

Background

Kingston University has a successful history of collaboration with a variety of Institutions both in the UK and overseas. These take a variety of forms and have been pursued in line with the University's overall objectives. Some of these have been centrally led but most have flowed naturally from faculty based initiatives. In the context of the [2008/09 Strategic Plan](#), it is timely to review the overall collaborative strategy and ensure that its sub strategies to be found in HE/FE provision and International Strategy are consistent and coherent.

Three objectives in the strategic plan are particularly relevant:

1. To expand and adapt our provision to offer additional funded places, where possible, by building upon our network of partners in the local and international markets
2. To provide a higher education experience within and beyond the classroom that is challenging and satisfying for our students and so equips them to be socially purposeful and successful citizens
3. To support the growth of progress which will include provision for employer led, work based learning and continuing professional development

These three Institutional Strategic Plan objectives are encapsulated in the mission of the University's collaborative strategy which is:

“Recognising that Kingston University will achieve more through working in partnership than it can achieve as an individual institution, to develop collaborative links with the appropriate providers and stakeholders within the region, nationally and internationally.”

This document sets out the capstone strategy for collaboration in the University and underlines the importance of proper oversight; policies and procedures in respect of approval; monitoring and review; student support; assessment; staff development; and communications.

Definitions

The University defines collaborative provision as 'collaborative provision denotes educational provision leading to an award of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation'¹ as per the [QAA Code of Practice](#).

The University's quality assurance and enhancement arrangement with respect to collaborative provision meet the requirements of the QAA

¹ <http://staff.kingston.ac.uk/C3/QAPH/default.aspx>

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Academic Infrastructure and are set out in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook.

The University's Partnership Model

The University has a range of 64 partnerships with other institutions and educational providers within the UK, in Europe and overseas. These partnerships serve a variety of purposes but all aim to deliver upon the University's mission:

"The mission of Kingston University is to promote participation in higher education, which it regards as a democratic entitlement; to strive for excellence in learning, teaching and research; to realise the creative potential and fire the imagination of all its members; and to equip its students to make effective contributions to society and the economy."

There are five constituent groupings to be found in the University partnership model: the Partner College Network; specialist and sector provision, international collaborations, employer engagement and research and enterprise.

The Partner College Network

Kingston University is at the centre of a thriving Partner College network which principally comprises 19 FE partners. There are also partners who are specialist providers and private corporations. In total, these partners provide education for over 2,500 students within the UK. These collaborative arrangements have been established for a variety of reasons:

- To build capacity for local delivery
- To promote the widening participation agenda
- To develop the synergy of resources in particular disciplines
- To build ladders of progression from FE to HE
- To establish partnerships in response to national initiatives

The partners are engaged in the life of the University in a variety of ways. The [Partner College Network](#) provides a biannual meeting at which major developments are identified and good practice shared. Its objectives are:

- to facilitate curriculum developments based on particular academic strengths which are complementary to Kingston University and collaborative institutions and which may lead to innovative developments
- to facilitate the sharing of good practice across the University's network of collaborative partnerships

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- provide a forum to share staff knowledge and expertise to support existing programmes as well as new curriculum developments
- to facilitate and ensure co-ordination of efforts to support the mutual promotion of the partnerships with each institution
- to consider statistics and funding methodologies in relation to the University's HEFCE funded collaborative partnerships
- to provide an opportunity to consider the joint identification of new market opportunities for courses and related activities such as research, consultancy and the provision of other services
- to identify and outline the provision of mutual support in the development of staff and physical resources
- to support the provision to students of a wider range of educational opportunities and facilities
- to provide guidance and advice on the University's policies, procedures, regulations and strategies, taking into consideration national developments
- to receive regular reports and consider matters arising from the HE in FE Working & Funding Group
- to work with common intelligence to optimise bidding outcomes for the region
- to support the Pro Vice-Chancellor on matters relevant to the University's HEFCE funded collaborative provision

These partners have access to the ['partner website'](#) which facilitates the interaction of partners at a variety of levels across the partnership. There are also private providers such as KLM who are part of the networks to be found mainly in the areas of aeronautical engineering and maintenance. A smaller HE/FE representative Working Group also serves to identify those issues which merit further and extended discussion by the partnership network. Partners have access to the University's staff development resources according to the basis upon which their students are funded which leads to either entitlement or eligibility to staff training.

