

Programme Closure – Guidance for Colleges and Schools

Purpose and scope

This guidance outlines responsibilities and processes for managing programme closures to Colleges and Schools, including the University's responsibilities to current and prospective students, and an approach to risk management. This guidance applies to both taught and research programmes, and should be read alongside the [Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy](#).

Although the expectation is that most students will be able to complete their programme of study, much of this guidance is focused on situations where existing students are unable to complete their programme of study. This may arise, for example, because the student has an authorised interruption of studies which means they will not complete the programme with their cohort, or because a decision has been made to end the programme early, before the current cohort completes their studies.

Main considerations

Portfolio review and governance

Colleges are responsible for ensuring that their teaching portfolio is aligned with their academic mission and University strategic plans, that it is adequately resourced and financially sustainable. Quality should be monitored and reviewed via the existing quality assurance governance processes, i.e. via School Annual Monitoring reports, and the relevant Quality Assurance Committees.

Proposals regarding programme closures may originate from the School (e.g. via Boards of Studies) or from the College (e.g. via College Portfolio Management Boards, or equivalent). Colleges should also ensure that they have governance and mechanisms in place to regularly review their portfolio, and that updates are reported to the College Education Committee.

In all cases, Schools should complete '**STEP 2 - Complete analysis: students on programme and teach out scenarios**' and submit a *Programme Closure Proposal Form* to the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent, for approval.

Programme closure principles

Where the School or College has proposed closing a programme to prospective students:

- It is anticipated that, in most cases, **the majority of current students will complete their programme of study as planned.**
 - Schools and Colleges should **identify any students who may not be able to complete their programme of study**, for example because of an existing authorised interruption of studies (AIS).
1. **Risk management:** College Offices and Schools are responsible for identifying the risks associated with programme closures to both prospective and current students and proposing appropriate risk mitigation measures. Heads of College and the Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students, are ultimately responsible for the risks associated with programme closures. The timescale of programme closures is an important part of the risk assessment and risk mitigation, i.e. generally, a shorter timescale has a higher risk and is likely to be more resource-intensive.

- **Any initial recommendations from Schools or Colleges to close programmes should be considered provisional until the analysis and Programme Closure Proposal Form, including risk assessment, (STEPS 1 and 2) have been completed and signed off by the appropriate authority (STEP 3).** Colleges are responsible for reviewing the risk assessment and signing off on programme closures, escalating any closures which are 'medium risk' or 'high risk' to the Head of College and the Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students. Risk analysis should feed into College Risk Registers for continued risk management and mitigation.
- **Schools are responsible for communications with:**
 - Academic teaching staff within their School
 - Teaching Offices, Student Support teams and any other professional services staff associated with the programme, e.g. laboratory technicians, learning technologists, website editors
 - Students on programme (including students on authorised interruption of studies (AIS)) - managed using template communications, tailored appropriately
 - External Partners [with recommended sign off from the Head of College] – managed in collaboration with the College
 - Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB), where applicable – managed in collaboration with the College [with recommended sign off from Head of College or Head of School]
 - Industrial Partners or other external stakeholders, where applicable – managed in collaboration with the College
 - Study and Work Away Service (SWAY), where applicable
 - Library Services, via Academic Support Librarians
- **Colleges are responsible for communications with the following stakeholders, where necessary:**
 - Collaborating Schools, where applicable, following initial discussion and agreement between the Schools
 - External Examiners, for taught programmes
 - Prospective students, including offer holders and non-offer holders – managed using template communications, tailored appropriately, and liaising with Schools as necessary
 - Legal Services
 - Fees team and Scholarships and Student Funding team within Registry, External funders
 - College recruitment and admissions teams
 - Student Immigration Service
 - Prospective Student Web Content (PSWC) team, Communications and Marketing (CAM)
 - External Partners, where applicable [with recommended sign off from the Head of College] – managed in collaboration with the School
 - Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB), where applicable – managed in collaboration with the School [with recommended sign off from Head of College or School]
 - Industrial Partners or other external stakeholders, where applicable – managed in collaboration with the School
 - Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP)

