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**Policy for Withdrawing a Programme *or* Suspending Recruitment to a Programme**

This document sets out the policy for withdrawing a programme *or* suspending recruitment to a programme

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| AU-PASC-19-2422 | B |  | Louise Foster-Agg  Head of Undergraduate Admissions | Admission Strategy Steering Committee  Programme Approval Steering Committee  Senate  Graduate School Management Committee | 10th March 2020 (Chair’s Action), 13th July 2020  11th November 2019, 9th October 2020  20th November 2019  4th June 2020 |  |

1. **Scope**

This policy applies to all of Aston’s foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate taught, continuing professional development and postgraduate research programmes/areas, including those delivered by distance learning, on a part time basis, as a Degree Apprenticeship or with partner institutions (“programmes.”)

For the purposes of this Policy the same principles for withdrawing or suspending recruitment apply to ‘Research areas’ (for postgraduate research students) as apply to taught programmes, in order to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to offer-holders if a College were to discontinue an area of research. For the avoidance of doubt wherever the term ‘programme’ appears in this policy this will include ‘research areas’ for postgraduate research students. It should be noted, however, that for postgraduate research degrees the availability of suitable research expertise and/or individual supervision capacity is not within the scope of this policy and should be managed through the existing processes which are in place for applying to research degrees.

The suspension or withdrawal of any advertised programme should not be taken lightly as the University has a responsibility to potential applicants, applicants and offer-holders; responsibilities that are defined in consumer protection law[[1]](#footnote-1) .

Proposals to withdraw more than a single programme at any one time, may constitute a ‘reportable event’ to the Office for Students (OfS), which we would have to notify the OfS about BEFORE we took any action. Any requests of this nature will be referred to the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement for further advice in the first instance.

1. **Definitions**
   1. A request to withdraw a programme is a *permanent* step to remove a programme from being offered by the University. Withdrawal of a programme is an appropriate course of action if the College is certain that the programme will not run in subsequent academic years. If a programme is withdrawn and the College subsequently decides that it would like to recruit to that programme, the programme will need to be re-approved; please see the policy for the [approval of new programmes](https://www2.aston.ac.uk/clipp/quality/a-z/prog-approval) for further information.
   2. Suspension of a programme is a *temporary* measure. Suspending recruitment to a programme may be an appropriate course of action where there is, for example, a short-term resourcing reason for the programme being unable to run or to allow a programme team to revaluate the programme’s purpose or content. Programmes can normally be suspended for a maximum of two years, to ensure the continuing validity of the programme content. If a programme is suspended and does not recruit at all for two years then it needs to be re-approved; please see the policy for the [approval of new programmes](https://www2.aston.ac.uk/clipp/quality/a-z/prog-approval).
2. **Applicants and Offer Holders**
   1. Due to the impact on individual applicants and any partner institutions as well as the legal and reputational impact of suspending/withdrawing a programme once offers have been made, requests to suspend/withdraw a programme should normally have been approved one academic year in advance of the programme’s planned start date/next recruitment (see timescales in 6.2 below.)
   2. It is very unlikely that a proposal to suspend/withdraw a programme will be approved if there are already applicants to and offer-holders for the programme; in particular, applicants accepting offers have entered into a contract with the University and the programme should continue to be delivered wherever possible.
   3. If a College is proposing to suspend/withdraw a programme which already has offer-holders, the College needs to provide a risk assessment in relation to the risks of closing a programme (and also identify if there are risks of the programme staying open). The risk assessment should be provided in section 9 of the Suspension of Recruitment/Withdrawal of Programme Form. This should include details of how any claims of breach of contract will be handled and what provision has been made to deal with this.
   4. In exceptional circumstances, and where a case to suspend recruitment to/withdraw a programme has been approved by the College and by the University, the Admissions Team will advise applicants and offer-holders. Other stakeholders, such as the students’ employers and placement providers, will be advised by the relevant University team[[2]](#footnote-2), as soon as is reasonably possible. Applicants and offer-holders will be provided with information by the University’s Admissions Team to help them make an informed decision on their future course of action. If recruitment to a programme is to be suspended/withdrawn this may include transfer of their application to another programme within the University or to another institution. The Marketing Team will also ensure that any marketing and publicity material is revised and the Admissions Team will advise UCAS as soon as is reasonably possible.
   5. All communications with prospective students, applicants and offer-holders relating to suspension/withdraw of a programme must only be undertaken by the Admissions Team who will liaise with the University’s General Counsel , Director of Student and Academic Services and Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement as appropriate and with other external organisations such as UCAS.
3. **Current students**

Where there is a proposal for a programme to be withdrawn it is expected that the subject area will make arrangements to ‘teach out’ current students to ensure the programme of study can be completed by all the students currently enrolled on the programme, or, in exceptional circumstances, to use all reasonable endeavours to deliver a modified version of the same programme or transfer students internally to a similar programme, or support students in seeking another higher education provider to help them to continue their studies.

