|  |  **Procedures for FE Programme Closure, Suspension** **And Substantial Change(s)** |
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| College Contact | Nicola Bell |
| College Policy | Admissions Policy on the [Public Documents page](http://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/about-us/corporateinformation/public-documents/) of the Belfast Met website.  |
| College Committee overseeing the procedure | Assistant Director of CurriculumHead of SchoolCurriculum Area ManagerOrganisational Quality Assurance Manager |
| Date approved |  |
| Date of Review | July 2023 |

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| **1. Purpose**  In all instances where Belfast Met FE programmes are being considered for closure, suspension or substantial change the following procedures are to be used. These procedures apply to all FE courses, to be closed, suspended or have substantial changes made to accredited full time and part time courses.The procedures seek to protect the interests of applicants and students by ensuring clear and transparent processes for the management of programme closure, suspension or substantial change in relation to the experience of applicants who have applied to or enrolled on an FE programme. The procedures align with the [Terms and Conditions for Applications and Enrolments](https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/siteFiles/resources/docs/TermsandConditions/TermsandConditionsforEnrolmentandApplication.pdf) These procedures set out the standard process; however, flexibility may be required if timescales do not permit the procedures to be followed exactly, and/or the process for closure or suspension is likely to be complex and high risk.  |
| **2. Definitions** 1. **Programme Closure**

Closing a programme means that there is no further intake to the programme and it will no longer be offered by the College. Those students already registered on the programme in previous semesters/academic years will continue to progress and complete the programme, or where this is not possible will be offered an alternative programme or transfer to another provider.  1. **Programme Suspension**

Suspension of a programme means that there is no intake to the programme for a specified period (normally the following academic year). Students already registered on the programme in previous academic years/semesters will continue to progress and complete the programme. 1. **Substantial Change**

A substantial change constitutes alteration(s) to a programme 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 programme and its component parts. A substantial change might include: change of programme location to another campus change to the title of a programme and/or associated award change to the accreditation of a programme change to the mode of delivery of a programme, or substantial change to the curriculum, assessment or modules within a programme (e.g. substantial changes to mandatory modules which results in a significant change to the programme offer).  **3. Reasons for programme closure, suspension or substantial change:**  Belfast Met regularly reviews and updates its programmes to ensure that its curriculum is relevant and to reflect best practice, taking account of the views of students and external stakeholders including employers. In exceptional circumstances: * a programme may be closed by the College or its awarding organisation(s) or,
* the College may no longer be able to teach a programme or an aspect of a programme to a specific group of students or,
* the College or awarding organisation(s) may introduce a substantial change which will impact on applicants and/or current students.

 There are a number of reasons why the College might close or suspend recruitment to a programme or make substantial changes. These may include but are not limited to the following: * demand for the programme is too small to cover the cost of delivery (i.e. insufficient numbers of applicants)
* outcome from programme (re-) approval processes carried out by awarding organisations or changes to the programme specification
* awarding organisations withhold approval of the programme (including failure to complete actions or to address conditions)
* review of the College’s programme provision by awarding organisations or collaborative partner
* staff involved in the delivery of the programme are temporarily/permanently unavailable and the College is unable to replace them
* external regulatory and professional bodies require changes that result in substantial change or a programme being suspended/closed
* external funding changes mean the programme is no longer financially viable
* concerns raised by internal and/or external stakeholders about the quality and academic standards of the programme
* replacing an existing programme with a new one
* changing strategic priorities at subject, School or College level
* closure/termination of a collaborative University partnership which results in the withdrawal of a programme.

