

## Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP)

### Information about Institutional Approval and Programme Validation by The Open University

Thank you for enquiring about institutional approval and validation by The Open University (OU).

If you wish to apply for institutional approval and validation, please complete the '*Application Form*', which is available on our website at the address below. Please provide all the relevant information about the institution that is being proposed for approval and the academic programmes that are being proposed for validation.

Once we receive your completed application form, the information you have provided will be assessed by the University and we will contact you with regards to the next stages.

If you have any queries regarding the information outlined in this guide, please contact us:

**Email:** [OUVP-enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:OUVP-enquiries@open.ac.uk)

**Website:** [www.open.ac.uk/about/validation-partnerships](http://www.open.ac.uk/about/validation-partnerships)

## The Open University and Open University Validation Partnerships

### About The Open University (OU)

The OU was established by Royal Charter in 1969 and currently offers almost 600 courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Over 170,000 people study with the OU, making it the largest academic institution in the UK. Since its creation, the OU has taught more than 2 million students. Other facts and figures:

- 76% of directly-registered OU students work full or part-time during their studies
- 23% of OU UK undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas
- 34% of new OU undergraduates are under 25
- 24709 students with disabilities studied with us in 2017/18
- 32% of students had one A level or a lower qualification at entry
- 78% of FTSE 100 companies sponsored staff on OU courses in 2017/18
- REF 2014: 72% of OU research submitted was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent

### About Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP)

Through its partnerships with a range of institutions nationally and worldwide, the OU validates awards which have parity of esteem with awards offered throughout UK higher education. The OU's validation activity is managed by OUVP.

Partnership approval and validation support the University's mission to widen access to higher education. We currently validate approximately 350 programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level and to date over 181,700 students have achieved an OU validated award.

#### Characteristics of approval and validation with The Open University

- Dedicated quality assured administrative and academic support through an OU Senior Quality and Partnerships Manager (primary day to day contact) and an Academic Reviewer from within Open University faculties
- Autonomy of curriculum design and development
- Validation of any subject as well as those qualifications embedded within degree apprenticeships
- Network of national and international subject specialist peers
- Promotion of Institutional Responsibility for Quality Assurance and supporting those wishing to gain degree awarding powers
- Network with a wide range of Partner Institutions throughout UK and overseas
- Quality Assurance through self-evaluation and peer review

The Open University has established a global presence in the higher education sector. It currently has a national and international network of 42 partner institutions, which share the following characteristics:

- Formal mechanisms to share good practice.
- Mutual respect for the autonomy and independence of each approved organisation.
- Where appropriate, shared development and ownership of learning materials and the use of Open University materials under license.

OUPV is underpinned by the high-quality support of the appointed professionals who participate in the external peer review processes which are central to its activities.

<u>Statistics</u>	
• Partner Institutions	<b>42</b>
International	<b>5</b>
UK	<b>37</b>
• Validated Programmes (approx.)	<b>350</b>
• Students on validated programmes (April 2021)	<b>41,059</b>
• Qualifications awarded (2019/20)	<b>6,902</b>
• Awards conferred to the end of 2019/20	<b>181,726</b>

### **The Open University’s approach to Institutional Approval and Programme Validation**

Our approach is based on the following key elements:

- Establishing a collaborative partnership between The Open University and the partner institution, in order to enable the institution to offer programmes leading to Open University validated awards.
- Providing a supportive framework within which partner institutions take responsibility for the quality assurance and day-to-day management of their own academic programmes.
- Using groups of experts from academic institutions, the professions, the business community and other appropriate organisations to make peer judgements about the quality of institutions and the learning programmes that they offer.

In line with this, institutions whose programmes are approved to lead to the University’s validated awards are expected to meet the following principles of institutional approval:

- **Principle 1:** Provision of an appropriate learning environment
- **Principle 2:** Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic authority
- **Principle 3:** Appropriate academic organisation and the administrative structure to support it
- **Principle 4:** Robust and rigorous quality assurance and enhancement that are informed by the UK Quality Code
- **Principle 5:** Relations with the wider academic community

## **Process of Institutional Approval and Programme Validation**

Institutions wishing to offer programmes leading to Open University validated awards must first be approved. However, the validation of one or more specific programmes can occur in parallel with the institutional approval process.

The institutional approval and validation processes involve a series of interactions between OUVP and the institution, culminating in a visit by a 'peer review' panel lasting one or two days, depending on the complexity of the proposal.

### **Peer Review**

OUVP carries out institutional approval and programme validation through a system known as 'peer review'. This means that all submissions are considered by specially convened panels of expert advisers drawn, as appropriate, from the fields of quality assurance, senior management, teaching in higher education, commerce, industry, and the professions.

The aim is to provide a panel that can offer a range of perspectives, take a critical but sensitive approach, and make suitable comparisons with standards and practice elsewhere in higher education in the UK. The proposed membership of institutional approval and validation panels will be discussed with the institution.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is institutional approval?**

Institutional approval is the process through which an institution is judged by a panel of peers, in order to assess if it provides a satisfactory environment for the conduct of programmes leading to OU validated awards. Approval of an institution is a pre-requisite for the validation of any programme of study, although, where appropriate, institutional approval and programme validation may proceed concurrently.

### **What is validation?**

Validation is the process whereby a judgement is reached by a panel of peers about whether or not a programme of study designed to lead to an OU validated award meets the principles and requirements for that award. OU validated awards must be equivalent in standard to comparable awards offered throughout UK higher education.

