



University of
Staffordshire

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP APPROVAL POLICY & PROCEDURE

Quality Assurance and Enhancement
June 2024



Academic Partnership Approval Policy and Procedure (including apprenticeship sub-contractors)

Introduction

1. University of Staffordshire's quality framework is in place to ensure that all of its courses meet appropriate standards, provide current and coherent curricula and deliver a high-quality student learning experience and positive outcomes. The framework:
 - Supports the University's Academic Strategy and achievement of institutional KPIs.
 - Provides assurance of the quality and standards of the provision.
 - Facilitates quality enhancement.
 - Facilitates the assessment of risk, focusing attention where it is most required.
2. The academic partnership approval policy and procedure is a key component of this framework, enabling the University to assess the market demand, strategic fit, academic suitability, financial viability and relevant regulatory and quality considerations for a proposed new academic partnership.
3. This policy and procedure should be undertaken for any potential new academic partner organisation to be involved in delivering courses or modules awarded by University of Staffordshire including organisations involved in the delivery of Apprenticeships.
4. The partnership approval policy and procedure is aligned with requirements derived from the Office for Students Conditions of Registration and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2023).
5. Requests for any variations from the provisions outlined below will require approval by the University's Partnerships Committee.
6. Transparency in the governance and oversight of partnership review exercises is supported by the obligation of internal decision-making bodies to declare potential conflicts of interests including legal, financial and personal relationships following the University's Declaration of Interest Policy. This applies to members of the University Partnership Committee, Executive Board, Executive, and Board of Governors. Other university staff involved in managing and attending partnership review activity will also be asked to declare potential conflicts of interest affecting the partner under review.

Initial Investigations

7. A potential new partner is identified in line with the University's strategic priorities.
8. The initial stage discussions with the potential partner will involve the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships and School representatives – including Heads of Department and subject specialists. These discussions will explore: the type of arrangement proposed -e.g. franchise, validation, etc.; reputational and capacity implications for the university; and the financial robustness and sustainability of the potential partnership as well as its operational compatibility. Other staff from across the University may be involved in these discussions to assess the suitability of the partner. These informal discussions should normally involve a virtual tour of the campus and information exchange on its current and planned resources.

9. Due diligence is the process of examining the legal and financial underpinning of an organisation as a key step towards establishing a partnership. This will establish the legal and financial status of the organisation and its capacity to enter into a partnership agreement with the University. It is needed to reduce the risk to the University of failure of any partnership ventures.
10. The Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will undertake preliminary due diligence to gather and confirm key organisational and academic information about the potential partner. The Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will work with the school to establish whether there is a strategic fit between the proposed partner and the University. This will include checks with the British Council (where appropriate), a web search, ethical investigations and consideration of other sources of information.
11. If the partnership is not to be progressed after the initial due diligence, the potential partner will be notified by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, who will store the relevant correspondence.

Business Case Development

12. The proposed partner and the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will prepare the Business Case Approval form to proceed with the partnership development. The Business Case Approval form will include risk investigations, strategic academic, student experience, regulatory and university and partner capacity considerations as well as market and financial aspects.
13. The Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will work with the School and Financial Services to produce a costing model to be included in the Business Case Approval form. As well as direct expenses, the costing model will factor in indirect costs, academic and professional services staff contributions, and appropriate partnership implementation, support and oversight activity – highlighting where the levels of expenditure expected exceed the average investment in comparable university partnerships.

School Consideration and Recommendation

14. The Business Case Approval form is then submitted to the Executive Dean of the School by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships. The Dean, in discussion with the School's Senior Management Team (SMT), will consider whether to endorse the proposal to proceed to the next stage of the approval process.
15. Where the proposed partnership involves more than one School, the approval process outlined above will take place in each School in parallel. Each School has autonomy to support or decline to participate in the proposed partnership.
16. If the School's SMT decides not to proceed with the proposed partnership at this stage, the potential partner will be notified by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, who will store the relevant correspondence.

University Partnerships Committee Consideration and Recommendation

17. Following the Executive Dean's approval, the school (usually the Associate Dean – Curriculum) will submit the Business Case Approval form to University Partnerships Committee with the support of the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships. The Business Case Approval form will contain the course list for the initial partnership launch and will present sufficient course-level considerations to enable University Partnerships Committee to provide or withhold strategic approval of each proposed programme at this stage.

