

## **INSTITUTIONAL ALIGNMENT AND PARTNERSHIP APPROVAL PROCESS OVERVIEW**

### **1. OVERVIEW**

#### **1.1. Introduction to the institutional alignment and partnership approval process**

- 1.1.1. The procedures for the approval of new partnerships are informed by the Expectations and Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, in particular the Partnerships theme, which notes that:
- 1.1.2. Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure and that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.
- 1.1.3. Further advice and guidance is available from the Partnerships Team.

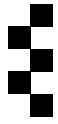
#### **1.2. Procedure for the approval of a new partnership arrangement**

- 1.2.1. There are four stages to the alignment process for new partnerships:
  - 1.2.1.1. Outline Approval: an evaluation of the strategic, financial, and legal/contractual aspects of the proposal to establish a prima facie case for proceeding with the partnership
  - 1.2.1.2. Alignment: an evaluation of the academic and quality assurance aspects of the proposal through mapping and collation of policies and procedure documents
  - 1.2.1.3. Panel: a discussion between the University of Essex, the partner institution and external panel members regarding the of the evidence and documentation provided
  - 1.2.1.4. Completion: the process is finalised with the signing of the completed legal agreement

### **2. OUTLINE APPROVAL**

#### **2.1. Overview of the outline approval stage**

- 2.1.1. The Partnerships Team works with the relevant Departments to undertake the early-stage evaluation, which should include:
  - 2.1.1.1. further discussions, internally and with the prospective partner institution, in order to assess the potential benefits and risks of the proposal to the University and alignment with the University's strategic aims
  - 2.1.1.2. initial due diligence checks to ensure that the organisation is reputable, financially sound, and has the legal capacity to enter a contractual arrangement (see due diligence checklist). For the proposal to proceed further, the outcome of the due diligence



checks must be approved by the Dean of Partnerships

- 2.1.2. Subject to the approval of the due diligence, the Partnerships Team in collaboration with the proposed partner, the relevant departments and Regional International Office will ensure that the following documentation is complete:
  - 2.1.2.1. Institutional Alignment Form – to provide rationale for proposing the new partnership and to detail how it aligns with the core mission of the University of Essex, being excellence in research and excellence in education. Referring also to the University of Essex Strategic Plan and the University’s Strategic Framework for Partnerships.
  - 2.1.2.2. Institutional Self-Evaluation Form – completed by the prospective partner to give an overview of their institution and provide their reasons for wanting to establish the partnership.
- 2.1.3. In addition, through liaison with the Director of Finance, a financial appraisal must be completed outlining the preliminary costings, tuition fees and the proposed agreement between the University of Essex and the partner. A financial model should be produced to summarise the financial risk and benefit of the proposed partnership.
- 2.1.4. Upon completion, the documents along with a summary of the financial model should be submitted to the Faculty Executive Deans and the Partnerships Advisory Group for information and to the Dean of Partnerships for approval<sup>1</sup>.

### **3. ALIGNMENT**

#### **3.1. Overview of the alignment stage**

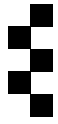
- 3.1.1. If approval is given, the proposal can proceed to the Alignment Stage - the format and requirements for this may vary depending on the nature of the arrangement under consideration, but typical arrangements for [validation or franchise partnerships](#) and [double or joint awards partnerships](#) are outlined below.

#### **3.2. Alignment for validation or franchise partnerships**

- 3.2.1. In establishing a new partnership, the University must assure itself that the prospective partner institution has the appropriate infrastructure to deliver HE courses and/or identify areas where input from the University is needed to ensure that the required standards of quality management and enhancement are established and maintained. The

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<sup>1</sup> Proposals initiated via broader institutional contact require approval by USG, following consultation with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Partnerships Team. Proposals initiated by individual departments, which are noted to normally involve an individual department, should be approved by the Faculty Executive Dean, as Chair of the Faculty Education Committee (FEC), following consultation with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Partnerships Team and may be referred to USG for further consideration and approval.



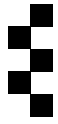
institutional alignment process enables the University to evaluate the proposed partner organisation's existing policies and procedures, particularly in those areas which underpin the subsequent approval of individual academic programmes, such as quality assurance and enhancement systems, HE resources and student support systems. Consideration is given to the institution's capacity to implement any necessary changes or additions to existing processes or resources.

### 3.2.2. Documentation requirements

- 3.2.2.1. The institutional alignment process requires documentary evidence of the partner institution's policies and procedures. The documentation checklist is available [here](#).
- 3.2.2.2. Documentation should be submitted to the Partnerships Team in an agreed electronic format at least six weeks in advance of the institutional alignment event. A briefing pack containing relevant documentation is sent to members of the institutional alignment panel at least three weeks in advance of the event.
- 3.2.2.3. For international proposals, all documentation should be submitted in English.
- 3.2.2.4. The University reserves the right to inspect students' work and to observe HE teaching at the prospective partner institution, at the discretion of the Chair of the institutional alignment panel.

