



# **Partner Policy Review and Resolution Procedure**

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# 1. Introduction

In the context of higher education partnerships, maintaining high academic standards and protecting the student experience are essential to institutional integrity and reputation. William College works in collaboration with a range of Partner Universities to deliver franchised programmes, including Bath Spa University (BSU) and Birkbeck, University of London (BBK).

This document sets out the procedures through which William College identifies, evaluates, and manages concerns arising from policies, frameworks, or decisions made by its Partner Universities. It ensures that such issues are handled transparently, consistently, and in alignment with the College's governance framework, the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, and the terms of all collaborative franchise agreements.

The procedures establish clear lines of accountability, support constructive dialogue with partners, and safeguard students' academic interests through evidence-based decision-making and timely resolution of issues.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to provide a structured process for the identification, review and resolution of any policy, procedure, or decision by Partner Universities that may:

- Be unclear, inconsistent, or unfit for its intended purpose.
- Have a negative impact on the quality of teaching, learning, or the student experience.
- Pose a regulatory, operational, or reputational risk to William College or its stakeholders.

This framework ensures that concerns are managed appropriately within the College's governance structures and that communication with Partner Universities follows agreed protocols and sector regulatory standards.

## 3. Scope

This procedure applies to:

- Any existing or proposed policy, procedural document, or directive issued by a Partner University that has a significant influence on the operation of William College's franchised programmes.
- Concerns raised by College's staff, students, or committees relating to potential adverse effects on the stakeholder learning experience or academic standards.
- Any changes made by Partner Universities that could affect academic delivery, assessment processes, student support mechanisms, or institutional governance.

For the purposes of this procedure, stakeholders include, but are not limited to, students and academic and professional services staff.

This process is intended to address concerns relating to partner policies or decisions rather than individual complaints. This review mechanism does not affect a student's right to use the College's formal Complaints Procedure.

## 4. Definitions

| Term                       | Definition                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Partner University         | A higher education institution that awards qualifications delivered through franchised programmes at William College                                   |
| Collaborative Provision    | Educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit, where the Partner University is not the sole provider                                |
| Conflict of Interest       | A situation where a personal or professional interest may influence, or appear to influence, an individual's impartiality in carrying out their duties |
| Derogation                 | A formal approved exception or deviation from a Partner University's standard policy or procedure                                                      |
| Franchised Programme       | A programme of study designed and awarded by a Partner University but delivered by William College                                                     |
| Office for Students (OfS)  | The independent regulator of higher education in England                                                                                               |
| Partnership Action Tracker | The College's internal system for logging, monitoring, and updating the status of concerns raised under this procedure                                 |
| Policy Impact Form (PIF)   | The standard form used to formally raise a concern about a Partner University's policy, procedure, or decision                                         |
| Stakeholder                | For the purposes of this procedure, stakeholders include students, academic and professional services staff, and Partner University representatives    |

## 5. Principles

The following principles underpin all actions taken under this procedure:

- All actions and decisions under this procedure must prioritise the interests and success of students, ensuring that outcomes enhance the overall learning experience.
- Concerns should be discussed constructively through appropriate partnership and internal channels to promote mutual understanding and effective resolution.
- Every concern must be supported by verifiable evidence, such as student feedback, performance indicators, or audit outcomes, to ensure fair and objective review.
- All actions, communications, and decisions must be clearly recorded within the College's governance and quality assurance systems.
- Issues that cannot be resolved through initial discussion must follow a structured review and referral route, which may include referral to senior leadership or external regulatory bodies when necessary.

All actions taken under this procedure should aim to achieve timely, proportionate, and effective resolution of concerns, minimising adverse impact on students and stakeholders.

Where a member of any panel or committee has a conflict of interest in relation to the Partner University or concern under review, they must declare this at the outset and recuse themselves from the relevant discussion and decision-making process. The Chair of the relevant body will determine appropriate alternative arrangements.