Specialist and Sector Provision

There are a number of specialist institutions such as SGUL in Medical Sciences; the Whitefields Schools and Centre in Education and private companies who provide education and training in specialist areas and sectors which enhance the reputation and sector specific engagement agenda within the University. These are to be found in academic areas in which the University is strong and has a national reputation. They are particularly important as some of these areas have been identified as being of national importance and in which the University has a reputation of excellence.

Most of these initiatives have come about through a mutual interest and involvement within a sector and also have the added benefit of yielding research and consultancy activity. Their interest tends to be narrower than

those of the members of the Partner College Network but have full access to the Partner Website and can, if they wish, engage in a range of university led activities.

Employer Engagement

The focus on employer engagement has grown in recent years, not least with the publication of the Leitch report in 2006 which stressed the link between the economic productivity of the country and higher level skills. The report flagged the importance of the role of universities to work responsively with employers to identify and provide provision that fulfils their workforce development requirements, specifically in terms of 'up-skilling' and continuing professional development. This is particularly important in the context of the UK's demographic and labour market profile. A more recent report focussing on the future of universities in a knowledge economy emphasises that 'around three quarters of the UK workforce of 2020 have already left compulsory education' and that the UK has a 'large pool of just under six million workers with qualifications at level three but no experience of higher education'².

This emphasis continues in the most recent government statements which although informed by sectoral budget cuts, continue to stress the importance of employers as active partners with higher education. Going forward additional weight will be given to programmes that provide ladders of opportunity through vocational work based provision, particularly for adults; that increase flexibility to employers and employees via part-time, fast track degrees and foundation degrees and to the development of long term sustainable employer contributions, not just to curriculum design and delivery, but more directly through co-funded models.

The University has a well earned reputation for working in partnership with a wide range of employers, professional bodies and employer representative bodies like the sector skills councils – and works hard to develop and deliver courses that fulfil their needs. The type of engagement depends on the nature of the partner. The University has existing partners who contribute substantially to the delivery of provision *ie.* KLM, Marshalls Aerospace, the National School of Government and Veolia. There are other examples of where partners have been involved in the design: The Royal Military School of Music Kellner Hall of curriculum *ie.* the development of the work based learning MSc Professional Engineering with ECuk. There are other examples within the Masters by Learning Agreement Framework of third party training providers whose specific job related training is recognised towards a University award.

² *Higher Ambitions: The future of universities in a knowledge economy*, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, November 2009

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Some of these partnership opportunities have been strategically driven; others have developed from long term relationships at faculty, school and course level. The University will continue to explore the opportunities for working in partnership, and whilst acknowledging the constraints on funding, will seek to capitalise where it can on funding incentives that promote the growth of this provision. This area of work is underpinned by the Employer Engagement Strategy and the Workforce Development Implementation Plan which seek to ensure that the University has in place the infrastructure, resource and expertise to be responsive.

International

The University has developed by encouraging staff and student participation in the development of international communities of research and practice; looking to adapt the content and mode of teaching and learning to prepare graduates to live, work and contribute to a world of social and cultural diversity. As a research-informed institution we have a lot to offer our partner institutions and our students who benefit from excellent teaching informed by the latest research and scholarship.

We encourage structured and appropriate overseas experiences for our students within programmes of study. Students should be able to develop, as part of their programmes of study, knowledge of other cultures and other countries to foster understanding across the student body and prepare them for living in a culturally diverse and globally interconnected world.

The University has developed strategic alliances with a number of different universities, colleges and businesses that add value to the learning and research environment of the community. The University expressly values the differences in our student population and supports students from different cultural backgrounds and locations to complete their degree programmes.

To enable this activity the University will:

- Be internationally recognised as a leading British University providing education relevant to the 21st century
- Encourage staff and students to participate in the development of international communities of research and professional practice
- Establish Kingston's presence in all regions of the world, whether through partnership arrangements, research collaborations or in student recruitment
- Work with international partners to further opportunities for all in higher education
- Develop an international reputation for programmes of teaching and learning that enable our graduates to live and work in an increasingly globalised world

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- Make the University a preferred choice for students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and international locations
- Ensure that all faculties are involved in the recruitment of international students
- Enhance administrative and support mechanisms, develop our estate and our HR practices that serve the needs of the University, staff and students operating in an international and culturally diverse environment, as well as from a variety of backgrounds
- Generate funds from international sources to support the University's operations and development

The arrangements which exist for the development and monitoring of partnerships are common but with additional safeguards for those Institutions which are outside of the UK. Following initial development discussions with a potential partner, the form for a 'Request to Proceed to Due Diligence' is completed. This requires additional information for international partners, specifically around the organisation of higher education in that country, regulatory and statutory requirements and political or ethical considerations. Before the request proceeds, the form must be signed by the PVC, and where appropriate to the International Office for confirmation that the potential partnership warrants further exploration.

