

# Procedure for Closing or Suspending a Course

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# Procedure for Closing or Suspending a Course

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document outlines LSBU's process for closing or suspending courses. The policy also covers course closures that involve the replacement of a course in particular subjects with a new one. This process covers all provision including on campus, offsite delivery, and collaborative arrangements.
- 1.2. This process aligns with the obligations set by the
  - Office for Students (OfS)
  - QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
  - Competition and Markets Authority Consumer Protection Law;
- 1.3. It must be applied in conjunction with the provisions of LSBU contained in:
  - Student Protection Plan;
  - Student Complaints Procedure
  - Student Compensation and Refund Policy
- 1.4. The Policy has 2 stages as detailed below:
  - Rationale and approval
  - Stakeholders notification
- 1.5. The policy is underpinned by the principle that in all cases the students' interests and experience on the affected courses is assured and monitored. Schools will ensure that students on affected courses are provided with appropriate information, advice and guidance to support their decision making. The School that is responsible for the course takes ownership for all aspects of this closure and suspension process.

Course closures and suspensions are a normal part of the University's annual business that ensures that courses remain relevant and current, and that the student experience can be maintained. The decision to close a course may occur for a variety of reasons including but not limited to:

- declining student numbers;
- key staff leaving the University / being on sabbatical;
- replacing an existing course with a new one;
- changing strategic priorities at School or University level;

- concerns about the quality and academic standards on the course;

The following procedure outlines what needs to be considered when closing or suspending a course at the LSBU. The procedure may be varied depending on the approval body making the closure decision and / or whether or not the course proposed for suspension or closure has students registered and/or applicants.

Schools must follow the procedure as appropriate for the closure or suspension of the course.

## **2. Definitions**

- 2.1. **Closure:** A course is closed when it is no longer available for students to apply.
- 2.2. **Suspension:** A course is suspended when it is made unavailable for recruitment for a defined period of time.

## **3. The Approval Procedure**

- 3.1. The approval process for the closure or suspension of a course varies depending on the specific reason(s) for the course closure or suspension. However, regardless of the reason the approval for course closures and suspension must include scrutiny and sign off by the Academic Planning Panel (APP), the University Executive and / or a designated group to approve that the plans for managing the closures or suspensions are appropriate for supporting any existing students or applicants.
- 3.2. Following any necessary review to determine the impact of the closure or suspension of a course, the normal process for closure or suspension starts with the School making the proposal to close or suspend a course through the School's Academic Standards Committee (SASC) completing a course closure or suspension form that is approved at SASC and signed off by the Dean. The course closure or suspension proposal is then discussed, assessed and approved by the University's Academic Planning Panel (APP) or other designated group.
- 3.3. In all cases and regardless of the approval body a course closure captures the rationale and the impact that the course closure or suspension will have on existing students and applicants, as well as how the closure will be managed for all impacted students and applicants if they exist. It is important that the decision to close or suspend a course highlights the position of existing and potential students. It should be remembered that applicants may apply up to two years in advance, and that students on interruption may also be impacted.
- 3.4. The details required to close or suspend a course will differ depending on whether a course has any existing students or applicants. Where a school is unsure about what is required they should contact their Senior Quality and Enhancement Advisor (SQEA).

## **4. Timing**

- 4.1. Wherever possible, decisions to close or suspend a course are taken in line with the timeframes set out in the academic planning calendar.
- 4.2. Courses are normally not closed or suspended if there are confirmed offer holders unless there are exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the School must consult with the Admissions and Recruitment Team and refer to the Student Protection Plan (SPP) before any steps are taken to close or suspend the course. It should be noted that if a decision to close or suspend a course 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 leading to potentially negative publicity.

