Policy for closing or suspending a programme

This is a defined policy that all Faculties are required to follow. It sets out the University's procedures for closing or suspending undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and also taught and integrated PhDs. 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 takes account of recent CMA guidance. The principle underpinning the policy is that in all cases the experience of students on the programme should be assured and monitored.

This policy does not apply to the closure of specialisations (pathways), minors or modules. These should be closed with due regard to CMA guidance and in discussion with any other Faculties involved in their delivery or which depend on modules proposed for closure.

1. Scope of the Policy
1.1 The policy is applicable to:

- 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
- 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.
- programmes delivered under a collaborative provision arrangement. Where, for a programme delivered under a collaborative provision arrangement, the intention is also to close the partnership, the collaborative provision policy should also be followed.

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.

3. Principles
3.1 Before commencing the formal procedures to close or suspend a programme, the Faculty must ensure that students who are on the programme or closely related programmes are consulted. Any other Faculties which rely on modules from the programme in question (e.g. a joint honours programme taught across more than one Faculty) to avoid any unintended impact on other programmes must also be consulted. In the case of a collaborative provision arrangement, the Faculty must contact Legal Services to take advice on the termination clauses in the memorandum of agreement prior to communicating with the partner institution, students or other stakeholders. In the case of joint programmes, all Faculties must agree to the closure before procedures commence. The external examiner(s) must also be invited to comment.

3.2 When offers have been accepted, it is not possible (unless there are exceptional circumstances) to close or suspend a programme. The Head of Admissions must be consulted in such cases. 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.

3.3 A Faculty'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 PSRB or government agency which accredits the programme.

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

3.5 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 Faculty Programmes Committee (FPC) should revisit the original form together with an updated rationale and other updated information. If there are no students remaining on the programme, the Accelerated Programme Closure Form should be used.

4. **Rationale for closure or suspension**

4.1 The University might decide to close or suspend a programme for 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 Academic Unit, 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 a collaborative provision arrangement which also results in the closure of a programme.

4.2 Recommending programme closure (for existing programmes on the regular validation cycle) is also an option available to FPC at Stage 4 of the programme validation process. If FPC were to recommend closure of an existing programme, the policy on programme closures would then be followed.

4.3 In addition, a programme which has no registered students and for which there are no outstanding applications should normally be closed automatically by the relevant Faculty using the Accelerated Programme Closure Form. Programmes that fall into this category will be identified as part of the annual curriculum planning process.

5. **Authority to make decisions about closure or suspension**

5.1 The decision to close a programme is made by the relevant FPC following consideration by the Faculty Executive Group (FEG) and is reported to Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). Where there are strategic implications for the University, the Faculty must inform the Vice-President (Education) at an early stage and prior to initial consideration by FEG.

6. **Process**

6.1 The process for closing or suspending a programme and replacing it with another has three stages.

6.2 A three stage Programme Closure or Suspension Form must be completed prior to consideration of closure by the relevant FPC.
7. **Stage 1**

7.1 Stage 1 of the process involves consideration by the relevant FEG (or equivalent) of the rationale for the proposed programme closure and an assessment of the impact of the proposed closure. FEG must be provided with information about the number of students registered on the programme and receive confirmation that there are not any applicants, offer holders or deferred offer holders who would be affected by the proposal. Where there are offer holders or deferred offer holders, the Head of Admissions must be consulted.

7.2 The relevant Director of Programmes must complete Stage 1 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form and submit this to the FEG for consideration.

**Joint Degrees**

7.3 For joint degree programmes or for collaborative provision arrangements involving more than one Faculty, the template should be considered by the lead Faculty’s FEG but only after discussions have taken place with the other relevant Faculties.

**Collaborative Provision**

7.4 For collaborative provision arrangements, the Faculty 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 memorandum of agreement and to identify whether the agreement will need to be renegotiated, varied or terminated.

7.5 The FEG will be invited to take the strategic decision to explore the possibility of closing or suspending the programme. If FEG is in favour, they should nominate the person who will be responsible for carrying out the Stage 2 Consultation. This would normally be the Director of Programmes who completed Stage 1 of the Form or nominee. The decision to proceed to Stage 2 should be reported to AQSC for note at the earliest opportunity.

