



PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY
ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE MAYNOOTH

PARTNERSHIP WITH
EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

PROCEDURE HANDBOOK

2013



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Faculty of the Pontifical University, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth is committed as a principal aim of its mission to "broadening access in higher and continuing education through inter-disciplinary and focused programmes that meet contemporary needs".¹ Within areas of study reflective of its mission, it desires to create a conducive teaching/learning environment, which provides access to students of different ages and backgrounds, and to achieving quality and excellence. As a result, the Pontifical University is committed to working in partnership with appropriate institutions and organisations in Ireland and abroad. It recognises the mutual benefits, which arise from collaborative study programmes, and the increased opportunities that such provision makes available to a wider range of students.

1.2 Section X of the Statutes of the Pontifical University (1999) authorises the relationship with other Institutes, for
"such co-operation is regarded by the Faculty as an important element in accomplishing its work" No. 149(2).

1.3 Acting on behalf of the Faculty, and in accordance with quality assurance procedures, the Director of Affiliated Programmes in conjunction with the Affiliated Programmes Board facilitates programme accreditation and validation.

1.4 In developing formal collaborative programmes, which involve a Pontifical University Award, the Faculty wishes to assure itself that partner institutions offer an ethos and environment for teaching and learning appropriate to higher education, the purposes of the proposed collaboration and the mission statement of the University.

1.5 Flourishing programmes can only be achieved by a partnership of trust and mutual interaction by all those involved. To this end, the Affiliated Programmes Board has adopted the guidelines and procedures set out in this Handbook for the validation, approval, monitoring, review and general academic quality assurance and quality enhancement in respect of the programmes delivered by external organisations.

1.6 These procedures are reviewed and updated periodically in the light of experience in implementing the procedures and feedback received from staff, students, external examiners. The future development of such partnerships may call for revision of the procedures from time to time, so that they continue to operate within the framework of the St. Patrick's College strategic plan and general academic quality assurance procedures.² All interested parties are invited to recommend improvements arising from their experience.

1.7 This Handbook is structured as follows:

2. Definitions
3. Roles and Responsibilities
4. Guiding Principles for Partnership Arrangements
5. Procedures of Accreditation/Validation
6. Procedures of Assessment
7. Procedures of On-going Quality Assurance

¹ The mission statement may be accessed at <http://www.maynoothcollege.ie/faculty/aims.shtml>

² See <http://www.maynoothcollege.ie/faculty/qualityreview07.shtml>

2. DEFINITIONS

In the context of this handbook the following definitions are adopted:

2.1 A Partnership will involve a contractual relationship with an appropriate external institution or organisation for the purposes of collaboration on programmes of study.

2.2 Accreditation of an organisation

Accreditation is the process whereby an organisation is evaluated and judged suitable for assuming, under prescribed conditions, responsibility for the management of programmes which lead to awards of the Pontifical University, including the implementation of quality assurance procedures and the maintenance and improvement of academic standards. Accreditation of an organisation will normally occur as a prelude to the validation/ franchise of programmes of study.

2.3 Partner organisations

A partner organisation is one accredited by St. Patrick's College, Maynooth in which a programme or range of programmes is validated and/or franchised by St. Patrick's College. Such an organisation may be in Ireland or abroad.

2.4 Programme of study

A programme of study is a set of courses or modules leading towards a Pontifical University higher certificate or degree award, or to continuing professional diplomas or postgraduate diplomas. It also may include programmes of research leading to postgraduate diplomas and degrees.

2.5 Validation of a programme of study

Validation is the process whereby a proposed programme of study – initiated and designed within an external organisation – is judged to be appropriate to lead to a Pontifical University award.

2.6 Franchising of a programme of study

Franchising is the process whereby a validated Pontifical University programme of study is wholly or partly delivered in the partner organisation by its own staff.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic quality in the programmes offered by external organisations to St. Patrick's College requires that the agreed aims, overall objectives and learning outcomes of educational programmes are consistently achieved. This requires the development among all stakeholders the desire to achieve the highest standards and to be recognised in this regard by peers, students, and potential students.

