Phase 1 Output – Scoping Report

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Introduction

This scoping report aligns with the phase 1 output for the British Council collaborative project between Cardiff Metropolitan University and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This document contains the inputs of the phase 1 analysis, comprising of:

- A desk-based review of the barriers to TNE partnerships between UK and Nigerian Universities
- The findings of a scoping visit to NOUN
- The findings of a survey exploring stakeholder perceptions of the barriers to TNE partnerships between UK and Nigerian Universities – a copy of the survey questions can be found in APPENDIX A
- An output, presenting the findings of the above, outlining the barriers to TNE partnerships between UK and Nigerian Universities

The purpose of this document was to combine three points of data capture, including input from relevant stakeholders to outline various barriers toward scoping and establishing a TNE partnership between a UK and Nigerian university.

Input 1 – Desk Based Review

Introduction

The first area of input to phase 1 was a desk-based review around potential barriers to TNE partnerships between UK and Nigerian Universities. The purpose of the activity was to involve project stakeholders in an initial review of the perceived barriers. The stakeholders involved were:

- The project leads from NOUN and Cardiff Metropolitan University
- The QAA
- The British Council

This initial review was loosely based around a PESTLE analysis in order to provide initial structure.

Output of Desk Based Review

Political Factors

Regulatory Uncertainty and Bureaucracy

The Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) is responsible for regulating universities and approving TNE collaborations. However, the approval process is unknown and there is a gap in knowledge in relation to local accreditation standards. UK HEIs must navigate multiple layers of regulation, which can delay or even prevent partnerships from materializing.

In the UK, regulatory frameworks such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) play a significant role in maintaining the standards of TNE partnerships. The QAA provides guidance on academic quality, governance, and risk management, which UK institutions must adhere to when setting up international collaborations.

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The British Council supports UK HEIs by providing policy guidance and facilitating partnerships through various TNE programmes. They are currently seeking to break down barriers to TNE to support new opportunities as part of their wider TNE strategy.

Political Stability and Security Risks

Nigeria is experiencing political instability due to regional conflicts, terrorism, insecurity and governance challenges. Institutions in areas affected by security threats are inaccessible for UK HEIs, restricting partnership opportunities. This could pose an issue in both establishing partnership as well as carrying out standard QA processes. Additionally, political transitions in Nigeria leads to policy shifts that affect foreign institutions operating in the country.

Based on electoral instability, the insecurity in Nigeria is limited mostly to hinterland not the capital cities or developed towns.

Diplomatic Relations and Government Support

Strong UK-Nigeria diplomatic ties are crucial for sustaining TNE collaborations. While both governments have expressed support for educational partnerships any changing policies in both countries can impact student and staff mobility, a key component of successful TNE models.

Economic Factors

Funding and Financial Sustainability

The **financial viability** of TNE partnerships in Nigeria is a key concern. HEIs often operate under financial constraints. UK institutions are currently facing financial difficulties, which could prompt reconsideration of attempting to establish TNE in new unpredictable areas, or areas where no initial partnerships exist.

Foreign Exchange Volatility and Tuition Affordability

Nigeria's currency, the Naira (NGN), has historically been volatile. This poses risks for UK HEIs in terms of pricing tuition fees and maintaining financial stability. Additionally,

high tuition fees associated with UK-affiliated degrees may be unaffordable for many Nigerian students, limiting participation in TNE programs. Being able to predict ongoing income could be difficult for both UK and Nigerian HEI's.

In 2023, the Federal Government of Nigeria withdrew fuel subsidy and introduced market driven forces to rule the Foreign Exchange rate which subdued the Volatility and affordability of the Foreign Exchange.

Resource costs associated with courses

Some courses require greater investment than others in order to be adequately resourced. e.g. certain school of technology courses require specific software/versions of software that require large setup or ongoing costs to keep in place.

Infrastructure and Operational Costs

Setting up TNE programs requires investment in infrastructure, faculty training and administrative support from both partners. The cost of establishing campuses, equipping classrooms and ensuring reliable utilities (such as electricity and internet) can be prohibitively high, especially in rural areas. As part of the operational costs that could be a challenge, the high cost of UK visas and the current prohibitive immigration policies and regulations could be a problem for prospective Nigerian students as part of exchange or top-ups.

Social Factors

Cultural and Pedagogical Differences

UK HEIs could operate with different teaching methodologies compared to Nigerian institutions. Link tutor support will be critical in ensuring the successful delivery of content and models.

UK HEIs could operate with different teaching methodologies compared to Nigerian institutions with varied cultural, social and economic diversities

The issues of cultural and pedagogical challenges notwithstanding, the provision of foundational programme that take into consideration these differences and cultural shock could help encourage high number of TNE partnerships between UK-HEIs and Nigerian HEIs.

Recognition of UK degrees

The recognition and acceptance of UK-affiliated degrees in Nigeria could vary across industries and employers. Some employers may prefer graduates from local universities, perceiving foreign-affiliated programs as less rigorous or not aligned with Nigerian labour market needs.

The recognition and acceptance of UK-affiliated degrees in Nigeria could vary across industries and employers. Some employers may prefer graduates from local universities, perceiving foreign-affiliated programs as less rigorous or not aligned with Nigerian labour market needs, but the general perception of UK affiliated degrees in Nigeria still stand high and unchallenged in ranking recognition.

Technological Factors

Digital Infrastructure Challenges

Nigeria faces significant challenges in internet connectivity, power supply, and digital literacy. Students and institutions will need have reliable access to technology.

Nigeria is facing significant challenges in internet connectivity, power supply and digital literacy.

Legal Factors

Recognition and Accreditation of UK Degrees

For a UK-awarded degree to be recognized in Nigeria, it must comply with NUC accreditation requirements. This often requires curriculum modifications and partnership agreements that align with local higher education standards.

This is not the case as it is only in Law degree that graduates of UK HEI will have to attend a programme that introduces them to Nigerian law before being called to Nigerian Bar.

Environmental Factors

Travel involved

Setting up and maintaining TNE partnerships involves travel to partner institutions. This is a clear environmental factor.

Input 2 – Scoping visit from the Cardiff Metropolitan University to Nigeria and NOUN

Introduction/contextual information

The visit formed part of a British Council-funded project exploring the barriers to transnational education (TNE) partnerships between UK and Nigerian higher-education institutions. The project includes multiple data-collection phases, such as desk-based research and a partnership visit to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). As part of the visit, two staff members from Cardiff Metropolitan University travelled to Abuja, Nigeria:

Karl Jones — Link Tutor, School of Technologies. Karl has extensive experience of partnership work across the education sector and is currently a TNE link tutor for the School of Technologies at Cardiff Metropolitan University, working with partners in Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

Simon Browning — TNE Partnership Manager, Global Engagement. Simon has extensive experience in managing and establishing TNE partnerships between the UK and partners overseas at various TNE locations.

Both staff members visited NOUN with distinct objectives. Karl, as a link tutor, explored potential barriers to transnational education (TNE) from the practitioner perspective and met with stakeholders to understand the wider regional context. Simon examined barriers at the strategic institutional level.

