

Policy for closing, suspending or withdrawing a programme

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Policy Statement

This policy sets out the University's procedures for closing or suspending undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. The policy also covers programme closures, which involve the replacement of a programme in a particular discipline with a new one. 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](#) and [RAU Teaching Quality Handbook Part 3a](#). The principles underpinning the policy is that in all cases the experience of the students on the programme should be assured and monitored.

Version Control

Version number	Purpose/change	Name and job title	Date (DD/MM/YYYY)
1	Creation of Policy	Emma Maskell, Assistant Registrar, Assurance and Enhancement Quality and	21/01/2016

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2	Revision in line with AQSC comments	Emma Maskell, Assistant Registrar Assurance and Enhancement	09/08/2016

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Scope of the Policy

The Policy is applicable to:

- On campus provision i.e. programmes which are delivered and supported entirely by Royal Agricultural University staff and which leads to an award of the Royal Agricultural University.
- Offsite delivery i.e. programmes which are delivered and supported entirely by Royal Agricultural University irrespective of the location of delivery and which leads to an award of the Royal Agricultural University. 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 arrangement. Where, for a programme delivered under a collaborative provision arrangement, the intention is also to close the partnership, the collaborative exit policy should also be followed.

Principles

Before commencing the formal procedure to close, suspend or withdraw a programme and replace it with another, the school must ensure that students who are on the programme or closely related programmes are consulted. Any other schools which rely on modules from the programme in questions to avoid any unintended impact on other programmes must also be consulted. The external examiner(s) must also be invited to comment.

A school's decision to close a programme must take full account of the needs of existing students, applicants to the programme, including deferred applicants and deferred offer holders and should as far as possible aim to support these students through to the completion of their intended study or put in place appropriate transitional arrangements. These arrangements should ensure that the programme continues to address the requirements of any PPSRB which accredits the programme.

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Rationale for Closure

The University might decide to close, suspend or withdraw a programme for a number of reasons for examples:

- Declining student numbers i.e. less than six students per year averaged over a rolling four year period.
- Replacing an existing programme with a new one
- Changing strategic priorities at a schools or University level
- Concerns about the quality and academic standards on the programme
- Closure (termination of memorandum of agreement (MoA), termination for another reason) of a collaborative provision arrangement, which results in withdrawal of a programme.
- Repeated failure of the programme team and School to meet internal quality assurance requirements.

Recommending programme closure (for existing programmes on the regular validation cycle) is also an option available to schools.

In addition, a programme, which has not had a student registered on it for three years and for which there, are no outstanding application should normally be closed automatically by the relevant school using this process. Programmes that fall into this category will be identified as part of the annual provision process

Authority to make decisions about closure

Decisions in respect of strategic priorities and breaches or termination of MoA above will be initiated by Academic Board.

Decisions in respect of poor recruitment/ student numbers may be initiated by either Academic Board or the individual School of study.

Decisions in respect of academic quality and academic standards will be initiated by AQSC

The final decision to terminate a programme must be made by a full meeting of Academic Board.

Process

The process for closing, suspending or withdrawing a programme and replacing it with another has the following stages.

Stage one

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Stage one of the process involves consideration by the relevant school of the rationale for the proposed programme closure and assessment of the impact of the programme closure.

The Dean must complete stage one of the Programme closure form and submit this to academic Board for consideration

Academic Board will be invited to take the strategic decision to explore the possibility of closing, suspending or withdrawing the programme. If Academic Board is in favour of exploring closure, they should nominate the person who will be responsible for carrying out stage 2 consultation process; this would usually be the Dean. The decision to proceed to stage 2 should be reported to AQSC at the earliest opportunity.

AQSC can recommend to Academic Board that a programme should be considered for closing, suspending or withdrawing due to quality assurance concerns.

