

# Policy for Closing or Suspending a Programme

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the University's procedures for closing<sup>1</sup> or suspending undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and also taught and integrated PhD programmes. The policy also covers programme closures which involve the replacement of a programme in a particular discipline with a new one. The Programme Closure Policy has 3 stages.
- 1.2 The main principles underpinning this Policy is that, in all cases, the experience of students on the programme should be assured and monitored and that Schools must ensure that students who are on the programme or closely related programmes are consulted.
- 1.3 The proposal to close or suspend a programme may be due to a number of reasons, for example:
- declining student numbers;
  - key staff leaving the University/being on sabbatical;
  - replacing an existing programme with a new one;
  - changing strategic priorities at School, Faculty or University level;
  - concerns about the quality and academic standards on the programme;
  - closure (termination of Memorandum of Agreement, termination for another reason) of an education partnership arrangement which also results in the closure of a programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Closure may also be known as 'Withdrawal'.

- 1.4 The procedure below shows the full process for those programmes that have students registered and/or applicants, and/or where the closure is likely to have financial or resource implications before the closure is finalised and therefore must engage with 3 governance points. Where the programme meets alternative criteria as detailed in section 14 below, alternative and shorter approval routes are available.

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1 **Closure:** A programme is closed when it ceases to be one for which a student may apply.
- 2.2 **Suspension:** A programme is suspended when a decision is taken not to recruit to the programme or to deliver the programme for a defined period.
- 2.3 **Home School:** the School within which the programme is located for all aspects of programme maintenance and student support.

## 3. Scope of the Policy

- 3.1 The policy is applicable to:
- 3.1.1 **On-campus provision**  
i.e. programmes which are delivered and supported entirely by University of Southampton staff and which lead to an award of the University of Southampton;
- 3.1.2 **offsite delivery**  
i.e. programmes which are delivered and supported entirely by University of Southampton staff irrespective of the location of delivery and which lead to an award of the University of Southampton. 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;

### 3.1.3 programmes delivered under an education partnership arrangement

i.e. where, for a programme delivered under an education partnership arrangement, the intention is also to close the partnership, the [education partnerships policy](#) should also be followed.

3.2 This policy **does not apply** to the closure of specialisations (pathways), minors or modules, however due consideration should still be given to the reference points in section 4 below.

