



# National Open University of Nigeria

Policy Title	Policy on Collaborations, Partnerships, Affiliations and Linkages
Policy No:	NQSA/POL/CPL/002
Owner:	National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
Approved By:	The University Senate
Manager/Driver:	Directorate of Advancement and Linkages (DAL)
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## 1.0 Introduction

The National Open University of Nigeria is the largest single- mode tertiary institution in the West African sub-region dedicated to providing access to quality higher education through the open, distance, and eLearning mode. NOUN is committed to strengthening its position as the leading provider of liberalised access to higher education and lifelong learning without distinction of race, creed, gender, age or political conviction, and special learning needs as provided for in the University's Act. No. 6 of 1983 and amended in Act. No. 19, 2018.

This policy underscores this commitment by facilitating the establishment and maintenance of academic collaborations with higher education institutions, organisations, and partners that contribute to transformative and meaningful learning experiences. It offers clear guidelines with the overarching aim of expanding the university's global presence through the promotion of academic exchanges, research collaborations, and the enhancement of educational resources.

## 2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to establish a strategic approach and guidelines for institutional linkages to advance best practices and internationalisation. The primary objectives are to:

- 2.1 promote academic and research collaboration with other institutions.
- 2.2 facilitate student and faculty exchange programmes for enriched academic experiences.
- 2.3 enhance research opportunities, resources, and knowledge sharing through partnerships.

- 2.4 expand the global reach and reputation of the university through international collaborations generally and south-south relationships.
- 2.5 empower academic units and directorates to engage in mutually beneficial regional and global academic relationships.
- 2.6 provide guidelines for the establishment and maintenance of academic collaborations and affiliations.

### **3.0 Scope**

The policy is applicable to:

- 3.1 NOUN staff, institutions, individuals, and potential collaborators considering establishing academic linkages with NOUN.
- 3.2 Management and review of all existing academic partnerships, collaborations, and linkages, within approved academic programmes, research, and all academic institutional exchange activities with partner institutions. It applies only to accredited programmes of all parties involved.
- 3.3 Staff and students of NOUN that are visiting research scholars in affiliated partner institutions and vice versa.
- 3.4 The university may enter various types of academic linkages, including but not limited to:
  - 3.4.1 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs): Non-binding agreements outlining the intent to collaborate and explore potential areas of cooperation such as providing training that may lead to award of certificates, diploma, degrees and or short courses for professional development.
  - 3.4.2 Articulation Agreements: Formal agreements that facilitate the seamless transfer of credits between partner institutions for the benefit of students.
  - 3.4.3 Research Collaborations: Agreements that promote joint research projects, grant applications, and knowledge sharing.
  - 3.4.4 Student Exchange Programmes: Programmes that allow students to study at partner institutions and earn academic credits.
  - 3.4.5 Faculty Exchange Programmes: Programmes that enable faculty members to engage in teaching or research activities at partner institutions.

3.4.6 Institutional Affiliations: All affiliation agreements must be submitted to the relevant department of the National Universities Commission (NUC).

3.5 The policy excludes all collaborations, partnerships, and linkages that:

3.5.1 violate the institution's ethical and academic standard or that compromise the integrity, values, and ethical principles of the university.

3.5.2 lack clear objectives: Linkages without well-defined goals, outcomes, or a clear purpose to ensure effective use of the university's resources.

3.5.3 pose a significant financial burden by requiring excessive financial resources without commensurate benefits to maintain fiscal responsibility.

3.5.4 do not align with the university's mission, vision, or strategic goals.

3.5.5 do not provide tangible value to the institution in terms of academic enrichment, research opportunities, or other relevant benefits.

3.5.6 with partners who have a track record of non-compliance with laws, regulations, or ethical standards, to avoid legal or reputational risks.

3.5.7 do not have the approval of the university in form of a Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement/Letter of Intent, to ensure accountability and transparency.

3.5.8 require exclusivity, preventing the university from engaging with other valuable collaborators, to maintain flexibility and diversity in collaborations.

3.5.9 present conflicts of interest or undermine the impartiality and fairness of academic activities, to maintain academic integrity.

3.5.10 do not contribute to achieving the university's strategic objectives or support its long-term plans, to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently.

## 4.0 Definitions

4.1 **Collaboration:** a formal joint venture between the university (NOUN) or its employee and an external (collaborator) individual or institution established

under a local or foreign law/statute, with the aim of achieving a pre-defined goal that is in line with the vision and mission of NOUN.

