Appendix 1. PROGRAMME APPROVAL, PERIODIC REVIEW AND CLOSURE PROCESSES

1. Introduction

1.1 The University takes a risk-based approach to programme approval, periodic and other review processes. This means the processes are tailored so that they are appropriate and proportional for the level of risk associated with the proposal. Periodic reviews are conducted on the same basis as initial approval, but must also include an evaluation of the quality of a programme since its last approval point, informed by student feedback and student outcomes. This will include a review of the cumulative annual monitoring reports.

1.2 A schedule of programme approval and review activity is agreed by Strategic Portfolio Group annually taking into account the following:

- the University's Portfolio Development Plan;
- the business case for new programmes in line with strategic objectives and market opportunities;
- the emergence of any risks to quality and standards;
- consideration of how to manage large scale or institutional changes to programmes, e.g., changes to credit structure of unit size;
- any intelligence indicating the need for an early review based on stakeholder feedback or new internal/external requirements;
- a deferral of a review from the academic year in which it is due.

1.3 When finalising the programme approval and review schedule, consideration will be given to the proposed start date of new programmes and for revised versions of existing programmes. This is to ensure there is sufficient lead time for appropriate marketing, recruitment and development activities, and to assess the potential impact(s) on different student groups (applicants, offer holders and students).

1.4 Where a Faculty wishes to defer a programme review, it must apply to Strategic Portfolio Group for an extension to the programme's period of approval. Before a deferral request is presented, a 'health check' on the programme will be carried out by Academic Quality. This will normally involve scrutiny of the latest external examiner report(s) and reports and action plans from the latest Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review. If the programme benefits from professional accreditation, the programme team must demonstrate that the relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) supports the deferral request (i.e. it would not jeopardise the programme's accreditation status).

2. Process

Introducing a new programme

2.1 New programme developments are normally guided by the Portfolio Development Plan, which is shaped by BU's strategic objectives and informed by market opportunities. The Strategic Portfolio Group is responsible for developing and maintaining this plan. Faculties are commissioned to develop priority initiatives aligned with the plan.

2.2 **All new programme proposals** must be approved by the Strategic Portfolio Group, based on the Programme Development Form completed by the faculty and signed off by Faculty Executive/Doctoral College. Strategic Portfolio Group will consider the business case and points below for each proposal:

- the programme's fit with the University's Portfolio Development Plan;
- the framework for delivery in relation to the BU proposition;
- the programme's alignment with BU's strategy as outlined in BU2035;
- evidence of a viable market as provided by the BU Market Research team;
- the resource requirements for the programme via a Course Costing form;
- any other information requested by Strategic Portfolio Group to demonstrate the suitability of a proposal.

2.3 Strategic Portfolio Group operates a two-stage approval process for new programme developments:

- **Stage 1:** Initial notification should be made using the *Programme Development Form.* The

Strategic Portfolio Group will conduct an initial assessment of the proposal to determine if the proposal should be developed further. Completed forms should only be submitted to Strategic Portfolio Group once the Faculty Executive confirms that the programme proposal is ready for consideration.

- **Stage 2**: If the proposal is supported at Stage 1, the faculty will be invited to provide more detailed information, including Market Research (in collaboration with the Marketing and Communications) and a completed *Course Costing Form (*in collaboration with Finance and Planning*)*. Where non-standard entry requirements are identified, these should be submitted to Admissions for approval using the *Entry Requirement Approval Form*. The Strategic Portfolio Group will then review this supplementary information. It is the responsibility of Strategic Portfolio Group to agree what is required in order for an appropriate discussion to take place and faculties may be asked to provide any other additional information at this point to support consideration of the proposal.

2.4 Approval at Stage 2 marks the formal commencement of the approval process. The *Programme Development Form* will be included in the Briefing and Resources document for the External Panel meeting.

2.5 Where a new award of the University is requested, this must be approved by Senate following Strategic Portfolio Group and the award subsequently included in *2A – Awards of the University: Policy*.

2.6 When, through programme review, a faculty wishes to close an existing programme and replace it with a new programme at the same level and similar subject, the existing programme will need to be closed, and the new programme to replace it approved through the standard processes outlined above. In these instances, a *Closure Request Form* must be submitted alongside the *Programme Development Form* (see section 4 for further details on the closure process).

Academic approval of a programme / review of an existing programme

A diagram of the Stages for approval, review and closure can be found on page 8, 9 and 10.

