PROGRAMME CLOSURE OR SUSPENSION

1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the Quality & Standards handbook covers the procedures for the closure or suspension of recruitment to taught programmes, including those delivered through collaborative arrangements.

Reasons for closure

1.1 There are a variety of reasons why a decision may be taken to close a programme, including, for example:
- a decline in student demand such that the viability of the provision is threatened;
- a new programme is approved which replaces existing provision;
- a reduction in funding or in funded student numbers;
- documented concerns about the standards and/or quality of the provision, which may affect its credibility;
- a change in University, Faculty or the partner's priorities for academic development;
- failure to meet the criteria set by the relevant group following a portfolio review exercise.

1.2 Many programme closures at Oxford Brookes are routine administrative exercises, involving the closure of programmes with no remaining students, or of those from which students are transferring onto improved, newly-validated replacement programmes. However, some programme closures require more complex issues to be addressed because the decision to close has implications for:
- remaining students, in respect of completing their studies;
- applicants holding offers of places on the programme;
- and/or for staff, whose positions may be at risk.

The procedures to be followed in these cases are set out in section 3 below. The appropriate closure process must be followed in order to assure the quality and standards of provision being phased out, so as to prevent reputational damage to the University and to protect the interests of students and applicants.

Authority to make closure decisions

1.3 Since the closure of a programme is primarily a business decision, the authority to initiate the programme closure process lies with the appropriate Faculty Executive group, acting on the advice of the relevant academic Department/School and (if appropriate) with the approval of the Vice-Chancellor's Group. In some cases (e.g. the closure of a partnership which involves more than one Faculty), a closure decision may originate from VCG, who will nominate a PVC/Dean to convene an exit group to take the closure process forward (see 5.3 below). The Recruitment and Admissions Group may also recommend that Faculty Executive Groups consider the future of programmes that have failed to meet targets over a period of time. See also the section on suspension of recruitment in 5.4 below.

1.4 However, the Academic Board has ultimate authority for making academic decisions about the University's portfolio of programmes, and - via its sub-committees: primarily QLIC - it may bring concerns about academic standards or quality to the attention of the relevant Faculty Executive group or to VCG, and ask them to consider whether a programme should be closed. In order to conclude the closure process, the relevant Faculty AESC/QLIC (or, for cross-University provision, University

QLIC) must approve the delivery and quality assurance arrangements to be put in place while existing students complete their programme of study.

Closure processes

1.5   The appropriate closure form should be completed via route A or B (see below). The **Route A** process should be followed for programmes that have never recruited, or have no remaining students, or that are being replaced through the revalidation process. The **Route B** process should be followed for programmes with remaining students and/or current applicants holding offers (including deferred offers).

1.6   All proposals for closure must, in due course, include the following information:
- Clear rationale for closure;
- Arrangements for phasing out the provision, or the identification of alternative provision, bearing in mind the University's contractual obligations to existing students and applicants holding offers; *NOTE: the aim of these arrangements should, wherever possible, be to enable existing students to continue on their current programme and complete the Brookes award for which they are registered;*
- Measures to be taken to protect the quality of the provision being phased out;
- Evidence of consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including students and staff.

Collaborative provision

1.7   As with home provision, the termination of a partnership or closure of a collaborative programme may arise in a number of ways. Irrespective of the circumstances, safeguarding the interests of any students remaining on the programmes is paramount, and the exit strategy must ensure the integrity and continuity of their education while studying for a Brookes award. Exit strategies must also give consideration to minimising the reputational damage to the University. The management of the closure of collaborative arrangements may take a variety of forms, depending on the situation, and the process of agreeing the exit process must therefore be carried out in consultation with the appropriate range of interested parties within Brookes and the partner organisation.

