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|  | **Procedures for HE Programme Closure, Suspension and Substantial Change(s)** |
| College Contact | Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager  **Please contact** [**qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk**](mailto:qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk) **with any queries or guidance required on these procedures** |
| College Policy | Admissions Policy at <http://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-information/public-documents/> |
| College Committee overseeing the procedure | Planning and Performance Review Panel |
| Approved | Admissions Group August 2017 |
| Date of Review | July 2023 |
| 1. **Purpose**  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | In all instances where Belfast Met HE programmes are being considered for **closure, suspension or substantial change** the following procedures are to be used.  These procedures apply to programmes delivered in collaboration with partner Universities and awarding bodies. The procedures have been aligned to the **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** (2015).  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 accepted an offer of a place, but not yet registered, and those that have deferred their offer; and the experience of students who are current or have temporarily withdrawn from the programme. The procedures align with the College’s Terms and Conditions.  These procedures set out the usual 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. **Definitions:** 2. Programme Closure   Closing a programme means that there are no further intakes to the programme and it will no longer be offered by the College. Those students already registered on the programme will continue to progress and complete the programme (teach out), 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 currently registered on the programme 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:   1. Change of programme location to another campus, 2. change to the title of a programme and/or associated award, 3. change to the accreditation of a programme, 4. change to the mode of delivery of a programme, or 5. 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 or programme may be closed by the College or its awarding body/University partners 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 body/University partner 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 applicants) * outcome from programme (re)approval processes by University partners or changes to the programme specification by awarding body partners * failure by University or awarding body partners to approve the programme (including failure to complete actions or to address conditions) * review of the College’s programme provision by a University or awarding body or collaborative partner * staff involved in the delivery of the programme are temporarily/permanently unavailable and it is impossible to substitute them * external regulatory and professional bodies require changes that result in substantial change or a programme being suspended/closed * external funding may alter * concerns 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 University Link Tutor/Subject Partnership Manager. The final decision to close, suspend or initiate substantial changes to a programme must be made by the Head of School through the Performance Review Panel process and consultation with the College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager. Such decisions should be made in good time to enable appropriate consultations and communications with all stakeholders including completion of the action plan linked to this procedure document.  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 and in association with Learner Success services. 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 Centre for Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager and relevant College centres/departments including Admissions and the Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing. 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 consulting and 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 College through the Performance Review process following the submission of an **Application to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an HE Programme** and consultation with the College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager. | | | | |

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| **Programme Closure**  **Stage 1: Securing Approval to Close a Programme**  The academic School must, in the first instance, make an assessment of 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, Admissions and the Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing and partner university/awarding body representatives.  The Head of School, or nominee must complete the Application Form to Notify Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an HE Programme and submit to the College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager and table it at the next Performance Review.  Once agreement has been reached by College Management that the programme may close, the Head of School, or nominee, will formally notify the appropriate departments to ensure that the programme is removed from the College’s webpages and PDF prospectus by the Centre for Corporate Communications & Marketing and the University partner to ensure removal from UCAS if appropriate. 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. A template and checklist are provided to support this. The College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager and Director of Curriculum should receive progress reports, as appropriate through the Performance Review process.  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 – eg Admissions and Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing. In the case of University partnership provision, the partner link tutor and Chair of Collaborative Programmes, or their nominee, should also attend. Partnership closures will be co-ordinated by the College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager.  The action plan must cover:   * notification and 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) * notification and communications to external stakeholders, eg University/awarding body partners, placement providers, external examiners * communications with internal College departments * programme management and delivery arrangements * arrangements for progressing and completing students, including those required to repeat modules.   The academic School must consider the needs of existing students (including those who have withdrawn temporarily), and applicants to the programme (including those who have deferred offers), ensuring that quality and academic standards are fully maintained. Student representatives should be involved in planning for managing programme closure and final arrangements for teaching and assessment. It should be noted that where students temporarily withdraw from a programme, the College cannot guarantee continuation on the same programme and/or units/modules.    Where it appears that it may not be possible to see out a programme i.e. put into place final arrangements for teaching and assessment and alternative arrangements need to be developed considered, the School must consult with the College’s Organisational Quality Manager and Director of Curriculum at the earliest opportunity in the first instance.  The School must also put in place arrangements to support applicants in making a decision 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 meet with current students to inform them of the programme closure and arrangements for final teaching and assessment of the programme. 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.  Campus Admin in liaison with the School is responsible for communicating with all applicants and with temporarily withdrawn students. Organisational 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 and the School will ensure removal from the UCAS database where appropriate through University partner links.  **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 Performance Review Panel by the relevant School. The School should submit this request as soon as possible and suspension may only commence once agreed by the Performance Review Panel, and appropriate College departments and teams are formally notified by the School.  In the event of a planned suspension to a programme, the 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 School must liaise with Campus Admin and communication with applicants will be through the School.  It is recognised that some programme suspensions occur late in the academic year and at relatively short notice, in which case processing through the Performance Review Group is not appropriate. In such cases, the authority to suspend the programme is subject to the approval and agreement of the Director of Curriculum.  All programme suspensions should be informed by consultation and discussion with relevant parties. This includes other Schools in the case of common modules/units, university and awarding body partner representatives, staff in Admissions and Campus Admin and the College Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager.  In the case of planned suspensions, the Head of School (or nominee) must complete the ‘Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an HE Programme’ application form and submit to the Performance Review panel.  Once the Performance Review panel has agreed that the programme may be suspended, the status of the programme will be changed on the College’s webpages by the School in association with the Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing and on the UCAS pages by the partner University. The status of the programme must be reflected in College records i.e. programme suspended.  **Stage 2: Managing Programme Suspension**  The 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**  Campus Admin and support team within the School are responsible for communicating with all applicants. The College’s Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager is responsible for informing external examiners and PSRBs (unless agreed otherwise with the School) about programme suspension.  The School and Campus Admin 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 School and Campus Admin and clear records should be maintained.  The School will ensure that the programme is removed from the UCAS database where this is the case with specific University partners, and will ensure liaison with the University partner regarding applicants.  The Centre for Corporate Communications and Marketing will ensure that the College website reflects the status of the programme suspension and amend the PDF version of the 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 Performance Review Panel, unless the School indicates to the Performance Review Panel that the suspension should be extended including the rationale for the extension.  Should the School wish to re-instate the programme before the end of the period of suspension, an application to the Performance Review Panel 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 University Partner/Awarding Body 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.  Schools considering substantial changes that will impact on current students and/or applicants must read the current College Terms and Conditions for Applicants to be clear on the legal obligations to applicants and to students, and consult with the Organisational Curriculum Quality Assurance Manager and Director of Curriculum at the earliest opportunity.  The Head of School must complete the ‘Application for Programme Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of an HE Programme’ and submit to the College’s Performance Review Group at the earliest opportunity and 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**  Once agreement has been reached that the proposed substantial change may, subject to approval, be made, the Head of School, or nominee and programme leader/director must consult with the Campus Admin to ensure appropriate communications with applicants. Where the proposed change will also impact on current students, the School must ensure that 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.  In consulting and communicating proposals for substantial changes to programmes with students, Schools must be aware of students’ rights as set out in the College Terms and Conditions |

This set of procedures will be reviewed with students through the Student Council process and through the College’s Learner Voice processes during each academic year.

Queries or feedback should be sent to the College’s Centre for Quality at [qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk](mailto:qualityassurance@belfastmet.ac.uk)

References:

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\_providers\_-\_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,2014/Content/Regulation/Student,protection/Statement\_good\_practice.pdf

QAA (2018) UK Quality Code for Higher Education. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code> [accessed 17 July 2018]