

Suspension and/or Discontinuation of Programmes

Procedure for Approval and Monitoring



1. Introduction

The Suspension and/or Discontinuation of Programmes covers two processes that enable the suspension of recruitment to programme of study which enables the opportunity to review and revise a programme prior to recommencing recruitment; or the discontinuation of a named award which results in programme closure.

The process is designed to meet external regulatory requirements to ensure students continue to receive a high quality education in the period of teaching out, and protect their rights as consumers. Firstly, it meets the following conditions of the Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England (Office for Students, 2022):

- **B1:** to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience. A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course: is up to date; provides educational challenge; is coherent; is effectively delivered; and requires students to develop relevant skills.
- **B2:** to take all reasonable steps to ensure students receive resources and support and are effectively engaged with the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students; and those students succeed in and beyond higher education.
- **B3:** To deliver positive outcomes for students on its higher education courses.
- **B4:** To ensure that students are assessed effectively; assessments are valid and reliable; regulations ensure that awards are credible at the point of being granted and in comparison to those granted previously.
- **B5:** To ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body) any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.
- **C1:** to demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, the provider has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.

The process is also designed to ensure the University can take actions to pause recruitment and close programmes where this supports the delivery of strategic objectives.

The process ensures a managed approach to suspension of recruitment or discontinuation of a named award that enables students to successfully complete the programme they registered on, and a timely approach that minimises the impact on current students and potential applicants.

The principles that underpin the design and operation of the Suspensions and Discontinuations Procedure are as follows:

- **Proportionality:** the process of suspending recruitment allows programme teams time to plan modifications or redesign programmes in a way that minimises risk to the student experience. The process of discontinuing a programme ensures a smooth and well-planned teach out for existing students that account for issues that arise during teaching out around resourcing, reassessments and staffing. The procedure ensures programmes and modules delivered by Partners or other Schools are carefully monitored throughout the approval process and teaching out period to ensure minimal risk to the student experience.

- **Listening to Students:** Student satisfaction can form one of the key datasets to inform the decision to suspend and/or discontinue a named award. All students on courses that have been suspended or discontinued are notified of decisions even in the case of teaching out, to ensure they have the opportunity to give feedback, or raise any concerns about the implications for their studies. Following a suspension, programme redesigns and modifications are driven by student feedback.

- **Engaging Academic Staff:** Academic staff submitting proposals receive support from Portfolio and Planning to complete and submit the proposal form for suspending recruitment and/or discontinuing an award. In the event of the redesign or modification of suspended programmes, Academic Governance and Quality and Portfolio and Planning will support academic staff with these processes. Portfolio and Planning will support the programme leader to develop a Management Plan that will allow the programme to be closely monitored at each SQMC during the teach out, ensuring a positive student experience.

- **Data Driven:** the provision of appropriate data by the Portfolio and Planning and Central Data teams provides proposers of suspensions/discontinuations with an understanding of market demand, both in terms of the applicant recruitment pipeline and labour market intelligence. Such data informs the proposals as well as subsequent curriculum development, enabling a demand-led approach to the decision making process.

- **Enabling Enhancement:** Whilst suspension to recruitment is in place, enhancements to the programme can be completed through the Modifications Procedure, facilitating a culture of innovation, creativity, currency and continuous improvement. When a programme is discontinued, SQMCs will consider how current programmes can be enhanced to promote high levels of engagement with current students. All discontinued programmes will continue to be subject to the annual Programme Review Process via the Local Enhancement Reflection route, enabling the continued enhancement of delivery for current cohorts.

- **Providing assurance to Governors:** the decisions to suspend or discontinue named awards are taken by the Executive; however, oversight of the Curriculum Approval Panel of approval decisions, and the reporting and monitoring of proposals and Management Plans by School Quality Management Committees and Subject Boards ensures effective oversight through the academic governance framework to Academic Board and ultimately to Governors of the robustness of the process.

2. Scope and Purpose

This procedure covers the procedure to follow for the suspension of recruitment to a programme of study; and the discontinuation (closure) of a programme of study.

