Higher Education Course Closure SOP

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Responsible Owner:
Head of Higher Education

Summary of Contents

This SOP applies to all provision at Level 4 or above and outlines the procedures and precepts relating to course closures or suspensions, in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Review Information (Responsible Owner):

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Approval/Noting By:

CMT: 30 June 2025

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July 2025

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Introduction

The procedure is informed by the QAA UK Quality Code 2024 and by the Competitions and Markets Authority- UK higher education providers advice on consumer protection law and the OfS Guide on Protecting students if a course, campus or university closes.

This should be read in conjunction with the current Student Protection Plan published on the College website.

There are a number of reasons why a course may need to be closed or changed. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Strategic realignment of college policy;
- Realignment of the curriculum policy and development of programme offer;
- Development in vocational skills or external body (including awarding organisation and Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirement;
- Decrease in demand;
- Outcome of a periodic review or re-approval process;
- Staff skills required are temporarily/permanently unavailable and it is impossible to substitute them; and
- Change in funding.

3.0 Scope

All courses at Level 4 and above.

4.0 Precepts

When courses are closed or changed the following precepts will underpin the process.

4.1 The aim of this process is to protect the rights of current and prospective students through clear and transparent communication in a timely way.

4.2 Students currently on programmes will be supported to complete the programme of study on which they are enrolled. This includes provision made for those with extenuating circumstances and leave of absence which may require completion beyond the normal period.

4.3 Student representatives will be invited when possible to inform the process.

4.4 Course closures and changes will normally be planned in the previous academic year and before the recruitment process begins.

4.5 Where it is impossible to make alterations or closures prior to recruitment as far as is possible all those who are prospective students (in receipt of course information or have entered the admission process) will be communicated with and support provided.

4.6 Agreement for alterations, changes, closures, and the resulting action plans must be agreed as part of the annual Curriculum Planning process.

4.7 External partners including awarding bodies and PSRBs will be fully informed of plans.

5.0 Definitions

5.1 Course Closure

The College may, when deemed necessary, close a course meaning that there will be no further intakes to the course and it will no longer be offered by the College. Those students already enrolled on the course will continue to progress and complete the course. Where students have broken study due to extenuating circumstances or leave of absence the College will provide support for completion and this may include an alternative course or transfer to another provider. In these circumstances the College may not be able to provide continuation of study of the same units at point of enrolment. However, the College will seek to uphold the principle of fairness so that the student is enabled to complete.

5.2 Course Suspension

The College may, where deemed necessary, suspend a course meaning that there will be 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. Courses may be re-instated as part of the usual curriculum planning process.

5.3 Substantial Change

Substantial changes constitute alternations 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.

Substantial changes would include, but are not limited to:

- Change of course location (to another Campus);
- Change to the title of a course or award;
- Change to the accreditation of a course;
- Change to the mode of delivery (e.g. from full to part time); and

- Substantial changes to the curriculum, assessment or modules.

6.0 Planning

6.1 The Deputy Principal of Curriculum through the annual Curriculum Plan will propose courses for closure, suspension or substantial change. These proposals will be discussed at CMT prior to presentation at the Education Committee of the Governing Body and as part of the annual bi-laterals at the Department for the Economy.

6.2 The Head of School will develop an action plan which will include:

i. Notification to internal departments including Marketing and Communications, MIS, Examinations, MILT, Admissions, Student Finance, Quality, and a student representative;

ii. Notification and discussion with Awarding Organisation/Body and the current External Examiner/Verifier and PRSBs where appropriate;

iii. Where a programme operates with a University, the School will link with the University Link Tutor/ Faculty Partnership Manager/ Senior Quality Partnertship Manager and complete any required documentation;

iv. Where a course closure or change is substantial i.e. crosses over more than one subject area, campus, or awarding organisation, a working group may be required.

v. This will include representatives from all Schools involved, MILT, Admissions, Marketing, Examinations, Student Finance, and Quality;

vi. Notification and communication with current students;

vii. Notification and communication with prospective students; and

viii. Other vocationally specific issues defined by the School.

6.3 Areas for consideration and responsibility within the plan;

Area	Action	Responsibility
Communication with current students	Arrangements for students to: • Complete the programme; • Extenuating circumstances; • Leave of Absence; • Limit to registration; Method of communication to include written.	Head of School
Communication with prospective students	Arrangements for students who have been interviewed or requested information to provide options including signposting and details of change/closure including timescale.	Head of School/Head of Admissions and Information Services

Communication with students with a deferred place or need to repeat units, or temporarily withdrew	Arrangements for students who have deferred a place or need to repeat units, or temporarily withdrew.	Head of School/Head of Admissions and Information Services
Notification of awarding organisation	Discuss plan to change or close course with Awarding Organisation and External Examiner where applicable. Complete and process awarding organisation administration procedures. For Ulster University programmes please see: • Appendix 2- CA5- Course Withdrawal Form • Appendix 3- CA5B- Course Suspension form	Head of School/Head of Higher Education
Management of recruitment and publicity materials	Course descriptor removed from college intranet and awarding organisation if applicable. Reference in College marketing materials to be removed.	Head of School/ Head of Admissions and Information Services