Stage 2

This stage of the process involved consultation with students and key internal and external stakeholders about the proposed closure or suspension or withdrawal. The Dean (or nominee) should organize the necessary consultation events and ensure that stage two of the programme closure form is completed and required minutes of all meetings appended

For all programme closures, suspensions or withdrawals, the School must inform students enrolled on the programme (and any linked programmes) and discuss the implication 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 the student learning experience during the teach out phase. In addition, appropriate student representatives should also be included in this process, as outlined in appendix a of the programme closure form.

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 Teaching Quality Handbook should also be included.

Stage three

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Stage three of the process is to approve /not approve the proposed closure or suspension or withdrawal.

Approval is by Academic Board

Once all three stages of the form have been completed and the relevant documents appended, it should be approved by Academic Board before being reported to AQSC.

Academic Board should consider in particular and either endorse or amend the proposed teach out arrangements and also identify any items that should be added to the Action Plan.

Internal Communications

Once approval to close suspend or withdraw a programme has been granted the Quality support Unit should notify the following people about the decision:

- Assistant Registrar – Admissions and Student Records
- Head of Marketing and Student Recruitment
- Student Support Services Manager
- The Head of the Partner Institution (for collaborative arrangement)
- The relevant PRSB (where applicable)
- Human Resources
- Development office (alumni)

The Dean or their nominee should inform the students on the programme that is going to be closed in writing with a confirmation of the way in which they will be supported to complete the programme.

Ongoing Monitoring

The programme must continue to be actively managed and subject to the University's Teaching Quality Handbook requirements of module survey, annual module and programme monitoring and external examining and must therefore retain a Programme Manager for the duration of the teach out phase. Ongoing monitoring must ensure that the equity of experience for students on the programme is maintained. If the programme is due for validation during the teach out phase, the School can apply to AQSC for an extension to the period of validation to cover the teach out phase. If the programme is due for validation during the teach out phase where significant changes need to be made to allow the programme to be taught out, a light touch validation must be conducted in order to ensure the programme continues to meet the exacting standards of the University and that it will continue to provide a high quality experience for the students.

Timing

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All decisions to close, suspend or withdraw programmes must be taken in good time, with due regard for the need to address the position of existing and potential students.

It should be remembered that applicants may apply for entry to a programme up to two years before taking up their place. The following procedures must therefore be followed for any programme closed /suspended/withdrawn at less than two years' notice.

It should be noted that if a decision to close/suspend/withdraw a programme is taken late in the admissions cycle, the availability of suitable alternatives at the University or at other institutions may be extremely limited, with significant consequences for any applicants affected (e.g. they may have given up employment with the intention of taking up the programme). Late decisions can have Tier 4 implications if a CAS has been issued which may cause student problems immigration prospects. Schools should therefore refrain from discontinuing programmes after this stage in the admissions cycle.

Informing Applicants

Registry Admissions team should identify any applicants who will be affected by the decision and notify them. If the applicant does not reply within the timescale requested in the initial letter a reminder letter should be sent advising the applicant that their application will be withdrawn if no response is received within a specified timescale.

For undergraduate programmes, the UCAS procedures summarized below must be followed in corresponding with the applicant.

UCAS Processes

In the event of a decision to close/suspend/withdraw an undergraduate programme, the Assistant Registrar, Admission and Student Records will ensure that the programme is removed from the UCAS database.

UCAS regulation 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 a programme has been reached the admission administrator responsible should take steps to ensure these are followed.

The steps to be taken will vary according to applicants status and the timing of the decision and are described in detail in Section 8 of the UCAS Admissions Guide.

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

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If this is not possible or the applicant does not wish to accept the alternative programme, he or she should be given the opportunity to substitute an alternative choice of institution or programme on the UCAS application form. Where an applicant has not received an offer or has received an offer but not replied to it, the applicant may ask the University to consider their application for an alternative programme or to reject the application, so that a substitution of the institution and programme may be made. If the decision is taken so late in the cycle that the UCAS deadlines have passed then the programme must be run for that one further entry point.

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Signed

Signed: _____ Date: MM/YYYY
Vice-Chancellor

Signed: _____ Date: MM/YYYY
Governor