

Partner Approval Process Guidance 2024-25

1. Introduction

This Guidance is intended to inform University and potential partner colleagues of the processes that need to be undertaken in order for the University to approve a new partner.

This Guidance relates to approval of all new partners who it is intended will be involved in the delivery of a University of Liverpool award. It sets out the processes by which the University will approve and contract with a new proposed partner. The first stage will determine that the reputation, standing and strategic direction of a proposed new partner are deemed an appropriate fit with the University. The second stage applies only to taught provision, and will approve the programme(s)/provision to be delivered as part of the partnership.

A partnership is an arrangement:

- Where the achievement of the learning outcomes for a module or programme are dependent on arrangements made with (an) other delivery or support organisation(s)

Or

- Where the learning opportunities leading to or contributing to the award of academic credit or a qualification are delivered, assessed or supported through an arrangement with one or more organisations other than the University of Liverpool.

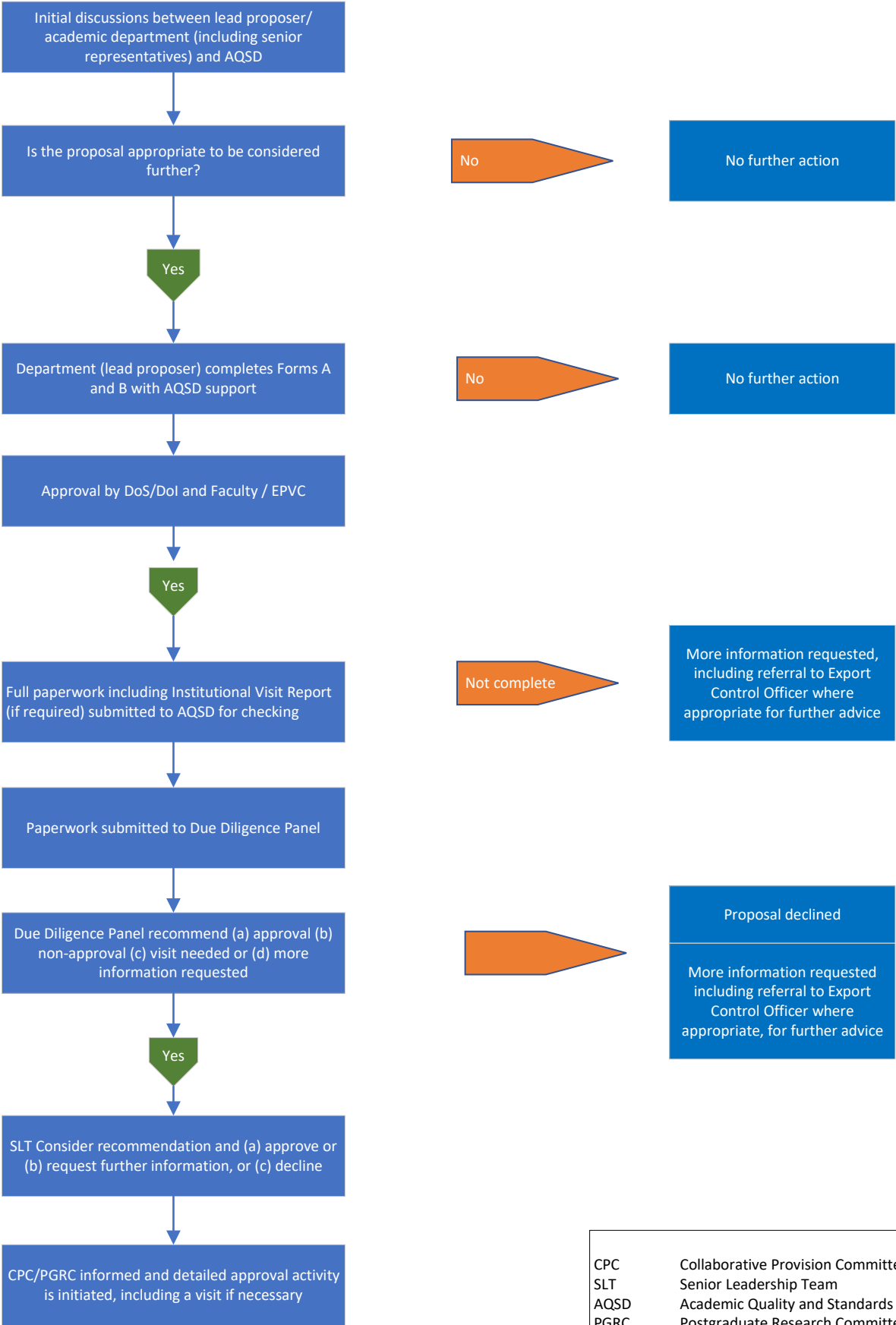
All of these arrangements would take into account external regulatory requirements.