The primary participants facilitating the partnership are:

- a) The Programme Director (representing the Partnered Organisation)
- b) The Director of Affiliated Programmes (St. Patrick's College, Maynooth)
- c) The Affiliated Programmes Board (St. Patrick's College, Maynooth)
- d) The Council of Faculty (St. Patrick's College, Maynooth)

a) The Programme Director

The Programme Director is the appointed person within the external organisation with responsibility for the co-ordination of the programme. It is a management position with a range of duties and responsibilities, including the following:

- reporting to the Director of Affiliated Programmes, St. Patrick's College
- Collating the required documentation for accreditation and/or validation of a programme of study
- Sourcing appropriate lecturers/deliverers of modules
- overall management, administration and development of the programme, such as the provision of resources, suitable location and so on
- the co-ordination and safe-keeping of assignments, marks and evaluations
- general academic leadership for the discipline area, including management of academic quality assurance and enhancement activities
- strategic planning and implementation
- budget holder
- providing an annual report

b) The Faculty of Theology

The full responsibilities of the Faculty are listed in Article 17 of the Statutes of the Pontifical University. With specific regard to the programmes delivered by partner organisations, its responsibilities include the following:

- Make provision for matters concerning examinations and the awarding of degrees and diplomas, including the accreditation of partner organisations and the validation of appropriate programmes;
- Approve policies and procedures overseeing the relationship with partnership organisations
- Approve Programme Directors and Module Deliverers
- Decide matters concerning studies and discipline that come before it, without prejudice to the authority of the Trustees;

c) The Affiliated Programmes Board

To assist it in exercising its general responsibilities, the Faculty Council delegates some of its functions to committees which carry them out in accordance with clearly defined terms of reference. The Affiliated Programmes Board is responsible for monitoring and facilitating the validation, review and approval of programmes with partnership organisations, as set out in its policies including:

- advising the Faculty, and the Director of Affiliated Programmes, on matters related to partner organisations
- monitoring matters relating to the standards of validated programmes, their quality, and the academic environment in which they operate;
- keeping under review procedures for ensuring the appropriateness of various forms of academic association with external organisations including the franchising of Pontifical University awards and the accreditation of courses offered by other organisations;
- considering reports from partner organisations in relation both to annual monitoring reports on programmes and the monitoring and implementation of quality improvement plans in this respect:
- liaising with other committees of the Faculty in relation to all programmes under its remit;
- carrying out such other functions as are considered appropriate subject to the approval of the Faculty;
- strategic planning and development of new ventures.

d) The Director of Affiliated Programmes

The Director of Affiliated Programmes is the Chairperson of the Affiliated Programmes Board. The responsibilities of the role include:

- liaising with the appointed Programme Directors in partner organisations
- supporting the practical requirements of the programmes;
- organising the quality assurance monitoring;
- development of procedures and policies;
- facilitating the progression of the implementation Quality Assurance recommendations;
- arrange the practical implementation of procedures of programme validation and the accreditation of partner organisations;
- strategic planning and development of new ventures. convening meetings of the Affiliating Programmes Board
- progressing the work of the Affiliated Programmes Board
- reporting to the Faculty

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 Fundamental to a partnership arrangement is the continuing dialogue between the partners, through which they work together to establish the highest standards possible. St. Patrick's College assists a partner organisation to take responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of the standards of the programme and, by association, the academic and professional standards of St. Patrick's College.

4.2 The general purpose of the accreditation and validation/franchising process is to ensure that:

- the programme is consistent with the mission and strategic development plan of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth;
- the programme satisfies a real need;
- the academic standards of the programme are appropriate given the programme level and the award it carries, and that the programme is comparable with similar programmes elsewhere in Ireland and internationally;
- there are sufficient resources and facilities available to run the programme as described in the Programme Document;
- the requirements of the NQAI in relation to access, transfer and progression, learning outcomes and standards are met.³

4.3 Partnership arrangements should be characterised by:

(a) a recognition of the need not to impact unnecessarily on the autonomy of the partner organisation;

(b) peer review, drawing upon appropriate expertise within St. Patrick's College. Where necessary St. Patrick's College will seek, relevant expertise available from other sources.

4.4 There should not normally be any differentiation between the title of a degree or other award in a partner organisation and St. Patrick's College, except where the programme content makes it appropriate to give a special designation. Where St. Patrick's College does not offer an award in the area concerned, titles employed should be those which enjoy national and, if appropriate, international recognition.

