

## PROCEDURE

### Procedures for Course Closure, Suspension and Significant Change

#### Contact Officer

Head of Academic Quality

#### Purpose

##### 1. Introduction

1.1 In all instances where UW awards are being considered for **course closure, suspension or significant change** to an undergraduate or taught postgraduate course, the following procedures are to be used. This applies to courses delivered through partner organisations as well as University based provision. The procedures align with the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education**, and take account of the **Office for Students Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England and Student Protection Plan**, as well as the **Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers** (2015). The procedures seek to protect the interests of applicants and students by ensuring clear and transparent processes for the management of course closure, suspension or significant change in relation to the experience of applicants who have accepted an offer of a place, but not yet registered, and those that have deferred their offer; and the experience of students who are current or have temporarily withdrawn from the course. The procedures align with the University [Terms and Conditions for Applicants](#), and are also intended to help members of the University meet its legal responsibilities.

1.2 These procedures set out the usual process; however, flexibility may be required if timescales do not permit the procedures to be followed exactly, and/or the process for closure or suspension is likely to be complex and high risk.

##### 2. Definitions

###### 2.1 Course Closure

2.1.1 Closing a course means that there are no further intakes to the course and it will no longer be offered by the University (or partner organisation). Those students already registered on the course will continue to progress and complete the course (teach out), or where this is not possible be offered an alternative course or transfer to another provider.

###### 2.2 Course Suspension

2.2.1 Suspension of a course means that there is no intake to the course for a specified period (normally the following academic year). Students currently registered on the course will continue to progress and complete the course.

###### 2.3 Significant Change

2.3.1 Significant changes constitute alterations to a course that could potentially affect the decision of an applicant to take up their place and/or significantly vary the information provided to applicants or to students regarding the nature of the course and its component parts.

2.3.2 A significant change might include:

- a change to the award title
- a change to the accreditation arrangements
- significant changes to the content of the programme such as adding or removing a mandatory module
- changes to the method of delivery or method of assessment of the programme such that the overall learning outcomes of the programme are fundamentally different
- significant changes to the location which the programme is taught

2.3.3 Significant changes can be made to a course through the procedures specified in the Quality Assurance Handbook. These procedures relate to the approval of the intention to make significant changes which will impact on applicants who have been offered a place and/or on students currently registered for the course, and are distinct from the approval process for any such significant change.

### **3 Reasons for course closure, suspension or significant change**

3.1 The University regularly reviews and updates its course and module portfolio to ensure currency and to reflect best practice, taking account of student and external views. In exceptional circumstances, a course or programme may cease to exist or the University may no longer be able to teach a programme or an aspect of a programme to a specific group of students, or the University may introduce a significant change which will impact on applicants and/or current students.

3.2 There are a number of reasons why the University might close or suspend recruitment to a course or make significant changes. These may include but are not limited to the following:

- demand for the course is too small to cover the cost of delivery (i.e. insufficient applicants)
- outcome from the periodic review or course (re)-approval process
- failure to approve the course (including failure to complete actions or address conditions)
- review of the academic portfolio of a School or collaborative partner
- staff involved in the delivery of the course are temporarily/permanently unavailable and it is impossible to substitute them
- external bodies (such as PSRBs) require changes that result in significant change or a course being suspended/closed
- external funding may alter
- concerns about the quality and academic standards of the course
- replacing an existing course with a new one
- changing strategic priorities at subject, School or University level
- closure/termination of collaborative partnership which results in the withdrawal of a course (see partnership closure process).

## **Principles**

### **4 Principles**

4.1 A School (or collaborative partner organisation) may not close, suspend or make significant changes to a course of its own authority because of the contractual liabilities between students, applicants and the University. In the case of collaborative provision, there should be early liaison with the Head of Collaborative Provision. The final decision to close, suspend or initiate significant changes to a course must be made by University Executive Board on the recommendation of Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG); having received the necessary

request/ recommendation from the Head of School or their nominee. Such requests should be made in good time to enable appropriate consultations and communications with all stakeholders.

4.2 The exceptions to this are:

- a) Where a decision is made to suspend recruitment to a course late in the recruitment cycle (eg. after 1<sup>st</sup> July where the course commences in September). In these instances, the Head of School (or nominee) will liaise directly with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost and Academic Registrar for approval to suspend the course. In such cases a report will be made to the Recruitment Review Group notifying them of the exceptional circumstances requiring such action, with the closure reported to the Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG).
- b) proposals for significant change relating to changes in accreditation arrangements, and/or to the content of programmes, learning outcomes and or assessment. These proposals for change are subject to the agreement of the College Director LTQE through the College Course and Module Amendments Sub-Group.

