

	Procedures for Programme Closure, Suspension and Substantial Change(s) for all Programmes
College Contact	Organisational Quality Assurance Manager
College Policy	Admissions Policy (available on the Public Documents page of the Belfast Met website).
College Committee overseeing the procedure	Higher Education Advisory Board (HEAB)
Date approved	January 2024
Approved by	Organisational Quality Assurance Manager
Date of Review	October 2024
Next Date of Review	September 2025

1. Purpose

This Procedure has been developed under Paragraph 7 of the College Admissions Policy. This Procedure has also been developed with the guidance and standards set out by QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the HEFCE statement of good practice on programme change and closure (2015), as well as the Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2023).

In all instances where Belfast Met ¹programmes are being considered for closure, suspension or a substantial change the following procedures are to be used.

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 and students who have applied to or enrolled on a programme. The procedures align with the [Terms and Conditions for Applications and Enrolments](#)

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.

¹ All programmes of study regardless of the mode or funding stream.

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.

2) 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.

3) 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 on programme regarding the nature of the programme and its component parts.

A substantial change might include:

- i. change of programme location to another campus
- ii. change to the title of a programme and/or associated award
- iii. change to the accreditation of a programme
- iv. change to the mode of delivery of a programme, or
- v. 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 and Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships). 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 ²Application to Notify Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of a 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 (including equality 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 relevant college staff and or Awarding Organisation.

All student and applicant communications on Closure, Suspension or Substantial change of a programme should be issued to students and applicants using the colleges EBS system.

² Please contact the Quality Assurance Team via email qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk to receive a link to complete the online 'Application to Notify Closure, Suspension or Substantial change of a programme'.

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 Development, and partner /awarding organisation representatives.

The Head of School or nominee must complete the ³Application Form to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of a Programme. Once the application is received by the Quality Assurance Team, the application is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Team and a summary report and recommendation (s) are issued to the Head of School and Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) to review. It is the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) who will approve the final outcome of the application.

If decided that the programme will close, the Head of School or nominee will formally notify the School Support Team and Corporate Development 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". All programme suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties.

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. Quality Assurance, Careers & Employability, Student Services and Corporate Development.

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

³ Please contact the Quality Assurance Team via email qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk to receive a link to complete the online 'Application to Notify Closure, Suspension or Substantial change of a programme'.

- 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. Students should also be provided with guidance on alternative options for the students. Students should also be advised of the Complaints process and Complaints and Compliments policy. Curriculum Quality Assurance is responsible for informing external examiners and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) about programme closure. It is recommended that communications are timely and when informing students of programme suspensions all meetings are documented, and email communication is sent to the students using EBS.

The school should communicate with Corporate Development to ensure that the programme is removed from the College's webpages and amend the PDF 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. The Academic School must in the first instance assess the rationale for, and impact of, a proposed programme suspension, 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 Development, and partner /awarding organisation representatives.

The Head of School or nominee must complete the ⁴**Application Form to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of a Programme**. Once the application is received by the Quality Assurance Team, the application is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Team and summary report and recommendation (s) are issued to the Head of School and Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) to review. It is the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) who will approve the outcome of the application.

In all cases, the authority to suspend the programme is subject to the approval and agreement of the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships). All programme suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties for example the Partner University, Awarding Organisation, Students, Parents, and employers.

If decided that the programme will be suspended, the Head of School or nominee will formally notify the School Support Team and Corporate Development 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 suspended". Suspension may only commence once

⁴ Please contact the Quality Assurance Team via email qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk to receive a link to complete the online 'Application to Notify Closure, Suspension or Substantial change of a programme'.

agreed by Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) and the Quality Assurance Manager.

Stage 2: Managing Programme Suspension

The Head of School or nominee must ensure that an action plan is developed for managing the suspension process and that arrangements are in place for managing and monitoring the programme suspension and communicating with students.

Where the process is complex or involves a number of parties, a programme suspension management group should be established and include the programme co-ordinator, student representative, and where appropriate representatives from relevant support departments – e.g. Quality Assurance, Careers & Employability, Student Services and Corporate Development.

The action plan should include:

- arrangements for progressing and completing students, including those required to repeat modules should be considered
- communications to current 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
- arrangements for marketing and recruitment of the programme for the next intake.

Stage 3: Communication

The Head of School or nominee will inform existing students and/or applicants of the programme suspension 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. Students should also be provided with guidance on alternative options for the students which should include a careers meeting with the class. Students should also be advised of the Complaints process and Complaints and Compliments policy. Curriculum Quality Assurance is responsible for informing external examiners and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) about programme closure. It is recommended that communications are timely and when informing students of programme suspensions, that all meetings are documented, and email communication is sent to the students using EBS.

The school should communicate with Corporate Development to ensure that the programme is removed from the College's webpages and amend the PDF prospectus to reflect the status of 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 Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) unless the Academic School indicates in writing to the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) and Quality Assurance Department that the suspension should be extended including the rationale for the extension. If a further extension is granted the reasons and conditions of this extension should be documented by the Quality Assurance Department.

The Head of School or nominee will inform students and/or applicants impacted by the suspension of the arrangements for the programme to be reinstated through their Business Unit Support Manager.

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 Partner University, PSB and or Awarding Organisation. Changes relating to the content of programmes learning outcomes and or assessment, mode of delivery and/or location of the programme should consider the implications for contractual liabilities, resource implications, public information, and communications with applicants and/or students. In the first instance any proposed 'substantial changes' should be discussed with the Quality Assurance Department who can then guide the relevant curriculum team of the relevant process. The process on a 'substantial' change will differ depending on what the substantial change is and what programme the substantial change will impact.

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](#) to be clear on the legal obligations to applicants and to students. Academic Schools considering substantial changes should consult in writing with the Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) and the Quality Assurance Manager at the earliest opportunity.

Substantial changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely fashion and should normally be agreed one year in advance of advertising the next intake. Approval of a substantial change will depend on the substantial change. Approvals must be documented.

Stage 2: Managing proposed substantial change to a programme and communications with applicants and/or students

Where substantial changes are intended to impact current students and/or represent changes to the information already provided for applicants, the college must conduct a consultation with current students and/or applicants. Substantial changes to a programme may require the written consent of students and/or applicants.

The Head of School or nominee is responsible for providing a summary of the consultation and/or evidence of the consultation to ensure students and / or applicants views have been considered and recommendations made. Where consent has been sought from students and/or applicants this evidence must also be made available if required.

The Head of School or nominee will inform existing students and/or applicants of the programme substantial change through their Business Unit Support Manager.

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](#).

References:

[Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](#)

[Belfast Met Admission Policy](#)

[Belfast Met Terms & Conditions for Enrolment & Application](#)

Competition and Markets Authority (May 2023) UK Higher Education Providers - [Advice on Consumer Protection Law: Helping you comply with your obligations](#).

[HEFCE \(2015\) Higher Education Programme Changes and Closures: Statement of Good Practice](#).

[QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).