

# PARTNERSHIP APPROVAL AND RENEWAL

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The University is mindful that the [Office for Students conditions relating to quality and standards](#) apply to all provision leading to an Oxford Brookes award, irrespective of where or how programmes of study are delivered and who delivers them. This section of the Quality & Standards Handbook covers the procedures for:
- approval of new partnerships, through LPAG
  - review and renewal of existing partnerships, through LPAG
  - improvement action planning, where there have been breaches of quality expectations
- The processes for the approval and revalidation of collaborative delivery arrangements are set out in the [new programme approval](#) and the [programme changes and revalidation](#) chapters of the Quality & Standards Handbook.
- 1.2 The procedures for negotiation, approval and management of collaborative partnerships therefore aim to ensure that:
- the selection of partners is based on clear criteria, and on thorough due diligence enquiries;
  - collaborative arrangements are fully costed and risk assessed; and consideration of the financial and business aspects of partnership proposals is separated from that of academic delivery and the quality of learning opportunities provided;
  - written agreements and related documentation clearly sets out the rights and responsibilities of the University and its partners in respect of the specified arrangements;
  - the University is able to ensure that the academic standards of any awards made in its name meet the expectations of the UK higher education sector, as articulated in the UK Quality Code, national or international qualifications frameworks, and any relevant subject/professional benchmarks;
  - the University can assure itself that the quality of learning opportunities offered by a partner organisation is of a high quality and enables students to achieve the standards (including, where relevant, the professional standards) required for the award to which the collaborative programme leads;
  - students receive accurate and comprehensive information about their programme of study and the award to which it leads.
- 1.3 In the design of its procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of its collaborative partnerships and provision, the University recognises - and seeks to manage - the risks associated with the devolution of responsibilities for managing quality and standards to, or sharing these responsibilities with, a partner. However, while recognising the risks involved, the University also wishes to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits associated with entering into collaborative arrangements, such as widening participation in higher education, securing market advantages, and developing good relationships with other educational establishments, professional bodies, employers, etc, in the UK and internationally.

**Please refer to other [guidance on collaborative provision](#):**

G5.1 provides information about common models of collaborative provision and the risks associated with them.

G5.2 provides advice on carrying out academic due diligence on a proposed partner organisation.

G5.3a/b sets out the methodology to be followed when completing a risk register for collaborative partnership proposals (in the CPPF/CPRF).

G5.4 a flowchart showing the routes for approval of different types of collaborative provision

G5.5 Liaison Manager role descriptor

G5.6 Liaison Manager's guide (ACP)

The University's register of collaborative provision can be found on the [APQO website](#).

## 2 NEW PARTNER APPROVAL

- 2.1 The partnership approval process is the means by which the University establishes the market demand, strategic fit and financial viability for a proposed new collaborative arrangement, and satisfies itself that a proposed new partner:
- is in good financial health and has the appropriate legal standing to enter into the proposed partnership;
  - has an educational ethos that is consistent with the University's strategic priorities;
  - has in place an appropriate governance framework for maintaining academic standards and quality, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
  - has the facilities and resources to provide a high quality higher education learning environment;
  - has the ability to market the programme appropriately.
- 2.2 Approval for entering into new collaborative partnerships must be sought from the Learning Partnerships Advisory Group (LPAG). The terms of reference and membership, and meeting dates, are available via the [Governance Hub](#). The committee meets approximately six times per year, and the executive authority for decision-making rests with the Chair (via a delegation from the Vice-Chancellor), who acts on the advice of the members of the Group. LPAG receives an annual report on the financial performance of all current partnerships, including the outcomes of refreshed financial due diligence enquiries; and provides an annual report on its activities to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors.
- 2.3 Project teams should work with their Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer to ensure that new partnership proposals - or proposals to extend the scope of arrangements with existing partners - are prepared for LPAG approval in sufficient time to allow for the further detailed development of the proposed arrangements and completion of the academic approval process, before the first intake of students.