18. Should University Partnerships Committee recommend progressing the proposal, it will proceed to the full due diligence stage.
19. If University Partnerships Committee decides not to proceed with the proposed partnership at this stage, the potential partner will be notified by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships – who will store the relevant correspondence.

Full Due Diligence

20. Following University Partnerships Committee approval to proceed to the next stage, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships liaises with the proposed partner to complete the Legal and Financial Due Diligence Questionnaire and supporting evidence. Indicative supporting documentation is expected to include:
 - A strategic overview document prepared by the proposing partner covering:
 - Introduction to the organisation and reasons for partnering with University of Staffordshire
 - Strategic overview of the approach to education and the future development and expansion of the partnership
 - Details of other HEI/educational partners and experience of programme delivery
 - Organisational/Management structure diagram
 - Reports from external review or bodies e.g. QAA, Ofsted, if available.
 - Overview of Quality Assurance policies and processes if available
 - Overview of institutional policy framework (including EDI, safeguarding, Prevent, and other policy areas as required)
 - Overview of Teaching and Learning strategy/approach
 - Overview of Student Support
 - Overview of staff expertise and development relating to the partnership
 - A sample of the proposed module tutors for the courses together with their CVs (Curriculum Vitae) and a proposed course staff profile for each programme
 - Review documents to be provided by the University including:
 - The completed Partnership Audit Document with associated evidence
 - Report from Library and Skills based on a completed checklist for library & learning resources
 - For overseas proposals – the UK Naric and British Council Country overviews (where available)
21. The due diligence is reviewed by various departments across the university including Financial Services, Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Registry. An assessment of risk is carried out by these colleagues and collated by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships. Should any department wish to speak to the partner to inform their considerations, this will be arranged.
22. As part of the full due diligence a physical visit to the partner will normally take place by a senior member of staff unless agreed otherwise by the Chair of University Partnerships Committee (e.g. where a partner delivers fully online provision or a previous visit by SU staff has already taken place and is duly documented and evidenced). A New Site Visit Report form is to be completed during this visit and submitted to the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships.

Final Partnership Approval

23. Upon receipt of the final due diligence, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will submit the final business case approval form with accompanying due diligence form and coversheet to

University Executive Board. This will contain the final agreed list of courses for the initial partnership launch. Further courses can be added in the future via University Partnerships Committee.

24. Where the resulting risk rating of these due diligence investigations is amber or red, matters will be raised with the University Executive Board for consideration of academic, financial, legal, regulatory, student support and quality aspects.
25. After considering the proposed partnership, University Executive Board will confirm the final approval of the new partnership. University Executive Board may request further information or evidence from the due diligence process. The Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will seek to obtain this from the proposed partner and the Business Case will be resubmitted to University Executive Board as required.
26. If University Executive Board decides not to proceed with the proposed partnership at this stage, the potential partner will be notified by the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, who will store the relevant correspondence.
27. Following University Executive Board approval of the partnership, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will notify the partner, Quality Assurance and Enhancement and the School via the Executive Dean and the Associate Dean – Curriculum.
28. The approval of the partnership will be noted at the next meeting of Academic Board and University Partnerships Committee.
29. The Associate Dean – Curriculum will notify the relevant course team(s) of the partnership approval and the subsequent courses which will require their input, and suitably brief them on the arrangements covered in the Business Case approval form as well as on the school plans for the development.
30. Quality Assurance and Enhancement will plan and commence the academic approval of the courses at the partner, through the University's Design Sprint Procedure. The school course team will progress the course(s) through the design sprint stage in conjunction with professional services colleagues.
31. A Curriculum Refinement and Approval Event will be held in line with the University's Design Sprint Procedure to consider the approval of the courses (where relevant) and their delivery by the partner. The partnership cannot commence until the course(s) and delivery of the course(s) by the partner has been approved.
32. The Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will notify the new partner of the outcome of the Curriculum Refinement and Approval Event.
33. Following the confirmation of the academic course/delivery approval, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will liaise with the partner, Legal Services and other stakeholders as required to review and negotiate contractual arrangements. A legal partnership agreement will be drafted and signed in line with university policies.
34. Once the contract has been signed, Quality Assurance and Enhancement will arrange for the partner to be added to the University of Staffordshire Register of Collaborative Provision.
35. The approval of the partnership is normally for five years at which time the agreement is subject to a periodic academic partnership review. Based on recommendations from Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, University Executive Board, may request the approval of the partnership for a shorter time period on the basis of concerns raised at any stage in the academic partnership approval process.

