

Partnership Approval

Procedure for the Approval of New Partnerships

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| Responsible Office | Centre for Educational Partnerships |
| Responsible Officer | PVC Partnership Strategy |
| Approving Authority | Academic Board |
| Date of Approval | 28 th April 2022 |
| Effective Date | 28 th April 2022 |
| Related Procedures | Programme Design and Approval Partnership Management |
| Related University Policies | N/A |
| Amended (if applicable) | April 2023 – Enhancements and clarifications for partnership provision July 2023 – Curriculum Committee replaced by Curriculum Approval Panel January 2024 – Housekeeping amendments |
| Supersedes | Collaborative Provision Handbook |
| Next Review Date | January 2025 |

Scope

This process applies to arrangements between the University and a partner organisation to deliver aspects of teaching, learning, assessment, and student support that lead to awards of the University or the award of, or exemption from, academic credit. They will usually apply to the delivery of whole programmes but may also apply to the delivery of individual modules or arrangements involving guaranteed progression.

Introduction

The process is designed to ensure that new partnerships meet external regulatory requirements as well as internal strategic and operational objectives. When considering the approval of partnerships, the University considers its obligations to comply with the following conditions of the Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England (Office for Students, 2018). For partnership approval, the following Conditions are relevant:

- B1: The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high-quality academic experience. A high-quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course: is up-to-date; provides educational challenge; is coherent; is effectively delivered; and requires students to develop relevant skills.
- B2: The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure: students registered on a higher education course receive resources and support to ensure: a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and b. those students succeeding in and beyond higher education; and effective engagement with students to ensure: a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education.
- B3: The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study.
- B4: The provider must ensure that: students are assessed effectively; each assessment is valid and reliable; academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible; academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.
- B5: The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body): any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.
- B6: The provider must participate in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework.

- C1: to demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, the provider has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.
- C3: Student protection plan needed for validated
- D: The provider must be:
 - financially viable;
 - be financially sustainable;
 - Have the necessary financial resources to provide and fully deliver the higher education courses as it has advertised and as it has contracted to deliver them;
 - Have the necessary financial resources to continue to comply with all conditions of its registration.
- E1: The provider's governing documents must uphold the public interest governance principles that are applicable to the provider.
- E2: The provider must have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements to:
 - Operate in accordance with its governing documents.
 - Deliver, in practice, the public interest governance principles that are applicable to it.
 - Provide and fully deliver the higher education courses advertised.
 - Continue to comply with all conditions of its registration.

The process also ensures partnerships meet the **University's Criteria for Teaching Partnerships:**

- a) they must be consistent with the University's Strategic Plan and contribute to its reputation, mission and values;
- b) they should be with organisations which have the academic standing to deliver programmes of study successfully to appropriate academic standards, the financial standing to sustain them, the infrastructure, resources and staffing to support them, and the legal standing to contract their delivery;
- c) they should be academically-led: built on our areas of subject strength and expertise and assist the University in building its profile and reputation nationally and, when appropriate, internationally;
- d) the partnership proposal should be financially viable and feasible, fully costed and priced accordingly;
- e) they should not be over-reliant on an individual member of staff, either at the partner organisation or within the University;
- f) they should be equivalent in quality and standards to comparable awards delivered solely by the University and adhere to the relevant regulatory frameworks in which they operate;
- g) the partner should be an organisation of esteem and appropriate ethical standard, in a region of stable governance and with appropriate frameworks protecting against

corruption, bribery and malpractice as indicated by the Corruption Perceptions Index;

- h) partnerships should have potential for collaboration beyond the curriculum, such as staff and student exchanges and collaborative research projects;
- i) partnerships should have the potential to support student progression to the University for the study of higher qualifications.