 **In the case of collaborative provision with a University Partner**, there should be early liaison with the nominated partner university and the College’s Quality Assurance Team. The final decision to **close**, **suspend** or **initiate substantial changes to a programme** must be made by the Head of School and in consultation with the College’s Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager to the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum. Such decisions should be made in good time to enable appropriate consultations and communications with all internal and external stakeholders including provision of the action plan contained in the **Application for Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an FE Programme**. Programme closure, suspension or substantial change should normally be initiated in the current academic year for the following academic year unless there are circumstances beyond the College’s control. In the event of closure or suspension, no new applicants would be recruited. Students already on the programme would be supported to complete their programme successfully. If this was not possible due to circumstances beyond the control of the College, transitional arrangements would be made in consultation with the student(s) affected, alternative providers and relevant representatives from the College as per the action plan linked to this procedure document.  The College will endeavour to mitigate the impact that programme closure, suspension or substantial change will have on current and prospective students. In the event of programme closure, a planned timeline and associated action plan for managing the closure and for communicating with applicants and current students must be drawn up by the Academic School in liaison with the College’s Quality Assurance Team and relevant College centres/departments including Learner Success, Corporate Communications and Marketing and Design. The action plan must explicitly consider the experience of current and prospective students to protect against any adverse impact a programme closure may have.  Care must be taken to ensure that the implications of programme closure, suspension or substantial change(s) have been carefully considered. Particular consideration must be given to communicating with current students, applicants and other internal and external stakeholders. Formal written communications should not be initiated until after the programme closure, suspension or substantial change has been agreed by the Head of School following the submission of an **Application to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an FE Programme**. |

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| 1. **Programme Closure**

 **Stage 1: Securing Approval to Close a Programme** The Academic School must in the first instance assess the rationale for, and impact of, a proposed programme closure, and ensure discussion with relevant parties as indicated in this document. This includes other College academic and support departments including Quality Assurance, Learner Success, Corporate Communications and Marketing and Design and partner /awarding organisation representatives. The Head of School or nominee must complete the **Application Form to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an FE Programme** and submit to the College’s Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum. Once agreement has been reached by College Management that the programme may close, the Head of School or nominee will formally notify the School Support Team and the Centre for Corporate Communications & Marketing to ensure that the programme is removed from the College’s webpages and PDF prospectus. The status of the programme should be reflected in College records as “programme closed”. **Stage 2: Management of Programme Closure** The Head of School or nominee must ensure that an action plan is developed for managing the closure process and that arrangements are in place for managing and monitoring the programme closure and communicating with students.Where the process is complex or involves a number of parties a programme closure management group should be established and include the programme co-ordinator, student representative, and where appropriate representatives from relevant support departments – e.g. Careers & Employability, Student Services and Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing. The action plan should include:* arrangements for progressing and completing students, including those required to repeat modules should be considered
* communications to students and to applicants (including those who have been offered a place on the programme but not yet accepted and those who have accepted a place but have not yet registered)
* communications to external stakeholders, e.g. awarding organisations, placement providers, external examiners
* communications with internal College departments
* the Academic School must support applicants in deciding about an alternative programme or releasing their place and their contract with the College if transferring to another provider.

**Stage 3: Communication** The Head of School or nominee will inform existing students and/or applicants of the programme closure and arrangements for final teaching and assessment of the programme through their Business Unit Support Manager. Students should be informed of how the School plans to manage the quality of the student experience and how matters such as re-assessment, temporary withdrawal etc will be handled. Students must be provided with opportunities to raise queries and concerns. Curriculum Quality Assurance is responsible for informing external examiners and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) about programme closure. The Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing will ensure that the programme is removed from the College website and amend the PDF version of the prospectus to reflect the status of the programme closure.  |
| **Programme Suspension**  **Stage 1: Approval for Programme Suspension**  Programme suspension is normally for one academic year or one intake. A request to suspend a programme must be made to the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum by the relevant Head of School using **Application for Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an FE Programme**. The Academic School should submit this as soon as possible and suspension may only commence once agreed by the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum and the Quality Assurance Manager. Appropriate college departments and teams are formally notified by the School.  In the event of a planned suspension to a programme, the Academic School must give full consideration to how applicants will be supported in making a decision about alternative programmes or releasing their place and contract with the College. The Academic School Support teams managed by Business Unit Support Manager are responsible for communicating with all applicants. In all cases, the authority to suspend the programme is subject to the approval and agreement of the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum. All programme suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties.  In the case of planned suspensions, the Head of School or nominee must complete the **Notification of Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of Programme** application form and submit to the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum.  Once the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum has agreed that the programme may be suspended, the Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing will ensure that the PDF version of the prospectus reflects the status of the programme suspension. Academic School Support Teams will ensure that the College website is updated to reflect the programme suspension.**Stage 2: Managing Programme Suspension**  The Academic School should ensure that a meeting is held to consider the implications of the programme suspension for the following, and to ensure appropriate communications and actions: * students who were due to return to studies and/or who may be required to repeat modules as a result of academic failure
* current students on the programme
* external examiners, placement providers and other external partners, PSRBs
* arrangements for marketing and recruitment of the programme for the next intake.