## **5. Student Protection Plan**

- 5.1 The Student Protection Plan (SPP) outlines what students can expect should a course be closed or suspended at LSBU. The SPP defines the University's responsibility to students to ensure that they can continue and complete their studies, or can be compensated if this is not possible. Schools are expected to be fully aware of the provisions set out in the SPP and associated University policies when deciding to close or suspend a course.
- 5.2. The decision to close a course must take full account of the needs of existing students, 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 providing advice and guidance that highlights how they will be supported to complete their intended course, put in place appropriate alternative arrangements, and clarify how they can make a complaint if required. In addition, the arrangements should ensure that the course continues to address the requirements of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) or other body which accredits the course.
- 5.3. The following limitations apply to the opportunity to close /suspend a course:
  - Where there are existing students on a course the university expects, where possible, that arrangements to 'teach-out' current students are put in place. This means that current students can complete their course within the timeframes determined by the course and University regulations.
  - Where offers have been accepted, it is not possible to close or suspend a course without the approval of the University Executive or delegated body. Schools should consult with the Admissions and Recruitment Team and International in such cases before the decision to close is made.
  - Where applications have been received but offers not yet made, a decision to close or suspend a course must be made early enough in the cycle so as not to disadvantage applicants.
  - Where offers have been made, but not yet accepted, it may not be possible (unless there are exceptional circumstances) to close or

suspend a course without having first obtained the agreement of the offer holders. Schools should consult with the Admissions and Recruitment Team and International in such cases. Applicants that find themselves in this position should be offered an alternative equivalent course.

## **6. Implications for Staff**

- 6.1. Where staff terms and conditions or service are affected or there are potential redundancies, including any impact on professional services staff, the Group Director of People must be consulted at the earliest opportunity.

## **7. Authority to recommend closure or suspension of a Course.**

- 7.1 The proposal to close/suspend a course can be made by any of the bodies below:

- Academic Planning Panel (APP)
- School Academic Standards Committee (SASC)
- University Executive or designated group
- Academic Board

## **8. Rationale and approval**

### **8.1. Approval actions**

This stage of the process collects the information necessary for the SASC and School to recommend to the APP for approval the closure or suspension of a course.

- 8.2. The Associate Dean – Education and Student Experience (AD - ESE) and the Head of Division will usually complete this stage of the process by completing the Course Closure or Suspension form. The form must be fully completed prior to consideration at the SASC. Incomplete forms will be rejected.
- 8.3. Consultation with colleagues outside of the course may be required to ensure that all areas affected are accounted for, for example Admissions, International, LSBU Global and collaborative partners.
- 8.4. The external examiner(s) should be notified about the intention to close or suspend a course.
- 8.5. The completed course closure or suspension form should then be considered and endorsed by the SASC. The SASC will review the course closure or suspension proposal and assess the impact of the closure and the appropriateness of the plans for managing the student experience. The SASC may approve the proposal, request more information or reject the proposal.
- 8.6. Following approval by the SASC the course closure or suspension form should be signed off by the Dean.

- 8.7. The closure or suspension proposal is then submitted to the APP by the SQEA for approval. The APP will review the course closure or suspension proposal and assess the impact of the closure and the appropriateness of the plans for managing the student experience. Members of the APP will specifically assess whether the impact of closure or suspension affects other Schools in the University. The APP may approve the proposal, request more information or reject the proposal.

## **9. Post Approval Actions**

- 9.1 The decision of APP will be reported to the School and the SQEA. The SQEA will notify Student Operations and then Student Operations will notify all the relevant departments.
- 9.2 Applicants must then be informed that the course will be closed or suspended and provided with information about other courses of study available at the University. The Admission and Recruitment 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 Admission and Recruitment Team must also advise UCAS in order to let the applicant make a substitute choice.

- 9.3 The AD - ESE must inform the School Marketing Manager that the course will be closed or suspended and provide them with information about other courses of study available at LSBU. Webpages and promotional material will then be updated.
- 9.4 The AD - ESE and Head of Division will ensure that a detailed course closure management form is completed for each course approved for closure, and this will be approved and subsequently monitored at SASC.

