

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS HANDBOOK

Chapter 4 - How to Establish a New Academic Partnership

4.1 Outline Steps

4.1.1 The Faculty:

- a. Determines the partnerships they wish to establish, considering relevant Faculty partnership strategies, risks, and undertaking any initial checks and due diligence related to the proposed partner(s). The Faculty should also assess its ability to commit appropriate resources, the means of mitigating any perceived risks, and the overall benefits of the proposal to the Faculty.
 - i. The Minimum Compliance checklist in **Annex 1** should be considered from this stage for Joint awards. It may also be useful to consider, in part, for other partnerships.
- b. Undertakes a site visit to the proposed partner(s) as appropriate. This is essential for complex partnerships. During these visits an assessment should be made of the quality of the academic provision and the support provided, in particular looking at evidence of:
 - i. Quality of library and IT resources and facilities;
 - ii. Quality and expertise of academic staff;
 - iii. Availability of other specialist equipment (e.g., lab equipment);
 - iv. Student support mechanisms
 - v. Teaching methodology (differences in the ways in which teaching is carried out);
 - vi. Types of assessment (will partnership students be able to adapt to the University of Exeter's assessment patterns and methods if required?);
 - vii. Level of teaching (will the teaching and learning that takes place at the partner be appropriate for student transition to the University of Exeter or vice versa? Is the level appropriate for validation proposals?);
 - viii. Curriculum assessment (will the students be sufficiently prepared in terms of academic knowledge? How will any gaps be addressed? How do the credit ratings for modules compare with University of Exeter programmes?);
 - ix. Requirements for external accreditation by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (Will they be fulfilled?); and

- x. Students' plans, aspirations and interest in the partnership programme (a meeting with students can also provide useful information on overall academic quality and English language skills if applicable).
- c. Selects and completes a relevant Partnership Proposal Form (PPF) using the descriptors (2.1) above to choose the correct partnership type. Note, some PGR Split-site partnerships utilise a separate spreadsheet, instead of a PPF, this is coordinated by IIB. The PPF is also used by the legal team to draft the legal agreement and therefore Faculties should ensure they fill it in as fully and accurately as possible.
 - i. The PPF can be shared with a partner for review, however, any legal agreement should not be shared with a partner for review until a PPF has been fully approved.
 - ii. If the partnership involves a new programme, the legal agreement cannot be signed until the programme has received Academic Approval (see Chapter 4 Academic Approval, Approval and Revision of Taught Modules and Programmes Handbook). It can, however, be shared as draft, once Business Approval has been received (see Chapter 3 Business Approval, Approval and Revision of Taught Modules and Programmes Handbook for further information on programme approval and amendment).
- d. Submits their PPF to their Faculty for stage 1, and then stage 2 approval (see section 4.2 - 4.4 for more information on the approvals process).
- e. Submits the PPF to Academic Partnerships for review, along with evidence of the stage 1 and 2 approvals (e.g., a copy of the approvals by email, meeting minutes, etc.). Academic Partnerships will then ensure the PPF is submitted to the relevant Dean for approval.

4.1.2 Academic Partnerships:

- a. Receive the PPF for review.
- b. Submit the PPF, and evidence of stage 1 and 2 approvals (e.g., an email), to the relevant Dean for approval.
- c. Submits the final approved PPF to Legal Services so that they can draft the appropriate contract/item.
- d. Ensure the relevant approved PPF and final contract are entered into the Register of Agreements (in collaboration with the Global Partnerships Team).

4.1.3 Stages of approval:

- a. There is a 3-stage process for approving academic partnerships (a diagram outlining the process can be found in **Annex 2**) and further information on each of these stages can be found below:
 - i. Stage 1 – Faculty Approval
 - ii. Stage 2 – Strategic Approval
 - iii. Stage 3 – Quality Assurance/ Dean’s Approval
- b. Once stages 1 - 3 are complete the legal agreement can be drafted and signed by both parties.
- c. Details of what is required during each approval stage is listed below (stage 1 – 3).

4.2 Stage 1 - Faculty Approval

- 4.2.1 If, following initial consideration and research, the potential partnership appears positive and valuable to the Faculty, then the PPF will need to be submitted for approval to the relevant Faculty Executive Group, before progressing to stage 2.

4.3 Stage 2 - Strategic Approval

- 4.3.1 Following stage 1 approval, the PPF should then be progressed to Stage 2 for Strategic Approval.
- 4.3.2 Routes for strategic approval. The Faculty submits the PPF to the relevant group/board below. This can be supported as appropriate.
- a. All international academic partnerships (UG, PGT and PGR) = Global Engagement Committee (GEC)
 - b. Domestic (UK) academic partnerships for UG and PGT = Education and Student Experience Executive Committee (EdSEEC)
 - c. Domestic (UK) academic partnerships for PGR = Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC). Single student UK PGR split-site partnerships may be delegated to the Dean of Graduate Research for approval and can therefore skip stage 2 approval, and proceed to stage 3, please email partnerships@exeter.ac.uk

4.4 Stage 3 - University Quality Assurance Approval

4.4.1 Following approval by the relevant strategy group, the PPF should then be progressed to Stage 3 - Quality Assurance Approval. In most cases this will be through the Associate Dean for Taught Students for Taught partnerships, or the Dean of Postgraduate Research for PGR Partnerships.

