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## *UK Partnership Strategy – Leading the Field*

Managed by: Head of Partnerships

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### Strategy Statement

This strategy has been developed to support the achievement of the University's vision and strategy for the future, specifically relating to strategic and sustainable partnership working through the establishment of '*partnerships with land-based colleges ... that will diversify our student community and extend the reach of the learning opportunities we offer*'. This is consistent with the University's aspiration to be recognised by the Office for Students as a Specialist Provider capable of maintaining *World Class* distinctive and diverse provision of land-based education and training for the benefit of students and employers.

## Version Control

Version number	Purpose/change	Name and job title	Date (DD/MM/YYYY)
1.0	Initial version for internal discussion	Neil Ravenscroft, PVC International/ Nigel Warner, Head of UK Partnerships	April 2021
2.0	Final version for AB approval	Neil Ravenscroft, PVC International/ Nigel Warner, Head of UK Partnerships	July 2021

## Contents

Partnership Objectives .....	3
Partnership Vision .....	4
Partnership Delivery .....	5
Delivering Value .....	6
Partnership Management .....	7

# UK Partnership Strategy – Leading the Field

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## Partnership Objectives

The RAU seeks to ensure a consistent approach to the development, sustainability and review of partnership activities to: (a) ensure that the sector has **access** to World Class land-based education and training that benefits students and employers; (b) offer new routes for student **progression and achievement**; and (c) to enhance the RAU's **leadership** role as a Civic University that supports the land-based sector in the UK. Key objectives of this strategy are:

- (a) To continue to lead the sector through active collaboration in key organisations including Landex and the LEPs;
- (b) To develop academically relevant collaborative relationships with key regional land-based and general FE Colleges which are legally and financially sound, have demonstrated consistently high quality academic provision and which can add value to core RAU activities relating to teaching, research and/or knowledge exchange;
- (c) To identify and collaborate with appropriate key partners to contribute to achieving the University's Access and Participation Plan;
- (d) To ensure that all students on partnership programmes have an opportunity to experience the RAU, through direct teaching inputs, site visits and other enhancement activities, with all students on partnership programmes encouraged to progress to study at the RAU;
- (e) To develop new progression partnerships to provide additional routes to study at RAU, with a particular emphasis on working with local schools and colleges; and
- (f) To achieve a substantial and sustainable net income to the University.

## Partnership Vision

### ***Sector Leadership***

The RAU has been at the forefront of agricultural and land-based education for most of its 175-year history. Its leadership role remains vital, for the industries and employers that it serves, and for the network of education and training providers of which it is part. As the Government's Plan for Growth, *Build Back Better*, observes, 'high quality education and skills training play a vital role in sustaining productivity growth and our international competitiveness.' This is embedded in the recent DfE *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, which underlines that, now more than ever, it is necessary to reform post-school education to ensure that it supports people in gaining the life-long skills that our economy needs. This means focusing post-16 skills on increasing productivity, supporting growth industries and giving individuals suitable opportunities to progress in their careers. The RAU has a crucial role to play in collaborating with Landex and the FE sector in delivering this agenda, in terms of ensuring that:

- Employer needs are located at the heart of programme design and delivery so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill skills gaps;
- Partner colleges have the skills and support to develop a portfolio of degree and higher-level technical qualifications that provide a full range of opportunities;
- The RAU and partner colleges develop a range of training and learning opportunities that support career development throughout the agri-food industries;
- All partner colleges are encouraged to collaborate with RAU in developing excellence in teaching and in ensuring that all their degree students are taught a full and comprehensive range of higher skills that equip them for graduate employment.

### ***Access to RAU Programmes***

By 2025 the RAU will have underpinned its reputation as the leading Specialist Provider of land-based education and training in the UK, working with a network of regional providers to deliver an innovative, diverse and appropriately challenging range of programmes for the benefit of students and employers. The RAU will have at least 900 students enrolled through a network of regional partners, with all students experiencing some direct teaching provision from RAU staff, and all students able to benefit from enhancement opportunities offered by RAU.

In addressing current external examiner concerns about the lack of exposure that many students have to the higher skills that should be associated with degree programmes, RAU will work directly with all partner colleges in the delivery of

research methods and dissertation modules. This will entail a shift away from conventional validation and franchise arrangements towards new forms of hybrid provision that have embedded within them substantial components of direct delivery by RAU staff, for all students in all years. Direct delivery of teaching will be facilitated through RAU's blended pedagogy, supported by a new cloud-based VLE.

All programmes offered at partner colleges will be consistent with the latest OfS guidance on high-cost science subjects (eg Agriculture, Forestry and Food Science; Earth and Environmental Sciences; Biosciences). These programmes can include business, finance, economics and other social science elements as long as they remain categorized as high-cost.

### ***Progression to HE***

Providing new progression routes to HE is a key element of RAU's partnership vision. By 2025 RAU will have established at least two progression agreements that offer pre-university foundation programmes in Agricultural Science and related subjects. At least one of these will address WP students and contribute to the achievement of RAU's APP, concentrating in particular in collaborating with local providers and students to address the Agri-Food & Rural business agenda set out by GFirst LEP. This could be delivered through RAU Swindon, using RAU's Integrated Foundation Year.