Once this form has been approved by the University's [Academic Directorate](#), a Due Diligence process takes place. This is similar to Due Diligence for UK partners, but requires additional information on regulatory and statutory requirements by central or regional authorities in the country, and the need for any authorisations and licenses. Following approval of the Due Diligence report by Academic Directorate, a further form to request a 'New Field' is completed. This is a detailed form required for all new collaborations, and includes questions, for example, on evidence of demand, risk and resources. Recent amendments have ensured greater need for a sound business case to be presented, and further information on international tax liability. When appropriate this form must be signed off by the Director of International Development in order for it to proceed. Once the business case is considered and if approved the quality assurance processes and final contract negotiations can take place. The Business Case for a new partnership plays an important part in informing the decision about whether to develop, and approve a new partnership. The potential partner should be informed at an early stage about the likely costs and this must be discussed with the Finance Office. In respect of overseas partnerships HEFCE income must not be used to cross subsidise overseas partnerships.

Dorich House Group: Kingston University is a founding member of the Dorich House Group which was established in 2008 and is a network of seven European institutions which closely work together to facilitate joint working in a number of areas: the establishment of strong bi-lateral Erasmus agreements; language teaching; work placements for students; staff mobility and research. An annual joint conference is held as well as issue specific conferences and

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seminars. Its membership comprises Cadiz, Istanbul Bigli, Lyon 2 and 3, Mykolas Romeris and Oldenburg Universities.

Research and Enterprise

The University aims to work collaboratively in the areas of research and enterprise, locally, nationally and internationally. This may be led by institutions, research centres and groups or individual researchers. An example of the first research partnership model is the work of the Dorich House Group – a set of seven European universities (brought together by KU) which set out to bring together a range of individuals whose research is complementary within the broad themes of ‘migration’, ‘the ageing population’ and ‘sustainable development’. The aim is to make joint bids to European Framework funding. At the other end of the spectrum several individual researchers have strong one-to-one links with individuals in other institutions which do not involve a formal partnership but which result in high quality joint research outputs.

While research collaboration emphasises important international links, as well as national and local collaborations, the area of enterprise tends to have a more local/national focus. Both formal and informal links and partnerships with local industries – both large-scale and SMEs and belonging to both the private and the public sectors – underpin the University’s work in this area. Such links support, among other initiatives, knowledge exchange schemes, and they facilitate staff consultancy and the commercialisation of the University’s knowledge base and intellectual property.

Assurance and Enhancement

The [Academic Quality and Standards Handbook](#) provides information on the quality assurance and enhancement procedures for approving and operating partnership arrangements. All partners are institutionally approved and operate within an institutional agreement. Arrangements are overseen by Executive Committees. In addition [QEC](#) receives Institutionally Monitoring reports annually and Institutional Reapproval occurs every five years. Full details of these requirements are set out in the AQS handbook.

Those partners where provision is distributed across a number of faculties have individual meetings with the PVC and for a UK partner, the Head of Planning in order to plan in detail student recruitment and to review the year’s activities. This occasion also serves as an opportunity to raise issues and address matters of mutual interest. Issues that may benefit from a larger audience are taken forward to the Partnership Network meetings. There are a variety of mechanisms through which the University can ensure its partners have access to the University in order to facilitate effective working processes. The relationship is enhanced in particular through:

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- The Partnership website
- Shared staff development
- Subject specific workshops
- Academic support and development
- Access to key personnel and support in quality assurance and enhancement
- [IQERs](#)

Conclusion

The *QAA Outcomes from institutional audit, second series: Collaborative provision in the institutional audit report*³ sets out the outcomes from Institutional Audit and is to be found on the Partnership Website. The report found that there were key areas which an Institution needed to consider to achieve excellence in collaborative provision.

Of note is that the report cites the University and SGUL partnerships as an example of Effective Working Partnerships. The Report acknowledges that collaboration is a key element to widening participation and enriching and extending the staff and student community. Kingston University has developed alliances with a number of different universities, colleges and businesses. These add value to the learning and research environment of the community. We expressly value differences in our student population and support students from a variety of backgrounds and locations to complete their degree programmes. We work in partnership to create an educational and social environment which will foster mutual advantage from the diversity of cultural, national and linguistic origins of staff and students and provide an infrastructure through our administration and support mechanisms to serve the needs of staff and students operating in diverse environments as well as from different backgrounds.

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³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/series2/ColabProv.asp>