Key to abbreviations

QAE: Quality Assurance and Enhancement

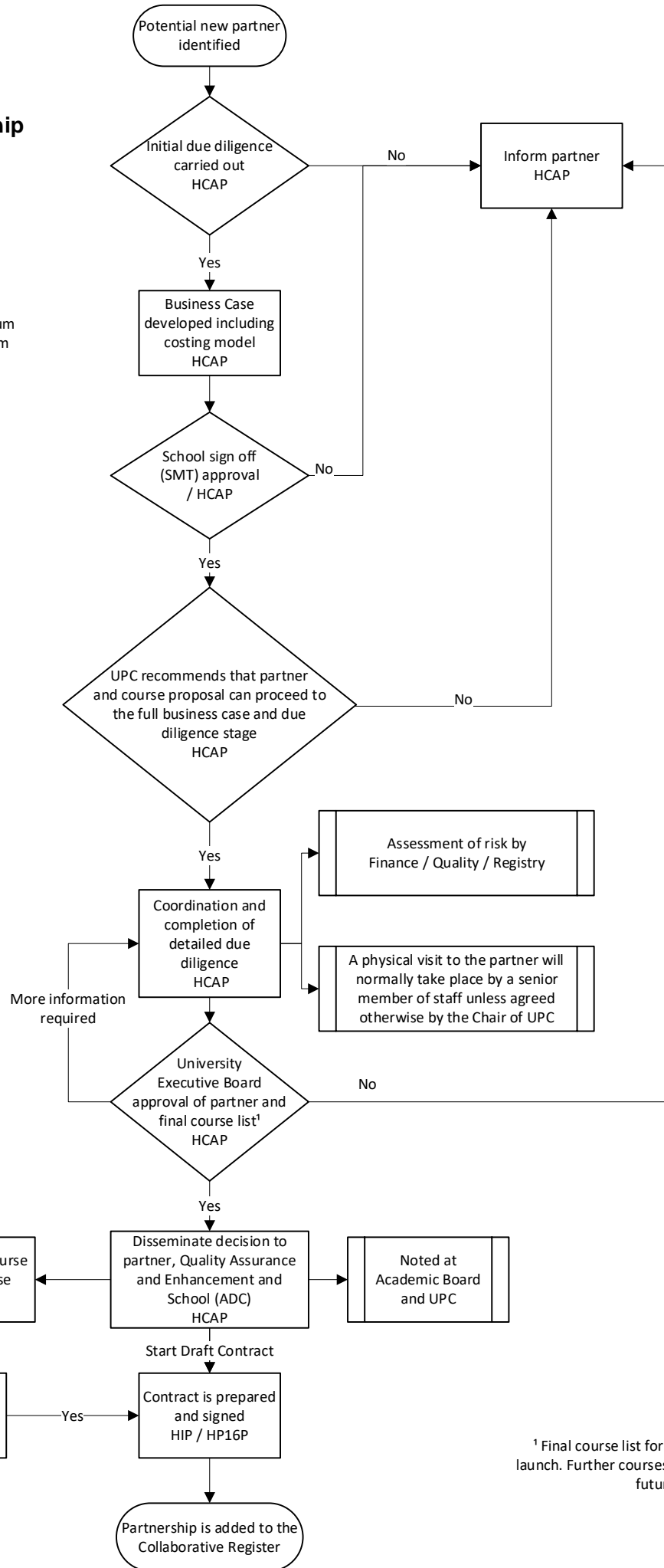
HCAP: Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships

SMT: Senior Management Team

UPC: University Partnerships Committee

Academic Partnership Approval

- HCAP – Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships
- UPC – University Partnerships Committee
- QAE – Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- ADC – Associate Dean – Curriculum
- SMT – Senior Management Team



¹ Final course list for initial partnership launch. Further courses can be added in the future.

