

7B - Partnership Approval: Policy and Procedure

1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This policy and procedure is primarily aimed at Bournemouth University (BU) staff and provides information on the principles underlying new partnership development and the approvals process. The procedure explains the process to be followed to approve new Partners and new partnership activities with existing Partners. This applies to both UK and International Partners.
- 1.2 This policy and procedure applies to all partnership activities which come under defined partnership models as set out in *7A - Partnership Models and Definitions: Policy*. Academic Quality provide an advisory and support role throughout the approval process.
- 1.3 The approval process for new Partner providers or new partnership arrangements may vary according to the partnership model, the type and nature of collaboration planned or the risk assessment outcome. The taxonomy provides an overview of the standard approval processes for new Partners. Section 3.3 provides an overview of the approval process for a new partnership activity with an existing Partner.

1.4 Key Responsibilities

Academic Standards and Education Committee (ASEC): is responsible for, and has oversight of, all partnership proposals. ASEC will consider and approve partner proposals. ASEC will decide the appropriate methodology for partner approval.

University Leadership Team (ULT): has authority to approve high profile, strategic partnerships, to consider partnership proposals and to make recommendations to ASEC for partnership approval.

Faculty Executive Deans: the Faculty Executive Dean is able to consider and approve specific, low risk partnership models on behalf of the Faculty.

Faculties: are responsible for ensuring that partner proposals align to key principles of partner provision and University strategic objectives in the area of collaborative activity.

Academic Quality: are responsible for managing and coordinating the approval process and providing advice and support to key stakeholders undertaking the process for partner approval. The Academic Quality Team will conduct due diligence enquiries, with Legal Services, and make recommendations to Faculties, ULT and ASEC on the basis of evidence collated.

