

The Partnership Approval Process

The Partnership Approval Process provides the requirements and process to approve a new collaborative partnership. The Director of Quality and Educational Development, in consultation with relevant colleagues, is responsible for determining the exact nature of the approval process in terms of information required, financial, legal and academic scrutiny, and the requirement for a formal approval visit. The process will vary according to the nature of the collaboration proposed, and consideration of the risks involved.

1.0 Typology of Collaborative Provision

- 1.1 The University is involved in a number of different types of collaborative relationships with other institutions, as set out below in the Typology of Collaborative Provision. This typology is not definitive, and from time to time the University agrees to initiate other forms of collaborative partnership, and/or to vary the nature of the arrangement in order to take account of particular circumstances or needs. Such variations will always be considered and approved through the relevant executive and committee processes.
- 1.2 The Typology of Collaborative Provision and definitions of the possible types of Collaborative Provision are as follows:
- 1.3 **Articulation:** An articulation agreement is a formal agreement that allows specific credit that has been gained from one higher education institution to be transferred to another institution, guaranteeing admission with advanced standing. The right to such advanced standing applies to all students covered by the agreement, who have gained that specific credit, without a further consideration of that credit, subject to any limitations set out in the agreement. As the University in receipt of the credits, UW will need to assure itself of the quality and standards of the learning that is undertaken at the partner institution. For further information, see Annexe 1: Principles and process for the approval Articulation.
- 1.4 **Recognition:** an arrangement whereby a named award delivered by another institution is formally recognised as appropriate for entry with or without advanced standing to one or more specified UW programmes, thereby providing a basis for individual applications to the course. There is no guaranteed entry through any recognition arrangement. For further information, see Annexe 2: Principles and process for the approval of recognition arrangements.
- 1.5 **Offsite Delivery (including Flying Faculty):** UW credit-bearing modules or courses delivered by University staff outside University premises in conjunction with a partner which provides premises and equipment, learning resources, and/or student or administrative support that is integral to the student learning experience. For further information, please see [Guidance on Approval Processes for Off-site Delivery](#).
- 1.6 **Dual Award:** An arrangement where the University works with one or more degree-awarding bodies to offer a jointly conceived programme leading to separate awards granted by both/all awarding institutions. Dual awards require students to achieve more than one set of learning outcomes. Each degree-awarding body is responsible for its own award but the two components form a single package. Where a student

meets the requirements of one degree-awarding body only, they receive only a single award. For further information, see Annexe 3: Principles and process for the approval of Joint and Dual Awards.

- 1.7 **Joint Award:** An arrangement where the University works with one or more degree-awarding bodies for the purposes of programme design, development, delivery, assessment, management and decision-making on student achievement of a programme and where a student successfully completing the programme gains a single award jointly awarded by all of the degree-awarding bodies. For further information, see Annexe 3: Principles and process for the approval of Joint and Dual Awards.
- 1.8 **Franchise/Subcontracting:** An arrangement whereby a partner works with the University to deliver whole or parts of programmes, designed by University staff, leading to an award or the award of credit by the University. The relationship, based on a formal contract, in which the University (also known as the lead provider) allows a partner (known as the delivery provider) to deliver all, or part, of a course which has been designed, approved and is owned by the University, and is also normally delivered by the University itself. The University retains overall control of the course's content, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements.
- 1.9 **Validation:** A partnership arrangement whereby a course owned, developed and delivered either in its entirety by one or more partners, or jointly with UW, is validated as leading to a UW award. A validated course is a module or course which University of Worcester approves to contribute, or lead, to one of its awards. The University remains responsible for the academic standards of the award granted in its name.

2.0 Establishing a Partnership

- 2.1 As an awarding institution UW has ultimate responsibility for all awards made in its name, including for programmes delivered at and by collaborative partner institutions. It is therefore important that every effort is made, in collaboration with our partner institutions, to ensure an appropriate learning environment exists, and is maintained for all students studying under collaborative arrangements. This requires UW to have robust procedures in place for the approval of new collaborative arrangements.
- 2.2 Partnership approval is granted by Academic Board following a process of due diligence to assure the University of the probity, financial and academic soundness of the proposed partner. This is undertaken through the submission of information, scrutiny of documentation and normally a partner approval visit. The purpose of partnership approval is to assure the University of the standing and probity of the potential partner organisation, and ensure mutual understanding of the basis for the partnership.
- 2.3 Partnership approval is granted without prejudice to the outcome of any programme specific approval process.
- 2.4 Where appropriate, the partnership and course approval process will be integrated to minimise duplication and burden.
- 2.5 An approval process must be completed prior to UW offering any programme in collaboration with a partner institution. The different stages of the approval process are as follows:

- Stage 1:** Identification of potential partnership
- Stage 2:** Preliminary enquiries and partnership risk assessment
- Stage 3:** Approval to proceed and confirmation of terms and conditions for partnership approval
- Stage 4:** Due Diligence
- Stage 5:** Partner approval visit
- Stage 6:** ASQEC and Academic Board approval of the proposed partnership
- Stage 7:** Agreements

3.0 Stage 1: Identification of potential partnership

- 3.1 Initiatives for collaborative partnership may come from the University or from the organisation proposing the relationship. Potential arrangements may take a variety of forms (see Section 1: Typology of Collaborative Provision).
- 3.2 Partnerships can be initiated by Schools or, in exceptional circumstances, through the Deputy Provost Director for Educational Partnerships (for UK Partnerships) or Director of International (for non-UK Partnerships). The Head of School would usually lead on the discussions concerning a new potential partnership and the early stages of assessing the viability of a new partnership through to submission of the proposal to the UW Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG).

4.0 Stage 2: Preliminary enquiries

- 4.1 At the commencement of preliminary enquiries, the Deputy Provost Director for Educational Partnerships (for UK Partnerships) or Director of International (for non-UK Partnerships) and the Director of Quality and Educational Development should be informed and, where pertinent, involved in any initial discussions.
- 4.2 Where led by the School, the Head of School (or nominee) is responsible for making preliminary enquiries about the potential partner through initial discussions, published material in the public domain and the organisation's website, to assist in assessing the viability of the proposed partnership.
- 4.3 It is advisable that staff engaged in preliminary discussions keep a written record of matters discussed and matters agreed in principle.
- 4.4 The Preliminary enquiries form (Annexe 4) is to be used by Schools/Departments to seek agreement from the Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG) to commence the formal Institutional approval process for a new partnership relating to academic (taught and/or research) activity. It provides a summary of the proposed collaboration and its rationale, and the outcome of initial enquiries and discussions about the suitability of the proposed partner.
- 4.5 The preliminary enquiries form of your discussions with a partner should be submitted to APPG in order to make an informed judgement on the strategic fit of the proposal and to identify issues which can be addressed in the initial stages of development. The preliminary enquiries form should be submitted at an early stage, normally *at least* 18-12 months before a new partnership might commence.
- 4.6 It is expected that preliminary enquiries will be completed by the School with reference to information from initial discussions with potential partners. These initial discussions should make clear to the proposed partner, as appropriate, that there is a formal process of partnership approval involving detailed due diligence

that commences after APPG has given assent to proceed; a summary of this process in flow chart form is available on the AQU webpages.

- 4.7 Depending on the nature of the proposed collaboration and/or the status of the proposed partner this may or may not involve a formal visit, scrutiny of financial status and other documentation; this is decided by the Director of Quality and Educational Development, in consultation with relevant colleagues, following APPG approval to proceed.
- 4.8 The preliminary enquiries will also vary depending on the nature of the proposed collaboration, and it is expected this is taken into account in completing the form. The information relevant where a full programme is being delivered by the proposed partner, will be different from that required where the University is delivering the programme but the learning is off-site.
- 4.9 In certain cases, the School and/or Deputy Provost ~~Director for Educational Partnerships (for UK Partnerships)~~ or Director of International (for non-UK Partnerships) or the Director of Quality and Educational Development may consider it advisable to bring forward aspects of the due diligence process, before completion of the preliminary enquiries.
- 4.10 Initial considerations will cover matters such as:
 - nature and reputation of proposed partner
 - compatibility of mission and strategic objectives
 - legal and financial status of the organisation
 - suitability of resources to underpin proposed collaboration
 - current experience of delivering higher education (HE) and current partnerships (if relevant)
 - effective management of quality of provision.
- 4.11 In the case of overseas organisations, checks may be made with the British Council and UK NARIC as to the recognition and standing of the proposed partner and its awards. For some arrangements there may also be a need to ascertain whether a licence to operate is required.
- 4.12 In parallel with the preliminary enquiries process, the Academic Quality Unit will complete a risk assessment to ascertain the level of due diligence required (Annexe 5). This may involve a request to Worcester International to provide a background report on the proposed country of delivery and implications for the University in working with a partner to deliver higher education. The completed risk assessment will go to APPG along with the completed preliminary enquiries form.