4.3 Course closure, suspension or significant change would normally be initiated for the following academic year unless there are circumstances beyond the University's control. In the event of closure or suspension, no new applicants would be recruited. Students already on the course would be supported to complete their course successfully or if this was not possible due to circumstances beyond the control of the University, transitional arrangements would be made in consultation with the student(s) affected, and involving relevant representatives from the Institute/department, the collaborative partner and link tutor if relevant, Registry Services and the Academic Quality Unit (AQU).

4.4 The University will endeavour to mitigate the impact that course closure, suspension or significant change will have on current and prospective students. In the event of course closure, a planned timeline and action plan for managing the closure and for communicating with applicants and current students must be drawn up by the School in liaison with departments or partners. The action plan must explicitly consider the experience of current and prospective students to protect against any adverse impact a course closure may have.

4.5 Care must be taken to ensure that the implications of course closure, suspension and significant changes have been carefully considered. Particular consideration must be given to consulting and communicating with current students, applicants and other internal and external stakeholders, including the University of Worcester International College (UWIC). Formal written communications should not be initiated until after the course closure, suspension or significant change has been agreed by APPG.

4.6 Where a course is being closed or suspended and modules are accessed/shared within a School or with other Schools, consultation within or with the other School(s) must take place. Course closure or suspension may or may not result in the closure or suspension of related modules. Consideration must be given to all courses that identify shared modules which would be affected by proposals.

4.7 In the case of Joint Honours subject combinations, all Schools must agree to the closure or suspension before the procedure commences. Where agreement cannot be reached, the School proposing the course closure or suspension must highlight this as part of the proposal to APPG for their consideration.

4.8 In the case of collaborative provision, the School must consult with the Head of Collaborative Programmes and AQU in order to assess the strategic, contractual and operational implications. If the course closure or suspension is initiated by the collaborative partner organisation, the School should still ensure these consultations take place, and that the partner is fully aware of the course closure, suspension and significant change policy and processes.

4.9 The Secretary of APPG will formally notify AQU, (including the officer responsible for external examiners), Admissions, Student Records, Timetabling, Communications & Participation, International Office, other School (if applicable), and UWIC (if applicable), when the course closure, suspension or significant change has been approved by University Executive.

4.10 Normally, the relevant School (in liaison with the partner where appropriate) is responsible for communicating course closure, suspension or significant change with current students, and Registry Services (in liaison with the partner where relevant) is responsible for communicating course closure, suspension or significant change with applicants.

4.11 Where a course has been suspended for two consecutive years, the School should consider whether it would be appropriate to close the course. The AQU will report to APPG on course suspensions annually.

## Procedures/processes

### 5 Course Closure

#### 5.1 Stage One: Approval for Course Closure

5.1.1 In the first instance the School must make an assessment of the rationale for, and impact of, a proposed course closure, and ensure discussion with relevant parties as indicated in this document. This includes other Schools in the case of Joint Honours subjects, and shared modules, partner representatives and managers in the case of collaborative provision, staff in Registry Services and AQU, as relevant.

5.1.2 The Head of School (or nominee) must complete the APPG Form 2 [Course Closure and Suspension](#) and submit to APPG.

5.1.3 Once agreement has been reached by APPG that the course may close, the Secretary of APPG will formally notify the appropriate departments (as outlined in 4.9 above). The course will be removed from the University's and UWIC's webpages by Communications & Participation and from the UCAS pages by the Admissions Office. The status of the programme is reflected in Registry records i.e. course closed.

#### 5.2 Stage Two: Managing Course Closure

5.2.1 The Head of School (or nominee) must ensure that an action plan, either CCS Form 1 [Course Closure Action Plan](#) or CCS Form 2 [Course Closure Action Plan \(Collaborative\)](#), is developed for managing the closure process for approval by the School Senior Management Team, and that arrangements are in place for managing and monitoring the course closure. A template and checklist are provided for this purpose. The Senior Management Team and the College LTQE Committee should receive progress reports as appropriate.

5.2.2 Where the process is complex or involves a number of partners and/or stakeholders a course closure management group will be established. The course closure management group should normally include the course leader, student representative, School Head of Department and, where appropriate, officers from relevant professional service departments – eg Registry Services, AQU. In the case of collaborative provision, the partner and/or link tutor and Head of

Collaborative Programmes should also attend. UK partnership closures will be co-ordinated by the Head of Collaborative Programmes and international partnership closures will be co-ordinated by the Deputy Head of Academic Quality.