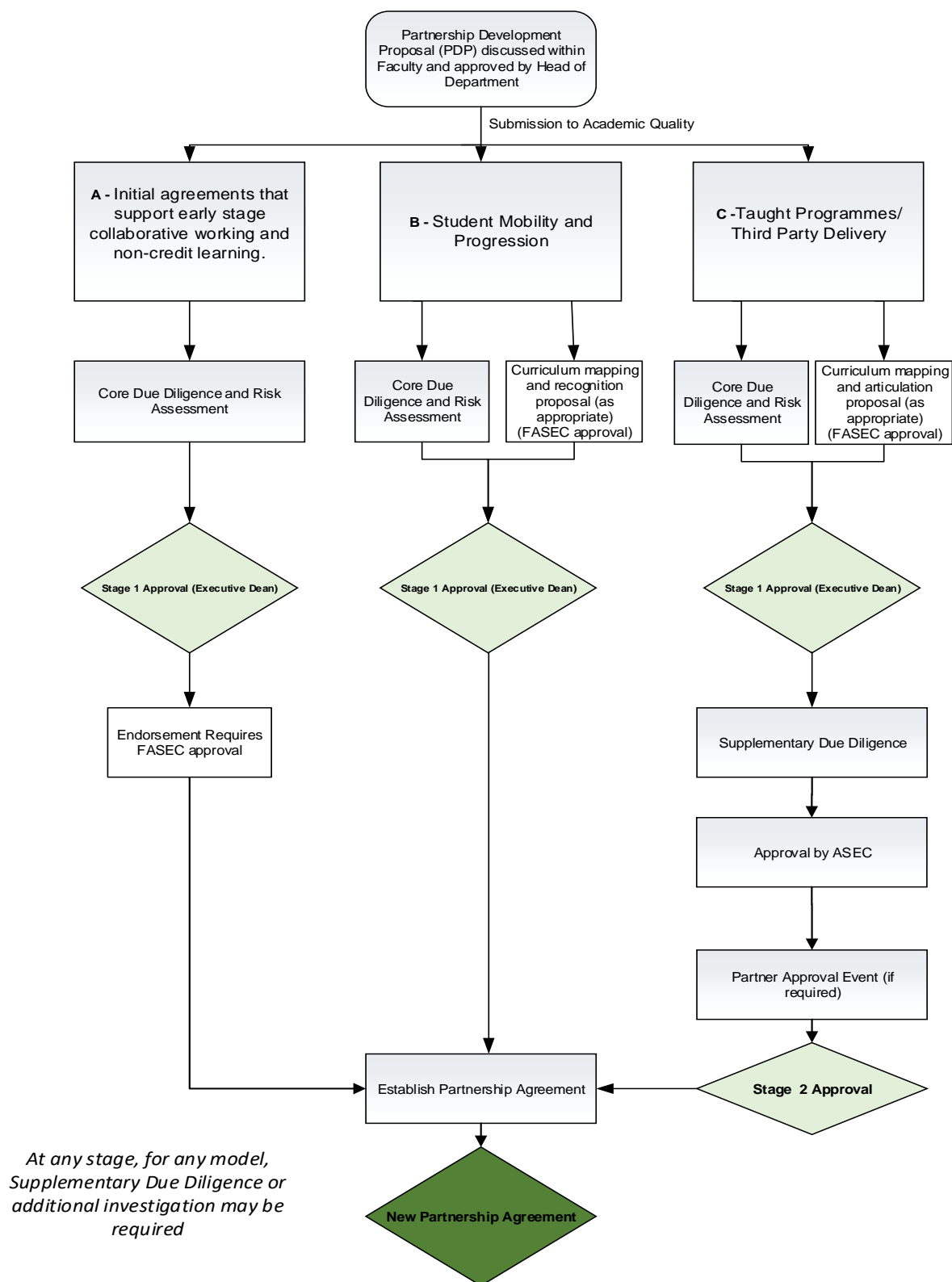
2 POLICY

- 2.1 The following principles underpin the consideration of any potential new partnership or related activities. These should be considered and clearly addressed as appropriate in any proposals:

- i. Partnerships should support the delivery of actions and outcomes within the BU 2025 Strategic Plan, by driving innovation through international collaboration in a range of areas including, but not limited to, pedagogy, curriculum design, capacity to undertake high impact research, leveraging funding streams, enhancing the BU and Partner brands, recruiting students to BU, providing international educational opportunities at home and abroad for BU students.
 - ii. Partners should have strategic aims which are compatible with the BU Vision and Values.
 - iii. The University must be satisfied that engagement with any prospective Partner would not constitute an unacceptable academic risk to reputation.
 - iv. Partnerships should have the potential to make a positive contribution to the reputation and standing of the University, and therefore the University will only collaborate with Partners who themselves have a good academic and/or professional reputation in their field.
 - v. Partners must have credibility and experience related to the academic level of collaboration sought.
 - vi. For Validation partnerships there must be a direct academic fit with the University's own areas of subject expertise.
 - vii. There must be sufficient student numbers on any programme delivered under a partnership to ensure an appropriate and high quality student experience.
 - viii. Partners must be properly established and of appropriate legal standing.
 - ix. Partners must be of appropriate financial standing and the partnership must not constitute an unacceptable level of financial risk for the University.
 - x. For existing providers of HE, Partners must have appropriate and well established quality assurance and enhancement systems in place, evidenced through external inspections and reviews.
 - xi. Financial arrangements must be robust and sustainable, and at least meet Full Economic Costing (FEC) cost contributions. There must be a clear articulation of the resource requirements associated with any proposed partnership and/or provision including staffing, accommodation, facilities, learning resources and capital investment.
 - xii. Partnerships are linked to Faculties on the basis of subject expertise. Some Partners may work with multiple Faculties.
- 2.2 The University undertakes a 'risk-based' approach to partner approval, review and monitoring and has developed a taxonomy of partnership models to ensure consistent, proportionate and effective approval processes are applied to all potential partnerships developments. The policy allows for judgements to be made according to the type of partnership, the experience of the Partner, information and data collated throughout the approval process and the nature of risk presented, which is constantly assessed at each stage. At any point during the approval process, a partnership proposal can be escalated for further scrutiny and an enhanced approval process may be required. The process is designed to be flexible to support future and existing partnership developments and to manage the risk accordingly.

3 PROCEDURE

- 3.1 The diagram below provides an overview of the process:



3.2 Approval Process for New Partners

3.2.1 All partnership proposals should originate from within a Faculty and require approval by the Faculty Executive. Faculties will submit a Partnership Development Proposal (PDP) to academicquality@bournemouth.ac.uk that is signed off by the Head of Department as confirmation that the proposal aligns with principles set out in Section 2.

