

Course Closure and Suspension of Courses Policy and Procedures

Purpose

This document sets out the AECC University College policy for the suspension and/or closure of existing courses.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 **Course Suspension:** Suspension of a course means that there is no intake to the course for a specified period (normally one academic year in the first instance). Learners currently enrolled on a suspended course will continue to progress and complete the course
- 1.2 **Course Closure:** Closure of a course means that there are no further intakes to the course and it will no longer be offered by the University College. Existing learners will other than in the most exceptional circumstance complete their studies on the course for which they are enrolled (see under 'arrangements for enrolled learners' below).
 - Where a course team undertakes a review of an existing course and changes are proposed as a result that will lead to the **introduction of a new version of the course** this will not be regarded as a course closure. This policy need not be implemented; changes required to the course will be undertaken through the standard periodic review arrangements and the course version number amended accordingly. The usual expectation will be that learners enrolled on the course under review will continue on that version of the course, and will be taught out on that course unless specific arrangements are made to provide for transfers to the new version as part of the periodic review process. The Course Considerations Panel will pay particular attention to the section of the Summary and Resources document (Managing change). If current learners are to be permitted to transfer to the proposed new course a mapping of learning outcomes must be provided.
 - When a course team undertakes a review of an existing course and wishes to close that course and **replace it with a new course**, the existing course may be closed through this policy and procedures, and the new, replacement course should be presented for Course consideration and approval in the usual way. The Course Closure Student Arrangements form will be provided to the Course Consideration Panel for the new course, for information. The Course Considerations Panel will pay particular attention to the section of the Summary and Resources document (Managing change). If current learners are to be permitted to transfer to the proposed new course a mapping of learning outcomes must be provided.
- 1.3 Course closures and suspension of courses are considered to be a significant change according to consumer legislation. In order to ensure full compliance with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and related regulations, learners should be given the fullest information, advice and guidance to enable them to make well- informed decisions in the event of course closure or suspension.
- 1.4 In considering whether to close or suspend a course the University College must consider the arrangements from the point of view of affected learners, applicants and potential applicants, as well as from an academic and financial perspective.
- 1.5 Where units on a course proposed for closure or suspension are shared with courses that will continue, or involved delivery with an Educational Partner, arrangements for management of these units must be discussed by the relevant Course Leaders and Heads of School and Partners where applicable. If amendments are required in relation to non-closing courses the Course Modification Policy should be followed. Issues relating to shared units must be taken into account in making and considering cases for course closure or suspension.

- 1.6 It is best practice to propose a course suspension or closure before the start of an application cycle. Where this is not possible, such proposals should be made, considered and approved in good time to allow applicants to find alternative provision.

2 Responsibilities

- 2.1 Advice regarding the operation of this policy and procedure may be sought from the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or the Academic Registrar.
- 2.2 References in this policy to any University College role or office holder include their appointed nominee.
- 2.3 The Head of School initiates the closure or suspension process in discussion with the Course Leader and other relevant colleagues and takes a proposal to RSAG or Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) at the appropriate time in the academic year.
- 2.4 Recruitment Selection and Admissions Group (RSAG) recommends course closures and course suspensions for business-related reasons (including low recruitment), to the Executive Group.
- 2.5 The Executive Group approves recommendations for course closures and for course suspensions for business-related reasons (including low recruitment).
- 2.6 ASQC approves course suspensions for reasons related to the academic standards and quality of a course
- 2.7 If approved by the Executive, the Head of School submits the Course Closure Student Arrangements form to ASQC in cases where the course to be closed has existing enrolled learners.
- 2.8 When the Executive Group has approved a course closure or suspension, and the course has existing learners enrolled, ASQC approves arrangements to ensure the quality of the learning experience for learners already enrolled on the course, and/or, where applicable, that any arrangements for transfer to an alternative course are appropriate.
- 2.9 The Head of School ensures coordination of the closure or suspension process including, for course closure, communication with current learners.
- 2.10 Registry (Admissions) communicates with applicants and offer holders about course closures or suspensions.
- 2.11 The Head of Marketing and Communications has overall oversight of all information in the public domain in relation to the closure and suspension of courses

