

Educational Partnerships Policy



Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles and processes which apply to the development, approval, monitoring and review of educational partnerships with external organisations.
2. The policy aims to aid the development of meaningful and fruitful engagements with external partner(s), without restricting innovation or the development of research links.
3. The framework ensures that the University is providing a high quality learning experience for all students on the increasing range of partnership activity the University is engaging with both within the UK and internationally.
4. This policy applies to:
 - a. Provision which leads to either a programme or award of credit from Newcastle University in collaboration with an external partner.
 - b. Provision delivered by Newcastle University staff in a transnational context including 'flying faculty' arrangements and overseas campuses.
 - c. Articulation arrangements.
 - d. Newcastle University provision funded and partially delivered by an external organisation.
 - e. Provision provided by an external partner which contributes to a Newcastle University award.
 - f. Joint Research Degree Provision.
 - g. Joint Venture activity such as Newcastle University's partnerships with INTO.

Principles

5. The following principles underpin the aims of this Policy:
 - a. To support the strategic aims and values of Newcastle University as outlined in [Vision 2021](#).
 - b. To support the University's Internationalisation Strategy, in particular Strategic Objectives SO1 and SO3:

SO1: Develop and sustain a number of high quality in-country operations and partnerships to deliver excellence in teaching, training, engagement and research

SO3: Develop a cohort of high quality Partners abroad that share our vision
 - c. That the University has ultimate responsibility for the quality, academic standards and student experience of any award granted in its name wherever these take place and whoever provides them.
 - d. That the academic standards of an award involving an educational partnership should be equivalent to comparable awards/credit delivered at the University.
 - e. That the approach taken to the approval of a partnership should be proportionate to the level of risk, nature and level of complexity involved in the project.
6. These principles are further explained in the University's [Strategic Approach to the Development of Educational Partnerships](#).

Developing an Educational Partnership

7. The development of an educational partnership can be rewarding for the University and the proposed partner and can lead to a number of different strands of collaboration from staff/student exchanges to joint programmes and research projects.
8. Staff embarking on a collaborative arrangement should not underestimate the time commitment required to develop a successful partnership. The most successful projects are those where ongoing dialogue takes place with the proposed partner(s) to develop a common understanding of the respective operating environments and where each partner is fully aware and engaged with their respective roles and responsibilities.

Support available in developing partnerships

9. A range of support is available both within the University and externally to support the development of partnerships.
10. Professional support advice should be sought at an early stage to help the development of any educational partnership. Sources include:
 - a. Learning and Teaching Projects Operational Group (LATPOG) (internal access only) comprises professional support staff from Research and Enterprise Services (RES), International Office, Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS), NUIT, Library, Student Progress, Human Resources and Finance who offer advice and guidance on a range of topics such as:
 - i. Country specific information for international collaborations
 - ii. EU funding opportunities and assistance in completing funding bids
 - iii. Costing and pricing
 - iv. Contractual advice
 - v. Quality management
 - vi. Licensing issues
 - vii. IT requirements
 - viii. Admissions and enrolment
 - ix. Visa issues
 - x. Employment issues

Involving LATPOG at an early stage of the development of an educational partnership can help identify and resolve issues and provide support and guidance for both the proposing academic unit and the partner.

- b. Faculty Learning and Teaching Administrators– who provide support and advice on the preparation for the Programme Approval Committee and on relevant Faculty policies.
- c. The Learning and Teaching Development Service, which is responsible for supporting the processes for the approval, monitoring and review of educational partnerships. Key staff contact details and a range of resources are available at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/governance/partnerships>.
- d. For those programmes subject to professional, statutory or regulatory body approval or accreditation it is important to have discussions at an early stage. These should ensure that it is clear from the outset whether recognition of the programme will be possible and what, if any, requirements or approval levels are required.

Memorandum of Understanding

11. Often, particularly with overseas institutions, a Memorandum of Understanding can help to develop a relationship further. Such agreements do not commit the University to specific activities and are not

legally binding but are a useful tool to show commitment to the further development of the relationship with a partner organisation.

12. Information and guidance on the MoU process is available at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/teaching/mou_advice.htm.

Information sources

13. Universities UK's International Unit has produced several helpful guides including:
- [UK Higher Education and Partnerships for overseas institutions](#) (login required), which is helpful to share with the partner at an early stage. Arabic and Chinese versions are also available.
 - International Partnerships: A Legal Guide for UK Universities (login required).
 - [HE Global Integrated Advisory Service](#) is a website created by the UK International Unit to bring together services which can support Higher Education Institutions development of international activity.