INITIAL STEPS FOR SCHOOLS

STEP 1 – Engage with stakeholders

Once the School or College has made a recommendation to close a programme, **the School should identify a suitable senior colleague to lead this work and coordinate actions as necessary with the College.** The Head of School (or delegated other senior member of staff) should **engage, with due regard to confidentiality, with relevant academic and professional services staff within the School,** including Teaching Office Managers and Student Support Managers, as soon as possible, bringing in support from HR where appropriate. It is important to ensure that relevant staff in Schools are made aware of potential programme closures early on. The engagement of staff in Schools is also critical for obtaining accurate student information and for a thorough analysis of risks and scenarios where students are unable to complete their programme.

Communications with the following stakeholders will normally be led by the School, but should be managed in consultation with the College(s):

- **Collaborative programmes** – Programmes should be identified as collaborative / not collaborative at the initial discussions
 - **Internal collaborations (with Schools within the University of Edinburgh (UoE)):** For programmes including courses delivered by other Schools (e.g. interdisciplinary programmes, Joint Honours degrees, intercalated degrees, etc.), Schools should engage with the relevant stakeholders in other Schools to discuss implications of closure and identify any risks as soon as possible. Colleges should be kept up to date on these discussions.
 - **External collaborations (with other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) / partners):** For collaborative programmes delivered with other HEIs or partners (e.g. Dual or Joint degree awards), Schools must check the end date of the current the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) and consult the MoA for any provisions covering early closure of the programme, for example, any requirements for giving notice and any other legal requirements. Schools and Colleges should consider whether it is possible to wait until the end date of the MoA and then not renew it, rather than end the MoA prematurely, factoring in any requirement to give notice of intention not to renew. Where considering ending the collaboration before the stated end date, the College must consult with Legal Services and Edinburgh Global, given that the MoA is a legally binding agreement. Schools and Colleges should agree on an approach to communications with partners, as the approach will vary between collaborations.
- **Programmes with Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSRB) and/or other external stakeholders** - Programmes with PSRB and/or other external stakeholders (e.g. industrial partners, placement hosts, study abroad partners) should be identified at the initial discussions. Schools and Colleges should agree on an approach to communications with PSRB and external stakeholders, as the approach will vary between programmes.
- **Prospective students, including offer holders and non-offer holders** – appropriate template communications, tailored to the particular circumstances, should be used. Communications and Marketing (CAM), the Prospective Student Web Content (PSWC) team, and the College admissions team may assist with this work where appropriate.

STEP 2 – Complete analysis: students on programme and teach out scenarios

1. Identify **complete list of students on programme**, including status and mode of study (i.e. current student, student on AIS, number of credits achieved, full-time/part-time/part-time intermittent mode of study, etc)

