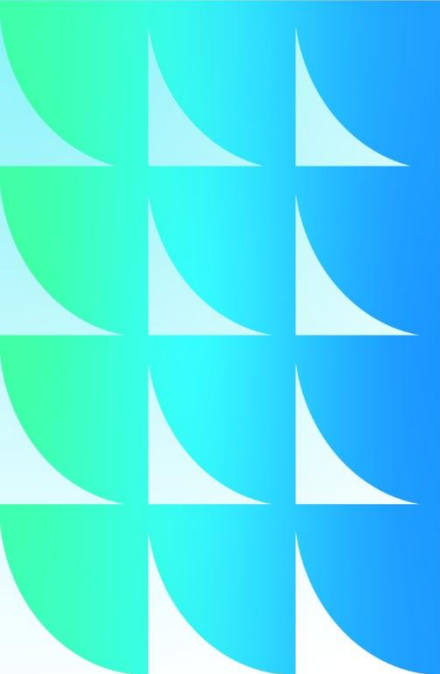




Further guidance for programme documentation

Open University Validation Partnerships

September 2026

Background document

The background document for validation and revalidation proposals provides the context and rationale for the proposal, describing how it has involved consultation with all stakeholders, including students, staff, employers and other external input. It is produced specifically to facilitate the (re)validation process and to assist a panel that may not be familiar with the partner or the background to the proposal. It should be reflective and analytical. It will be treated as a confidential document. The OU has identified minimum requirements for background documentation.

Critical appraisal (for revalidation proposals)

In the case of revalidations, the background document should also incorporate a critical appraisal of the success of the programme and its development in practice. The partner needs to draw on existing evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of their mechanisms for managing and enhancing the programme.

The revalidation submission should include the rationale of any proposed modifications to the programme, such as the addition or replacement of new modules or pathways. This takes account of subject area developments that have taken place since the last (re)validation. The critical appraisal should also be informed by feedback from students, external examiners and other relevant external stakeholders during the approval period.

The [background and critical appraisal template](#) is available on the OUVF website.

Student handbook

A draft student handbook should describe details of all aspects of the proposed programme in accessible and student-friendly language. It needs to include a programme specification, details of all modules in the programme, as well as regulations and resources for student support (which should be in line with published CMA requirements, see page 29 of the [Handbook for Validated Awards](#)).

When modules within a programme are offered as single registerable modules, a student handbook should also be developed for module-only students, setting out the arrangements for delivery of their provision.

The OU has identified minimum content for student handbooks, and the guidance document can be found in Appendix 1 of the [Handbook for Validated Awards](#).

Programme specification and curriculum map

The programme specification should provide a concise description of the programme's aims and intended learning outcomes and how they will be achieved and demonstrated. The specification will help students understand how the teaching and learning methods enable the outcomes to be achieved and how the assessment methods enable achievement to be demonstrated. An indication is given of the relationship between the programme and its study elements and any subsequent professional qualifications or career paths.

The expectations around student achievement and attributes outlined in the learning outcomes must be appropriate to the level of the award within the QAA Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Learning outcomes must also reflect the detailed statements of graduate attributes set out in the QAA subject benchmark statements are relevant to the programme/award.

The programme specification is a publicly available document and must be accessible to students, teaching staff, assessors, external examiners, employers, and the wider community. The OU has a programme specification template that all partners must use, and which is available on the OUVF website.

Partner institutions should map the learning outcomes set out in modules specifications against the intended learning outcomes for the programme as outlined in the programme specification, to ensure overall completeness and coherence. The curriculum map is included in the programme specification template.

Validated programmes delivered in other languages must have a programme specification both in English and in the language of delivery.

Module specifications

For the purposes of (re)validation, module specifications should be submitted as a separate document. As the (re)validation process is generally an iterative process, having the module specifications as one document makes updating easier.

There is a [module specification template](#) for module specifications that partners must use and is available on the OUVV website.

Apprenticeship standards

For programmes being used to deliver against English apprenticeship standards or frameworks, the following additional information/ documentation should be submitted:

- Clarity regarding the range of delivery modes to be used. Will apprenticeship students and non-apprenticeship students be eligible to register for the award for example?
- Apprenticeship standard (approved for delivery) which the proposed award maps to.
- Mapping of the academic award to this standard which should be appended to the programme specification.
- The approved assessment plan and details of how the academic award links to this.
- End-point assessment details and how this will or will not link to the degree element.
- An example commitment statement that will be used.
- Work-based learning quality assurance resources. For example, handbooks developed for the employers, mentors, practice tutors, etc.