5.2.3 The action plan must cover:

- notification and communications to students and to applicants (including those who have been offered a place on the course but not yet accepted and those who have accepted a place but have not yet registered)
- notification and communications to other stakeholders, eg partners, placement providers, PSRBs, external examiners, and other stakeholders
- communications with internal University departments
- implications for course management and delivery
- implications for progressing and completing students, including those required to repeat modules.

5.2.4 The School must take full account of the needs of existing students (including those who have withdrawn temporarily), and applicants to the course (including those who have deferred offers), ensuring that quality and academic standards, and PSRB requirements, where relevant, are maintained. Student representatives should be involved in planning for managing course closure and teaching out. It should be noted that where students temporarily withdraw from a course, the University cannot guarantee continuation on the same course and/or modules [Taught Courses Regulatory Framework, 3.9].

5.2.5 In the event that it appears impossible to 'teach out' the course, and alternative arrangements need to be considered, the School must consult with the Academic Registrar and the Director of Quality and Educational Development in the first instance.

5.2.6 The School must also give full consideration to how applicants will be supported in making a decision about an alternative course or releasing their place and their contract with the University. The School must liaise with Registry Services, and communication with applicants will be through Registry Services.

### **5.3 Stage Three: Communication**

5.3.1 The Head of School (or nominee) will meet with current students to inform them of the course closure and arrangements for teaching out the course. Students should be informed of how the School intends to ensure the quality of the student experience, how matters such as reassessment, temporary withdrawal etc will be handled. Students must be provided with opportunities to raise queries and concerns.

5.3.2 Registry Services in liaison with the School is responsible for communicating with all applicants and with temporarily withdrawn students. AQU is responsible for informing external examiners and PSRBs (unless agreed otherwise with the School) about course closure.

5.3.3 The Assistant Registrar (Recruitment & Admissions) will ensure that the course is removed from the UCAS database and will ensure liaison with the School regarding applicants. UCAS regulations mean that specific procedures need to be followed in respect of any student who has applied for or is holding an offer of a place on the course concerned. All communications with applicants will be via Registry Services.

5.3.4 Communications & Participation will ensure that the UW and UWIC websites reflect the status of the course closure.

## **6 Course Suspension**

### **6.1 Stage one: Approval for Course Suspension**

6.1.1 Course suspension is normally for one academic year or one intake. The Head of School (or nominee) must complete the APPG Form 2 [Course Closure and Suspension](#) and submit to APPG. This should be submitted as soon as possible, and suspension may only commence once agreed by APPG. The Secretary of APPG will formally notify the appropriate departments (as outlined in 4.9 above) of the course suspension.

6.1.2 In the event of a planned suspension to a course, the School or partner must give full consideration to how applicants will be supported in making a decision about alternative courses or releasing their place and contract with the University. The School must liaise with Registry Services, and communication with applicants will be through Registry Services.

6.1.3 It is recognised that some course suspensions occur late in the academic year and at relatively short notice, in which case processing through the APPG is not appropriate. In such cases, the authority to suspend the course is subject to the approval and agreement of the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Academic Registrar and reported to APPG (see 6.3.5).

6.1.4 All course suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties. This includes other Schools in the case of Joint Honours subjects, and shared modules, partner representatives and managers in the case of collaborative provision, staff in Registry Services and AQU, as relevant.

6.1.5 Once agreement has been reached by APPG or the Deputy Vice Chancellor that the course may be suspended, the status of the course will be changed on the University's webpages by Communications & Participation and on the UCAS pages by the Admissions Office. The status of the programme is reflected in Registry records i.e. course suspended.

### **6.2 Stage 2 Managing Course Suspension**

6.2.1 The School should ensure that a meeting is held to consider the implications of the course suspension for the following, and to ensure appropriate communications and actions:

- students who were due to return to studies and/or who may be required to repeat modules as a result of academic failure
- current students on the programme
- external examiners, placement providers and other external partners, PSRBs
- arrangements for marketing and recruitment of the course for the next intake.

### **6.3 Stage 3: Communication**

6.3.1 Registry Services, in liaison with the School, is responsible for communicating with all applicants. AQU is responsible for informing external examiners and PSRBs (unless agreed otherwise with the School) about course suspension.

6.3.2 The School, in liaison with Registry Services, is responsible for ensuring that any current students (or temporarily withdrawn students) who were due to commence the course and/or are required to repeat modules are communicated with and appropriate arrangements to support progression made. Communication should be through Registry Services and clear records maintained.