### **What is the benefit of having learning programmes validated?**

OU validated awards have parity of esteem with the awards offered throughout UK higher education. A validated award is exactly the same as an OU direct award and offers the same opportunities in terms of employment and application for postgraduate study. Open University partner institutions become part of a wide network of information and expertise, at regional, national and international levels, and secure access to the advisory services offered by The Open University.

### **What qualifications can students achieve?**

A full range of taught awards at first degree, postgraduate level and those embedded within Degree Apprenticeships are available including:

- Certificate of Higher Education, broadly equivalent to 1,200 hours of study at the level of the 1st year of an English Honours degree.
- Diploma in Higher Education, broadly equivalent to 1200 hours of study at each of the levels of the 1st and 2nd years of an English Honours degree.
- Foundation Degrees.
- First Degrees: BA, BSc, BEd, BEng, BMus, LLB, BTP, MEng.
- Professional/Graduate Diplomas.
- Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas, broadly equivalent to respectively 600 and 1,200 hours of study at postgraduate level.
- Taught Masters and Doctorate degrees: MA, MBA, MSc, MEd, MArch, MTh, DCLinPsy.
- Degree Apprenticeship Qualifications

### **What sort of certificates will students receive?**

Students will receive an Open University validated award certificate, which will include their name, the award, the name of the institution they studied at and the date the award was conferred. The Open University coat of arms, crest and logo will appear on the certificate, which will be signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the University Secretary. In addition, students will receive a Diploma Supplement, which provides those who have completed a higher qualification with a formal, verifiable and comprehensive record of learning and achievement. This comes in addition to the transcripts that students will have received as they progress through their programme.

**Does the location of the programme matter?**

No, providing sufficient resources are put in place to support student learning.

**Does it matter if programmes are not full-time?**

No. Programmes can be offered on a full-time or part-time basis or by distance or open learning as well as by flexible learning in conjunction with employers.

**Do the programmes have to be distance learning?**

No. The Open University validates both taught and distance learning programmes.

**Does the programme have to be taught in English?**

No, but there has to be a sufficiently extensive peer group fluent in the language of tuition and in English and experienced in UK-based higher education.

**Does it matter if the institution has programmes validated by other bodies?**

No, The Open University works with a number of institutions that have other validating partners. Where an institution has a current or former relationship with another UK awarding institution for the validation of programmes, OUVV will make enquiries of that awarding institution as to the standing and effectiveness of the institution seeking approval.

**Who decides what should be in the programme and how it should be delivered?**

The partner institution is responsible for the design and delivery of learning programmes, but they must meet the OU criteria for validated programmes.

**What does the institution need to demonstrate in order to achieve institutional approval? The institution must demonstrate that:**

- It can provide access to resources, including human resources, information technology and library facilities' appropriate for the programmes of study that it wishes to offer.
- It has procedures in place to assure itself that a learning programme is running as planned and that the standard of the work being achieved is maintained and, where possible, improved.
- It can provide, and is able to maintain, a challenging learning environment for students.

All these considerations must be met and apply whether or not the organisation is an educational institution. The Open University recognises that commercial structures and organisational cultures vary considerably and that commercial bodies must respond to imperatives which are different from those of educational institutions. Nevertheless, certain elements of a 'teaching and learning environment' must be in place, maintained and safeguarded if standards of programmes leading to Open University validated awards are to be consistently upheld.

**What does the institution need to demonstrate to achieve programme validation?**

The institution must demonstrate to a panel of people, who are experts in the subject area and knowledgeable about higher education, that the programme to be offered:

- has clear aims and objectives.
- is structured and coherent.
- is pitched at a level appropriate to the award being sought.
- is delivered by staff with appropriate qualifications.
- Can be assessed competently and impartially.

**How long will the approval and validation process take?**

This depends on the complexity of the proposals, but it usually takes about 12 months, although in some instances it may be slightly quicker.

### **What will institutional approval and validation cost?**

The Open University will seek to cover its own costs in full in the initial approval and validation of programmes. Charges for institutional approval and validation vary, depending on the services that the institution requires from the University and the complexity of the proposals. Estimated costing can be discussed during the initial meeting but detailed costing will only be provided where the University has decided to progress an application following receipt and examination of the completed enquiry form.

### **How do institutions begin the approval and validation process?**

By completing and returning the application form. This should include all the relevant information about the institution that is being proposed for institutional approval and the academic programmes that are being proposed for validation. All enquiries should be directed to [ouvp-enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:ouvp-enquiries@open.ac.uk)

### **Where can I find out more information?**

For further information about approval and validation by The Open University, please visit [www.open.ac.uk/about/validation-partnerships](http://www.open.ac.uk/about/validation-partnerships). In particular, the *OU Handbook for Validated Awards*, which is available on the website, sets out the principles and regulations for Open University validated awards. Section B of the handbook focuses more specifically on institutional approval and section D on programme validation.

The following links lead to further information that you may find useful:

#### **Application Form**

[\(OU\) Validation Partnerships Application Form -1.docx](#)

#### **Academic Regulations**

[Regulations for Validated Awards of the OU](#)

**Handbook** (guidance and procedures – section C deals with institutional approval)

[OU Handbook for Validated Awards.](#)

**Other resources for partners** (templates, guidance etc)

[Partners | Validation Partnerships \(open.ac.uk\)](#)