

Procedure for Withdrawing or Suspending Higher Education Courses

Introduction

1. The University continually reviews its Higher Education (HE) curriculum to ensure it delivers to student demand (local, national and international) and student expectations, and aligns with strategic objectives, pedagogical developments, and emerging academic and professional practice. The University is committed to ensuring the quality of learning opportunities and supporting students towards achieving the best possible academic outcomes. Beyond the normal academic practice of reviewing and updating modules / units and courses / programmes, in exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to close a course or programme.
2. In such circumstances the University would ensure that existing or potential students would be fully informed, consulted and supported to protect their interests.

Definitions

3. Although the University is still running validated programmes incorporating modules in Levels 6 and 7 for the purpose of this Procedure, the terms courses and units are used.
4. The following terms are used to define non-continuation of a course:
 - Closure - a course is closed when it ceases to be one for which a student may apply.
 - Suspension - a course is suspended when a decision is taken not to recruit to the course or to deliver the course for a defined period.

Academic Board approval

5. The recommendation to close or suspend a course must be made by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The recommendation to close or suspend must be discussed initially at SLT followed by a consultation period with current students who are affected. The Academic Board would then be required to make a decision to approve. If there are strategic implications for the University, the Chair of the Board of Governors should be informed at an early stage.
6. In all other cases, the recommendation to close or suspend a course must cover the following areas:
 - the rationale for closure or suspension (see paragraph 7)
 - the proposed arrangements for students currently registered on the course (see paragraphs 8-11)
 - the proposed arrangements for applicants who have accepted offers of a place on the course (see paras 12-14).

7. The Academic Board will only accept the recommendation if the rationale is sufficiently strong to justify the disruption to students and applicants, and if the arrangements for students and applicants satisfy the requirements set out below. The rationale should include proposals outlining timescales for closure and measures to engage students and maintain the highest quality of the academic and general University experience.

Rationale for closure or suspension of a course

8. The following may be regarded as sufficient cause for closing or suspending a course:

- the demand for the course is too small to cover the cost of delivery (declining student numbers)
- staff involved in teaching the course are permanently unavailable (for example the lack of the sole subject specialist on a niche course) or temporarily unavailable and it is unduly difficult or impossible to replace that individual.
- concerns about the quality and academic standards on the course
- external bodies (such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies) make changes that lead to a recommendation to close or suspend the course
- if recommended at a Course Review event.

Arrangements for students currently registered on the course

9. Unless there are exceptional circumstances the University will always plan to 'teach out' any course accepted for closure [*the course continues to be accredited but no new students can be enrolled, and arrangements are in place to ensure all existing students can either complete the course of study, or transition to a mutually agreed course at no disadvantage*]. Therefore, where the recommendation is to close or suspend the course to new entrants only then current students must be allowed to complete their designated period of registration on the course unless they give their explicit written consent to the contrary. Such consent must not be sought until a closure or suspension recommendation has been agreed by the Academic Board.

10. Where the recommendation is to close or suspend the course and current students will be affected, a consultation period should be put in place with the views of all current students on the proposed arrangements sought by the University and included with the recommendation to the Academic Board. The consultation must begin as soon as possible after consideration to close a course ensuring all students have the opportunity to feed into the process. Timescales for closure and arrangements for managing the course to closure need to be carefully considered and discussed with students, by face-to-face contact where possible. Expectations must be managed and any views expressed listened to and responded to accordingly. From a student's perspective this period will be extremely unsettling. Proposed arrangements for students currently registered on the course (including those whose registration is suspended but have not yet completed the course) must encompass the following:

- confirmation that the standard of provision to current students will be maintained throughout their period of registration (ie course taught out)
- confirmation that the previously stated learning outcomes of the course will still be achievable by current students, even if the range of unit choices is smaller because of staffing reductions

- options provided for current students in regard to transferring to another course within the University or to another institution.

11. As part of this process, a number of other factors must be taken into account:

- impact on remaining student cohorts once new entrants cease (or if course suspended) - to include impact on mental health and wellbeing
- impact on interrupted students (for instance those who intend to return to study after illness)
- student perception of the validity of the ongoing course in terms of quality of award and future employment/career
- ongoing arrangements for tutors, and maintaining staff:student ratios, contact time, course resources
- academic standards and quality of learning opportunities
- impact on specific groups of students taking into account educational and personal backgrounds and protected characteristics, and including part time students, potential new entrants, repeaters, deferrals, etc - to include impact on mental health and wellbeing
- information for alumni and other stakeholders including industry partners such as sponsors or employers.

12. The University is committed to ensuring the continuity of studies as far as is reasonably practicable.

Arrangements for prospective students (including deferred entrants)

13. All communications with applicants on these matters must be undertaken by the Admissions Office team. Applicants who have accepted offers, including those who have deferred offers, should not be contacted until a closure/suspension recommendation has been accepted and approved at the Academic Board. These applicants should then be informed of their options in regard to transferring their application to another course within the University or to another institution.

14. Applicants who have been made offers, but have not yet accepted them may be contacted at an earlier stage to be informed that a closure/suspension recommendation has been made. Such applicants should be told that the offer of a place is suspended until a decision has been made and will be withdrawn if the recommendation is accepted.