2.7 **Initial Planning meeting:** for new programmes, this is held at the start of the process after Strategic Portfolio Group has approved the programme development proposal. For existing programmes, this will be initiated after Strategic Portfolio Group has confirmed the annual schedule for review. A date for the Initial Planning meeting will be agreed between the relevant School and Academic Quality. The meeting will be led by Academic Quality, and it is intended to support faculties by providing information on the programme approval or review procedures. This includes guidance on documentation requirements; key external considerations, such as compliance with consumer protection and expectations set by the Office for Students (OfS); and an opportunity to discuss any specific requirements relevant to the approval/review. The Doctoral College will lead on the initial planning meeting for any new Standard Research Degree programmes and PhDs by publication. It is recommended that attendees include the following:

- Head of School or senior representative of the Doctoral College as appropriate
- Programme leader(s) (and other members of the team if appropriate);
- Link Tutor (for approval/reviews with partners);
- Academic Quality.

Other members of staff may attend as appropriate.

2.8 Where there is more than one approval/review taking place within the same school, one initial planning meeting will usually be arranged to cover all of the programmes within that school.

2.9 **Nominating external panel members:** external panel members (EPMs) from part of the programme approval or review panel, providing a level of independence that is important to support decision-making and ensure that quality and standards are being met. Normally, two EPMs are appointed: at least one should be an academic subject expert, and one member should be from industry or professional practice. Faculties are responsible for nominating appropriate EPMs using the *Evaluation panel composition and external panel member nomination form.* Completed nomination forms should be submitted to Academic Quality as soon as possible after the initial planning meeting, and no later than the agreed deadline. This is normally 8 weeks in advance of the external panel meeting.

2.10 **Faculty approval** is overseen and led by the Associate Dean for Education and Student Experience in each Faculty or their nominee, or by the Doctoral College in the case of Standard Research Degrees and PhDs by Publication. Academic Quality is able to provide advice to the Faculty/Doctoral College as required. The purpose of Faculty approval is to confirm that programmes, whether new or undergoing review, and their associated documentation (e.g., Briefing and Resources Document, Programme Specification, Unit Specifications; full list provided below) are ready for final scrutiny by an External Panel.

- The approach to Faculty approval should be proportionate to the perceived level of risk associated with the development. Faculties have flexibility to define an approach suitable for its own requirements e.g. informal face to face meetings, or approval by correspondence.
- The Link Tutor will normally participate in arrangements for Faculty approval to support programme teams for partnership provision.

2.11 **External Panel meeting:** this involves convening a panel to evaluate all new and existing programmes to ensure they meet the requirements for academic standards and provide high-quality learning opportunities. Further information on the purpose of the external panel meeting is available in 4C - Panel Members for Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Procedure.

2.12 **External Panel membership:** Academic Quality, on behalf of Education and Student Experience Committee, is responsible for appointing the approval or review panel for the External Panel meeting. The level of scrutiny required and the size of the panel will depend on the scale and scope and the perceived or actual risk associated with the programme(s).

2.13 A panel will normally comprise:

- at least one, but normally two internal and independent panel members from QAEG (one of whom will chair the meeting);
- at least one or more academic subject experts independent of BU;
- an independent panel member from industry or professional practitioner from the relevant field (a requirement for work based learning awards, including Foundation degree or Degree Apprenticeship evaluation events);
- PSRB representative(s), if appropriate;
- an independent representative from the student body
- a representative from Academic Quality, who co-ordinates the meeting and is the main point of contact between the parties involved
- independent representatives from the Research Degree Committee and the Research Degrees Committee (for Standard Research Degrees and PhDs by publication);

Panel composition, appropriateness of membership and any permissible variations to this will be approved by the Head of Academic Quality or their nominee. Further information about the roles of internal and external panel members is provided in 4C - Panel Members for Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Procedure.

2.14 **Documentation requirements:** for the External Panel meeting the following documents will normally be required. Faculties are responsible for preparing the documentation for an external panel meeting. The Academic Quality team will advise on the timeline for submission, which is usually at least 3 weeks prior to the scheduled meeting date:

- Briefing and Resources document
  - outlines the scope of the programme and the context;
  - demonstrates that the programme has been designed in line with current internal and external frames of reference as set out in 2B - Programme Structure and Curriculum Design Characteristics: Policy;
  - outlines the resources available to support the programme;
  - for programme reviews: evaluates the delivery of the programme and provides an overview and rationale for any major changes.
- Programme Specification

- is the defining document for each programme and as such provides a summary of key information.
- it may be used by students and by applicants when choosing their programme of study.
- it defines the aims, intended learning outcomes (ILOs), structure, credits, regulations, locations of delivery, mode of study and awards that may be conferred.