1. **Responsibility for Policy**

This Policy will be reviewed annually by the University’s CMA Steering Group, the Programme Approval Steering Committee (PASC), the Graduate School Management Committee and the Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee (ASSC.) It should be read in conjunction with the University’s Student Protection Plan.

1. **PROCESS FOR THE SUSPENSION/WITHDRAWAL OF PROGRAMMES**
   1. **Step One – Consultation with Admissions**

Where a College wishes to put forward a request to suspend/withdraw a programme, the Programme Director should initially speak to the Head of Undergraduate/Head of Postgraduate Admissions/PGR Admissions Manager or the relevant UG Admissions Manager (as appropriate) to establish the possible impact on individual offer-holders and on recruitment. In any cases where withdraw/suspension of a programme is being initiated by someone other than the Programme Director, the Programme Director should be consulted as part of the process at the earliest opportunity. Depending on the nature of the situation, the Admissions Team may also request that colleagues in Marketing/the International Office are consulted and may consult with the University’s General Counsel, Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Director of Student and Academic Services as appropriate. The following issues should be considered:

* Are there any current offer-holders for the programme? Consideration should be given to deferred applicants as well as applicants applying in the current application cycle.
* Is there any impact on applicants who are due to progress from pathway programmes? This may include applicants from the foundation year, from pre-masters programmes, articulation agreements or pathway programmes with schools/colleges.
* Do other Colleges within Aston, external partners or accrediting bodies need to be consulted?
* Can additional resource be put in place that would enable the programme to be offered as advertised?
* Can an alternative/replacement programme be offered?
* What is the level of current interest in the programme?
* Is this a collaborative programme? For collaborative programmes the Secretary to the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group (CPSG) should be notified and discussions may need to be initiated with the collaborative partner. There may be contractual or tax implications and partner marketing will need to be adjusted.
* Is there a particular impact on international recruitment?
* Any proposals to withdraw more than a single programme at any one time, may constitute a ‘reportable event’ to the Office for Students (OfS), which we would have to notify the OfS about BEFORE we took any action. Any requests of this nature will be referred to the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement for further advice in the first instance.

If the Programme Director wishes to suspend/withdraw the programme following discussion with Admissions, no further offers should be made at this stage in order to limit the impact on applicants.

Applicants should not be informed of the programme suspension/withdraw and the programme should not be withdrawn from the website/from publications/online application form/UCAS until Steps Two and Three below have been completed to ensure that applicants do not receive information that has not yet been endorsed by the College/University. Any legal or reputational issues should be identified and addressed at this point.

* 1. **Timescales**
* Requests to suspend/withdraw a programme should normally have been approved one year in advance of the programme’s planned start/next recruitment date. For a September 2021 start this would mean that the programme suspension/withdrawal process outlined in this document should have been completed by 1September 2020. It is very unlikely that a proposal to suspend/withdraw a programme will be approved if there are already applicants to and offer-holders for the programme; in particular, applicants accepting offers have entered into a contract with the University and the programme should continue to be delivered wherever possible. In exceptional circumstances, and where a case to suspend recruitment to/withdraw a programme has been approved by the University, the University Admissions Team will advise applicants and offer-holders. Other stakeholders, such as the students’ employer and/or placement providers, will be notified by the relevant University team[[3]](#footnote-3), as soon as is reasonably possible. Applicants and offer-holders will be provided with information by the University’s Admissions team to help them make an informed decision on their future course of action. If recruitment to a programme is be suspended/withdrawn this may include transfer of their application to another programme within the University or to another institution. The Marketing Team will also ensure that any marketing and publicity material is revised and Admissions will advise UCAS as soon as is reasonably possible.
* As some of our applicants will need to have finalised their application choices by 15 October prior to the year of entry (for example medicine and applicants to Oxford/Cambridge), these timescales are in place to ensure that our obligations under consumer protection law are upheld and that we provide fair information and advice to all of our applicants.
* Where a programme has no offer-holders or applications in progress, it may be possible to suspend recruitment/withdraw a programme at any point during the application cycle, as long as there are not foundation/pathway/partnership students expecting to progress to the programme.
  1. **Step Two – College Endorsement**