## 4. Internal and External Reference Points:

4.1 The policy is aligned with the following reference points:

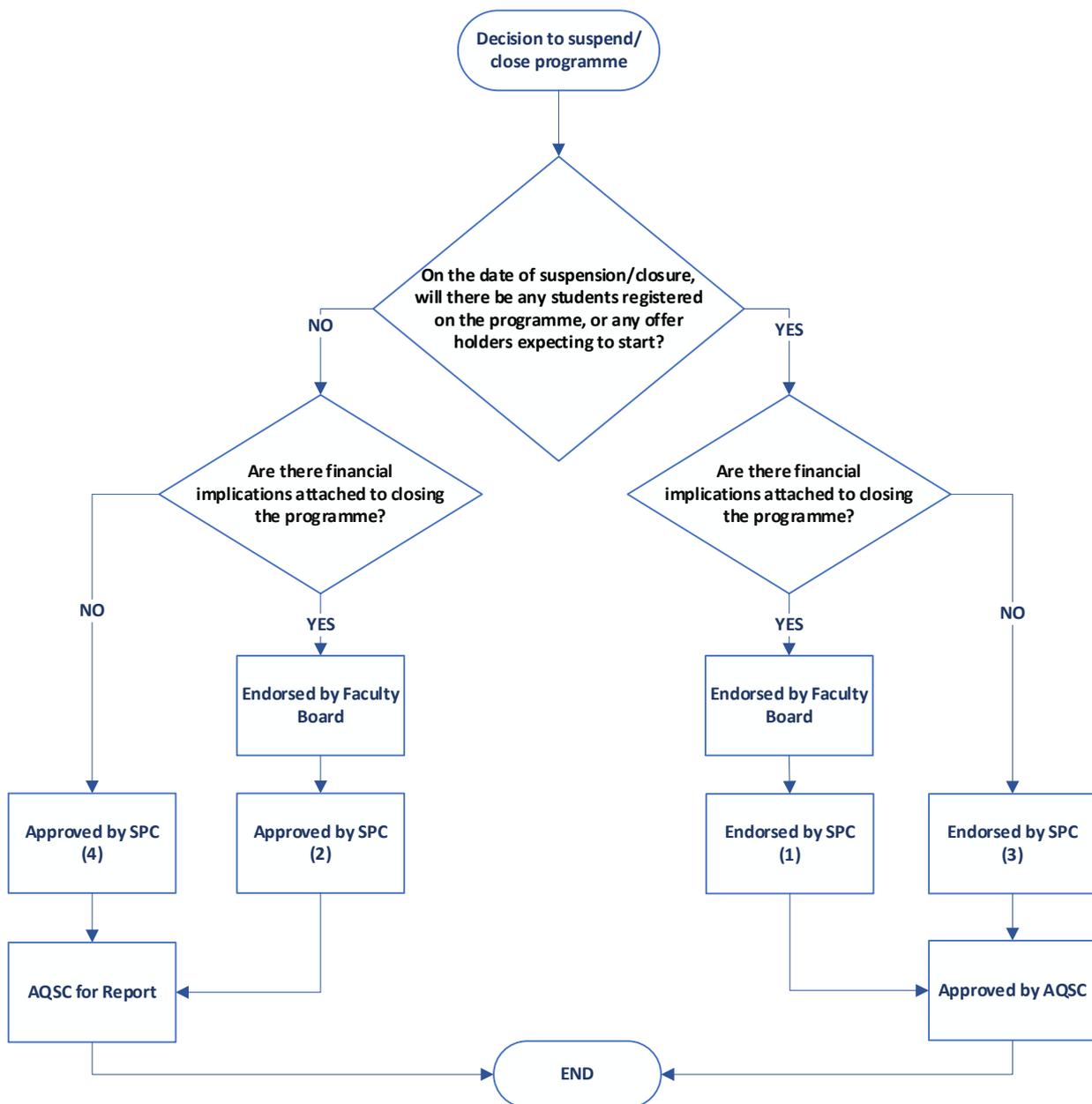
- [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#);
- [Competition and Markets Authority Consumer Protection Law](#);

4.2 The following internal documents are also referred to in this Policy:

- [Student Protection Plan](#);
- [Timescales for the publication of programme and module information for students and applicants](#)

## 5. Governance

5.1 The approval route for the closure or suspension of programmes and the approval body varies depending on a number of criteria. The diagram shows this, with further descriptions below.



5.2 If the programme has students registered on it, offers have been accepted, and/or the closure is likely to have financial or resource implications, it must be endorsed by both the School Programmes Committee and by Faculty Board prior to submission to AQSS for approval **(1)**. Please see Limitations detailed in section 7 below.

5.3 If the programme does not have any registered students or any offers have been accepted but there are financial or resource implications, it must be endorsed by both the School Programmes Committee and by Faculty Board prior to submission to AQSS for Report. **(2)**

- 5.4 If the programme has students on it, but there are no financial or resource implications, the endorsement from School Programmes Committee can be forwarded directly to AQSS for approval (3). Please see Limitations detailed in section 7 below.
- 5.5 If the programme does not have any registered students or any about to enrol on the programme and there are no financial or resource implications the closure can be approved by the School Programmes Committee and reported to Faculty Board and AQSS (4). Please see the detailed in section 14 below.

## 6. Timing

- 6.1 All decisions to close or suspend programmes must be taken in good time and in line with the [Timescales for the publication of programme and module information for students and applicants](#). Rationales for a decision to close or suspend a programme will 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.
- 6.2 A programme must not be closed or suspended once there are confirmed offer holders unless there are exceptional circumstances (for example the death of the sole subject specialist on a niche programme). In such cases, the School must consult the Admissions Manager and refer to the statements made in the Student Protection Plan before any steps are taken to close or suspend the programme. If a decision to close or suspend 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 and the applicant might be able to claim financial compensation from the University, thereby causing potential reputational damage.

## 7. Student Protection Plan

- 7.1 The [Student Protection Plan](#) sets out what students can expect to happen should a programme or campus close. The purpose of this

plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies, or can be compensated if this is not possible. For more advice, please see the [Student Protection Plan](#).