- Unit Specifications

  - defines a unit of study in terms of aims, intended learning outcomes (ILOs), content, learning, teaching and assessment methods and learning resources.
  - Unit Specifications are used by academic staff, students and external examiners.
  - The combined collection of Unit Specifications presented to an External Panel meeting should clearly indicate any units that are already in approval in another programme.

- Completed Faculty Executive sign off and actions template (can be included as an appendix to the Briefing and Resources document);
- Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review (AMER): for periodic reviews, key aspects of the latest AMER (normally the programme action plan, department summary, external examiner(s) report)) and/or Research Degrees quality report as appropriate;
- Placement Handbook: all programmes with a placement component, including professional practice placements, must provide a Placement Handbook. The Placement Handbook may follow a standard template developed by the Faculty or may be specific to the programme. For further information please see *4K – Placements: Policy and Procedure*.
- 8A – Code of Practice for Research Degrees and Programme Handbook where information relevant to postgraduate research students is not included in 8A or the programme specification (as appropriate).

2.15 The Academic Quality team will send the documentation to the panel ahead of the External Panel meeting. The External Panel meeting will consist of a number of meetings between the panel and different stakeholders involved in the programme(s). Depending on the number of programmes being considered, the meetings normally take place over one day and are held at the place of delivery. An *indicative event schedule* outlines the different components of the meeting. PSRBs will be involved as needed under their own requirements.

2.16 **External Panel meeting outcome:** the panel will assess whether a programme meets each of the key expectations of quality and standards. The maximum period of approval for programmes is six years. If any expectation is not met, a condition or recommendation can be imposed. If concerns cannot be met through conditions, a more limited approval period or no approval may be proposed. If a review is limited in scope, the existing period of approval will not change. For programmes delivered by a new Partner, the maximum period of approval is three years in the first instance. Following the first review the maximum approval period is six years.

2.17 The panel's conclusions will be reported to the development team for information and action at the end of the Panel meeting. These will be captured in a formal set of outcomes and a written report, which will record the process, debate and outcomes. These will be produced by Academic Quality and circulated to the panel and the Faculty/Partner following the meeting for action and comment on matters of fact and accuracy.

2.18 If conditions of approval and/or recommendations are set, the panel will state the timescale the Faculty/Partner are required to provide a full response to the conditions and at least an initial response to the recommendations. The Faculty/Partner should send the response to Academic Quality, who will send it on to the panel for consideration.

2.19 New programmes will be promoted from the point at which conditional approval is granted by the external panel. Programmes will only be opened for applications once it has been confirmed that conditions of approval have been met. Recommendations can be adopted before the start of the programme or considered over a longer time period. Responses to recommendations will be formally incorporated into the annual monitoring process through the programme action plan so that programme teams can continue to consider the points raised and action or close them off as appropriate. Programmes cannot be delivered until formal University approval has been granted so it is important that the development team meets the specified deadline for responding to conditions/recommendations.

2.20 Once all panel members have confirmed that they are satisfied that the conditions have been satisfactorily met, approval is confirmed by Academic Quality and notification of formal approval will be sent to the Faculty/Partner and relevant staff in Professional Services. Completion of the programme approval or review will be reported to the next meeting of Education Student and Experience Committee.

2.21 On receipt of notification of formal approval, Faculties are responsible for ensuring that final versions of the Programme Specification(s) and Unit Specifications are provided to Academic Quality within two weeks, to be saved by Academic Quality as a PDF in the appropriate network folder, BU's central depository for all definitive documents.

2.22 Academic Quality will ensure that Programme Specification(s) are stored appropriately to support Marketing and Communications in publishing course information to applicants, in accordance with the *Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures* and *3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure*. For Partners on the Validated Partner model it is normally the responsibility of the Partner to advertise the programme and to provide a link to the Programme Specification. Please refer to the relevant Partnership Operations Manual.

2.23 **Programmes with PSRBs:** where a programme is subject to PSRB approval or accreditation, this is normally aligned with the programme approval/review process to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. It is essential that all PSRB requirements are met, and the programme approval/review process may need to be adapted accordingly. The responsibility for identifying PSRB requirements resides with the Faculty, and this information should be shared with Academic Quality. Faculties are responsible for maintaining direct liaison with PSRBs throughout the programme approval/review process.

