

# Academic Quality and Standards Handbook

## Section 8: Course Suspension and Closure

2023-24

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose and Aims

1.1.1 This section describes:

- (a) How the University supports the suspension or closure of an existing course
- (b) How the suspension or closure of a course is approved by the University.

1.1.2 The aim of the suspension and closure process is to ensure that the University meets the obligations and expectations of its staff, students and regulators by:

- (a) Ensuring compliance with the University's obligations under its conditions of registration with the Office for Students (OfS), and broader compliance responsibilities (i.e. Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Guidance)
- (b) Ensuring that internal expertise is exploited in protecting the student's interests and outcomes in suspending and closing University courses are well communicated to all involved (e.g. Marketing and Communication Teams, Wellbeing Teams, Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT))
- (c) Responding to the individual circumstances of each suspension or closure to ensure that all quality requirements are proportionate to the risk being managed.

## 1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 The following definitions are used:

- (a) **Suspension:** A course will not undertake the recruitment of new students. All remaining students will be 'taught out' for the remainder of their course, including all publicised elements. A course may be suspended with a view to closing or re-opening
- (b) **Closure:** A course will not undertake the recruitment of new students. All remaining students will be 'taught out' for the remainder of their course including all publicised elements.

## 1.3 Regulation relevant to this section

1.3.1 Condition B1 of the OfS conditions of registration require that providers ensure students registered on each higher education course receive a high-quality academic experience.

1.3.2 A high-quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course:

- 1) is up-to-date
- 2) provides educational challenge

- 3) is coherent
- 4) is effectively delivered; and
- 5) requires students to develop relevant skills.

1.3.3 Condition B2 requires that providers must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

- 1) students registered on a higher education course receive resources and support to ensure:
  - a) a high-quality academic experience for those students; and
  - b) those students succeeding in and beyond higher education; and
- 2) effective engagement with students to ensure:
  - a) a high-quality academic experience for those students; and
  - b) those students succeed in and beyond higher education.

1.3.4 Condition B3 requires that providers must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study.

1.3.5 Condition B4 requires providers must ensure that:

- 1) students are assessed effectively;
- 2) each assessment is valid and reliable;
- 3) academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;
- 4) academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and
- 5) relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

1.3.6 Condition B5 requires that providers must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body):

- 1) any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and
- 2) awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.

1.3.7 The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education relevant for course suspension and closure are:

- (a) The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework
- (b) The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards
- (c) Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed
- (d) From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

## **1.4 Responsibilities**

- 1.4.1 Academic Board has the responsibility and authority to set, maintain and assure academic standards.
- 1.4.2 Academic Quality and Standards Office (AQSO) is responsible for organising and managing the suspension and closure process for courses.
- 1.4.3 Academic Quality Lead in each School or College is responsible for ensuring that colleagues observe the procedures and requirements.
- 1.4.4 The School or College is responsible for ensuring that the impact of suspension and closure of courses with accreditation and/or endorsement by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) and/or industry stakeholder is managed appropriately. Further information on accreditation and endorsement can be found in Section 9: External Accreditation and Endorsement.
- 1.4.5 A Course Leader – identified for each course by the relevant School or College – is responsible for ensuring that any proposal for the suspension/closure of a course is managed appropriately and according to this section. They are also responsible for giving assurance that the communication throughout the suspension/closure of a course has been appropriately undertaken.
- 1.4.6 The School or College Quality Committee is responsible for oversight of the teaching out plan and the quality of the student experience during teach out.
- 1.4.7 The University Secretary is responsible for CMA compliance and the requirements of the Student Protection Plan.

## **1.5 Cross School or College or Academic Partnership courses**

- 1.5.1 Some courses may be jointly delivered by two or more Schools or Colleges e.g. combined, major/minor and joint honours courses, or by an Academic Partner.
- 1.5.2 To avoid confusion and undue effort, milestones in the course suspension and closure process should not be duplicated (e.g. submission of documents to the AQSO).

- 1.5.3 The lead School or College, as designated on the Suspension and Closure Form (SC1), should direct activities. Nonetheless, at key stages all School or Colleges involved must confirm all decisions by providing signatures as directed on the form.

## **1.6 Interpretation**

- 1.6.1 This document refers to named positions (e.g. Academic Quality Lead, Deans or Directors or Heads of School or College) to detail required activities or authorisations.
- 1.6.2 Where a department does not have the identified position, an alternative must be identified, with comparable seniority and remit, such that all required activities or authorisations are undertaken.