- 7.2 A School's decision to close a programme must take full account of the needs of existing students, applicants to the programme and offer holders, 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 arrangements. These arrangements should ensure that the programme continues to address the requirements of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body or other body which accredits the programme.
- 7.3 A programme which has registered students, and/or applications from students must be presented to AQSS for approval after the consultation and evidence has been reviewed by the School Programme Committee and Faculty Board. No programme in this position can be closed without the approval of AQSS.
- 7.4 The following limitations apply to the opportunity to close/suspend a programme:
- 7.4.1 Where offers have been accepted, it is not possible to close or suspend a programme (unless there are exceptional circumstances). The Admissions Manager must be consulted in such cases.
- 7.4.2 Where applications have been received but offers not yet made, a decision to close or suspend a programme must be made early enough in the cycle so as not to disadvantage applicants.
- 7.4.3 Where offers have been made, but not yet accepted, it may not be possible (unless there are exceptional circumstances) to close or suspend a programme without having first obtained the agreement of offer holders. The Admissions Manager must be consulted in such cases. Applicants that find themselves in

this position should be offered an alternative equivalent programme.

## **8. Implications for Staff**

8.1 Where staff terms and conditions or service are affected or there are potential redundancies, the Director of Human Resources (Service Delivery) must be consulted at the earliest opportunity.

## **9. Authority to recommend closure or suspension of a programme.**

9.1 The proposal to close/suspend a programme can be made by any of the bodies below:

- Programme Review Panel
- School Programmes Committee
- Faculty Board (often through Business planning)
- AQSS

## **10. Stage 1: Rationale**

### **Overview**

10.1 This stage of the process collects the information necessary for the School Programmes Committee and Faculty Board to endorse and for AQSS to approve the proposal to close or suspend a programme.

10.2 The Director of Programmes will usually be nominated to complete this stage of the process.

10.3 This stage requires consultation with colleagues outside of the programme.

10.4 The external examiner(s) must also be invited to comment on the proposal to close or suspend a programme.

## **Governance**

- 10.5 The proposal to close/suspend a programme is in 3 parts;
- Considered and Endorsed by School Programmes Committee
  - Considered and Endorsed by Faculty Board.
  - Approved by AQSS.

## **Documentation**

- 10.6 The following documentation is necessary for stage 1 of the process.
- Stage 1 (sections 1-6) of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form fully completed.
    - information about the number of students registered on the programme;
    - information about the number of applicants, offer holders or deferred offer holders who would be affected by the proposal<sup>2</sup>.

## **Process**

- 10.7 The Director of Programmes will complete Stage 1 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form.
- 10.8 For joint degree programmes or for education partnership arrangements involving more than one School the template should be considered by the home Faculty Board but only after initial discussions have taken place with the other relevant Schools.
- 10.9 For education partnership arrangements, the Director of Programmes must contact Legal Services to take advice on the termination clauses in the Memorandum of Agreement before communicating with the partner institution, students and other stakeholders. This is to ensure that the programme closure is conducted in accordance with the

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<sup>2</sup> Where there are offer holders or deferred offer holders, the Admissions Manager must be consulted.

Memorandum of Agreement and to identify whether the agreement will need to be renegotiated, varied or terminated.

10.10 Once complete the Director of Programmes will submit Stage 1 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form to the School Programmes Committee for consideration.

### **School Programmes Committee**

10.11 The School Programmes Committee will:

- Review the rationale and the assessment of the impact of the proposed closure.

### **Outcomes from School Programmes Committee**

- a) Endorse the proposal to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.
- b) Request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to endorse the proposal.
- c) Reject the proposal to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.

10.12 The decision of the School Programmes Committee will be submitted to the Faculty Board.

### **Faculty Board**

10.13 The Faculty Board will;

- Review the rationale and the assessment of the impact of the proposed closure.
- Consult with the Deputy Head of School (Education).
- Ensure that the requirements for joint programmes are met (if relevant).
- For education partnership programmes, ensure that Legal Services have been involved in terminating the Memorandum of Agreement.

## **Outcomes from Faculty Board**

10.14 The Faculty Board will make one of the following decisions:

- a) Endorse the proposal to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.
  - b) Request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to endorse the proposal.
  - c) Reject the proposal to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.