## 6. Responsibilities

| Department/ Individual                               | Responsibilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Any Staff Member, Student, or Student Representative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and raise concerns using the PIF.</li> <li>Provide supporting evidence where possible.</li> <li>Engage with the process as required.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                          |
| Quality Team                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receive and acknowledge PIFs.</li> <li>Conduct initial review.</li> <li>Liaise with the Partnership Development Manager.</li> <li>Refer concerns as appropriate.</li> <li>Maintain the Partnership Action Tracker.</li> <li>Communicate outcomes to originators.</li> </ul>       |
| Academic Partnership Development Manager             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the Quality Team in Stage One resolution.</li> <li>Participate in the Academic Review Panel.</li> <li>Manage formal communications with Partner Universities.</li> <li>Prepare Board papers for Stage Four.</li> <li>Monitor implementation of agreed actions.</li> </ul> |
| Academic Review Panel                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and evaluate concerns referred to Stage Two.</li> <li>Assess evidence and impact.</li> <li>Determine whether local resolution or further referral is required.</li> <li>Produce review and referral reports where necessary.</li> </ul>                                    |
| Senior Leadership and Management Team (SLMT)         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review operational concerns referred to Stage Three.</li> <li>Consider financial, operational, and reputational implications.</li> <li>Implement and track Board of Governors decisions.</li> <li>Communicate outcomes to stakeholders.</li> </ul>                                |
| Executive Leadership Team (ELT)                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review concerns with strategic, regulatory, or reputational implications at Stage Three.</li> <li>Provide strategic direction on partner communications and risk mitigation.</li> </ul>                                                                                           |
| Academic Board                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversee academic standards and quality matters.</li> <li>Receive referred concerns; approve derogations or policy amendments.</li> <li>Receive annual reports.</li> </ul>                                                                                                         |
| Board of Governors                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide governance oversight at Stage Four.</li> <li>Approve actions where regulatory, reputational, or contractual matters are at stake.</li> <li>Receive annual reports on all concerns and outcomes.</li> </ul>                                                                |

## 7. Procedures

The following stages outline the steps to be followed when raising, reviewing, and resolving concerns related to Partner University policies, frameworks, or decisions. Concerns are typically managed through a staged process (Stages One to Five). In exceptional cases involving significant risk, an immediate referral route applies. This ensures that concerns are managed proportionately, with appropriate oversight applied based on risk and impact.

## 7.1 Exception to the Standard Process: Immediate Referral

In exceptional circumstances where a concern presents an immediate and serious risk (for example, relating to safeguarding, a significant regulatory breach, or partner failure, such as an inability to fulfil academic, regulatory, or contractual responsibilities), the standard staged process may be bypassed. In such cases, the concern must be referred immediately to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and, where required, the Board of Governors (BoG), without delay.

The Quality Team must be notified at the same time and will ensure that the concern is formally recorded in the Partnership Action Tracker.

Once immediate risks have been addressed, the concern will either proceed through the relevant stages of this procedure or be monitored under Stage Five (Monitoring and Closure), as appropriate.

## 7.2 Stage One: Identification and Initial Review

### 7.2.1 Raising a Concern

Any member of staff, student representative, or committee may raise a concern about a Partner University's policy or decision that appears unclear, inconsistent, or has the potential to adversely affect students' academic experience.

Submissions should be made via the Policy Impact Form (PIF) and sent to the Quality Team, which will acknowledge receipt within five working days and conduct an initial review to determine appropriate next steps.

### 7.2.2 Minor Clarifications

If the issue involves a simple clarification or procedural ambiguity, the Quality Team, in consultation with the Partnership Development Manager, may resolve the matter informally through direct liaison with the Partner University link tutor or during Partnership Operational Meetings. Whilst the resolution process is informal, all outcomes and agreed actions will be formally recorded through minutes and action logs to maintain an audit trail.

If a satisfactory resolution is not obtained, the issue will be referred to Stage Two for formal review.

## 7.3 Stage Two: Review by the Academic Review Panel

A concern will be referred to Stage Two when one or more of the following apply:

- The issue affects multiple cohorts or academic years.
- Academic standards, assessment integrity, or progression are at risk.
- Non-compliance with OfS conditions or partner regulations is suspected.
- The concern has a substantial negative impact on students.
- Administrative resolution has failed.

The PIF should include:

- Reference to the relevant policy or procedure.
- A description of the concern and supporting evidence.
- Assessment of academic, regulatory, or operational implications.
- Recommended actions or amendments.

The Quality Team will assess submissions within 10 working days, confirm next steps with the person raising the concern, and record the matter in the Partnership Action Tracker.