³ See: <http://www.nqai.ie>

5. PROCEDURES FOR ACCREDITATION/VALIDATION OF A PARTNER ORGANISATION

Accreditation is the process whereby an organisation is evaluated and judged suitable for assuming, under prescribed conditions, responsibility for the management of programmes which lead to awards of the Pontifical University, including the implementation of quality assurance procedures and the maintenance and improvement of academic standards.

Validation is the process whereby a proposed programme of study to be offered in a partner organisation as appropriate to lead to a Pontifical University award.

Franchising is the process whereby a validated Pontifical University programme of study is wholly or partly delivered in the partner organisation by its own staff.

The processes of accreditation and validation/franchising can run concurrently. If necessary, the process of accreditation may take place before the process validation/franchising.

The process is as follows:

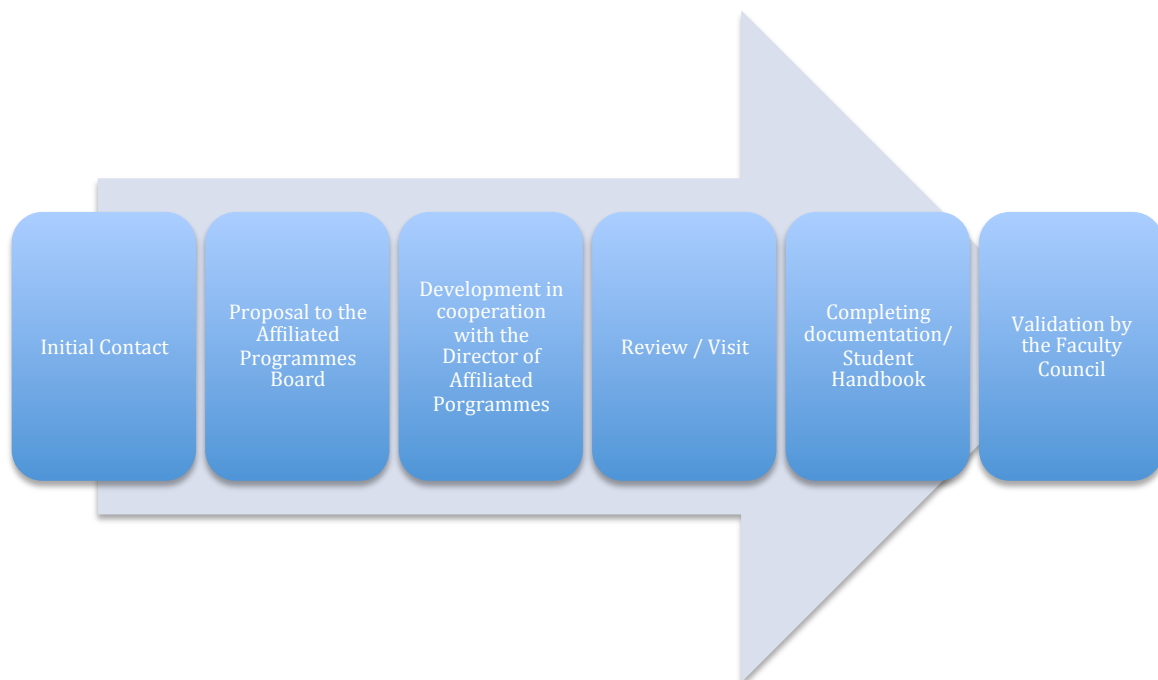


Figure One

5.1 Procedures for Accreditation of a Partner Organisation

5.1.1 Roles and Responsibilities

- (a) *It is the responsibility of the organisation seeking a partnership with St. Patrick's College to progress any proposal to the satisfaction of the Faculty.*
- (b) The Director of Affiliated Programmes acts in a supportive role.
- (c) The Affiliated Programmes Board evaluates and recommends the proposal to the Faculty.
- (d) The final decision to accredit a partner organisation rests with the Faculty.

5.1.2 Initial Proposal

An initial proposal form is completed, supplemented with as much supporting documentation as possible (See Appendix). The Affiliated Programmes Board considers the proposal. If it coheres with the general purposes (Section 4.2), strategy and mission of St. Patrick's College, approval is given to proceed to the following stages.

