

Course Closure, Suspension and Significant Change Policy and Procedures

CONTENTS

1	Purpose	1
2	Requirements	1
3	Definitions	1
4	Significantly changing, suspending, or closing a course	2
5	Consultation and communication	3
6	Course Closure Procedure	4
7	Course Suspension Procedure	6
8	Significant Change Procedure	7

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To explain how decisions are made for closing, suspending, or making significant changes to University of Worcester courses, including those delivered by partners. The procedures cover how such decisions are approved and managed and how applicants and students are informed about decisions to close, suspend, or significantly change a course.

2 Requirements

- 2.1 The procedures explained below meet the expectations of the [Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers](#) and the [Office for Students Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England](#). The procedures align with the [Student Protection Plan](#) and [University Terms and Conditions for Applicants](#),
- 2.2 The normal procedures for closing, suspending, or making significant changes explained below apply to all courses delivered or validated by the University. However, in complex or high-risk circumstances, the University has the right to adapt the process to ensure all interests are effectively managed.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 Course Closure
This means that no more students will be admitted on to a course offered by the University or any of its partners. 'Teach out' applies for students already on the course.

3.2 Course Suspension

Course suspension means no students will be admitted on to a course offered by the University or by any of its partners for a specified period (usually the next academic year). Course suspension does not affect students already on a course meaning that they will continue to receive teaching, learning and assessment opportunities.

3.3 Significant Change

These are any changes to a course that could affect an applicant's decision to accept their offer to study on the course or any change that substantively varies the information already given to applicants about the nature of the course. Examples of significant changes include changes to:

- a) The award title.
- b) Accreditation arrangements.
- c) Substantive course content, such as adding or removing a mandatory module.
- d) Method of delivery or assessment that fundamentally impacts the course learning outcomes.
- e) The primary location where the course is delivered.

The process for making a significant course change is explained in Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG) Guidance 1 [Relationship between Course Change, Course Re-Approval and APPG](#).

3.4 Teach-out

Students already on a course that is closing will normally continue to receive teaching, learning and assessment opportunities. Where this is not possible, the University will offer students the opportunity to transfer to another course at the University or transfer to another higher education provider.

4 Significantly changing, suspending, or closing a course

4.1 The University regularly reviews and updates its courses and modules to ensure they are current, reflect good practice, and appropriately take account of student and external views. This may include consideration of whether it would be appropriate to significantly change, suspend, or close a course or related courses. This could be because:

- a) There are not enough applicants to a course to make it cost-effective.
- b) The outcome of a periodic review demands this.
- c) The course has not been successfully approved or re-approved. This could mean that the actions needed for a course to be approved or re-approved have not been completed.
- d) Unavailability of staff (temporary or permanent) who cannot be replaced.
- e) Changes required by external bodies such as Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) mean the University must make significant changes or suspend or close a course.
- f) External funding has changed.
- g) Concerns about the quality and academic standards of a course.
- h) A course is being replaced.
- i) Strategic priorities change at subject, School, or University level.
- j) A partner organisation is closing.

- 4.2 The final decision to close, suspend or make significant changes to a course is made by University Executive Board on the recommendation of APPG (with one exception noted below). Courses or Schools should make requests to significantly change, suspend or close a course in good time to allow appropriate consultations and communications with all stakeholders. Courses, Schools, and/or partner organisations are not permitted to close, suspend, or make significant changes to a course without APPG approval. This is because of the University's contractual responsibilities to students and applicants. In the case of collaborative provision, there should be early liaison with the Head of Collaborative Programmes.
- 4.3 The exception is where a School wishes to suspend recruitment to a course in the period after offers have been made and before the course commences because recruitment is poor and an urgent decision before the next APPG meeting is required. Where this happens the Head of School (or nominee) will communicate with the relevant PVC and directly with the Chair of APPG, PVC Communications and External Affairs and Academic Registrar for approval to suspend recruitment to the course. In such cases the Head of School must complete the relevant APPG form to report suspension to the next meeting of APPG.
- 4.4 The University will aim to mitigate the impact of course closure, suspension or significant change on current students and applicants. For course closure, Schools should create a timeline and action plan for managing the closure that includes liaison with stakeholders (including partners if relevant) and communicating with applicants and current students. The action plan must explain how the course closure will impact on applicants and the current student experience. Course suspension may also require an action plan, in order that the implications for students who are part-time and/or may be required to repeat a year for example can be taken into account ; AQU can advise on this.
- 4.5 The School must consult the University's Human Resources Department where the proposed closure of a course will have implications for University of Worcester staff.

