

Office of Quality, Standards
and Partnerships



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL
Academic Partnerships

SECTION 07

Introduction

This document summarises the University's processes for partnership approval, monitoring and review. The University's overall approach to Quality Assurance is detailed fully in Quality Assurance Manual Section 01 – *General Principles and Quality Assurance Policy*.

The University has a duty to ensure that its responsibility for standards and quality is discharged effectively through its procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of academic partnerships. In doing this it seeks to ensure that due account is taken of:

- Appropriate external reference points, including:
 - The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015.
 - The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).
 - The QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and its underpinning Advice and Guidance
 - Relevant QAA guidance such as qualification characteristics and country reports.
 - Guidance on institutional status and comparability statements from the UK NARIC database.
 - Requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), employers and any relevant national legislation/national commitments to European and international processes.
- The compatibility of partnership proposals and developments with institutional goals and the Strategic Plan, and in particular the Academic Partnerships Policy and the University's Internationalisation Strategy.
- Strategic, academic and resource planning.
- Existing provision within the institution, including any existing awards that may be offered jointly with other institutions.
- The level of risk involved in each approval and the optimal level of resource necessary to ensure that the required outcomes of the partnership are achieved.

The University distinguishes between two types of academic partnership - Cooperation and Collaboration - which both require signed agreements between the University and its Partner.

Collaboration - is the delivery by a partner of any part of a programme of study leading to an award of the University or award for which the University is responsible.

Cooperation - does not involve delivery by a partner of any part of a programme of study leading to an award of the University. Cooperation may include, but is not limited to, activities such as international study opportunities or progression arrangements, including those which allow for advanced entry to University programmes.

Further details on these categories can be found in the University's Academic Partnerships Policy.

The standing of any partner should be consistent with the requirements of the University's Academic Partnerships Policy, Strategic Plan and Internationalisation Strategy.

In working with Partners, the University is responsible for:

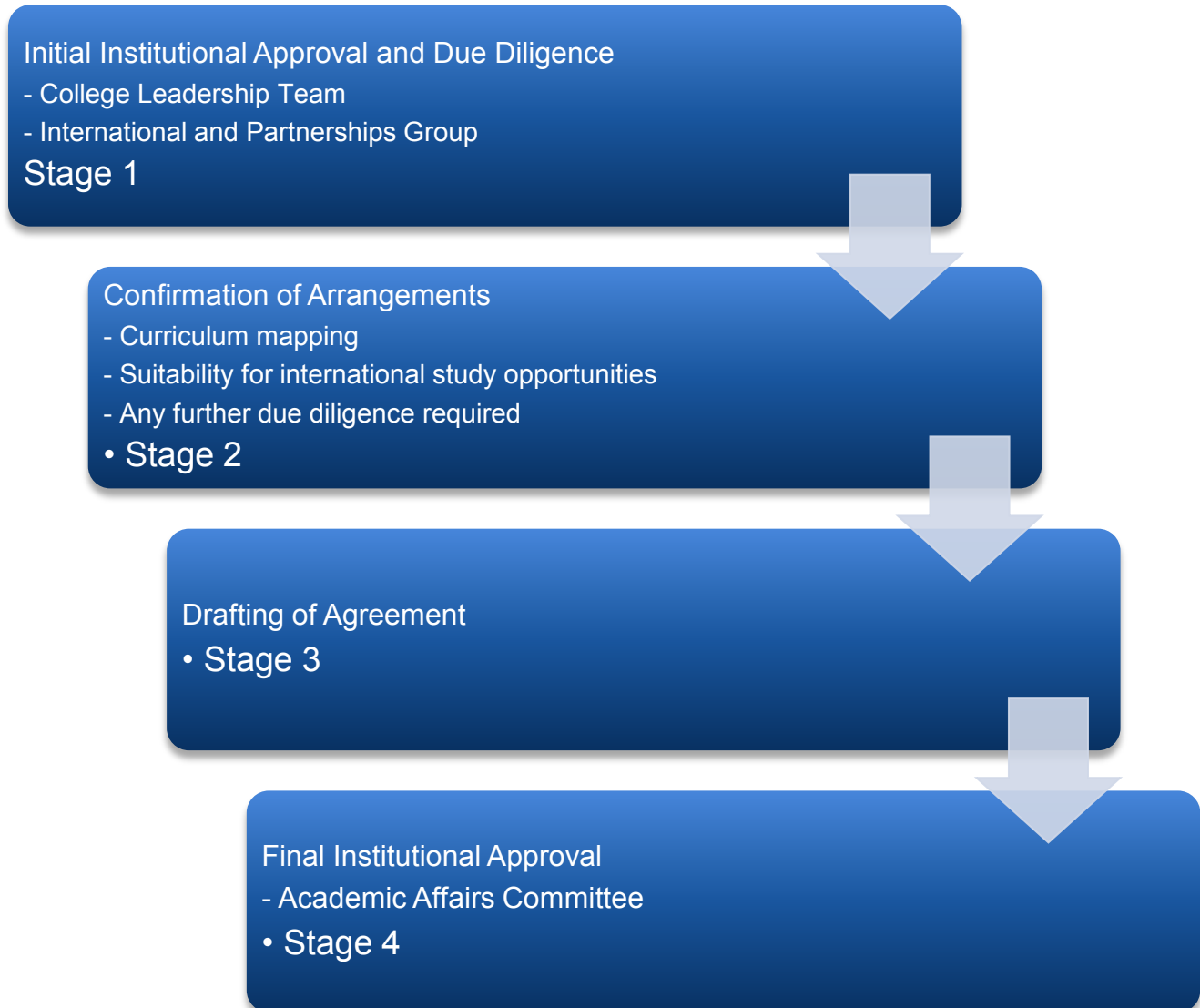
- The academic quality and standards, and the quality of learning opportunities, of all awards made in its name, including those delivered jointly with another institution.
- Conducting appropriate and sufficient due diligence.
- The drafting and management of all partnership agreements, including maintaining an authoritative record of all academic partnerships entered into by the University.
- Ensuring that partner staff engaged in delivery of a collaborative programme are appropriately qualified for their role.
- Appointing the External Examiners for all University programmes, including those delivered jointly with another institution.
- Maintaining its authority for awarding certificates and transcripts relating to the programmes of study delivered through collaborative arrangements.
- Ensuring that it has effective oversight over the accuracy of all published information relating to its collaborative provision, such as promotional material and programme information or guidance on the appropriate channels for student complaints and appeals.