3.2.2 As outlined in the Partnership Taxonomy different partnership models require different levels of approval and varied timescales. Expected timescales for standard approval are published by Academic Quality. Table 1 summarises standard approving authorities for typical partnership models:

Taxonomy Category	Typical Partnership Model	Normal Level of approval	Approving authority
A (typically non-credit bearing)	- Research/Staff Exchange - Endorsement	Stage 1	Faculty Executive Dean
B (typically mobility and progression activities)	- Student Exchange - Recognition	Stage 1	Faculty Executive Dean
	- Articulation	Stage 1 & 2	ASEC
C (typically taught programmes/third party delivery)	- Off-campus - Shared Delivery/Programme - Franchise - Validation	Stage 1 & 2	ASEC

Table 1

3.2.3 Faculties are required to complete a risk assessment as part of the initial approval. This provides an early indicator of the level of risk associated with a proposed partnership and will help inform the Faculty decision. The risk assessment is then reviewed in line with the due diligence enquiry completed by the Academic Quality Team, and confirmed as accurate or revised according to the due diligence findings.

3.2.4 Faculties must ensure that relevant curriculum mapping is undertaken for all new proposals for student mobility and progression activities where the transfer of academic credit is involved to confirm the suitability of the arrangements. The completed Curriculum Mapping template and Recognition/Articulation Proposal form (where applicable) should be considered by FASEC prior to Stage 1 approval, recorded in the minutes of the FASEC meeting.

3.2.5 **Stage 1 approval** is required for standard, low-risk partnerships as indicated in the taxonomy and can be approved by the relevant Executive Dean on behalf of the Faculty Executive. Academic Quality will make a recommendation to the Executive Dean on the basis of the information provided by the Faculty, the findings of the due diligence enquiry and the advice of Legal Services. Approval will only be sought by the Executive Dean if the proposal is deemed to be low-risk. It is possible that Legal Services, Academic Quality or the Executive Dean may require referral to ASEC for further consideration in advance of approval if there are concerns raised regarding academic standards and quality. For concerns regarding corporate or reputation matters, the proposal may be referred to University Leadership Team (ULT) for consideration.

3.2.6 Stage 1 typical outcomes:

- The proposal is **not approved** and is not progressed further;
- The proposal is **not approved** but is **referred back for additional due diligence / information or ASEC / ULT** consideration;
- The proposal is **approved** and progressed to the next stage (if relevant).

3.2.7 Supplementary due diligence may be undertaken for certain partnerships that require additional scrutiny at stage 1. For example, international student exchange proposals.

- 3.2.8 **Stage 2 approval** is required for partnership proposals that are deemed to be of higher risk and require more complex, in-depth approval processes. Proposals requiring Stage 2 approval are considered by ASEC who will make a recommendation as to whether the proposal proceeds to the next stage of approval. If the proposal is recommended to ASEC for consideration, ASEC may make one of the following judgements:
- The proposal is **not approved** and is not progressed further;
 - The proposal is **not approved** but is **referred back for additional due diligence / information and resubmission to ASEC**;
 - The proposal is **approved subject to a Partner Approval Event**.
- 3.2.9 The Partner Approval Event is an opportunity to confirm information and statements provided in the documentation, to meet with Partner staff and current students, to assess the appropriateness of learning resources and comparability of student experience. ASEC will determine the nature of the Partner Approval Event, whether a Partner visit is required and nominate a panel who will undertake the event on behalf of ASEC.
- 3.2.10 The Academic Quality Team will manage and support the Partner Approval Event in consultation with the relevant Faculty and Partner provider. Academic Quality are responsible for collating the Partner Approval documentation, circulating it to the panel and recording the outcomes.
- 3.2.11 The Panel will determine if the Partner should be approved, and may make recommendations or set additional approval conditions. Timescales for the Partner to meet conditions will be determined and a written response by the Partner explaining how conditions are met will be circulated to all Panel members for approval. The Academic Quality Team will produce a report of the Partner Approval Event which is submitted to ASEC for ratification.