The principles that underpin the design and operation of the Partnership Approval process are therefore as follows:

- **Proportionality:** the process for partnership approval is adaptable to differing proposals. It includes an initial screening phase to ensure that only viable proposals are put forward for further development. Partnership proposals that do go forward are scrutinized and assessed via a due diligence process that is proportionate to risk; and an academic approval event as part of the Programme Design and Approval process.
- **Engaging Academic Staff:** Centre for Educational Partnerships engages with Head(s) of School in the generation and exploration of partnership proposals and the development of business cases for those that proceed. The Academic section of the Due Diligence enquiries is undertaken by a member of the senior leadership team and scrutinizes the ability and capacity of partner academic staff to deliver the programme. Partner academic staff are engaged throughout the approval process as the partnership proposal is explored and developed.
- **Data Driven:** the consideration of new partnerships is underpinned by the due diligence phase of work, which considers a range of data about the proposed partner covering academic, financial, legal and reputational factors.
- **Enabling Enhancement:** As partnerships are developed, the due diligence process is used to identify areas for development which feeds into the later stages of approval of programmes and their delivery.
- **Providing assurance to Governors:** the due diligence process led by Partnership Strategy Group is designed to provide detailed information and assurance on partnership proposals. The Annual Report on Quality and Standards includes a report on approved partners and programmes, and the effectiveness of the operation of partnership approval and management processes.

Procedure

A Initial Partnership Proposal Review

| Task | Procedure |
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| A1. Initial proposal screening | Proposals for new partnerships are directed in the first instance to the Centre for Educational Partnerships. The PVC Partnership Strategy screens proposals, liaises with appropriate Head(s) of School and selects which should go forward for further development and consideration by Partnership Strategy Group. |
| A2. Development of Initial Partnership Proposal | <p>Selected proposals for new partnerships are defined in Initial Partnership Proposal form, completed by the PVC Partnership Strategy in liaison with Head(s) of School, for consideration by Partnership Strategy Group.</p> <p>For new or non-standard partnership or collaboration types, the University Secretary, in consultation with internal stakeholders, will determine which aspects of the University's partnership approval and quality management framework apply; considering the regulatory requirements and risks arising from the specific proposal.</p> |
| A3. Decision to Progress | Partnership Strategy Group assesses Initial Partnership Proposal and decides which proposals should proceed to full development. |
| A4: Notification to Stakeholders | Centre for Educational Partnerships informs Academic Governance and Quality (AGQ), Portfolio and Planning (P&P), and relevant School(s) that the partnership is proceeding to full development phase. |

B. Partnership Development and Approval

| Task | Procedure |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| B1. Due Diligence parameters | <p>The purpose of due diligence is for the University to undertake a review and assessment of the competency of the partner to deliver the proposed partnership, identify any associated legal, financial, and academic risks and consider whether these can be mitigated or not.</p> <p>There is a set of templated questions within the Due Diligence Questionnaire, which Partnership Strategy Group may review</p> |

and add to, before the questionnaire is sent to the partner for completion of their sections; or may request additional information or make further enquiries at any stage in the Due Diligence process.

B2. Due Diligence, Risk Assessment and Business Case

Centre for Educational Partnerships engages with the proposed partner to complete ***Due Diligence Questionnaire***, coordinating the return of documents and evidence from the partner and other appropriate bodies; and checking the validity of documentation where it appears in the public domain.

Centre for Educational Partnerships completes the ***Risk Assessment*** of the partnership, informed by due diligence responses.

Portfolio and Planning work with the Centre for Educational Partnerships, the School and the Finance department to generate a full ***Business Case*** and ***Course Costing Sheets*** for the proposal.

Portfolio and Planning to notify stakeholders that the proposal is being developed and invite them to input into the development of the ***Business Case***.

B3. Site Visits

Site Visit(s) are coordinated by Centre for Educational Partnerships and completed by a representative from the Centre for Educational Partnerships and School representatives to ensure proposed teaching space is satisfactory.

Virtual site visits may be allowed at this stage. An in-person site visit is normally required before Agreements are signed and/or Programmes are advertised; and in all instances an in-person site visit is required before teaching commences.