Once discussion with the Admissions Team has taken place, the Programme Director should submit a request to suspend recruitment/withdraw a programme to the appropriate College Committee in the first instance. This could be either, College Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), Quality Sub-Committee (QSC), or Curriculum Development Sub-Committee (CDSC) depending on local arrangements, but must also include approval from the Senior Management Team (SMT). The details of the withdrawal/suspension should be provided in the **Suspension of Recruitment/Withdraw of Programme Form** (see Appendix One of this document.)

If the College endorses the withdrawal/suspension, written evidence should be provided in Section 14 of the form. If more than one College is involved, the withdrawal should be endorsed by both College. For example, if there are any shared modules with another programmes evidence should be given of their continued viability.

* 1. **Step Three – University Endorsement**

If the College endorses the suspension/withdrawal of the programme, the following steps should be taken:

* *Collaborative Programmes -* As soon as the intention to withdraw is known, the Secretary to the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group (CPSG) should be notified and discussions initiated with the collaborative partner via CPSG.The signed Suspension of Recruitment/Withdraw of Programme Form must be provided to CPSG for approval before the steps below are followed.
* *Research degrees/areas –*Graduate School Management Committee should be informed at the same time as PASC if a College decides to recommend withdrawal or suspension of a programme

If the programme is not collaborative (or following CPSG approval):

* If the College endorses the suspension/withdrawal, a signed copy of the Suspension of Recruitment/Withdraw of Programme Form should be submitted to PASC for approval. Chair’s Action may be possible. When the withdrawal/suspension of recruitment has been fully approved, the Secretary to PASC will advise the relevant College along with those areas listed in 6.5 below so that the programme details can be correctly updated on SITS to reflect that the programme will no longer be running and appropriate actions can be taken by the Admissions, Marketing, Recruitment and International teams. For programmes where a suspension of recruitment has been requested, the secretary to PASC will maintain a list of such programmes so that the University may monitor whether a programme may subsequently need re-approval.
  1. **Step Four - Implementation of decision**

Once approval is given by the University to suspend recruitment to a programme/withdraw a programme, the following actions should be taken:

**Marketing and Recruitment**

* Secretary of PASC to notify the Head of Undergraduate/Postgraduate Admissions/PGR Admissions Manager, Head of Student Recruitment, Head of International, Director of Marketing, Head of Postgraduate Communications/ Head of Undergraduate Communications as appropriate and the Marketing Manager for the owning College. For programmes involving an employer the team normally responsible for liaising with that employer should also be notified (e.g. APEC, Degree Apprenticeships, Careers, etc.)
* Applications should be closed on the Aston website or on UCAS (Admissions)
* Any other live advertising (e.g. digital campaigns) should cease
* The programme page should be removed from the website (Marketing) and the UCAS profile should be removed for Undergraduate Courses (Admissions.) Marketing should also give consideration as to whether any other marketing collateral needs to be removed (e.g. if there is a testimonial from a student studying the course, it should either be removed or the course reference changed to the subject area or College.)
* Marketing by any collaborative partners should cease (Marketing/CPSG/College)
* Student Recruitment/Outreach, the International Office and all staff attending fairs/events should be advised (Heads of SRO/International)
* Any external bodies involved in recruitment and delivery (for example Agents, QS or partners such as Keypath, Kaplan, NCUK etc., employers or placement providers) should be advised (International/Careers teams)
* Consideration should be given as to whether the course should appear in future publications (depending on whether there is an intention to recommence recruitment in the future.)

In all cases it is important to revise all marketing and recruitment material as soon as possible.

If the intention is to recommence recruitment in the future (i.e. suspension to recruitment has been requested), this should be clearly communicated at this stage to allow decisions about whether the programme should appear in future publications such as the prospectus. If a replacement or alternative programme is available this should be communicated to the stakeholders listed above.