3 Rationale for closing or suspending courses

- 3.1 A decision to close or suspend a course may be appropriate for a number of reasons, for example:
- Declining learner numbers
 - Lack of recruitment
 - Concerns about financial viability
 - Changing strategic priorities
 - External funding changes
 - Staff involved in teaching the course are temporarily or permanently unavailable and it is unduly difficult or impossible to replace them
 - Concerns about the quality and academic standards on the course
 - Changing requirements of external bodies, which leads to a recommendation to close the course
 - As a result of periodic course review

4 Procedures for closing a course

- 4.1 A decision to close a course must take full account of the needs of existing learners (including those on a study break), applicants to the course and offer holders, including deferred applicants and deferred offer holders and should as far as possible aim to support these learners through to the completion of their intended study or put in place appropriate arrangements.
- 4.2 These arrangements must ensure that the course continues to address the requirements of any Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) which accredits the course. It is the Head of School's responsibility to ensure this is the case.
- 4.3 In considering closure of a course the Head of School should liaise with all relevant stakeholders, including members of the course team, Marketing, Registry, Finance, other Schools (for example, where units on the course to be closed are used on other courses) and Educational Partners (where applicable).

Seeking approval

- 4.4 The relevant Head of School should submit the case for course closure to the **RSAG** for consideration. The case made must take into account the needs of existing learners and offer holders as well as financial/ business rationales. Consideration must be given to any implications for access and participation of learners from disadvantaged groups. Where units on the course proposed for closure are shared with courses that will continue (including courses in other Schools or delivered with or for Educational Partners), arrangements for the delivery of these units must be addressed within the proposal. The normal expectation is that units will continue to be delivered to meet the commitments to existing students
- 4.5 RSAG may
 - Accept the case and recommend the course be closed
 - Request further information and reconsider the case
 - Reject the case (in which case the course should continue to run – although a separate case may then be made for its suspension)
 - Agree to recommend suspending rather than closing the course, for a specified period.
- 4.6 RSAG, through the Deputy Vice Chancellor as RSAG Chair, will make a recommendation on closing the course to the **Executive Group**, with whom the final decision to close the course will rest.
- 4.7 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will report the Executive's decision to the RSAG Secretary for onward communication, action and report.
- 4.8 The RSAG Secretary will ensure that the closure is reported to the next meeting of Academic Board
- 4.9 The Head of School will ensure that, where applicable, relevant PSRB's are informed.
- 4.10 Following approval from the Executive, if there are any existing learners remaining on the course to be closed the Head of School must complete a Course closure student arrangements form for submission to ASQC, for oversight of the proposed arrangements for continuing learners.
- 4.11 The form will outline the arrangements to ensure the quality of the learning experience for learners already enrolled on the course, and/or, where applicable that any arrangements for transfer to an alternative course are appropriate.
- 4.12 The proposed arrangements for learners currently registered on the course (including those whose registration is suspended but have not yet completed the course) must encompass the following:
 - Confirmation that the standard of provision to current learners will be maintained throughout their period of registration.

