

Policy for closing or suspending a programme

2022-21

1 Introduction

This is a policy which all Schools and the Off Campus Division are required to follow. It sets out the University's principles which determine the closure or suspension of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and provides an overview of the procedures to be adopted. The policy is aligned with the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education chapters B2 – Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education, B8 Programme Monitoring and Review and B10 Managing Higher Education with others. The principle underpinning the policy is that in all cases the experience of those who are affected by the programme closure or suspension, to include: those students who have accepted an offer but not yet enrolled; those students who have deferred their offer; and those students who are current ("Current and Prospective Students") should be assured and monitored.

2 Scope of the Policy

The policy is applicable to:

- On campus provision ie programmes which are delivered by the University of Bolton staff, which are based at the Bolton Campus and which lead to an award of the University of Bolton;
- Offsite delivery ie programmes which are delivered entirely by University of Bolton staff irrespective of the location of delivery and which lead to an award of the University of Bolton. Where the programme also exists in an on campus delivery mode and only one of the versions is closing this should nonetheless be put through the programme closure process in order to safeguard the experience of students on that particular iteration of the programme;
- Programmes delivered under a collaborative provision arrangement. Where for a programme delivered under collaborative provision arrangement, the intention is also to close the partnership, the Contracts and Compliance Officer should be contacted to provide legal advice.

3 Principles

Before commencing the formal procedures to close or suspend a programme the School must ensure that current students who are on the programme are consulted (including those who have suspended their studies for a period of time or are referred) and must take full account of the needs of prospective students ie applicants, those

who are holding an offer and those who have deferred their enrollment (“Prospective Students”). The point at which a student accepts an offer from the University, the initial contract between the University and the student is made, therefore the decision to close or suspend a programme is breaching the terms of the contract.

A School’s decision to recommend closure or suspension of a programme must take full account of how current students are to be supported through to the completion of their intended study or put in place appropriate transitional arrangements in consultation with the students. These arrangements should ensure that the programme continues to address the requirement of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) that accredits the programme.

A School’s decision to recommend closure or suspension of a programme must also take full account of how Prospective Students are to be supported in making a decision about an alternative programme or releasing themselves from their place and their contract to the University.

Any other School, Centre or Division which rely on modules from the programme in question (eg Off Campus Division programmes) to avoid any unintended impact on other programmes must also be consulted. In the case of a collaborative provision arrangement the School/Division must contact the Contracts and Compliance Officer to obtain legal advice about the termination clauses in the agreement prior to contacting the partner organisation, students or stakeholders. The External Examiner(s) must also be invited to comment.

Current and Prospective Students will be given adequate notice of any changes.

4 Rationale for the closure or suspension of a programme

There are a number of reasons why the University may close or suspend a programme, for example:

- Declining student numbers;
- Replacing an existing programme with a new one;
- Changing strategic priorities at Subject, School or University level;
- Concerns about the quality and academic standards of the programme;
- Closure (termination of a collaborative partner agreement or termination for other reasons) of a collaborative provision arrangement which results in withdrawal of a programme.

Recommending programme closure or suspension is also an option as part of the Internal Subject Review (ISR) process. If the School or ISR Panel recommend closure of an existing programme, this Policy on Programme Closure and Suspension would then be followed.

Similarly during the spring Academic Planning cycle, the Academic Portfolio of a School is considered and adjustments may be made during this process which results in recommendations for programme closure or suspension.

The University will make all efforts to ensure that the impact on Current and Prospective Students is mitigated as far as this is possible. The planning timeline for managing the closure or suspension process is required to take into account the experience of Current and Prospective Students with the aim and intention that students would be protected from adverse impact of such closures or suspensions.

In the event of a programme closing or being suspended, unless beyond the control of the University, the closure or suspension in terms of new intake would not be in place until the following academic year with no new applicants having been accepted and Students would be supported to complete their programme of study or in the event that this was not possible due to circumstances beyond the control of the University, transitional arrangements would be made in consultation with the student(s) affected.

5 Authority to make decisions about closure

The final decision to close or suspend a programme is made by the Programmes Committee having received recommendation and appropriate documentation from a School or the Off Campus Division or as a result of an ISR Panel Recommendation.

6 Communicating the decision to close, or suspend recruitment to, a programme

Once the decision has been reached by Programmes Committee, the programme is removed from the website (by Student Recruitment and Admissions Department) for future enrolment and the status of the programme is updated to reflect the change ie suspended recruitment or closure of the programme on internal record systems (by Standards and Enhancement Office).

7 Procedure

The full procedure is described in the document Programme Closure Procedure and Guidelines.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on this policy.

The University of Bolton is committed to the promotion of equality, diversity and a supportive environment for all members of our community. Our commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of plain English, the promotion of the positive duty in relation to the protected characteristics of race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

All University policies are subject to periodic review under the equality impact assessment process.

9 Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed after the first year, and every three years thereafter, to judge its effectiveness and updated in accordance with changes in the law by the Education Committee.

10 Related Policies

<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/studentinformation-policyzone/Home.aspx>

11 Dissemination of and Access to the Policy

This policy will be published on the University of Bolton's website to be available to all staff, students, visitors and contractors on

<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/studentinformation-policyzone/Home.aspx>

Policy Ref	
Version Number	1
Version Date	<i>December 2015</i>
Name of Developer	Hilary Birtwistle
Policy Owner (School/Centre/Unit)	Standards and Enhancement
Person responsible for implementation (post holder)	Head of Quality Systems
Approving Committee/Board	Senate
Date approved	11 th December 2015
Effective from	To be implemented with immediate effect in relation to programmes that are to be closed from September 2016 and beyond
Dissemination method (e.g. website)	Web pages
Review Frequency	12 months
Reviewing Committee	Education Committee
Consultation History (individuals/groups consulted with dates)	Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, Members of Programmes Committee, Members of Standards and Enhancement
Document History (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	Newly created policy and refreshed procedures in light of CMA and Consumer Rights Act 2015

Procedures for closing or suspending a programme

2017-18

The procedure for closing or suspending a programme has three stages.