15. Once the decision has been made to close or suspend a course, the Student Recruitment and Admissions team should consult the UCAS Admissions Guide for specific information relating to UCAS applicants. They should identify any applicants who will be affected by the decision and notify them. If the applicant does not reply within the timescale requested in the initial letter, the Admissions team should issue a reminder letter advising the applicant that their application will be withdrawn if no response is received within a specified timescale. The Head of HE Registry will close or suspend on UCAS any courses that are affected.

Arrangements for Staff

16. Where staff terms and conditions or service are affected or there are potential redundancies, the Head of Human Resources must be consulted at the earliest opportunity in considering any course closure. The Head of Human Resources would ensure that any staff affected are well supported throughout the process.

Communications

17. If approval to close or suspend a course is granted, the Registrar will notify the following to alert them of the decision:

- Chief Operating Officer
- Director of Communications

18. The Registrar will also ensure that all other personnel affected within the University are notified along with academic partners as appropriate (awarding bodies, accrediting institutes, external examiners etc.).

19. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) will inform the students on the course that is going to be closed in writing together with confirmation of the way in which they will be supported to complete the course.

20. The Director of Communications will liaise with the Head of Development to inform any external agencies allied to the course affected (employers, research partners etc).

Other considerations

21. If a decision to close or suspend a course is taken late in the admissions cycle, the availability of suitable alternatives at the University or at other institutions may be extremely limited and the existing student may consider claiming financial compensation from the University, with a potential risk or damage to reputation and financial status. Referral should be made to the [Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy](#)

Publications and Marketing

22. When a closure/suspension recommendation has been accepted, the Registrar will consult with the Director of Communications to ensure all necessary amendments are made to University publications and the website and UCAS will be notified.

Appendix:

A. Proposal for Withdrawal or Suspension of a Course of Study

Appendix A

Proposal for Withdrawal or Suspension of a Course of Study

Items to note:

- courses should not normally be withdrawn or suspended once the application cycle for that year has commenced.
- the impact of any withdrawal / suspension of courses should be discussed with relevant colleagues in Admissions to confirm how any prospective, current, or deferred applicants will be handled, including applicants, and students on Extended BA courses leading to the future course.
- applicants should not be contacted until any withdrawal or suspension has been approved.

1. Is this proposal for a withdrawal or suspension of course(s) / programme(s)? (Please tick)				
Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Withdrawal
2. Name of course(s) / programme(s) to be withdrawn or suspended:				
3a. Proposed date of commencement of suspension or withdrawal				
3b. If a suspension, what is the duration of the suspension?				
3c. If a suspension, will the course / programme be the same as the current approved version when it is reintroduced? (if not, the Academic Board will make a decision as to whether its reintroduction should be considered as a new course / programme)				

4. Proposal for course / programme withdrawal or suspension made by:		
5. Proposal approved by:		
Notes:		
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) (signature)		
Date:		
6. How will any applicants (including prospective applicants, offer holders and those with deferred entry, including those that may enter through the Extended BA) be handled? Please detail alternative course / programme options that may be available.		
7. Will the proposal affect current students? If 'Yes', how will they be treated? e.g. are there part-time students, or students on leave of absence / interrupted study, who will still be on the course / programme, or students on the Extended BA course?		
8a. Number of home students on the course / programme(s):		
Current Year - 3	Current Year - 2	Current Year - 1
8b. Number of overseas students on the course / programme(s):		
9. Associated fee income		
Current Year - 3	Current Year - 2	Current Year - 1
£	£	£

10. Please explain how any net income lost from this proposal will be recovered and detail any other financial implications:

11. What is the rationale for suspension / withdrawal of the course / programme:

12. Does this proposal have implications for other courses / programmes within the department or other departments? (e.g. units / modules that are available to other courses)

13. Which academics and/or which support staff are involved with the course(s)? How much of their time is used?

14. Please identify any reduction in costs accompanying suspension / withdrawal of this course:

15. Please provide information on any space freed up by suspension / withdrawal of this course - (e.g. office space, timetabled space (please consult with Head of Facilities and Head of Curriculum Operations as appropriate)):

16. Please explain how any reputational damage will be avoided due to suspension / withdrawal of the course(s):

17. Is the course in the current prospectus?

--

18. Chief Operating Officer / Head of Finance comments:
--

--

19. Any other comments and or supporting information?
--

--

Approval by Chair of Academic Board:

Signature:	
-------------------	--

Date:	
--------------	--

Approval by Chair of Board of Governors (if required):

Signature:	
-------------------	--

Date:	
--------------	--

Document version control	
Document title:	Procedure for Withdrawing or Suspending Higher Education courses
Effective Date:	September 2022 (for AY 2022/23)
Approving body:	SLT 24 Aug 22
Version:	5
Supersedes:	Version 4, Sep 21
Previous review dates:	Version 3 - Sep 20 (no change) Version 2 - Sep 19 Version 1 - and previously inclusion in Validation Procedures (HE)
Next review date:	June 2023 (or as appropriate depending on University title process)
Related Statutes, Ordinances, & General Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Quality Code - Admissions, Recruitment & Widening Access • QAA Quality Code - Course Design & Development • QAA Quality Code - Student Engagement • Handbook for Validated Awards • OfS Student Protection Plans
Related policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions Policy • Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy
Related procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validation, Revalidation and Modification Procedures (HE)
Related information:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUP Student Protection Plan
Policy owner and Lead contact:	Head of Compliance & Quality Systems Email: jwright@aup.ac.uk