As part of their agreement with the University, both UK and International Partners are responsible for:

- Ensuring that all required University processes to ensure academic quality and standards are implemented within the partner institution, including participating fully in the University's annual monitoring and periodic academic review processes.

- Working with the University to meet the requirements of all reviews, audits or thematic enquiries conducted by the QAA or other statutory body.
- Working with the University to ensure that the terms and conditions originally approved at the time of validation, centre approval and approval to deliver continue to be met, and informing the University promptly should there be any material changes.
- Ensuring that all public information is accurate and reliable in relation to University of Lincoln programmes, and that students have key information about their programme including the programme specification approved by the University of Lincoln.
- Ensuring that the information made available to students includes guidance on the appropriate channels for student complaints and appeals.

Cooperative Partnership Approval Stages



For the efficient and timely approval of partnerships Stages 2 and 3 will usually run concurrently.

Collaborative Partnership Approval Stages

Initial Institutional Approval and Due Diligence

- College Leadership Team
- International and Partnerships Group

Stage 1

Production of Centre Approval Documents

Stage 2

Centre Approval/Approval to Deliver Event

- Any further due diligence required

Stage 3

Report and Agreement

Stage 4

Final Institutional Approval

- Academic Affairs Committee

Stage 5

Stage 1 – Initial Approval for all Partnerships

Proposals for new partnerships must be approved by the International and Partnerships Group (IPG). A Partnership Proposal, signed by the relevant Head of College, must be submitted to IPG.

Partnership proposals shall first be referred to the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships (OQSP) for an initial due diligence assessment in order to inform IPG's decision. The level of potential risk associated with each new partnership will be considered by IPG when determining whether to approve the proposal. The level of risk will inform any further due diligence required, including the nature of any approval event.

In the case of collaborative proposals, or for other proposals where requested, IPG will require a financial case to be presented. The proposal, alongside the Partnership Costing Model, must be completed with Planning, Finance, Marketing, the Library, ICT, Estates and the International Office (where applicable) to confirm resources and timescales.

IPG will scrutinise the partnership proposal and decide whether to approve it to proceed to approval. IPG may request further initial due diligence to be carried out at their discretion before arriving at a decision.