While we recognise that a single institution visit in Nigeria limits broader generalisability, NOUN's size and regional role mean the engagement offers insights that are indicative of the wider sector. These findings will be complemented by desk research and, in the survey phase, additional data from other universities.

During the visit, several specific meetings and visits were arranged:

- NOUN (Main Site) – Meetings with staff representing the core functional areas of the university, including visiting and meeting staff from the Library; the Directorate of Examinations and Assessment (DEA); the Directorate of Quality Assurance; the Directorate of Learners' Content Management System (LCMS); the Directorate of Research Administration (DRA); the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages; and the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL).

- NOUN (Study Centre) – A visit to NOUN's model study centre, in order to see how the university operates in the wider context, as well as to meet and interview NOUN students.

- Meeting with the British Council - Meeting to discuss the current context of developing TNE between the UK and Nigeria.

The following outline the feedback from partnership, as well as the link tutor, structed in some cases by key themes and others by specific meetings.

Partnership Feedback Report

Overview

As part of phase 1 of the project, a visit was undertaken to NOUN to look to provide additional insight on any barriers to TNE development. The visit sought to use a vetting visit as the basis for discussion, using the various areas within this as a starting point to identify barriers.

An initial meeting with the NOUN project team was held, which looked at a range of items

1) The regulatory frameworks and contexts that partnerships sit within
2) The nature of how a partnership would develop and the different stages to this
3) A deeper look at a vetting visit as a core component

Following this meeting with the team, individual visits were then made to key staff within NOUN

1) Director of Quality Assurance
2) Director of Registry Services
3) Director of Student Services

These individual visits allowed for additional discussions to be had around any issues that might affect these areas.

Outcomes / Themes

Following the various discussions, a range of different topics were identified which may require additional follow up to explore in more depth. It is noted that NOUN has a particular business model, which is primarily on-line delivery, and so responses from other Nigerian institutions would be useful to triangulate some of these findings to see whether they are unique to the business model and scale of NOUN or if they are across the sector.

Financial considerations

During discussions there were several areas that came up under the area of finance:

- Currency management and payment
- Fluctuating values of currency / exchange rates
- Not wishing to devalue the local offerings if TNE was provided cheaper

Through these discussions it was noted that, whilst finance was indeed part of the discussions between institutions when looking to embark on these types of partnerships it was an area that could be flexible. From the UK perspective, the institution would have a standard practice with regards to the fees it would want to receive. This would consider the costs associated with managing the partnership as well as a profit on the relationship. However, it was noted that the UK institution would not look to impose tuition fees on the Nigerian institution.

The two aspects here are separate.

Given that the fees gathered from the students to the Nigerian institution were separate from the fees paid between the collaborating institutions, one area noted was that it was the Nigerian institution that would bear the cost of any fluctuations in exchange rates. Therefore, care would be needed from the Nigerian institution to set fees that were not only profitable for them but also covered this fluctuation.

This conversation also looked to address the concern of "cheaper" degrees as the Nigerian institution would be free to set its own fees so could be comparable.

Possible areas for follow up:

- A cost analysis of what it would take to run a TNE partnership from the Nigerian end

Whilst the Nigerian institution would have leeway to set its own fees – would not be dictated by the UK institution – an analysis would be good to see if setting the fees at the same level as a local degree allowed the Nigerian institution to cover its costs. I.e. after paying the franchise fee to the UK institution, would the remainder still cover the costs of the Nigerian institution running the course and making a profit.

Is there a sliding scale here where it becomes non-profitable?

Local contextualisation

This theme came out of discussions with both the Registry and Student Support staff.

An item noted was that it was important to understand the local cultures. Whilst the UK institution might consider this in terms of considerations of Nigeria, a theme that came out is that different regions had slightly different cultures that affected studies. An example given was that in the North, women tended to stay at home more meaning that online suited them rather than the typical face-to-face study. This would be different in other regions.

It was also noted the need to contextualise curriculum and support to the different regions. Whilst there was an overarching set of processes and policies that did govern NOUN's delivery there may be a need to look at these minor tweaks. From the student support side, they noted that one key aspect of their work was the staff in the local centres understanding the students and being able to provide that bespoke support to them.

From a UK perspective, whilst we could allow contextualisation, and in some cases (e.g. taxation) would want it, care should be taken as to just how customised the relationship is depending on the area of the country it is operating in. Given the regulations around the management of curriculum in the UK, and local contextualisation may result in unwanted complexities in the partnership with potentially different areas being seen as different programmes, rather than a single whole.

Possible areas for follow up:

- The level of differences between the different areas of Nigeria

If there are these differences, then how would the integrity of the programme be maintained? How would these complexities be factored in given the UK institution would look to come in with a set curriculum. Whilst this could be customised, it is typically customised for the overall market and then expected to be delivered in the same way at any given centre.

If there are differences needed – for example modes of delivery – between regions then there is an additional layer of complexity added here where the same programme is being taught in different ways across different centres. Whilst differing modes of study are not necessarily uncommon (e.g. full time and part time) the mix of both face-to-face and hybrid study could present some logistical and quality challenges to ensure that there was an equivalence of standards not only between the UK and Nigeria, but also within Nigeria.

Acknowledgement of the study achieved

In conversation with the Registry staff, the issue of credit recognition was one thing brought up. Examples were given where students had done study in Nigeria, gone to the UK, and that this was not fully recognised there, meaning students had to come in at a lower level. Therefore, a concern raised was around this recognition of effort within the Nigerian system and how this would then be recognised within the TNE context. For example, if student was undertaken in Nigerian context and then student was looking to move to a TNE arrangement, the credits would need to be acknowledged.

Possible areas for follow up:

- Whilst it was not possible to go deeper into the nature and equivalence levels of Nigerian education as compared to the UK, it might be worth looking at how students might move from one to another. For example, if a student was to undertake study on a Nigerian qualification and then wish to transfer across to the TNE programme, are the levels considered the same?

Whilst there is always the aspect here of mapping between programmes, which can mean that students need to join at a lower point in order to meet all learning outcomes, it would be critical to map out the levels and expectations of each level to ensure that there was parity between the TNE degree and the local degree to allow that movement. If this was not in place then this might be a barrier as it may stop aspects of progression or articulation, where a student might try and do level 4 & 5 (Year 1 and 2) on a Nigerian qualification and then come to the TNE for level 6 (final year 3).

Care would therefore need to be taken in the set-up of the programmes that they were cognisant of the local market and how it operated in that area.

Ownership of the Quality Processes

This was one area in particular that presented possible barriers to TNE development from a couple of different angles.

It was noted that the curriculum that an institution delivers has to be approved by the NUC as the governing body. This governing body sets a series of benchmark expectations for that area of study. If the partnership is trying to operate in that area then it can use these benchmarks in the development. However, if the programme is in a subject that is not listed by the NUC, then further work would need to be done in the process to create this and get it approved by the NUC.

