

PROCEDURE

Procedures for Course Closure, Suspension and Substantial Change

Contact Officer

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Purpose

1. Introduction

1.1 In all instances where UW awards are being considered for **course closure, suspension or substantial 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 **HEFCE statement of good practice on course change and closure (2015)**, 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 substantial 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and those that have deferred their offer; and the experience of students who are current or have temporarily withdrawn from the course.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 Substantial Change

2.3.1 Substantial 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 substantial change might include:

- change of course location to another campus or partner college
- change to the title of a course and/or associated award
- change to the accreditation of a course
- change to the mode of delivery of a course, or
- substantial change to the curriculum, assessment or modules within a course (e.g. substantial changes to mandatory modules which results in a significant change to the course offer).

2.3.3 Substantial changes can be made to a course through the procedures specified in the Quality Assurance Handbook (defined as major amendments to courses). These procedures relate to the approval of the intention to make major and substantial 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 major and substantial change.

3 Reasons for course closure, suspension or substantial 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 substantial 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 substantial 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 an Institute 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 substantial 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, Institute 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 An Institute (or collaborative partner organisation) may not close, suspend or make substantial 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 Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Educational Partnerships. The final decision to close, suspend or initiate substantial changes to a course must be made by University Executive on the recommendation of Course Scrutiny Group (CSG), having received the necessary request/recommendation from the Head of Institute 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 (e.g. after 1st July where the course commences in September). In these instances, the Head of Institute (or nominee) is required to liaise directly with the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Academic Registrar for approval to suspend the course. Academic Registry will provide a report to CSG on all course suspensions early in each academic year
- b) proposals for substantial 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 Director of Quality and Educational Development (DQED) (as is currently the case). The DQED will consult or refer as necessary.

4.3 Course closure, suspension or substantial 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 substantial 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 Institute 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 substantial 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 substantial change has been agreed by University Executive.

4.6 Where a course is being closed or suspended and modules are accessed/shared within an Institute or with other Institutes, consultation within or with the other Institute(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 Institutes must agree to the closure or suspension before the procedure commences. Where agreement cannot be reached, the Institute proposing the course closure or suspension must highlight this as part of the proposal to CSG for their consideration.

4.8 In the case of collaborative provision, the Institute must consult with Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Educational Partnerships, Head of Collaborative Programmes and the 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 Institute should still ensure these consultations take place, and that the partner is fully aware of the course closure, suspension and substantial change policy and processes.

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

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

4.11 Where a course has been suspended for two consecutive years, the Institute should consider whether it would be appropriate to close the course. The AQU will report to CSG 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 Institute 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 Institutes 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 Institute (or nominee) must complete the 'Request for Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of Courses' and submit to CSG.

5.1.3 Once agreement has been reached by CSG that the course may close, the Secretary of CSG will formally notify the appropriate departments (as outlined in 4.9 above). The course will be removed from the University'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 Institute (or nominee) must ensure that an action plan is developed for managing the closure process for approval by the Institute 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 Institute Quality Committee (IQC) 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, IQC Chair 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. Partnership closures will be co-ordinated by the Head of Collaborative Programmes.

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 Institute 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 Institute must consult with the Academic Registrar and DQED in the first instance.

5.2.6 The Institute 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 Institute 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 Institute (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 Institute 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 Institute 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 Institute) 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 Institute 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 & Participations will ensure that the UW website reflects 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. A request to suspend a course must be made to CSG. This should be submitted as soon as possible and suspension may only

commence once agreed by CSG and University Executive. The Secretary of CSG 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 Institute 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 Institute 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 CSG 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.

6.1.4 All course suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties. This includes other Institutes 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 In the case of planned suspensions, the Head of Institute (or nominee) must complete the 'Request for Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of Courses' and submit to CSG.

6.1.6 Once agreement has been reached by CSG 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 Institute 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 Institute, is responsible for communicating with all applicants. AQU is responsible for informing external examiners and PSRBs (unless agreed otherwise with the Institute) about course suspension.

6.3.2 The Institute, 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 Institute 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 website 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 CSG 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 CSG, unless the Institute indicates to CSG 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 CSG must be made which must state the reason for the reversal of the suspension and requested reinstatement date.

7 Substantial Change

7.1 Stage 1: Approval for intention to make Substantial Change

7.1.1 The intention to make a substantial change to a course is subject to the agreement of CSG 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 substantial changes relating to accreditation arrangements, and/or to the content of programmes, learning outcomes and or assessment, are subject to the agreement of the DQED (as is currently the case) who will advise on and refer any implications for contractual liabilities.

7.1.2 Substantial changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely fashion and should normally be agreed one year in advance of the next intake. Where substantial 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 Institutes considering substantial 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 DQED and Academic Registrar at the earliest opportunity.

7.1.4 Substantial 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 Institute (or nominee) must complete the 'Request for Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of Courses' and submit to CSG or an 'amendments to approved courses form' to the IQC Secretary and the AQU. Forms should be submitted in good time and in advance of consultations with students or other stakeholders.

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

7.2.1 Once agreement has been reached that the proposed substantial change may, subject to approval, be made, the Head of Institute (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 Institute 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 substantial changes to courses with students, Institutes 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 substantial change annually.

References

Competition and Markets Authority (2015) UK Higher Education Providers - Advice on Consumer Protection Law: Helping you comply with your obligations. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428549/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf [accessed 8th February 2017]

HEFCE (2015) Higher Education Course Changes and Closures: Statement of Good Practice. http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Regulation/Student,protection/Statement_good_practice.pdf [accessed 8th February 2017]

QAA (2016) UK Quality Code for Higher Education. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code> [accessed 8th February 2017]

UW (2015a) Taught Course Regulatory Framework. <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/documents/TaughtCoursesRegulatoryFramework.pdf> [accessed 8th February 2017]

UW (2015b) Terms and Conditions. <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/1006.htm> [accessed 8th February 2017]

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Related Policies, Procedures and Guidance	Policy for Course Closure, Suspension or Major Change Request for Course Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change template Course Closure Action Plan