5.0 Stage 3: Approval to proceed and confirmation of terms and conditions for partnership approval

- 5.1 APPG approval of a proposed partner is required to ensure that the proposal fits with the University's overall strategy and the likely benefits, costs and risks associated with the initiative, to determine whether the proposed collaboration should be pursued and the formal partnership approval process commenced. .
- 5.2 If APPG agrees the proposal should be taken forward, the Deputy Head of Academic Quality writes to the prospective partner indicating that the formal partnership approval process can commence.
- 5.3 At the same time, the proposed partner is informed of the University's formal processes for Institutional and course approval and its terms and conditions. This will normally include a proposed outline schedule for approval. It is usually expected that a partner proposal is linked with a specific course proposal; it would be unusual to progress a partnership approval without identified course provision.
- 5.4 Often, particularly with non-UK partners, a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) can help to develop a relationship further. Such agreements do not commit the University to specific activities and are not legally binding but are a useful tool to show commitment to the further development of the relationship with a partner organisation.
- 5.5 The proposed partner is required to indicate acceptance of the terms and conditions in writing before the partnership approval process may commence. The standard conditions under which partnership approval is granted and to which all partners must adhere are found in Annexe 6.
- 5.6 Following the agreement from APPG to proceed to partnership approval, and acceptance by the proposed partner of the terms and conditions, the Deputy Head of Academic Quality will:
 - consult with the Director of Quality and Educational Development on the requirements for partner approval and due diligence
 - provisionally agree with the School and the prospective partner a mutually acceptable timetable for partner approval
 - request the partner to complete the due diligence form and provide associated information
 - initiate arrangements for the scrutiny of the documentation
 - where relevant, advise Library Services of the proposed partnership and provide notification that an resource statement has been requested.
- 5.7 At the same time as requesting due diligence information, the Deputy Head of Academic Quality will provide the potential partner with an information pack about the University composed of (as relevant):
 - Undergraduate and postgraduate prospectus
 - University of Worcester (UW) Strategic Plan
 - Quality Assurance Procedures relating to Collaborative Academic Arrangements and Provision
 - Partner and course approval processes
 - Partnerships and Collaborative Academic Arrangements Policy
 - Template for Partnership Agreement
 - Relevant UW information, eg about the School, Library Services and Student Services etc

- Principles of UW collaborative financial arrangements and weblink to UW student fees page.
- 5.8 From this point, it is usual for the School to submit the course proposal, including the business case, to APPG for approval. The Head of School (or nominee) is also responsible from this point for ensuring that the financial arrangements for the partnership in terms of student fees, collection of fees, and split of income is negotiated and agreed with the proposed partner. The University Deputy Director of Finance should be fully involved in this process.
- 6.0 Stage 4: Due Diligence**
- 6.1 The Academic Quality Unit will determine the level of due diligence required. The primary purpose of the due diligence process is to ensure that the proposed partner is of appropriate standing and that it is capable of providing a suitable learning environment for the delivery of programmes of study leading to a UW award, and that the proposed partner is financially viable.
- 6.2 Full due diligence, requiring completion of the standard due diligence form (Annexe 7) and submission by the proposed partner organisation of relevant evidence is required for most new partner organisations. Specific requirements are reviewed for each proposed partner in advance of requesting completion, to take account of the nature of the proposed partnership and the status of the partner, in order to ensure relevance and clarity of information required. Possible exceptions in relation to full due diligence may include:
- some internationally recognised and long established HE institutions
 - some UK further education colleges
 - NHS Trusts, and some other governmental agencies.
- 6.3 Proposed partners may be required to undergo financial sustainability and management (FSM) checks (Annexe 8); this is the scrutiny of the financial sustainability and management arrangements of the proposed partner organisation and any subsidiary, parent company or linked organisation. Partner organisations must offer evidence that they are financially sustainable, financial management is sound and a clear relationship exists between the organisation's financial policy and the safeguarding of the quality and standards of its provision. Therefore, organisations undergoing the FSM check are required to provide information on:
- details of the organisation, trading names and addresses, key individuals (directors, shareholders, trustees) and relationships with other organisations
 - sufficient track record of financial performance, including submission of three years of signed, audited, full financial statements
 - assurance of financial sustainability
- 6.4 The Deputy Head of Academic Quality will write to the proposed partner institution with the due diligence request, outlining the documentation that is required and the deadline for return. The Deputy Head of Academic Quality will also review publicly available information, alongside the returned documentation.
- 6.5 For institutions that have or have had links with other degree awarding institutions, the Academic Quality Unit will contact these to enquire about their satisfaction with the partner. Cases where other Higher Education Institutions have withdrawn from a partnership will always be investigated.