This then highlighted an issue that is not necessarily confined to Nigeria, which is overall ownership of the quality processes and outcomes from the award.

Locally, the NUC would provide strong oversight on what is being delivered so work would need to be done with them in the planning stages to ensure that they are happy with any curriculum proposals. However, an area that was partially explored was what would happen if there was a clash between the UK policies and Nigerian policies.

Typically, in TNE, the local institution takes on the programme of the UK institution. However, by doing so it also takes on the regulations and polices that come with it. This is due to the fact that, from the QAA point of view, it is the responsibility of the awarding body (UK institution) to ensure the integrity of the award and its equivalence to home provision. Within the context of Nigeria, this may prove to be a problem if the directives of the NUC differ from those of the UK. This then brings into question a level of precedence in what is applied.

In discussions with staff, and particularly the Quality staff, there was a clear preference for Joint or Dual Degrees as they are outlined in the NUC guidelines. These are seen as a true collaborative partnership between the institutions, and which are developed collaboratively between them.

This would cover all aspects from the curriculum design to the management of the programme. The benefits of these can easily be seen. By going down this route, staff were keen to point out that this would make the outcome better than anything each institution could do on its own.

It is also noted that discussions with NOUN quality staff revealed the robust procedures that they have with regards to curriculum design and its stages of development, way before it got to the NUC. Therefore, it is noted that NOUN had the capacity and capability to develop curriculum appropriately. However, this true collaborative approach is one that, in this instance, might be a barrier the other way – i.e. for UK institutions to come into Nigeria.

UK institutions, whilst willing to look at things such as student mobility, would typically look to have ultimate control. With the various regulatory bodies (OfS, Medr, QAA, etc) all auditing and monitoring the activities it would be difficult for a UK institution to operate in the collaborative way in which NOUN were talking. Whilst certain processes could, and would, be devolved ultimately the UK institution would want to have the final say over activities involving students enrolled on its record system.

Possible areas for follow up:

- Understanding the application of the modules outlined by the NUC with regards to precedence / hierarchy in the partnership.

The guidelines, and the discussion in NOUN, all point towards a true collaborative relationship. However, as noted, this would be difficult to apply in the UK context.

It might be worth engaging with the NUC to see if there are any fictional scenario case studies that might be produced which could show a typical relationship of each type. These could then show how the partnerships are expected to work in a more operational way and allow aspects such as this hierarchy to be explored in more depth.

Additional Factors

Within the conversations, time was taken to look at some of the more operational aspects. In particular, and building on the point noted above, the ability for a Nigerian institution to operate different regulations within its student body. Discussion took place therefore to explore how an institution might operate if it had to apply different policies and regulations to different groups of students based on the programme of study and its awarding body.

Overall, NOUN noted that they could adapt to different regulations and did not see this as a problem.

From a Registry perspective, they already capture core data on the student and have the capacity to be able to capture additional data as needed. Examples were given where they had to do that for internal reasons and these processes mirrored UK methods. Therefore, the management of the data was considered to be robust enough that if there were different data requirements between the UK and Nigeria, then the systems could be leveraged accordingly for each programme to provide what was needed.

It was also felt that any tweaks to the system itself that might be needed to capture and manage different processes or tracking could be done.

From a Student Services point of view, this was also echoed. Whilst they have a set of overarching processes and policies, as noted above, they also do undertake some local contextualisation in their operationalisation. As such, they are able to adapt to what is needed for each student type. In this area, the key aspect was one of advocacy. Making sure that the students understood what was required of them depending on the type of study they were doing. Focus here was very much on that to eliminate any confusion that the students might have. But once that was addressed, it was not felt that there were any barriers concerning having to adopt different policies.

Link tutor feedback report

Overview

The link tutor visit was focussed on establishing what barriers may be on a localised institutional and regional level for establishing TNE partnerships. As part of this the link tutor was to:

- Evaluate barriers around establishing and monitoring visits
- Meeting with faculty and core departmental leads at NOUN to discuss potential barriers
- Meeting with NUC for Nigerian contextual and regulatory information
- Meeting with the British Council.

The following discusses some of the findings and considerations, by theme, line of enquiry or by meeting where appropriate.

Mobility of staff

An important consideration when establishing any transnational education partnership is ensuring that partners can deliver and maintain qualifications and meet the accreditation requirements of any awards in place. A major part of this is the mobility of key staff during the initial set-up, and the ongoing mobility of link tutors, external examiners, and moderators to ensure quality requirements are met.

In the lead-up to the visit to Nigeria, two practical issues dominated: visa applications and vaccinations. The visa portal was frequently inoperable, so the team engaged a third-party service to process applications and secure entry. This added complexity and cost factors that must be planned for in TNE partnerships, especially where staff turnover can lead to repeated applications. Vaccination requirements also required additional planning, coordination, and budget, which again can have financial and time implications , more so with changing staff.

Student Support Considerations with Hybrid Models

NOUN's scale means student support has to work across a central hub and many outreach centres spread across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Students may not meet their subject- or course-specific staff in person until scheduled workshops during the academic year.

To address this, NOUN uses two main mechanisms. First, each outreach centre has a designated member of staff who provides pastoral and academic support as needed. Second, a centralised support system is in place: students submit course-specific queries through an electronic portal, a central team manages these via a ticketing system, allocates them to the appropriate staff member, and follows up to confirm resolution. This model appears to work well, ensuring students receive timely support when required, and seems to manage student issues in a complex operational environment.

Considerations around delivery and Hybrid Models in Nigeria

The National Universities Commission (NUC) in Nigeria permits hybrid delivery models of up to a 70:30 split between online and face-to-face teaching. Universities can implement this in ways that suit their context.

At NOUN, most annual teaching is delivered online. Students attend live lectures or watch recordings throughout the year. In the final year, students may visit sites more often to support project work, though this is not mandatory. The face-to-face component (the 30%) is made up of laboratory or practical blocks at study centres across Nigeria, scheduled for each subject.

This model raises questions for UK-validated or franchised degrees. Some UK providers may struggle to align with a 70:30 split, especially in practice-heavy subjects where students must develop and demonstrate a continuous set of technical skills. Computing and cyber security are clear examples, as they often require access to specialist hardware and secure lab environments. The demand to equip every study centre with the required resources may be unrealistic at scale.

There are potential routes forward. UK universities could validate Nigerian qualifications that already mitigate these constraints (for example, by using alternative assessment designs or virtualised lab environments). They could also allow resourcing realities to shape the scope and structure of provision, ensuring that programme requirements match what can be delivered reliably across centres.

Assessment considerations and quality assurance of examinations

Given the remote nature of delivery at NOUN, many units include an online test as part of their assessment model. Students complete these at home, and there are anti-cheating measures in place. Even so, there are ongoing concerns about academic integrity and the ways students might try to game remote assessments.

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While multiple-choice, auto-marked quizzes can play a role, many UK degrees lean on vocational, contextualised tasks and assessments that require students to develop and demonstrate specific skills. At NOUN's scale, any UK-validated qualification would need careful design to work at volume. This is a potential barrier to franchised provision and suggests locally validated programmes may be a better fit for the context in some cases.