## **10. Notification to Stakeholders**

- 10.1 Once approved at the APP the decision to close a course must be notified to students and other relevant internal and external stakeholders.
- 10.2 Stakeholders should be provided with the rationale for the closure or suspension of the course and provided with information and guidance on the likely impact of the decision on them starting, continuing and completing their studies.
- 10.3 The AD - ESE will carry out or will nominate an appropriate person who will be responsible for running the meetings for notifying all stakeholders and will work with the Head of Student Administration to schedule the meetings with the affected stakeholders. It is important to consider the impact of a course closure where modules might be shared with other Schools.
- 10.4 The AD - ESE or nominee will organise and carry out the necessary consultations with internal stakeholders. All meetings will be supported and minuted by the student administration team working with the SQEAs to ensure that this procedure is fully implemented.

## **11. Students**

- 11.1 For all course closures or suspensions, the School must inform students enrolled on the course (and other affected courses) and discuss the implications and plans with them at the earliest opportunity. Please see Appendix A for further guidance on how to undertake this consultation. Students will have different needs based on their individual circumstances and must be provided with support and options to help them decide what is best for them. This includes ensuring that students are advised of the complaints process if they are not happy with how we handle the process.
- 11.2 Adjustments to the options and this process may be needed to address any students with additional needs, such as a disability / reduced mobility / caring responsibilities. These will need to be addressed on a case by case basis, and would include the exploration of any reasonable costs that might be incurred as a result of the course closure.
- 11.3 In light of the feedback received as part of the consultation, the AD - ESE or nominee should update the proposed course closure management document which will be made available for students currently enrolled or enrolled prior to the last date of admission, to support them through to completion.
- 11.4 Students should be informed of any plans for teaching out the course 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 needs of students who have suspended their studies or need to refer or those who have deferred entry. Information about ongoing monitoring requirements for the course should follow the University normal course monitoring process and this expectation should be made clear to students.
- 11.5 The University first choice is to teach out a course whenever this is possible and feasible, however there will be situations where this may not be the best option for students or the University, therefore to protect the student interests schools must consider other options for students, for example:

## **12. Transfer to another course at the University**

Schools should consider arranging transfers where this is possible and appropriate to another University course that is similar to the course being closed. Schools should make available to students support to assist them in making an informed choice about their options. Schools should highlight the similarities and differences for students and the extent to which the options align with the original course, and whether they continue to meet the career / study aspiration of the students. If a decision is made to transfer to another University course the School should arrange this transfer in collaboration with the appropriate professional services groups.

## **13. Transfer to different institution**

Schools should consider arranging transfers or direct entry to another provider. Schools should identify possible providers across the UK that could accommodate students impacted by a closure or suspension. Schools should

put in place support for students who wish to explore other Universities that offer comparable courses and provide advice and guidance on the implication of a transfer. In cases of transfer, support must be provided to students that enables the transfer to and recognition of credits at the new institution.

#### **14. Refund and compensation**

The Student compensation and refund policy sets out the University's position on refunds and compensation when it is not possible for students to complete their courses as expected at the University. Schools will implement the provisions of this policy when proposing the refund of fees paid to the University and / or the award of compensation if this is required as a result of a course closure.

- 14.1. On completion of the process of notifying stake holders, the AD - ESE or nominee should update the course closure management document to reflect any changes resulting from the consultations.
- 14.2. The course closure management document must be reviewed and approved by SASC and noted at the Quality and Standards committee (QSC).

#### **15. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB)**

- 15.1. The AD - ESE or nominee will consult with any external accreditation / PSRBs or regulatory bodies to provide information about the closure. The results of the consultation will be detailed on the course closure management document, and any communications recorded by Student Administration.

#### **16. Communication with Stakeholders**

##### **16.1. University Wide Communication**

The minutes of the APP which will include a list of all courses approved for suspension and closure will be forwarded to the QSC. Following the APP, the School SQEA notifies Student Operations of all approved suspensions and closures. Student Operations notifies all relevant Professional Service Groups of the approved closures and suspensions.

- 16.2. Student Operations will ensure that the Student Records system is appropriately updated to remove course(s) and associated modules.
- 16.3. Marketing will ensure that the website, UCAS and other marketing materials are updated as appropriate.
- 16.4. International will ensure that recruitment partners are appropriately notified to stop recruitment to the courses and any international applicants appropriately consulted.
- 16.5. LSBU Global will be notified of the closure to assess the impact on partners.
- 16.6. Student Administration will be notified of the courses so that plans can be made for meetings with the affected stakeholders, and a record of the meetings and



actions recorded.