### Collaborative Provision Proposal Forms

- 2.4 Formal proposals for new partnerships are presented to LPAG on the appropriate Collaborative Provision Proposal Form (CPPF - see below), which provides the Group with details of:
- the legal, financial and academic standing of the prospective partner;
  - the proposed collaborative programme arrangements, and who will be responsible for their development and management;
  - the business case and financial model which will support the proposal;
  - the risk register for the proposed provision.
- 2.5 There are [several CPPF forms](#), tailored for the approval of different types of collaborative arrangements, as follows:
- CPPF 1** (template T5.1) is to be completed in the case of proposals (including 'short courses') relating to prospective new partners (UK or international), or to the extension of arrangements with existing partners who do not belong to the Associate College Partnership. The CPPF 1 must be accompanied by a full business plan.
  - CPPF 2** (template T5.2) should be completed for any proposals relating to current members of the Associate College Partnership. Members of the ACP are considered to have a 'highly trusted status' as a consequence of the maturity of the relationships between these partner colleges and the University. The initial approval process for the addition of new provision therefore involves a shorter submission to LPAG, since the partners are well known to the University, and a standard financial model is in place. A business plan is not required for proposals that conform to this model: however, CPPF2 forms should be accompanied by a detailed business plan for proposals that do not conform to the standard model. Where a new programme is proposed for delivery by more than one ACP partner, a separate CPPF2 form must be completed for each college.

- iii. **CPPF 3** (template T5.3) should be completed for proposals relating only to articulation or credit rating arrangements (i.e. there is no associated validation or franchise arrangement). A full business plan is not needed with CPPF3, but a template is available on which proposers should provide a summary of the likely costs and income associated with the arrangement. The CPPF is used both for the approval of new and the renewal of existing credit rating or articulation arrangements.
- 2.6 The CPPF and business case templates, and guidance on carrying out due diligence enquiries and risk assessments, are available from the APQO website (see guidance notes G5.1, G5.2, G5.3a/b); and the Faculty link QAO can advise on their completion. The PDT chair is responsible for completing the CPPF form, drawing on information provided by the prospective partner, which should be checked in consultation with relevant Brookes colleagues outside the Faculty (as shown in each section of the form) in order to ensure that the information presented is sufficiently independent and comprehensive.

## **Collaborative research degrees**

- 2.7 Proposals for collaborative research degree programmes leading to a dual or joint award with another degree-awarding body should be presented to the Research Degrees Committee on the RDC Collaborative PhD Proposal Form (template T5-12 – advice on its completion is available from the Research Degrees Team), once approval has been obtained from the Faculty Head of Finance & Planning and the Faculty Executive Group. When approval has been given by RDC, this form is submitted to LPAG, accompanied by a note of RDC's conclusions and recommendations, and their analysis of the key risks associated with the proposed arrangements. LPAG will assess the proposal and, if satisfied that appropriate due diligence has been carried out, the Chair will give authorisation for the contract to be drawn up (*NOTE: joint PhD studentships are not subject to this process*). Ongoing monitoring of the arrangements is the responsibility of RDC.

## **Preparing a partnership proposal – due diligence**

- 2.8 The project leader (or a representative from the PDT) must visit the prospective partner in advance of submitting a proposal to LPAG, to assess their ability to support the programme/s of study which will lead to the proposed Brookes award/s (through, for example, viewing their facilities and learning resources, meeting with academic staff, and sampling assessed student work) and to seek outline agreement on the financial arrangements. In the case of a new international partner, it should be established at this stage that they will be able to make payments to Brookes in Sterling, US Dollars or Euro. The visit will also be useful for collecting information to complete the CPPF – at this stage, project leaders should also consult with colleagues in the Directorate of Academic & Student Administration, and the UK Partnerships or Brookes Global team (as appropriate), and with their Associate Dean Strategy & Development and Faculty Head of Finance & Planning. **Please read guidance note G5.2 for advice on carrying out academic due diligence enquiries.**
- 2.9 During this consultation phase, a letter of intention to collaborate or Memorandum of Understanding may be drafted using the template available on the APQO website (template T5.10), but the partner is not permitted to publish any statements which might imply that the proposed provision has been approved, or to use the University's logo in any promotional publications. Advice should be sought from the Associate Dean Education & Student Experience and link QAO at this stage, in order to agree a timescale for completion of the approval process.

## **Preparing a partnership proposal - assessing the risks**

- 2.10 Please also read [guidance notes G5.3a/b](#). A risk assessment template is an integral element of all CPPF and CPRF forms, and advice should be sought from the Associate Dean (Strategy & Development) for the proposing Faculty on completing this element of the form. The ADSD will assist the project leader in assessing the severity of the risks associated with the proposal, and with the production of risk improvement action plans (template T5.13) for all risks rated M/H, H/M or H/H before submission to Faculty Executive and LPAG. The ADSD may also require the PDT to produce risk improvement plans for risks rated M/M and below, if they consider it necessary in the context of the proposal.
- 2.11 All risk improvement action plans must be submitted to LPAG with the CPPF/CPRF. On consideration of the documentation, LPAG may make recommendations about the Faculty's

assessment of the risks associated with the development of the proposed arrangements, and ask for adjustments to be made or additional risk improvement plans to be produced.

