

Procedure for Closing or Suspending Higher Education Courses

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1 Introduction

1.1 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.

1.2 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 units and courses, in exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to close a course.

1.3 In such circumstances and reflection requirements of Office for Students (OfS) Condition C3 (Student Protection Plan) the University would ensure that existing or potential students would be fully informed, consulted and supported to protect their interests.

1.4 This Procedure applies to all higher education courses at Arts University Plymouth, including those delivered by academic partner institutions.

2 Non-continuation definitions

2.1 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.

3 Non-continuation recommendation and procedure

3.1 The recommendation to close or suspend a course must be made by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

3.2 The recommendation to close or suspend must initially be discussed formally by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE) followed by a consultation period with current students who are affected.

3.3 The Academic Board would then be required to approve the closure or suspension.

3.4 If there are strategic implications for the University, the Chair of the Board of Governors should be informed prior to the Academic Board.

3.5 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 4)

- the proposed arrangements for students currently registered on the course (see paragraphs 5)
- the proposed arrangements for applicants who have accepted offers of a place on the course (see paras 7).

3.6. 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 in para 4.

3.7 The rationale should include proposals outlining timescales for closure and measures to continue to engage students while maintaining academic standards and quality and a positive student experience.

4 Rationale for closure or suspension of a course

4.1. 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 non-approval of a course recommended at a Course Review event (see [Periodic Review Procedures](#)).

5 Arrangements for students

5.1. 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*].

5.2 Therefore, when 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.

5.3 Such consent must not be sought until a closure or suspension recommendation has been agreed by the Academic Board.

5.4 If 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.

6 Student consultation

6.1 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.

6.2 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 (i.e. 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.

6.3 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 prospects
- 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, such as specific learning disabilities and including part time students, potential new entrants, repeaters, deferrals, etc.
- information for alumni and other stakeholders including industry partners such as sponsors or employers.

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

7 Arrangements for applicants

7.1 All communications with applicants on these matters must be undertaken by the Admissions Office team.

7.2 Applicants who have accepted offers, including those who have deferred offers, should not be contacted until a non-continuation (closure / suspension) recommendation has been approved

by 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 HE provider.

7.3 Applicants who have been made offers, but have not yet accepted them may be contacted at an earlier stage to be informed that a non-continuation (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.

7.4 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 Academic Registrar will close or suspend any courses that are affected with UCAS.

8 Arrangements for Staff

8.1 Where staff terms and conditions or service are affected or there may be potential for redundancies, the Head of Human Resources must be consulted at the earliest opportunity in considering any course closure.

8.2 The Head of Human Resources would ensure that any staff affected are supported throughout the process.

9 Communications

9.1 While the form at Appendix 1 should be used as good practice and to form an audit trail, the minutes of the relevant Academic Board may serve as a record of any decision made.

9.2 If approval to close or suspend a course is granted, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor will notify the Chief Operating Officer and other appropriate senior staff members to alert them of the decision:

9.3 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will ensure that any other personnel directly affected within the University are notified along with academic contacts as appropriate (awarding bodies, accrediting institutes, external examiners etc.).

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

9.5 External agencies, academic partner institutions (if affected) and industry partners allied to the course affected (employers, research partners etc) will be notified as appropriate by a relevant staff member with the Director of Development and Partnerships and Dean of Arts, Design & Media informed along with the relevant Assistant Dean.

9.6 While closure of a subject area is a [reportable event](#) with the OfS, closure of a course is not.

10 Compensation

10.1 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 existing students 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](#) and [Complaints Policy & Procedures for Students](#).

11 Publications and Marketing

11.1 When a non-continuation (closure / suspension) recommendation has been approved, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor will consult with the Academic Registrar, Head of Compliance & Quality and Brand & Communications / Student Recruitment teams to ensure all necessary amendments are made to University publications and the website and ensure that UCAS are notified.

Appendix:

A. Proposal for Closure or Suspension of a HE Course of Study.

Appendix A

Proposal for Closure or Suspension of a HE Course of Study

Items to note:

- courses should not normally be closed or suspended once the application cycle for that year has commenced.
- the impact of any closure / 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 closure or suspension of course(s)? (Please tick)				
Suspension	☐	☐	☐	Closure
2. Name of course(s) to be closed or suspended:				
3a. Proposed date of commencement of suspension or closure				
3b. If a suspension, what is the duration of the suspension?				
3c. If a suspension, will the course 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)				
4. Proposal for course closure 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, or students on the Extended BA course?		
8a. Number of home students on the course(s):		
Current Year - 3	Current Year - 2	Current Year - 1
8b. Number of overseas students on the course(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 / closure of the course(s):		
12. Does this proposal have implications for other courses within the department or other departments? (e.g. units 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 / closure of this course:

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

16. Please explain how any reputational damage will be avoided due to suspension / closure 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:	

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Related policies:	• Admissions Policy • Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy • Student Transfer Policy
Related procedures	• Validation, Revalidation and Modification Procedures (HE) • Periodic Review Procedures • Complaint Policy & Procedures for Students
Related information:	• AUP Student Protection Plan
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