

**Online Programme Management (OPM) Partnership for Online Course Development**

1. **Introduction**

Durham University seeks to expand its offering of high-quality online master’s programmes, beyond the provision already supported in Durham University Business School (DUBS) and Arts and Humanities. In addition, Durham University has identified a desire to develop online CPD, executive education, and outreach courses that showcase Durham’s strengths and contribute to local, national, and global knowledge and skills development. These initiatives have the potential to provide the University with additional income streams and raise the profile of Durham University both locally and globally in addition to other strategic benefits.

The tender specification outline is focused on supporting the development of fully online postgraduate programmes.

Durham University seeks a framework agreement which positions the chosen supplier as the preferred supplier for the development of 5-10 large scale postgraduate programmes over the next 5 years. It is envisioned that a framework agreement would be required, with the option to undertake variable approaches to course development from full service to single services depending upon the needs of each individual programme and our resource needs. As such, each programme would be considered an addendum to a master services agreement, and subject to negotiated terms of development and delivery.

The chosen partner will work closely with colleagues in the Durham Centre for Academic Development (DCAD).

1. **Requirements**

The supplier will provide demonstrable expertise and capabilities in the following areas and will collaborate closely with Durham University to achieve jointly defined success criteria for each aspect.

1. **Market Insight:**

* Analysis of demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing demand for online education.
* Identification of key markets, subject areas, skills gaps, and underserved student populations with unique learning needs.
* Assessment of competitor offerings and benchmarking against best practices in online program development.

1. **Program Development:**

* Collaborate with academic departments to identify market demand and develop new online programs aligned with institutional goals and industry needs.
* In collaboration with and under the supervision of DU learning design and development colleagues, design engaging and interactive online courses that meet rigorous academic standards and incorporate innovative pedagogical approaches,
* Develop multimedia content, learning resources, and assessments to enhance the online learning experience for students in a wide variety of formats.
* Alignment of programmes to Durham University’s Principles of Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

1. **Marketing and Recruitment:**

* In collaboration with DU marketing colleagues, develop targeted marketing strategies to promote online programs and attract qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds.
* Implement effective recruitment campaigns to increase enrolment in online courses and programs.
* Provide support for student inquiries, application processing, and enrolment management.

1. **Student Support and Services:**

* Deliver comprehensive student support services, including advising, guidance and technical assistance within the agreed scope.
  + To provide suitable DBS, or equivalent, checks are completed and that all regulatory and legal compliance requirements are met by the company's workforce.
* To collaborate to define roles and service provision for a programme of specialised student support in line with the universities provision of student support, for example mental health support and counselling.
  + To include roles and responsibilities, scope of advising and university oversight.
* Ensure accessibility and inclusivity in online learning environments by providing accommodations and support for students with disabilities in line with university policies.
* Co-deliver/facilitate induction/transition support and ongoing engagement activities to foster a sense of community among online learners.

1. **Technology Infrastructure:**

* To develop online courses within an appropriate Virtual Learning Environment, and to support the optimisation of the environment, including supporting staff and students with its utilisation.
* Ensure the reliability, security, and scalability of the technology infrastructure to accommodate growing enrolment and usage.
* Offer technical support services for students on partnership programmes, faculty, and staff to troubleshoot issues and optimize the online learning experience.

1. **Flexibility and Scalability**

The OPM company will be expected to demonstrate flexibility and scalability in course selection and development to accommodate changing market dynamics, student preferences, and institutional goals over time. This may include:

* Offering modular or stackable course formats that allow for customization and personalization of learning pathways.
* Leveraging technology-enabled learning tools and platforms to enhance course delivery and engagement.
* Adapting course content and delivery methods to meet the needs of diverse student populations, including part-time learners, working professionals, and international students.
* Scaling up or down course offerings based on enrolment trends, resource availability, and strategic priorities identified by Durham University.

1. **Continuous Improvement:**

The delivery of courses will be an iterative process guided by ongoing evaluation, feedback, and performance monitoring. The OPM company will collaborate with Durham University to establish mechanisms and benchmarks for:

* Regular review and updating of course content to reflect advancements in knowledge, industry practices, and educational pedagogy.
* Monitoring of student outcomes, satisfaction levels, and course completion rates to identify areas for improvement and optimization.
* Incorporation of assessment data, learner analytics, and qualitative feedback into decision-making processes for course refinement and enhancement.

