

Procedure for the closure, suspension or change to Higher Education Programmes 2021-22

These processes articulate the College's procedures for applicants and students to the college's Higher Education provision.

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the College's procedures for closing, suspending or changing any of Higher Education programmes that it is either approved (via an Awarding Body), franchised or validated (via a Partner University). It is designed to reflect the Statement of Good Practice adopted by HEFCE, UUK, Guild HE, NUS in October 2015. It is also designed to meet the requirements for the CMA Student Protection Plan.

2. Closure and Suspension

The College may seek to close and remove a Higher Education programme from its offer. The closure of a programme means that the College will cease to recognise the programme as one for which a student may be registered.

Suspension of a programme of study is defined by a fixed timeframe in which a programme will not be delivered.

Decisions to close or suspend a College Higher Education programme approved by the Awarding Body must be formally approved by the College's Higher Education Academic Standards Committee and ratified by the Head of HE and reported to the Governing Body's Standards Committee because of the implications for the contractual relationship between current and prospective students and the College.

Any request to close or suspend a programme must be made by the Head of Department with responsibility for that area of study. The Head of Department is required to make a business case to the HE Academic Standards Committee who will make a proposal for the Executive Team who will refer to the Standards committee to make the final decision. Any such request would need to include the following:

- Rationale
- Strategic and financial implications
- Impact, if any, on arrangements with partner institutions
- Impact on current and prospective students
- Impact on existing or proposed programmes
- Impact on relationships with employers
- The expected impact on staff and resources
- Communications Plan
- Arrangements for 'Teaching Out'

3. Programme Changes/Closures Prior to Registration

Where material changes (such as a number of changes to the structure of the programme, or the removal or addition of a number of modules) are made between the publication of the prospectus and registration, the College will draw these changes to the attention of applicants as soon as possible and advise them of their right to seek entry to another College programme for which they may be qualified or to withdraw their application and seek entry to another institution.

Where the applicant has already accepted an offer, they shall be furnished with all necessary information, advice and guidance by the College to help them make an informed decision on their future course of action.

Decisions not to run a particular programme prior to enrolment will normally be made based on student applications. Decisions about the viability of the course offering and the student experience as a result of low numbers will be made as early as possible to give applicants plenty of time to make alternative arrangements.

The college will provide the applicant with specialist careers advice and guidance and where possible guide to alternative provision within the college. Where this does not exist the college will work with its partner universities in an attempt to secure a place for the applicant on a suitable alternative with them.

In normal circumstances, material changes to programmes will not be made after registration, but where this is unavoidable, students and their representatives shall be consulted at the earliest opportunity on the changes and, where practicable, their views shall be taken into account.

If a student reasonably believes that a material change to their programme adversely affects them, they may cancel their contract with the College. In such circumstances the College will offer suitable information, advice and guidance to a student and, where possible, facilitate their transfer to another institution which offers an appropriate programme for which they are qualified.

Further to commencement of the programme and during the course of a student's studies, the College may make minor amendments to programmes in order to improve the quality; to meet the latest requirements of an accrediting body; or in response to student feedback. Where such minor amendments to the delivery of a programme are necessary, the College will consult with or inform students and their representatives of these changes, as appropriate, and in line with College quality assurance processes.

4. Student Protection

The college will, wherever possible ensure that current students are enabled to complete their programme of study prior to closure – this is called 'teach out'.

Current students

Where a programme is being closed to new entrants only, the College's proposed arrangements for students currently registered on the programme (including those whose registration is suspended but have not yet completed the programme) must comply with the following:

- Current students should be informed of their options. The College will provide all necessary information, advice, guidance and support to facilitate students in deciding which option to follow.
- The standard of academic provision and the student experience must, as far as is reasonably practicable, be maintained throughout their period of registration. In particular, the conditions must be maintained to enable the stated learning outcomes in the relevant Programme Specification to be achievable by students who are part of teach out.
- To ensure the student experience and to support the students, students who are in a teach out situation will be closely monitored and consulted.

Applicants

In the event of a programme closure, suspension or material changes to programme content, all communications with applicants must be undertaken via Admissions and will be approved by the Head of HE.

Applicants who have accepted offers should not be contacted until the closure or suspension process has been fully completed. Applicants thus affected should then be informed of their options to transfer their applications to another programme within the College or to another institution.

Applicants who have been made offers, but have not yet accepted them, may however be advised that a closure or suspension request has been made. Such applicants should be advised that the offer of a place is suspended until a final decision has been made and will be withdrawn if the request is accepted. They should also be advised that they may choose another programme or institution.

Where relevant UCAS should be notified when the closure or suspension request has been finalised and this programme will be removed from the college's UCAS offering.

5. Timing

Wherever possible, requests to delete, suspend or make material changes to the content of programmes should be made in a timely manner.

Since preparation for the production of the printed prospectus takes place sometime ahead of publication, the process of strategic planning should identify those programmes which are likely to be closed prior to the commencement of the prospectus production process.

As a result of unforeseen and unforeseeable circumstances (e.g. loss of specialist staff) it may be necessary to close or suspend a programme within a foreshortened timescale. In such circumstances, the student interest is paramount and full consultation should be undertaken with all affected students.

In order to ensure full compliance with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and related regulations, students should be given the fullest information, advice and guidance to enable them to make well-informed decisions in the event of programme closure or suspension.

6. Closure as a result of organisational insolvency

The insolvency regime for FE Colleges was in March 2019, the college currently has a 'Good' Financial Health and a high level of confidence that there is no risk to its ongoing operation.

A contingency plan exists should the college not be able to deliver programmes in the future. The following will be considered as an option for students to ensure that their studies can be continued:

1. Negotiation with the ESFA related to enabling the college to 'teach out' within the college as such usual rules as set out earlier in this procedure will apply with further consideration given to the impact on the learner experience.
2. Consideration of 'teach out' arrangements being put in place with our partner universities. Which may include the transfer of teaching staff from the college to the university for the purposes of this arrangement. This would be the preferred option for the college as it maintains the curriculum focus and awarding institution for degrees validated by partner universities and as such would be the least disruptive from the students' point of view.
3. For programmes not validated by one of the college's partner universities (EdExcel) the college would approach local further education colleges to ascertain whether they would be able to support the college to 'teach out' provision, again consideration may be given to arrangements for college based staff to support teach out arrangements.
4. Where new providers are needed to teach out either validated or direct delivery provision then consideration will be given to the synergy between course content and curriculum as well as a transfer of grades and accreditation of prior learning within those institutions.