Site Visit Reports are completed by the Centre for Educational Partnerships and should include detail on whether the visit has been virtual or in-person. If visits are virtual, the site visit report will outline when the in-person visit is scheduled for.

Site Visit Reports for new partners are provided by the Centre for Educational Partnerships to the Approval Panel to support assessment of delivery capability.

B4. Approval to Proceed

Partnership Strategy Group conducts assessment of information and documentation received from the ***Due Diligence Questionnaire, Risk Assessment, Business Case, Course Costings Sheets, and Site Visit Report(s)*** and decides whether the partnership proposal should proceed to full development.

Where the **Risk Assessment** shows a proposal to be 'High Risk', the Board of Governors will be required to give the Approval to Proceed.

B5. Partnership agreement drafted, agreed and signed

Centre for Educational Partnerships coordinates activity for the drafting of **Partnership Agreement** and liaises with the partner to get the agreement agreed and signed. Amendments to template contracts will be reviewed by key internal stakeholders.

Responsibilities for operations at partners are detailed in the **Operational Responsibilities Checklist**, which is aligned with template contracts. The PVC Partnership Strategy will make any amendments to the Operational Responsibilities Checklist in consultation with key internal stakeholders. Finalised Operational Responsibilities Checklist will be presented at the Approval Panel Event to inform the review of delivery capability.

B6. Notification of partnership approval to internal stakeholders

Centre for Educational Partnerships notifies internal stakeholders¹ that a new partnership has been approved; and that partnership agreement is in place/being drafted and that the Academic Approval process (including programme approval and approval of delivery arrangements) will begin.

Centre for Educational Partnerships to pass on details of due diligence findings, indicating any areas that require further exploration through the **Programme Design and Approval** process to Portfolio and Planning, to be included within the Programme Development Space.

Centre for Educational Partnerships to pass on completed Site Visit Reports, programme Schedules (as part of partnership agreements), Operational Responsibility Checklists, and Academic Calendars and Assessment Schedules to Portfolio and Planning, to be included within the Programme Development Space as part of contextual information for Approval Panels.

B7. Marketing and Admissions for Programmes Delivered with Partners

Marketing of new partnerships and programmes as well as the acceptance of applications and making of offers can only take place in accordance with the requirements set out in the **Programme Design and Approval** Procedure (see A9: Programme Design and Approval); and the Approval of Partnership Publicity and Marketing Information Procedure

Centre for Educational Partnerships to be responsible for ensuring that partners are aware of the Approval of Partnership Publicity and Marketing Information Procedure requirements and that websites adhere. Centre for Educational Partnerships is responsible for ensuring that BSU website also complies.

¹ Academic Governance and Quality; PVC Student Experience; Head of Schools; Head of Schools Administrative and Technical Services; Technical Manager; Estates; Library and Learning Services; IT Services; Finance; Immigration Compliance and Advice; Admissions; External Affairs Unit; Recruitment; Data and Insights Service; Student and Registry Services; Careers; PVC Research; VP Education, SU President, Students Union Deputy CEO

C. Approval of Programmes Delivered through Partnership

After new partnerships have been approved, the constituent academic programmes and their delivery arrangements also require separate approval through an Approval Panel as part of the Programme Design and Approval Procedure. The Approval Panel is the final approval point for the academic provision that will be run under the partnership. Details for this process are in the ***Programme Design and Approval*** process.

Approval Panel Events act with delegated authority from the Curriculum Approval Panel to approve the academic provision for partnerships, as well as confirm that delivery arrangements are satisfactory. Approval Panel Events consist of meetings held between an Approval Panel from the University, member(s) of the relevant BSU School of Study academic team, and the programme and management team from the Partner.