2. **Outline scenarios for completion of programme** up to completion of programme by the current cohort. Identify any students who may require individual plans (e.g. students on AIS). Programmes should be closed at the end of an academic year, unless there are exceptional reasons which necessitate the closure of the programme at a different timepoint. Schools must make all reasonable efforts to identify options for students to continue their studies (see Appendix 1 - Scenarios in relation to completion of programmes), including:
 - Wherever possible, plan to teach or supervise students on programme until the end of their programme (SCENARIOS A and B). This may include making modifications to the programme Degree Programmes Tables (DPT), e.g. by having a reduced set of elective courses
 - If teaching students until they complete the existing programme is not possible, identify potential alternatives within existing UoE programmes (SCENARIO C). Alternative programmes may be within or outwith the School. This option would require early discussions between relevant Heads of School and the College Dean of Education. Transferring students to alternative, existing UoE programmes may require concessions to DPTs (e.g. exemption for the requirement to complete a compulsory course), which can be approved by Colleges. Schools must note that only courses listed as compulsory courses on the DPT are considered compulsory.
 - If teaching students until they complete their existing programme is not possible, and there are no suitable alternative, existing UoE programmes, Schools may consider setting up generic / umbrella degree programmes. These would be temporary programmes set up with a more flexible DPT and which could host students transferring from a range of related programmes (SCENARIO C), e.g. MSc Clinical Sciences could receive students from smaller, more specialised MSc programmes which are due to close. As above, this option would require early discussions with the relevant Head of School and the College Dean of Education. Schools should propose these new programmes to Colleges following the standard programme approvals process, where time allows, although this process may need to be expedited.
 - In cases where it is necessary to make changes to supervisory arrangements for postgraduate research students, the College should aim to provide alternative supervision wherever possible. If this is not possible despite having undertaken reasonable endeavours, the College may request that the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee consider terminating supervision of the student as set out in Regulation 43 of the Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations
 - It is expected that, **for most programme closures, Schools will be able to identify options for students to continue their programme** (SCENARIOS A or B). If the School is not able to teach students until they complete their programme, and existing or new alternative programmes cannot be provided within the University, Schools should initiate conversations with the School and College leadership, including Head of School, Dean of Education, Head of College and Associate Principal, Students, in order to consider other scenarios.
3. **For any students who are not able to complete their programme, collect further student information** (e.g. visa status, fee status, scholarship status, students with disabilities and/or mental health issues, other protected characteristics). Where there are students who are not able to complete their programme, Schools should complete an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) in order to fulfil the University's statutory duty to assess the equality impact of applying its policies and practices. This should be completed following the University guidance and EqIA template (see Appendix 2). An example EqIA will be provided

in order to support Schools with this exercise, however it is important to note that the EqIA must address the issues relevant to each impact assessment.

4. **Complete Programme Closure Proposal Form**, which includes a risk assessment, and share with the College as soon as possible.

INITIAL STEPS FOR COLLEGES

STEP 1 – Engage with stakeholders outwith School

The College should identify a suitable senior colleague to lead this work and coordinate actions as necessary with the School. Colleges should engage with relevant stakeholders to complete their analysis in parallel with the initial steps for Schools (STEPS 1 and 2). Any risks identified must be included in the risk assessment as part of the *Programme Closure Proposal Form* before College review and sign off (STEP 3). The School and College leads should work together to agree on a briefing plan for colleagues across the University that need to be involved. Some of the discussions with stakeholders will be led by Schools, but Colleges should be prepared to input, assist and coordinate these where necessary. Colleges must take the lead on any discussions with Legal Services and any discussions regarding fee refunds to ensure a consistent approach across the University.

The following actions will only be necessary in some cases and should be completed as needed:

- **Engage with Legal Services:** Programme closures to new prospective students only should not require legal advice, unless there are complex individual cases or the closure to prospective students also involves the termination of a contract with a third party (e.g. an external partner within a collaboration). Colleges should seek advice from Legal Services where the risk is medium or high, or if there are unusual complexities not captured in Appendix 1 - Scenarios in relation to completion of programmes.
- **Identify any students who may be eligible for deposit/fee refunds, including cases where there is external funding / scholarships** (e.g. SAAS, employers, scholarship agencies, etc). Colleges should refer to the [Tuition Fee policies](#) to check eligibility (note: the Tuition Fee policies are under review with amendments expected in early 2026). Initial assessments may be made once the analysis of students on programme and plans for students' completion of programmes is complete (School STEP 2), but this is likely to be an iterative process as scenarios become clear and as students select their options for continuation / exit.
- **Collaborative programmes:** Programmes should be identified as collaborative / not collaborative at the initial stages of discussion, and may be internal or external collaborations:
 - **Internal collaborations (with Schools within UoE):** For programmes including courses delivered by other Schools (e.g. interdisciplinary programmes, Joint Honours degrees, intercalated degrees, etc.), Colleges should ensure that the necessary discussions have taken place with the relevant stakeholders in other Schools to discuss implications of closure and identify any risks as soon as possible.
 - **External collaborations (with other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) / partners):** For collaborative programmes delivered with other HEIs or partners (e.g. Dual or Joint degree awards), Schools should check the end date of the current the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) and consult the MoA for any provisions covering early closure of the programme, for example, any requirements for giving notice. Schools and Colleges should consider whether it is possible to wait until the end date of the MoA and then not renew it, rather than end the MoA prematurely, factoring in any requirement to give notice of intention not to renew. Where considering ending the collaboration before the stated end date, the College should consult on this with Legal Services and Edinburgh

