

# Higher Education Course Closure, Suspension & Substantial Change Policy

1.	Purpose .....	3
2.	Overview.....	3
3.	Course Viability Process .....	4
4.	Course Closure.....	5
5.	Course Suspension.....	5
6.	Substantial Change.....	5
7.	Course Closure, Suspension, or Substantial Change Process: .....	6
8.	Planning – Closure or Suspension only.....	6
8.1	Proposal: .....	7
8.2	Consultation – Closure and Suspension only:.....	7
8.3	Approval .....	9
9	Equality Impact Assessment .....	9
10	Data Retention Statement .....	9
11	Policy Review and Ownership .....	10
12	Amendments Log .....	10

## 1. Purpose

To inform staff, students, potential students, and other external interested parties of the procedure for closing, suspending, or making major changes to Higher Education (HE) programmes.

## 2. Overview

The College regularly reviews and updates the programmes, courses, units, and modules offered to ensure they remain current and reflect best practice. In exceptional circumstances this means that a course or programme may cease to exist, or the College may no longer be able to teach a programme or an aspect of a programme to a group of students, or the College may introduce a substantial change which will impact on applicants and/or current students. In all instances where courses are being considered for closure, suspension or a substantial change to a course, the College will follow a set procedure which aligns with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and takes account of the HEFCE statement of good practice on course change and closure (2015), their Office for Students (OfS) Student Protection Plan, as well as the Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2015). It will have also carefully considered the College Accountability Agreement and the impact these changes will have on our local and national picture of higher education.

This procedure seeks to protect the interests of applicants and students by ensuring clear and transparent processes for the management of course closure, suspension, or substantial change in relation to the experience of:

- Applicants who have accepted an offer of a place, but not yet enrolled
- Applicants who have deferred their offer
- Current students
- Students who have intermitted (temporarily withdrawn) from the course.

There are a number of reasons why the College might close or suspend recruitment to a course or make substantial changes.

These may include but are not limited to the following:

- Demand for the course is too small to cover the cost of delivery (i.e. insufficient applicants)
- Insufficient numbers applied to offer a positive student experience
- Review of the academic portfolio through curriculum planning
- Staff involved in the delivery of the course are temporarily/permanently unavailable and it is impossible to substitute them.
- External bodies (such as PSRBs) require changes that result in substantial change or a course being suspended/closed
- External funding may alter
- Concerns about the quality and academic standards of the course
- Replacing an existing course with a new one
- Changing strategic priorities
- Closure/termination by collaborative partner which results in the withdrawal of a course

### 3. Course Viability Process

Using the schedule below, the HE course viability process will demonstrate action taken and list any operational activity to try to secure continuation of the course. This will include various course viability meetings with the Heads of Faculty to review possible outcomes and options available to students.

Month	Activity	Responsibility
September	Review course application and enrolments across HE provision	HE Quality Assurance
October	Identify which courses may be 'at risk' of closure or suspension  Arrange meetings with Heads of Faculty	HE Quality Assurance and Heads of Faculty
November	Hold Course Viability meetings with Heads of Faculty  Recommend courses to monitor – for targeted intervention	HE Quality Assurance and Heads of Faculty
February	Review course applications and UCAS status for provision.  Arrange further Course Viability meetings with Heads of Faculty to provide recommendations to either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor – with request for targeted recruitment</li> <li>• Suspend</li> <li>• Close</li> </ul> Complete proposals and send to P&Q for review (Stage 1)	HE Quality Assurance  HE Quality Assurance and Heads of Faculty  HE Quality Assurance, P&Q Group
March	Depending on the outcome of P&Q Approval, activity will either be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor until UCAS rejection deadline (June)</li> <li>• Complete consultation stage (Stage 2) for closure or suspension.</li> </ul>	HE Quality Assurance
April – June	Consultation and Approval stage for course closure or suspension  Monitoring period ends for courses still in Course Viability.  Final Course Viability meetings with Heads of Faculty and proposal to close or suspend approved at P&Q (Stage 3)	HE Quality Assurance  HE Quality Assurance and P&Q Group

July - August	Clearing Consultation and Approval for those courses closing or suspending	
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## 4. Course Closure

Closing a course means that there will be no further student intakes to the course, and it will no longer be offered by the College. Those students already registered on the course will continue to progress and complete the course ('teach out'), or where this is not possible will be offered an alternative course or transfer to another provider. During HE curriculum planning a date will be agreed with the Head of Faculty (HoF) and Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality (DPCQ) when a decision needs to be made as to whether a course is viable, this will be largely influenced by the number of applications received. Applicants must be made aware by updating the College website with this information. New applicants must be advised at point of interview if there is a chance the course may be withdrawn to ensure they are not disadvantaged.