2. New Partner Approval

Development and Approval Process

See flowchart below.

Approval Process for new university partners (teaching and research)



2.1 Strategic Fit

The strategic fit of a partner will be assessed as part of the due diligence process. AQSD and the Department/School/Faculty will work together to establish whether there is a strategic fit between the proposed partner and the University; this should be assessed against the Strategic Plan. This will include checks with the British Council (where appropriate), a web search and consideration of other sources of information. This information will be used to complete Form A: New Partner Proposal and Due Diligence and Form B: Business Case for the Approval of a New Partnership Arrangement.

2.2 Due Diligence

Due diligence is the process of examining the financial, legal and resource underpinning of an organisation as one of the first steps towards establishing a partnership. It is needed to reduce the risk to the University of failure of any partnership ventures. Due diligence is the process by which inquiries are conducted for the purpose of timely, sufficient and accurate disclosure of all information and documents needed to inform the decision making of the University.

All proposed partners will be subject to due diligence activity, although the extent of the due diligence will be defined through a risk-based approach. Not all partner activity will need to be approved by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), as shown in the information in the relevant taxonomy.

The responsibility for obtaining the appropriate documentation rests with the lead proposer in the department, School or Faculty, supported and guided by AQSD. All proposals must have a named lead proposer.

The documentation needed to complete this process is detailed in Forms A and B. On completion of these forms, all paperwork will be submitted, via AQSD to the Due Diligence Panel (DDP). It is possible to submit the Forms A and B separately to the DDP, although this will lengthen the process, as appropriate programme level approval (where required) cannot begin until the partnership has been approved. All supporting documentation will need to be presented in English. Faculties/Schools/ Institutes will need to arrange appropriate authorised translations if necessary.

Major strategic partnerships, e.g. a new overseas campus, may submit different due diligence information which will be evaluated at DDP.

The DDP will make the following recommendations to SLT:

- that the partnership be approved;
- that the partnership not be approved;
- that a visit is needed (see 2.3) before a recommendation can be made.

All decisions of SLT will be reported to DDP, CPC and PGRC as appropriate.

Major strategic partnerships will be referred on by SLT to Senate and Council for approval.

2.3 Institutional Level Visit to partner

Unless advised otherwise by AQSD, a visit is required as a further element of the due diligence process, a successful outcome is needed for the programme proposal to continue. The discussions at the visit will be institutional and programme related, but will not involve specific programme approval.

The overall purpose of the visit is to gather further information that has not been evident or forthcoming from the received paperwork, to assure the University that the proposed partner is an organisation of good standing who will ensure a high-quality educational experience for students and that there are no significant factors that will impact on the student experience or the University's ability to manage the partnership. The visit is a fact-finding process for both partners; it is not the approval of a specific academic programme.

The visit should involve at least two members of staff from the University, usually including a relevant AQSD representative and a senior member of academic staff from outside the Faculty proposing the partnership. Staff invited to act as Panel members for Institutional Level Visits should have knowledge and experience of collaborative provision and experience of the University's quality assurance processes. The agenda for the day will involve discussions with senior management of the proposed partner, together with scrutiny of relevant documentation, where appropriate. It may be appropriate for a member of academic staff from the proposing School/Institute to attend in order to assess the learning environment, including the suitability of any subject-specific facilities and resources.

The requirements for the visit will initially be identified by the decision of the DDP. This includes a decision regarding panel membership, which will be based on the risk analysis of the partner and will take into account experience of the partner in dealing with higher education and the level of the programmes under consideration, e.g. undergraduate, levels 4, 5 or 6, postgraduate level 7 or PGR.