5 Initial consultation and communication to decide if a course should be closed, suspended or changed

- 5.1 Making significant course changes or suspending or closing a course requires careful consideration. This includes consulting and communicating with staff, current students, applicants, and other relevant stakeholders who are impacted by the decision. Formal written communication should not begin until after APPG and UEB have approved the course closure, suspension, or significant change. Records should be kept of all communication with students relating to course suspension, closure, and significant change.
- 5.2 The circumstances and reasons for closing or suspending a course are likely to determine the extent to which discussions need to be handled in a staged process. For example, closing courses that have no applicants or students will be quite different from closing courses with students currently studying towards the award.
- 5.3 Courses with shared modules (within the School or with other Schools) that are being considered for suspension or closure must consult with all impacted Schools, Departments, and course leaders.
- 5.4 In the case of Joint Honours subject combinations, all relevant Schools must agree to the closure or suspension before beginning the APPG process. Where agreement cannot be reached, the School proposing the course closure or suspension must highlight this as part of the proposal to APPG.

- 5.5 In the case of collaborative provision, the School must consult with the **PVC Partnerships**, the Head of Collaborative Programmes and AQU. This is so the strategic, contractual, and operational implications can be assessed. If the collaborative partner organisation proposes the course closure or suspension, the School must make sure consultation takes place, and that the partner is fully aware of this Policy and Procedures.
- 5.6 When a course closure, suspension or significant change has been approved by APPG, the Secretary will formally notify AQU, (including the officer responsible for external examiners), Admissions, Student Records, Timetabling, Communications and External Affairs, International Office, other Schools (if applicable),
- 5.7 Normally, the relevant School (working with the partner where appropriate) is responsible for communicating course closure, suspension or significant change with current students. **The School should also liaise closely with Admissions in communicating** course closure, suspension or significant change to applicants.
- 5.8 Where a course has been suspended for two consecutive years, the School should consider whether it would be appropriate to close the course. AQU reports course suspensions to APPG on an annual basis.

6 Course Closure Procedure

- 6.1 **Initial considerations:** the Head of School should consider carefully the implications of closing a particular course (for example the impact on staff, students and other programmes) and discuss with relevant members of University Executive as appropriate.

Stage One: Approval for Course Closure

- 6.2 Following consultation (as explained above **in section 5**), the Head of School (or nominee) must complete and submit APPG Form 2 [Course Closure and Suspension](#).
- 6.3 Where APPG agrees to close the course, its Secretary will formally notify the appropriate departments (as explained in **paragraph 5.x**).
- 6.4 Communications and External Affairs will remove the course from the University's webpages. The Admissions Office will remove the course from the UCAS pages. Registry Services will update the status of the course to show it has been closed.

Stage Two: Managing Course Closure

- 6.5 The Head of School (or nominee) completes the action plan in either [CCS Form 1 Course Closure Action Plan](#) or, in the case of collaborative provision [CCS Form 2 Course Closure Action Plan \(Collaborative\)](#). The action plan includes:
- Communicating with students and applicants who have been offered a place on the course but not yet accepted, those who have accepted a place but have not yet registered, those who have deferred offers.
 - Communicating with other stakeholders, e.g., partners, placement providers, PSRBs, external examiners.
 - Communicating with internal University departments.
 - The implications for course management and delivery.
 - The implications for students already on the course, including those that need to repeat modules, or are part-time

- 6.6 The School must show it has accounted for the needs of existing students (including those who have temporarily withdrawn), and applicants 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. Where students temporarily withdraw from a course, the University cannot guarantee continuation on the same course and/or modules [[Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#), 22.20].
- 6.7 Transitional teach out arrangements are made in consultation with the affected student(s) involving representatives from the School/department, the collaborative partner and link tutor (if relevant), Registry Services, Head of Collaborative Programmes, and the Academic Quality Unit (AQU).
- 6.8 If it seems it may not be possible to 'teach-out' the course, and alternative arrangements need to be considered, the School must consult at the earliest opportunity with the **relevant PVC**, Academic Registrar and the Director of Quality and Educational Development.
- 6.9 The School must consider 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 work with the Admissions Office to agree communication with applicants.
- 6.10 The School Senior Management Team must approve the completed action plan, and is **responsible for managing and monitoring the course closure**. The action plan and progress updates should be reported to the College LTQE.
- 6.11 Where the course closure process is complex or involves more than one partner and/or stakeholders, the School should set up a course closure management group. Membership of the course closure management group normally includes the course leader, a student representative, and Head of Department. For collaborative provision, the course closure management group will include a representative of the partner organisation, the link tutor, and Head of Collaborative Programmes. The course closure management group may also include officers from relevant professional service departments – e.g., Registry Services, AQU. **Regular updates should be reported to CAPSC.**

Stage Three: Communication

- 6.12 Communication about course closure should be as follows:
- a) The Head of School (or nominee) should meet current students to explain that the course is being closed, the teach out arrangements, how the School will ensure the quality of their experience, and how matters such as reassessment, temporary withdrawal etc. will be handled. Students must be given opportunities to raise queries and concerns.
 - b) **The Course Leader or Head of School will communicate with applicants and temporarily withdrawn students, explaining alternative course options. Admissions to follow up if necessary.**
 - c) Unless otherwise agreed AQU will inform external examiners and PSRBs.
 - d) The Admissions Office will remove the course from the UCAS database.
 - e) Communications and External Affairs will ensure that the UW website reflects the status of the course closure.