## 5. Course Suspension

Suspension of a course means that there will be no intake to the course for a specified period (normally the following academic year). Students currently registered on the course will continue to progress and complete. Suspension does not automatically mean that the course will run the year it is due to be reinstated. The same scrutiny must be applied to viability as demonstrated for new courses. A course can close, despite being suspended for a year. Students must be informed the same way for both suspension and closure.

## 6. Substantial Change

To propose a substantial change, the HE Course Closure, Suspension, and Substantial Change Proposal form should be used.

Substantial changes constitute alterations to a course 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 course and its component parts.

A substantial change might include:

- change of course location (eg. to another campus);
- change to the title of a course and/or associated award;
- change to the accreditation of a course (eg. change of franchise partner)
- change to the mode of delivery of a course (eg. full-time to part-time, or through distance-learning)
- substantial change to the curriculum, assessment or modules within a course (eg. substantial changes to mandatory modules which results in a significant change to the course offer). Substantial changes must be notified (and approved) in a timely fashion.

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.

When considering making substantial changes that will impact on current students and/or applicants, Heads of Faculty must read the College's HE Student Contract to be clear on the legal obligations to applicants and to students and consult with HoHE at the earliest opportunity. Once agreement has been reached that the proposed substantial change can be made the HoHE will ensure appropriate communication with applicants. Where the proposed change will also impact on current students, the Head of Faculty must ensure that the proposal has the agreement of all students.

## 7. Course Closure, Suspension, or Substantial Change Process:

The College requires an initial planning process called HE Course Viability where the HE Course Closure, Suspension, or Substantial Change Proposal form will be completed. This proposal demonstrates the college has completed the three stages of planning: Proposal, Consultation and Approval.

Once it has been decided a course will be closed or recruitment suspended, the course will be removed immediately from the College's website and UCAS. If the course is delivered as part of a franchise agreement the Head of Higher Education Quality and Performance (HoHE) must notify the partner University or Awarding Organisation of the decision. The HE Admissions Team must notify any applicants under offer and advise of alternatives available. The Head of Faculty or Programme Leader will meet with current students to inform them of the course closure and arrangements for 'teaching out' the course. Students should be informed of how the College intends to ensure the quality of the student experience and must be provided with opportunities to raise queries and concerns.

Course closure, suspension or substantial change will normally be initiated for the following academic year unless there are circumstances beyond the College's control. In the event of closure or suspension, no new applicants will be recruited. Students already on the course will be supported to complete their course successfully or if this is not possible due to circumstances beyond the control of the College, transitional arrangements will be made in consultation with the student(s) affected.

The College will endeavour to mitigate the impact that course closure, suspension or substantial change will have on current and prospective students. In the event of course closure, a planned timeline and action plan for managing the closure and for communicating with applicants and current students will be drawn up by the College; this will explicitly consider the experience of current and prospective students.

Where collaborative partners wish to close or suspend courses, assessment of the strategic, contractual, and operational implications will still be made, and the College procedure followed. The HoHE or Head of Faculty will be responsible for communicating course closure, suspension, or substantial change to current students. HE Admissions will be responsible for communicating course closure, suspension, or substantial change to applicants.

## 8. Planning – Closure or Suspension only

There are three stages of planning: Proposal, Consultation, and Approval

### 8.1 Proposal:

The HoHE will work with the Heads of Faculty to review all available options for programme continuation. The Heads of Faculty and HoHE will complete the HE Course Closure, Suspension, or Substantial Change Proposal to demonstrate initial research and consultation activity.

This proposal will be discussed at HE Faculty Meetings prior to presentation to the DPCQ and Vice Principal Skills and Student Services (VPSS).

### 8.2 Consultation – Closure and Suspension only:

Consultation details are presented in the proposal and although each consultation may approach these key requirements slightly differently, faculties must follow the steps as closely as possible. Any adaptations to this process must be documented in the consultation stage of the proposal.