Global. Schools and Colleges should agree on an approach to communications with partners, as the approach will vary between collaborations.

- Colleges should follow the [termination process for collaborative programmes](#) as appropriate
- **Programmes with PSRB and/or other external stakeholders** - Programmes with PSRB and/or other external stakeholders (e.g. industrial partners, placement hosts, study abroad partners) should be identified at the initial discussions. Schools and Colleges should agree on an approach to communications with PSRB and external stakeholders, as the approach will vary between programmes.
- As noted above, it is expected that, **for most programme closures, students on that programme will be able to complete their programme** (SCENARIOS A or B). If it is not possible for some students to complete their programme, for example because of AIS or planned/unplanned early closure, Colleges should engage with Schools to consider further scenarios. Where there are potential alternative, existing programmes in other Schools into which such students may be able to transfer, Colleges must ensure that early discussions take place and an agreement is reached with the new hosting School.
- In cases where students are not able to continue their programme, and there are no suitable existing, or new, alternative programmes within the University, Colleges must engage with the School and College leadership, including Head of School, Dean of Education, Head of College and Associate Principal, Students, in order to consider other scenarios, including **potential alternative programmes at other Higher Education Institutions**.

STEP 2 – Complete risk assessment

Colleges should input to the risk assessment, as part of the *Programme Closure Proposal Form* as necessary, based on the engagement with internal/external partners, advice from Legal Services (where required), and any other stakeholders.

COLLEGE FINAL SIGN OFF

STEP 3 – College review and sign off

Prior to the review and sign off of any *Programme Closure Proposal Form*, the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent Committee (with delegated responsibility by the Head of College), should ensure that the necessary discussions have taken place with stakeholders within the School, e.g. Head of School, Director of Teaching, Programme Director, Cohort Lead, Course Organisers. In many cases, the programme closure will have already been approved by the School Board of Studies. This information should be clear *Programme Closure Proposal Form*, if not, the College should request further information. 'Low risk' closures may be signed off by the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent Committee, with any closures identified as 'medium risk' or 'high risk' escalated to the Head of College and the Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students.

The review should recommend one of the following outcomes:

- a. **Close programme to prospective students** (meaning there are plans for completion of programme by existing students and any identified risks are accepted)
- b. **Close programme to prospective and current students** (this may or may not include conditions, such as amendments needed to the teach-out plans, further risk mitigation needed, further advice from Legal Services needed)

- c. **Do not proceed with programme closure; the programme may be kept ‘under review’ if necessary.** In these cases, the programme may still be considered ‘under review’ and should be reviewed at the next College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent.

NEXT STEPS FOR SCHOOLS

STEP 4 – Communications to students on programme

Plan communications to students on programme, according to relevant student status and whether all of current cohort will have the opportunity to complete their programme of study, adapting template communications as needed. A separate communications plan will be needed for students on AIS who may not be checking their UoE email. All students must be made aware that it may not be possible to grant any further AIS, per section 6.2 of the [Authorised Interruption of Study policy](#), once a decision has been made to close a programme. Draft communications should be shared with key staff prior to being sent to students (Directors of Students, Programme Directors, Cohort Leads, Teaching Office staff, Student Support teams). Schools should check with Student Support teams whether there are any wellbeing concerns prior to communications being sent out to students.