- 6.6 In the case of overseas (non-UK) institutions, the University will also seek the views of the British Council and other independent sources, including government offices of the country in which the organisation is based and/or from the UK NARIC (if this has not already been completed as part of the preliminary enquiries).
- 6.7 The Director of International will be asked to comment on Higher Education in the country where the proposed non-UK partner is based and will be consulted on the appropriateness of the returned due diligence documentation.
- 6.8 Due diligence documentation is checked for completeness by the Deputy Head of Academic Quality. Preparations for the partnership approval visit may be postponed or terminated if the quality of the documentation provided is deemed to be unsatisfactory.
- 6.9 Documentation relating to the approval is reviewed by the Director of International (for non-UK Partnerships), the Head of School (or nominee), the Deputy Head of Academic Quality, the Director of Finance (or nominee) (regarding financial information) and, where appropriate, other members of the University with relevant expertise. Comments on the documentation provided are forwarded to the Deputy Head of Academic Quality in advance of the approval visit.
- 6.10 AQU will forward the partner's completed library resource statement to the University's Library Services for consideration. On the basis of this information and any further correspondence required, Library Services will review the partner's general learning resources and infrastructures and assess their adequacy and compatibility with UW resources. UW Library Services is responsible for forwarding a brief report of its conclusions to AQU for the institutional approval visit, together with the completed checklist. The report will also include information for staff at the partner institution on support available from the University's Library Services for students and staff.
- 6.11 On the basis of the information provided by the partner and the information from the due diligence checks, the Deputy Head of Academic Quality begins to draft the Partner Approval Report and collate any key documentation to inform the approval visit. Additionally, drafting of the Partnership Agreement is begun in order that this can be shared with the proposed partner in advance of the partner approval visit.

7.0 Stage 5: Partner approval visit

- 7.1 Approval visits are chaired by an appropriate senior member of University staff, and may involve the Director of International (for non-UK Partnerships), the Head of School (or nominee) from the sponsoring University of Worcester School and the Deputy Head of Academic Quality or other AQU Quality Officer who acts as officer for the event.
- 7.2 In the case of proposed overseas non-UK partnerships necessitating a visit, or other 'high risk' partnerships, an appropriately qualified and experienced external adviser may also form part of the approval process. The nature of the external adviser involvement in the approval process will be agreed by the Director of Quality and Educational Development.
- 7.3 The Director of Quality and Educational Development will approve the visit team, and may require additional membership of the panel, where such expertise is required. It will be the responsibility of AQU to identify and nominate an appropriate external adviser.