5.1.3 Development of the Proposal

The Director and/or a member of the Affiliated Programmes Board undertakes to support and advise the proposed partner organisation in relation to the final document to be prepared for the Faculty. The proposal-document should address the following:

- (a) the mission of the potential partner;
- (b) the academic and administrative structures;
- (c) the availability and use of resources including staff accommodation, computer facilities, laboratories, library facilities;
- (d) the quality of its teaching staff;
- (e) the curriculum currently on offer;
- (f) the quality assurance procedures in place;

And if applicable

- (g) the academic and professional achievements and aspirations of the potential partner;
- (h) the staff development arrangements;
- (i) the quality of its research.

As part of the process, one or more visits to the potential partner organisation. On completion of the visit(s), the Director and/or member of the Affiliated Programmes Board prepares a report for the Affiliated Programmes Board. In turn, a report is presented to the Faculty of Theology recommending, where considered appropriate, that the partner organisation be accredited. The Affiliated Programmes can ask for further documentation and development of the proposal.

5.1.4 The final decision on the approval of accreditation of a partner organisation shall be made having regard to the recommendation of the Affiliated Boards by the Faculty of Theology, subject to the completion of a Memorandum of Understanding (See Appendix).

5.1.5 The partner organisation shall undertake not publicise accreditation unless it is associated with validation/franchising of programmes of study;

5.1.6 Where a partner organisation is accredited, such accreditation shall remain in place for no longer than one year in the absence of an application for validation/ franchising of programmes of study.

5.2 Procedures for the Validation and Franchising of a Programme of Study

A partner organisation may make a programme submission to St. Patrick's College. The programme may be initiated and designed within an external organisation and proposed for validation or the partner organisation may propose to deliver a validated Pontifical University programme of study by its own staff.

Subject to a successful report being available on the accreditation of a potential partner, the partner organisation may wish to make a course/programme submission to St Patrick's College. A formal request for validation/franchising of programmes of study should be made in writing to the Director of Affiliated Programmes.

5.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

- (a) *It is the responsibility of the Programme Director to progress any proposal to the satisfaction of the Faculty*
- (b) The Director of Affiliated Programmes acts in a supportive role.
- (c) The Affiliated Programmes Board evaluates and recommends the proposal to the Faculty.
- (d) The final decision to accredit a partner organisation rests with the Faculty of Theology.

5.2.2 Initial Proposal

In the case of franchising, the focus of this request should be on the institutional environment and in this regard the submission should include relevant details as itemised below. These also apply to validation.

- (a) Resources available to operate the course/programme effectively;
- (b) Proposed admissions criteria;
- (c) Course/programme management and quality assurance arrangements.

And where applicable

- (d) Staff development,

For franchising purposes, while the submission need not include programme details, any proposed modifications to the franchised programme of study must be detailed in the submission.

Validation

The emphasis in the validation process is broader to reflect both the institutional environment and the quality of the programme. In this context the submission for validation should broadly include the following additional information:

- (a) Programme background and demand;
- (b) Title of programme, award sought and date of submission;
- (c) Programme aims and objectives;
- (d) Nature, duration and general structure of programme;
- (e) Curriculum, syllabuses, assessment procedures, learning outcomes;
- (f) Relationships with professional and academic bodies, course advisory boards, for example.

The detailed requirements for the submission are set out in Appendix, which is extracted from the St. Patrick's College Handbook for Quality Enhancement.

5.2.3 The Board of Affiliated Programmes assesses the particular validation/franchising proposal. It may include others to reflect the appropriate expertise necessary to assess the proposal.

5.2.4 Certain programmes of study submitted to St. Patrick's College may also be subject to the approval of the relevant statutory or professional body. In considering any application for validation, the proposing institution shall liaise as necessary with the relevant body.

5.2.5 (a) The Director of Affiliated Programmes and/or member(s) of the Affiliated Programmes Board will visit the partner organisation to study in more detail the environment in which the programme would operate with particular reference to the management structure and support systems and facilities in existence and, in the case of a validation process, the programme documentation.

(b) The assessment of the detailed validation/franchising proposal should ensure that the standards associated with the proposal are generally comparable with those standards operating within St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

A report will be submitted to the Affiliated Programmes Board, setting out its recommendations with any conditions in relation to the application for validation/franchising by the partner organisation.

5.2.6 The Affiliated Programmes Board reports its recommendations to the Faculty of theology regarding the outcome of the validation/franchising process.

