Academic Link Tutor Policy

Introduction

1. Staffordshire University's quality framework is in place to ensure that all its courses meet appropriate standards, provide current and coherent curricula and deliver a high-quality student learning experience and positive outcomes for all its provision including delivery in partnership.
   The framework:
   - Supports the University's Academic Strategy and achievement of institutional KPIs
   - Provides assurance of the quality and standards of the provision
   - Facilitates quality enhancement
   - Facilitates the assessment of risk, focusing attention where it is most required
   - Sets guidelines for the provision and oversight of clear, accurate and appropriate information, advice and guidance on university courses for prospective and current students, staff, and stakeholders.

2. Staffordshire University is committed to maintaining and developing educational partnerships with universities, colleges and other organizations in the UK and internationally.

3. Staffordshire University has a range of collaborative activity with academic partner organizations, including franchise, validated, outreach and dual award models. Staffordshire University is responsible for the standards of any award issued in its name; all such activity is within the scope of the Office for Student's Conditions of Registration, and provisions for its design, oversight and management have been informed by these regulatory requirements as well as by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2023) and related guidance on academic partnership delivery.

4. All franchised, validated and dual award courses delivered in collaboration with a partner institution - including those delivered within an Apprenticeship framework- will be assigned a Staffordshire University Academic Link Tutor (ALT), to support the academic quality and standards of the course/s delivered at the partner institution. This policy outlines the role and main responsibilities of academic link tutors for undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision delivered through academic partnerships.

Appointment of Academic Link Tutors

5. The School Academic Committee(s) are responsible for selecting and confirming the appointment of Academic Link Tutors.

6. On confirmation of appointment of a new ALT AQS will update the Academic Link Tutor register, notify Post-16/International Partnerships staff as appropriate, and provide the ALT with an overview of key information and resources for the role.

7. The tenure period for Academic Link Tutors will normally be four years, after which the tenure may be renewed, if required. Re-appointment will be confirmed annually and be subject to confirmation of satisfactory performance in the role by their line manager.

8.   At the start of each academic year Schools must confirm details of all Academic Link Tutor appointments with the AQS who maintain the register of Academic Link Tutors and will share this with Post-16/International Partnerships staff as appropriate.

9.   Where provision with a single partner involves several Academic Link Tutors, the Academic Link Tutors should hold regular dialogue as a group to ensure consistency of academic arrangements across the partnership, seeking input from Post-16/International Partnerships, Student and Academic Services (SaAS) and the Academic Quality Service (AQS) where required.

10.   Any subsequent changes to the allocation of Academic Link Tutors must be notified by Schools to AQS during the year for School Academic Committee ratification.

11.   Details of Academic Link Tutor appointments will be given to partner institutions by Post-16/International Partnerships as appropriate.

12.   New Academic Link Tutors will be required to attend an induction meeting with the AQS and the Head of Post-16/International Partnerships and join relevant training for the role dependant on their experience and the partnership they are joining. Training activities are organised by AQS and Post-16/International Partnerships throughout the year; additional School and peer CPD can be put in place where the Schools consider this beneficial.

13.   Continuing Academic Link Tutors are expected to keep up to date with university developments by attending relevant training/CPD opportunities annually and following Post-16/International Partnerships and AQS communications.

14.   School appraisal of how a member of staff has fulfilled their Academic Link Tutor role/s will be part of their annual Performance and Development Review (PDR).

Academic Link Tutor Responsibilities

15.   Through its risk assessment, approval and monitoring procedures, the University is able to build trust in its partners and place reliance on their quality systems. Quality and standards are assured through the work of staff operating across departments in different roles i.e. Post-16/International Partnerships, Student and Academic Services, AQS, ALTs, external subject specialists, external examiners, partner staff and University professional services staff.

16.   The over-riding responsibility of the ALT is to support the academic delivery of collaborative provision delivered through partners to ensure that standards and quality are maintained and that the course team at partners are working in accordance with University policy and procedures relating to the delivery of our courses. This will involve liaising with other Academic Link Tutors allocated to the same partner to ensure consistency of academic decisions and practice where required.

17.   The role of the ALT falls into three broad areas:
        • Supporting the University oversight of academic standards
        • Overseeing the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities
        • Helping to ensure the application of the University's Quality Management Framework

18.   The ALT provides advice, guidance and training to the partner on these areas from a course perspective, and liaises with Post-16/International Partnerships, Academic Quality Service and Student and Academic Services for the identification of partner-level related training.

19. The ALT will also escalate matters arising from these areas of activity with their course leader, course director and/or head of department and Associate Dean Students for decision-making and actioning as appropriate.

Overseeing Academic Standards

Course Standards

20. This involves helping to ensure that the course and its delivery have not diverged significantly from the academic standards set and confirmed at approval, and includes:

- Advising the partner course team on course approvals/validation, meeting any course specific conditions of validation, structure and content of programme specification and other course documents.
- For dual awards, ensuring curriculum is current and leading on changes where required.
- Checking that adequate specialist resources are in place for delivery of the course.
- Advising the course team on the procedures to be followed for the approval of modifications to the approved course and ensuring that these are followed up as necessary within the School.
- Maintaining the Course Monitoring Plan(s) for their respective partner course(s) (which are integrated in the central Course Monitoring action plan for the SU course they are part of) and participating in Course Monitoring exercises as appropriate ensuring their respective Course Director/Leader and Head of Department are fully cognisant of collaborative delivery aspects.
- Contributing to Annual and 5-yearly review preparations and events as appropriate.

Assessment Standards

21. This involves helping to ensure that the academic standards actually achieved by students are consistent with what was planned at approval, comparable with university provision and acceptable in the light of all relevant external benchmarks. The ALT will ensure that the partner organisation follows the University's latest principles regarding assessment as set out within the University's policy and procedures, liaising with their course leader as necessary. This will include participating in and maintaining oversight of the following for their subject areas, liaising with their course leads as appropriate where there is both on-campus and partnership delivery of a course:

- Internal verification of assessments
- Internal moderation (3rd marking)
- Ensuring correct examination processes are followed

External Examining

22. ALTs contribute to the effective operation of external examining arrangements to assure the maintenance of appropriate academic standards. Responsibilities include:

- Assisting as appropriate on the appointment of external examiners(s) for collaborative provision leading to university awards, liaising with course leaders as appropriate where a single external examiner reviews both on-campus and collaborative provision.

- Reviewing and analysing external examiner reports, sharing relevant elements with the partner, and ensuing that the partner course team/partner organisation responds effectively to the issues raised therein, liaising with both the partner and external examiner as appropriate. The ALT will also ensure that partner feedback is incorporated in the course team/department answer to the external examiner report.

Course Quality

23.   Responsibilities involve helping to ensure that the course quality and quality of the student experience continue to be appropriate to the course aims. This includes:

- Being familiar with and having oversight of the university metrics for their course provision.
- Maintaining the Course Monitoring Plan for the collaborative course(s) and contributing to relevant central Course Monitoring preparatory activity and bi-annual meetings as appropriate.
- Meeting students to review their experience of the course and ensuring the student voice is represented, captured and integrated in Staffordshire University processes and activity.
- Liaising with the partner course leader, Post-16/International Partnerships and AQS to ensure that both organisations are aware of issues arising from complaints and appeals and to resolve issues where necessary.

Quality of Teaching: Staffing

24.   Responsibilities involve the monitoring the operation of collaborative provision to ensure that staff engaged in the delivery of provision are appropriately qualified and trained and consulting with the partner to help ensure that the quality of staffing for the course is maintained. This includes:

- Considering the impact of staff leaving with the partner course lead and discussing the matter with Post-16/International Partnerships and AQS where appropriate.
- Ensuring new staff joining the teaching team at the partner are approved through relevant School committees prior to teaching on Staffordshire University courses.
- Considering any academic staff development needs arising with the partner course leader and ensuring that they are addressed, including taking advantage of appropriate CPD and lecturer training opportunities within the University.

Course Level Management

25.   Responsibilities involve checking that there is effective implementation of course level quality processes and include:

- Attending course committee meetings or equivalent as appropriate or reviewing meeting documents to ensure its effective operation, including review and remedy of difficulties.
- Checking that course level student representation and feedback systems are effective.
-
- Developing an annual ALT Planner with the partner to agree the type and level of course specific support for the forthcoming academic year.

Publicity and Marketing

26.   The ALT is responsible for checking that the collaborative provision course(s) are accurately represented and does not mislead students. This will involve checking and approving, on behalf of the University, any course related promotional materials, bearing the University's name, prior to publication. This checking will be done in liaison with Post-16/International Partnerships who are responsible for oversight of more generic University publicity.

Input to School and University Quality Management Framework Processes

27.   Responsibilities involve contributing as appropriate to the processes through which the University assures itself of the continued health of its collaborative provision courses, and the quality of the overall partnership. This includes:

- Contributing to annual or 5-yearly partnership reports as appropriate as well as to central course monitoring exercises through their oversight of partner course action plans
- Attending meetings as required to discuss monitoring and review.
- Informing the Head of Post-16/International Partnerships, and the relevant Head of Department of any matter which may affect the nature of the University relationship, in particular early intelligence of any proposed review or inspection of collaborative provision by any external body.

28.   The above activities will also be undertaken for the awards delivered as part of an apprenticeship.

Partner Visits

29.   ALT will provide advance details of their visits to the partner for School, Post-16/International Partnerships, AQS and SaAS awareness. Post-16/International Partnerships will note these on the Partnerships travel calendar as appropriate, and the AQS will monitor related visit report submissions.

30.   Expected visit arrangements to partner institutions include the following:

- At least two visits per year, one of which will be in person with the rest taking place by video conference if needed. The two meetings (in person or virtual) may include attendance at a Course Committee.

- Academic Link Tutors should also normally attend Award Boards (in person or virtually) for all institutions for which they are responsible.

31.   Additional visits may be required as determined through ongoing risk management assessment through Post-16/International Partnerships, e.g. where serious quality issues have been identified or where a partner is developing new provision or has multiple sites. Visits may be face-to-face or by video conference as necessary.

32.   If the Academic Link Tutor is unable to undertake a visit, the School, in collaboration with Post-16/International Partnerships, should arrange for an alternative academic staff with suitable knowledge of the partner and/or area of provision to go in their place.

33.   Academic Link Tutors should work with colleagues in the School and wider University to ensure that the scheduling of any visits is appropriate to the ongoing support of both the course/s for which they are responsible and the wider interests of the University and the collaborative academic partnership.

34.   Academic Link Tutors will meet and liaise with relevant course staff and key support staff at the partner institution to consider the delivery and management of the approved collaborative course/s, to identify areas of good practice or concern, and determine ways in which to deal with any issues.

Key to abbreviations

ALT: Academic Link Tutor
AQS: Academic Quality Service
SaAS: Student and Academic Services
SAC: School Academic Committee
UPC: University Partnerships Committee