

Guidance on course closures, major changes and implications for student progression

1 Background

1.1 Around three years ago the University introduced a [Course Closure Form](#). The form, which is submitted by Institutes to the Academic Portfolio Committee (now University Executive), is intended to ensure that the consequences of course closure is thought through, particularly in relation to students who are following 'non-standard' progression routes through programmes (eg because of part-time study, intercalation or re-assessment). In this way precept 9 of the QAA code of Practice: Programme approval review and monitoring is met:

In the event of a decision to discontinue a programme, measures are taken to notify and protect the interests of students registered for, or accepted for admission to, the programme.

1.2 Use of the course closure form is still variable across Institutes, with the result that APC receives many forms after the decision to close or not recruit to a course has already been taken and implemented. In some cases this is understandable as the decision is taken late in the day when recruitment has failed to establish a viable cohort for consecutive years.

1.3 In 2009/10 the decision was made to suspend recruitment to a number of courses run with partner colleges on the grounds of unviable student numbers. As course 'suspensions to first year recruitment', these decisions were not processed through the course closure process. In relation to a number of these courses, special arrangements had to be made for students who were required to re-take modules. There was no process for approval of these arrangements and in some cases they have been at a considerable cost to staff – both in the partner college and at the University.

1.4 Additionally it has also become apparent that where there are major changes (for whatever reason) to a course, this too may pose problems in relation to students who have failed module reassessments and are required to retake modules in order to continue, and the structure or content of the new programme is not comparable with the previous programme.¹

¹ The URF and PRF include the following which provide context for these proposals:

4.9 The University may change module provision without notice but will ensure that students who have legitimately registered for a named award will be able to follow an appropriate programme of modules to qualify for the named award.

12.7 A student who is required to undertake reassessment may not demand reassessment in elements which are no longer current within the course. However, the Board of Examiners may exercise its discretion in providing special arrangements where it is not practicable for students to be reassessed in the same elements or by the same methods as at the first attempt. Such arrangements shall be subject to the principle that an award is only made when a student has fulfilled the objectives of the course and achieved the required standard.

1.5 Responses to the problem of students being required to re-take modules which are not running have included:

- Finding alternative equivalent modules for the student to take, or
- Providing a programme of directed supported study for the student, or
- Permitting students to have a further re-assessment opportunity.

1.4 Clearly these responses have significantly different costs for both the University and/or partner institution, and also for the student – for example directed supported study will require an allocation of teaching hours, and the relative costs of reassessment as against re-taking a module are quite different for the student (which will be even more the case in the future). The question of equity in the treatment of students within a common set of assessment regulations also arises, as does the academic basis and authority of the decision.

2 Guidance

2.1 This paper establishes principles for dealing with the situation where students are required to re-take modules but the module is no longer running, so that students, partner institutions and course /staff teams are clear about the action to be taken, and decisions can be made on an equitable and transparent basis. It should be remembered that within the regulations, students may be required to re-take modules because they have failed two assessment opportunities, because they have failed to submit assessments or not met the attendance requirements of the module, or alternatively because they have submitted a successful claim of mitigating circumstances, or possibly because they have intercalated.

2.2 Principles

- 1 The principles of the academic regulations with respect to failure and reassessment opportunities must be applied fairly and equitably
- 2 The consequences of failure and the means by which a student can retrieve failure must be taken by the relevant examination board and recorded in the minutes
- 3 Where a student is required through application of the regulations, to re-take a module which is not running in the next academic year, the following decisions are open to an examination board:
 - a. To determine that the student should follow a specified alternative equivalent module (this should be the expected normal outcome)
 - b. To determine that the student should follow a personalised programme of supported, directed study, based on the module learning outcomes and leading to appropriate assessments
 - c. To offer the student the opportunity to transfer to a new or alternative equivalent course (particularly where the student may have failed a number of modules)
 - d. To exceptionally offer the student one further final re-assessment opportunity.

2.3 The Subject Assessment Board should make recommendations to the Board of Examiners in relation to each module failed. Since these are not normally subject to discussion, in the event that the recommendations are to vary the application of the regulations as at 2.2, this should be reported to, and confirmed by, the Board of Examiners. This means that the Board of Examiners can, if necessary, review the recommendation in the light of the full profile of student results. In the event that decisions made by the Subject Assessment and Examination Boards require amendment as a result of a late decision not to run a specific module, a revised decision must be made via Chair's action, if necessary involving the external examiner, and reported to the next meeting of the Board(s).

2.4 The Chair and officers of the Board of Examiners should be mindful of issues of transparency and equity (for students in relation to equality of opportunity and cost) in reaching decisions.

2.5 The Head of Registry Services should specifically report on this matter in the report to ASQEC on examination board minutes.

3 Management of course closure/suspension/major change by Institutes

3.1 Institute Quality Committees should review at their first meeting in each academic year, any courses that have suspended recruitment, are planned for closure or major review, and identify whether there are implications for continuing students.

3.2 Where courses are undergoing major change, the approval process must explicitly address transition arrangements for continuing students.

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