

COURSE APPROVAL PROCESS
for the
Discontinuation of Existing Programmes
Document CD04

Academic Quality, Standards and Conduct
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CD04: PROCESS FOR THE DISCONTINUATION OF EXISTING PROGRAMMES

1. General Approach

The course approvals process is predicated on a risk-based approach: those proposals posing greater risk to academic quality and standards, the student learning experience, institutional reputation or financial loss requiring greater scrutiny and higher levels of authority as the final point of approval. The purpose is to evaluate and confirm the final detail of all courses of study open to students. The formally approved version of any course is designated as the 'definitive document' forming the basis of the record in LUSI (Lancaster University Student Information).

Note that within the course approvals process and accompanying documents, 'course' is used to describe both programmes and modules. Where the context refers to only one of these, the relevant term (i.e. programme or module) will be used instead.

2. Categories of approval

The Course Approvals Process is aligned to the University's statutory and regulatory obligations in relation to quality and standards, and consumer protection rights. Categories of approval are further determined by the scope of the proposal, the breadth of scrutiny required, and the level of reputational, financial or organisational risk which the proposal may expose the University. There are three broad categories of approval.

a) New programmes

Which covers both new programmes and the introduction of new variants to existing programmes. Note that where new core or optional modules are being introduced *as part of a new programme*, these should be submitted alongside the programme proposal for scrutiny and approval.

b) Modification of existing provision

Which covers

- i) major modifications; being changes made to existing programmes or programme variants (including the introduction of new modules and substantial changes to existing module diets) or changes to core or optional modules
- ii) minor modifications; being changes to existing modules or programmes which fall outside the definition for major modifications.

c) Discontinuation of existing programmes (to which this process document refers)

Which covers the temporary suspension of recruitment to a programme or the permanent withdrawal of a programme from the academic portfolio.

The table below provides a summary of the programme discontinuation categories of approval and the final approval gateways. Note that in all cases, proposals begin with scrutiny at Department level before progressing on to Faculty and Institutional level where relevant.

Categories of Approval		Final Approval Gateway
Programme Discontinuations	• All programme suspension (including variants) • All programme laydown (including variants)	• Faculty • University Academic Dean

3. Discontinuation of Existing Programmes

3.1. Purpose

In order to protect the interests of applicants and students, the University has in place robust procedures for the discontinuation (i.e. permanent lay-down or temporary suspension) of any programme of study. Because of the contractual obligations between applicants and students and the University, no Department or Faculty may permanently lay-down a programme on its own authority. Proposals to temporarily suspend an existing programme of study must be approved by the Faculty, but proposals to permanently lay-down an existing programme of study must be approved by the University Academic Dean, acting on behalf of Senate and Council. This ensures that the interests of offer-holders, applicants with deferred places, and students who have intercalated from their studies are appropriately considered, informed and supported during any discontinuation procedure.

3.2. Principles

It is an agreed University principle that preference is given to cease recruitment and teach-out a programme, allowing all extant cohorts to follow the programme on which they registered. The University would support immediate closure of a programme only in emergencies, in which case the Student Protection Plan must be followed.

It is the responsibility of the Faculty to manage the teach-out period or suspension period once recruitment has ceased. All programmes subject to discontinuation should be monitored and reported through the Annual Programme Review (APR) process to verify that the quality of the provision and the student learning experience are being maintained. It is imperative that every effort must be made to support the remaining students registered on the programme until the conclusion of their studies.

A communications plan must be agreed with Marketing, Admissions and Registry to ensure that any offer holders, applicants with deferred places, or students who have intercalated, are informed of any decision with regard to their programme of study and the options available to them.

The recommendation to discontinue a programme must be made by the administering Department for that programme. In the case of joint, major/minor, and interdisciplinary courses, the administering Department must obtain the agreement of the partner Department(s) to the discontinuation. It is the responsibility of the Faculty to ensure that due process is followed and that all relevant colleagues are consulted before a programme discontinuation proposal is processed.

After three calendar years a suspended programme will be automatically laid down unless an application is made to reinstate it. For reasons of academic and administrative currency, suspended programmes will normally be subject to the process for the approval of new courses, which must be completed before recruitment begins.

The University reserves the right to close any programme which has not registered students for three years, unless the Department or Faculty is able to provide compelling evidence for future recruitment of significant numbers of students onto that programme. Departments and Faculties will be consulted where such programmes are identified.

3.3. Process

Proposals for the discontinuation of existing individual programmes include the completion of a **Discontinuation of Existing Programmes Form (CDA08a)**, evidence of internal and external consultation as necessary, and a teach-out plan where students are registered on the programme proposed for withdrawal.

For proposals for the discontinuation of existing multiple programmes under the same rationale for discontinuation, there is instead a bulk version of the **Discontinuation of Existing Programmes Form**

(CDA08b) which must be completed instead. This also includes evidence of internal and external consultation as necessary and a teach-out plan where students are registered on the programmes proposed for withdrawal.