Suspension of recruitment should be used in particular circumstances where there is a reasonable chance that recruitment could be recommenced after a period of review. If there is limited chance of recruitment re-commencing after a period of review, then discontinuation should be considered.

Whilst the decision to suspend a programme is time limited to one academic year/intake; and the decision to discontinue a programme concerns the teaching out of cohorts over several years, the implications for students can be similar in respect of the interruption to or ending of teaching activity for a period of one year or longer. In particular, students on study breaks, undertaking re-starts, on part time routes or PPY years, as well as those who are required to undertake re-assessments or re-take modules as a result of failure on programmes that have been discontinued or have had a period of recruitment suspension can be impacted by the changes to teaching delivery.

Discontinuation and Suspension procedures may also be used where individual delivery sites are closed. In the event of a site closure, separate Proposals and Management Plans should be drafted for each site.

Discontinuation and Suspension procedures may also be used where PSRB accreditation is removed or no longer offered - see the PSRB Management Policy.

3. Procedure

3a. Consideration of Suspension/Discontinuation Where application numbers are low, or there is insufficient interest, a decision may be made to consider suspension of recruitment for that programme by the senior management team.

Decisions to suspend recruitment for a programme or discontinue a programme may be made to allow academic staff to redesign the programme; and may also be initiated by Heads of School and Educational Partners in consideration with Portfolio and Planning

A partner may propose a suspension/discontinuation via the Link Tutor who then informs the Head of School. The Head of School consults with Portfolio and Planning to initiate the process, and liaises with the Link Tutor throughout the process to ensure that the partner is fully consulted and informed of progress.

3b. Drafting of Proposal

The Head of Academic Portfolio Development coordinates the submission of the Suspensions and Discontinuations Proposal Form ensuring that the Head of School is briefed on the requirements for and completes the relevant sections.

The Head of School informs all members of staff in the programme team of the Proposal, seeking relevant information for and completing the Proposal Form.

Where the programme owns modules shared with other programmes (including in other Schools), the Head of School should liaise with these programme teams to agree arrangements, listing the shared modules and associated decisions on the Proposal Form.

The Head of Academic Portfolio Development will undertake research and analysis of the proposal, and draft a timeline for approval of the Proposal, as well as any proposed re-design or modification activity, taking into account requirement alignment with marketing, admissions and recruitment cycles.

Student and Registry Services will confirm data on current students and the Head of Academic Portfolio Development will confirm data on applicants for inclusion in the Proposal Form.

3c. Approval

Head of Academic Portfolio Development makes a recommendation to the Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Planning for the approval of the Suspensions and Discontinuations Proposal.

3d. Notification and Reporting

Once approved, Portfolio and Planning notifies and shares the Proposal form with relevant stakeholders¹

Academic Governance and Quality to contact the relevant external examiner to formally inform them of the approval of the suspension/discontinuation.

Academic Governance and Quality will ensure all programmes with shared modules have been identified in the Proposal, and provide support to the relevant Head of School/programme leaders of all affected

¹ Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise (for postgraduate taught provision), Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience, Academic Governance and Quality, Admissions, External Affairs Unit, Library and Learning Services, Recruitment, Student and Registry Services, Students' Union Vice-President Education, Timetabling, Head of School, School Operations Manager, Centre for Educational Partnerships and the Link Tutor (for collaborative provision).

programmes to enact any relevant Modifications required as a result of suspension or discontinuation.

PVC Partnerships Strategy to confirm the approval of suspension of recruitment/discontinuation of a programme to educational partner.

Head of Academic Portfolio Development to prepare an annual report for the Curriculum Approval Panel of approved suspensions and discontinuations.

3e. Development of Management Plan

Portfolio and Planning coordinates a central database for Management Plans for the duration of the teach out process.

Heads of School to draft the Suspensions and Discontinuation Management Plan alongside the Student Teach Out Tracker Tool to ensure the experience of all students is secured.

The Suspensions and Discontinuation Management Plan must ensure that the student experience is secured and the quality and standards of the award is maintained for the remaining cohorts or for those impacted by the pause in teaching for programmes that have suspended recruitment.