Letters of Intent (Memoranda of Understanding)

A Letter of Intent (also known as a Memorandum of Understanding) sets out possible future areas of activity without committing either partner to undertaking any activity, in order to allow initial discussion between parties to proceed.

A Letter of Intent must be referred to OQSP to conduct a due diligence search on all named institutions and to ensure the contents do not exceed the criteria of a Letter of Intent.

All Letters of Intent must be approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (External Relations). A Letter of Intent may be signed by the Vice Chancellor, a Deputy Vice Chancellor or a Pro Vice Chancellor.

The Letter of Intent will be noted by the next available IPG.

In all other respects, partnerships proposed through a Letter of Intent will be subject to the University's established partnership approval procedures.

Other Agreements

An agreement may be proposed which is judged to be predominantly strategic, rather than academic, in nature. OQSP will work with the proposer to determine the most appropriate body for approval of the agreement, which may be College Leadership Team, IPG, Senior Leadership Team or another formal strategic oversight group. Agreements may also be required to be referred to the College or University Academic Affairs Committee as appropriate.

Information Security

Cooperative and collaborative partnership arrangements must be supported, where applicable, by information sharing and/or data processing agreements in accordance with data protection legislation. It is the responsibility of the School or Department of the University that shares information to ensure that an appropriate information sharing or data processing agreement is in place. Advice should be sought from the Information Compliance Officers in the Secretariat. OQSP will provide assistance in putting these in place, and may take the lead in ensuring that information sharing agreements are in place for University level partners. Where an information sharing or data sharing agreement is required to be added to an existing agreement, this does not require the approval of Academic Affairs Committee.

Stage 2 – Approval of Cooperative Partnerships

OQSP will work with the proposer to determine what further due diligence is required and to produce a partnership agreement.

Due diligence measures may include, but are not limited to:

- Establishing the appropriateness of other institutions' qualifications for the purposes of standard or advanced entry.
- Establishing the appropriateness of other institutions to provide University of Lincoln students with international study opportunities.
- Conducting further reputational, educational, financial or legal due diligence as necessary.

Qualifications for Standard or Advanced Entry

Qualifications may be used for standard admission to University programmes, or for admission with advanced standing.

Where a qualification is to be used for standard or advanced entry to a university programme, the equivalence of the qualification to a UK qualification will be established through use of the UK NARIC database and other appropriate sources of information.

Where a qualification is to be used for advanced entry, the relevant College must satisfy itself that a qualification is of the appropriate level and volume of credit, and, where applicable, that there is sufficient curriculum match, for example through the use of a curriculum mapping exercise, to allow the award of credit. This will usually be confirmed through Academic Affairs Committee.

OQSP will assist with advising on the appropriateness of the qualification and on any formal approval requirements.

International Study Opportunities

Colleges will work with the Student Mobility Team in the International Office to establish the appropriateness of another institution to provide international study opportunities to University of Lincoln students. The Student Mobility Team will confirm to OQSP that an institution is considered appropriate to provide international study opportunities. For more information please see Quality Assurance Manual Section 07A - *International Study*.

Agreements for Academic Cooperation

OQSP will draft the agreement for academic cooperation in consultation with the College and the proposed partner.

Once a cooperative agreement is drafted to all parties' satisfaction, it will be submitted to Academic Affairs Committee for approval, accompanied by a note on any quality assurance and other due diligence measures that have been conducted.

An agreement for academic cooperation may be signed by the Vice Chancellor, a Deputy Vice Chancellor or a Pro Vice Chancellor.

Stage 2 – Approval of Collaborative Partnerships

The University must satisfy itself that a proposed collaborative partner is of sufficient quality and standing to deliver a University programme of studies.

Before any partner can deliver a University programme:

- The appropriate College must support the development
- A current signed agreement must be in place
- The Centre Approval process must be complete
- They must be Approved to Deliver each particular programme and required mode of delivery
- Any new programme must be validated in the usual way

Centre Approval/Approval to Deliver University of Lincoln Programmes

Centre Approval/Approval to Deliver is the process by which authority is given to a new partner or centre to offer and deliver University programmes.

Centre Approval relates to the initial assessment of a potential partner's general ability to deliver University programmes to a suitable standard

Approval to Deliver relates to the potential partner's ability to deliver specific programmes

The process seeks to confirm that the centre is able to fulfil the requirements for delivering HE programmes to an appropriate academic standard and can provide a student experience of sufficient quality for any specified programme validated by the University. It should be noted that separate approval is required for each site at which provision is to be offered.

