

Collaborative Academic Lead guidance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A Collaborative Academic Lead (CAL) plays an important internal/external role in developing collaborative partnerships and provision for NTU.
- 1.2 This role is multifaceted, and incorporates elements of relationship management, quality assurance, and educational development:
 - Relationship management considerations include building and maintaining an open, trusting relationship with the course team(s)/partner colleagues, based on two-way communication and mutual learning, to nurture and support the effective operation of the partnership.
 - Quality assurance considerations include supporting the University to meet the Office for Students' (OfS) B conditions of registration for all students, regardless of where or how they study, including where we are responsible only for granting awards for students registered with another provider.
 - Educational development considerations include engaging in professional discussions about learning, teaching and assessment, identifying opportunities for evidence-based enhancement, and supporting student progression where there is an approved progression route to a University course.
- 1.3 The CAL works alongside the External Examiner(s) (EE) but the role and responsibilities of the CAL should complement rather than duplicate those of the EE. For a detailed articulation of the focus of each role, see Appendix 1.

2. Appointment criteria and time allowance

- 2.1 The academic link School will appoint CALs to its Validation Service collaborative provision and to its School-based collaborative provision.
- 2.2 The role of the CAL is proportionate to the size and nature of the collaboration. This supplement sets out the core expectations of the role, which are flexible enough to meet the needs of a wide range of collaborations. Specific CAL responsibilities for individual collaborations are set out in the Collaborative Operational Document and agreed at academic approval.
- 2.3 Where there is large or complex provision, for example where more than one School is involved in the collaboration, a lead CAL may be appointed to ensure consistency across the provision. For international collaborations, the lead manager

may be appointed from NTU Global. In addition, the University may appoint an additional colleague from either the School or CADQ (Centre for Academic Development and Quality) to attend the examination board.

- 2.4 A CAL is appointed before the academic approval of the collaboration takes place. Appointments will last for up to five years. Following a periodic collaborative review, the link School may opt to either extend the tenure of the existing collaborative academic lead or appoint a new collaborative academic lead. Where the CAL is also the course leader (for example in the case of a joint or dual degree) it is expected that they will continue as CAL.
- 2.5 A CAL should meet most of the following characteristics on the grounds that the more of the characteristics they meet, the more likely they are to be effective:
 - a. broad expertise in the subject area of the collaboration to which they are appointed;
 - b. academic or professional qualifications at an equivalent or higher level than the course(s) to which they are appointed;
 - c. appropriate cultural understanding, where the collaboration is international, and the ability to travel.
 - d. experience of collaborative arrangements, or other types of partnership (where possible), and/or knowledge and understanding of quality management in UK higher education;
 - e. experience of the enhancement of student learning opportunities.
- 2.6 It is expected that the CAL will participate in the periodic collaborative review of the partnership, a quality management activity which takes place at the end of the period of academic approval (3-5 years). The nature of participation will be determined between the CAL and the CADQ Review Manager.
- 2.7 The CAL should be impartial. It is therefore recommended that an individual is not appointed to the role where they have:
 - a. direct, current ties with the partner;
 - b. been a student, or member of staff at the partner within the last five years;
 - c. acted as a consultant for the partner within the last three years.
- 2.8 A CAL is given sufficient time to undertake the duties associated with the role. The time required should be specified in the Collaborative Operational Document and agreed with the CAL's line manager. The time allowance should be included in My Academic Portfolio (MAP) (where appropriate) and is clearly communicated to the newly appointed CAL.
- 2.9 Consideration of an appropriate time allowance should include visits to the partner, writing of the report, attendance at exam board meetings where appropriate, attendance at induction/workshop events, and ongoing liaison with the partner throughout the academic year. Where a CAL is appointed to a course with progression to the University, the time allowance will need to take in to account the additional duties associated with this role.
- 2.10 Due to the flexible and proportionate nature of the role, it is not possible to specify the time allowance required. Consideration of an appropriate time allowance should

take into account the specific details of the role as set out in the approved Collaborative Operational Document.

- 2.11 The time allowance should be reviewed annually by the CAL and their line manager.
- 2.12 Upon appointment, the CAL is issued with the following:
 - a. The Collaborative Operational Document;
 - b. Relevant course documentation;
 - c. The role requirements;
 - d. The Common Assessment Regulations in use at the partner institution (where applicable).
- 2.13 The CAL is supported in their role by:
 - a. An induction provided by CADQ;
 - b. Guidance for CALs provided on the CADQ website;
 - c. Annual workshops provided by CADQ;
 - d. NTU Global (for international collaborations).

3. Core expectations

- 3.1 There are six core expectations for the role which the CAL will decide how to prioritise, with input from the link School and partner colleagues, in the context of the collaborative partnership:
 - a. Manage the ongoing academic relationship with the partner or course team(s);
 - b. Engage in ongoing dialogue with the partner to ensure the health of the partnership is maintained, and recommend enhancements where appropriate;
 - c. Oversee the standards and quality of provision provided by the partner, and of the student experience including student engagement (see Appendix 1);
 - d. Engage in joint staff development activity, or provide staff development for the partner, where appropriate, and signpost to suitable staff development opportunities within NTU or externally;
 - e. Identify, implement, and support enhancements to the collaboration;
 - f. Ensure the collaboration operates in accordance with the approved Collaborative Operational Document.