For final assessments, students sit written, invigilated exams at study centres. Given the volume, module teams do not mark these scripts. Instead, papers go to centralised marking hubs. These hubs are overseen by NOUN employees, with marking carried out by contracted teams. Markers may be NOUN staff, academics from other Nigerian universities, or external contractors, with minimum qualifications required. I visited one of these hubs and observed the operation in practice.

This model suits the scale, but there are important considerations that need to be considered in the context of partnerships between Uk and Nigerian HEI's, including:

- Consistency and calibration of markers across hubs
- Clear marking guides, sampling, and second-marking
- External moderation and audit trails for quality assurance
- Turnaround times and the timeliness of feedback to students
- Data protection, script security, and conflict-of-interest management
- Robust processes for appeals and academic misconduct cases

Practical mitigations could include standardisation meetings, detailed rubrics with exemplars, cross-hub sampling and double-marking of a set percentage of scripts, statistical monitoring of marker variance, strong identity checks for remote tests, and shifting high-stakes skill demonstrations into controlled settings (e.g., centre-based practical, vivas, or verified portfolios). These steps would help align large-scale delivery with the expectations of UK-validated awards.

Security and Safety whilst in the region

As mentioned, initial visits in order to establish partnerships as well as ongoing visits to ensure quality assurance would be an important part of establishing a successful ongoing TNE partnership. This scoping visit took place in Abuja, which at the time of writing is rated green on the FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) travel advice. Even in an area like Abuja however, there is a level of risk for a foreign national, and during this visit, staff were accompanied by armed guards between site visits. Cardiff Metropolitan University makes use of an external alert system as part of its risk assessment planning which rates the current overall risk factor of travel to Nigeria as a 4 out of 5 (High). The greatest driving factors to this rating being:

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- Criminal activity is prevalent across much of the country, with kidnappings and armed robbery posing significant threats to both local and foreign nationals.
- Civil and labour unrest over a range of socio-economic grievances and political developments frequently occur in the country's major population centres.
- High risk factors around the security of LGBTQ individuals and
- Corruption could be an issue in the region but is not endemic.

The first three points pose a serious issue when considering how to maintain partnerships in the region, particularly where visits for areas around quality assurance may require travel to regions that have a less secure rating. The final point raises questions around how partnerships ensure financial security of processes from both sides.

Qualification fit and perceptions

Two key considerations for UK–Nigeria transnational models are the fit between qualification frameworks and perceptions of the relative value of different awards.

On frameworks, several NOUN division leads emphasised that any UK qualifications should address gaps in, or complement, existing Nigerian provision and not seek to replace it. The preference expressed was for additive, context-sensitive offerings rather than substitution.

On perceptions, questions were raised in meetings about what "importing" qualifications and frameworks implies when compared with Nigerian higher-education awards. Some comments suggested that awarding degrees from outside Nigeria could be read as a lack of confidence in domestic provision. This view also surfaced among students we met, where many said they would not choose a transnational degree over a Nigerian one, arguing that an award validated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) carries at least equal validity for their goals.

Some key considerations around this are:

- Positioning and purpose: Is the UK award filling a documented gap or duplicating what already exists locally?
- Equivalence and recognition: How do levels, credits, and outcomes map between UK frameworks and NUC standards, and is this mapping transparent to students and employers in order to demonstrate the benefits of studying TNE qualifications.
- Graduate outcomes: Will the qualification improve local employability and progression, and is there evidence to show this – how will this be demonstrated to potential students.

- Sustainability and capacity building: Does the partnership strengthen local provision (e.g., co-development, staff development, shared resources), rather than displace it?

Meeting with students

During the visit to the Abuja Model Study Center, there was a meeting with several of NOUN students. As part of the meeting students were asked to feedback on their decision-making process around selecting a HE provider, as well as engaged with discussions around what they thought about the prospect of transnational provision in offerings between UK and Nigerian HEI's.

Some students expressed that they selected NOUN as a university based on not meeting the entry requirements of other institutions. The local expression for this assessment is "the JAMB", a colloquialism for the main university entrance exam in Nigeria is the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), administered by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

Similar to UK UCAS scores, different institutions offer entry at different JAMB scores, something that would need to be considered for parity if offering UK university awarded degrees in the region.

Many students also expressed that the NOUN approach of maximising the potential 70/30 hybrid split allowed by the NUC was a key factor in selection. Many of the students expressed that the flexibility offered by the model, particularly in terms of geographical restrictions and family/home life commitments made the offer most appealing. This would be worth considering in terms of the design and development of any provision that would be marketed in the region.

Something students did reflect on whether they would consider a UK degree was around the validity of the qualifications. In Nigeria, higher education courses are validated centrally by the national universities commission, a process which the vast majority of students saw as ensuring the highest level of quality to the awards offered by Nigerian HEI's. A few expressed that they thought that a UK awarded degree may lead to greater global mobility, but in the whole most students did not think that one degree offered greater recognition than the other.

Input 3 – Survey to relevant stakeholders

Introduction/contextual information

The third area of data collection was focussed around reaching as many potential stakeholders as possible through the completion of a series of questions in a survey.

The initial phase of this data collection was to outline the stakeholders for engagement. This exercise was conducted between NOUN and Cardiff Met staff, and the below stakeholders were identified:

Stakeholder	Description	Why Include Their Views
Academic Staff (Cardiff Met & NOUN)	Lecturers and programme lead directly involved in curriculum design and delivery.	can highlight practical, academic, and regulatory obstacles to curriculum alignment and teaching in TNE partnerships.
Admin / International Office Staff	Staff who coordinate international partnerships, manage compliance etc	They provide insight into administrative and institutional readiness, including policy or procedural delays.
IT / MIS Staff (NOUN)	Technical teams responsible for digital infrastructure and online delivery at NOUN.	They understand infrastructure gaps, tech challenges, and digital limitations that may prevent scalable TNE.
Quality Assurance Bodies (QAA / NUC)	External bodies responsible for oversight, regulation, and quality assurance of HE provisions.	help identify compliance risks and standards mismatches that could delay or block implementation.
Students / Alumni	Current or former students engaging with online or international education models.	first-hand perspectives on accessibility, perception, and value of international education.
Employers / Industry Bodies	Organisations employing graduates, particularly in sectors relevant to Computing and IT.	assess employer trust in TNE qualifications and graduate preparedness for local markets.
British Council (UK & Nigeria)	Representatives overseeing the Going Global Partnerships programme and UK-Nigeria TNE engagement.	They provide strategic oversight, understand TNE policy environments in both countries, and can highlight systemic or recurring issues across other grant recipients or previous partnerships.

Once stakeholders were identified, draft questions were created and finalised between Cardiff Metropolitan university staff and staff at NOUN.