Approval is carried out by a panel consisting of:

A Chair, not from the College in which the provision resides

Two internal members, where one is a subject specialist from within the School and one is from outside the School

An appropriate member of Library staff, nominated by the University Librarian

A Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer

The panel composition may be varied, at the discretion of the Director of Quality, Enhancement and Standards, to respond to particular circumstances, e.g. where it is felt external input is needed to ensure impartial assessment of specialist technical resources or staffing requirements or to incorporate the requirements for a validation panel.

Documentation Required

For Centre Approval, the proposed partner must provide the following:

A rationale document, which will outline:

- The size, status, reputation, mission and objectives of the proposed partner
- The proposed partner's experience of similar collaborative links or delivering similar provision
- A summary of relevant quality assurance practices within the proposed partner and any previous experience of engaging with a higher education institution's quality processes
- An inventory of the resources available including teaching facilities, specialist facilities and library and IT facilities
- Details of the proposed partner's staff development policy and details of practice to demonstrate how staff knowledge/skills are developed

For an associated and any subsequent Approval to Deliver, the partner must provide:

- CVs of relevant staff to be involved in the delivery, including details of their current teaching commitments
- Details of specialist resources required for delivery of specific programmes such as laboratories, workshops and design studios.
- Details of learning resources required for delivery of specific programmes

For both Centre Approval and Approval to Deliver, the Panel will be provided with all relevant programme and module specifications, generated from the Academic Programme Management System. Where programme and module specifications have been developed specifically for the partnership, these will be jointly developed by the partner and the supporting College.

Validation of Programmes

Validation of a programme to be offered by a partner institution follows the normal University process as laid down in Quality Assurance Manual Section 02 - *Programme Approval* but the process itself will usually be combined with the approval and authorisation of that partner to deliver. Panels will be constructed to include the additional required levels of scrutiny required by the validation process.

Approval Visit

The panel will visit the proposed centre to discuss the proposal with centre staff and view the facilities. The documents listed above should be made available to the panel at least ten working days before the visit. At the end of the visit the panel will meet and come to a decision on the outcome.

The possible outcomes are:

1. To recommend approval
2. To recommend approval subject to conditions and/or recommendations
3. To not recommend approval until further development work has been undertaken and, where appropriate, a subsequent approval event held

Any conditions set by the panel must be completed before recruitment of students onto any programmes can begin. Any recommendations made by the panel must be responded to by the programme team, but do not necessarily have to be acted upon. The panel will stipulate the date by which conditions must be met. QQSP will produce a report of the event which will be agreed by the Chair and sent to the partner to confirm the panel's decisions and the reasons for them.

The partner will write a formal response to demonstrate how conditions and recommendations will be addressed, and will submit this to the Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer before the deadline

set. Once the panel Chair is assured that conditions have been met, approval is given and the documentation will be forwarded to the University's Academic Affairs Committee for final ratification.

Agreements for Academic Collaboration

OQSP will draft the agreement for academic collaboration in consultation with the College and the proposed partner.

Once a collaborative agreement is drafted to all parties' satisfaction, it will be submitted to Academic Affairs Committee for approval, accompanied by the report and a note on any other quality assurance and due diligence measures that have been conducted.

An agreement for academic collaboration may be signed by the Vice Chancellor, a Deputy Vice Chancellor or a Pro Vice Chancellor.

Monitoring of Programmes Delivered by Partners

An Annual Programme Monitoring Report must be completed for all programmes delivered by Partners during the previous academic year. A report template, based upon that for on-campus provision, should be used. Separate Annual Programme Monitoring Reports should be completed for each place of delivery, and submitted to the relevant Partner Subject Committee (or equivalent).

Partner Annual Programme Monitoring Reports will be approved alongside annual Link Tutor Reports at College Academic Affairs Committee. Partner Annual Programme Monitoring Reports must also be forwarded to Heads of School to incorporate into the School Overview Report.

An overview of the annual programme monitoring process is included in Quality Assurance Manual Section 03 - *Annual Programme Monitoring*.

Collaborative Partner Link Tutors

Link Tutors provide assistance and support to staff at partner institutions and provide assurance to the University that partnerships are operating appropriately and effectively.