## **Faculty Executive Group approval**

- 2.12 All proposals for new collaborative arrangements must be approved by the PVC/Dean of Faculty - usually through the Faculty Executive Group - prior to submission to LPAG. They must consider the completed CPPFs and business plans, and satisfy themselves that comprehensive due diligence enquiries have been made, and realistic assessments of the potential risks and likely exit options (including the costs) have been carried out. Due diligence enquiries are not required for new proposals with existing Associate College Partnership members, but the Faculty Executive must be satisfied that there is a robust analysis of the likely market demand for the new provision.
- 2.13 The Faculty Executive must approve the CPPF and business plan, including the membership of the Project Development Team, which should be established prior to submission to LPAG. If the Faculty Executive considers that the information contained in the form is insufficient, they should return it to the PDT for further work (assisted by the Associate Dean Strategy & Development) before any consideration may be given to the proposal at institutional level. The Faculty approval stage should involve a careful consideration of the risk assessment for a new collaborative arrangement, especially where:
- delivery is not in the UK;
  - delivery and/or assessment is in a language other than English;
  - elements of the programme are delivered or supported by a third party, e.g. placements/work-based learning;
  - the programme will be accredited by a professional body, and there is a professional body aspect to assessment;
  - Brookes does not have academic expertise in the discipline.
- 2.14 Faculty Executive Groups should ensure that business plans take account of any potential impact of the risks identified in the CPPF on the costs of the partnership arrangements. They should also ensure that the costs of the following (if applicable) have been appropriately considered:
- the entitlements of partner students to Brookes resources and facilities;
  - any teaching provided by Brookes staff;
  - exit options.

## **Learning Partnerships Advisory Group approval**

- 2.15 The CPPF, once approved by the Faculty Executive and signed off by the PVC/Dean, should be submitted to the secretary of LPAG – copied to the Faculty’s link QAO - for circulation to members. The PDT chair, Head of Department, Faculty Head of Finance & Planning, and proposed Liaison Manager (if not the PDT chair) will be invited to attend the meeting at which their proposal is discussed, in order to assist LPAG in making their decision by providing additional information or clarification about aspects of the proposal. The Associate Deans (Strategy & Development) are members of LPAG, and may also take part in the discussion of proposals originating from their Faculty.
- 2.16 LPAG members will assess proposals against the University’s partnership criteria (UK or International, as appropriate) and consider the rationale and business case presented. The Chair – with due regard to the University’s statutory responsibility to safeguard the standards of its awards - will exercise their discretion to either:
- approve the proposal to proceed to approval of the academic delivery arrangements via the appropriate process;
  - refer the proposal back to the Faculty for further development and re-submission (either for consideration by the full committee or for approval by the Chair only);
  - or - where it demonstrates insufficient fit with the University’s strategies and policies, and is considered to present an unacceptably high level of risk - reject the proposal.
- 2.17 LPAG may highlight issues relating to the proposed delivery arrangements for further exploration by the academic approval or review panel, in which case the LPAG secretary will bring this to the attention of the PDT chair when LPAG’s decision is communicated to them.

- 2.18 The approval of a new collaborative partnership is not complete until an appropriate University panel has formally approved the delivery of the proposed collaborative programme/s (as set out in the programme approval chapter of the Quality & Standards Handbook). Once any conditions of approval have been met to the panel's satisfaction, the legal contract will be finalised, and recruitment and delivery may commence.

### **3 PARTNERSHIP RENEWAL**

- 3.1 Partnership agreements are normally signed for a maximum period of five years (unless a longer contractual period is agreed in order to meet relevant national regulatory requirements), at which point a resubmission to LPAG is required, in order to refresh the due diligence enquiries and confirm that the partnership still fits with current strategic priorities. If LPAG approval is given for the continuation of the partnership, this is followed by a programme review and revalidation exercise, which must have a successful outcome to allow continued recruitment to the programme/s delivered by the partner, and renewal of the legal contract.