Approval of an Educational Partnership

14. The approval process is split into three main stages:
- Initial approval to proceed.
 - Strategic approval of the partner.
 - Academic approval of the programme.
15. The exact nature of the process is dependent on the nature of the proposed link and the risk associated with the proposal.

Initial Proposal Template

16. The Initial Proposal Template (IPT) should be submitted an early stage of your discussions with a partner in order for the School, Faculty and University to make an informed judgement on the strategic fit of the proposal and to identify issues which can be addressed in the initial stages of development.
17. The IPT and associated guidance can be accessed at: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/teaching/how.htm>
18. The IPT is initially considered by members of LATPOG, who provide advice and guidance in addition to identifying issues to be resolved in the development of the proposal.
19. The next stage is consideration by the Head of Academic Unit for comment and to provide evidence of support for the proposal; this is followed by scrutiny on behalf of the Faculty by the relevant Dean(s).
20. The Faculty Dean(s) will consider the proposal against the following criteria in order to make a judgement on whether the proposal should proceed:
- There is an appropriate rationale for the proposed partnership.
 - The proposed partnership is consistent with Faculty and University strategy.
 - The proposed partnership commands the commitment and the support of the senior management of the Faculty.
 - It would be appropriate to undertake the proposed partnership in view of the Faculty's existing partnership arrangements and other commitments.
21. All comments received are collated and submitted to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) for a decision on whether institutional approval is given to move to the next stage of development.
22. On receipt of institutional approval of the IPT, LTDS will inform the proposer, Head of Academic Unit, Faculty Dean and Faculty Learning and Teaching Support Team of the outcome, and start discussions with proposer on the recommended approval route and proposed timescale for the academic approval of the partnership.

23. If following, the approval of an IPT, a period of more than one academic year passes before the proposal reaches the [academic approval stage](#), the proposer must revisit the IPT. The IPT is then reappraised by the relevant Faculty Dean(s) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). This reappraisal ensures that the strategic fit of the proposal is still appropriate and that support for the development remains.

Strategic Approval of the Proposed Partner

24. The strategic approval of a proposed partner is required to ensure that the proposal fits with the University's overall strategy and that the partner is financially and academically sound.
25. Financial and academic considerations are of equal importance in the approval of partnerships.
26. The risk associated with the partnership will inform the level of approval and consideration required.

Approval of the Business Case for a partnership

27. The approval route for consideration of the business case varies depending on the level of financial risk involved.
28. Where the total expected lifetime cost of the proposal is greater than £250,000, an Financial Monitoring and Budget Scrutiny Group (FMBSG) Business Case Assessment must be prepared and approved by the relevant areas outlined in the table below.
29. For proposals whose total expected lifetime cost is less than £250,000 Faculty approval of the business case is required via the appropriate Faculty committee.
30. FMBSG may additionally request information on strategic projects which do not fall into the categories listed below, such as proposals relating to the Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia campus.

Estimated lifetime cost of project	Authorisation by	Concurrence required from
£0 to £250,000	Faculty PVC	Not required
£250,001 to £500,000	Faculty PVC	Not required
£500,001 to £1,000,000	Faculty PVC	FMBSG
£1,000,001 to £2,000,000	Executive Board	FMBSG
>£2.0 million	Council	Executive Board

Academic Approval of a Partnership

31. The academic approval of any proposed partner is important to ensure that the University is working with partners who are appropriate in terms of reputation and fit with the University's vision and aims; in addition to ensuring that there is capacity to deliver academically on the partnership.
32. During the IPT stage initial due diligence will be undertaken of the partner and a decision taken on the level of risk associated with the partnership. Guidance will be provided on the process for the academic approval of the proposed partner(s) which may include more detailed due diligence procedures.
33. Due diligence procedures will take account of the following areas:
- The legal, financial and cultural aspects of working in a particular country to ensure that the University is in a position to meet any legal and regulatory national requirements.
 - The legal and financial status of the partner.
 - The reputation and academic standing of the partner.
 - The ability and capacity of the partner to deliver on the proposed partnership, in terms of staffing, resources and access to learning opportunities.
34. For partnerships deemed to be low risk the LATPOG will undertake the necessary due diligence to ensure that the criteria for approval of the partner are met and provide a report to EPSC. Examples of low risk partners may include highly ranked UK Higher Education Institutions.

35. For those considered to be of higher risk, further due diligence procedures will be conducted by LATPOG, and other areas as appropriate, for consideration by EPSC. Examples of such partnerships would include:
- a. International partners where there is no existing working relationship with the University.
 - b. Proposals for the delivery of a programme at an academic level which the partner has no experience of.
 - c. Types of delivery which are new to the University.