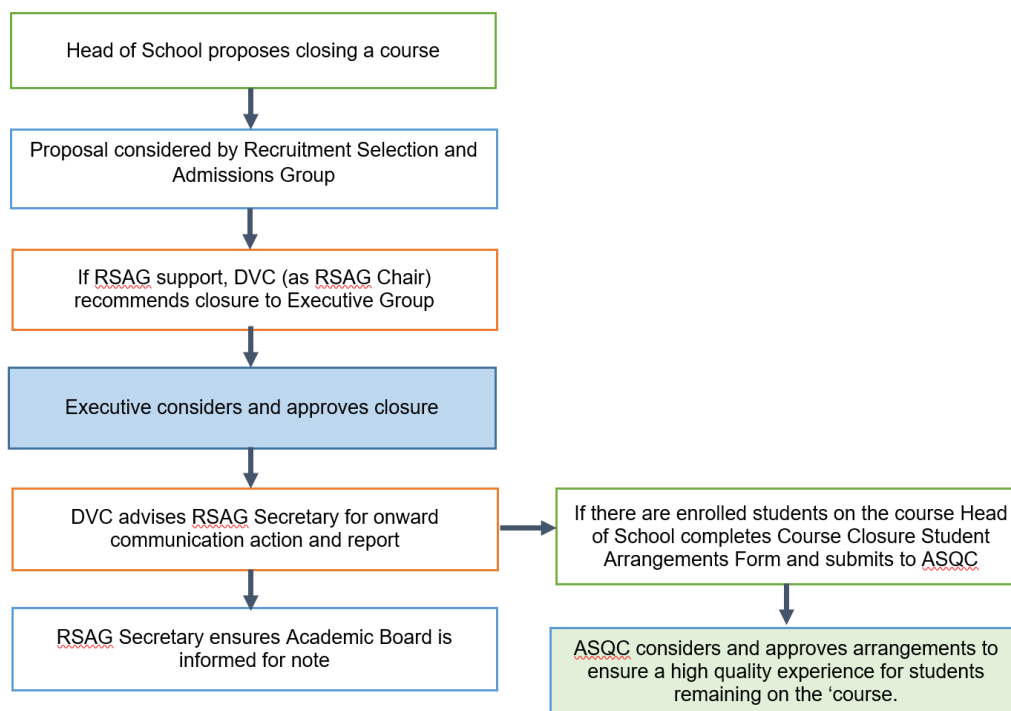
- Confirmation that the previously stated learning outcomes of the course will still be achievable by current learners.

4.13 ASQC will consider the proposed arrangements to ensure that

- what is proposed will ensure a high quality experience for learners remaining on the course
- the proposed arrangements for any courses sharing units with the closing course are appropriate.

4.14 ASQC may request further information, require modification of the proposed arrangements, or require alternative arrangements to be put in place, but may not change the Executive's decision to close the course.

4.15 Course closure process flowchart



Ongoing Monitoring

4.16 The course must continue to be actively managed and our quality assurance framework should continue to be followed, with regard to learner surveys, annual unit and course monitoring and external examining for the duration of the teach-out phase. Ongoing monitoring must ensure that the equity of experience for learners on the course is maintained.

Arrangements for enrolled learners

- 4.17 Other than in the most exceptional circumstance (see section 7) enrolled students (including those whose registration is suspended) must be allowed to complete their studies on the course for which they are enrolled (subject to normal progression requirements).
- 4.18 The Head of School must ensure that all learners enrolled on the course are informed about the proposed closure, that the reasons for the proposal are explained, and that the implications are discussed with them at the earliest opportunity. Learners should be informed of plans for teaching-out the course and provided with details of how AECC University College will maintain the quality of the student learning experience during the teach-out phase. This must include consideration of arrangements for learners who have suspended their studies or need to refer or those who have deferred entry.
- 4.19 The Head of School should ensure that learners on the course are advised formally that the course is going to be closed and that they are provided with confirmation of the way in which they will be supported to complete the course.

Arrangements for prospective learners

- 4.20 All communications with applicants and offer holders on these matters must be undertaken by Registry (Admissions).
- 4.21 Registry must inform applicants, and those who have not yet responded to an offer, that the course is being considered for closure and provide them with information about their options, at the time when a proposal for closure is being considered by RSAG. If the student has applied through UCAS, Registry must advise UCAS.
- 4.22 If exceptionally a course is to be closed and applicants have accepted offers offer holders should not be contacted until a proposal for closure has been approved by the Executive. These applicants should then be informed of their options in regard to transferring their application to another institution. If the student has applied through UCAS, Registry must advise UCAS.
- 4.23 A record of these communications should be logged.