1. **Additional criteria**

In addition to the above requirements, the preferred supplier will meet the following experience, attributes, and capabilities:

1. Financial stability, with the ability, and demonstrable experience of supporting the upfront investment required to achieve success and profitability for both sides of the partnership.
2. Evidence of supporting the development of online PGT portfolios from concept to enrolments and long-term success.
3. Demonstrable experience of reaching sustainable profitability through the development of fully online PGT programmes.
4. Experience of developing online PGT programmes with Russell Group Universities or similarly research-intensive UK and/or international HEI’s.
5. Experience of developing online PGT portfolios utilising the institutionally adopted VLE.
6. Demonstrable ability to assess the current market potential and opportunities to expand online provision in line with Durham University’s ambitions and expertise.
7. Flexibility to support Durham University with a range of operating models and service provision on a course-by-course basis.
8. Experience of and capability to support global learners in a wide range of time zones including meeting typical service levels for student query response times and 24/7 technical assistance.
9. Evidence of supporting Universities to develop their capabilities regarding online course design, development, and teaching.
10. The capability to attend Durham University campus regularly, to facilitator relationship building and smooth operations.

**Exclusivity**

The agreement should not be exclusive, and Durham University should be free to develop additional online programmes as required. To include, but not limited to, utilising university IP developed in partnership with the supplier to develop other online courses such as short courses, micro credentials, knowledge transfer courses and school’s courses, amongst others delivered on university platforms and/or alternatives.

Furthermore, Durham University reserves the right to utilise alternative marketing channels to promote programmes developed within the partnership.

**Quality Assurance**

Durham University retains the responsibility for academic approvals and oversight of quality assurance for all aspects of the partnership including the development of learning content, student support and teaching and learning.

1. **Roles**

The successful supplier will be expected to allocate a dedicated account manager to the contract. This person will be responsible for receiving and responding to operational queries on the contract.

Partnership operational queries will ordinarily be discussed directly with the representatives from DCAD.

Where issues experienced are of a contractual nature the Contract Manager named at section 12 must be involved as soon as the issue is encountered to ensure that an appropriate resolution can be reached.

1. **Ordering and Invoicing**

Payment for services will be required to be managed in two scenarios:

Revenue Share: where the OPM partner collects student fees on behalf of the university and pays the university the revenue share directly.

Fee for service: where the University selects a single or multiple services for a specific project to be completed or for a duration of time. In some cases, services will be provided to Faculties directly and in other cases, services may be delivered to the university centrally. Faculties may then be responsible for providing payment for services and a central point of payment may need to be identified.

1. **Legislation**

In the provision of online learning in the UK, the following legislation, guidelines and frameworks and organisational directives that the University, in collaboration with the OPM partner, will be required to meet:

* **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):** GDPR governs the protection and privacy of personal data, including data collected through online learning platforms.
* **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA):** The QAA is the primary body responsible for assuring the quality of higher education in the UK. They provide guidelines and frameworks for universities and colleges to ensure the quality of online learning programs.
* **Office for Students (OfS):** OfS is the regulatory body for higher education in England. It monitors and assesses the quality and standards of higher education, including online provision, and ensures that universities adhere to specific requirements.
* **Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023:** The Equality Act ensures that disabled students have equal access to education, including online learning. It requires universities to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that their online learning platforms and materials are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities.
* **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG):** WCAG provides international standards for making web content more accessible, including online learning platforms.
* **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006**: This act establishes a vetting and barring scheme to prevent unsuitable individuals from working with vulnerable groups, including children and vulnerable adults. It applies to staff and volunteers involved in online education, particularly in programs that involve minors or vulnerable individuals.
* **Prevent Duty Guidance:** Institutions must comply with the Prevent Duty, which aims to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism. This includes ensuring that online learning materials and platforms do not promote extremist views or radicalization.
* **Consumer Rights Act 2015:** This act outlines the rights of consumers when purchasing goods and services, including education services. It requires universities to provide clear information about online courses, including the content, fees, and terms and conditions.
* **Distance Selling Regulations:** For online courses where the student is not physically present at the institution, the Distance Selling Regulations provide additional consumer protections, such as a cooling-off period during which students can cancel their enrolment.
* **Intellectual Property Rights:** Universities must clarify ownership and usage rights for online learning materials created by staff and students. Clear policies should be in place to address copyright issues, licensing agreements, and intellectual property rights related to course content, multimedia resources, and research outputs.

1. **Service Levels**

Service levels to be defined include:

**Marketing and Recruitment:**

The supplier should lead in marketing and recruitment efforts to attract students to online programs. This may involve developing marketing materials, conducting outreach campaigns, and providing enrolment management services including, but not limited to the following activities:

* Develop and execute multi-channel marketing campaigns tailored to target audiences, program offerings, and enrolment objectives.
* Implement digital marketing tactics such as paid advertising, social media promotion, email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing to reach prospective students.
* Define specific targets for generating leads interested in online programs, based on market research and enrolment targets.
* Set quantifiable goals for the number of leads to be generated within defined timeframes (e.g., monthly, or quarterly targets).
* Establish conversion rate benchmarks for different stages of the enrolment funnel, including lead-to-application, application-to-enrolment, and inquiry-to-enrolment.
* Set enrolment targets for each online program offered by the institution, considering historical enrolment data, market demand, and program capacity.
* Define enrolment projections for specific intake periods and monitor progress towards meeting enrolment goals.
* Organise virtual recruitment events, webinars, and information sessions to showcase program offerings, engage prospective students, and address inquiries in real-time.
* Collaborate with academic departments, faculty members, and student ambassadors (where applicable) to host informative and engaging events that highlight the benefits of online education and the institution's unique value proposition.