## Programme Delivery

Conventional partnership arrangements have generally conformed to one of two forms: validation (a low-risk, low-return, arrangement in which a programme owned, developed and delivered in its entirety by a partner is deemed of sufficient quality and standard to lead to a RAU award); or franchise (a higher risk, higher return arrangement whereby a course developed and delivered by the RAU is also delivered by one or more partners). The current RAU partnership portfolio reflects this mix, with a dominance of validation arrangements offering limited but safe returns for – traditionally - relatively little input from, and risk to, RAU.

While offering a modest income and some reputational benefits, this approach no longer addresses RAU's vision and objectives established for UK partnerships. In addition, as the OfS has made clear in a recent consultation on *Quality and Standards*, it is concerned that such approaches to programme development and delivery may lead to '... low-quality courses or qualifications that do not meet sector-recognised standards.' Through enhanced, transparent, monitoring, the OfS seeks to 'ensure that students, from the UK and beyond, as well as the wider public and the taxpayers who subsidise their education, can have confidence in the quality of the courses offered by English higher education providers and that they represent value for money.'

In order to demonstrate that its programmes meet these ideals, RAU needs to take a more active and thorough-going approach to its partnership activity, to ensure that all its students receive a uniformly high quality of education with clear value added through association with the RAU. As a result, current 'standard' validation arrangements will not normally be renewed in this format. Instead, all partner colleges will be encouraged to work with RAU to collaborate closely in developing high quality validated or franchised programmes that include an element of direct module delivery by RAU staff. Student engagement with the RAU will be built into the delivery model, with active support for progression from the partner college to the RAU, for higher levels of study.

Where new partner colleges are identified, RAU will prioritise those partners who are members of Landex willing to embrace new customized and hybridized forms of franchised provision. This provision will include programme specifications that can be modified to meet local needs, full access to the new VLE, some direct module delivery by RAU staff and annual visits to RAU for enhancement activities. In addition, these partners will be encouraged to engage fully with RAU, through the award of Visiting Fellow status to staff who offer modules into other RAU programmes, or engage in RAU research and KE projects. These partner colleges will thus have the opportunity to become part of the RAU programme delivery infrastructure, thereby giving students more choice of modules and locations of study, as well as ensuring that both the RAU and the partner colleges are able to concentrate on the excellence of their teaching and broader support for high quality student experience.

## Delivering Value

RAU's future UK partnerships will be developed to deliver a high quality education for all students at a premium fee income. Incentives will be built into the delivery model to encourage partner colleges to achieve KPIs related to widening participation and student experience, performance and progression. In principle, the following criteria will apply:

- Tuition fees for all programmes will normally be charged at the same rate as that charged by RAU (currently £9250 pa);
- RAU will expect a top-slice of 30% of the fee income on all contracts with Landex members, whether franchise or validation, subject to a minimum headline top-slice income per partner of at least £220,000 per annum (registration of at least 80 students when fully operational). This fee will include all enhancement activities, access to the VLE & library, and an agreed level of direct module delivery;
- Rebates of up to 15% of the fee income will be available to partner colleges meeting agreed KPIs relating to WP and progression;
- RAU will franchise high-cost programmes to a limited number of private providers and other non-Landex members in cases where these providers

add value to RAU's core activities and brand. In addition to offering added value, these providers must be able to demonstrate that they are legally and financially sound and have delivered consistently high quality academic provision over the last 5 years. The fee income required from these providers will be in excess of that derived from Landex members, reflecting both the additional institutional risk factors and the lower significance of these providers to national agri-food education and training.

## Partnership Management

Overall responsibility for all UK partnership arrangements will lie with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (International), reporting to the Vice Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG) and Academic Board. A new UK Partnership Committee, with responsibility for the development and operation of UK partnerships, will be established in the Directorate of Academic Services, run by the Head of UK Partnerships. The committee will comprise representatives from the Directorates of Academic Services and External Affairs, the PVCs Education and International, the Directors of Research and KE, Programme Management representatives and representatives from the Students' Union. There will also be representation from partner college management, staff and students, and from relevant employer groups.

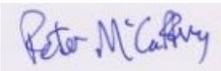
All partnerships will be based on a sound business plan, approved by ASPC and VCEG, and subject to a rigorous due diligence assessment of the partner; an assessment of the risks and the benefits each arrangement will bring to the University; and covered by a formal signed agreement between the RAU and the partner, normally for a period not exceeding five years. All partnerships will be assigned a Relationship Manager from the Directorate of Academic Services, who will be responsible for ensuring that the University's Partnership Vision and Objectives are achieved.

Regular monitoring of the quality of each partnership activity and the student experience will mirror that for internal provision and will be managed by Academic Registry, reporting to the UK Partnership Committee, Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and subsequently to Academic Board.

The RAU has established a set of guiding principles that underpin all partnership arrangements under the strategy. These are set out in the attached partnership policy document.

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**Signed**



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Vice-Chancellor

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> September  
2021