1.8   It can be difficult to predict the exact circumstances which may lead to the termination of a partnership, particularly in the case of a serious breach of contract. However, a number of potential exit strategies will have been identified at the point of consideration of a new partnership (or the renewal of an existing one), and approved by the Learning Partnerships Advisory Group. It is of key importance that due consideration is given to exit strategies at the point of initiation of a new partnership, since withdrawal from collaborative arrangements can be protracted and expensive if not managed effectively. Potential exit strategies should be reviewed regularly by the managing Faculty – through the annual review process, and at the point of the five-yearly contract renewal submission to LPAG - in order to assess whether they remain appropriate in the context of any changes to the risk environment in which the partnership is operating.

2   ROUTE A: ADMINISTRATIVE CLOSURE

2.1   Where there are no students or applicants on a programme, and the programme is to be archived, the closure form (T2.15) should be completed by the appropriate Programme Lead or Liaison Manager (for collaborative provision), signed off by the Faculty AESC/QLIC and sent to APQO, via the link QAO. APQO will notify the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team and Admissions Office, and the University Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee.

2.2   Where existing provision is to be replaced by a new programme in the same subject area, the implementation plan for the new provision, and phasing out of the old programme, will be outlined in the new programme submission document and in the report of the programme approval panel. A programme closure form (T2.15) should be completed by the Programme Lead, checked by the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team, and attached to the submission document, for processing on the course record system after the new programme approval event.

3 ROUTE B: PROGRAMMES WITH REMAINING STUDENTS AND/OR CURRENT APPLICANTS

3.1   When a proposal is made to close a programme on which students are currently studying, or for which applicants are holding offers of a place, a risk assessment should initially be undertaken by the Programme Lead or Subject Coordinator (or Liaison Manager, for collaborative arrangements) and the Faculty Head of Quality Assurance and Validations, in order to make recommendations about the process that should be followed in order to address the key issues as appropriate to the provision under consideration. The Head of the Department/School managing the provision should then submit the rationale for the closure, the initial risk assessment and the proposed closure process (including exit group membership) to the Faculty Executive group for approval. The Faculty Executive should then take a view on whether the PVC/Dean should submit a rationale for the closure to VCG, for approval of the decision to initiate the closure process. Once the appropriate level of executive support has been secured, the closure process may proceed. At this point, the ADSD or Head of Department should notify the appropriate colleagues in Registry and Admissions, in order to ensure the programme is closed to further applications.

3.2   Once the decision has been made by the Faculty Executive to close a programme with current students and/or applicants, an exit group should be convened to oversee the agreed closure process. The membership of a full exit group is given below; however, the size and membership of this group for a particular case will be determined by the initial assessment of the nature and severity of the risks and the likely issues that will need to be addressed (the minimum membership is indicated by asterisks – representation from Legal Services, Communications, and the Faculty Head of Finance & Planning should also be included for collaborative arrangements). If the provision is managed by a single Faculty, the exit group chair will be nominated by, and report to, the Faculty Executive group. If the exit group is to oversee the closure of a number of programmes managed by several Faculties, for example, in the case of the closure of a collaborative partnership delivering a range of provision, the chair will be appointed by VCG, to whom the exit group will be accountable until the final exit arrangements have been agreed and implemented (this may, in some cases, require only one meeting).

Membership of the exit group

3.3   The membership of the exit group must be approved by either the Faculty Executive group or VCG (depending on the group to which it reports), and may include some or all of the following, depending on the process agreed:
- Chair, nominated by Faculty Executive (or by VCG, in the case of multi-Faculty provision)
- Secretary, nominated by the Chair
- *Associate Dean/s Education & Student Experience, and/or Faculty Head/s of QA & Validations
- Associate Dean/s Strategy & Development
- Head/s of Department/School affected
- *Programme Lead/Subject Coordinator/Liaison Manager, as appropriate
- Faculty Head/s of Finance & Planning
- Faculty Head/s of Operations, or Academic Administration Manager/s
- *Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer, or (for multi-Faculty exit groups) the Head of APQO
- Legal Services representative
- Human Resources Business Partner
- Communications team representative
- Academic Registrar, or nominee
- *the Head of Admissions Operations (or their nominee) should be included if applicants are holding offers for places on the programme that is to be closed and the Academic Registrar is unable to attend the exit group.