For programme closures that are medium/high-risk, or where there are medium/high-risk individual cases, Legal Services should review any final communications before they are sent to students. Communications with students must be coordinated by the member of staff leading this work within the School. Individual communications with students need to be kept to a minimum and shared with relevant colleagues.

Colleges should update degree finder pages for programmes closing, as well as any other programmes affected by the closure (e.g. where there are changes to compulsory/elective courses). Communications should be sent to prospective students as soon as the applications are closed and/or the degree finder pages have been updated.

STEP 5 – Meet with students, process transfers, on-going student support where student is unable to complete their programme

Staff in schools should arrange meetings with students to discuss and advise on options available. For low-risk scenarios, meetings should be arranged with Student Advisers, likely in groups. For medium/high-risk scenarios, meetings should be arranged with Programme Directors / Directors of Students or other nominated senior staff.

Staff should present students with a clear set of options and should provide a contact person who can answer their questions in order to support them when considering their options. Students should be provided with a reasonable timeframe to make their decisions. Schools should process requests for any internal UoE programme transfers via EUCLID.

Schools should confirm the outcomes of students’ decisions with their College Office:

- i. **Students who will complete their programme (modified or not)**
- ii. **Students who will continue on programme until they complete a lower exit award**
- iii. **Students who will withdraw immediately with the highest exit award available to them:** Schools must arrange for Boards of Examiners to confirm the degree award and classification for each student.
- iv. **Students who will transfer to another existing or new UoE programme:** the list of students who have chosen to transfer to an alternative degree within UoE.

- v. **Students with any other outcomes (see Appendix 1 - Scenarios in relation to completion of programmes)**

NEXT STEPS FOR COLLEGES

STEP 4 – Identify prospective students and send communications

In cooperation with Schools where necessary, College admissions teams should identify a complete list of prospective students, and plan communications using template communications, according to status, and adapted as necessary

- Offer holders
- Applicants for which an offer has not yet been made
- Deferred entry prospective students (where offer has been made)
- Prospective students on other degree programmes affected by closure, e.g. for programmes where there is an overlap in courses with programmes which are closing, e.g. if there are Economics courses no longer running which would have been elective courses for Business programmes, the applicants to the Business programme should be informed of the reduced choice of electives

Communications and Marketing (CAM) provide some sample text for offer holders and applicants based on previous communications, which colleagues can use and adapt for their own particular needs.

[Sample text - programme changes and closures](#)

STEP 5 – Set up new generic / umbrella degrees and close programmes to prospective students

Where new generic / umbrella degrees have been identified as part of the scenarios in relation to completion of programmes (STEPS 1-2), Colleges should follow standard steps for the approval and set up of new programmes (although the timeline may need to be expedited) and request Student Systems to set up these new programme codes.

Schools should process requests for any internal UoE programme transfers via EUCLID. If the programme is in a different School, the College should ensure that the necessary discussions have taken place and an agreement has been reached with the new hosting School, prior to the transfer of any students. In cases where students do not have the option to continue their studies within UoE, the School and College leadership teams should identify potential alternative Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at which students may be able to continue their studies, and the College will manage this process in consultation with Legal Services. The University may or may not be involved in facilitating the transfer of students, and staff within Schools **must not** initiate any formal or informal conversations with other HEIs about students transferring institutions.

Colleges should take the necessary actions for closing programmes to prospective students, once the necessary communications have been sent. This includes:

- notifying Student Systems and SRA of closure of programmes for prospective students
- updating degree finder pages and ensuring any other University/College/School webpages are updated
- adjusting student intake targets and forecasting, following discussion with the School, and notifying Governance and Strategic Planning (GaSP) of any updates to these

Colleges should continue to lead on any discussions with Legal Services and other stakeholders regarding any 'medium' or 'high' risk programme closures, as well as complex individual student cases.