- 4.2 **Partnership:** a formal agreement between an individual or institution and NOUN on a merit-based understanding to work together in implementing a joint activity related to teaching/learning, research, services or innovations with mutual academic, financial or mutual benefits to both sides. Such benefits as will contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities at both institutions while maintaining and respecting the sovereignty and autonomy of both institutions.
- 4.3 **Academic Linkages:** Formal agreements, partnerships, or collaborative initiatives established with other educational institutions, organisations, or entities for academic and research purposes and which are of mutual benefits to both parties.
- 4.4 **International Linkages:** Formal inter-institutional agreements with international institutions or organisations involving the commitment of institutional academic resources in collaborative research, joint academic and scholarly activities, exchange of publications, student and/or staff exchange programmes, and collaborative degree programmes.
- 4.5 **Informal International Linkages:** Collegial relationship across international boundaries among individual school members, administrators, and/or students that involve no commitment of institutional resources.
- 4.6 **Institutional Resources:** Human and financial resources in NOUN or partners. This includes courses, academic programmes, degrees, diplomas, reports and findings on research conducted.
- 4.7 **Reciprocal Exchange:** Activities based on operations or activities where the maximum number of staff/students involved annually is specified and commits either party to reciprocity in the arrangement over a specified period.
- 4.8 **Validity Period:** The duration of an operational linkage agreement
- 4.9 **Research Scholar/Visiting Professor:** An affiliate from a partner university visiting primarily for the purpose of conducting academic research, observing or consulting in an area which involves academic research projects.
- 4.10 **Short-Term Operation:** An activity or event scheduled for the purposes of conducting other related activities not specified in the agreement.

- 4.11 **Letters of Intent (LOI):** Written statements of goodwill between the university and another institution, government or a non-profit organization expressing a mutual interest from both parties to form a partnership with the objective of generating a reciprocal benefit. LOI does not involve a commitment of university resources.
- 4.12 **Contract:** A letter of Intent which the provisions are binding upon the parties involved. Approved Templates for contracts shall always be adopted.
- 4.13 **Cooperation Contract:** A written agreement between the university and another institution, government, or non-profit institution that supports student and /or school exchanges, research collaborations, or multi-institutional degree programmes. A cooperation contract may entail a commitment of one or more university resources for academic and research purposes and should be approved by the Vice-Chancellor. Cooperation contracts also include “Memoranda of Understanding” (MOU), and “Letter of Intent” (LOI) which are written statements that outline the details of an agreement between the university and another institution expressing a mutual interest from both parties to form a partnership with objective of generating a reciprocal benefit before a legal agreement is finalized.
- 4.14 **Proponent:** The NOUN administrative unit(s) proposing a formal local or international linkage.
- 4.15 **Responsible Officer:** The Vice-Chancellor shall be the officer responsible for approving collaborations, partnerships and linkages on behalf of the university.
- 4.16 **Policy Custodian:** The Directorate of Advancement and Linkages holds this policy on behalf of the university.

## 5.0 Principles

NOUN welcomes the development of institutional linkages with other higher education institutions, corporate bodies, and other relevant organisations that share common academic interests and values; and that can contribute to the fulfilment of its vision, mission, and objectives, without detriment to its reputation.

## 6.0 Policy Statements

- 5.1 This Policy shall guide formal agreements between the partnering institutions and organisations through the provision of a broad framework for collaborative activities.
- 5.2 Formal agreements shall be developed and documented, outlining the terms and conditions of the collaboration, partnership or linkage, including the scope

and duration of the cooperation, terms of resource sharing, and the responsibilities of each party.

- 5.3 The policy shall ensure that formal relationships in the university are appropriately vetted before a commitment is made.
- 5.4 All agreements shall be processed through the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages as outlined in this policy document.
- 5.5 Documentation for proposed agreements shall indicate the objectives of forming the relationship and the designate unit, directorate, faculty, or staff committed to forming and supporting such relationship over time.
- 5.6 Linkages with partner institutions, including all amendments that may result after the initial formalisation process, remain in effect for the period stated in the agreement.
- 5.7 All agreements shall be subject to annual review based on the recommendation of the drivers of the linkage in consultation with the unit concerned.
- 5.8 Implementing unit shall undertake a formal review of an agreement not less than nine months to the expiration of the agreement and communicate recommendations for its renewal or otherwise to DAL.
- 5.9 DAL shall recommend amendments and renewals to the Vice-Chancellor, within six months prior to the expiration date of agreement.
- 5.10 Agreements classified as inactive or problematic may be terminated upon six months' written notice, unless otherwise stipulated in the contract.

Special cases may still be made where specifications do not apply in totality to the collaboration. However, the basis of such approvals must be resolved by the sponsoring unit, which shall also provide details of the basis on which the collaboration can reflect the spirit of the university's mission and vision statements.

## **7.0 Policy Implementation**

This policy shall become operational upon Senate's approval. It shall be implemented by the proponents of approved agreements while its administration and management shall be the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages. The Standard Operating Procedures for establishing academic linkages are outlined as follows:

- 7.1 NOUN shall receive a proposal for new partnership from an initiating institution through the Vice-Chancellor and if approved, directs DAA to treat.

