

Student Protection Plan

Policy and procedures for closure, suspension and changes to programmes

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This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation, Disability.

These processes articulate the College's procedures for applicants and students.

1. Main points of policy

- Milton Keynes College is committed to protecting the interests of students and applicants in the event of a Higher Education programme closing for whatever reason. This policy sets out the College's procedures for closing, suspending or changing any of the Higher Education programmes that 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 the HEFCE, UUK, Guild HE, NUS in October 2015. It is also designed to meet the requirements for the CMA Student Protection Plan.

2. List of procedures for implementation

- Obtaining approval to withdraw a programme
- Notification of decision to outside organisations
- Notification of decision and arrangements for current students
- Notification of decision and arrangements for prospective students

3. Related policies, documents and strategies

- HE Information Policy
- Collaborative Agreements with University partners
- QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review and Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education with others
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/UK-Quality-Code-for-Higher-Education-2013-18>

4. Background to Policy

From time to time Milton Keynes College may be faced with considering the closure of a Higher Education programme of study.

This may be because:

- (a) Notice has been given to Milton Keynes College by one of its University partners to close one or more programmes
 - (b) Notice has been given by Milton Keynes College to one of its University partners to close one or more programmes
- OR
- (c) Milton Keynes College has decided to withdraw one or more of its Higher National programmes (awarded by Edexcel)

The basis of proposals for programme closure may typically be one or more of the following:

- (a) Decline in student demand over a period of time to the point where the programme's viability is threatened;
- (b) Failure to recruit viable numbers to a new programme;
- (c) Documented concerns over quality which threaten the programme's integrity;
- (d) A breach of either parties' obligations under an agreement between Milton Keynes College and an awarding body;
- (e) A reduction in funding or funded numbers;

5. Definitions

- Staff:** Everyone employed directly and indirectly by Milton Keynes College, including non-paid volunteer workers both in work and outside working hours.
- Students:** Any existing students enrolled on the programme and any potential applicant to the programme.
- Applicants:** Individuals who have applied or are in the process of applying to study on a Higher Education programme at Milton Keynes College.
- HE Programme:** Includes Higher National Diplomas and Certificates (awarded by Pearson/ Edexcel) including those offered as part of a Higher Apprenticeship, Foundation Degrees.

6. Scope of the Policy

This policy covers all Higher Education programmes provided by Milton Keynes College, including those which form part of a Higher or Degree Apprenticeship and all current and prospective students, both full and part-time.

7. Policy Statement

Milton Keynes College is committed to protecting the interests of students, applicants and its own reputation in the event of the proposed closure of a Higher Education programme. These procedures have been established to provide a clear statement of the arrangements to secure both the quality of provision and the student experience following a decision to close a programme. The Student Protection Plan provides the main reference point for consideration of any potential impact on the student experience.

With the exception of Milton Keynes College being given notice to close a programme by one of its awarding bodies, the decision to close a programme will be made by the HE Academic Board.

8. Procedures associated with policy

The programme closure procedure requires a clear statement of the rationale for closure and the arrangements to secure both the quality of provision and the student experience following the decision to withdraw the programme. The HE Academic Board will expect to see evidence of how the outgoing programme is to be phased out and the support provided to any remaining students and applicants. This Student Protection Plan provides further guidance on actions to be taken in the event of programme closure.

8.1. Obtaining approval to withdraw a programme

Where a programme governed by a partnership agreement is suspended by the awarding body, the awarding body will notify the College writing as detailed in the relevant institutional agreement. The Head of School will then work with the relevant HE Programme Lead to ensure that arrangements for any current and prospective students are in place (see 5.3).

Where the proposal to close a Higher Education programme originates within the College, the recommendation should be submitted by the relevant Head of School to the HE Academic Board and be ratified by the Senior Leadership Team.

In order to allow adequate time for discussion and consultation, the recommendation for closure should be submitted to the HE Academic Board before the end of June in the year the programme is recommended for closure.

The minimum time between a proposal for closure being submitted to the HE Academic Board and a decision being taken should normally be a minimum of three months prior to the commencement of the next academic year, or as required by the appropriate institutional agreement.

A template (Appendix 1) is provided for this purpose and the HE Academic Board will expect to receive the following information as a basis for its decision:

- (a) A clear statement of the rationale for the programme's closure
- (b) A clearly defined phasing-out period which includes start and end dates;
- (c) The arrangements for providing students enrolled on the programme and all staff with information on the proposed closure;
- (d) The arrangements to provide information, advice and guidance to support next steps;
- (e) A clearly defined list of options available to students to enable them to either complete their original programme of study or transfer with their agreement to an alternative programme or institution
- (f) The arrangements to ensure that the quality of the student learning experience will continue to meet awarding body and QAA expectations during the phasing-out period;
- (g) The mechanism to ensure that any proposed reduction in overall staffing levels will not impact unreasonably on the student experience, particularly with regard to ensuring that the intended learning outcomes of the programme will still be achievable by current students;
- (h) The mechanism to ensure that adequate resources continue to be provided to maintain the quality of the student experience during the phasing-out period;
- (i) The assessment and re-assessment arrangements for any students, particularly part-time students who will not have completed their intended programme by the closure date;
- (j) Evidence of consultation internally and/or externally with key stakeholders.