EVALUATION (COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS)

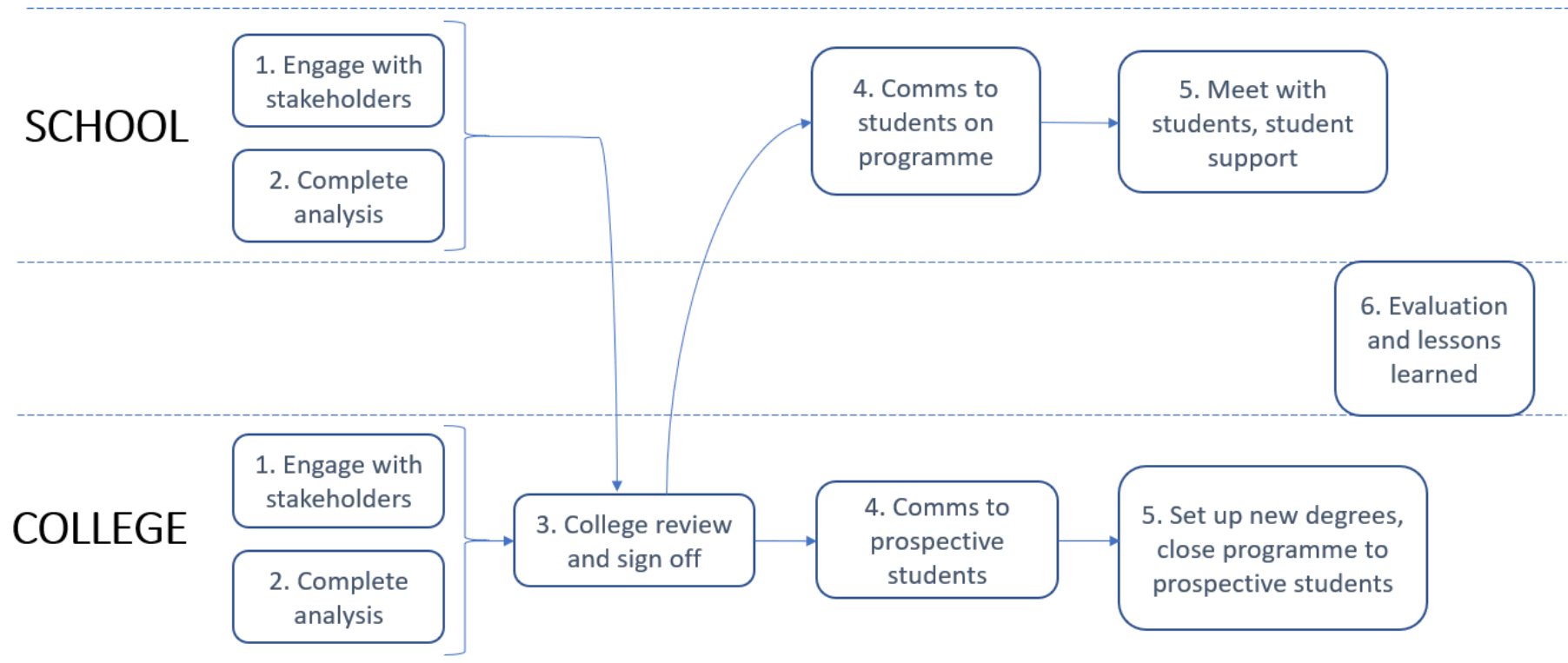
STEP 6 – Evaluation and lessons learned

Throughout the process of programme closures (particularly for closures at scale or other high-risk closures), Colleges and Schools should consider how to record lessons learned, and report these back to the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent Committee, and the College Education Committee for sharing best practice and learning going forward.

The evaluation stage should include consideration of the following:

- How effective were the criteria or mechanisms used for identifying programmes for closure?
- Were there unanticipated issues that should be included in this Guidance or in the Programme and Course Approval and Management policy?
- Were risks adequately identified and mitigated?
- Was the division of responsibilities between Schools and Colleges appropriate?
- Were there any lessons learned that should inform our practices going forward?