In considering the proposals, approval gateways should be satisfied that they have been presented with sufficient evidence to assure them that the discontinuation is appropriate, that an impact assessment has been completed and risk appropriately mitigated, and, where the programme will be taught-out, that the student learning experience will be secured.

Note that proposals to discontinue programmes undergo three stages the course approvals process, being submissions to the Department, Faculty and Institutional approval gateways. In the event that a teach-out plan is required, the proposer may wish to consult with professional services to consider impacts, risks and to develop the teach-out plan.

3.3.1. Evidencing the proposal

3.3.1.1. Rationale

All proposals should be submitted on a **Discontinuation of Existing Programme Form (CD08a or CD08b)** and begin with a clear rationale for discontinuing a programme, setting out supporting the evidence, e.g. research that shows a decreasing market, or details of decreasing numbers recruited to the programme over recent years, key member(s) of staff otherwise engaged and unable to teach, etc. If the discontinuance is part of a wider plan for developing new programmes or revising the current portfolio of programmes in the subject area, this should be included within the evidence.

Proposals must also indicate the point from which the discontinuation will take effect (e.g. from October 20XX). *Please refer to Section 3.4 below for further information on programme discontinuation timescales.*

For suspensions, proposals should state how many academic sessions the programme will be suspended for, the maximum being three years, after which the programme will be automatically laid down.

3.3.1.2. Teach-out arrangements

The proposal should detail the arrangements for students registered on a programme, including those whose registration is interrupted and have not yet completed the programme, such as students who have deferred entry or have elected to intercalate. Such arrangements must encompass the following:

- that the standard of provision to current students will be maintained throughout their period of registration.
- that the previously stated learning outcomes of the programme will still be achievable by current students, even if the range of module choices is smaller or different.
- the options for current students in regard to transferring to another programme within the University or to another institution.

The University has a duty to ensure that students will not be disadvantaged by the discontinuation of a programme, therefore attention should be paid to planning teaching-out carefully. The arrangements for teaching out all remaining students on the programme should include:

- re-sit arrangements.
- arrangements to repeat failed modules.

- arrangements to repeat a year of study.
- arrangements for students who have interrupted their studies, or wish to do so.
- arrangements for part-time students on the programme.

3.3.1.3. Impact and benefits

The proposal should include a summary of how those affected by the discontinuation have been informed of the proposal and any consultation that has taken place, with an outline of their agreement to the proposal or their objections/concerns. The level of detail required in this section will depend on the nature and extent of the impact of the proposed discontinuation and whether anyone affected has expressed concerns or objections to the proposal. A key factor is the extent to which anyone could be disadvantaged by the discontinuation and how this will be mitigated. The following stakeholder must be taken into consideration:

- Administering department
- Other departments and services
- Current students
- Applicants

Should any additional resources be needed to ensure the continuing support of any student remaining on the programme, the programme team should include these in the proposal document.

3.3.2. Collaboration

Where the programme involves a collaborative partner, a clear plan should to be presented setting out the mechanisms for teaching-out any existing cohorts, either guaranteeing the involvement of the partner, or providing ways for students to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme without the partner's involvement. There would generally be exit and teach-out arrangements articulated in the partnership Memorandum of Agreement, and these should always be referred to in the first instance. For collaborative programmes, 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 programme will be managed (both administratively and academically where relevant) until remaining students complete their studies
- if any of the remaining students will receive a different professional recognition as a result of the discontinuation, e.g. no accreditation or affiliation
- how, if at all, the student's learning experience or qualification will change
- confirmation of the communications plan to applicants and students, including the partner's responsibilities.

3.3.3. Departmental approval

The Departmental approval gateway is charged with reviewing the detail of a proposal, checking that the proposal submission is complete and accurate, and should be satisfied that sufficient internal and external consultation and input has occurred. This is particularly true in the case of cross-Departmental or Faculty developments.

Having considered the proposal and reviewed the submission documents, the Departmental approval gateway may determine one of the following outcomes:

- to recommend or approve the proposal as presented
- to recommend or approve the proposal subject to conditions, or

- to reject the proposal

In the case of discontinuation proposals, the Departmental approval gateway will want to ensure that the proposal aligns with wider Department, Faculty or University plans and that appropriate steps have or will be taken to protect the interests of any applicants holding offers or students registered on the programme in question.

Once a decision regarding approval has been made, the outcome should be recorded on the **Discontinuation of Existing Programme Form (CD08a or CD08b)**, noting any observations, assumptions or conditions which contributed to the decision taken, and signed by the Chair of the Departmental approval gateway. Subject to satisfactory completion of any conditions or recommendations the proposal can then be passed to the Faculty approval gateway as the next stage in the approval process.

3.3.4. Faculty approval

The Faculty approval gateway is responsible for considering proposals from a strategic perspective, assessing each against Faculty and University objectives and strategies.