### Communication Checklist

Stage		Action	Responsibility	Method
<b>1</b>	<b>Initial communication</b>			
1a	Course Viability Meetings	HoHE and HoF meet to review course viability and consider targeted recruitment activity	HoHE, HoF	Teams / campus meeting
1b	Proposal	Proposal for closure, suspension or substantial change presented to SLT at P&Q	HoHE, HoF	
<b>2</b>	<b>Consultation</b>			
2a	Communication with internal HE staff	HoF to meet with HE teaching staff to confirm outcome of proposal.	HoF	
2b	Communication with internal departments	HoHE to inform internal departments of pending closure, suspension or substantial change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exams</li><li>• Admissions</li><li>• Marketing</li><li>• Careers</li></ul>	HoHE	Either HE Teams Working Group / email confirmation
2c	Communication with applicants / offer holders	Admissions to send student notification template email and support potential applicants with their options	HoHE / Admissions	
2d	Communication with students with a deferred place or need to repeat units, or temporarily withdrew	Arrangements for students who have deferred a place or need to repeat units, or temporarily withdrew.	HE Admissions Team / HoHE / HoF	Formal email (template) and offer of Teams discussion with Admissions.

2e	Communication with current students	<p>Arrangements for students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the programme;</li> <li>• Share perspectives, raise concerns</li> <li>• Defer</li> <li>• Find an alternative programme</li> </ul>	HoHE and HoF	Formal email (template) to student email addresses. Group Teams messages and meetings – if required.
2f	Notification to Partner / Awarding organisation	<p>Discuss plan to close, suspend or change course with Partner or Awarding Organisation.</p> <p>Complete and process awarding organisation administration procedures.</p>	HoHE / HoF / HE Admissions	As per the course closure arrangements of the Partner / Awarding organisation. Working group may be required.
2g	Management of recruitment and publicity materials	<p>Course descriptor removed from college intranet and external websites.</p> <p>Reference in College marketing materials to be removed.</p>	Marketing Manager	
<b>3</b>	<b>Approval:</b>			
3a	SLT approval	HoHE and HoF present consultation finding to SLT at P&Q.	HoHE / HoF	
3b	Formal notification to internal departments	<p>Admissions: Check CMA (student facing information) and confirm removal of course from the admission process.</p> <p>MIS: confirm removal/suspension of programme from Prosolution.</p> <p>Exams: Cleansing of data and student registrations issues.</p> <p>Finance: student finance issues / registration fees / termination fees</p> <p>Quality: Exam / Assessment Board and quality assurance processes.</p> <p>WEX: Employer engagement throughout process</p> <p>Careers: Update progression information and offer</p> <p>Marketing: check CMA website accuracy.</p>	HoHE / HE Quality Coordinator	Coordinated activities.



### 8.3 Approval

Final approval for the Course Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change will be provided by the Senior Leadership Team and documented on the HE Course Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change Proposal.

Course closures, suspensions and substantial changes will be monitored through the following Higher Education Quality Meetings:

- HE Faculty Meetings
- HE Quality and Performance Meetings
- Curriculum Planning Activity
- Quality Resource Review Meetings
- HE Strategy Meetings

This includes reporting in the HE Self Evaluation Document (SED). Strategic oversight will be provided through the HE Strategy Meeting and outcomes forwarded to the College Management Group (CMG).

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

HE Student Protection Plan  
HE Admissions Policy  
HE Refunds and Compensation Policy  
HE Student Contract (Terms and Conditions)  
Access and Participation Plan  
Student Value for Money Statement  
Student Transfer Policy

## 9 Equality Impact Assessment

Wiltshire College & University Centre strives to ensure equality of opportunity for all students, local people and the workforce. As an employer and a provider of education, the College aims to ensure that none are placed at a disadvantage as a result of its policies and procedures. It is intended that this policy and procedure is fair to all. Where any part could potentially lead to unequal outcomes, the policy then justifies why this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

## 10 Data Retention Statement

Wiltshire College & University Centre is committed to ensure the data it collects, and holds is in line with the ICO's guidance and meets data protection law. Where appropriate a Data Protection Impact Assessment will be undertaken as and when policies are updated to ensure risks to the individual and college are considered and managed.

For further information please refer to Wiltshire College & University Centre's Data Protection Policy.

## 11 Policy Review and Ownership

This policy and procedure is owned by the Head of Higher Education Quality & Performance. It will be reviewed periodically in light of developments in employment legislation, good employment practice or audit; and to ensure it continues to be relevant and supports operational effectiveness. The document is managed by the Campus and Curriculum Admin Team Leader.

## 12 Amendments Log

Version	Date of Issue	Amendment summary	Author(s)
V1.0			
V2			