Process overview



APPENDIX 1. Scenarios in relation to completion of programmes

Scenario from programme perspective	Scenario from student perspective	Students complete programme	Eligible for refund	Risk level (L/M/H)
A. Teach out with no DPT modifications. Programme is closed for prospective students but teaching continues for students on programme, without modifications to DPT, until completion by final cohort	A1. Student continues on programme and completes programme by end date	Yes	No	Low
	A2. Student unable to complete programme due to e.g. AIS, repeat years, withdrawal	No – exit with lower / no degree award	May be yes or no on case-by-case basis, in line with fee policy for withdrawal or interruption of studies	Medium
B. Teach out with DPT modifications. Programme is closed for prospective students but teaching continues for students on programme, with modifications to DPT, until completion by final cohort	B1. Student continues on programme, but with reduced range of courses, and completes programme by end date	Yes	No	Low
	B2. Student continues on programme, but does not complete programme due to e.g. previously agreed AIS, repeat years	No – exit with lower / no degree award	May be yes or no on case-by-case basis, in line with fee policy for withdrawal or interruption of studies	Medium
C. Programme closure at the end of the AY, with option for UoE internal transfer. Programme is closed for prospective and current students from next AY, with the option to transfer to another UoE programme. NOTE: the transfer may be to an existing programme or to a new generic/umbrella programme; it may be necessary to consider concessions to the DPT	C1. Student chooses to transfer to alternative, continuing programme within UoE	N/A – continues on alternative UoE programme	No – but fees charged on the replacement programme shall be no higher than the fees on the original programme of study	Medium/High (only becomes Low once student agrees to transfer)

	C2. Student chooses not to transfer to alternative, continuing programme, and exits with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	No	Medium/High
D. Programme closure at the end of the AY, with option to continue at alternative HEI. Programme is closed for prospective and current students from next AY, with no option to transfer to another UoE programme. Students have the option for an assisted transfer to a programme at another university	D1. Student chooses to transfer to alternative programme at another university	No	No	Medium/High
	D2. Student chooses not to transfer to alternative programme at another university, and exits with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	No	Medium/High
E. Programme closure at the end of the AY, with no option to complete. Programme is closed for prospective and current students from next AY, and there is no alternative programme to which students can transfer within or outwith UoE	E1. Student must exit with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	No	High
F. Programme closure during the AY, with option for UoE internal transfer. Programme is closed for applicants and for current students in current AY, with the option to transfer to another UoE programme. NOTE: the transfer may be to an existing programme or to a new generic/umbrella programme; it may be necessary to consider concessions to the DPT	F1. Student chooses to transfer to alternative, continuing programme within UoE	No – continues on alternative UoE programme	No – but fees charged on the replacement programme shall be no higher than the fees on the original	High
	F2. Student chooses not to transfer to alternative, continuing programme, and exits with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	Yes – refund fees for that academic year	High
G. Programme closure during the AY, with option to continue at alternative HEI. Programme is closed for applicants and for	G1. Student chooses to transfer to alternative programme at another university	No	Yes – refund fees paid for that academic year	High

current students in current AY, with no option to transfer to another UoE programme. Students have the option for an assisted transfer to a programme at another university	G2. Student chooses not to transfer to alternative programme at another university, and exits with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	Yes – refund fees paid for that academic year	High
H. Programme closure during the AY, with no option to complete. Programme is closed for prospective and current students in current AY, and there is no alternative programme to which students can transfer within or outwith UoE	H1. Student must exit with lower / no exit award	No – exit with lower / no degree award	Yes – refund fees paid for that academic year	High

APPENDIX 2. Relevant University and external policies and regulations

[Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy](#)

[Student Terms and Conditions](#)

[Authorised Interruption of Study policy](#)

[Equality Impact Assessment \(EqIA\)](#)

[Tuition Fee policies](#)

[Renewal and Termination Process of Collaborative Programmes \(External Partners\)](#)

[Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\) guidance & consumer law](#)

[CMA sample text - programme changes and closures](#)