**Stage 3: Communication**  The Academic School Support teams managed by Business Unit Support Manager are responsible for communicating with all applicants. The College’s Curriculum Quality Assurance team is responsible for informing the awarding organisations (unless agreed otherwise with the Academic School) about programme suspension.  The Academic School Support teams managed by Business Unit Support Manager are responsible for ensuring that any current students (or temporarily withdrawn students) who were due to commence the programme and/or are required to repeat modules are communicated with and appropriate arrangements to support progression made. Communication should be through the Academic School Support teams and Campus Admin and records should be maintained.  The Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing will ensure that the PDF version of the prospectus to reflect the status of the programme suspension. Academic School Support teams will ensure that the College website is updated to reflect the programme suspension.**Stage 4: Reinstatement of a Suspended Programme**  Programmes that have been suspended will automatically become available at the end of the term for which the suspension has been agreed by the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum, unless the Academic School indicates that the suspension should be extended including the rationale for the extension.  Should the Academic School wish to re-instate the programme before the end of the period of suspension, an application to the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum must be made which must state the reason for the reversal of the suspension and requested reinstatement date. |
| **Substantial Changes to a Programme**  **Stage 1: Approval for intention to make Substantial Change(s)**  The intention to make a substantial change to a programme is generally subject to the agreement of the Awarding Organisation for changes relating to the content of programmes, learning outcomes and or assessment mode of delivery and/or location of the programme in order that consideration can be given to the implications for contractual liabilities, resource implications, public information, and communications with applicants and/or students.  Substantial changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely fashion and should normally be agreed one year in advance of the next intake. Where substantial changes are intended to impact on current students and/or represent changes to the information already provided for applicants, these will be exceptional, must involve consultation with students, and may require the written consent of students and/or applicants.  Academic Schools considering substantial changes that will impact on current students and/or applicants must read the current College [Terms and Conditions for Applications and Enrolments](https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/siteFiles/resources/docs/TermsandConditions/TermsandConditionsforEnrolmentandApplication.pdf) to be clear on the legal obligations to applicants and to students and consult with the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum and the Quality Assurance Manager at the earliest opportunity.  The Head of School must complete the **Application for Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an FE Programme** and submit to the Director or Assistant Director of Curriculum in advance of communications with students or other stakeholders. **Stage 2: Managing proposed substantial change to a course and communications with applicants and/or students** The Head of School or nominee will inform existing students and/or applicants of the programme substantial change through their Business Unit Support Manager. The Head of School or nominee will assess the impact of the substantial change in consultation with existing students.  In consulting and communicating proposals for substantial changes to programmes with students, Head of School or nominee must be aware of students’ rights as set out in the College [Terms and Conditions.](https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/siteFiles/resources/docs/TermsandConditions/TermsandConditionsforEnrolmentandApplication.pdf)   |
| Queries or feedback should be sent to the College’s Centre for Quality at qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk  |
| References: [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](https://nipso.org.uk/nipso/) [Belfast Met Terms & Conditions for Enrolment & Application](https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/siteFiles/resources/docs/TermsandConditions/TermsandConditionsforEnrolmentandApplication.pdf)Competition and Markets Authority (2015) UK Higher Education Providers - [Advice on Consumer Protection Law: Helping you comply with your obligations.](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428549/HE_provi%20ders_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf) [HEFCE (2015) Higher Education Programme Changes and Closures: Statement of Good Practice](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE%2C2014/Content/Regulation/Student%2Cprotection/Statement_go%20od_practice.pdf). [QAA (2016) UK Quality Code for Higher Education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-andquality/the-quality-code). [accessed 8th February 2017] |