### 3.3. Alignments for double or joint award partnerships

- 3.3.1. A double award is defined by the University as an arrangement whereby the University and one or more other awarding institution(s) together provide a programme leading to *separate awards* of both or all the institutions. Such arrangements usually involve accruing credit elsewhere. The University of Essex is individually responsible for the quality and standard of the award made in its name.
- 3.3.2. A joint award is defined by the University as an arrangement whereby the University and one or more other awarding institution(s) together provide a programme leading to *a joint award* of both, or all, institutions. Such arrangements usually involve accruing credit elsewhere.
- 3.3.3. The development of double or joint awards should normally only be considered where:
  - 3.3.3.1. degree awarding powers are held by all partner institutions, and, in the case of joint degrees, that the proposed partner institution(s) have the necessary legal powers to award a joint degree
  - 3.3.3.2. the University of Essex and the partner institution(s) already have successful provision in the subject area at an equivalent academic level
  - 3.3.3.3. the proposed partner institution(s) are compatible with the University of Essex in terms of institutional values and systems
- 3.3.4. the academic standards of the award will meet the University of Essex's



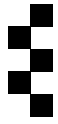
expectations in relation to relevant UK benchmarks (for example the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements), irrespective of the expectations of the partner institution(s).

- 3.3.5. The evaluation of the academic and quality assurance aspects of the proposal is undertaken at both institutional and course level, through an approval process which leads to the approval by Senate of both the partner institution and the double or joint award.
- 3.3.6. At institutional level, the approval process involves an evaluation of the proposed partner institution's academic infrastructure and existing policies and procedures, such as quality assurance systems, HE resources and student support systems. At course level, the process for approving a double or joint award involves evaluating the programme of study as a whole and the comparability and "fit" between components of the course undertaken at each institution, and determining whether the course as a whole, and the components within it, are of an equivalent academic standard to comparable modules/courses within the University and across the UK Higher Education sector as a whole. For provision at postgraduate research level, alignment with the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees should also be ensured. The Code is available online at: <https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies>
- 3.3.7. Where students are to be taught and assessed in a language other than English for the component of study at the partner institution, sufficient language preparation should be a pre-requisite for study at the partner institution, or alternatively this should be built into the course prior to study at the partner institution.
- 3.3.8. Documentation Requirements
  - 3.3.8.1. The approval process requires documentary evidence, written in English, of the prospective partner institution's suitability for the conduct of higher education programmes that result in the awarding of credit that contributes to the award. This should be produced by the relevant academic Department(s) in consultation with the proposed partner institution
  - 3.3.8.2. The documentation checklist is available [here](#).

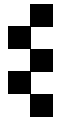
## 4. PANEL

### 4.1. Panels for validation and franchise partnerships

- 4.1.1. Discussions involve senior staff from both institutions and a decision is typically made following a series of formal and informal meetings, leading up to an institutional alignment event, which is normally held at the partner institution.
- 4.1.2. Panel membership is approved by the Dean of Partnerships on behalf of the Education Committee and typically comprises:
  - Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (Chair)
  - Dean of Partnerships (alternative Chair)



- external academic with appropriate experience in collaborative provision
  - Academic Registrar or nominee
  - The Deputy Director or Academic Services (Quality and Development) or nominee
  - a representative nominated by the proposed partner institution
  - a senior administrator from the Partnerships Team (Secretary)
- 4.1.3. The membership of the panel may be varied at the Chair's discretion. In the absence of one or more panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the alignment event should proceed is at the Chair's discretion.
- 4.1.4. The alignment event usually takes place over a full day and the agenda is based on a template which may be modified if appropriate for a specific alignment event. The institutional alignment event will normally include a tour of relevant facilities and panel members should normally meet with students and/or recent graduates of the prospective partner institution.
- 4.1.5. The Chair will normally commence by:
- explaining the purpose of the event
  - introducing panel members
  - confirming the agenda
  - explaining institutional alignment procedures and the responsibilities of the panel
  - identifying any collective or individual issues raised by panel members in relation to the alignment documentation.
- 4.1.6. Partner institution members of the institutional alignment panel are present for all the panel's discussions, except meetings with students and/or graduates of the institution under consideration.
- 4.1.7. The agenda will include one or more blocks of time in which the panel may discuss the proposed partnership in detail with members of the senior management team of the prospective partner institution, and in which members of the prospective partner institution will have the opportunity to respond to points raised. The Chair is responsible for highlighting positive aspects of the proposed partnership and raising issues in a constructive manner.
- 4.1.8. Towards the end of the event, the panel will meet to determine their recommendations. The Chair normally commences this private meeting of the panel by summarising the issues and the prospective partner institution's responses and they will conclude the meeting by agreeing the outcome of the event with the panel before inviting members of the prospective partner institution back for verbal feedback. A unanimous decision of the panel is required for the conclusion of the institutional alignment event.