Regulatory framework and institutional policies

In addition to the student handbook (or VLE information), the partner institution's regulations ([Regulations for validated awards of The Open University](#)) and policies should be provided as separate documents. This includes any documents included in the student handbook (or on the VLE), either by means of a simple reference or a general statement, including a reference to where the full document can be found. It is accepted that this may lead to some duplication of information.

Material on institution-wide strategies and policies and procedures should be the same for all programmes considered for validation.

The policy and regulatory framework required for (re)validation submissions typically comprise:

- **Admissions policy and regulations for the programme:** These will be in accordance with the OU's Regulations for validated awards of The Open University.
- **Assessment/progression policy and regulations:** These need to be in accordance with the OU's Regulations for validated awards of The Open University.

Staff development policy

This needs to be the partner institution's staff development policy setting out how it operates at programme level. This should include information on:

- Staff appraisal.

- Peer review or teaching.
- Induction and mentoring of new staff.
- Support to visiting and part-time staff.
- Opportunities for internal staff development or CPD workshops.
- Opportunities for research/scholarship activities.
- Staff involvement in subject networks.

Placement learning policies and regulations/study abroad regulations

This should cover:

- The role of supervisors/mentors.
- Criteria for approval of placements.
- Student support and information.
- Student responsibilities and feedback.
- Monitoring and evaluation of placement/study abroad opportunities.

Apprenticeship regulations for the (re) validation of programmes being used to deliver against English apprenticeship standards or frameworks.

This should cover:

- The role of mentors, practice tutors, work-based learning tutors etc.
- Independent learner record and commitment statement.
- Student support and information relating to the workplace.

- Student responsibilities and feedback.
- Employer responsibilities and feedback.
- Monitoring and evaluation of work-based learning.
- Complaints and appeals processes for apprenticeship students.

Equality and diversity policies (covering both staffing and student matters):

The OU's expectations regarding equality and diversity are set out in Section H of the handbook.

The OU expects partners to have established internal procedures for formal approval of programme documentation. Submission documentation must be prepared by partners in advance of preliminary (re)validation meetings and reviewed to take account of external input as part of the (re)validation process.

Process panel member

The OU may nominate an academic representative (the process panel member (PPM)). They must have specialist expertise in the proposal area and their role is to make comments relevant to validation during the development of the programme. The PPM attends the preliminary validation meeting organised by the partner and the final validation meeting organised by the OU.

The partner is invited to identify one external panel member – an institutional process panel member (IPPM) – for the preliminary validation panel. They may also take part in the final validation, subject to approval by the OU. The aim of this is to give partners the opportunity to have a 'critical friend' involved in the

process of considering whether the programme is ready to be (re)validated, who can also be a link between the preliminary and the final validation meetings.

Approval of the IPPMs to sit on final validation panels is subject to the submission of a CV to the S/QPM. The nomination should be submitted at an early stage, in advance of the planning meeting.

The following criteria will be taken into account:

- Expertise relevant to the proposal.
- Impartiality – for example, the nominee does not have any formal links with the partner institution in the last five years as an external examiner or a former member of staff.
- Prior experience of teaching on programmes at the same level or above.
- Where appropriate, professional expertise from a relevant professional background.
- Individuals who have been engaged by the partner as external consultants for the proposal should not be nominated as process panel members.

Panel members are asked to provide initial comments on (re)validation documentation, including issues for consideration and any further information needed. A summary of those comments is shared with the partner institution. The OU encourages observers nominated by the partner institution to overview the (re)validation process and attend meetings where appropriate, except those with students.

Observers are not decision-making members of the panel, but they are encouraged to assist the panel by contributing factual information when requested. However, if a situation arises where the participation of observers is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the chair has the discretion to ask observers to leave until recalled.

Observers are from the partner institution's academic staff but may not be members of the institution's senior management or persons involved in the management or teaching of the programme under validation or revalidation. Observers may be invited when a partnership reapproval and (re)validation of a programme takes place concurrently, subject to the prior agreement of the panel chair. When this happens, observers are normally external members of the partner institution's academic board or its equivalent, or from the partner institution's governing body. Observers are not permitted at the partnership development approval or partnership development reapproval meetings when they do not include the concurrent (re)validation of a programme.