School-based collaborative provision

- g. Review and update the Collaborative Operational Document on annual basis, and seek approval for any changes from the School Academic Standards and Quality Committee;

Validation Service provision

- h. Liaise with the partner on the nomination of external examiners, using networks to identify suitable nominees where required, and providing advice

- and guidance on the suitability of nominees prior to submission to the University for approval.
- i. Act as a critical friend in relation to proposed changes to existing courses, prior to submission to the University for approval.
 - j. Attend the board of examiners' meeting where possible (including virtually) and support exam board decision making in line with approved assessment regulations (except where an additional examination board CAL is appointed).
- 3.2 Where a CAL is appointed to a course with an approved progression route to the University, the following additional key responsibilities apply:
- k. Monitor the ongoing alignment of the courses to ensure effective progression.
 - l. Provide appropriate information to students about the progression route.
 - m. Facilitate opportunities for students to engage with the University prior to progression.
- 3.3 Specific details of the role, including the number, and nature of any visits to the partner, are set out in the Collaborative Operational Document, and are reviewed annually.
- 3.4 The CAL acts as a critical friend in the spirit of partnership, and therefore may engage in academic debate about, for example, teaching and learning philosophies, the nature of the subject and research into its discipline. However, a CAL must never attempt to impose specific views upon a partner.

4. Visiting the partner

- 4.1 In carrying out these responsibilities, it is expected that the CAL undertakes one or more visits to the partner in each academic year. During the visit, the following activities may be undertaken. Where more than one visit is made, these activities may be spread across visits:
- a. Meet with the course team(s) to discuss the ongoing operation of the course;
 - b. Meet with current students on the course(s) to discuss their learning opportunities;
 - c. Attend teaching sessions, where possible and appropriate;
 - d. Participate in the examination board (where a separate examination board liaison is not appointed).
- 4.2 Where a CAL is appointed to a course with an approved progression route to the University, more frequent visits are undertaken, and the following additional activities may apply:
- f. Participate in the induction of new students on the partner course to introduce them to the University, and the progression route.
 - g. Provide guest lectures, or arrange for colleagues to undertake these, as appropriate.
 - h. Facilitate student visits to the University prior to progression.
 - i. Facilitate any bridging requirements for the progression.

- 4.3 Between visits, the CAL will maintain an ongoing dialogue with the partner to fulfil the other duties associated with the role.

5. Reporting

- 5.1 The CAL produces a short, action focused annual report which draws on findings from visits and ongoing dialogue with the partner throughout the academic year. Prior to visiting an international partner, the CAL should liaise with NTU Global to establish whether there are any business or operational concerns that need to be considered.
- 5.2 The purpose of the report is to:
- a. summarise engagement with the partner during the reporting year,
 - b. Provide the partner and the University with a summary of findings in relation to standards, student experience and learning opportunities.
 - c. reflect on the overall health of the collaboration.
 - d. identify areas of shareable good practice and to make recommendations for enhancements.
- 5.3 The annual report is shared with the partner and received and considered by the course committee and the School Academic Standards and Quality Committee/Academic Partnerships Sub-Committee.
- 5.4 Where there are significant concerns about the provision, they should be raised as soon as possible, for School-based collaborative provision with the most appropriate colleague within the School, and for Validation Service provision with the Collaborations and Partnerships team within CADQ.
- 5.5 Collaborative academic leads have the option to complete an online engagement log. The purpose of the log is to record significant streams of work, themes, and discussions with the partner. The engagement log provides the basis for the annual report, supplies evidence for periodic review, and supports partnership continuity when a new collaborative academic lead is appointed. Collaborative academic leads are therefore strongly advised to maintain the engagement log throughout their tenure.

6. Appendix 1

- 6.1 In theory the role and responsibilities of the Collaborative Academic Lead should not duplicate those of the External Examiner. In practice there may be some overlap in the monitoring of the OfS B Conditions. Where these are concerned, we recommend that the EE focuses on “high quality academic experience” (B1); resources (B2.1); effectiveness of assessment (B4.1 and B4.2); and sector standards (B5) while the CAL focuses on student support (B2.1); student engagement (B2.2); and successful outcomes (B3).