For partnership provision, the Suspensions and Discontinuation Management Plan should be written jointly by the University and the partner provider via the Link Tutor.

3f. Implementation and Communications

The Head of School will liaise with partners and/or programme teams with shared modules, as necessary, to confirm approval and implement the previously agreed arrangements. This may require the partners or programme leads of these other programmes to prepare a Modification submission.

Heads of School to ensure that SQMCs receive the completed Suspensions and Discontinuations Proposal Form and Management Plan at the next meeting.

Head of Academic Portfolio Development to support Head of School to draft communication to all students on the programme informing them of the decision to suspend recruitment or discontinue the programme, including those on programmes with shared modules. Guidance provided in *Appendix 1 - Communication to Students on Suspended and Discontinued Programmes* should be followed. Students will be notified of the current and potential implications for their teaching out period or (for suspensions), the implications of not delivering a year of teaching for

new students, including in respect of study breaks, re-assessments and registration period.

Head of Academic Portfolio Development to support partners to communicate as required with all students taught at partner providers.

Head of Admissions to notify applicants and offer-holders when a decision has been made to suspend recruitment to a named award; or discontinue a programme.

Where possible, sufficient notice will be given regarding the suspension of recruitment or discontinuation and whilst this is normally six months or more, by necessity, this may be less than six months before the entry of a cohort. In such circumstances and in accordance with the Study Terms and Conditions, the University will make every effort to offer affected applicants a place on an appropriate alternative award or to support applicants in finding a place on an alternative programme or at another institution.

3g. Monitoring and Review

Whilst in suspension or discontinuation, Heads of School must ensure that all actions identified and agreed in the Management Plan are completed and adequately monitored to safeguard the experience of current students. This is done through:

Monitoring of the Student Experience and Delivery:

1. Updating and reporting of the Management Plan at each School Quality Management Committee, ensuring student status and progress is updated and considered.
2. Completion of annual Programme Review

Monitoring of Student Progression (including re-assessment, re-takes and re-starts)

1. Standing items on Subject Board agendas to consider the implications of re-takes and re-assessments for students where modules are not running.

Subject Boards should follow the guidance in *Appendix 2 - Monitoring Student Progression* where re-sits/re-takes are required when programmes are in discontinuation or modules are closing.

Where the named award in suspension/discontinuation is delivered at a partner provider, the Link Tutor should work closely with the partner for the duration of the process to ensure safeguarding of the student experience, and ensure the Management Plan is reported to the SQMC.

3h. Re-Commencement of Recruitment/ Discontinuation after Suspension

During the academic year following a suspension of recruitment, Portfolio and Planning works with the School to establish a decision on whether recruitment will recommence for the following academic year or whether the award should be discontinued.

Portfolio and Planning present recommendations for either the recommencement of recruitment or discontinuation of an award to the Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Planning, for approval.

Portfolio and Planning will notify all relevant stakeholders of the decision, to enable teams to implement their own processes.

The decision to either reopen recruitment or discontinue an award must be reported to the relevant School Quality Management Committee.

Where a programme is to be reopened to recruitment, the School needs to follow the relevant procedures (e.g. Programme Design and Approval, Modifications procedures).

If the discontinuation of a named award is approved, the Proposal Form and Management Plan will be refreshed; and the relevant communications should be made to applicants, students, external examiners, staff and partners.

3i. Completion of Teaching Out

Student and Registry Services will inform Portfolio and Planning when all students have completed their studies and this is noted at the School Quality Management Committee.

Portfolio and Planning will notify all relevant stakeholders of the completion of programme closure, to enable teams to implement their own processes (e.g. updating web pages, archiving programme documentation, notifying partners).

Document Details

Responsible Office: Academic Governance and Quality

Responsible Officer: Head of Academic Governance and Quality

Approving Authority: Academic Board

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Related Policies and Procedures:

Programme Design and Approval Procedure;

Modifications Procedure;

Programme Review Procedure;

Partnership Management Procedure;

Student Protection Plan

Study Terms and Conditions

Supersedes:

Procedures for Suspension of Recruitment and/or Discontinuation of a Named Award

Next review due: July 2025