#### **Timing of revalidation**

- 3.2 The standard length of contract for all types of collaborative arrangements is five years, but an approval or review and revalidation panel has the discretion to set a shorter approval period if they consider that the partner's capacity to meet the criteria for approval is limited and requires an early review. There is also provision for carrying out a review and revalidation earlier than the full term of approval, where:
- the University programme (where there is equivalent on-campus provision) undergoes revision;
  - the partner revises their programme (in the case of validation, credit rating or articulation arrangements);
  - student performance data, or other evidence, gives cause for concern about academic standards on the partner programme;
  - there are changes to national permissions and regulations, or to professional body requirements, that impact significantly on the operation of the programme.
- 3.3 The five-yearly revalidation and renewal of collaborative provision is a two-stage process, through which the University:
- i. reviews (via LPAG) individual partnership arrangements, through refreshed due diligence enquiries, assessments of ongoing market demand and re-negotiated financial agreements, prior to the renewal of a contract;
  - ii. assures itself (via a validation panel) of the security of the academic standards of programmes of study which are delivered through partnership arrangements and lead to Oxford Brookes awards; and that a high quality learning experience is being provided by the partner organisation, enabling students to achieve good outcomes.
- 3.4 Revalidation should usually take place at least 15 months prior to the expiry of the contract, since permission to recruit to the collaborative programme/s is suspended in the last year of the contract, pending a successful outcome of the approval exercise. This is so that no students may be recruited for a start date beyond the date of expiry of the current contract until a satisfactory review and revalidation has taken place, in order to allow time to change or terminate the partnership without prejudicing existing applicants. However, this may vary according to the frequency of intakes, and the recruitment cycle, for different partnerships, and advice on the timing of the review and revalidation should be sought from the Faculty link QAO. The renewal of the contract between the University and the partner is dependent on the satisfactory resolution of all conditions set by the revalidation panel.

#### **Timing of reviews for groups of programmes or delivery partners (e.g. ACP, institutional partnerships)**

- 3.5 New programmes are often added to a partner organisation's portfolio of provision leading to Oxford Brookes awards as the partnership develops and strengthens. Individual legal agreements are drawn up to cover each programme (or group of programmes approved at the same time)\*, so they are not required to follow the same five-year cycle, unless a shorter initial period of approval is applied to new additions to the portfolio for the purpose of synchronising the reviews. It is therefore likely that programmes delivered by the same partner will be subject to periodic review at different times;

however, a CPRF submission to LPAG is required for each programme (or cognate group of programmes) as they become due for review - even if other programmes in the portfolio have recently been reviewed - so that LPAG can take a view on the market demand and business case for each aspect of the portfolio with that partner.

- 3.6 \*NOTE: 'umbrella' agreements were introduced for each ACP partner from 2018-19, with all programmes delivered by each college being subsumed into the single agreement as they complete their five yearly reviews. However, programmes will remain on their existing revalidation cycle under the umbrella contracts.
- 3.7 It is also possible that the same provision may be delivered by a number of partner organisations: this is especially the case within the ACP. It is desirable that these programmes should be reviewed at the same time for all partners involved in its delivery, in case curriculum changes are required in order to maintain currency.

## **Stage 1: Review of the partnership**

- 3.8 Partnership review focuses on the track record of the partnership and its future direction and sustainability, as well as the mechanisms in place to enable the ongoing management of the delivery and quality assurance of the programmes of study involved. If a contract is to be renewed at the end of its five year approval period, LPAG approval for continuation of the collaborative arrangements must be sought prior to carrying out the quinquennial revalidation of the provision. A submission to LPAG is not required if the contract is not to be renewed, as the provisions of the current contract will remain in force while existing students – i.e. recruited prior to the expiry date - complete their studies. However, the programme/s must still undergo a review in order to ensure that standards and quality are maintained for the remaining students during the teach-out period.
- 3.9 Articulation arrangements should also be reviewed every five years – this exercise should be carried out as part of the programme review and revalidation to which entry is granted, if that programme is also delivered by the same partner. If the articulation arrangement guarantees entry to an on-campus programme, the review may be combined with the review and revalidation of the home programme, if the timescales coincide.

## **Collaborative Provision Renewal Forms**

- 3.10 Renewal proposals must be submitted to LPAG on the appropriate [Collaborative Partnership Renewal Form](#), as follows:
- i. **CPRF 1** (template T5.4) - for renewal of arrangements with existing International or UK partners who do not belong to the Associate College Partnership.
  - ii. **CPRF 2** (template T5.5) - for renewal of arrangements with current members of the Associate College Partnership.
  - iii. **CPRF 3** (template T5.3) for the approval of new and the renewal of existing articulation or credit rating (only) arrangements.
- 3.11 The CPRF primarily focuses on refreshing the financial, legal and academic due diligence enquiries and analysing the track record of the partnership since it was last approved or renewed. LPAG will assess the recruitment to the programme/s over the previous five years and consider whether convincing evidence of a continuing market for the provision is presented in the CPRF; and they will consider whether the partnership still fits with Faculty and University strategic priorities. Proposals for the renewal of the partnership are also subject to the risk assessment requirements as new proposals, as set out in 2.10 and 2.11 above, and in guidance note G5.3a/b.
- 3.12 Stage 2 of the renewal process – revalidation of the academic delivery arrangements - is carried out in line with the processes described in the [programme approval](#) chapter of the Quality & Standards Handbook.