10.15 The recommendation of the Faculty Board will be submitted to AQSS.

## **Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee**

10.16 AQSS will receive the recommendation from the Faculty Board and will either:

- a) Approve the recommendation of the Faculty Board to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.
  - b) Request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to approve the recommendation of the Faculty Board.
  - c) Reject the recommendation of the Faculty Board to investigate the closure or suspension of the programme.

## **Post approval Actions**

10.17 The decision of AQSS will be reported to the Associate Dean (Education), Deputy Head of School (Education), Director of Programmes, Head of Faculty Student Administration and the Faculty Curriculum and Quality Assurance Team.

10.18 Applicants must then be informed that the programme might be closed or suspended and provided with information about other programmes of study available at the University. The Admissions Team will be able to help with this. If the applicant subsequently wishes to withdraw their application this should be permitted. If the

student has applied through UCAS, the Admissions Team must also advise UCAS in order to let the applicant make a substitute choice.

- 10.19 The Director of Programmes must inform the Faculty Marketing Manager that the programme might be closed or suspended and provide them with information about other programmes of study available at Southampton. Webpages and promotional material will then be updated.

## 11. Stage 2: Consultation and Review

### Overview

- 11.1 This stage of the process takes place after AQSS has approved the recommendation to investigate closing the programme. This stage ends when the Programme Closure or Suspension Form is submitted to the School Programmes Committee.

### Process

- 11.2 This stage involves consultation with students and internal and external stakeholders about the proposed closure or suspension.
- 11.3 The Deputy Head of School (Education) will nominate the person who will be responsible for carrying out the Stage 2: Consultation. This will normally be the Director of Programmes who completed Stage 1.
- 11.4 The nominee will organise and carry out the necessary consultation with internal stakeholders.

### Students

- 11.5 For all programme closures or suspensions, the School must **inform** students enrolled on the programme (and any linked programmes) and discuss the implications with them at the earliest opportunity. Please see Appendix A below for further guidance on how to undertake this consultation.
- 11.6 In light of the feedback received as part of the consultation, the nominee 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.

- 11.7 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. Care should be taken not to forget the need for arrangements for students who have suspended their studies or need to refer or those who have deferred entry. Information about ongoing monitoring requirements for the programme in line with the requirements of the University's Quality, Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) Framework should also be included.

### **Joint Programmes**

- 11.8 The nominee will consult with all affected Schools (through the Head of Faculty Student Administration) and local learning and teaching staff (where applicable). The results of the consultation will be detailed on the Programme Closure or Suspension Form.
- 11.9 The Head of Faculty Student Administration and local learning and teaching staff must be provided with the completed Stage 1 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form in order to inform this consultation.

### **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies**

- 11.10 The nominee will consult with external accreditation/professional or regulatory bodies. The nominee should check whether SPC has appointed a 'Responsible Individual' to oversee the relationship with the professional or regulatory bodies. The results of the consultation will be detailed on the Programme Closure or Suspension Form.

### **Professional Services**

- 11.11 Where the School Programmes Committee considers that the closure of the programme may have an impact to the work of a Professional Service they should identify this on the Programme Closure or

Suspension Form and ensure that this is disseminated to the relevant Director of Service.

11.12 Examples of where this may be necessary are:

- where the closure of the programme has implications for staffing;
- where closure of the programme will result in a reduced budget allocation from the Library;
- where closure of a programme that usually attracts a large number of international students (with VISA requirements) would result in a reduction of work for the VISA team.

## 12. Stage 3: Approval

### Overview

12.1 This stage of the process takes place after all aspects of stakeholder consultation has been completed. This stage ends when the Programme Closure or Suspension Form is approved by AQSS.

### Governance

12.2 The approval to close/suspend a programme is in 3 parts:

- Consideration and endorsement by the School Programmes Committee
- Consideration and endorsement by Faculty Board
- Approval by AQSS

### Documentation

12.3 The following documentation is necessary for stage 3 of the process.

- Stages 1 and 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form fully completed.

## **Process**

12.4 Once complete the Director of Programmes will submit Stage 1 and 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form to the School Programmes Committee for consideration.

## **School Programmes Committee**

12.5 The School Programmes Committee will review the outcome of the consultation detailed in stage 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form, paying particular attention to any requirements for joint and/or education partnership programmes, ensure that these requirements are met.