Appendix 1 – Roles and Responsibilities

Centre for Educational Partnerships (PVC – Partnership Strategy)

1. Receive and screen all proposals for new partnerships
2. Develop Initial Partnership Proposal with input from relevant Head(s) of School
3. Deliver Initial Partnership Proposal to Partnership Strategy Group for consideration and decision to proceed
4. Notify Portfolio and Planning, Academic Governance and Quality and relevant Head(s) of School of partnerships that are proceeding to full development
5. For proposals that are proceeding, liaise with partner to arrange completion of Due Diligence Questionnaire and collation of documentation
6. Complete Risk Assessment based on Due Diligence responses
7. Coordinate and conduct Site Visit to partner site(s) of delivery with appropriate school staff. Ensure that a Site Visit (virtual or in-person) has been carried out before partnerships are approved; and ensure that an in-person Site Visit has been conducted before agreements are signed.
8. Contact Portfolio & Planning to arrange completion of Business Case, with Portfolio & Planning working in consultation with the Centre for Educational Partnerships, relevant School(s) and the Finance Department to generate a full Business Case and Course Costing Sheets for the proposal.
9. Deliver completed Due Diligence Questionnaire, with accompanying documentation, Risk Assessment, Site Visit report and Business Case to Partnership Strategy Group for consideration and approval

10. Coordinate generation, agreement and signing of partnership agreement with partner, and formally confirm completion of partnership approval process with partner
11. Notify stakeholders that the Partnership has been approved and formed
12. Work with Academic Governance and Quality to input into the Partnerships section of the Annual Quality and Standards Report; including assessing the effectiveness of this procedure.

Partnership Strategy Group

1. Receive and consider Initial Partnership Proposals, and decide on which should proceed to full development
2. Set parameters and scope of Due Diligence Questionnaire, proportionate to risk and bespoke to specific characteristics of the proposed partnership
3. Consider completed Due Diligence Questionnaire and associated docs and decide if due diligence satisfied. As part of due diligence, review partner policies. Request further information and scrutiny where required.
4. Liaise with PVC Partnership Strategy and contribute to the generation of new partnership agreements

Head of School

1. Liaise with Centre for Education Partnerships on development and completion of Initial Partnership Proposals, with cost/benefit analysis.
2. Liaise with Centre for Educational Partnerships and the partner on general development of the partnership.
3. Work with Centre for Educational Partnerships and Portfolio and Planning to develop Business Case for new partnerships.
4. Attend (or nominate appropriate academic staff member to attend) and complete Site Visit report for partner site(s) of delivery.

Academic Governance and Quality

1. Feed into academic due diligence and review for partner academic policies and regulations, as required
2. Advise on academic elements of new partnership agreements, as required
3. Work with the Centre for Educational Partnerships to complete the Partnerships section of the Annual Quality and Standards Report; including assessing the effectiveness of this procedure.

Portfolio and Planning

1. Trigger Programme Design and Approval procedures to commence once partnerships have been agreed, liaising with Centre for Educational Partnerships and Academic Governance and Quality team to schedule activity.
2. Portfolio & Planning working in consultation with the Centre for Educational Partnerships, relevant School(s) and the Finance Department to generate a full Business Case and Course Costing Sheets for the proposal.
3. Liaise with Partnership Strategy Group/Centre for Educational Partnerships to extract any key information from due diligence which requires further consideration as part of Programme Design and Approval process, and place this into the programme development space

PVC Academic Planning, PVC Student Experience and Vice Provost

1. Review the academic information received as part of Due Diligence and request additional information or make further enquiries if required.
2. Provide commentary and advice to inform decision of approval on the Academic segment of Due Diligence questionnaire to Partnership Strategy Group.

Chief Financial Officer

1. Review the financial information received as part of Due Diligence and request additional information or make further enquiries if required.
2. Provide commentary and advice to inform decision of approval on the Financial segment of Due Diligence questionnaire to Partnership Strategy Group.

University Secretary

1. Review the legal and governance information received as part of Due Diligence and request additional information or make further enquiries if required.
2. Provide commentary and advice to inform decision of approval on the Legal and Governance segment of Due Diligence questionnaire to Partnership Strategy Group.
3. For new or non-standard partnership or collaboration types, to determine which aspects of the University's partnership approval and quality management framework apply.