Overview of responses

The survey recorded 333 responses. Participation was led by current Nigerian students (roughly three-fifths of all responses), followed by university staff (around a quarter to a third in total—74 academic and 18 support/admin). Smaller but useful perspectives came from previous Nigerian students (14), Nigerian employers/industry (4), and regulatory staff (NUC, 3), in addition to a handful of other roles. Almost all respondents left at least one open-ended comment, enabling group-by-group theme analysis.

Thematic finding

Students

In the survey students were asked to reflect on how they choose a provider and what would make a joint UK–Nigeria offer work for them. Many students talked about cost not as a single fee but as a set of pressures that build up over time such as tuition, extra charges, materials, connectivity and day-to-day living. Students were particularly interested in information around the possibility of scholarships.

Students also raised the question of fit and validity. Some thought a UK-awarded degree could support mobility later on, but most compared it directly with nationally validated awards and did not assume one would carry more weight than the other in Nigeria. Visa timelines and changing requirements were highlighted as a practical barrier for short exchanges and visits. Students asked for clear, institution-backed guidance, obvious points of contact, timely updates, and simple routes for credit transfer, complaints and progression.

Academic staff

Academic colleagues focused on whether partnerships are built to last. Travel, external examining/moderation and staffing all need predictable funding, and arrangements that rely on one or two members of staff are fragile and have clear points of failure. A lot of effort could be spent aligning approvals and quality processes across the National Universities Commission (NUC) and UK requirements, where timelines and documentation do not always match.

Capacity is also a concern. Transnational education (TNE) brings new delivery patterns and coordination across time zones on top of existing workloads. On programme design, staff want learning outcomes and assessment standards to align without simply copying models that do not fit the local context. It was identified that specific elements can also provide clear barriers, such as power reliability, connectivity and access to platforms and libraries. Clear governance, realistic milestones and a route to escalate issues were seen as important to keep partnerships on track.

Support and professional services

Support teams described TNE as a systems job as much as a teaching one. Admissions, identity, virtual learning environments/learning management systems (VLE/LMS), results, transcripts and data protection must line up across institutions.

Specialist workflows such as credit transfer, award documentation and external moderation need people who know them well, but headcount and training do not always keep pace.

Where ownership is unclear, processes slow down and hand-offs multiply. Teams asked for predictable response times, simple ticketing and shared calendars for intakes, assessment boards and certification. Stable resourcing was raised as necessary if promised service levels are to be met.

Employers and industry (small sample; directional)

Employers said they look first at what graduates can actually do. Directly usable technical skills matter, alongside communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Curricula that reflect local sector needs build confidence faster than generic models. Internships, placements and project-based work help make skills visible on records and transcripts, which supports hiring decisions.

Regulator (NUC) (small sample; directional)

Regulatory colleagues emphasised clean mapping to standards, clear and consistent award titles, and evidence that delivery quality is maintained. Tidy, on-time submissions and defined responsibilities reduce back-and-forth. Oversight visits and verification still matter, so mobility needs to be workable in practice. Early, transparent planning around accreditation helps avoid rework later.

Other

A small number of responses did not fit the groups above. These comments tended to touch on wider public-sector processes, expectations of service quality and general perceptions of programme value. They underline the need for clear communications, visible points of contact and straightforward processes for students and staff.

Outline of identified barriers

The below outlines the final considered barriers from each stage of data collection.

As well as identifying the barriers, a brief description of each barrier is presented, along with which area of data collection informed this. An additional column is provided that shows a possible way to group these barriers into one of several areas including:

- Regulatory/Legal

- Finance/Economic

- Operational/Organisational

- Pedagogic/Academic

- Technological

- Security/Risk

- Perception/Recognition

- Environmental/Sustainability

Barrier	Brief description	Identified in	Group
Regulatory uncertainty (NUC process)	Approval steps and local accreditation standards are not fully known to UK partners.	Desk review (Political); Meeting with NUC	Regulatory/Legal
Multiple UK oversight bodies	QAA/OfS/Medr requirements add layers and can slow set-up.	Desk review (Political); Partnership feedback	Regulatory/Legal
Policy shifts affecting mobility	Changes in UK/Nigeria policy can disrupt staff/student movement.	Desk review (Political)	Regulatory/Legal
Precedence clashes (NUC vs UK regs)	Unclear hierarchy if NUC directives conflict with UK university regulations.	Partnership feedback (Quality processes);	Regulatory/Legal

		Meeting with NUC	
Preferred models differ	NOUN's preference for joint/dual degrees vs UK institutions' need for ultimate control.	Partnership feedback; Meeting with NUC	Regulatory/Legal
Standards mapping and award titles	Need clean mapping to NUC standards and consistent award titles.	Survey – Regulator (NUC); Meeting with NUC	Regulatory/Legal
Timely, tidy submissions & roles	On-time submissions and clear responsibilities reduce back-and-forth.	Survey – Regulator (NUC)	Regulatory/Legal
Oversight visits must be workable	Regulators still need in-person verification; mobility must be feasible.	Survey – Regulator (NUC); Security & safety	Regulatory/Legal
Financial sustainability	Both partners face tight budgets; partnerships need predictable, durable funding.	Desk review (Economic); Survey – Academic staff	Finance/Economic
FX volatility & fee currency	Exchange-rate risk and which currency students pay in can undermine viability.	Desk review (Economic); Partnership feedback; Meeting with NUC	Finance/Economic
Tuition affordability	Total cost to students (fees, extras, connectivity, living) is a major constraint.	Desk review (Economic); Survey – Students	Finance/Economic
"Cheaper degree" optics	Risk of devaluing local offers if TNE is priced lower.	Partnership feedback (Finance)	Finance/Economic
Programme resourcing costs	Some subjects need expensive software/hardware/licences to deliver properly.	Desk review (Economic)	Finance/Economic
Infrastructure & set-up costs	Campuses/classrooms /utilities investment can	Desk review (Economic)	Finance/Economic

	be high, especially beyond cities.		
Visa application complexity	Unreliable portals led to third-party processing; adds time/cost.	Link tutor (Mobility of staff)	Operational/Organisational
Vaccination/logistics burden	Vaccination and travel health add planning time and costs, repeated with staff changes.	Link tutor (Mobility of staff)	Operational/Organisational
Reliance on few individuals	Arrangements that hinge on 1–2 staff are fragile and high-risk.	Survey – Academic staff	Operational/Organisational
Capacity and workload	TNE adds new delivery patterns and time-zone coordination onto existing loads.	Survey – Academic staff	Operational/Organisational
Misaligned timelines/docs	NUC and UK quality/approval timelines and documentation don't always align.	Survey – Academic staff; Partnership feedback	Operational/Organisational
Cross-system alignment	Admissions, identity, VLE/LMS, results, transcripts and data protection must line up.	Survey – Support/Admin	Operational/Organisational
Unclear ownership/hand-offs	Process ownership gaps slow delivery; too many hand-offs.	Survey – Support/Admin	Operational/Organisational
Headcount/training gaps	Specialist workflows (credit transfer, moderation, certification) need resourcing.	Survey – Support/Admin	Operational/Organisational
Predictable service levels	Need defined response times, ticketing, and shared calendars to keep on track.	Survey – Support/Admin	Operational/Organisational
Mixed regulations per cohort	Operating different policies/regulations for different student groups adds complexity.	Partnership feedback (Additional)	Operational/Organisational
Regional cultural differences	Variations across Nigerian regions affect	Desk review (Social); Partnership	Pedagogic/Academic

