorised to deliver. The Register is maintained by the External Collaborations Team.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Description and Purpose	Location
Admissions Officer	Handles the admissions process for students applying to partnership programmes. Ensures that applicants meet the entry requirements and coordinates with the partner on application procedures.	BNU
Partner Lead	The main point of contact at the partner institution, responsible for coordinating partnership activities and ensuring compliance with the partnership agreement.	Partner
Partner Module Lead	Responsible for the delivery and management of specific modules within a programme at the partner institution. Ensures that module content and assessment align with the University's requirements.	Partner
Partner Programme Lead	Oversees the delivery of a specific programme at the partner institution. Ensures that the programme meets the University's academic standards and coordinates with the University on curriculum and assessment matters.	Partner
Partnerships and Licensing Librarian	Responsible for managing licensing and access to BNU library resources for use by partners.	BNU
Partnership Tutor	Provides academic support and guidance to a specified partner. Ensures that the quality of teaching and learning meets the University's standards.	BNU
Registry Officer	Manages student records, registration and assessment processes at the University. Ensures that all student data is accurately recorded and maintained in compliance with regulatory requirements.	BNU
Relationship Manager	Oversees the overall partnership, ensuring effective communication and collaboration between the University and the partner. Manages the strategic aspects of the partnership and addresses any issues that arise.	BNU
Student Records and Data Officer	Responsible for maintaining and updating student records and data at the University. Ensures data accuracy and compliance with data protection regulations.	BNU

Equality Impact Assessment

As a University, we are committed to enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We have a legal (Equality Act 2010) and ethical obligation to ensure our policies, systems and processes are fair, inclusive and ensure every member of the BNU community can thrive.

Whilst we all have protected characteristics, we know there are certain characteristics and communities that are marginalised and underrepresented in Higher Education and the workplace. These are: different ethnicities (including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boaters, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) Disabled individuals; neurodiverse individuals; pregnancy (including maternity and paternity impact); the LGBT+ community; carers; people of different faiths; people impacted by menopause and individuals from a range of backgrounds including: socio-economic disadvantage, homeless, alcohol and/or substance misuse, people experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence, ex-armed forces, looked after children and care leavers. We also know individuals have multiple intersectional experiences and different points in their lives and careers.

1. *With reference to the above characteristics, in what ways does this policy enhance equality and the access of opportunity at BNU?*

The Partner Quality Framework enhances equality and access to opportunity at BNU in several ways:

- **Inclusive Partnerships:** By establishing rigorous selection criteria and due diligence processes, the framework ensures that partnerships are formed with institutions that share BNU's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This alignment promotes a culture of inclusivity across all collaborative activities.

- **Transparent Agreements:** The framework mandates clear and transparent partnership agreements, which include provisions for equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or characteristics.

- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation processes help identify and address any disparities in access or outcomes for students from marginalised and underrepresented communities, ensuring that all students benefit equally from partnership activities.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The framework emphasises the importance of engaging stakeholders, including students from diverse backgrounds, in the partnership process. Their input helps shape policies and practices that enhance equality and access to opportunities.

- **Sustainable and Ethical Practices:** By promoting sustainable and ethical practices, the framework ensures that partnerships contribute positively to the community and adhere to ethical standards, which include considerations for EDI.

2. *In what ways does the policy adversely impact individuals from marginalised and underrepresented communities?*

While the Partner Quality Framework aims to enhance equality, there are potential adverse impacts that need to be considered:

- **Risk of Exclusion:** Stringent selection criteria and due diligence processes might inadvertently exclude potential partners that serve marginalised and underrepresented communities, limiting their access to BNU's resources and opportunities.

- **Resource Allocation:** The focus on compliance and quality assurance might lead to disproportionate allocation of resources towards larger, more established partners, potentially disadvantaging smaller institutions that cater to underrepresented groups.

- **Administrative Burden:** The detailed monitoring and reporting requirements could impose an administrative burden on partners, particularly those with limited capacity, which might affect their ability to effectively support students from marginalised backgrounds.

- **Conflict Resolution:** The framework's conflict resolution procedures might not fully account for the unique challenges faced by individuals from marginalised communities, potentially leading to inequitable outcomes in dispute resolution.

3. *How does this proposal work towards achieving the BNU Equality Objectives as outlined in the [Equality Strategy 2023-2028](#)? Please signpost objectives and actions in the BNU Equality Strategy.*

The Partner Quality Framework supports the BNU Equality Objectives as outlined in the Equality Strategy 2023-2028 in the following ways:

- **Objective A: Amplify Unheard Voices:** The framework's emphasis on stakeholder engagement and transparent agreements ensures that the voices of students and staff from diverse backgrounds are heard and considered in partnership activities. This aligns with the objective to amplify unheard voices within the BNU community.

- **Objective B: Build a Diverse Workforce:** By requiring partners to adhere to rigorous selection criteria and due diligence processes, the framework promotes the recruitment and retention of diverse staff and students, supporting the objective to build a diverse workforce.

- **Priority One: Involve and Empower the Community:** The framework's focus on continuous monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable practices empowers the BNU community by ensuring that partnership activities are inclusive and equitable.

- **Priority Two: Promote Inclusive Practices:** The framework's commitment to ethical standards and transparent agreements promotes inclusive practices across all partnership activities, aligning with the priority to promote inclusivity within the BNU community.

- **Priority Three: Address Disparities:** By identifying and addressing potential adverse impacts through regular monitoring and evaluation, the framework works towards

addressing disparities in access and outcomes for students from marginalised and underrepresented communities.

These actions and principles within the Partner Quality Framework directly contribute to achieving the BNU Equality Objectives and priorities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

Signed:
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