

University of Suffolk

PROCEDURE FOR THE SUSPENSION OR WITHDRAWAL OF EXISTING COURSES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of its portfolio planning, monitoring and review processes, the University of Suffolk recognises the importance of reviewing the viability of course provision on a regular basis. Ongoing viability may be influenced by a range of factors, including:
- alignment with current and future strategic priorities
 - current and future market demand
 - resource and investment requirements (including staffing availability)
 - the quality and academic standard of the provision
 - changes in the relevant subject area
 - external stakeholder engagement
 - changes in Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements.
- 1.2 As a result, there may be occasions when it is necessary for the University or its partner institutions to either temporarily suspend recruitment to a course or to withdraw a course completely. This procedure outlines the ways in which decisions to temporarily suspend recruitment to courses or to permanently withdraw courses are approved within the University of Suffolk and its partner institutions. It draws on the expectations of the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (in particular Chapter B8 on programme monitoring and review) and on relevant consumer protection legislation.
- 1.3 The Quality Code stipulates that institutions should have “an agreed and planned procedure for managing the closure of a programme, which includes protecting the academic interests of all students already studying on the programme (including those who have taken an agreed break from their studies) and those who have applied to study on it” (*Chapter B8, Indicator 3*). A key aspect of the procedure is ensuring that both applicants and students have adequate notice of the intended suspension or withdrawal of a course; that they are consulted on the implications and provided with adequate support in terms of considering their options; and that current students are provided with the opportunity to successfully complete their course.

2. Suspension of an existing course

- 2.1 Where an existing course is to remain in validation but is not to be open to new recruitment for a specified period of time, the School or partner institution should seek approval for course suspension from the Quality Committee, using the ‘course recruitment suspension’ form which is available on the course approval, modification and review pages on the University website. This should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) at least ten working days before the Quality

Committee meeting at which the proposal is to be considered. If Quality Committee meeting schedules do not permit the timely approval of the suspension of recruitment (for example over the summer period), it may be necessary for the suspension of recruitment to be approved via Chair's action on the advice of the Recruitment Monitoring Group.

- 2.2 The maximum period for which recruitment can be suspended is two academic years. No further suspensions to recruitment are possible after this period and the course must either be opened to new recruitment or formally withdrawn (see Section 3 below).
- 2.3 In considering whether to apply for suspension of recruitment to a course, academic schools should liaise with all relevant stakeholders, including members of the course team, External Relations (including Admissions) and Finance. Where relevant, the impact on existing part-time students (particularly those who may be affected by lack of infill from subsequent cohorts), collaborative partners, feeder courses and/or modules used on other courses should be taken into consideration. Implications in terms of staffing, and any knock-on effect of staff changes on the student experience for subsequent levels of the course, should also be considered.
- 2.4 Requests for suspension of recruitment can be put forward at any point in the academic year, but should normally be submitted to the Quality Committee for approval at least six months before the commencement of the academic year in which suspension is to take effect. This is in order to ensure that applicants and other relevant stakeholders are provided with sufficient notice regarding the planned suspension. It is recognised that there may be circumstances in which a late decision is made to suspend recruitment because the course has not recruited a viable cohort and will therefore not provide a sound student experience. In such cases, the approval of the Quality Committee should be sought as soon as possible, and not less than four weeks before the start of the academic year. Where a late decision is made to suspend recruitment because of lack of a viable cohort, the suspension should be reviewed by the Quality Committee during the following semester with a view to determining whether permanent withdrawal would be a more appropriate option.
- 2.5 The Quality Committee acts under delegated authority of Senate in approving course suspension, with decisions reported to Senate for information. Once course suspension is approved, the University and/or partner website and UCAS listing will be amended as applicable so that new applicants cannot apply for the course during its period of suspension.
- 2.6 The University recognises its responsibilities towards any applicants who have been made offers for admission to a course that is subsequently suspended. The Admissions Policy sets out the procedures for ensuring that applicants are provided with sufficient advice and guidance to allow them to transfer to another course at the University or at another provider. The School or partner institution should recognise that where applicants are made an offer to study on a course, the University has entered into a contract to provide that course if the applicant accepts the offer and meets any conditions for entry. Decisions on course suspensions must therefore be made in a timely manner to ensure that the number of applicants affected is kept to a minimum. The School or partner

institution should liaise with External Relations at the earliest opportunity to advise of the plans for course suspension, and the Quality Committee should communicate the decision to External Relations as soon as possible.