Criteria for Approval

36. The EPSC will assess the appropriateness of the proposed partner taking into consideration the following and the [Strategic Approach for the Development of Educational Partnerships](#):
- a. Does the proposal support Vision 2021 and the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience and Internationalisation strategies and meet the expectations of the [Newcastle offer](#) (for undergraduate programmes)?
 - b. Is the partner of an appropriate standing in the proposed subject area(s) for the University to collaborate with?
 - c. What is the legal status of the prospective partner and can they enter a legally binding contract with the University for the proposed project?
 - d. Is the partner financially sound?
 - e. Has the partner had experience of delivering comparable programmes at a similar level, or is capable of doing so?
 - f. Does the partner have an acceptable record of partnership with other institutions?
 - g. Does the partner have robust quality management procedures?
 - h. Does the partner have appropriate access to resources (physical and staffing) to deliver the proposal?
 - i. Does the partner provide an appropriate and safe working environment for University students and staff?
 - j. Has the partner been subject to any allegations or convictions for fraud, bribery or corruption or have there been any suggestions that in the conduct of their business they have adopted practices that may run contrary to the Bribery Act 2010.
 - k. Is there a reputational risk associated with the partnership (for example, the partner's business and ethical interests, the risk of being unable to deliver the project)?
 - l. and, in the case of proposed international partnerships:
Are there appropriate measures in place to ensure that there is a joint understanding of the current practices of higher education in each respective country and the capacity to address differences in cultures and expectation to ensure that the requirements of the arrangement can be met?
37. In cases of partnerships with private providers, non-educational or non-academic providers' in addition to the above further information will be required on the following:
- a. Ownership, nature and financing of the proposed partner.
 - b. The governance structure (to ensure that the academic and business decision making is separate).

Documentation to be submitted for approval of a partner

38. To aid EPSC in reaching a decision on whether to recommend to ULTSEC that a proposed provider should be approved normally the following documents will be considered:
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- a. Approved IPT.
- b. [Partner Approval Template](#) – this should be developed in conjunction with the partner organisation and includes information on its organisational structure, legal and financial status, and its quality management structures.
- c. Due diligence reports from LATPOG.
- d. Report of visits by programme proposers/EPSC as appropriate (see paragraphs 40 and 41).
- e. Evidence of support for the proposal from the Senior Management of the partner.
- f. Draft Student Lifecycle Table (see paragraphs 44 to 48).
- g. Draft Business Case (if available).
- h. Draft Memorandum of Agreement (if available).

EPSC can request additional information in order to make an informed judgement; this may include a visit (see paragraphs 40 and 41) to the partner.

39. To help the proposed partner in developing their documentation, and in the interests of creating a transparent relationship, the University will provide a completed Partner Approval Template and other relevant documents.
40. EPSC will consider each proposed educational partner in relation to the criteria set out in paragraphs 36 and 37, on the basis of the documentation set out in paragraph 38. On this basis EPSC will make a recommendation to ULTSEC on whether to approve the proposed educational partner, and ULTSEC will make the final decision on approval (exercising delegated authority from Senate). All ULTSEC decisions on proposed partnerships will be reported to Senate.
41. Where ULTSEC approves a partnership subject to the satisfaction of one or more conditions, ULTSEC must confirm that these conditions have been met before the legal agreement for the partnership is signed. The secretary to ULTSEC is responsible for ensuring that the action taken to address conditions is reported to ULTSEC and, where relevant, EPSC.

Site Visits to partner organisations

42. Visits to proposed partner(s) will take place if they are deemed to be higher risk and will be triggered specifically by the following:
 - a. Where the partner has not previously delivered a programme at the proposed level.
 - b. Where the partner is located geographically in an area where the University has no previous existing relationships.
 - c. Where the University is entering into a new type of provision.
 - d. Where the partner does not have its own degree awarding powers.
43. The visit will be undertaken by members of EPSC, who will co-opt academic staff and members of the professional support services as necessary. The visit will provide an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the framework within which the proposed partner operates and to further develop the relationship. A visit report template will be completed for consideration by EPSC and made available to Faculty Programme Approval Committees.

Student Lifecycle Table

44. The [Student Lifecycle Table](#) has been produced to assist Academic Units articulate the supporting structure for educational partnership programmes based upon the student lifecycle from recruitment and admissions through to graduation. This is important to assure the University that there is appropriate support in place to ensure the quality of learning opportunities and the overall student experience, and that there is clarity on where the responsibility for each aspect is located.