## **1.7 Further Guidance**

- 1.7.1 For further guidance colleagues should make early contact with the AQSO (e.g. enquiries regarding non-standard courses or appointments) at [quality@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:quality@uwl.ac.uk) or on 020 8231 2116.
- 1.7.2 Where a proposal involves an academic partnership with an external institution, the lead School or College should ensure they contact both the AQSO, and the Global Partnerships Office (GPO) at [UWL.GPO@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:UWL.GPO@uwl.ac.uk) or on 020 8231 2449 at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.7.3 The University Secretary should be consulted where CMA compliance guidance is required, including dealing with issues that may lead to complaints and appeals. Advice can be provided on the provisions of the Student Protection Plan.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF SUSPENSION AND CLOSURE PROCESS

### 2.1 Stages of suspension and closure process

2.1.1 The University might decide to suspend or close a course for several reasons, including:

- (a) Declining student numbers
- (b) Lack of specialist academic staff which is affecting the delivery of the course
- (c) Replacing an existing course with a new one
- (d) Changing strategic priorities in the academic discipline, School or College or University.
- (e) Concerns about the quality, academic standards or student outcomes on the course raised by students, staff, or External Examiners; or
- (f) Termination of an academic partnership which results in withdrawal of a course.

2.1.2 The suspension and closure process for all provision comprises two stages:

#	Stage	Authorising Body	Responsibility
1	University Approval	Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE)	Dean or Director or Head of School or College
2	Academic Planning and Monitoring	School or College Quality Committee	Course Leader

2.1.3 It must be noted that, the process of recruitment places a contractual obligation on the School or College and University to run the course as advertised, and therefore only in extreme situations will the University approve the closure of a course without fulfilling the University's contractual obligation to teach out students currently active on the course. In this exceptional situation all students will be offered replacement provision. All current students must be consulted prior to transferring to the replacement provision.

### 2.2 Criteria for effective suspension/closure

2.2.1 In suspending or closing provision, the authorising body and responsible officers should certify that the proposal:

- (a) Clearly articulates how the outcomes – for each enrollable and exit qualification – will continue to meet the threshold standards set by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQs).
- (b) Clearly articulates how the course team will provide a reliable and fair opportunity for all students – regardless of background – to achieve the outcomes of the course within a reasonable time period.

- (c) Clearly articulates how appropriate communications with students and other stakeholders regarding the suspension/closure are proposed to be and have been undertaken.
- (d) Clearly articulates how appropriate communications with staff and External Examiners affected by the suspension/closure have been undertaken.
- (e) Clearly articulates how the facilities, learning resources and student support services required by the course team will be maintained during the closure period in order to deliver a high-quality experience.
- (f) Clearly articulates how appropriately qualified and sufficient staff required to deliver the course will be maintained during the suspension/closure period in order to deliver a high-quality experience.
- (g) Clearly articulates how internal and external stakeholders (current staff, students, alumni, employers, and where appropriate PSRBs) have been appropriately engaged in the suspension/closure of the course.
- (h) Sets out necessary actions in relation to the Student Protection Plan where appropriate.

## **2.3 Timings**

- 2.3.1 In most instances, early removal of the course from the University publicity materials will be important to the management of the suspension or closure process.
- 2.3.2 Therefore, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed with the relevant member of the VCE (with responsibility for the lead School or College) University Approval documentation should be submitted to VCE no later than the end of November, for courses due to cease recruitment the following September.
- 2.3.3 It should be noted that to obtain all the information required, work on some aspects of the Approval stage should begin well in advance of these deadlines.
- 2.3.4 In appropriate circumstances the process of suspending or closing a course can depart from the timelines stated and be completed more quickly.



### **3 APPROVAL FOR COURSE SUSPENSION/CLOSURE**

#### **3.1 Overview**

##### **3.1.1 Approval ensures:**

- (a) Confirmation of the strategic and business rationale for the suspension or closure of the course within the School or College and institutional portfolio
- (b) All relevant prior information on PSRB, or other external requirements is known prior to the commencement of the suspension or closure process; and
- (c) Confirmation of compliance with regulatory or legislative requirements (e.g. consumer protection, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and the implementation of the student protection plan).

##### **3.1.2 Approval ensures that there is a compelling case for the strategic and business rationale of the planned closure/suspension and to provide course teams and professional services with the technical information that they need to:**

- (a) Communicate effectively with students
- (b) Plan effectively for managing student outcomes
- (c) Arrange and manage student finance implications, where applicable
- (d) Ensure compliance with legislation and regulation (e.g. consumer protection, UKVI and the student protection plan); and
- (e) Make required statutory or compliance returns such as those required for the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

##### **3.1.3 Following successful Approval:**

- (a) The course can be removed from the University's website, and its prospectus, and students offered places on the course may be informed that the course will not be taking further enrolments. These must all carry a clear message that the course is currently subject to a closure that will not affect current students, unless full and immediate closure has been approved by the VCE
- (b) The School or College can commit the required staffing and estates required in order to undertake the full suspension/closure and teach out process; and
- (c) Where necessary, the School or College, in consultation with the AQSO, can approach the relevant PSRB to discuss arrangements for the closure of the accreditation process to be undertaken.