3. Withdrawal of an existing course

- 3.1 The decision to apply for permanent withdrawal of a course is normally agreed after discussion between relevant senior staff within the University, including the Dean of School and representatives from External Relations (including Admissions) and Finance. Where relevant, the impact on collaborative partners, feeder courses and/or modules used on other courses should be taken into consideration. Implications in terms of staffing, and any knock-on effect for other courses, should also be considered.
- 3.2 The School or partner institution should seek approval for course withdrawal from the Quality Committee, using the 'course discontinuation' form which is available on the course approval, modification and review pages on the University website. This should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) at least ten working days before the Quality Committee meeting at which the proposal is to be considered.
- 3.3 The course discontinuation form should also be used when a School or partner institution does not wish an existing course that is reaching the end of its period of validation to be re-approved, or where an existing course is being replaced by a new course within the same subject area via course (re)approval procedures. Validation of courses should not just be left to expire without formal withdrawal of the course.
- 3.4 Requests for course withdrawal can be put forward at any point in the academic year, but should normally be submitted to the Quality Committee for approval at least six months before the intended withdrawal date (i.e. when new recruitment will cease).
- 3.5 Within the course discontinuation form, the course team will be expected to provide an exit strategy which must outline a clear plan for students to be able to complete their course without compromising academic standards and the quality of their learning experience. It is expected that students enrolled on the course will follow it to completion, unless transfer to a replacement course is deemed beneficial to their interests and is agreeable to the students concerned. In exceptional circumstances (for example for students returning from an extended period of intercalation), students may be asked to transfer to a comparable course.
- 3.6 The exit strategy should be informed by full and early consultation with all affected students. The proposed course withdrawal should be discussed with student representatives for the course and other relevant stakeholders via the Course Committee. In addition, all current students potentially affected by the withdrawal of the course should be consulted by the Course Administrator on behalf of the Course Leader via email. This should be supplemented by a notification of the proposed withdrawal of the course on the Learn course area (or equivalent within partner institutions). Students should be provided with a minimum of 20 working days in which to raise any concerns, either directly to the Module or Course Leader or via their course representative (allowing sufficient time for

their course representative to pass any comments on to the Module or Course Leader by the deadline).

- 3.7 Students should be provided with an opportunity to meet with relevant members of staff within the School or partner institution to discuss any concerns. If any issues cannot be resolved, then it may be necessary to involve the Students' Union in order to support continued discussion and reach an agreement on the proposed way forward. Course discontinuation forms should clearly detail any concerns expressed by students and how these were resolved. Course teams should note that these records (including feedback submitted by students and any associated notes of meetings with students) may have to be provided to external agencies if a student makes a formal complaint about their experience at the University of Suffolk or one of its partner institutions, and therefore the documentation should be retained for a period of ten years.
- 3.8 The Quality Committee acts under delegated authority of Senate in approving course withdrawal, with decisions reported to Senate for information. Once course withdrawal is approved, steps will be taken to remove the course from the UCAS listing and the University and/or partner website so that new students cannot apply for the course. Any existing applicants will be contacted as appropriate in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Admissions Policy. The University recognises its responsibilities towards any applicants who have been made offers for admission to a course that is subsequently withdrawn. All such applicants must be provided with sufficient advice and guidance to allow them to transfer to another course at the University or at another provider. The School or partner institution should liaise with External Relations at the earliest opportunity to coordinate this process.
- 3.9 During the period of withdrawal, it is essential that academic standards are safeguarded and that the quality of the student learning experience maintained. The course team should comply with all requirements for ongoing quality monitoring until all students have completed the course, in accordance with Risk-Based Monitoring and Enhancement (RIME) processes. An external examiner should remain appointed to the course throughout the teach-out period.
- 3.10 A withdrawn course may only be revived by the approval of a new course proposal, in accordance with the relevant *Procedure for the validation of new courses*.