

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

PLANNING AND APPROVAL OF A NEW COLLABORATIVE PARTNER (TAUGHT PROVISION)

This procedure covers the establishment of partnerships for all collaborative taught provision arrangements. The establishment of articulation arrangements and collaborations involving the supervision of research/training of PGR students are covered by separate procedures.

1. Identification of new collaborative partners

Opportunities for taught provision collaboration with new partners may be identified by either Academic Partnerships (AP) or Faculties/Schools (or occasionally, by another area of the University).

AP will normally take the lead in developing these relationships and will liaise with the cognate Faculty/School within the University at an early stage. Where an opportunity is identified by a Faculty/School or other area, it must be discussed with AP at a very early stage. This recognises that while a Faculty/School may drive a partnership of particular significance to itself, AP has the PU responsibility for oversight of all institutional partnerships. These discussions must take place before any firm commitment is given to the potential partner.

2. Initial Identification of potential risks and their management

Once AP and the cognate Faculty/School have agreed that there is a joint willingness to explore the potential partnership, then the [“Information to assist enquiries from potential Plymouth University collaborative delivery partners”](#) proforma, produced by AP will be completed by the Head of UK Partnerships or the Associate Dean - International, as appropriate.

This information set will be reviewed by the Director of AP/ AP Senior Management Team and the Dean(s) of the appropriate Faculty(ies). The potential risks to the success of the proposed partnership (including impact on the University’s reputation) and, where possible, how these may be mitigated will be identified and a decision made as to whether the University should continue to explore the collaboration or not at this time (or if more information is required before a decision can be made).

It is acknowledged that the proposed partner may wish to reciprocate this investigation and the University will make available all necessary documentation to comply with such an investigation.

3. Further identification of potential risks and their management

Once AP and the cognate Faculty/School have agreed investigation of the proposal should continue, then AP will undertake further due diligence checks to clarify the benefits and risks (and possible means of mitigation) to the University of undertaking the collaboration, i.e.:

- Site visit and report.
- Refinement of the nature of the proposal including proposals for programmes to be offered via the collaboration.
- Benefits to the University
- Reputation:
 - What are the political/ethical/cultural issues associated with the potential collaboration? (e.g. political unrest in an international partner's country; the range of business and ethical interests and links that a private provider may have, within the UK and internationally).
 - What risks do these pose to the proposed arrangement, the safety of University staff/students or to the University's reputation?
 - Has the institution/organisation been the subject of any adverse/supportive publicity recently? Has it been identified as a good example in its field?
 - What existing experience does the proposed partner have in academic provision? In collaborative academic activity with other partners (UK or international)?
- National and international recognition (for educational institutions):
 - Outcome of last QAA Higher Education Review or equivalent (UK institutions).
 - Evidence of standing based on advice from British Council (non-UK institutions).
 - Institution's position in league tables e.g. THE World University Rankings.
- Finance/Resources:
 - The level of resource (staff and non-staff, financial and opportunity cost) of a) establishing the partnership and b) its on-going operation, once established.
 - Forecast student numbers and anticipated revenue to the University.
 - A full financial due diligence check on the proposed partner; for private providers this will also include a check on key staff (Owner(s), CEO and Directors). Financial due diligence will consider the risks of bad debt and of business failure of the partner (with any mitigation measures).
- Market and competitor intelligence.
- Legal/regulatory issues:
 - Are there any constraints on the partner's or the University's operations which may affect its capacity to collaborate? (including constraints arising from collaborative agreements with other institutions)?
 - Will the provision need to be accredited within the country of delivery (e.g. by the government or a professional body)?

Once the above information has been collated it will be reviewed by the Director of AP/AP Senior Management Team and the Dean (s) of the appropriate Faculty/(ies) and a decision will then be taken as to whether the University should proceed with the proposed collaboration or not at this time (or whether more information is required before a decision can be made).

4. Consideration by ADPC

Following the Dean/Director's agreement to proceed, AP SMT will identify the AP Lead on developing the proposal. The AP Lead will convene and Chair a Project Board, which will include AP and School/Faculty representatives and Business Partners. The Project Board will then be responsible for the preparation and submission to ADPC of the business case encompassing the proposed institutional collaboration and individual programme approval, using the appropriate **ADPC forms**.

In some cases, depending on the particular proposal, the Project Board may not be convened until after ADPC's decision to proceed. In these cases, the AP Lead will prepare the ADPC submission.