4.1.9. During the feedback session, the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the partner institution of any conditions and/or recommendations for the partner institution and/or the University and/or the University and the partner institution jointly to action or to consider. A deadline will be set by which conditions and/or recommendations should be met and/or responded to, and the Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions and recommendations are circulated as soon as possible after the event.

- **Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the alignment panel, normally prior the commencement of the partnership
- **Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered, possibly after the partnership has commenced.
- The panel may also identify **commendations**, providing an opportunity to congratulate the institution on aspects of good practice.

4.1.10. Institutional alignment report

4.1.10.1. The secretary to the alignment panel will prepare a summary of the panel's discussions in the form of a report which will be circulated to panel members for confirmation. The report may include conditions and/or recommendations for the partner institution and/or the University and/or the partner institution and the University jointly to action or to consider.

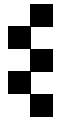
4.1.10.2. The Dean of Partnerships considers the institutional alignment report and makes a recommendation to Education Committee and Senate that the partnership be approved and a recommendation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee that any proposed courses be validated; approvals are subject to any conditions contained in the report being met.

4.1.11. Responding to conditions and recommendations

4.1.11.1. The institution should make a formal response to the institutional alignment report by the agreed deadline(s), evidencing how specific conditions have been met and addressing any recommendations. This response should be submitted to the alignment panel secretary for onward submission to the alignment panel chair. The Chair will review the response and decide whether the conditions have been met, in liaison with other panel members where necessary. The responses will be reported to Education Committee, Senate and Academic Quality and Standards Committee when the conditions have been met.

## 4.2. Panels for double and joint award partnerships

4.2.1. An approval panel is identified and approved by the Dean of Partnerships and typically comprises:



- Dean of Partnerships or nominee (Chair)
  - at least one external academic with relevant subject expertise
  - Deputy Dean Education of relevant Faculty
  - at least one member of the University's teaching staff from a cognate discipline area
  - one member external to the programme team concerned but internal to the partner institution
  - senior administrator from the Partnerships Team (Secretary).
- 4.2.2. The membership of the panel may be varied at the Chair's discretion.
- 4.2.3. The proposed partnership and double or joint award arrangement are evaluated by the panel either by correspondence or via a meeting of the panel held at the University, supported where appropriate by:
- one or more visits to the partner institution by representatives of the approval panel to view facilities and resources and meet with students
  - discussions with relevant members of the University Department(s) concerned.
  - The panel may request further information to be submitted by either the relevant University Department(s) or the partner institution at any stage in the approval process.
- 4.2.4. Institutional alignment report
- 4.2.4.1. The approval panel will determine whether the proposed partnership and double or joint award should be approved; any conditions and/or recommendations attached to approval for the University or the partner institution (or both) to action or consider; and the date when approval will commence. The panel's discussions will be summarised in a report of the approval panel which will be drafted by the panel secretary in liaison with the Chair and other members of the panel. A deadline will be set by which conditions and/or recommendations should be met and/or responded to.
- 4.2.4.2. The Dean of Partnerships and the relevant Faculty Education Committee consider the report and jointly make a recommendation to Education Committee and Senate that the partnership be approved and a recommendation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee that any proposed courses be validated; approvals are subject to any conditions contained in the report being met. The Partnerships Team will monitor subsequent progress against any conditions and recommendations contained within the report, in liaison with the relevant Faculty Dean. The responses will be reported to Education Committee, Senate and Academic Quality and Standards Committee when the conditions have been met.

## 5. COMPLETION

### 5.1. Overview of the completion stage

- 5.1.1. Following institutional alignment of a new partner institution, and before any courses commence under the arrangement, a formal legal agreement should be drafted by the Partnerships Team in consultation with relevant colleagues within the University and at the partner institution, drawing on advice from the University's solicitors as appropriate.
- 5.1.2. Formal collaboration agreements with partner institutions are subject to review at regular intervals, normally on a maximum of a five-year cycle, drawing on advice from the University's solicitors, to ensure currency and to continue to provide adequate safeguards for both parties.
- 5.1.3. The review may be brought forward when substantial changes to the partnership arrangement are proposed, for example changes to governance arrangements, significant amendment of the responsibilities of either party or institutional level changes to course delivery methods. Where deemed appropriate by the Dean of Partnerships, the review of the collaboration agreement may necessitate further institutional or course level alignment or review activity.

#### Document review information

Document owner	Partnerships Team
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