## **17. Internal School Communications**

- 17.1 The Dean and / or AD - ESE will inform relevant teams within the affected School.
- 17.2. The AD - ESE and appropriate Head of Division should notify all relevant PSRBs or other external accrediting bodies (where applicable).
- 17.3. For collaborative provision arrangements, LSBU Global and GovLegal should be advised of the closure, and arrangements made for supporting the closure process with the partner(s). LSBU Global should be consulted to coordinate and manage all activities with the partner in collaboration with the link tutor.
- 17.4. Students will be informed by the Dean, AD - ESE or nominee that their course is going to be closed. This must be in writing and will be supported by the Student Administration team. The letter will include details of the way in which they will be supported to complete the course, and of the other options open to them such as transfer or refund / compensation. It will outline the advice and guidance that will be made available to ensure that they are appropriately supported in making their decisions.

## **18. Communication with Applicants**

- 18.1. The Admissions and Recruitment Team should consult the UCAS Admissions Guide for specific information relating to UCAS applicants.
- 18.2. They should identify all applicants who will be affected by the decision and notify them requesting a response in a reasonable timeframe. If the applicant does not reply within the timescale requested in the initial letter the Admissions and Recruitment Team should issue a reminder letter advising the applicant that their application will be withdrawn if no response is received within a specified timescale. In all cases we should ensure that the timeframes are reasonable.
- 18.3. Where special arrangements exist because of PSRB or other regulatory requirements the School and the Admissions and Recruitment Team should ensure that these are followed.

## **19. Ongoing Monitoring**

- 19.1. The course must continue to be actively managed and remains subject to the University's course monitoring and all other quality and standards provisions such as module evaluations and external examining. A Course Leader must oversee the course for the duration of the teach out plan as outlined in the course closure management document.
- 19.1. Ongoing monitoring must ensure that the equity of experience for students on the course is maintained.
- 19.2. Where necessary minor course changes can be approved through SASC to ensure that the course remains current and relevant for students. Where major

changes are required, for example as a result of PSRB changes, the course leader should consult with the AD - ESE and the Academic Quality and Enhancement Team to determine the best way to accommodate the required changes while maintaining the academic standards and quality, and the student experience expected by the University.

**20. Appendix A: Consultation with Students**

20.1. For all course closures, students registered on the course must be provided with information and guidance on the impact of closing the course along with the plans for teaching out the course, transferring or being refunded / compensated and managing their experience and expectations.

21.2 Students and their course representatives should also be included in the discussion about the closure process, as outlined below:

<b>Type of Course</b>	<b>Students to be invited to meetings</b>
Course closure within a School which has no co- dependencies or knock-on effects on other courses	<p>Invite all students and course representatives along to consultative meetings with the School. Every effort should be made to include as many students as possible.</p> <p>Notify the VP Education, Students' Union</p> <p>Feedback from the meeting to be used to update the course closure management form and approved at SASC.</p>

<p>Course with significant knock-on effects within a School</p>	<p>Invite all students and course representatives from the closing course along to the consultative meeting with the School. Every effort should be made to include as many students as possible.</p> <p>Invite course reps from all affected courses.</p> <p>Invite any other students most affected as well as those it may also affect from other courses.</p> <p>Notify the VP Education, Students' Union</p> <p>Feedback from the meeting to be used to update the course closure management form and approved at SASC.</p>
<p>Courses that will lead to effects across several Schools due to large numbers of modules taken by students in other Schools</p>	<p>Invite all students and course representatives from the closing course along to the consultative meeting with the School. Every effort should be made to include as many students as possible.</p> <p>Invite course reps from all affected courses.</p> <p>Invite all affected students from other Schools to attend the consultative meeting (or a separate one if this is logistically challenging).</p> <p>Feedback from the meeting to be used to update the course closure management form and approved at SASC.</p>