### **7.3.1 Academic Review Panel Evaluation**

The Academic Review Panel, comprising of the Provost, the relevant Academic Deans for the partnership, a representative from the Quality Team, Programme Leaders, the Partnership Development Manager, and relevant representatives, will:

- Review the evidence and seriousness of the concern.
- Seek input from staff, students, or the Partner University where appropriate.
- Evaluate the impact on academic standards, compliance, and reputation.
- Decide whether the matter can be resolved locally or requires referral to senior management.

Outcomes may include:

- Internal resolution through clarification or local guidance.
- Referral to the Academic Board or Senior Leadership and Management Team (SLMT).
- Immediate referral to ELT due to serious risk to student experience or compliance.

If referral is required, the Panel will produce a report summarising evidence, risk assessment, and recommended actions.

This report will be shared by the Quality Team with the person raising the concern and relevant stakeholders within five working days of the Panel's decision.

## **7.4 Stage Three: Senior Review and Partner Communication**

This stage should be completed within 15 working days of referral from Stage Two, unless exceptional circumstances require additional time, which must be documented and communicated to the person raising the concern.

This stage focuses on reaching an agreed resolution with the Partner University or determining appropriate institutional action.

The Academic Board, SLMT, or Executive Leadership Team (ELT), as appropriate to the nature of the concern, will review the matter to determine appropriate actions.

Operational matters will be reviewed by the SLMT, while concerns with strategic, regulatory, or reputational implications will be referred to the ELT. A relevant subcommittee (such as the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee) may also be involved where appropriate.

These may include:

- Approval of a request for derogation or exemption.
- Recommendation for modification of the Partner University's policy.
- Formal communication with the partner will be issued under the authority of the Academic Partnership Development Manager or Provost through either:
  - Scheduled Partnership Management Group meetings.
  - Direct written correspondence when urgent action is required.

Each communication must clearly outline:

- The concern and supporting evidence.
- The proposed solution or policy amendment.
- The rationale for the request.

The SLMT will also consider broader operational, financial, or reputational implications and ensure that all risk mitigation measures are in place.

Affected stakeholders, including students where relevant, will be informed of the progress and outcome of Stage Three review in a timely manner and in accordance with the College's communication protocols. All discussions, whether verbal or written, must be documented in minutes or summary correspondence and filed by the Quality Team, Academic Partnership Development Manager and the Partnership Action Tracker updated accordingly.

## 7.5 Stage Four: Reporting and Governance Oversight

This stage should be initiated within 10 working days of a Stage Three outcome where referral to the BoG is required.

This stage applies where concerns require formal governance oversight and decision-making.

For transparency and accountability, all decisions and outcomes are reported to the Board of Governors at the next scheduled meeting. Where urgent action is required, an extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors may be convened, or authority may be delegated in accordance with the College's governance framework.

Matters posing substantial regulatory, reputational, or operational risk will be reported to the Board of Governors. Referral to the BoG occurs when:

- The issue impacts student safety, academic standards, regulatory compliance, institutional finances or institutional reputation.
- Proposed changes alter the College's legal or contractual obligations.
- The matter cannot be resolved through operational channels.

A Board paper summarising the concern, actions taken, risk assessment, and correspondence with the Partner University will be prepared by the Academic Partnership Development Manager.

The Board of Governors may:

- Approve the proposed action.
- Request additional evidence.
- Direct interim protective measures.
- Return the matter for further investigation.

Where a decision requires formal agreement with the Partner University (for example a derogation or contractual amendment), the Board's decision and any instructions for formal communication will be clearly recorded and authorised sign-off delegated (e.g., to the Academic Partnership Development Manager or Chair of SLMT) as appropriate.

The SLMT and Quality Team will be responsible for implementing and tracking Board of Governors' decisions and reporting progress to the Board of Governors in the timescale specified by the Board. Where a Board of Governors' decision directly affects students or other stakeholders, the SLMT will ensure that appropriate communication to relevant stakeholders is issued within five working days of the Board's decision.

## **7.6 Stage Five: Monitoring, Follow-Up and Closure**

This stage should commence within five working days of a confirmed outcome at Stage Three or Stage Four.

The objective of this stage is to ensure that agreed resolutions are effectively implemented and that risks have been appropriately mitigated.