## 4 BREACHES OF CONTRACT: IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLANNING

- 4.1 The Improvement Action Planning process should be used to address instances where the quality of collaborative provision falls significantly below the expectations set out in the Operations Manual, which is the primary reference point relating to the management and delivery of a collaborative programme. This process provides an opportunity to resolve the problems in a collaborative way before a suspension notice is issued. It is intended to enable a dialogue between the Oxford Brookes Faculty and the partner organisation, in order to agree on an appropriate and timely course of action and hence to protect the interests of students on the programmes involved.

### Escalating quality issues

- 4.2 There are a range of quality assurance mechanisms currently in place in order to monitor the quality of collaborative arrangements, and address any issues that arise. In terms of lines of accountability, Liaison Managers report to Faculty AESC/QLICs on a regular basis (in some faculties, this is via a Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee or Liaison Managers' Forum), and FAESC/QLICs also receive approval and review panel reports, and annual review - including external examiners' - reports. The Chair of the FAESC/QLIC is a member of the Faculty Executive, and, where an academic quality issue identified through one of these reporting mechanisms cannot be resolved by the FAESC/QLIC within a reasonable period of time (or continues to recur at intervals), this is the route by which it should be escalated to the Faculty Executive.
- 4.3 At this point, the Faculty Executive should make a decision on whether to initiate the improvement action plan process. A working group of University and Partner staff (as listed below) should be convened in order to draw up an improvement action plan, to ensure there is a shared understanding of the issues, and to agree on the appropriate resolution and timeframe. The group should be chaired by the Faculty ADESE or ADSD, and should include:
- Liaison Manager for the programme under consideration (*Brookes*)
  - Programme Manager for the programme under consideration (*Partner*)
  - Faculty ADSD (*Brookes*)
  - Faculty ADESE or Head of QA & Validations (*Brookes*)
  - Head of UK Partnerships & Apprenticeships (*Brookes*)
  - HE Manager, or equivalent (*Partner*)
  - Principal's nominee, equivalent to ADESE or PVCSE (*Partner*)
  - Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer (*Brookes*)
  - Other representatives from Brookes or the Partner, as appropriate to the issues being considered.

### Drawing up action plans

- 4.4 The outcome of this dialogue should be an action plan to address the issues within an agreed timescale, such that there will be minimal impact on the student experience. As part of this process, the group may also wish to consider how tuition fee income could be utilised more effectively in order to address the current issues and enhance the student experience. The action plan drawn up by the working group should clearly outline: the key issues, the action/s required to address them, the individuals responsible for each action, the deadline by which each action should be implemented, and the criteria for judging whether they have been successful. The risks associated with not implementing each action (i.e. the impact on current students and applicants) should also be assessed and recorded.
- 4.5 If the outcome of the working group discussion is that it is not possible to achieve the required quality of delivery within a reasonable timescale, a decision may be made to suspend recruitment to the programme while the issues are addressed. This decision should, ideally, be by mutual agreement; however, where there is a disagreement between the University and the Partner, the University reserves the right to issue a suspension notice.

## **Reporting on progress**

- 4.6 The action plan drawn up by the working group should be approved by the Faculty AESC/QLIC and reported to the Faculty Executive. The University Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee and LPAG should also be notified of any programmes being placed under an improvement action plan. The working group should continue to meet to ensure the implementation of the action plan, providing updates on progress for each meeting of the Faculty AESC/QLIC. The plan is monitored in this way by the Faculty AESC/QLIC, and the Faculty Executive should be notified once the action plan has been completed to the satisfaction of the working group and Faculty AESC/QLIC. The improvement notice may then be lifted, and the University QLIC and LPAG should be notified of this.
- 4.7 The Faculty AESC/QLIC should report any missed deadlines for satisfactory implementation of actions to the Faculty Executive. The Chair of the Faculty AESC/QLIC will advise the Faculty Executive on whether acceptable alternative arrangements have been put in place and, if not, the Faculty Executive may issue a suspension notice. The University QLIC should be notified if an improvement action plan is escalated in this way.
- 4.8 The improvement action plan procedures should be managed between the Faculty and the Partner concerned, through the working group; with notification of progress to QLIC and LPAG. However, if an issue cannot be resolved through these measures, the Faculty may refer it to the Vice-Chancellor's Group for further advice.