- 7.4 The external adviser should be employed in (or recently retired from) a senior position at a UK HEI, and have experience of managing or operating collaborative arrangements, including overseas collaborations if the proposed UW partner is an overseas organisation. The external adviser should be familiar with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and have experience of current practice and developments in learning, teaching and assessment, and quality management in Higher Education. The nominee should not have any affiliation (currently or for the last five years) with the University or the proposed partner
- 7.5 The Academic Quality Unit will make and confirm all arrangements for the approval visit which normally lasts between a half day and one full day. In certain circumstances, the partner approval visit and meetings to approve the academic collaborative provision can take place on the same day. If this is the case the Director of Quality and Educational Development (in consultation with colleagues) will agree the arrangements and the external and internal panel members to be involved in each part of the process. Alternatively, where the proposed partnership is particularly complex and/or of higher risk, the Director of Quality and Educational Development may advise a pre-meeting of the visit team in advance of the visit, in order to discuss issues, determine the agenda and identify any requests for further information.
- 7.6 Documentation to be provided for the partner approval visit will normally comprise of:
- draft partner approval report compiled by Deputy Head of Academic Quality based on due diligence documentation submitted
 - draft Partnership Agreement (or relevant template)
 - copies of any key documentation provided by the proposed partner (to be determined by Deputy Head of Academic Quality)
 - partner approval process document for reference.
- 7.7 The agenda will be informed by the draft partner approval report, and should be appropriate to the nature of the proposed partner and proposed partnership and scrutiny of the documentation provided.
- 7.8 The agenda may include consideration of the following as appropriate to the nature of the proposed partner and proposed partnership and scrutiny of the documentation provided:
- a) history and legal status of the organisation
 - b) size, mission, and key objectives of organisation
 - c) rationale for development of partnership in context of HE strategy
 - d) links with other HEIs
 - e) recognition of partner by other organisations (eg British Council /UK NARIC for overseas institutions; OfS/Ofsted/QAA etc)
 - f) financial status of organisation (based on assessment by UW Director of Finance)
 - g) governance and management structure
 - h) funding of students (actual or planned)
 - i) nature of financial arrangements (for first proposed course)
 - j) equality and diversity, health and safety policies, including insurance arrangements
 - k) current academic provision (subject range and level)
 - l) quality assurance framework and processes
 - m) curriculum development and delivery (experience and track record)
 - n) teaching, learning and assessment (strategy and track record)

- o) progression and achievement (track record)
- p) policy on student feedback/evaluation
- q) student recruitment (market and track record) and means for assuring the accuracy of information for prospective students
- r) student academic support and guidance (policy and services)
- s) student pastoral support and advice (policy and services)
- t) student complaints policy and procedures
- u) student records (system and operation)
- v) recruitment and appraisal of staff (policy)
- w) staff development, including teaching qualifications, research and scholarly activity (policy and track record)
- x) learning resources (as assessed by Library Services)
- y) terms for partnership agreement
- z) arrangements for teaching student out, should the partnership be terminated.

7.9 The possible outcomes of a partner approval visit are:

- Recommendation to Academic Board of Approval of the proposed partner organisation as one with which the University would wish to collaborate, with or without conditions and/or recommendations; or
- Referred with a request for further information from the partner organisation and/or the School; or
- Partnership proposal not approved.

7.10 Where approval is granted subject to conditions and/or recommendations, the date by which a response to these is required is agreed. Responses to conditions and recommendations must be sent to the Deputy Head of Academic Quality in writing detailing the ways in which each condition and recommendation has been met, together with, where relevant, revised documentation (highlighted as appropriate).

7.11 Partnership approval is normally granted for a maximum period of six years at which point a full Partnership Review will be conducted. All new partnerships will be subject to an operations review 12-14 months after the partnership has commenced operation.

7.12 At the conclusion of the approval visit, the Chair may provide feedback in relation to any outstanding matters that need to be evidenced, conditions and/or recommendations that are likely to be in the final report, together with some indication of the next steps in the approval process.

7.13 The AQU Quality Officer attending the approval visit completes the partner approval report, normally within two weeks of the approval visit. The unconfirmed report is sent to the Chair and others involved in the approval visit and to the head of the prospective partner organisation for comment and correction of factual errors.

8.0 Stage 6: ASQEC and Academic Board approval of the proposed partnership

8.1 Finalised partnership approval reports are considered by Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) which makes a formal recommendation for approval to Academic Board. ASQEC is responsible for confirming that the due diligence and partnership approval process has been carried out robustly and in line with University policy and procedures. If ASQEC is satisfied with the report, it will recommend approval of the proposed partnership to Academic Board. The Board will receive the partnership approval report for information.

9.0 Stage 7: Agreements

- 9.1 A joint partnership and course agreement is issued after successful approval of the first course in the Partnership. The Agreement must be signed by University Vice Chancellor and the appropriate representative of the partner organisation. Students may not be registered onto a UW approved programme unless and until an Agreement has been completed, signed and lodged with the University Secretary's Office.

Approval/Review Table

| Item | Notes |
|----------------------------------|---|
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See [AQU webpages](#) for Annexes and related forms