

# Course Discontinuation Policy and Procedure

## 1. Introduction

The Australian Performing Arts Conservatory (APAC) Course Discontinuation Policy and Procedure sets out the purpose, scope, principles, policy statements, procedures and responsibilities relating to the discontinuation of courses.

The document is designed to underpin and structure APAC's approach to the discontinuation of courses, ensure compliance with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements, to foster good practice, and to appropriately assign responsibility and accountability.

Note that this Policy and Procedure does not cover cases of provider default, which are covered in the *Tuition Assurance Policy and Procedure*.

### 1.1. Purpose

The intent of this document is to provide a framework, reflecting underpinning principles, for the discontinuation of courses.

### 1.2. Scope

This Policy and Procedure applies to all staff, members of decision-making bodies and students.

### 1.3. Principles

- Discontinuation of a course is informed by APAC's mission and strategic goals;
- Discontinuation of a course is informed by an evidence-based assessment of its viability and of the opportunity costs of continuing to offer it,
- Decisions to discontinue a course should be transparent and timely; and
- In implementing and managing the discontinuation of a course, the interests of students enrolled in that course are of high priority and are not unnecessarily discounted.

## 2. Policy Statements

### 2.1. Discontinuation

- A number of factors, individually or collectively, may drive the decision to discontinue a course. These include but are not limited to:
  - changes to APAC's mission or strategic goals;
  - diminishing alignment of a course with APAC's mission or strategic goals;
  - falling or stalled student demand;
  - changes or expected changes in the labour market;

- the opportunity costs of continuing to offer the course, which might include impeding the offering a different and better course with higher demand;
  - increasing competition from other higher education providers;
  - the scale of investment required to increase competitiveness and market share;
  - rising costs of required facilities, infrastructure and other ancillary support;
  - changes to professional accreditation requirements;
  - increasing costs of meeting accreditation requirements;
  - concerns about longer term maintenance of academic standards,
  - concerns about finding suitable staff; and
  - government decisions impacting affordability, access or demand.
- Decisions to discontinue a course should not be delayed where it is evident that viability is marginal and that the prospects for turnaround are not reasonable.
  - Information on the website and in other electronic forms should be expeditiously updated to reflect the discontinuation and cessation or suspension of intakes. Other marketing materials with now incorrect or misleading information should be withdrawn. Student recruitment agents should immediately be informed.

## **2.2. Protecting the Interests of Students**

- Implementing and managing a decision to discontinue a course must take into account the interests of students and must include a strategy for ensuring that students who are enrolled in the course are able to complete the course, or a similar course, without unreasonable disadvantage.
- APAC will maintain course discontinuation agreements, approved by the Academic Board, for all its courses with reputable providers offering similar courses to protect students in an instance where APAC is unable to teach out a course or offer an alternative.
- The decision to discontinue a course should not result in the erosion of the quality of provision for students, including in the achievement of learning outcomes or of academic standards.
- Decisions to discontinue a course, including the rationale for discontinuation, should be communicated clearly to all stakeholders as soon as is feasible once the decision is made.

## **3. Procedure**

### **3.1. Making the Decision**

- The decision to discontinue a course is made by the Board of Directors, after consideration of relevant and detailed evidence and advice from the Academic Board, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Director of Higher Education (DoHE), and decision-making and advisory groups. The Board of Directors may also seek advice from the Course Advisory Committee,

other staff, or relevant external experts. Where the Board of Directors requires additional evidence or analysis it may delegate a member of the senior management team to oversee its collation and provision.

- A recommendation to discontinue a course, including the evidence that motivates the recommendation, may be made to the Board of Directors by the CEO, the Director of Higher Education, or the Academic Board. Consideration of discontinuing a course may also arise directly from the monitoring and review of aspects of APAC's performance by the Board of Directors.
- Before deciding to discontinue a course or to recommend its discontinuation, consideration should be given to alternative options, such as making significant changes to the course guided by an external review and transition plans (if required) before a proposal for discontinuation is finalised.
- Once the decision to discontinue is made there should be no new intakes of students into the course and the marketing or promotion of the course should cease. Where the decision-making process is likely to be protracted, for reasons such as conducting a review of the course, student intakes should be suspended.

### **3.2. Communicating the Decision**

- Once a decision to discontinue a course is approved by the Board of Directors:
  - the CEO or delegate will notify The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in writing no later than fourteen (14) days after the day the decision was made of APAC's decision to discontinue the course;
  - The Director of Higher Education will notify any relevant professional accrediting bodies of the decision to discontinue the course where required;
  - affected current students and prospective students will be notified by email within five (5) business days.
- The notification to current students includes:
  - the rationale for the decision and a link to this Policy and Procedure;
  - the duration of the teach-out period;
  - options other than remaining enrolled during the teach-out period;
  - details of face-to-face meetings with APAC staff to obtain information and advice; and
  - options for seeking individual support, information and advice.