	study modes and support needs.	feedback (Local contextualisation)	
Balancing contextualisation & integrity	Adapting to local context while maintaining a single, equivalent UK programme is hard.	Partnership feedback (Local contextualisation)	Pedagogic/Academic
70:30 hybrid fit for UK awards	UK-validated models may struggle to meet a 70/30 online–face-to-face split in practice-heavy subjects.	Delivery/Hybrid section; Meeting with NUC	Pedagogic/Academic
Practical lab resourcing at scale	Equipping many centres with specialist labs/hardware may be unrealistic.	Delivery/Hybrid section	Pedagogic/Academic
Academic integrity at scale	Risks with at-home online tests; need strong ID checks and proctoring.	Assessment/QA section	Pedagogic/Academic
Marking consistency	Calibrating large, multi-hub marking operations is challenging.	Assessment/QA section	Pedagogic/Academic
Clear rubrics & sampling	Need detailed guides, sampling and second-marking to assure standards.	Assessment/QA section	Pedagogic/Academic
Turnaround & feedback timeliness	Large volumes can delay results and feedback.	Assessment/QA section	Pedagogic/Academic
Data protection & script security	Secure handling of scripts and conflicts-of-interest need tight controls.	Assessment/QA section	Pedagogic/Academic
Credit transfer/articulation	Recognition of prior study and smooth movement between programmes not guaranteed.	Partnership feedback (Acknowledgement of study); Survey – Students	Pedagogic/Academic
Outcomes/assessment alignment	Learning outcomes and standards must align	Survey – Academic	Pedagogic/Academic

	without copy-pasting unsuitable models.	staff; Meeting with NUC	
Connectivity & power reliability	Internet/power instability impedes delivery and access to platforms/libraries.	Desk review (Technological); Survey – Academic staff	Technological
Digital literacy gaps	Variable digital skills among students/staff can limit online delivery.	Desk review (Technological)	Technological
Virtual lab capability	Need robust virtualised environments where physical labs aren't feasible.	Delivery/Hybrid section	Technological
Identity verification	Reliable mechanisms needed for remote assessment identity checks.	Assessment/ QA section	Technological
Security risks to travellers	Crime, kidnapping and armed robbery risks elevate travel risk management needs.	Desk review (Political stability); Security & safety	Security/Risk
Civil/labour unrest	Protests and strikes in major centres can disrupt operations and visits.	Security & safety	Security/Risk
LGBTQ safety concerns	Elevated risk to LGBTQ staff/students affects mobility and duty of care.	Security & safety	Security/Risk
Corruption risk	Corruption can affect operational and financial processes.	Security & safety	Security/Risk
Need for armed escorts	Security posture (e.g., armed guards) signals elevated baseline risk.	Security & safety	Security/Risk
Perception: importing = low faith in local HE	Some see foreign awards as implying weak confidence in domestic provision.	Qualification fit & perceptions; Meeting with students	Perception/Recognition

Employer acceptance varies	Some employers may prefer local degrees; confidence depends on local relevance.	Desk review (Social); Survey – Employers (directional)	Perception/Recognition
Students don't see extra "weight"	Many students did not view UK awards as carrying more value in Nigeria.	Meeting with students; Survey – Students	Perception/Recognition
Clarity on equivalence	Students and employers need transparent mapping of levels/credits/outcomes.	Qualification fit & perceptions; Survey – Students	Perception/Recognition
Evidence of graduate outcomes	Need demonstrable employability/progression benefits to justify TNE choice.	Qualification fit & perceptions	Perception/Recognition
Communications & guidance	Students want clear contacts, timely updates, simple processes for credit/complaints.	Survey – Students; "Other" comments	Perception/Recognition
Scholarship availability	Lack of scholarships reduces access for cost-sensitive students.	Survey – Students	Finance/Economic
Environmental footprint of travel	Travel for set-up and QA adds environmental impact (noted as a factor).	Desk review (Environmental)	Environmental/Sustainability

APPENDIX A - Interview questions

Forms

Questionnaire - Barriers to Transnational Education between UK and Nigerian HEI's

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View responses

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Templates

Questionnaire - Barriers to Transnational Education between UK and Nigerian HEI's

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. This project is funded by the British Council and is a collaboration between the National Open University of Nigeria (Nigeria) and Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK).

The aim of this project is to explore what the possible barriers may be in setting up a Transnational partnership between a UK and Nigerian HEI. All perspectives are useful, so if you have a possible answer but are unsure, please answer anyway.

Definitions:

Transnational education (TNE): is education delivered in a country other than the country in which the awarding institution is based, eg students based in country Y studying for a degree from a university in country Z. UK HE TNE refers to UK degree programmes delivered outside of the UK.

 HEI: stands for Higher Education Institution. It refers to any organization that provides post-secondary education, including universities, colleges, professional schools, and institutes. In the context of this project, HEI refers to university

Section 1

1.About you Required to answer. Single choice.

I work at a Nigerian University

I work at a UK Univeristy

I do not work at a University

2.I am:Required to answer. Single choice.

QAA Staff

NUC Staff

A Current Nigerian Student

A Previous Nigerian Student

A Nigerian Employer / Industry body

A British Council Staff member

3.At a Nigerian University I am:Required to answer. Single choice.

A member of academic staff

A partnership officer/TNE administrator

A member of support staff (admin/mis/registry etc)

4.At a UK Universtiy I am:Required to answer. Single choice.

A member of academic staff

A partnership officer/TNE administrator

A member of support staff (admin/mis/registry etc)

Section 2

Academic staff

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As a member of academic staff, please answer the following questions as best you can

5.If you wish - please provide the name of your employer/company (note - this will only be used for analysis and will remain anonymous in any findings)Single line text.

Enter your answer

6.What challenges or processes at your university could limit your ability to collaborate internationally?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

7.What difficulties have you experienced when aligning curriculum or teaching methods across partnerships?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

8.Are there any legal or regulatory constraints you're aware of that might impact TNE partnerships between Nigerian and UK Universities?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

9.As an academic, what are the major barriers that you think exist in establishing and maintaining TNE partnerships?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

10.What are some of the barriers toward establishing and maintaining TNE between Nigerian and UK universities that may be specific to your subject area?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

11.Are there sufficient resources (e.g., time, staffing, infrastructure) allocated to support international engagement in your role?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

12.How confident do you feel in navigating cultural or institutional differences between UK and Nigerian HEIs?Single choice.

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Neutral

Somewhat not confident

Not confident at all

13.Have you been involved in any form of TNE previously? If so, what lessons did you learn that could apply here?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 3

A partnership officer/TNE administrator

As a member of A partnership officer/TNE administrator Staff, please answer the following questions as best you can

14.If you wish - please provide the name of your employer/company (note - this will only be used for analysis and will remain anonymous in any findings)Single line text.