**Admissions**

As programmes will normally be suspended/withdrawn a minimum of one year in advance, it is anticipated that there will be few or no applicants or offer-holders for the programme. If there are any applicants or offer-holders:

* All communications with applicants and offer-holders must be undertaken by admissions, following discussion with the University’s General Counsel and the Director of Student and Academic Services
* An alternative programme at Aston must be offered wherever possible. if Aston cannot provide an alternative programme, offer-holders should be advised on how they might transfer their application to another institution and directed to sources of advice on making that choice
* Any deposits or tuition fees must be refunded in full if the student decides not to come to Aston

Where appropriate, the University will liaise with UCAS to ensure that applicants are not disadvantaged.

* 1. **Step Five – Reactivation/Review (Suspension of Recruitment Only)**

Where recruitment to a programme has been suspended, a decision should be made by the College within two years as to whether a programme should be reactivated or withdrawn. Programme withdrawal should be actioned using the procedure outlined in this document. If a programme is to recommence recruitment, the appropriate College Senior Management Team Committee should endorse this. The College should ensure that the original rationale for suspending the programme has been adequately addressed and check whether any updates are required to the academic content of the programme. Programme Directors should consult with Admissions/Marketing to ensure that the timing of recommencing recruitment is in line with the requirements for updating the prospectus, open days or any other marketing activity. The secretary of PASC should maintain a list of programmes where recruitment has been suspended.

[Please see overleaf for Suspension of Recruitment/Withdrawal of Programme Form.]

Appendix 1

**SUSPENSION OF RECRUITMENT/WITHDRAWAL OF PROGRAMME FORM**

Sections 1 – 4, 6 – 12 and 14-15 must be completed for all requests

Section 5 is for suspension of recruitment requests only

Section 13 is for withdrawal of programme requests only

If any section is inapplicable, please insert N/A.

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| 1. **Programme name(s) and code(s). Please list below** |
| 1. **College contact:** |
| 1. **Are you intending to withdraw the programme *or* suspend recruitment to the programme?** |
| 1. **Proposed date of suspension of recruitment/withdraw of programme:** |
| 1. **For suspension of recruitment *only*, please indicate whether you intend to suspend recruitment for one or two years:** |
| 1. **Rationale for suspending recruitment/withdrawing the programme:** |
| 1. **Please describe the effect of the suspension of recruitment/withdraw of the programme on the planning and operational resources of the College(s) involved.** |
| 1. **Details of any other programmes affected by the suspension of recruitment/withdraw of the programme.** Please provide evidence of liaison with other Colleges if appropriate. |
| 1. **Are there any current offer-holders (including deferred offer-holders) on the programme?** If an accepted offer is rescinded there will be a risk that this could be viewed as breach of contract. The College needs to provide its **risk assessment** in relation to the risks of closing the programme which already has current offer-holders on (and also if there are risks of the programme staying open) and this should include how any such claims of breach of contract will be handled and what provision has been made to deal with this. |
| 1. **Are any applicants/students expecting to progress to this programme impacted?** Please outline if this will have an effect on progression from the Aston Foundation Year and/or from external partners. |
| 1. **Details of discussions with admissions.** Please confirm that discussions have been had with the appropriate UG/PGT/PGR Admissions Manager, particularly in relation to deferred offers. |
| 1. **Details of any discussions with the International Office.** Please confirm that discussions have been had with the International Office and outline below the outcome/plan for international students affected by the withdrawal. |
| 1. **For programme withdraw only, please describe the transitional arrangements for students currently on the programme.** |
| 1. **College Endorsement**   Has this proposal been discussed and approved at College level?   1. Meeting (please circle which): LTC QSC CDSC 2. Senior Management Team. Please sign to confirm:   Name of Chair:  Signature:  Date:  Date of Meeting:  **Please attach to this form the relevant section of the minutes of the meeting where this decision was discussed.** |
| 1. **Approval of Chair of PASC**   Has this document been discussed and approved at PASC? Please sign to confirm:  Name:  Signature:  Date: |

1. CMA, UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law Helping you comply with your obligations 12 March 2015 CMA33 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Depending on the nature of the situation this may be the Careers Service or by other employer-facing teams such as the Aston Professional Education Centre (APEC) or Degree Apprenticeship Team. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Depending on the nature of the situation this may be undertaken by the Careers Service or by other employer facing teams such as Aston Professional Education Centre (APEC) or Degree Apprenticeships Team. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)