- The notification to prospective students who have been issued an offer but have not yet commenced will be contacted (and their agent if applicable) and notified of the change. These prospective students will be given the opportunity to:
  - commence the current course being discontinued if the student can complete the course by the teach out date;
  - transfer into an alternative course provided by APAC of similar Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) standing; or
  - withdraw from APAC to continue the course at an alternative provider. Prospective students who decide to withdraw from APAC may be entitled to a refund of any funds paid in accordance with the International Student Refund Policy and Procedure or the Refund Policy and Procedure for Higher Education Domestic Students.
- Information on the website and in other electronic forms should be expeditiously updated to reflect the discontinuation, and cessation or suspension of intakes. Other marketing materials, containing now incorrect or misleading information, should be withdrawn. Student recruitment agents should immediately be informed.

### **3.3. The Discontinuation Plan**

- The discontinuation plan is the application of a general framework, as set out below, to the particular case of discontinuation. The Director of Higher Education, together with the relevant Head of Discipline (HoD), calibrates the framework to the particular case.

#### **3.3.1 Teach-Out**

The core of the discontinuation framework is provision for the teach-out of the course by APAC.

Where teach-out is likely to extend beyond the current accreditation period for the course, APAC will seek to secure from the accreditation authority and extension to accreditation to cover the teach-out period. This process is initiated by the Director of Higher Education.

- The length of the teach-out period is determined by the number of teaching periods required for the last intake into the course to complete the course in standard duration. That number is then doubled.
- The length of the teach-out is not extended for individual students who seek leave of absence during the teach-out period.
- Where there are elective units within the course, APAC may reduce the number offered to the minimum required to enable course completion.
- Arrangements allow students to meet the learning outcomes of the course being discontinued and do not lead to a reduction in the level of resources, services and support to students in the teach-out.

- The structure of the teach-out enables international students to complete the course within the duration of their existing student visa, provided that the student maintains satisfactory progress.
- An enrolment plan is developed for each student to enable the most expeditious completion time given their circumstances, and with no requirement that a student enrol in more than a full-time study load in a teaching period. Enrolments are monitored on an on-going basis to allow timely intervention and advice.
- If there are any students remaining at the end of the teach-out period, then APAC will manage these on a case-by-case basis.

### **3.3.2 Alternative APAC Courses**

The framework provides for the voluntary transfer of students from the course scheduled for discontinuation to other APAC courses.

- The Director of Higher Education organises information and advice sessions with students who may have an interest in transferring to another APAC course.
- Students wishing to continue exploration of this option are provided with enrolment plans, tailored to their particular circumstances, which set out credit transfer from the original course to the new course and which map out the sequence of units that would need to be completed to meet the requirements for the new course.

### **3.3.3 Alternative Courses with Other Providers**

The framework provides for the voluntary transfer of students from the course scheduled for discontinuation to a course offered by another provider.

- The Director of Higher Education will proactively identify comparable courses at other providers which may be of interest to students, and will make contact with those providers to discuss the possibility of transfer.
- The Director of Higher Education organises information and advice sessions with students who may have an interest in transferring to a course offered by another provider, to indicate options identified and to determine if students have identified other options.
- APAC will assist, if requested, students in negotiating the transfer process.

## **3.4. Complaints and Appeals**

Affected students who are not satisfied with arrangement outlined in the discontinuation plan may make a complaint under the *Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

## **4. Responsibilities**

### **4.1. The Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors is responsible for:

- Assuring itself that there is framework in place for managing the discontinuation of a course; and
- Determining that a course will be discontinued.

### **4.2. Academic Board**

The Academic Board is responsible for:

- the review of proposed course discontinuation plans in order to provide endorsement to the Board of Directors.

### **4.3. The Director of Higher Education**

The Director of Higher Education is responsible for:

- calibrating, in partnership with the relevant Head of Discipline, the general course discontinuation framework to the particular case of discontinuation;
- managing the process of securing any required accreditation extension from the accreditation authority;
- ensuring that the discontinuation decision is appropriately communicated; and
- coordinating student information and advice sessions; and proactively contacting other providers offering comparable course to discuss the possibility of student transfer.

## **5. Relevant Documents**

- APAC Business Continuity Plan
- APAC Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure
- APAC International Student Refund Policy and Procedure
- APAC Refund Policy and Procedure for Higher Education Domestic Students
- APAC Tuition Assurance Policy and Procedure
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Material Change Notification Policy

## 6. Definitions

- **Course** is an approved sequence of study leading to the conferral of a higher education award.
- **Teach-out Period** is the period of time during which currently enrolled students are able to complete their course.
- **Unit** is a discrete unit of study with its own name, code and value that makes up part of a course.

## Version Control and Document Owner

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