The Faculty approval gateway will assure itself that each discontinuation proposal provides a coherent and sound rationale and should be satisfied that students' academic experience will be secured, and that the curriculum, assessment, learning outcomes and learning resources can be maintained during any teaching-out period.

Consideration of discontinuation proposals should normally be through the Faculty Leadership Group (FLG) or an equivalent senior committee involving the Faculty Executive Dean.

In order to meet its responsibility, the Faculty approval gateway may invite the programme team to take questions during its deliberations. Where appropriate, a Joint Faculty Teaching Committee may be convened to execute the duties of the Faculty approval gateway.

Having considered the proposal and reviewed the submission documents, the Faculty approval gateway may determine one of the following outcomes:

- to recommend or approve the proposal as presented
- to recommend or approve the proposal subject to conditions, or
- to reject the proposal

Once a decision regarding approval has been made, the outcome should be recorded on the **Discontinuation of Existing Programme Form (CD08a or CD08b)**, noting any observations, assumptions or conditions which contributed to the decision taken, and signed by the Chair of the Faculty approval gateway. Subject to satisfactory completion of conditions or recommendations, proposals should then be passed to the Vice Chancellor's Office for final consideration by the University Academic Dean.

3.3.5. Institutional approval

The University Academic Dean has responsibility for final approval of all programme discontinuations, and in scrutinising the proposal must be satisfied that due process has been followed, with all prior approvals gateways completed, and that any risks associated with the proposed discontinuation have been, or will be, appropriately managed.

In arriving at a decision, University Academic Dean may meet with or converse with the programme team (or representative) to seek further information or clarification. The outcome will be one of the following:

- to approve the proposal as presented
- to approve the proposal subject to conditions, or
- to reject the proposal

Once a decision regarding approval has been made, the outcome should be recorded on the **Discontinuation of Existing Programmes Form (CD08a or CD08b)**, noting any observations, assumptions or conditions which contributed to the decision taken, and signed by the University Academic Dean on behalf of the University. The Faculty and programme team will be informed of the decision and LUSI updated as required.

3.3.6. Dormant programmes

In the event that:

- there are no students registered on the programme proposed for discontinuation, and
- the programme is not currently advertised or open to applications, and
- there are no applicants who have been made or accepted offers on the programme, and
- there are no deferred applications or intercalating students on the programme, and
- there is no impact from the discontinuance on other departments or faculties,

a written recommendation, signed by the relevant Associate Dean, to discontinue a programme can be submitted directly to the University Academic Dean rather than progressing the proposal through the full process.

For proposals for the discontinuation of dormant programmes, there is instead a very short, streamlined version of the **Discontinuation of Existing Programmes Form (CDA08c)** which must be completed instead.

3.3.7. Documentation Summary

The documents to support discontinuation proposals include:

- Discontinuation of Existing Programme Form (CD08a or CD08b or CD08c)
- Teach out plan*
- Evidence of internal consultation*
- External Examiner comments*

(* if required)

3.3.8. Confirmation of approval

The outcome of the approval process is confirmed to key stakeholders, including, but not confined to, all Departments, Faculties and partners involved in the delivery of the programme. For permanent programme lay-downs requiring University Academic Dean approval, Student Programmes Administration (SPA), Marketing and Recruitment, Admissions and International Development (RAID), Finance, Facilities, Library, ISS, the UK Visa Team, and Planning will all be notified. The Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager (QAEM) will circulate confirmation of approval and make appropriate amendments to the course record (LUSI).

3.3.9. Communication to applicants and students

These processes and the timeline for approval have been designed to ensure that applicants and students are not impacted by course modifications or discontinuations. However, in exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to implement a change which does affect these groups, in which case a communications plan must be adopted to ensure information has been disseminated and

the appropriate consent obtained. Such cases should always be discussed with the QAEM in the first instance.

3.4. Deadlines for approval

Proposals to discontinue programmes (whether to suspend or withdraw) need to consider marketing, recruitment and application timelines. This means that the suspension, and in particular withdrawal, of programmes should be made at least prior to the applicant cycle and preferably in time for the preparation of marketing materials.

For example, in order to have the listing of a programme removed from printed publications for marketing, the discontinuation of a programme would need to be approved two academic years preceding the point of approval, e.g. to halt entry from September 2026, confirmed final approval of the discontinuation would be required by September 2024 for an undergraduate programme and March 2025 for a postgraduate programme. Online marketing of the programme can be stopped at any point but consideration must always be given to potential applicants and therefore the Recruitment and Marketing team and the Admissions team should be consulted.

Occasionally and in very exceptional circumstances only, it may become necessary to discontinue a programme during the applicant cycle. Where this is the case, the administering Department and/or Faculty should alert the University Academic Dean to the issue as early as possible and the Recruitment and Marketing team must advise on what mitigations will be necessary to protect the interests of applicants and prospective applicants.