## **Outcomes from School Programmes Committee**

12.6 The School Programmes Committee will make one of the following recommendations:

- a) endorse the closure or suspension the programme.
- b) request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to endorse the closure or suspension of the programme.
- c) reject the closure or suspension the programme.

12.7 The recommendation of the School Programmes Committee will be submitted to Faculty Board.

## **Faculty Board**

12.8 The Faculty Board will review the recommendation from the School Programmes Committee and may wish to review the outcome of the consultation detailed in stage 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form.

## **Outcomes from Faculty Board**

12.9 The Faculty Board will make one of the following recommendations:

- a) Endorse the closure or suspension of the programme.

- b) Request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to endorse the closure or suspension of the programme.
- c) Reject the closure or suspension the programme.

12.10 The recommendation of the Faculty Board will be submitted to AQSS. The endorsed Programme Closure or Suspension Form will be submitted to the Secretary of AQSS.

### **Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee**

12.11 AQSS will receive the recommendation from the Faculty Board and make one of the following decisions:

- a) Approve the closure or suspension of the programme.
- b) Request further information before coming to a decision as to whether to approve the closure or suspension of the programme.
- c) Reject the closure or suspension of the programme.

12.12 The programme can be formally closed upon approval by AQSS.

## **13. Post approval Actions**

13.1 The decision of AQSS will be reported to the Associate Dean (Education), Deputy Head of School (Education), Director of Programmes, Head of Faculty Student Administration and the Faculty Curriculum and Quality Assurance Team.

13.2 Applicants must be informed at this stage that the programme will be closed or suspended and provide them with information about other programmes of study available at the University. The Admissions Team will be able to help with this. If the applicant subsequently wishes to withdraw their application this should be permitted. If the student has applied through UCAS, the Admissions Team must also advise UCAS in order to let the applicant make a substitute choice.

13.3 The Director of Programmes should inform the inform the Faculty Marketing Manager that the programme is closing or being suspended and provide them with information about other

programmes of study available at Southampton. Webpages and promotional material will be updated.

## **Communication with Stakeholders**

### *University Wide Communication*

13.4 The minutes of AQSS which will include a list of all programmes presented to it under the remit of this Policy will be disseminated to Directors of Professional Services and the Students Union in the spirit of improved communication and planning. If a taught or integrated PhD programme is closed, the Director of the Doctoral College will be included in this notification.

### *Internal Faculty/School Communications*

13.5 The Lead Faculty's Head of Faculty Student Administration will inform relevant teams within the affected Faculties and Schools.

13.6 The Lead Faculty's Head of Faculty Student Administration should notify the relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (where applicable).

13.7 The Lead Faculty's Head of Faculty Student Administration should notify the relevant Directors of Service where implications for Professional Services have been identified.

13.8 For education partnership arrangements, the partner should be advised. Legal Services and the Head of the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT) should be consulted to confirm the most appropriate person to write to the partner.

13.9 The Lead Faculty's Curriculum and Quality Assurance Team will update the Curriculum Manager System.

13.10 The Lead Faculty Curriculum and Quality Assurance team will ensure that all necessary action is taken to remove programme(s) and associated modules on Banner.

13.11 Students will be informed by the Deputy Head of School (Education) that their programme is going to be closed. This must be in writing.

The letter will include details of the way in which they will be supported to complete the programme.