- 7.2 NOUN may also seek a new partnership with an institution or organisation in which case, a proposal shall be communicated with the identified institution or organisation.
- 7.3 Proposals for academic linkages may be initiated by a senior teaching staff or non-teaching member of staff of the university. The initiator should obtain a buy in of the head of the relevant unit, Dean, Director or Head of Department on the need for a collaborative agreement.
- 7.4 Proposals that are at the behest of the Vice-Chancellor shall be driven on his behalf by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor or the Director, Advancement and Linkages.
- 7.5 An academic linkage agreement shall be processed by the initiator (academic unit) through the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages. The initiator may be an academic unit, faculty member, a partner institution or a representative of an external academic unit, research group or an academic/ non-teaching member of staff.
- 7.6 The initiator, who may also act as the driver, shall complete a General Agreement Proposal Form to be provided by DAL.
- 7.7 The initiator/driver shall also provide DAL with the following information:
  - 7.7.1 a letter which specifies the goals of the proposed agreement and anticipated next steps.
  - 7.7.2 background, history and information on prior contract with the institution/organization
  - 7.7.3 derivable benefits from the agreement
  - 7.7.4 primary contact(s) for the implementation and submission of annual reports of activities resulting from the agreement.
  - 7.7.5 confirmation of the language to be adopted in the proposed agreement.
  - 7.7.6 mode for signing of the agreement: in person or electronically.
  - 7.7.7 evidence of support of the head of the relevant unit involved in the proposed agreement (denoted by their signature).
- 7.8 the General Agreement Proposal Form shall be submitted along with letters of support from the relevant Deans, Directors or Registrar (if from a senior non-teaching staff) to DAL for processing.

- 7.9 DAA shall seek the Vice-Chancellor's approval in principle and shall on behalf of NOUN develop an agreement document using the institutional template approved by the Senate of the institution.
- 7.10 the DAL shall negotiate the terms of the agreement on behalf of NOUN in consultation with the academic unit of the institution.
- 7.11 the draft agreement shall be forwarded to the head of the implementing unit for further deliberation and recommendation.
- 7.12 a brief on the submissions made is prepared and forwarded by the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages for the necessary approval of the Vice -Chancellor.
- 7.13 upon Vice-Chancellor's approval, the partnering institution/organisation shall identify two signatories each for formalisation of the agreement.
- 7.14 DAL shall be responsible for the maintenance of an updated database of all agreements which must be presented for annual reviews by a statutory committee charged with that responsibility.
- 7.15 Other information:
- 7.15.1 The submission of the General Proposal Forms will not be required for the establishment of Supplementary Agreements with partners with whom NOUN has an existing General Agreement.
- 7.15.2 An agreement may be formalised electronically or in-person. Both parties shall be required to sign two (2) copies of the agreement document. One of the signed and dated copies shall be retained by the partnering institution/organisations.
- 7.15.3 A signing ceremony which involves the heads of both institutions or their designated officers in person may be arranged. The initiating institution/organisation shall be responsible for arranging the visit while working with the Vice-Chancellor's office to arrange for participation of senior university leadership.
- 7.15.4 Progress reports on activities accomplished and work plans shall be forwarded annually to DAL at a time jointly agreed upon by the partnering institutions. Request for renewal or termination of an agreement should be reported and discussions on the issue be initiated in the annual report.
- 7.15.5 NO agreement can be acted upon until the full review process has been completed and the necessary approvals have been obtained.



## 7.16 Review of Agreements

A statutory committee should be constituted to review all linkage agreements compiled by the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages. The committee shall undertake a comprehensive review of each proposal and make recommendations based on the following:

- 7.16.1 reputation and class of potential institutional partners.
- 7.16.2 general scope and specific areas of the proposed cooperation.
- 7.16.3 resources and strengths of the prospective partners, and extent to which they complement NOUN resources and strengths.
- 7.16.4 potential benefits for other academic units; partners' responsibilities, potential liabilities arising from the activities proposed, the financial arrangement, and any services to be provided.
- 7.16.5 evidence that the relevant unit and partner institution can support their commitments under the contract; and
- 7.16.6 time frame of the proposed cooperation including terms of renewal and termination.

## 8.0 Sanctions on Violating this Policy

- 8.1 Sanctions for non-compliance with the guidelines and procedures outlined in this policy shall be in line with stipulated disciplinary actions for staff and students accordingly.
- 8.2 The NUC's prescribed sanctions would be activated anytime by either party in the affiliation defaults on the affiliation MOU.

## 9.0 Policy Alignment

This policy aligns with:

- 9.1 NOUN Act, No. 19, 2018
- 9.2 NOUN ODeL Policy
- 9.3 NOUN Strategic Brief
- 9.4 NOUN Academic Brief
- 9.5 NOUN Regional strategy
- 9.6 NOUN Quality Assurance Policy

## **Team of Developers**

1. Mrs Ileka and team
2. Prof. Christine Ofulue
3. Prof Dorothy Ofoha
4. Prof Joy Eyisi
5. Prof Gloria Anetor