The role of the External Examiner

- 6.2 External Examiners are appointed per course or small group of cognate courses and should be able to comment effectively at individual course level.
- 6.3 The following areas of focus are informed by the **OfS Conditions of Registration B1, B2, B4 and B5**; by AdvanceHE’s three core external examination practices based on the QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice & Guidance: External Expertise (2018); and by *NTU’s Quality Handbook Section 15: Assessment and Section 9: External Examining*.
- 6.4 Subject standards benchmark. As a subject specialist, the EE considers:
- a. Course currency: the extent to which the course is **up to date (B1.1)** and requires students to **develop relevant skills (B1.5)**.
 - b. Course design: the extent to which the course is **coherent (B1.3)** (constructively aligned), and **provides educational challenge (B1.2)**, i.e., *demonstrates vertical and horizontal integration (QH15 4.2c)*.
 - c. Course resourcing: the extent to which **resources (B2.1)** for the course enable subject-specific teaching and learning.
 - d. Course relevance: the extent to which the threshold standards for [the provider’s] qualifications are consistent with the relevant national standards (QC 3).¹ In OfS words, the EE considers whether any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards (B5.1). NTU’s QH (Quality Handbook) requires specific consideration of the extent to which *the standards set for the course are appropriate for its awards (QH9 5.1a)*.
- 6.5 Sector standards benchmark. As an external academic, the EE provides sector *comparability of standards (QH9 5.1b)* and of achievement beyond threshold level, i.e., can compare student demonstration of learning for a first, second, or third degree on similar courses at a minimum of two institutions.²

¹ Checking the course against relevant national standards is a core EE practice AdvanceHE calls “Maintainer of academic standards.”

² “The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers” (QC 3). Checking above-threshold achievement is a core EE practice referred to as “Guardian of national standards” by AdvanceHE.

- 6.6 Assessment design calibrator (process checker³): The EE evaluates assessment design for:
- a. **Validity**: by checking the alignment of module and course learning outcomes with the assessment brief, marking criteria, and feedback for students, the EE can determine the relevance of the assessment to the learning outcomes (**B4.2**; *QH15 1.1a*).
 - b. **Reliability**: by checking the consistency of results when the same assessment is graded by different markers using the same marking criteria, the EE can determine the effectiveness of the rubric (including relevance of headings and clarity of marking descriptors) and moderation processes, and the extent to which course team members share expectations (**B4.2**; *QH15 1.1b*).
 - c. **Rigor**: by checking the range of student work and results, the EE can determine the extent to which the assessment *enables students to demonstrate learning at high levels* (*QH15 1.1c*).
 - d. **Authenticity**: by checking the extent to which the assessment provides a real-world on-the-job test, the EE can determine whether the assessment requires students to **develop relevant skills** (**B1.5**).
 - e. **Effectiveness**: by speaking with students and course teams, the EE can determine the extent to which assessment design and alignment is transparent for students and markers (*clearly communicated*) (**B4.1**; *QH15 1.1f*).
- 6.7 Taken together, these areas of focus enable the EE to assess the extent to which **awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards** (**B5.2**).

The role of the Collaborative Academic Lead

- 6.8 The CAL may be appointed at portfolio or Centre level: the focus of the role is less likely to be at course level. The CAL should consider the following as they prioritise the core expectations of their role.
- 6.9 Condition B2 requires a high-quality academic experience (as defined by B1) for students and their **continued success in and beyond higher education** via **support** (**B2.1**) and **effective engagement** (**B2.2**). Condition B3 requires **successful outcomes for all students** which are **recognised and valued by employers**, and which also **enable further study**. In this context the CAL considers:
- a. **Engagement**: How is the course delivered? Is it **effectively delivered** (**B1.4**) for all students?
 - b. **Academic support**: To what extent is academic support for all students holistic and embedded in the design of the course? For example, how are formative assessment and feedback used to feed forward to summative assessment?

³ The “process checker” core EE practice refers to checking whether the provider “uses... assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent” (3), and not a tickbox process check as it is frequently understood.

- c. **Non-academic support:** What pastoral support is available for students through the partner? Via NTU? Are student support expectations sustainable for colleagues?
 - d. **Successful outcomes for all students:** How *inclusive* is assessment design and strategy (QH15 1.1e)? Are assessments designed so that *all students are enabled to demonstrate achievement* (QH15 1.1d)? Are there inclusive curricular interventions from NTU Success for All case studies which might be usefully recommended to the partner to support student progression and achievement? Are there inclusive curricular interventions implemented by the partner which might be usefully transferred to NTU courses? What does progression and achievement data indicate, and what outcomes is the data unable to capture?
 - e. **Continued success in and beyond higher education:** How effectively are progression route courses aligned with NTU courses?
- 6.10 CADQ will directly monitor the following B Conditions which are not under consideration by the EE or CAL: **The provider must ensure that:**
- **Academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible (B4.3);**
 - **Academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course (B4.4); and**
 - **Relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously (B4.5).**

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
<i>Version:</i>	<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>Implementation date:</i>	<i>Nature of significant revisions:</i>
Sept 2016	30.09.16	01.10.16	None
Sept 2017	12.09.17	01.10.17	None
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	Major changes to the role including title, role expectations and reporting requirements.
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	None
Sept 2020	16.09.20	01.10.20	None
Sept 2021	07.09.21	01.10.21	Change of Supplement number from SB5 to SB3.
Sept 2022	22.09.22	01.10.22	None
Sept 2023	14.09.23	01.10.23	None
Jan 2024	25.01.24	30.01.24	Full rewrite following change to Collaborative Academic Lead role. QHS renamed and renumbered.

Equality Analysis		
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Sept 2016	04.09.16	CADQ