5.2.7 The final decision regarding the partnership rests with the Faculty of Theology, and is subject to the completion of a Memorandum of Understanding.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 The procedures for the validation/franchising of a programme of study are to be compatible with St. Patrick's College quality assurance procedures and standards.

6.1.1 It is the responsibility of the organisation seeking a partnership with St. Patrick's College for the purpose of validating a programme of study to satisfy the Faculty that the programme in question is at third-level. In this respect, the following criteria should be addressed by the potential partner:

- A candidate to be enrolled on the programme will possess an appropriate level of education and experience.
- The staff teaching on the programme will, in general, be expected to possess a third-level qualification at honours degree level, or equivalent. In special circumstances, and depending on the nature of the programme, consideration may be given to alternative qualifications.
- Programmes of study to be offered by the potential partner and under which the partnership is sought should be equivalent, in terms of level and standard, to programmes offered by St. Patrick's College. Such programmes should have a strong academic emphasis rather than an orientation towards skills development.
- An effective strategy for assessment of students on the programme is an essential requirement. Assessment methods should be equivalent to the procedures employed for the assessment of students within St. Patrick's College.

6.2 St. Patrick's College shall be satisfied that the partner organisation has in place appropriate procedures for quality assurance and that rolling annual course/programme reports are undertaken within the partner organisation, with written records maintained. The partner organisation is required to submit to St. Patrick's College and any other validating body, by a mutually agreed date and in an agreed form, a written annual report to ensure that the terms of the validation/franchising agreement have been complied with; for example, any issues raised by students, external examiners or external inspection bodies should have been adequately addressed in a manner compatible with St. Patrick's College quality assurance procedures.

Regular reviews of the partnership arrangement should be undertaken jointly at five-yearly intervals, though in some cases an interim review might be desirable. This review process also provides the partner organisation(s) with the opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of the validation/franchise agreement. It is desirable that the review takes full account of the views of the students within the partner organisation(s), as well as those of external examiners and external members of review panels.

6.3 The academic structures adopted by the partners in the validation/franchising relationship should be such as to guarantee and enhance the academic and professional standards of the validated programme(s).

6.4 Either the Faculty of Theology or the partner organisation can propose an external examiner, although final appointment rests with the Faculty. The external examiner shall submit to the Director of Affiliated Programmes at appropriate times, and on an annual basis, a report on the standard of assessment and the quality of the programme.

6.5 Reports of external examiners will be treated as confidential to St. Patrick's College and to the partner organisation, but will be made available to validation and review panels, where appropriate.

6.6 Copies of the validation/franchising documents, in an agreed format, are retained by the Office of the Pontifical University and the partner organisation, together with a record of subsequent amendments. The partner organisation ensures that programme documentation is up-dated in the light of agreed amendments.

The partner organisation should create and maintain in perpetuity a full record of the programmes of study taken by each of its candidates registered for an award of the Pontifical University to enable transcripts of the studies undertaken to be provided on request. Copies of these records should be provided by the partner organisation to the Office of the Pontifical University. In the event that a partner organisation ceases to operate or otherwise ceases its accreditation/validation relationship with St. Patrick's College, suitable arrangements must be agreed with St. Patrick's College in relation to the provision of transcripts.

The Director of Affiliated Programmes, in conjunction with the Affiliated Programmes Board, shall ensure that the partner organisation is complying with relevant St. Patrick's College quality assurance procedures and assessment regulations. In the case of a student seeking a recheck of results or wishing to submit an appeal against the decision of an examination board the partner organisation shall put in place arrangements that are compatible with the Pontifical University regulations in this regard.

6.7 The Director of Affiliated Programmes shall report regularly to the Faculty in relation to the standards achieved in the programme(s) of study offered in the partner organisation and in respect of any related matters.

6.8 In the case of the validation of programmes in organisations overseas, some of the procedures in this document may require modification to suit the particular circumstances: in so doing it is essential that attention is paid to the ultimate objective of ensuring parity of standards with those of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

7 A MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

A Memorandum of Agreement shall take account of the foregoing procedures is agreed by St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and the partner organisation. The Memorandum sets out the responsibilities and duties of each of the partners in order to establish clearly the mutual expectations of the relationship, covering, inter alia, the involvement of St. Patrick's College in the examining and awarding process. Where applicable a Schedule/Addendum to the General Agreement may be appropriate in cases where more than one programme may be validated/franchised under these partnership arrangements.