45. The Table should also be used as a basis for discussion and negotiation with the partner in establishing each party's roles and responsibilities in the partnership. The Table will also inform the development of the [Agreement](#) covering the arrangement.
46. EPSC and the Faculty Programme Approval Committee will consider the table as part of the evidence to make a judgement on the ability of the Academic Unit and partner to deliver the programme.
47. The finalised Student Lifecycle Table will be considered and its application monitored through EPSC.
48. Guidance on the types of issues to consider when completing the Student Lifecycle Table is included in the [Guidance on areas for negotiation and agreement with partners](#)

Programme Approval for new educational partnership provision

49. The level of programme approval required will vary on the type of educational partnership proposed and will be based upon the level of complexity, volume and risk involved in the programme. In addition to standard criteria for approval, the partner's ability to deliver the academic programme will be considered.
50. The programme approval requirements for programmes delivered through an educational partnership are set out in the University's [Policy on the Approval of New Programmes](#). This should be read in conjunction with the [Guidance on types of provision and approval processes](#), which sets out which stages of the approval process are required for each type of provision.
51. Programme Approval Committees (PAC) are responsible for the detailed academic scrutiny of programmes involving educational partnerships, and make recommendations to the University on whether to approve such programmes.
52. The constitution of the PAC can be found in the [University's Policy on the Approval of New Programmes](#). For programmes delivered through an educational partnership an additional criterion on the partner's ability to fulfil their role in the partnerships must be met deliver the programme and the PAC membership is expanded to include a member of LTDS.
53. Prior to the PAC making a recommendation to the University to approve a proposed programme delivered through an educational partnership, the finalised programme approval should be provided to the Chair and Secretary of EPSC. They will review this to ensure the programme is consistent with the context in which the partner was originally approved. Following this review EPSC will make a recommendation to the University on whether to approve the proposed programme.
54. Requests for permission for early advertising for proposed programmes delivered through a partnership will only be granted where there are exceptional circumstances. The process for making such requests is set out in the new programme approval policy.

Changes to an Educational Partnership

55. Partnerships change and develop over time and in order to simplify the process through which established collaborations can be enhanced the following procedures will be followed.

Addition of programme(s) with an existing partner in the same subject area

56. No additional partner approval will be required, however, depending on the nature of the partner and financial risk involved Executive Board and Council may be required to approve the business case for the proposal.
57. Where it is proposed to deliver an existing Newcastle University programme in collaboration with an existing partner the programme approval process will follow the University's [Policy on Changes to Programmes](#).
58. Where it is proposed to develop a programme which is not offered at Newcastle University the full [programme approval process](#) will be required.

Addition of programme(s) with an existing partner in a different subject area

59. Where a partner has previously been approved for collaboration in a particular subject area and it is proposed to extend the relationship into other subjects, EPSC will consider the appropriateness and academic ability of the partner in the new subject area.
60. Additionally depending on the nature of the partner and financial risk involved Executive Board and Council may be required to approve the business case for the proposal.
61. Where it is proposed to deliver an existing Newcastle University programme in collaboration with an existing partner the programme approval process will follow the University's [Policy on Changes to Programmes](#).
62. Where it is proposed to develop a programme which is not currently offered at Newcastle University the full [programme approval process](#) will be required.
63. In all cases any changes to existing partnerships will require a change to the existing Memorandum of Agreement or the development of a new one, and consultation at an early stage with the [Learning and Teaching Team in RES](#) should be undertaken.

Contractual Agreements

64. Contact should be made at an early stage with the [Learning and Teaching Team in RES](#) to start the contractual agreement process with the partner.
65. Each educational partnership agreement will vary depending on the nature of the programme, and the roles, responsibilities and location of the partner, and will be informed by the completed [Student Lifecycle Table](#) (See paragraphs 44-48). The following list provides examples of the types of areas where discussion and negotiation with the partner may be required in order to develop a successful partnership agreement:
 - a. Regulatory requirements
 - b. Publicity and marketing
 - c. Recruitment and Admissions
 - d. Enrolment and Registration
 - e. Information for Students
 - f. Discipline, Complaints and Appeals
 - g. Assessment Procedures
 - h. Quality Management
 - i. Graduation, Certificates and Transcripts
 - j. Language(s) of instruction and assessment
 - k. Financial arrangements
 - l. Legal arrangements
 - m. Data Protection
 - n. Employment Issues
 - o. Staff Development Training
 - p. Health and Safety
66. Further information and guidance on these areas is available from [LTDS](#) and [the Learning and Teaching Team in RES](#) in addition to guidance notes available in [Guidance on areas for negotiation and agreement with partners](#).