Where there are any expected changes to staff/staffing structure, consultation with People Services must be sought.

On receipt of a request to close or suspend a programme, SLT may agree one of the following:

- Decline the request
- Approve the request without condition(s)
- Approve the request with condition(s)

8.2. Notification of decision to outside organisations

Once a closure recommendation has been approved by the HE Academic Board the Director of Marketing must be notified to ensure that all publications and websites are amended.

Partnership agreements: The College is required to notify the University partner of its intention to suspend a programme in writing, giving no less than six months' notice before the end of the academic year during which notice is given.

8.3. Notification of decisions and arrangements for current students

All communications with current students about the closure of their course must be undertaken by the appropriate HE Programme Lead or delegate.

Current students must be allowed to complete their designated period of enrolment on the programme unless they give their explicit written consent to the contrary. Such consent must not be sought until a closure recommendation has been approved by the HE Academic Board.

Where a programme is being closed to recruitment, the proposed arrangements for students currently enrolled on the programme (including those who have suspended studies) must include the following:

- Discussion about student options in regard to transferring to another programme within Milton Keynes College or to another institution and arrangements for doing so;
- Confirmation of the student timetable for the remaining period of the programme;
- The standard of academic provision and the student experience must be maintained as far as possible throughout the registration period. It is important to maintain standards to enable a programme's stated learning outcomes to be achieved by students who are being 'taught out'. Arrangements for the staffing and resourcing of the programme for the remaining period;
- Written confirmation to all students clarifying any amendments to the programme regulations regarding assessment and progression with particular reference to:
 - (a) Students who have temporarily withdrawn;
 - (b) Students who have failed modules and would normally be allowed to retake these the following year
 - (c) Students under mitigating circumstances who have been granted an extension beyond the end of the academic year
 - (d) Students planning to progress from a Foundation Degree to an Honours Degree
- 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 and their nominated representatives.
- 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.
- To ensure the student experience and to support the students, the Quality Team will monitor their experience.

8.4. Notification of decision and arrangements for prospective students

All communications with applicants on the following matters must be undertaken by the Admissions Team. The quality of these communications will be subject to review by Marketing.

Applicants who have accepted offers should not be contacted until a closure recommendation has been approved by the HE Academic Board. These applicants should then be informed of their options in regard to transferring their application to another programme or 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.

All Public Information relating to the programme should either be removed or amended by the HE Marketing Manager in line with the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance, to inform potential applicants that the programme has been withdrawn. The following list provides a reference as to where this information is currently published:

- College website
- HE Handbook
- HE Prospectus
- Programme leaflets – web-based and hard copy
- Awarding body website and prospectus
- Third party, e.g. employers

8.5. Marketing

Once a closure recommendation has been approved by the HE Academic Board and ratified by the Senior Leadership Team, the Director of Marketing will, where appropriate, prepare and publish a press statement.

Appendix 1:

Business Case Template for Withdrawing an HE Course

Name of course:	
Head of School submitting this proposal:	
Name of School:	
Statement of rationale for closure of this programme:	
Phasing out period (to contain start and end dates)	
Start date:	
End date:	
The arrangements for providing students enrolled on the programme and all staff with information on the proposed closure:	
The arrangements to provide information, advice and guidance to support next steps:	

Please detail a clearly defined list of options available to students to enable them to either complete their original programme of study or transfer, with their agreement, to an alternative programme or institution:

The arrangements to ensure that the quality of the student learning experience will continue to meet awarding body and QAA expectations during the phasing-out period

The mechanism to ensure that any proposed reduction in overall staffing levels will not impact unreasonably on the student experience, particularly with regard to ensuring that the intended learning outcomes of the programme will still be achievable by **current student**

The mechanism to ensure that adequate resources continue to be provided to maintain the quality of the student experience during the phasing-out **period**

The assessment and re-assessment arrangements for any students, particularly part-time students who will not have completed their intended programme by the closure date;

Evidence of consultation internally and/or externally with key stakeholders	
Where there are any expected changes to staff/staffing structure, consultation with People Services must be sought	Please confirm (delete as applicable) Consultation has taken place: Yes/No Consultation is not required:
Please list any potential staffing issues arising following consultation with People Services	
Any other issues/information:	
Signed:	
Head of School for:	
Discussed at HE Academic Board dated:	
Approved/Not approved by HE Academic Board:	
Reason(s) for non-approval (if applicable):	

Signed by Chair of HE Academic Board:	
Date:	
Submitted to the SLT for ratification on:	
The Senior Leadership Team has:	
Delete as applicable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declined the request • Approved the request without conditions • Approved the request with the following conditions: 	
Reason(s) for non-approval, if applicable.	
Signed (by member of the SLT):	
Dated:	
This form should be returned to the Chair of the HE Academic Board and the Head of School.	
If approved, the Director of Marketing and Communications should be notified to ensure that all publications and websites are amended.	Date of notification:
Partnership agreements: The College is required to notify the University partner of its intention to suspend a programme in writing, giving no less than six months' notice before the end of the academic year during which notice is given.	Date of notification to University Partner (if applicable):

A copy of this Approval Template should be kept with the respective HE Academic Board minutes and a copy retained by the respective Head of School.