Enter your answer

15.What administrative steps slow or complicate setting up international partnerships?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

16.How clear are the policies and guidelines around managing TNE at your institution? If no TNE partnerships exist, please reference general partnership activityMulti Line Text.

Enter your answer

17.What support or resources are currently missing that prevent smoother collaboration?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

18.are there any other points around barriers to establishing UK/Nigerian TNE partnerships that you think may be of importance to this project?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

19.What internal teams or departments would need to be involved to set up a UK–Nigeria TNE partnership, and where do you foresee friction or delays?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

20.Has your institution previously considered or pursued TNE partnerships in Nigeria or similar contexts? What was the outcome?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

21.How are priorities for international partnerships decided at your institution, and where does TNE sit within those priorities?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 4

A member of support staff (admin/mis/registry etc)

As a member of support staff (admin/mis/registry etc), please answer the following questions as best you can

22.If you wish - please provide the name of your employer/company (note - this will only be used for analysis and will remain anonymous in any findings)Single line text.

Enter your answer

23.Are the current digital infrastructures (e.g., learning management systems, data sharing platforms, and student information systems) sufficient to support transnational education (TNE)Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

24.What technical barriers exist to delivering a shared or online programme between a UK and Nigerian institution?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

25.What challenges have you encountered in implementing secure and reliable digital solutions across borders?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

26.Do support teams currently have the training or capacity needed to manage international digital collaboration effectively?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

27.What would help you and your team feel better equipped to support a TNE partnership?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

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28.Are there any other barriers you believe are important to consider when establishing a TNE partnership between UK and Nigerian universities?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 5

Quality Assurance Bodies (QAA / NUC)

As a member of Quality Assurance Bodies (QAA / NUC), please answer the following questions as best you can

29.What key quality assurance or regulatory issues arise in cross-country programme delivery between UK and Nigerian HEI's?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

30.Are there any significant gaps, overlaps, or misalignments between the UK and Nigerian quality assurance frameworks that hinder the development of transnational education (TNE) partnerships?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

31.To your knowledge, what has hindered the approval, recognition, or sustained operation of past TNE initiatives between UK and Nigerian institutions?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

32.Are there any additional regulatory, quality assurance, or recognition-related barriers that you think are important for this project to consider?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

33.What mechanisms would need to be in place to ensure ongoing quality monitoring and compliance in a UK–Nigeria TNE partnership?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 6

Nigerian Students / Alumni

As Nigerian Students / Alumni, please answer the following questions as best you can
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34.What would be your main concerns or hesitations about enrolling in a joint UK–Nigerian university programme? (Select all that apply)
 Multiple choice.

Academic quality and compatibility (e.g., differences in teaching methods, grading systems, or credit transfer)

Financial and logistical barriers (e.g., high fees, visa issues, scholarships, travel costs)

Student experience concerns (e.g., cultural differences, support, time zones, dual environments)

Recognition and career prospects (e.g., employer perception, internship/job opportunities, alumni network)

35.Have you faced any obstacles (financial, digital access, support) in engaging with international or online learning? (Select all that apply)Multiple choice.

Financial barriers (e.g., high tuition fees, lack of scholarships)

Digital access and infrastructure (e.g., poor internet, limited devices, platform issues)

Academic or institutional challenges (e.g., lack of support, educational system differences)

Perception and effectiveness of online learning (e.g., employer recognition, hands-on experience)

36.What would your views be on applying for a UK university qualification that was delivered in a Nigerian university? (Select all that apply)Multiple choice.

Positive perceptions (e.g., affordability, convenience, global degree access, reduced costs)

Conditional approval (e.g., depends on UK-standard quality, recognition, or academic delivery)

Concerns and scepticism (e.g., employer perception, faculty inconsistency, international reputation)

Interest in global-local education blend (e.g., staying in Nigeria while accessing global networks)

37.What would motivate you to choose a transnational education (TNE) programme over studying directly in the UK or Nigeria alone? (Select all that apply)Multiple choice.

Cost-effectiveness and local convenience (e.g., lower fees, proximity to home/work)

Global exposure and flexibility (e.g., study across both countries, cross-cultural learning)

Access to international resources (e.g., diverse faculty, blended learning, UK curriculum)

Enhanced career opportunities (e.g., global networks, professional growth, scholarships)

38.What kind of career support or guidance would you expect from a TNE programme? (Select all that apply)Multiple choice.

Job and internship support (e.g., placement in UK and Nigeria, industry partnerships)

Career preparation services (e.g., counselling, CV/resume guidance, transition support)

Global engagement and mentorship (e.g., access to alumni, fairs, mentorship, visa/job help)

Entrepreneurship and independent planning (e.g., business development, self-managed careers)

39.Do you believe employers in Nigeria and abroad would value a UK–Nigerian joint degree? Why or why not?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 7

Nigerian Employers / Industry Bodies

As Nigerian Employers / Industry Bodies, please answer the following questions as best you can

40.Are there any barriers to recognising or valuing UK-Nigerian joint qualifications in your recruitment?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

41.Do graduates from international or transnational education (TNE) programmes face challenges in meeting your workplace expectations? If so, what are they?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

42.What concerns might your organisation have about hiring from TNE programmes (e.g., skills gaps, quality, local relevance)?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

43.Are there specific technical or soft skills you find lacking in graduates from international or joint degree programmes?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

44.How are UK-affiliated degrees delivered in Nigeria generally perceived in your industry or sector?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

45.When hiring, do you tend to prioritise degrees earned from local institutions, international study abroad, or does it depend on the role? Why?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

46.Are there any other factors you believe could pose barriers to establishing or scaling UK–Nigerian TNE partnerships from an employer's perspective? Ulti Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 8

British council

As employees at the British council please answer the following questions as best you can

47.Based on your experience, what common barriers have UK HEIs faced when establishing TNE partnerships in Nigeria?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

48.In your view, what areas of support or infrastructure are currently underdeveloped in UK–Nigeria TNE initiatives?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

49.Are there policy or funding-related constraints that regularly impact the development of long-term partnerships?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

50.What lessons have been learned from past UK–Nigeria partnership efforts that could inform new or future TNE initiatives?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

51.What role do you see the British Council playing in strengthening or scaling UK–Nigeria TNE partnerships over the next five years?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

52.Are there any other key barriers—whether strategic, operational, or contextual—that you believe are important for this project to consider?Multi Line Text.

Enter your answer

Section 9

Other

If you are not represented on the list, but would like to provide some insight into the project, please complete the below

53.What barriers do you feel exist in setting up a UK/Nigerian TNE partnership? Please feel free to provide detail and clarification around your role or persepectiveMulti Line Text.