Area	Action	Responsibility
Notification of internal departments	Admissions: request to remove course from the admission process. MIS: Removal/suspension of programme from QL. Examinations: Cleansing of data and student registrations issues. Finance: student finance issues. Quality: Examination Board and quality assurance processes. SPICE: notification re work-placement.	Head of School

Other issues	Employer partners; Vocational issues isolated by School; Course Closure; Removal from UCAS	Head of School/ Head of Admissions and Information Services

6.4 Communication Strategies

Written communication is required to update current and where possible, prospective students. The College intranet and other usual forms of communication will be used to support the process.

7.0 Monitoring and Review and Strategic Oversight

Course changes and closures will be monitored through IMPMS including SER reviews and Achievement and Priorities. Strategic oversight will be provided through the Higher Education Review Board and outcomes forwarded to the College Management Team and the Education Committee of the Governing Body.

8.0 Communication Plan

This Procedure will be uploaded to the College intranet and referred to in staff induction and training.

9.0 Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	February 2023	Minor changes to University roles and College Work Placement system
1.1	October 2023	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
1.2	June 2025	Update to introduction section aligning to current guidance. Reference to Student Protection Plan added and responsibility titles updated. Appendix 2 and 3 added to reflect Ulster University documentation requirements.

Appendix 2: CA5- Course Withdrawal Form

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

COURSE WITHDRAWAL

(Please attach supporting documentation as appropriate) **Form CA5 (CMS)**

COURSE TITLE: **COURSE CODE:**

1 REASON FOR WITHDRAWAL

2 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
Please specify any resource implications: staffing, equipment, specialist accommodation.

3 LAST INTAKE: ACADEMIC YEAR 20 /

4 NOTIFICATION TO APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS

4.1 HAVE APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS BEEN ADVISED OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE COURSE?

Yes☐ No☐ Not Applicable☐

Please provide evidence of how current students have been informed.

4.2 IS THE COURSE TO BE CONTINUED UNTIL CURRENT STUDENTS COMPLETE?

Yes☐ No☐ Not Applicable☐

4.3 WHAT ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS?
(Principles to be followed in the event of course closure are set out in the Programme Approval, Management and Review Handbook and Partnership Handbook.)

The procedure to withdraw a programme in the CMS should be followed (see Faculty Approval guidance) and the completed CA5 form should be submitted through the CMS. The withdrawal date set in CMS should be the date the last student is expected to complete, in order to keep the course open for revision. To withdraw particular modules, or a course location, or mode of attendance, use the Course Revision, CA3 process in CMS.

The external examiner should be advised of this withdrawal. Prospectus and other publicity material should be updated.

Centre for Curriculum
Enhancement and Approval
November2023

Appendix 3: CA5b- Course Suspension Form

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

COURSE SUSPENSION

(Please attach supporting documentation as appropriate) **Form CA5b**

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1 COURSE TITLE:

COURSE CODE:

2 LOCATION:

3 MODE OF ATTENDANCE:
(full-time, part-time, both)

4 SPONSORING FACULTY:
Sponsoring School*:*

5 COURSE/SUBJECT DIRECTOR:

6 REASON FOR SUSPENSION:

7 LIST ANY COURSE-SPECIFIC MODULES TO BE SUSPENDED:

8 PROPOSED DATE OF SUSPENSION: INTAKE: ACADEMIC YEAR 20

9 PROPOSED NEXT INTAKE: YEAR 20 / (This should be no more than 12 months from above)

10 NOTIFICATION TO APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS

HAVE APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS BEEN ADVISED OF THE SUSPENSION OF THE COURSE?

YES/NO/NOT APPLICABLE

WHAT ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR APPLICANTS AND CURRENT STUDENTS? (Principles to be followed in the event of course suspension are set out in Section M of the Partnership Handbook.)

Signed : …… Date: …….

Course Director

Signed: ……. ……. Date: …….

College approval Designation

The complete form should be sent to the University Faculty Partnership Manager by 30 June in the academic semester prior to suspension.

The college admissions office and the external examiner should be advised of this suspension. Prospectus and other publicity material should be updated. For continuing suspension, a form CA5b is submitted annually for a maximum of three years.

Signed : …… Date: …….

Faculty Partnership Manager

Signed: ……. Date: …….

(Associate) Dean

The completed form should be forwarded to the Academic Office, J410, Tower, Coleraine. Suspension will be noted by the Collaborative Courses Unit, Finance Department and Academic Planning Advisory Group.

Academic Office
July 2018