3.3 Approval Process for New Provision and/or Amendments with Existing Partners

- 3.3.1 Typically for low risk partnership (category A and B in taxonomy) where there is a proposal for a new partnership model with an existing Partner, Faculties must contact Academic Quality and may be required to complete the PDP and submit the completed proposal to Academic Quality. Academic Quality will review the proposal and make a judgment on whether any further due diligence or curriculum mapping is required, dependent on the partnership model and the time since due diligence on the Partner was last completed. The Head of Academic Quality will approve the partnership on the basis of the due diligence, or refer to ASEC or ULT for further consideration.
- 3.3.2 For higher-risk, typically category C partnerships, Faculties are required to complete a PDP and ASEC will determine if any additional approvals are required related to the proposed partnership activity. ASEC will consider the proposed activities and relevant Partner model, the experience to date with the Partner and the date and nature of the original Partner approval. In some instances, the approval already in place may be deemed sufficient to cover the additional activities proposed.

4 ESTABLISHING FORMAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

- 4.1 All academic partnership agreements are managed and coordinated by the Academic Quality Team, in liaison with Legal Services. There are a range of standard BU agreements specific to partnership models. The signatory for all academic partnership agreements is the Vice-Chancellor and under no circumstances should any other member of staff sign partnership agreements.¹ ASEC is notified regularly of all newly signed partnership agreements.

5 MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

¹ The only exception to this is Erasmus+ Inter-Institutional agreements on a pre-approved BU template which can be signed by the Head of Academic Quality.

- 5.1 Where partnership arrangements relate to the award of BU credit or to BU programmes or awards, monitoring of quality and standards is in accordance with standard University processes as set out in Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures.

6 MANAGEMENT OF PARTNER AGREEMENTS AND REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIPS

- 6.1 Academic Quality oversee and update all Partner agreements and any related schedules. A risk-based approach is taken to ongoing monitoring of the partnership and the contractual arrangements with the Partner. In accordance with the risk-based approach, in some instances it may be deemed appropriate to renew some aspects of due diligence, e.g. financial checks. Any substantive matters which are highlighted through such due diligence checks may be remitted to ULT and / or ASEC for review and consideration as appropriate. Annual updates to contract schedules are managed by Academic Quality, in consultation with Faculties and Legal Services.

6.2 Renewal of Partnership Agreements

- 6.2.1 Where existing partnership agreements are nearing the end of their term, the Lead Faculty will be contacted by Academic Quality normally twelve months prior to the end date of the existing agreement to confirm whether they wish to renew the partnership. On receipt of Faculty confirmation, and based on a review of standard quality and standards monitoring mechanisms, Academic Quality will assess the level of risk associated with the renewal of the agreement, and may conduct new due diligence checks as deemed appropriate and require further documentation from Faculty. Renewals are considered by the Faculty Executive Dean or ASEC depending on the partnership model.

- 6.2.2 The Faculty Executive Dean may be required to approve the renewal of certain partnership models. In cases where the review of monitoring data or updated Due Diligence indicates a potential risk to quality and standards, the Faculty may refer renewals to ASEC for further consideration.

6.3 Periodic Review – ‘Partner Review’

- 6.3.1 New Partners approved by ASEC and Partner Approval Event are normally subject to periodic review after a period of five years through the Partner Review process, see *7C - Partner Review: Policy and Procedure*.

7 ENDING A PARTNERSHIP

- 7.1 There are a range of circumstances in which a partnership may end, for example:
- when the current agreement expires and it is not renewed;
 - when outcomes are not as anticipated;
 - a change in the strategic direction of the University or the Partner;
 - closure of programmes may lead to termination of the partnership;
 - a change in the risk assessment for a particular partnership, prompted by a quality assurance mechanism or external body report.
- 7.2 The University processes that need to be followed for termination of a partnership will vary according to the partnership model and the content of the partnership agreement. In all cases, the Academic Quality Team will manage this process in liaison with Legal Services and the Faculty as appropriate. For some models, particularly those involving programme delivery, a formal Partner closure event will normally take place coordinated by Academic Quality. Partnership closure reports are submitted to ASEC for consideration.

8 REFERENCES

- 8.1 The following policy documents are available on the Bournemouth University Academic Regulations Policy and Procedure

[7A - Partnership Models and Definitions: Policy](#)

[7C - Partner Review: Policy and Procedure](#)

Further guidance and operational detail is available on the Academic Quality webpage.