8. **Stage 2**

8.1 This Stage of the process involves consultation with students and key internal and external stakeholders about the proposed closure or suspension. The Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Team must also inform applicants at this stage that the programme might be closed or suspended and provide them with information about other programmes of study available at Southampton. If the applicant subsequently wishes to withdraw their application this should be permitted. If the student has applied through UCAS, the Faculty Recruitment and Admissions Team must advise UCAS in order to let the applicant make a substitute choice.

8.2 As determined by FEG, the process is led by the Director of Programmes or nominee. The latter should organise the necessary consultation events and ensure that Stage 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form is completed and the required minutes of all meetings appended.

8.3 For all programme closures or suspensions, the Faculty must inform 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 Faculty 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 or Suspension Form.

8.4 In the light of the feedback received as part of the consultation, the Director of Programmes (or 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. 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 QME framework should also be included.
9. Stage 3

9.1 Stage 3 of the process is to approve/not approve the proposed closure, suspension.

9.2 Approval is by the Lead Faculty’s FPC following approval by the FPCs of other relevant Faculties (for joint honours taught across more than one Faculty).

9.3 The Director of Programmes or nominee who has completed the Stage 2 Consultation should ensure that Stages 1 and 2 of the Programme Closure or Suspension Form are considered by the FPCs in other Faculties which have an interest in the programme and their decisions noted on the Form. Once all three stages of the form have been completed and the relevant documents appended, it should be approved by the relevant FPC before being reported to AQSC. Where there are resource considerations, FPC’s decision to close a programme will also be endorsed by FEG.

9.4 FPC 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 Faculty’s Action Plan.

10. Communications

10.1 Once approval to close or suspend a programme has been granted, the secretary to AQSC will send an email to the following to alert them to the decision. A standard contact email list will be maintained by the secretary to AQSC for this purpose: Head of University Admissions, Director of Student Recruitment and International Relations, Director of Student Services, Head of Student Systems and Operations, Head of ODAR (Office of Development and Alumni Relations), Director of Marketing and Communications, VP (Education) Students’ Union.

10.2 If a PhD programme is closed, the secretary to AQSC will also notify the Director of the Doctoral College.

Internal Faculty Communications

10.3 The Faculty Academic Registrar must ensure that relevant teams within the Faculty are notified.

10.4 The Lead Faculty’s Faculty Academic Registrar should notify the relevant PSRB/s (where applicable):

10.5 For collaborative provision arrangements, 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.

10.6 The Lead Faculty’s Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) Team Leader should update the Curriculum Manager system.

10.7 A list of all programme closures will also be included in the annual digest of AQSC decisions prepared by QSAT.

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

11. Ongoing Monitoring

11.1 The programme must continue to be actively managed and subject to the University’s QME requirements of module survey, annual module and programme monitoring and external examining and must therefore retain a Programme Leader 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 Faculty can apply to AQSC for an extension to the period of validation 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). If the programme is due for validation 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 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.

11.2 The light-touch validation requires the completion of Stages 3 and 4 only of the existing university Programme Validation process and form. A Faculty Scrutiny Group meeting must be held but this does not require the involvement of an external adviser. The focus of the light-touch validation should be on ensuring that the programme remains current and continues to be resourced appropriately.

12. Timing
12.1 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.

12.2 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 Faculty must consult the Head of Admissions before any steps are taken to close or suspend the programme.

12.3 It should be noted that 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.

13. Informing Applicants
13.1 Once the decision has been made to close or suspend a programme, Faculty Recruitment and Admissions teams should consult the UCAS Admissions Guide for specific information relating to UCAS applicants. 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, Faculty Recruitment and Admissions teams should issue a reminder letter advising the applicant that their application will be withdrawn if no response is received within a specified timescale.

13.2 For taught postgraduate programmes, in some specialist areas (e.g. teaching,), there may be additional procedures dictated by the relevant application scheme or PSRB and the Faculties concerned should ensure that they adhere to these as well as to the internal procedures.