6.3.3 The Assistant Registrar (Recruitment & Admissions) will ensure that the course is removed from the UCAS database and will ensure liaison with the School regarding applicants. UCAS

regulations mean that specific procedures need to be followed in respect of any student who has applied for or is holding an offer of a place on the course concerned. All communications with applicants will be via Registry Services.

6.3.4 Communications & Participations will ensure that the UW and UWIC websites reflects the status of the course suspension.

6.3.5 The Academic Registrar will ensure a report of all course suspensions is submitted to an early meeting of the APPG on an annual basis.

#### **6.4 Reinstatement of a Suspended Course**

6.4.1 Courses that have been suspended will automatically become available at the end of the term for which the suspension has been agreed by APPG, unless the School indicates to APPG that the suspension should be extended.

6.4.2 Should the department wish to re-instate the course before the end of the period of suspension, an application to APPG must be made which must state the reason for the reversal of the suspension and requested reinstatement date.

### **7 Significant Change**

#### **7.1 Stage 1: Approval for intention to make Significant Change**

7.1.1 The intention to make a significant change to a course is subject to the agreement of APPG for changes relating to award title, mode of delivery and/or location of the course in order that consideration can be given to the implications for contractual liabilities, resource implications, public information, and communications with applicants and/or students. The intention to make significant changes relating to accreditation arrangements, and/or to the content of programmes, learning outcomes and or assessment, are subject to the agreement of the College Director LTQE who will advise on and refer any implications for contractual liabilities.

7.1.2 Significant changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely fashion and should normally be agreed one year in advance of the next intake. Where significant changes are intended to impact on current students and/or represent changes to the information already provided for applicants, these will be exceptional, must involve consultation with students, and may require the written consent of students and/or applicants.

7.1.3 Schools considering significant changes that will impact on current students and/or applicants must read the current University [Terms and Conditions for Applicants](#) to be clear on the legal obligations to applicants and to students, and to consult with the Director of Quality and Educational Development and Academic Registrar at the earliest opportunity.

7.1.4 Significant changes made to courses after students have made module choices for the following year will only be permitted exceptionally.

7.1.5 The Head of School (or nominee) must complete the **APPG Form 3: [Request for Significant Change](#)** and submit to APPG. Forms should be submitted in good time and in advance of consultations with students or other stakeholders.

#### **7.2 Stage 2: Managing proposed significant change to a course and communications with applicants and/or students**

7.2.1 Once agreement has been reached that the proposed significant change may, subject to approval, be made, the Head of School (or nominee) and course leader must consult with the Academic Registrar (or nominee) to ensure appropriate communications with applicants. Where

the proposed change will also impact on current students, the School must ensure that the proposal has the agreement of all students. In certain cases, there may be a requirement to obtain this in writing from each individual student/applicant.

7.2.2 In consulting and communicating proposals for significant changes to courses with students, Schools must be aware of students' rights as set out in the University [Terms and Conditions for Applicants](#).

7.2.3 The AQU will monitor and report to ASQEC on the scale and scope of significant change annually.

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| <b>Date Approved</b>                             | 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2017   |
| <b>Approval Authority</b>                        | ASQEC   |
| <b>Date of Commencement</b>                      | 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2017   |
| <b>Date of Review</b>                            | August 2021   |
| <b>Amendment Dates</b>                           | <p>August 2019<br/> <i>Changes due to restructure from Institutes to Schools and Colleges, CSG to APPG.</i></p> <p>August 2021<br/> <i>Changes to align terminology with the Terms and Conditions for Applicants.</i></p> <p>August 2021<br/> <i>Changes to reflect changes to titles of APPG Forms (<b>APPG Form 2: <a href="#">Course Closure and Suspension</a></b> and <b>APPG Form 3: <a href="#">Request for Significant Change</a></b>)</i></p> <p><i>Changes to include UWIC involvement.</i></p> |
| <b>Date for Next Review</b>                      | August 2022   |
| <b>Related Policies, Procedures and Guidance</b> | <p>Policy for Course Closure, Suspension or Significant Change - awaiting update</p> <p><b>APPG Form 2:</b> <a href="#">Course Closure and Suspension</a></p> <p><b>APPG Form 3:</b> <a href="#">Request for Significant Change</a></p> <p>CCS Form 1 <a href="#">Course Closure Action Plan</a></p> <p>CCS Form 2 <a href="#">Course Closure Action Plan (Collaborative)</a></p>   |