ADPC will consider the business case, paying particular attention to:

- Alignment to University strategy
- Financial and reputational benefits to the University
- Research alliances/opportunities provided by the proposed partnership

and will determine if the proposed partnership and the identified level of risk to the University (and suggested mitigation) is acceptable or not.

If the proposal, the level of risk and its mitigation is deemed acceptable, ADPC will decide whether the University should continue to explore the collaboration or not at this time.

ADPC may also decide that it requires further information before a decision can be made. The Director of Academic Partnerships may decide given the scale, nature or risk that it should be referred to the University Executive Group in addition to ADPC.

The University's **Schedule of Delegation** states that "*Any arrangement deemed by Academic Development and Partnerships Committee or University Executive Group to involve high reputational, financial or staff risk (before risk mitigation applied) requires approval from the Board of Governors*". It is therefore the responsibility of ADPC/UEG to make this determination and to ensure that the proposal is considered by the Board of Governors before any further action is taken on developing the proposal. It is expected that the Director of Academic Partnerships will ensure that new collaborative provision partnerships which are not referred for approval to the Board of Governors will be notified to the Board via the normal University Executive report.

5. Draft Academic Collaboration Agreement (ACA)

A draft Academic Collaboration Agreement (ACA) must be drawn up at an early stage of partnership planning for discussion between the University and the potential partner, so as to enable any contractual issues to be resolved in advance of the Stage 2 approval event (see below). AP will coordinate the drafting of the ACA and will be responsible for consulting with the partner.

6. Institutional approval process

Note: The institutional approval event may also include the approval of programmes to be delivered by the partner.

Following ADPC approval a short preliminary meeting will be convened by the Central Quality Office (CQO) with members of the Project Board (including the Finance Business Partner and representation from the cognate University Faculty/ies) to discuss the approval process, required documentation, responsibilities of all of those involved as well as the timescale for Stage One and Two approval meetings (including deadlines for submission of documentation).

Documentary requirements

Representatives of the Project Board will be expected to provide the following documentation for consideration during the Approval Process:

- Partnership Operational Handbook (details how the partnership will be managed and the roles and responsibilities of those involved at PU and the partner institution)
- Programme documentation – programme specification, programme operational specification, module records
- CVs of staff involved in the teaching of the programmes involved.

Stage One

CQO will convene an informal meeting of the Approval Panel Chair, CQO and representatives of the Project Board no later than 6 weeks before the full Panel meeting and after receipt of the required documentation. This meeting may also include a video conference meeting with representatives from the partner institution depending on the size and complexity of the provision involved. The object of this meeting is to consider the paperwork provided and agree any lines of further enquiry which need to be raised at the approval meeting.

Stage Two

The meeting of the full Approval Panel will be convened by CQO to consider the lines of enquiry identified at Stage One plus any additional points raised by the Panel and revised documentation.

Membership of the Institutional Approval Panel will normally comprise:

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
- Director of AP (or nominee)
- Dean(s) of the cognate University Faculty(ies) (or nominee(s))
- An Associate Dean from another Faculty
- Members of University staff with experience of collaborative arrangements*
- An external advisor from another HEI with significant experience of partnership provision*
- Director of Doctoral College (where postgraduate programmes are involved)
- Central Quality Office representative

* See below regarding programme approval panel membership

Following consideration of the proposed institutional partnership, the Approval Panel may conclude that:

- The partnership be approved.
- The partnership will be approved subject to the satisfying of conditions set by the Panel by a specified deadline.
- The partnership is not approved.

Programme approval

As indicated above, the institutional approval event may be combined with consideration of programmes to be offered by the partner. In such cases, the meeting at which programmes are considered will be separate and subsequent to that at which institutional approval is considered.

Programme approval will follow the normal University process, involving external advisers and University colleagues with subject-specific expertise.

Programmes can only run once the institution is approved fully as a partner by the University. Therefore, if institutional approval is subject to conditions, then programme approval can only be granted conditionally at that point by the Approval Panel. Full programme approval can be confirmed once institutional approval is complete and any conditions specific to the programme(s) are satisfied.

Finalising the Academic Collaboration Agreement

Following institutional (and programme) approval, the Academic Collaboration Agreement will be finalised by AP and signed by the Vice-Chancellor/Deputy Vice-Chancellor and partner representative. CQO will arrange secure storage for the original agreement and will also update the University's Collaborative Provision Register by uploading to the Salesforce database.