It is recognised that there is potentially a wide variety of possible institutions with which the University could develop partnerships. Therefore, the exact details of an agenda will vary according to the nature of the partner and prior experience with partners of a similar profile. Hence, it is a risk-based approach and will focus on areas that may pose the greatest risk to the University.

The Institutional Level Visit report template should be completed, either by a nominated Secretary or by a member of the Panel, and returned to AQSD for submission to DDP for further consideration of the proposed partnership.

3. Programme approval

3.1 Taxonomy of Partnerships and approval processes

The University has defined various models of partnership and the type of approval activity needed before an academic programme can run.

For taught provision, the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) will confirm the model and the activity to take place once SLT has approved the partnership to go ahead.

After approval of a new taught partner has been recorded at CPC, the appropriate approval activity for taught provision, as suggested by the taxonomy, will be confirmed and the programme approval process will begin. The approval process for new PGR partnerships concludes once DDP approval has been given. Sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 of this guidance are relevant only to taught partnerships.

3.2 Programme Level Academic Visit

If a visit to the partner is needed as part of the academic programme approval process, i.e. to look at the curriculum, teaching facilities and learning resources or for a full approval event, this will already have been approved as part of the partner approval process or as part of the activity stipulated in the taxonomy.

Where the visit has taken place as part of the partnership approval activity, AQSD will ensure that the visit report is considered at DDP before further programme approval activity commences. Where a further visit is needed, this should be conducted before full programme approval has been undertaken.

3.3 Planning meeting

If a visit is not required, a planning meeting should be convened to agree the appropriate timescales and activity leading to approval. AQSD will coordinate the planning meeting and ensure the correct approval activity is undertaken. Where possible, a partner should be involved in the planning meeting, using video-conferencing if necessary.

3.4 Approval activity

Where a programme approval visit is not necessary and a programme is a wholly UoL delivered programme, the approval process will follow that of internal programmes, detailed here:

[Programme and Module Approval - Academic Quality and Standards Division - University of Liverpool](#)

The University Approval Panel will report back to CPC to confirm approval of collaborative programmes.

4. Contracts/Agreements

AQSD will prepare the contractual agreement. For taught programmes, contract drafting will commence whilst approval activity is on-going, though no contracts will be signed until full partnership and programme approval has been given. For PGR programmes, contract drafting will begin once DDP approval is given. Discussions and commentary from the partner will be on-going in the preparation of the contract/agreements.

Following confirmation that a taught programme has been approved, the contractual agreement can be signed. Contracts can only be signed by a senior member of the University, this will normally be the Vice Chancellor or designated alternate signatory (SLT member).

Programme delivery cannot take place until the contractual agreement has been signed by both parties. Contractual agreements will have a review point, which normally mirrors that of the programme review period.

5. Additional programmes with an existing partner

For the addition of new programmes with an existing partner, the appropriate programme approval process as identified in the relevant taxonomy needs to be completed. An additional appendix for programme level details will be added to the contract.

A further visit may be required, at programme level, to ensure the facilities and resources are commensurate with requirements for the subject area.

For some strategic partnerships, or for collaborations involving more than one institution, bespoke approval activity, such as Joint Validation Events, may be agreed.

6. Exit and Closure

Where the decision has been made to close a programme or partnership, a closure meeting should be held to discuss an appropriate exit strategy to protect the student experience and, where relevant, to confirm teach out arrangements. The meeting should include appropriate Faculty and central professional services staff and partner representatives, in person or via video-conferencing.

Notes from the closure meeting for taught programmes should be received at CPC and PGR closure meeting notes shall be received at PGRC. An exit strategy will be agreed as part of the closure meeting.

7. Annual Monitoring Process

The annual monitoring process to be used will be that identified within the appropriate taxonomy. Partnerships that require an annual monitoring visit are shown in the relevant taxonomy. Information on UoL's collaborative partnership annual monitoring processes is available via the Monitoring/ Management section of the following web page:

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/aqsd/collaborative-provision/policies-and-procedures/>

8. Periodic review of Programmes and Partnership

The collaborative partnership review and renewal processes to be used will be those identified within the relevant taxonomy. Partnerships that require an institutional visit for renewal of the partnership are shown in the corresponding taxonomy.