5 Procedures for suspending a course

- 5.1 A decision to suspend a course must take full account of the needs of existing learners (including those on a study break), applicants to the course 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.
- 5.2 A record of these communications should be logged.
- 5.3 These arrangements must ensure that the course continues to address the requirements of any PSRB which accredits the course. It is the Course Leader's responsibility to ensure that these requirements are met.
- 5.4 For suspensions for business reasons such as low recruitment the relevant Head of School should submit the case for course suspension to RSAG for consideration. The case made must take into account the needs of existing learners and offer holders as well as financial/ business rationales.
- 5.5 Where units on the course proposed for suspension are shared with courses that will continue (including Educational Partners) , arrangements for the delivery of these units must be addressed within the proposal. The School must obtain the agreement of other affected Schools/Partners to the recommendation for suspension. Where appropriate, it must be explained how any unit requirements for other Schools will be addressed following the suspension. The normal expectation is that units will continue to be delivered to meet the commitments to existing learners.
- 5.6 RSAG, through the Deputy Vice Chancellor as RSAG Chair, will make a recommendation on closing the course to the Executive Group, with whom the final decision to suspend the course will rest.
- 5.7 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will report the decision to the RSAG Secretary for onward action and reporting.
- 5.8 The RSAG Secretary will ensure that the suspension is reported to the next meeting of Academic Board
- 5.9 The Head of School will ensure that, where applicable, relevant PSRB/s are informed.
- 5.10 All communications with applicants and offer holders on these matters must be undertaken by Registry.
- 5.11 Registry (Admissions) must inform applicants and/or offer holders about the suspension and provide them with information about their options. If the learner has applied through UCAS, Registry must advise UCAS.
- 5.12 In the event that there are concerns about the academic standards and quality of a course (for

example, sustained poor learner progression and/or academic performance) the Head of School, in discussion with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and relevant colleagues may bring a recommendation to ASQC to suspend recruitment to the course while issues are resolved.

- 5.13 ASQC will normally require the course to undergo periodic review before being permitted to re-recruit.
- 5.14 The Head of School must ensure that effective arrangements are put in place to secure the quality of delivery and experience for existing students to complete the course. These arrangements will be monitored through regular reports to ASQC.
- 5.15 The Head of School will ensure that, where applicable, relevant PSRB/s are informed.
- 5.16 The ASQC Secretary will ensure the suspension is reported to the next meeting of Academic Board
- 5.17 All communications with applicants and offer holders on these matters must be undertaken by Registry.

6 Amending University College publications/marketing material

- 6.1 Once a course closure or course suspension proposal has been approved it is the responsibility of the Course Leader, in liaison with Marketing and Registry (Admissions), to ensure all necessary amendments are made to all University College publications and the website, and that any external references to the course (eg publicity through external websites) are amended.
- 6.2 A record of these changes should be kept.

7 Circumstances beyond the University College's control

- 7.1 In very exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for a course to close due to circumstances which are beyond the University College's control, and for teaching-out within the institution to be impossible.
- 7.2 In these circumstances the Head of School, the Academic Registrar and the Executive will discuss the arrangements to identify:
 - whether the University College can offer alternative courses within the institution
 - how the University College will help learners to transfer to other institutions, including support for transfer of credit/recognition of prior learning
 - any financial recompense as appropriate

in line with the relevant provisions of the University College's Student Protection Plan.

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Approved by:	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Reference source	This policy has been designed to reflect the following external reference points: QAA UK Quality Code (2018) and associated Advice and Guidance Competition Marketing Authority: UK higher education providers - advice on consumer protection law Helping you comply with your obligations 12 March 2015 CMA33 HEFCE, UUK, Guild HE, AoC, NUS, Independent Universities Group and Study UK good practice statement 'Higher education course changes and closures: statement of good practice' October 2015
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