Institutional Approval Guidance

**Guidance for Partners**

**2024/25**

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**Institutional Approval Process**

## **1. Structure of the Institutional Approval Process**

Institutional Approval normally comprises three main stages:

* A proposal to establish the relationship in principle, subject to due diligence including financial soundness and an evaluation of the proposed institution’s existing policies and procedures, particularly in those areas which underpin the subsequent approval of individual academic courses, such as QA systems, HE resources and student support systems.  Consideration is given to the institution’s capacity to implement any necessary changes or additions to existing processes or resources.  Discussions involve senior staff from UEA and a decision is typically made following a series of formal and informal meetings, a paper-based review of documentation and an institutional approval event.
* The decision to establish a new collaborative partnership is made by the University’s Senate following formal recommendation from the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). The prospective partner institution simultaneously recommends to its Governing Body that the collaborative partnership be established.
* A formal collaboration agreement is drawn up between the parties concerned and signed by the UEA Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Executive or Principal of the partner institution. The agreement is a legally binding document, normally reviewed every five years, which sets out the rights and obligations of the parties, and includes clauses on termination in order to safeguard the interests of students should a partnership end.

## **2. Evaluating a Proposed New Partnership**

The University will take into account the following factors in the early stages of determining whether to establish a new collaborative relationship:

* an explanation by the prospective partner organisation of why it wishes to seek a relationship with the University, or vice versa;
* an explanation by the University of its policy and procedures for establishing partnerships, including information on existing partnerships;
* any other previous or existing partnerships entered into by the prospective partner organisation with any reasons for rejection, termination or proposed transfer of courses;
* aspirations of the prospective partner organisation about possible courses for approval and longer term ambitions;
* gathering of information, such as the last three year’s audited accounts, to support the due diligence process;
* sharing of information on what would be expected by all parties in the operation of the relationship at institutional and course level, including the management of courses, their monitoring, and the conduct of the assessment process, including the involvement of External Examiners;
* the ability of the prospective partner organisation to provide the human and material resources to operate the arrangement successfully;
* the academic/professional capacity of the prospective partner organisation to deliver any learning and teaching or support at the appropriate levels;
* the ability of the prospective partner organisation to provide an appropriate and safe working environment for students;
* the legal status of the prospective partner organisation in its own country and its capacity to enter into a legally binding agreement;
* a timetable for moving forward in the Institutional Approval process.

## **3. Documentation Requirements**

The Institutional Approval process requires documentary evidence of the proposed Institution’s policies and procedures and other documentation.  A detailed list of the material that is required can be found in the Institutional Approval Documentation checklist.

The documentation should be submitted to Academic Partnerships in an agreed format at least four weeks in advance of the Institutional Approval event. An electronic briefing pack containing relevant documentation is sent to members of the Institutional Approval panel two to three weeks in advance of the event.

## **4. Institutional Approval Panel**

An Institutional Approval panel will be formed, with membership typically comprising:

* Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic Partnerships and Apprenticeships (Chair);
* External academic with appropriate experience in collaborative provision;
* At least one experienced member of academic staff from UEA;
* A representative from UEA Library Services;
* Academic Partnerships representative
* Student representative
* Secretary (provided by Academic Partnerships)

The partner institution’s learning resources provision is a key consideration of the institutional approval process. Therefore, in some cases UEA may decide to conduct a separate visit to the partner institution with a UEA Library Services representative to review learning resources and provide a report for the Institutional Approval panel’s consideration.

The exact membership of the panel for each event will be subject to approval by the Associate PVC Academic Partnerships and Apprenticeships.  In the absence of any panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the event should proceed is at the Chair’s discretion.  Panel members should normally meet with students and/or recent graduates of the prospective institution as part of the institutional approval event.

## **5. Institutional Approval Event**

The Institutional Approval Panel will meet at the prospective institution.  The Institutional Approval event usually takes place over a full day and the agenda is based on a template which may be modified if appropriate for a specific Institutional Approval event. The Institutional Approval event will normally include a tour of relevant facilities.

The agenda will include one or more blocks of time in which the panel may discuss the proposed partnership in detail with members of the senior management team of the prospective institution, and in which members of the prospective institution will have the opportunity to respond to points raised.

The Chair is responsible for highlighting positive aspects of the proposed partnership and raising issues in a constructive manner. The Chair normally commences this second private meeting of the panel by summarising the issues and the prospective institution’s responses and s/he will conclude the meeting by agreeing the outcome of the event with the panel before inviting members of the prospective institution back for verbal feedback.  Where the decision of the Panel is not unanimous, the decision of the Chair is final.

There are three possible outcomes from an event:

* decision to approve the institution, in which case no further action by the senior management team is required;
* not to approve the institution;
* decision to approve the institution with conditions and/or requirements and/or recommendations, in which case the senior management team must provide the Chair with evidence, within agreed timescales, that the conditions and/or requirements have been met, and must respond to any recommendations.

**Commendations** allow the panel a chance to congratulate the partner institution on aspects of good practice.

**Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel prior to an institutional approval, by agreed deadlines.

**Requirements** are those issues on which action will be expected once institutional approval has started, by agreed deadlines, and progress will be monitored through the relevant Joint Board of Study.

**Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered by the partner institution, possibly after institutional approval has commenced and are considered by the Joint Board of Study.

During the feedback session the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the partner institution of any conditions, requirements and/or recommendations for the institution and/or the University and partner institutions to action or to consider. A deadline will be set by which conditions, requirements and/or recommendations should be met and/or responded to, and the Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions and recommendations are circulated within five working days of the event.

## **6. Institutional Approval Report**

The Secretary to the Institutional Approval panel will prepare a summary of the panel’s discussions in the form of a report which, once approved by the Chair, will be circulated to panel members for confirmation.  The report will make a formal recommendation to LTC for approval. The relevant Joint Board of Study will be responsible for monitoring subsequent progress against conditions, requirements and/or recommendations included in the institutional approval report.

## **7. Conditions**

Conditions are signed off by correspondence under Chair’s Action, in consultation with Panel members as necessary.

If the conditions have been met, the Chair will recommend Institutional Approval.  If in the Chair’s opinion any condition has not been met or further evidence is required, the Chair will consider the further documentation which will address only the outstanding issues, in consultation with Panel members as necessary.  If the conditions are not able to be met, the matter should be referred back to LTC to determine whether to request that the prospective institution undertake further work on the proposal and proceed to a further Institutional Approval or to withdraw altogether.