Role of the exit group

3.4   The role of the exit group is to:
- to draw up and monitor an action plan for the exit process, ensuring all key players understand their responsibilities and the timescales for action;

- carry out a risk assessment on the action plan to ensure that all relevant legal, financial, HR and QA issues are taken into consideration in completing the programme closure form (template T2.16 – available on the APQO website). A suggested risk assessment tool is available (template T2.17) which exit group Chairs may find useful when reporting on progress to FEG/VCG (see final bullet point below);
- ensure that appropriate consultation is carried out with students; and clear information is provided about the arrangements that are to be put in place for the remainder of their programme of study;
- ensure that appropriate consultation is carried out with staff, including relevant union representatives; and that clear information is provided about the implications of the closure on their employment (*referring to the HR guidance on handling redundancy and redeployment*);
- ensure that consultation with relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body/ies and other key stakeholders (e.g. partner organisations, funding bodies) is undertaken;
- agree on the point at which applications to the provision should be suspended, and on the means and content of communications with applicants who are already in the system [*if no further applications are to be accepted, the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team should be notified at this point in order to close recruitment to the programme* – they will accept a draft closure form as the authority to do this];
- agree on the means and timing of internal and external communications, and the processes to be used for approving message content;
- draw up the proposed teach-out and quality assurance arrangements to be put in place to enable existing students to complete their programme of study, for approval by University QLIC, and subsequent monitoring by Faculty AESC/QLICs;
- the Chair will report regularly on progress to the Faculty Executive Group or VCG, as appropriate.

Approval of closure forms and monitoring teach-out plans

3.5 The end point of the exit group's work, once all the issues referred to above have been satisfactorily resolved, is the completion of the programme closure form (T2.16), which should be submitted together with the initial risk assessment and a report on phasing out costs, for approval by the Faculty Executive group, or VCG (if more than one Faculty is involved).

3.6 The approved closure form will then be submitted, via the Faculty link QAO, to Faculty AESC/QLIC for consideration of the teaching out and quality assurance arrangements to ensure they are sufficient to protect the interests of any remaining students. QLIC will approve the removal of the programme from the University's portfolio on behalf of Academic Board. The Faculty AESC/QLIC will be responsible for monitoring the teaching out plans once approved by QLIC and the exit group is not required to continue beyond approval of the closure form by the Faculty Executive. However, in some, more complex cases – for example the closure of a partnership involving more than one Faculty - the original exit group may continue to meet from time to time, to review progress with/share experiences of teach-out arrangements and, if necessary, recommend further action to the relevant Faculty AESC/QLICs, Faculty Executive Groups or VCG.

3.7 Once approved, the APQO will report the outcomes of the closure process to relevant teams, to ensure that prospectus and UCAS entries are amended, and the records system and other definitive programme information is updated. Once all remaining students have completed the programme, the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team will designate it as 'archived' on the system.

4   SUSPENSION OF RECRUITMENT

4.1 Suspension of recruitment, rather than closure, may be the preferred option where there is reason to believe that the issues underlying the decision to suspend are temporary. However, suspension of a programme is often a first step towards closure, which may be taken to allow Schools/Departments to undertake the revalidation of the current provision or the development of new, replacement provision. It is recommended that a programme should not remain in suspension for longer than two years without a decision to re-open, replace, or close being made; during which time it is subject to the normal QA processes.

4.2   Please note that there is a formal process for reviewing the viability of, and potentially suspending, programmes delivered by the Associate College Partnership – advice on this procedure should be sought from the Head of UK Partnerships & Apprenticeships

4.3   It is vital that an appropriate process is followed - including a risk assessment of proposed actions (T2.17) - in order to ensure that the University is compliant with consumer legislation in respect of providing early communication about any programme changes to applicants and students. When a proposal to suspend is made, a similar group to the minimum exit group should be convened in order to determine whether suspension, rather than closure, is the appropriate course of action. The group should also ensure that a suspension form is completed (T2.18) – submission requirements for the suspension form are the same as for closure forms, as noted above.