Enter your answer

Appendix B – Good Practice in establishing and maintaining TNE partnerships

TNE Outline of sector best practice

When outlining best practice in UK HE transnational education, The QAA has considered three main reference points

1. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which articulates the principles of UK higher education for securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality.
2. The Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education (QE-TNE) scheme.
3. QAA's partnership training offered to QAA member organisations.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)

The Quality Code enables providers to see what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other, irrespective of the regulatory framework in which they operate. All providers across the UK can use the Quality Code to satisfy themselves, external stakeholders and international partners that their quality processes support enhancement above the baseline. Because the Quality Code aligns to the ESG, it offers providers an internationally recognised framework through which they can demonstrate their delivery of a high-quality student experience, enabling students to succeed in their studies and progress their personal and professional goals. The code consists of a number of sector-agreed principles which identify features that are fundamental to securing academic standards and offering a high-quality student learning experience. These principles are supported by Key Practices which set out how a provider can demonstrate they are adhering to the Sector-Agrees Principles. Each Principle is supported by Advice and Guidance which offers further details,

Principle 8 of the code focuses on "Operating partnerships with other organisations".

The Principle states:

"Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience."

There are 6 key practices to support the Principle:

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a. Where academic provision is delivered through partnership, all partners agree, understand, communicate and take responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality.
b. Providers are aware that working in partnership with other organisations will involve different levels of risk. Due diligence processes are completed in accordance with each provider's approach to minimising risk, maintaining academic standards and enhancing quality.
c. Written agreements between partners are signed prior to the start of a programme or module and cover the lifecycle of the partnership, including details about closing a partnership.
d. Providers and their partners ensure compliance with the regulatory and legislative requirements of the countries in which they work and maintain an awareness of the cultural context in which they operate. Providers ensure students have information about the responsibilities of each partner and where to go for support throughout their studies.
e. Providers maintain accurate, up-to-date records of partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.
f. Partnerships are subject to ongoing scrutiny that includes periodic monitoring, evaluation and review to assure quality and facilitate enhancement.

The Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education (QE-TNE) scheme.

The QE-TNE scheme is a programme of country-specific quality enhancement thematic activity and is designed to evaluate practice, over and above the regulatory baseline by focusing on quality enhancement. It is a UK wide scheme open to all UK HE degree awarding bodies. It is mandatory for HE providers with TNE provision in Wales and Scotland and voluntary for providers in England. It operates over the academic years 2021-22 to 2025-26. Findings from the scheme do not have any regulatory status.

The Scheme produces a range of outputs and resources for providers, including:

- Country guides which outline the Higher education landscape, the regulatory HE landscape for TNE and UK TNE provision.
- Visit reports of UK providers and their TNE arrangements which include findings, effective practice and recommendations for further practice. Conducted by a peer team including a student reviewer, reports cover the student learning experience, enhancement of learning and teaching, the effectiveness of the working arrangements (the partnership), comparability of the student experience, equivalence of outcomes and approach to employability.
- Provider-led case studies which focus on institutional or country-based activity to share good practice and learning.
- Thematic insights which focus on themes emerging from the activities and outputs to support providers in developing and enhancing their TNE

arrangements. These include different TNE models, operational management of partnerships, and the role of link tutors.

QAA Training in partnerships and risk management

QAA has developed a number of training sessions focusing on the institutional partnership journey, associated risks and good practice.

5 key stages of the partnership journey are identified:

1. Institutional reflection (Know yourself)
2. Due Diligence (Know your partner)
3. Setting up a partnership
4. Managing the partnership
5. Reviewing/developing the partnership

Whilst each stage is identified, it is important to acknowledge the relationship and connectivity between the stages.

To outline sector best practice reference is made to these 5 stages.

Institutional reflection

Prior to developing any partnerships, a provider needs to have considered its

- Institutional values
- Institutional priorities
- Institutional infrastructure and resource capacity
- Academic portfolio and levels
- Framework for partnership work including governance   and quality assurance
- Attitude towards risk

and the

- Regulatory environment in which it operates
- Types of partnership/ arrangements it wishes to engage in
- Location of partnerships/ arrangements

These considerations would be developed into a TNE strategy which aligns with the institution strategy and links to governance and the committee structure. This institutional reflection enables providers to consider any potential partner institution and assess how they match in terms of strategy, values, portfolio, structures and resources.

Due Diligence

Key considerations when determining the suitability of a potential partner are:

- Legal entity and powers
- Constitution, governance
- Financials
- History & reputation
- Values
- Learning environment and programmes
- Quality of provision

Consideration also needs to be given to:

- Landscape and ease of doing business
- Cultural and political differences
- Local HE quality assurance/regulatory landscape
- Attitudes to TNE
- Existing UK TNE provision

Considering all these factors is not without challenge, but where providers have invested time and resources in robust due diligence, it has enabled them to make informed decisions.

Setting up a partnership

The Quality Code Principle 8 Key Practices highlight the importance of written agreements and accurate records. The first Key Practice for Principle 1 sets out the underlying principles of any partnership and programme approvals.

- Academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience are the responsibility of the provider.
- Degree-awarding bodies are aware that they have ultimate responsibility for the qualifications offered in their name.

Effective setting up of partnerships involves having a clear governance structure which supports approvals, and a staged process which is robust and efficient. The components of agreements should be informed by the due diligence process and the institution's own strategy.

Considerations for inclusion in an agreement include

- Quality assurance
- Acts/ laws
- Responsibilities
- Resources
- Exit/ termination
- Financial arrangements
- Student numbers
- Exclusivity
- Intellectual property

Detailed agreements which consider all potential aspects of the partnership help providers reduce risk to their regulatory responsibilities.

Managing the partnership

Partnership management considerations include:

- Terminology and shared understanding
- Responsibilities
- Teaching and learning
- Assurance and enhancement of teaching quality
- Resourcing
- Assessment, marking and moderation
- Communication
- Language proficiency
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity
- Roles
- Exam and award boards
- Calendars
- Time differences

Effective practice shows that these are agreed and communicated via a partnership manual or handbook which may form part of the approval process. An effective handbook provides details of the management and operational delivery of the partnership and identifies in detail the responsibilities of each partner, including the entitlement and expectations of key staff. The handbook may also include areas such as the process for contextualization of teaching resources and assessments.

Communication is key to effective partnership management and consideration of how this operates at different levels and formally and informally has contributed to effective partnership arrangements.

Reviewing/ Developing the partnership

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Principle 8 Key Practices highlight the importance of ongoing scrutiny which includes monitoring, evaluation and review.

Those processes should have been considered as part of the earlier stages of the partnership journey and should be known to staff and students.

Meaningful stakeholder participation in this stage is key. Effective practice can be seen where there is a clear model of monitoring and evaluation which is planned managed and feeds into the partnership. There is also a clear thought-out process for exiting a partnership and protecting students

Benefits have been shown where partners have been actively involved in the process, for example, in the consideration of data.

In summary creating an effective meaningful partnership involves having

- strategic objectives, agreed resource and infrastructure capacity and a defined risk appetite.
- processes to conduct effective and ongoing due diligence.
- strategies for communication and staff development that ensure shared understanding of, and support for, partnership activity from the start.
- plans in place for effective on-going partnership management and monitoring.
- A desire to develop a genuine partnership developing a bidirectional relationship