##### **3.1.4 Partner institutions may proceed similarly, although any communications or materials related to the suspension or closure should be approved by the University prior to release. Completion of University Approval signifies that the University is committed to suspending or closing the course from the date indicated.**

## **3.2 Prepare Suspension and Closure Form (SC1)**

- 3.2.1 A Course Leader proposing the suspension or closure of an existing course should complete the Suspension and Closure Form (SC1). The form is accessible on the [AQSO SharePoint site](#).
- 3.2.2 In completing the form, the Course Leader will need to:
- (a) Consult the Student Protection Plan to check whether the circumstances around the proposed suspension or closure and its impact on students is listed, and the necessary external statutory and regulatory requirements
  - (b) Provide a teaching out plan for the students on the course
  - (c) Investigate and understand the requirements of any required suspension or closure of PSRB accreditation including the costs involved
- 3.2.3 The Course Leader for the course should conduct discussions with:
- (a) Strategic Planning and Marketing colleagues to establish the current demand for the course
  - (b) Student Services colleagues to establish the impact on student fees and funding arrangements
  - (c) Academic Registry colleagues or University Secretary as required, to establish the regulatory requirements for the course suspension or closure, and in particular the need for activating the Student Protection Plan
  - (d) GPO and the International Office, regarding the impact of the proposal either for direct international recruitment or for delivery in one of the University branch campuses or academic partnerships. Where the suspension and/or closure relates to an Academic Partner, the School or College must inform the AQSO and the GPO of their planned approach to student communications, monitoring of student progression and reporting obligations.
  - (e) Compliance Team, regarding the impact of the proposal for international students.
- 3.2.4 The completed Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) should be signed by the Dean or Director or Head of School or College and the relevant member of VCE (with responsibility for the School or College).
- 3.2.5 Where the proposal is for a course jointly delivered by two or more Schools or Colleges, the respective Dean or Director or Heads of each School or College should sign the form.
- 3.2.6 Where the proposal involves academic partnerships, a senior officer from each partner institution must also sign the Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) to indicate approval.

3.2.7 Where submissions have incomplete fields or missing signatures, they will be returned to the lead School or College for completion, prior to further processing.

### **3.3 University Approval**

3.3.1 The fully endorsed Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) should be submitted for approval by the VCE. In signing the form, VCE confirms that the proposal has been discussed and approved at executive level within the University.

3.3.2 The approval confirms that the following points have been discussed and confirmed at both Executive and Operational level:

- (a) The proposal is consistent with the University's strategic plan
- (b) The proposal is consistent with the University Student Protection Plan, and the decision whether to activate the plan is in line with the University's regulatory obligations
- (c) Students and applicants' interests have been thoroughly planned for at an individual and collective level
- (d) All impacts on the outcomes of current students have been mitigated or will be effectively communicated under the terms of the University's Student Protection Plan
- (e) The plan does not affect the outcomes or experience of any group of students disproportionately.

3.3.3 VCE will consider the application for confirmation of suspension/closure, and in some cases may request that the Course Leader attend a meeting of the VCE to discuss issues arising from the proposal.

3.3.4 After considering the proposal, the VCE will take one of the following actions:

- (a) Approve without revisions
- (b) Approve subject to revisions to the satisfaction of the Director of Academic Quality and Standards
- (c) Refer for resubmission at a later date
- (d) Reject the course for suspension and closure

3.3.5 Once the VCE has granted approval, the AQSO will notify the lead School or College, as well as the relevant professional services. From the School or College's perspective, the full approval process can now be considered complete.

3.3.6 The signed Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) must be sent to the AQSO by the Directorate Office for their records.

### **3.4 Actions following Approval**

- 3.4.1 Once the AQSO receives the approved Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) they will inform:
- (a) Strategic Planning
  - (b) Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions
  - (c) Assistant Registrar
  - (d) GPO, where relevant
  - (e) Apprenticeships Office, where relevant
  - (f) Placement Office, where relevant
  - (g) Compliance, where relevant
- 3.4.2 Once complete, University Approval is valid for 12 months. During this time, Stage 2 must be commenced. After 12 months, fresh University Approval may be requested, in recognition that the prevailing conditions surrounding the suspension or closure could have changed.
- 3.4.3 At this point University Approval is considered complete, and School or College(s) and professional services may proceed with detailed planning for the suspension/closure.
- 3.4.4 Partner institutions may proceed similarly, although any publicity materials which refer to the suspension or closure should be approved by the University prior to advertisement and/or recruitment.
- 3.4.5 Between application for University Approval and Final Approval, Schools or Colleges should avoid:
- (a) Amending the Suspension and Closure Form (SC1). If the lead School or College becomes aware that corrections are needed, a new version should not be created. Rather, a summary of the amendments should be sent to the AQSO, along with documentary evidence (e.g. an email) showing the approval of the Chair of the School or College's Executive (or its nominated body).
- NOTE: If these are deemed to constitute a fundamental departure the AQSO may request that a new Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) be prepared, and in some cases that the document is resubmitted for University Approval.
- 3.4.6 Completion of University Approval signifies that the University is committed to suspending or closing the course from the date indicated.

