

Collaborative Partner Approval Process

1. Discussions between a partner and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) may be initiated in a variety of different ways and take place between the partner and staff from a number of different LJMU Faculties or Service Areas. At a point where the partnership is ready to progress from very initial discussions, contact should be made with either International Relations (for international partnerships) or Academic Registry (for UK partnerships), in order to begin the formal Partner Approval and Programme Approval stages. Contact details for a range of staff at university who might help in the discussions and development of a partnership are available on the [Collaborative Provision webpage](#).
2. The Collaborative Partner Approval Process should be used for consideration of any new partners where the proposed partnership activity involves the delivery of any university credit by a partner organisation. The university works with various partner organisations, through a range of different [Types of Academic Collaborative Partnerships](#).
3. The university's due diligence and partner approval process measures a potential partner's strategic fit, legal status and financial stability. All proposed partners are subject to due diligence.
4. A formal university record will be kept of approved partner organisations.
5. The process of partner approval involves a number of stages, and the approach taken can vary depending on the type of activity being undertaken. This document sets out the approval route for the following types of academic partnerships:
 - Part 1 – validation, franchise and taught joint/dual awards
 - Part 2 – Dual PhDs
6. Where a partnership exists, and a new type of activity is proposed, an assessment will need to be made to establish whether any additional due diligence activity is required.

Part 1 – Validation, Franchise and taught Joint/Dual awards

7. A summary of the partner approval process for validation, franchise and taught joint/dual awards is outlined in Appendix 1, at the end of this guidance. The process involves a number of stages, which each have associated milestones for completion. This guidance provides details about each of these stages and milestones.

Stage 1 – Initial key considerations

8. The first stage of the partner approval process is to explore some initial key considerations, which will determine whether completion of further activity is appropriate. This is led by International Relations for international partners and by Academic Registry for UK partners.
9. Most, if not all, of this activity can take place internally, without communication with the proposed partner organisation.
10. If a proposed partner organisation does not meet one of the specified university criteria, for example if they do not teach in English, the proposal will not proceed to the first milestone for formal consideration.
11. **Milestone 1** – if a proposed partner organisation does meet the specified university criteria, based on the answers to the initial key questions, this will proceed for endorsement by the Faculty PVC(s).
12. If the proposal is not approved, this will be communicated to the partner by International Relations (International partners) or Academic Registry (UK partners).
13. Once the proposal has been approved at Milestone 1, a Memorandum of Understanding can be signed, where required by the partner. A MoU has no legal status and is a statement of intent between LJMU and the partner organisation.

Stage 2 – Initial due diligence

14. Following endorsement to proceed by the Faculty PVC(s), some initial due diligence will be completed. This will be co-ordinated by International Relations for international partnerships and by Academic Registry for UK partnerships.
15. Completion of this information will require input, and the provision of some documentation, from the proposed partner organisation. Where the required documentation is available only in a language other than English, translation will be required of the key content of these documents.
16. [Due Diligence Guidance](#) is available outlining the different areas explored through the due diligence activities, and also providing links to some of the equivalent information and policies of the university, which may be required by a partner to complete their own due diligence activities.
17. This stage will include initial financial checks in compliance with the Financial Due Diligence Policy (available via the [Policy Centre](#)), to be completed by Finance based on the information and evidence provided by the partner.
18. This stage includes consideration of alignment of academic level and the qualification framework that a partner is already working to, with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). If external benchmarking of this alignment is not available, the School will be required to put together a proposal, for consideration by the University Recognition Group (URG), to outline the strategy to reconcile the Qualification Framework(s) within which the proposed partner operates with the FHEQ.

19. **Milestone 2** – once completed, the initial due diligence will be considered for endorsement by the Academic Planning and Fees Panel (APFP).
20. If the proposal is not approved, this will be communicated to the partner by International Relations (International partners) or Academic Registry (UK partners).

Stage 3 – Programme Costing and Pricing

21. To inform the costing activity, a set of details about the proposed programme will need to be prepared by the LJMU School, using a standardised set of questions, the Costing Assumptions. This will be informed by discussion with the proposed partner organisation.
22. The Planning Proposal for the programme in Courseloop will be completed by the School in parallel with the costing/pricing activity, so that the financial proposals and academic proposals can then progress for consideration at the same time. An Associate Academic Registrar can provide support and guidance in completion of the Planning Proposal.
23. Once the Costing Assumptions have been completed, the lead proposer within the School should share them with Finance, and arrange a costing meeting. In instances where the proposed partnership is with an international partner and will involve programmes across a number of different Schools/Faculties, the costing meeting may be arranged by International Relations, following completion by the Schools of the Costing Assumptions.
24. The following representatives should be invited to attend the costing meeting:
 - A representative from the link School(s)
 - Finance
 - *For international partnerships* – a representative from International Relations

In addition, Associate Academic Registrars can be invited to costings, for both UK and international partnerships, and/or can provide advice relating to the costing, however their input is optional and is not required for the activity to go ahead.

25. The Proposed Pricing Details, as an output of the costing meeting, will be agreed with input from each of the above stakeholders (the School, Finance and International Relations, where relevant).
26. When they are prepared, the School Director, or nominee, will submit the following documentation for endorsement by the Faculty Management Team (FMT) and by APFP:
 - the completed costing spreadsheet (including the Costing Assumptions and the Proposed Pricing Details), and
 - the Planning Proposal in Courseloop
27. **Milestone 3a** – FMT endorsement of the proposal to proceed to APFP.