4.5 Legal Agreement

4.5.1 After all approvals, Legal Services will produce a draft of the formal Legal Agreement, based upon the information in the PPF, with review and input from the Faculty/Academic Partnerships. This is then negotiated with the partner institution(s) as appropriate. Note, drafting legal agreements can take a variable amount of time depending on the complexity of the arrangement and the relationship with the partner.

4.5.2 Typically, a Legal Agreement will include the following elements (the actual content will depend on the nature and complexity of the partnership, and the risk associated with it):

- a. formal identification of the partners included, with formal contact details;
- b. start date, review date(s) and end date of the Agreement;
- c. definition of the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved (including students, if relevant);
- d. definitions of terminology;
- e. definition of delegated powers;
- f. description of the shared provision;
- g. 'ownership' of students, including admissions and registration procedures;
- h. identification of the academic regulations, policies and procedures to be followed;
- i. student complaints, appeals, and disciplinary procedures;
- j. degree awarding processes and production of a certificate;
- k. financial arrangements;
- l. Intellectual Property Rights, and confidentiality;
- m. insurance and indemnities;
- n. data protection matters;
- o. marketing and promotional activity, and approval of materials and use of logo;
- p. legal jurisdiction;
- q. implications of failure to fulfil obligations, including mediation and termination procedures;

- r. protection of students on termination of the Agreement;
- s. procedure for amending the Agreement.
- t. For PGR partnerships; details of the thesis submission and examination (Viva) process.

4.5.3 When the wording of the legal agreement is agreed and confirmed by all parties, it must be signed by the designated signatory (see Annex 2). Each academic partnership is a legally binding commitment for the University, and carries risk. The authority to sign an Agreement therefore resides at senior management level.

4.6 Programme Development and Approval

4.6.1 The University is responsible for ensuring that the standards and quality of the partnership programme is equivalent to that of standard (non-partnership) University provision.

4.6.2 The Faculty must consider the level and content of programmes, appropriateness of assessment, and the student experience (including facilities and student support), when developing and approving shared provision. These must be monitored by an External Examiner.

4.6.3 Depending on the type of partnership proposed, there may be a need to develop a completely new programme, or to create a variant of an existing programme for partnership students. Details for this process are found in the University's Approval and Revision of Taught Modules and Programmes Handbook of the Teaching Quality Assurance Manual and on the University's [Programme and Module Development Webpage](#).

4.6.4 Please refer to section 4.1.1.c for details regarding when PPFs and Legal agreements can be shared in relation to development and approval of PAAFs.

4.6.5 If more than one Faculty/Department within the University is involved in the partnership, the programme will need to be considered and approved by each Faculty/Department.

4.6.6 If the partnership contributes to an award that is accredited by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) then the University must assure itself that the external body's requirements are met within the partnership programme.

4.7 Miscellaneous - Study Abroad and Student Exchange agreements

4.7.1 Student exchanges are generally proposed to ensure that there are sufficient high quality, appropriate institutions for University of Exeter students to study at as part of their undergraduate studies. Most exchanges take place at undergraduate level. These are strategically important for the student experience and for ensuring that the University meets its goal of increasing take-up of study abroad opportunities. The exchange partner, however, may not necessarily always be seen to be strategically important.

4.7.2 Study Abroad and Student Exchange agreements are normally initiated through a Department or Faculty, or via the [Global Opportunities team](#) (for cross university exchanges).

4.7.3 Please refer to Chapter 19 of the Learning and Teaching Support Handbook of the Teaching Quality Assurance Manual for more information. The process for approving these types of arrangements for UG/PGT is as follows;

- a. Initial strategic approval of student exchange and study abroad agreements will be through the relevant strategy group (normally the Global Engagement Committee)
- b. Quality assurance approval is carried out by the Head of Global Partnerships.
- c. Renewals of student exchange agreements will be delegated to the Global Opportunities Manager where the relationship and student experience has been deemed to be fit for purpose. For cases in which a question has arisen, any renewal will be submitted to the relevant strategy board.
- d. The Global Opportunities Manager will provide an annual report on all student exchange/study abroad partners and submit this to the Global Engagement Committee.
- e. The Global Opportunities team work directly with the Legal Service team to produce their own legal agreements.

4.7.4 For PGR: Please refer to Annex 11 PPF for PGR, Study Abroad and Student Exchange, for relevant approval processes. Please also see Chapter 16 Visiting Postgraduate Research Students Policy and Procedures in the Postgraduate Research Handbook for in-coming PGR students.