#### *Communication with Applicants*

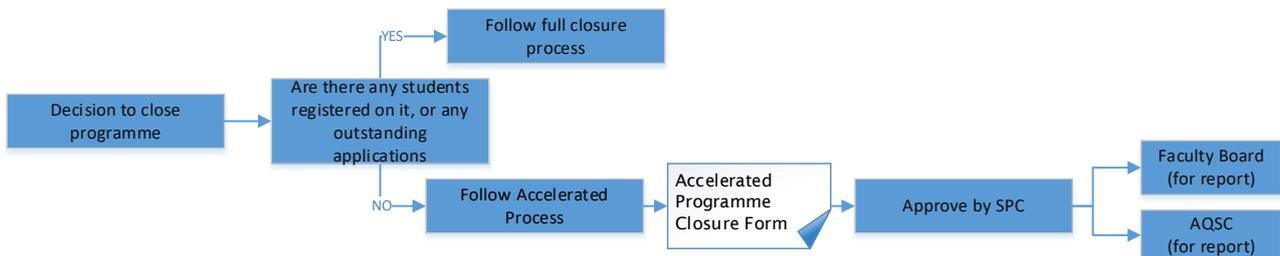
- 13.12 The Admissions Team should consult the UCAS Admissions Guide for specific information relating to UCAS applicants.
- 13.13 They should identify any applicants who will be affected by the decision and notify them. If the applicant does not reply within the timescale requested in the initial letter the Admissions Team should issue a reminder letter advising the applicant that their application will be withdrawn if no response is received within a specified timescale.
- 13.14 For taught postgraduate programmes, in some specialist areas (e.g. teaching), there may be additional procedures dictated by the relevant application scheme or Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body and the Schools concerned should ensure that they adhere to these as well as to this Policy.

#### *Ongoing Monitoring*

- 13.15 The programme must continue to be actively managed and subject to the University's QME requirements for annual monitoring and external examining. A Programme Lead must also be appointed for the duration of the teach-out phase.
- 13.16 Ongoing monitoring must ensure that the equity of experience for students on the programme is maintained. If the programme is due for review during the teach-out phase the School can apply to AQSS with a request for an extension to the period of review to cover the teach-out phase (e.g. in cases where few students remain on the programme and who are either undertaking referral or repeat arrangements).
- 13.17 If the programme is due for review during the teach-out phase but still has one or more cohorts of students on it or where significant changes need to be made to allow the programme to be taught-out, a review 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.

## 14. Accelerated Process



- 14.1 A programme which has no students remaining on the programme, has no registered students and for which there are no outstanding applications may be closed or suspended using the accelerated process<sup>3</sup>. These programmes can be approved by School Programmes Committee and submitted to Faculty Board and AQSS for report only.
- 14.2 If a programme is suspended using this process and a decision is taken at a later date to close it, there is no need to repeat the whole process. Rather the School Programmes Committee should revisit the original form together with an updated rationale and any further consultation.
- 14.3 The Accelerated Programme Closure Form may be used.

<sup>3</sup> Programmes that fall into this category are normally identified as part of the annual curriculum planning process.

## 15. Appendix A: Consultation with Students

- 15.1 For all programme closures, students registered on the programme must be consulted about the impact of closing the programme and the plans for teaching-out the programme.
- 15.2 In addition, student representatives should also be included in the consultation process, as outlined below:

Type of Programme	Students to be invited and SSLC to be consulted
Programme closure within a School which has no co-dependencies or knock-on effects on other programmes	<p>Invite the Academic President for that Academic Unit along to the consultative meeting with the students. Course reps also to be invited.</p> <p>Notify the VP Education and Democracy, Students' Union</p> <p>Consultation results to be taken to the next SSLC for that Academic Unit</p>
Programmes with significant knock-on effects within a School	<p>Invite one or more of the Faculty Board student representatives, the School Officer, the most affected students as well as those it may also affect from other programmes.</p> <p>Notify the VP Education, Students' Union</p> <p>Take the consultation results to the SSLC of the "home" discipline/Academic Unit</p>
Programmes that will lead to effects across several Schools due to large numbers of modules taken by students in other Schools	<p>Invite one or more of the Faculty Board student representatives from the lead Faculty or the VP Education for oversight.</p> <p>If VP Education and Democracy not invited, notify the VP Education and Democracy, Students' Union.</p> <p>Invite all affected students from other Schools to attend the consultative meeting (or a separate one if this is logistically challenging, in which case the Faculty Board</p>

	<p>student representatives from the lead Faculty or the VP Education should be invited once more).</p> <p>The results of the consultation should go to the “home” SSLC for noting/discussion.</p>
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- 15.3 If modules from the programme form core or compulsory modules on other programmes, then student representation from those programmes should also be sought.
- 15.4 Please include the date of meetings, numbers of students present and details of any student representatives who attended the meeting.
- 15.5 Do not identify the students attending by name.
- 15.6 Append anonymised notes from the meeting/s to the Programme Closure Form.
- 15.7 Students attending meetings should be informed that their comments will not be attributed.

Document Information	
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