28. **Milestone 3b** – APFP endorsement of the proposal to proceed to stage 4. APFP is responsible for ensuring that applications are consistent with the university's strategic and operational planning processes, as well as approving the financial arrangements for the proposal.
29. APFP will consider the Programme Proposal in Courseloop as part of the Milestone 3b endorsement. If the programme is endorsed by APFP, but it is a new partner which is still subject to due diligence and approval, the programme code will only be issued after partner approval is confirmed.
30. If the proposal is not approved (either by FMT or by APFP), this will be communicated to the partner by International Relations (International partners) or Academic Registry (UK partners).

Stage 4 – Agreement of the financial arrangements with the Partner

31. Following APFP agreement of the Planning Proposal and the associated pricing details, negotiation with the partner to reach an agreed price will be led by the Director of International Relations for international partners and by the Academic Registrar for UK partners.
32. A standard approach will be used for this communication, and will include the provision of:
 - A basic summary of payment terms and the way that charges are constructed – e.g., administration fees, validation fees, minimum fees, etc.
 - Details of the standard collaborative operating arrangements
33. **Milestone 4** – agreement between LJMU and the proposed partner organisation on the financial terms.
34. If LJMU and the partner do not reach an agreement on the financial terms, the partnership will not progress.

Stage 5 – Detailed due diligence

35. The completion of the detailed due diligence, including the legal questionnaire, will be co-ordinated by International Relations for international partnerships and by Academic Registry for UK partnerships. This can commence once the partner has provided written confirmation of agreement to the financial terms.
36. Completion of this information will require input and the provision of some documentation from the proposed partner organisation. As previously stated, where the required documentation is available only in a language other than English, translation will be required of the key content of these documents.
37. **Milestone 5a** – the detailed due diligence, alongside the answers and evidence provided at the previous stages, will collectively be considered for endorsement by Academic Registry. A risk matrix is used to ensure consistent and informed consideration of the completed due diligence.
38. Academic Registry may suggest conditions of partner approval as part of their endorsement.

39. At this stage, the initial financial checks will be revisited by Finance, to ensure that the assessment remains valid and has not changed.
40. **Milestone 5b** – the completed partner approval application, including the answers and evidence collated at all of the stages as outlined above, are considered for approval by APFP.
41. Academic Registry will circulate notification of the decision of APFP including any conditions of partner approval, to the link Faculty and International Relations. The partner will be informed of the outcome by International Relations (International partners) or Academic Registry (UK partners).
42. Any conditions of partner approval will usually need to be met before the university will sign any legally binding contract with the partner. This will be specified within the APFP outcomes.
43. Oversight of partner approval conditions is maintained by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC).
44. Following partner approval, for franchise and validated collaborative programmes, the [Collaborative Programme Approval process](#) should be followed. For taught Joint and Dual awards, the processes outlined in the [Guidance for Joint and Dual](#) awards will be instigated, including development of an Operational Framework.

Part 2 – Dual PhDs

Stage 1 – Planned Partnership and Dual PhD Proposal

45. The first stage of the partner approval process is to explore some initial key considerations about both the partnership and the dual PhD proposal, which will determine whether there is a strategic appetite for the dual PhD to progress. This is led by the School which is proposing the dual PhD partnership.
46. Unlike a validation, franchise or taught joint/dual award partner approval, the partner approval for a dual PhD will not usually require financial due diligence to be completed, as there will be no financial arrangement between the partner and LJMU. If the particular partnership will involve any payments between LJMU and the partner university, finance must be contacted during stage 1 of the partner approval to determine whether financial due diligence is required.
47. **Milestone 1a** – the initial proposal will then proceed for endorsement by the Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.
48. **Milestone 1b** – the proposals are considered for endorsement by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.
49. If the proposal is not endorsed, this will be communicated to the partner by the School.

Stage 2 – Due Diligence

50. The completion of the detailed due diligence, including the legal questionnaire, will be co-ordinated by International Relations. This can commence once Milestone 1b has been signed off by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.
51. **Milestone 2a** – the detailed due diligence, alongside the answers and evidence provided at the previous stage, will collectively be considered for endorsement by Academic Registry. A risk matrix is used to ensure consistent and informed consideration of the completed due diligence.
52. Academic Registry may suggest conditions of partner approval as part of their endorsement.
53. **Milestone 2b** – the completed partner approval application is considered for approval by APFP.
54. Academic Registry will circulate notification of the decision of APFP, including any conditions of partner approval, to the link School, International Relations and the Doctoral Academy.
55. Following partner approval for Dual PhDs, co-ordination of the next steps will be led by the Doctoral Academy.
56. Any conditions of partner approval will usually need to be met before the university will sign any legally binding contract with the partner. This will be specified within the APFP outcomes.
57. The Doctoral Academy will liaise with Academic Registry, to ensure that all partner approval conditions have been met before a dual PhD contract is forwarded to Legal and Governance for completion.
58. Oversight of partner approval conditions is maintained by AQSC.
59. Usually only one dual PhD will be offered in partnership between LJMU and a partner. Where any additional dual PhDs are to be put in place with an existing partnership, Stage 2 due diligence information would need to be updated unless the most recent due diligence was approved by APFP within the last 4 years.

Appendix 1

