

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

For the meeting of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to be held on 22 February 2016

Guidance on Discontinuation of CoursesBackground

Although still rare, the number of requests for discontinuation of courses is rising. The Teaching Quality website provides a wealth of guidance supporting departments through proposals for new and revised courses (<http://warwick.ac.uk/quality/categories/courseapproval/>). However, it provides no information on steps to take when considering the discontinuation of an existing course. Existing course proposal forms (also used for revision to courses) are unsuitable as they do not cover the relevant considerations in this context. This paper sets out a proposed policy and procedure for academic departments to guide them through the process. The procedure set out below is designed to accord with the requirements of Indicator 3 of chapter B8 of the UK Quality Code, which requires all 'Higher Education providers to operate a process to protect the academic interests of students when a programme is closed' and Indicator 9 of chapter B2 of the UK Quality Code which requires that 'Higher Education providers inform prospective students, at the earliest opportunity, of any significant changes to a programme to which they have applied. Prospective students are advised promptly of the options available in the circumstances'. It should be noted that the new course approval process, anticipated for introduction from 2016-17, will include discontinuation of courses.

The key objective of the process should be to enable courses to come to an end where necessary whilst protecting the interests of any current students or applicants.

Proposed Policy and Procedure

1. Through regular reviews of their provision, departments may reach a stage where closure and/or replacement of a course is the appropriate way forward.

In those situations, departments need to consider the following:

- i. Are there current students registered on the course proposed for discontinuation?
 - The department must consult the students, make them aware of the plans and provide a clear plan for the students to be able to complete the course.
 - All affected students (not just representatives) must be provided with an opportunity to raise and discuss their concerns with the department.
 - Arrangements may include provision to teach out the cohort (i.e. no change to the course from the students' perspective), transfers onto similar courses, etc.
 - Support for public relations and communications should be sought, where necessary.
 - The Students' Union should be notified in order that the Students' Union Advice and Welfare Services can advise students as necessary.

- ii. Is the discontinued course a collaborative one?
 - A clear plan needs to be presented, setting out the mechanisms for teach out of any existing cohorts, either guaranteeing the involvement of the partner, or providing ways of maintaining learning outcomes of the course without the partner's involvement.
 - There would generally be exit and teach out arrangements articulated in collaborative contracts with partners and these should be referred to where possible;

- iii. Have offers been made to applicants?
 - Departments should contact the Admissions Office at the earliest opportunity and make them aware of their plans to discontinue the course. Timeliness is critical, however approval by the relevant committees need to be in hand before applicants are notified.
 - A communications plan for notifying applicants of the proposed closure should be agreed between the department and admissions. Where a collaborative partner is involved they will also need to agree communications, this is particularly critical where partners manage or contribute to recruitment and admissions.
- iv. Have other departments with an interest in the courses been consulted?
 - Consultation with any departments involved in the delivery of a course must take place.
 - If the discontinuation concerns aspects of a course often taken by students from other departments (typically individual modules), these departments should also be consulted and notified in good time of the proposed discontinuation.

2. Requests for discontinuation of courses should be submitted to the Board of Graduate/Undergraduate Studies, as appropriate, for consideration. In addition, requests for discontinuation of courses delivered in collaboration with a partner organisation will require approval from the Collaborative, Flexible, Distributed-Learning Sub-Committee (CFDLSC). All requests to discontinue a course must include the following information:

- Name of the course and award (including sub-qualifications);
- Course code (and course route where relevant);
- Request for withdrawal from admissions with effect from "X" (this is particularly critical to avoid offers being made and accepted);
- Request for discontinuation of a course with effect from "X" (normally "upon completion of the course by current students");
- Number of students still registered on the course and the anticipated end of registration (i.e. expected completion of the programme);
- Rationale for the request and which departments (academic and administrative) have been consulted to inform the decision;
- Information on how students are going to be supported towards successful completion of the course (any changes to delivery method or staff?);
- Have students already on course been consulted on the proposed discontinuation and the outcomes of that consultation?
- Will/have students been offered transfer onto different degrees?
- Have offers been made for the next intake? If so, is a communication plan in place to notify offer holders of the discontinuation?
- Have CMA guidance implications been considered?

For collaborative courses, further assurance, preferably in the form of a supporting letter from the partner, should be submitted outlining the following:

- Details of the exit arrangements between the partner(s) and the University;
- How the course is going to be managed (both administratively and academically where relevant) until remaining students complete their studies?
- Are any of the continuing students receiving a different award outcome as a result of the discontinuation, e.g. no accreditation or affiliation?
- How, if at all, will the student's experience or qualification change?

3. Once all of the information above is collated, the request for discontinuation needs to be submitted to the Board of Graduate/Undergraduate Studies for consideration. For collaborative courses the request needs to be submitted to CFDLSC for consideration at the same time. Appendix 1 sets out a draft 'Course Discontinuation Request Form'.
4. On approval, the department will be notified by the relevant Committee Secretariat. Strategic Planning and Analytics will also be notified of the discontinuation, to enable the Student Record System (SITS) to be updated.

Recommendation

The Academic Quality and Standards Committee is invited to consider and approve the above policy and procedure for the discontinuation of courses at the University.

Martin Mik (Assistant Registrar, Learning and Teaching) and
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