7. Course Suspension Procedure

7.1 **Initial considerations:** the Head of School should consider carefully the implications for staff, current students and applicants of suspending recruitment to a course. The implications for related courses should also be considered. In particular considerations should be given to how students required to repeat a year will be supported.

Stage One: Approval for Course Suspension

7.2 Following consultation (as explained above in section 5), the Head of School (or nominee) must complete APPG Form 2 [Course Closure and Suspension](#) and submit to APPG. Course suspension is normally for one academic year or one intake.

7.3 The School must consider how applicants will be supported in deciding about an alternative course or releasing their place and their contract with the University. The School must work with Admissions to agree communication with applicants.

7.4 Where APPG agrees to suspend the course, its Secretary will formally notify the appropriate departments (as explained in paragraph 5.x).

7.5 Where course suspension occurs late in the academic year and at relatively short notice the authority to suspend the course is subject to the approval and agreement of the relevant PVC, Chair of APPG, the Academic Registrar and PVC Communications and External Affairs. The Head of School should complete the relevant APPG form and submit it to the next meeting of APPG.

Stage Two: Managing Course Suspension

7.6 The School should ensure it has in place plans to:

- a) Communicate with students on the course, including those due to return to studies and/or who may be required to repeat modules because of academic failure.
- b) Communicate with external examiners, placement providers and other external partners, and PSRBs, as appropriate.
- c) Review arrangements for marketing and recruitment of the course for the next intake.

Stage Three: Communication

7.7 Communication about course suspension will be as follows:

- a) Registry Services will communicate with students (including those that are temporarily withdrawn and those required to repeat modules) to explain progression and support arrangements.
- b) The Course Leader or Head of School will communicate with applicants, explaining alternative course options. Admissions to follow up if necessary.
- c) Admissions to ensure that UCAS is updated.
- d) Unless otherwise agreed AQU will inform external examiners and PSRBs.
- e) Communications and External Affairs will ensure that the webpages reflect the status of the course suspension.

7.8 Reinstatement of a Suspended Course

Suspended courses automatically become available at the end of the period of suspension, unless the School indicates to APPG that the suspension should be extended.

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

8. Significant Change Procedure

Stage One: Approval for Intention to make Significant Change

- 8.1 APPG must agree all significant course changes before they are made. Significant changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely way and normally one year before the next course intake. Schools should seek early advice from AQU about with the changes require a course approval or reapproval.
- 8.2 APPG will determine whether the significant changes require consultation with the external examiner or a course reapproval which includes the involvement of an external advisor.
- 8.3 Where significant changes may impact current students, especially in relation to module choices already made, and/or involve changes to the information already given to applicants, these will be exceptional, must involve consultation with students, and may require the written consent of students and/or applicants. Relevant stakeholders must be formally consulted before the request for a significant change is submitted to APPG.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 The Head of School (or nominee) must complete and submit 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.

Stage Two: Managing Significant Change

- 8.6 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 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.
- 8.7 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](#).

Version control information to be updated.

Approval/Review Table

Item	Notes
Version Number	3.1
Date of Approval	March 2023
Approved by	ASQEC
Effective from	Immediate
Policy Officer	Head of Academic Quality
Department	Directorate of Quality and Educational Development
Review date	July 2027
Last reviewed	March 2023
Policy/procedure/guidance superseded by this version	Policy for Course Closure, Suspension and Significant Change, and Procedures for Course Closure, Suspension and Significant Change, dated October 2021 and October 2022
Equality Impact Assessment	N/A
Accessibility Checked	16 March 2023

Recent changes

Committee	Date	Change
APPG	April 2023	Minor corrections regarding responsibilities for informing students and applicants
ASQEC	March 2023	Reviewed and updated to ensure currency.
ASQEC	October 2021	Separate Policy and Procedures documents merged, reviewed/updated, and checked for currency.
N/A	August 2021	Changes to reflect changes to titles of APPG Forms (APPG Form 2: Course Closure and Suspension and APPG Form 3: Request for Significant Change) Changes to include UWIC involvement.
N/A	August 2019	Changes due to restructure from Institutes to Schools and Colleges, CSG to APPG. Changes to align terminology with the Terms and Conditions for Applicants.