Please see Quality Assurance Manual Section 07B - *Collaborative Partner Link Tutors* for further details.

Changes to Programmes Delivered by Partners

Validated programmes may be changed in two ways:

- Where major changes are required, revalidation is required and follows the same process as validation. This process is described in Quality Assurance Manual Section 02 - *Programme Approval*.
- Where less significant changes are required, the programme modification process will be used. This process is described in the Quality Assurance Manual Section 04 - *Programme Modification*.

Changes must be discussed and agreed with University programme teams. Advice should also be sought from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships.

When programmes delivered by partners are revalidated, a Re-Approval to Deliver exercise will take place.

Periodic Academic Review of Collaborative Programmes

In addition to the annual monitoring process outlined above, all provision of the University is reviewed on a periodic basis. Periodic Academic Review (PAR) is carried out over a 5/6 year cycle, and covers all of the provision offered by an academic School or cognate subject area.

All partnership provision is attached to an academic School and will be reviewed alongside the rest of the provision. Staff from partners will be involved in the writing of the PAR Self Evaluation Document and will be expected to be present at the PAR event. Members of the PAR panel may also visit the partner during the course of the review.

Details of the PAR process are available in Quality Assurance Manual 06 - *Periodic Academic Review*.

Processes for Renewal of Academic Partnerships

Both collaborative and cooperative arrangements which are due for renewal shall be subject to the oversight of IPG. Where appropriate, IPG may wish to review elements such as numbers of students recruited, numbers of students taking up international study opportunities, or a financial review of the performance of the partnership under the terms of the previous agreement. IPG shall take this review into account in considering strategic renewal of the partnership. Renewal of academic partnership agreements remains the responsibility of Academic Affairs Committee.

If IPG agrees in principle to the renewal of the partnership, OQSP will conduct a fresh review of due diligence, including the status of the institution, which will be reported to Academic Affairs Committee along with any updated quality assurance measures (for example, programme (re)validations and approval to deliver events, updated curriculum mapping or renewal of student exchange arrangements) which have taken place over the course of the previous agreement. Consideration shall be given to any concerns which have been identified through External Examiner reports, Annual Monitoring and Periodic Academic Review and any reputational issues which could give cause for concern to the University.

In all other respects, procedures for renewal of a partnership shall follow those for establishment of a new partnership.

Centre Reviews

In addition to the processes described above, the University also reserves the right to carry out Centre Reviews where it wishes to review the operation of a partnership or where there are causes for concern. Reviews will be carried out by a member of the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships with support from other colleagues within the University.

Typically a review panel will consist of two internal panel members and a representative from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships. If External Examiner reports or Periodic Academic Review have identified obvious areas of concern, then the University may at its own discretion invite an external panel member in an appropriate subject discipline to join the panel. The University may also invite other representatives onto the panel, for example a representative from Student Administration with oversight of partnerships, as required.

Areas for review may typically be, but are not limited to:

- Student Experience;
- Public Information;
- Assessment and Moderation;
- Operation of Examination Boards;
- Issues arising from External Examiner Reports, Annual Programme Monitoring and Periodic Academic Review;

and will typically involve meetings with staff and students of the partner institution, alongside a review of documentation.

The representative from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships will produce a report of the review, including any recommendations for action by the partner institution and University programme

teams, who may also be required to produce an action plan in response. The finalised report will be presented to the University Academic Affairs Committee for approval.

Partnerships Register

The Partnerships Register is the definitive record of the University's cooperative and collaborative academic partnerships. A register is held for each of the University's Colleges. The Partnerships Register is maintained, updated and published by the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships. The Register contains the following information relating to each partnership:

- Institution name
- Country (where outside the UK)
- Programmes delivered by the partner and level of study (where applicable)
- Subject area
- University contact name
- Nature of the relationship (for example, student exchange)
- Details of the signed agreement
- A record of approvals (please note, this is for partnerships approved since the inaugural meeting of PPOG in July 2014. Details of approvals for historical partnerships will be added as and when these partnerships are renewed)
- Student exchange numbers (where applicable)
- A brief indicator of due diligence

The Partnerships Register is updated throughout the academic year as new partnership proposals are approved in principle and as new agreements are signed and historical agreements renewed.

Annual Review of the Partnerships Register

The Partnerships Register is received annually by International and Partnerships Group and Academic Affairs Committee.