## **4 ACADEMIC PLANNING AND MONITORING OF COURSE SUSPENSION/CLOSURE**

### **4.1 Overview**

4.1.1 Academic Planning and Monitoring ensures:

- (a) The course is suspended or closed in accordance with the University's approved principles and regulations, as approved by the Academic Board
- (b) Each enrollable and exit qualification will continue to meet the threshold standards set by the FHEQs
- (c) Appropriate communications with students and other stakeholders are proposed, monitored and completed
- (d) There are and will continue to be sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality learning experience for all students
- (e) There are and will continue to be sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources, and student support services to deliver a high-quality learning experience for all students
- (f) Compliance with regulatory or legislative requirements (e.g. the Student Protection Plan, UKVI and consumer protection).

4.1.2 This must include a formal notification to all remaining students on the course, providing an explanation for the suspension or closure, assurance that the integrity and continuity of their education will be preserved and details of who to contact for further information.

### **4.2 Academic Planning and Monitoring**

4.2.1 The Academic Planning and Monitoring stage begins immediately following University Approval and continues throughout the suspension or closure of the course.

4.2.2 Academic Planning and Monitoring should consist of a number of meetings. These should be planned for key decision points throughout the suspension/closure process (e.g. after each Award Board). The meeting points should be agreed by the Chair in consultation with the relevant Course Academic Administrator.

4.2.3 The function of the meetings is to confirm that the learning experience of continuing students on a suspended/closing course has been appropriately considered and preserved. The Course Leader will continue to complete the Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) and share this with other members in advance of the meeting in order to inform discussions.

4.2.4 Attendees at the initial suspension/closure meeting should include:

- (a) Dean or Director or Head of School or College or nominee (Chair)

- (b) Academic Quality Lead
- (c) Member of the AQSO
- (d) Course Leader of the closing course
- (e) Course Academic Administrator
- (f) Student Representatives
- (g) Assistant Registrar
- (h) Representative from Student Recruitment and Admissions, where there are current applicants or outstanding offers for the course.

4.2.5 For courses with academic partners, additional attendees will be:

- (a) Academic Partnership Link Tutor;
- (b) Senior member of the delivery team from the academic partner.

4.2.6 For degree apprenticeship courses additional attendees will be:

- (a) Director of Apprenticeships or nominee;
- (b) Employer representatives.

4.2.7 The Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) will direct the agenda of the meeting.

4.2.8 The outcomes will be recorded on the Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) by a note-taker identified by the Chair and will be subject to approval by the Chair. These will be shared with all members after the meeting and submitted to the AQSO.

### **4.3 Implementation of the Plan**

4.3.1 Meetings with the course team will continue until all students have completed the course (or have been transferred to alternative provision or compensated under the terms of the Student Compensation Policy).

4.3.2 Attendees at the continuing meetings must include at a minimum:

- (a) Academic Quality Lead (Chair)
- (b) Member of the AQSO
- (c) Course Academic Administrator
- (d) Course Leader of the closing course.

4.3.3 Where required, additional attendees may include:

- (a) Student Representatives
  - (b) Assistant Registrar
  - (c) Representative from Student Recruitment and Admissions, where there are current applicants or outstanding offers for the course
  - (d) Academic Partnership Link Tutor
  - (e) Senior member of the delivery team from the academic partner
  - (f) Director of Apprenticeships or nominee
  - (g) Employer representatives (for degree apprenticeships).
- 4.3.4 Following all continuing meetings, communications to the wider stakeholder group must be agreed and implemented, and an updated Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) submitted to the AQSO and the Chair of the School or College Quality Committee no later than 3 working days following the meeting.
- 4.3.5 The Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) will be monitored by the AQSO and the School or College Quality Committee. Specific actions may be requested to ensure completeness.
- 4.3.6 When the meetings have confirmed all students have completed the course (or have been transferred to alternative provision or compensated under the terms of the Student Compensation Policy), the Course Suspension and Closure Form (SC1) will be forwarded to the AQSO for their records.
- 4.4 Non-award course suspension/closures**
- 4.4.1 The process for University approval of the closure of non-award credit bearing and non-credit bearing courses is the same as detailed above.
- 4.4.2 Given the potential impact of the closure of a non-award course, the proposer of the course must arrange for the completion of University Approval stages, however with sign off from the Dean or Director or Head of School or College and the Dean of Academic Partnerships (UK) and Director of Research and Enterprise Operations rather than VCE.