67. Until the Agreement is finalised and signed by an authorised signatory the programme or module is not fully approved and students cannot be registered.
68. The final signed version of all Agreements will be held in RES.

Review and monitoring of educational partnerships

69. Educational partnerships are monitored in a range of ways to ensure on-going quality and standards and to ensure that any issues identified are addressed in the appropriate manner. Programmes delivered through a partnership are subject to:
 - a. [Annual Monitoring and Review](#), with partners either being involved in the writing of the report or having had sight of the report prior to submission. For new educational partnerships in the first year of operation this will incorporate a One Year-on Review to identify any particular issues the partnership faced and how these were addressed in order to share practice and enhance the University's understanding of such issues.
 - b. [Learning and Teaching Review](#). Normally this will take place within a subject area's LTR, but where a subject area's partnership provision is large or complex it may be deemed necessary to consider these programmes separately from the subject area's 'home' provision. In cases where the provision is spread across a number of School's the LTR will normally consider all areas.
 - c. [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework for Research Degree Programmes](#), with partnership provision considered in both Annual Review and Audit Visits.
 - d. The University's [External Examiner policy](#), and the additional requirements set out in the statements on [Academic Governance Arrangements for Trans-national Education and Partnership Activity which results in Taught Awards](#), and [External examining for taught programmes or modules offered in multiple locations](#).
70. Relevant AMR, LTR, external examiner reports and QAEF reports will be sent to LTDS, which will prepare overview reports for consideration by EPSC to identify any institutional issues or areas of good practice which could be shared with other partnerships.
71. Any serious issues of concern which arise through any of the monitoring and review processes can prompt a full review of the partnership by the EPSC.

Renewal of an educational partnership

72. The renewal of an educational partnership is undertaken by EPSC and will normally take place every five years. A review can take place earlier if specified in the Agreement or if serious issues have been identified with the partnership.
73. The renewal of the Agreement for the partnership is an integral part of the re-approval event. Discussions with the partner and the Learning and Teaching Team in RES on any updates required to the legal agreement should begin at an early stage to allow the presentation of an agreed draft to the meeting of EPSC.
74. EPSC will consider the following criteria in order to make a judgement on whether to recommend renewal of the collaboration:
 - a. Whether the rationale for the collaboration remains valid.
 - b. Whether the collaboration remains aligned with the University's strategy and mission.
 - c. Whether the partner retains appropriate academic, financial and legal status.
 - d. Whether the collaboration has met and will continue to meet the appropriate academic standards and offer the appropriate learning, teaching and student experience.
 - e. Whether the collaboration has operated in line with the terms outlined in the legal Agreement.
 - f. Whether the business case remains valid.

75. EPSC will receive a range of evidence to evaluate whether the partnership has met the above criteria:
- a. Annual Monitoring Reports or PGR Annual Reports as appropriate.
 - b. Learning and Teaching Review or PGR Annual Review visit reports as appropriate.
 - c. External Examiner Reports.
 - d. Student Feedback.
 - e. [Self-evaluation template](#) from the Academic Unit, Faculty and Partner on the operation of the partnership.
 - f. Business Case.
 - g. Updated legal Agreement.
76. EPSC will make a recommendation to ULTSEC, which will have responsibility for considering the recommendation for approval. The outcome of ULTSEC's decision will be reported to Senate.

Suspension and termination of an educational partnership

77. In cases where Academic Units wish to terminate or suspend an educational partnership contact should be made at an early stage with the Faculty, LTDS and the [Learning and Teaching Team in RES](#) for advice and guidance.
78. Academic Units should follow the procedures outlined in the [Policy on Changes to Programmes](#). For provision delivered through an educational partnership, consultation on the proposed suspension or termination must also include consultation with the partner organisation.
79. If a proposal to terminate or suspend an educational partnership is approved by the chair of ULTSEC, LTDS will update both the programme tracking database and the University's Educational Partnerships Register and ensure that the termination/suspension is reported to Senate. LTDS will also inform the Learning and Teaching Team in RES, which will then instigate the procedures to terminate the legal Agreement.

University's Register of Educational Partnerships

80. LTDS is responsible for the maintenance of the University's Register of Educational Partnerships. This is a publically available document providing information on the University's current partnerships; this can be accessed [here](#).

Approved by ULTESEC 18 Oct. 2012; amended and approved 16 July 2015, and 6 July 2016.	
Intended for use by:	Proposers of new partnerships Degree Programme Directors of existing partnerships School Administrators Faculty Learning and Teaching Support Teams Research and Enterprise Services International Office
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