The Quality Team, together with the Academic Partnership Development Manager, will monitor progress and implementation of agreed actions. Those who raised the concern will be updated at key milestones. All affected stakeholders, including students where appropriate, will also be kept informed of progress and outcomes throughout this stage.

Ongoing matters remain logged in the Partnership Action Tracker until resolved and verified by the Partner University.

Once closed, all related records (PIFs, correspondence, meeting notes) will be securely stored as part of the College's audit trail.

Where the person raising a concern is dissatisfied with the outcome at any stage, they may request a review by submitting written grounds to the Quality Team within 10 working days of receiving the outcome. The Quality Team will refer the request to the next appropriate governance body for consideration.

## **8. Annual Reporting and Continuous Improvement**

An annual report summarising all concerns, actions, and outcomes will be submitted to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors.

This report will:

- Identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.
- Identify recurring risks or trends.
- Recommend improvements for future collaborative arrangements.

## **9. Policy Review**

This procedure will be reviewed annually or earlier if triggered by significant regulatory or partner changes. Any amendments are subject to the approval of the Academic Board.

## **10. Related Policies and Documents**

- Partnership Agreement
- Student Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

# Appendix A

## Policy Impact Form (PIF)

### Guidance Notes

This form is for raising a concern about a policy, procedure, or decision made by one of William College's Partner Universities that you feel may be having a negative impact on your studies, your role, or the wider College community.

Anyone can complete this form, whether you are a student, a member of staff, or a student representative.

Once submitted, the Quality Team will acknowledge receipt within five (5) working days and will guide you through the next steps. Submitting this form will not negatively affect your studies, employment, or relationship with the College.

If you are unsure whether this form is the right route for your concern, please contact the Quality Team at xx before submitting. If your concern relates to a personal complaint rather than a partner policy or decision, you may wish to refer to the College's Student Complaints Procedure (students) or Staff Complaints Grievance Procedure (staff) instead.

All information provided will be treated confidentially and stored securely in line with the College's data protection obligations.

### **Section 1 – About You**

Please tick to confirm your role:

Student ☐                      Member of Staff ☐                      Student Representative ☐

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **If you are a student, please complete:**

- Full name:
- Student ID number:
- Programme of study:
- Year of study:
- Contact email:

#### **If you are a member of staff, please complete:**

- Full name:
- Job title / role:
- Department:
- Contact email:

## **Section 2 – Details of Your Concern**

Please describe your concern as clearly as you can. You do not need to use technical or legal language, just explain what has happened and why you feel it is a problem.

**Partner University the concern relates to** (if known):

**Policy, procedure, or decision the concern relates to** (if known — leave blank if unsure):

**Date you became aware of this concern:**

**Description of your concern:** (Please provide as much detail as possible)

## **Section 3 – Impact**

**For students — please answer the following:**

- How has this affected your studies or experience at the College?
- Has this affected other students that you are aware of? Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐
- If yes, please give an indication of how many students may be affected:

**For staff — please answer the following:**

- Who is affected by this concern?  
Students ☐ Staff ☐ Both ☐ Other stakeholders ☐
- Estimated number of students or cohorts affected (if known):
- Academic impact (e.g. effect on assessment, progression, teaching quality):
- Regulatory or compliance impact (e.g. potential breach of OfS conditions or partner agreement):
- Reputational or operational impact:

## **Section 4 – Evidence**

Please list any evidence you are attaching to support your concern. This could include emails, documents, feedback, or any other relevant information. You do not need to have formal evidence to submit this form, but any supporting information will help the Quality Team review your concern effectively.

Are you attaching supporting evidence? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please describe what you are attaching:

## **Section 5 – Suggested Resolution**

Do you have any suggestions for how this concern could be resolved? (*Optional — you are not required to suggest a solution*)

Is urgent action required in your view? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please explain why:

### **Section 6 – Declaration**

I confirm that the information provided in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge, and I consent to this information being used by William College to investigate and respond to my concern in line with the Escalation Procedures for Collaborative Provision.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section 7 – For Quality Team Use Only**

Date received:

Acknowledgement sent (date):

Assigned to:

Stage 1 outcome:

Resolved at Stage 1 ☐

Referred to Stage 2 ☐

Date logged in Partnership Action Tracker:

Notes: