

## University of Buckingham

### Strategy & Criteria for Collaborative Partnerships 2016

#### **Strategy**

##### *Background*

The University of Buckingham has developed a number of partnerships which are geographically spread and culturally diverse. We recognise that collaborative partnerships provide unique opportunities for students to benefit from UK higher education, and aim to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills required to equip them for the workplace, wherever they may have chosen to study with us.

##### *Vision*

The University will only consider a partnership that it has the resources to manage effectively. As such, small to medium sized enterprises are currently seen as preferred educational partners. Over the years, as well as partnering with medium sized providers overseas, The University has also developed a professional niche in assisting other small, independent institutions to grow.

Strategically, the University aims to expand its current portfolio both in the UK and abroad, primarily offering courses from level 4-7. The University does not actively employ recruitment professionals or ordinarily adopt the services of agents in order to establish new partnerships, and nor does it intend to do so. Partnerships are built through reach of reputation and academic networks. The University will continue to build on these networks and explore opportunities with prospective partners whose educational aims and academic ethos match its own.

#### **Selection Criteria for New Partnerships**

Broadly, the selection criteria for partnerships are defined as follows:

##### *Educational Opportunity*

The University was founded on the principles of Classical Liberalism, and has taught the ideals of free-thinking and liberal political thought, it has maintained the independence of academia since it opened forty years ago. As such, we expect our partners to mirror our ethos, which includes attention given to students via small group teaching, and freedom to address the issues raised in the subjects offered without undue cultural and legal limitations.

We would consider a partnership with an institution wishing to deliver programmes in areas where we have subject specific expertise. The new programmes need to have coherence with, (although need not be identical) to our own (except in the case of a franchise arrangement).

The prospective partner would have to provide the University with evidence of market demand for the programme, and a clear educational rationale for its need and delivery. We expect all partners to work with us in meeting the expectations of the UK QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, in addition to complying with its local legal and regulatory requirements. Working with the right partner can be an advantage to staff and students who benefit from the exchange of scholarly expertise, research, and in some cases, further opportunities for study. Both institutions may also benefit from an increased awareness and enhanced reputation by creating a greater market presence.

### *Philanthropic Opportunity*

Entering into a collaborative partnership may also extend beyond reputational and financial benefits, and the University will consider proposals from a philanthropic perspective providing they are backed with a viable business case and educational rationale. Institutional links can have social development gains, particularly in areas where opportunities for quality university education are limited. The University therefore recognises the potential for opportunities in developing countries, and those in a post-war environment.

### *Financial Sustainability*

The University undertakes a rigorous financial assessment of a prospective partner at an early stage in the consideration process. The financial viability and sustainability of any partner will be ascertained before any agreement may be entered into.

All partners are subject to initial and ongoing financial and annual due diligence in the following areas:

- Financial Risk
- Legal (including local regulations where relevant)
- Regulatory Compliance (UK and local)
- Educational Delivery
- Ethics

### *Other Critical Factors*

- Competition arising (particular attention is given to providing degrees in the UK, and offering 2 year degrees)
- Reputational Risk (for the University and to its partner)
- Resources (staffing for effective management and delivery of collaborative education arrangements)
- Growth (The University will not normally consider a partner which has more than 2000 students)
- Type of Collaboration (validation is preferred, but the benefits of franchising a Foundation Pathway are recognised and all cases will be considered on individual merit).
- Branch Campus (the University has considered this approach to off shore education, and any development in this area will be subject to intense and rigorous scrutiny, due diligence and analysis).
- Contingency (the University must be able to satisfy itself that any collaborative partner is financially viable, but where a venture may fail, it is able to facilitate the learning of any remaining students)

Where the University seeks to partner with providers overseas, it will not normally, for reasons of financial and quality assurance guarantees, enter into an agreement with an institution whose primary funding is derived from outside of their country.

By adopting a selective approach to collaborative partnerships, the University aims to ensure that current and future agreements continue to reflect and meet the University's own academic expectations and business requirements. This will ensure that the University has faith in the integrity of its partners, and confidence in the standards and quality of the education delivered to students, wherever they may be studying for a Buckingham award.

## ***Future Strategy***

The University has the scope and capacity to work with two additional medium sized enterprises and 3-4 small institutions. Moving beyond this would require a review of staffing, which will be considered as needs arise in accordance with Buckingham's policies.

In the future, the University aims to develop partnerships with reputable institutions that meet the selection criteria, and ideally in subject areas such as Computer Science and Humanities, although Business related proposals will be considered where a strong case is presented.

The University sees the value in collaborative partnerships for students and staff, and over the period 2016-2021, the strategy is to increase partnerships by at least three.