A three stage Programme Closure or Suspension Form (PCSF) must be completed prior to consideration by the Programmes Committee.

1 Stage One

Stage One of the procedure involves consideration by the relevant School Board (or equivalent) of the rationale for the proposed programme closure and an assessment of the impact of the proposed closure or suspension.

The Head of School (or nominee) must complete Stage One of the PCSF and submit this to the School Board for consideration. The form requires confirmation (covering all iterations of the programmes) of current students who would be affected including those who have deferred studies, applicants and those who have deferred their application.

For collaborative provision arrangements the form should be considered by the Off Campus Division Board but only after discussions have taken place with the other relevant School(s).

For collaborative provision arrangements, the Off Campus Division must contact the Contracts and Compliance Officer to take advice on the termination clauses in the Collaborative Partner Agreement (or similar document) before communicating with the partner organisation, student and other stakeholders. This is to ensure that the programme closure is conducted in accordance with the agreement and to identify whether the agreement will need to be renegotiated, varied or terminated.

The PCSF is then submitted to Programmes Committee for a strategic decision to be made about the proposal.

If the Programmes Committee is in favour of closure or suspension of the programme and there are no students or applicants impacted upon, the procedure moves directly to Stage Three.

If the Programmes Committee is in favour of closure or suspension of the programme and there are students and/or applicants who would be impacted upon, the Programmes Committee will nominate the person who will be responsible for carrying out the Stage Two Consultation. This will normally be the Head of School (or nominee) who completed Stage One of the PCSF.

2 Stage Two

This stage of the procedure involves consultation with students and key internal and external stakeholders (including applicants, those who have been offered a place but

not yet enrolled and those who have accepted a place but not yet enrolled) about the proposed closure or suspension of a programme.

As determined by the Programmes Committee, the process is led by the Head of School or nominee, The latter should organise the necessary consultation events and ensure that Stage Two of the PCSF is completed and the required minutes of all meetings appended.

For all programme closures or suspensions, the School and/or the Off Campus Division must enter into consultation with students enrolled on the programme (and any linked programmes) and discuss the implications with them at the earliest opportunity. Students should be informed of any plans for teaching-out the programme and provided with details of how the School intends to maintain the quality of student learning experience during the teach out phase. In addition, appropriate student representatives should be included in this process, as outlined in appendix A of the PCSF.

In the light of the feedback received as part of the consultation, the person leading the consultation should detail the proposed arrangements which will be made for students currently enrolled or enrolled prior to the last date of admission, to support them through to completion. Care should be taken not to forget the need for arrangements for students who have suspended their studies or need to refer. Information about ongoing monitoring requirements for the programme in line with the requirements of the University's Annual Quality Management framework should also be included.

3 Stage Three

Stage Three is the procedure associated with the approval (or not) of the proposed closure or suspension.

The Head of School (or nominee) who has completed Stage Two should ensure that Stages One and Two of the PCSF have been considered by the relevant School and Off Campus Division where they have an interest in the programme and their decisions and comments noted on the form. Once all three stages of the form have been completed and the relevant documents appended (ie minutes/action plans), it should be considered by the Programmes Committee. Approval is by the Programmes Committee following confirmation of approval from the School and/or the Off Campus Division.

The decision of Programmes Committee can be to:

- approve the proposed closure or suspension;
- give due consideration to the proposed teachout and/transition arrangements identifying any items that should be added to the School/Division Action Plan;
- not approve the proposal;
- make alternative recommendations for the School to consider.

4 Internal Communications

Once approval to close or suspend has been granted, the Head of School or the Programmes Committee secretary shall notify the following people (via the course

record system automated email which provides the necessary information about the category of the closure/suspension):

- Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions
- Admissions Team Leader
- Executive Dean Research and Graduate School (for PhDs)
- Head of Student Services
- Head of Off Campus Division
- Heads of School
- Relevant PSRB (where applicable)
- Students' Union

5 UCAS Processes

In the event of a decision to close/suspend an undergraduate programme, the University Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions (or nominee) will ensure that the programme is removed from the UCAS database.

UCAS regulations also require us to follow specific procedures in respect of any students who have applied for or are holding an offer of a place on the programme concerned. As soon as agreement to discontinue or suspend a programme has been reached the Admissions tutor responsible should take steps to ensure that these procedures are followed in liaison with the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions (or nominee). The steps to be taken will vary according to the applicants' status and the timing of the decision.

Usually, where a student has already accepted an offer for the discontinued programme, School representatives will be asked to contact him or her with an offer of a place on a suitable alternative programme.

If this is not possible or the applicant does not wish to accept the alternative programme the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions (or nominee) will provide guidance to the Admissions Tutor and the Student to determine the best procedural way forward.

If the decision is taken so late in the admission cycle that the UCAS deadlines have passed then the University will assess the feasibility of the programme being run for one further entry point. However, other options available to the University, if that is not feasible, will include liaising with other providers to see if the course can be offered elsewhere and the student supported in making that transition which would include permitting the student to terminate their obligations under the contract with the University if they are adversely affected by the suspension or closure.