**Student Support Services:**

Service levels to be agreed to support the following areas:

* Non-academic advising on policies, progression, payments, and student finance arrangements in line with Durham policies and processes.
* The availability of support staff, the range of services offered, and the expected response times for addressing student inquiries and concerns.
* Clear response time targets for different types of inquiries, such as:
  + Urgent inquiries (e.g., technical issues preventing access to course materials): Guaranteed response within 2 hours during regular business hours.
  + Non-urgent inquiries (e.g., general questions about course content or assignments): Guaranteed response within 24 hours during regular business hours.
* Implement mechanisms for measuring student satisfaction with support services, such as periodic surveys or feedback forms.
* Set benchmarks for student satisfaction levels and establish processes for addressing and resolving any areas of dissatisfaction identified through feedback mechanisms.

**Collaboration and support**

* Establish designated points of contact on both sides to serve as primary liaisons for communication and coordination.
* Ensure that contact information for key personnel is readily available and updated to facilitate timely communication and problem resolution.
* Agree upon a schedule for regular meetings between the OPM provider and university representatives to discuss progress, address concerns, and coordinate activities.
* Define the frequency, format, and agenda for these meetings to ensure productive collaboration and communication.
* Define communication channels and protocols for sharing information, updates, and documentation between the OPM provider and university.
* Utilize email, project management tools, shared document repositories, and collaborative platforms to streamline communication and ensure transparency.
* Define reporting requirements and expectations for the OPM provider to provide regular progress updates, performance metrics, and key deliverables to the university.
* Specify the format, frequency, and content of reports to ensure they are actionable, informative, and aligned with the university's needs and objectives.
* Establish a clear process for identifying, escalating, and resolving issues or challenges that arise during the partnership.
* Define roles and responsibilities for addressing issues, setting timelines for resolution, and communicating updates to relevant stakeholders.
* Implement collaborative project management tools or systems to track tasks, milestones, and deadlines associated with the partnership.
* Ensure that both parties have access to project management tools and receive training or support as needed to effectively utilize them.
* Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from both the university and the OPM provider to assess the effectiveness of collaboration and identify areas for improvement.
* Encourage open communication and constructive feedback to foster continuous improvement and strengthen the partnership over time.
* Define a change management process for handling modifications to project scope, timelines, or deliverables during the partnership.
* Ensure that changes are documented, evaluated for impact, and approved by appropriate stakeholders before implementation.

Further service levels are to be defined as required.

1. **Support**

Support for key stakeholders at Durham University should be covered by service levels provided by the supplier, as detailed above.

1. **Contingency Planning**

The most likely impact to suppliers are delays to communications and workflow in the event of strike action. In the event of strike action, the supplier will be informed in advance of the strike days and likely impact.

No reimbursement or compensation will be provided by the University in this event.

In the unlikely event of a national emergency, impacting workflow for a sustained period, such as in the case of the coronavirus epidemic, the university retains the right to include/or not any such period of impact within the total contract length.

No reimbursement or compensation will be provided by the University in this event.

1. **Data Processing, Storage and IPR**

**Data Holding Requirements:**

* The supplier is required to ensure compliance with data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
* Specific provisions in the contract will govern the supplier's handling of university data, including:
  + Data processing agreements or clauses outlining responsibilities and obligations related to data protection.
  + Adherence to data protection principles, security measures, and lawful processing requirements.
  + Restrictions on data use, disclosure, and access by unauthorized parties.
  + Mechanisms for monitoring compliance, conducting audits, and addressing data security incidents.

**Access to University's Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):**

* The supplier's access to the University's Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) will be determined based on the services provided and negotiated terms in the contract.
* Access to University IPR may be necessary for tasks such as developing course materials, software, or instructional content.
* Contract provisions will ensure protection of University IPR, including:
  + Definition of the scope and purpose of the supplier's access to University IPR.
  + Confidentiality and non-disclosure requirements to prevent unauthorized use or disclosure.
  + Ownership and licensing arrangements for any new IPR created during the contract term.

**Provisions for Retaining Ownership of University's IPR:**

* The University will retain ownership of its Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and expects clear provisions in the contract to safeguard these rights.
* Contractual provisions will include:
  + Confirmation that ownership of pre-existing University IPR remains with the University.
  + Assignment or licensing of new IPR developed during the contract term to the University.
  + Protection, enforcement, and defence of University IPR against infringement or misuse.
  + Indemnification clauses holding the supplier accountable for any infringement resulting from their actions.