3 IMPACT AND CONSULTATION WITH CURRENT STUDENTS

3.1 It is a Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirement that students should normally be able to follow the programme which was in place when they accepted the offer and subsequently enrolled on to. Consequently, it is the expectation that a new version of an existing programme will come into effect for the next new intake of students and will not affect current students. Changes to this are exceptional and must be approved by the Strategic Portfolio Group; for example, where there is strong student interest or a PSRB requirement. In such cases consent must be obtained from the affected students as set out below before the changes can be implemented.

3.2 If material changes are proposed which will apply to current students, all students affected must be informed of the proposed changes and the written agreement of affected students, per level, per programme, must be obtained, as per the expectations of *4B Programme and Unit Modifications*. If any of the students affected are Student Visa holders the Immigration Advice and Compliance Team (IACT) must be notified to ensure there are no consequences for existing students visas. Faculties should ensure all reasonable efforts are made to obtain student consent for the proposed changes. This includes making repeated attempts to contact students through different means.

3.3 Student consultation and consent should always be obtained before the External Panel meeting, as this provides an opportunity to consider and incorporate student feedback into the development. Students must be informed that the changes remain subject to formal approval. If the review process results in amendments to the proposals originally shared with students, further consultation and consent may be required with all affected students.

3.4 Faculties must keep a clear audit trail of the consultation and consent process with students regarding changes, including any potential issues that are raised and evidence of agreement. The outcome of the process must be reported to Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee, which will review the consent outcome before making a decision on approving the changes for existing students. As per the University's Student Agreement, the Faculty must consider matters relating to fairness; both the impact of any changes and the fairness of the process followed in considering and communicating the change, as part of their deliberations.

3.5 While Faculty Education and Student Experience Committees are responsible for determining whether to increase the student consent threshold beyond the minimum level (i.e., 50% +1), it is strongly recommended that 100% student consent is sought where changes made through the review process have a significant impact on course-related material information provided to students. This includes, for example, the introduction of a new award title. Advice can be sought from Academic Quality and Legal Services.

3.6 Further advice about the consultation and consent process can be sought from Academic Quality and Legal Services. More information about the communication requirements is given in *3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure.*

4 SUSPENSIONS AND PROGRAMME CLOSURES

4.1 Recruitment to a programme can be ceased either as a suspension or closure:

- A **suspension** will mean that recruitment to a programme will be put on hold for a recruitment cycle, although recruitment may be re-opened for applications at a future point. Suspension of recruitment is usually granted for one recruitment cycle. Repeated suspensions may lead to a decision to close a programme.
- A **closure**, by contrast, indicates that there will be no further intakes and the programme will be permanently withdrawn from the University's portfolio. Recruitment will be closed to new intakes.

Decisions to cease recruitment may be driven by a range of factors, including declining student demand, concerns regarding financial viability, staffing availability, broader strategic priorities or replacement by a new programme in a related subject area.

4.2 All suspension and closure requests must be submitted to and approved by the Strategic Portfolio Group. When reviewing requests, consideration will be given to the impact on different student groups (including applicants, offer holders and students); academic partners; and other delivery impacts such as common units, delivery locations and PSRBs. Consideration will also be given to the teaching arrangements and resource requirements required to maintain academic standards and quality until all students have completed their studies.

Exceptionally, Strategic Portfolio Group may request that a closure meeting takes place on a risk-basis, for example a high number of students or partner provider. Strategic Portfolio Group will determine the format of any closure meeting, membership of any closure panel, and any themes to explored, with outcome submitted to Strategic Portfolio Group.

4.3 Documentation requirements:

- For suspensions, faculties must complete section A and B of the *Suspension and Closure Form*, with sign off by Faculty Executive.
- For closures, faculties must complete section A, B and C of the *Suspension and Closure Form*, with sign off by Faculty Executive. To facilitate programme closures, recruitment will need to be suspended for upcoming intakes via the same form.

4.4 Once a programme closure has been approved by Strategic Portfolio Group, ongoing monitoring will be overseen by Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee. This will continue until all students have completed, to ensure academic standards and quality are maintained throughout the teach-out period. All closing programmes must continue to engage with the Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review process until all students have completed. Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee will formally record when no students remain on the programme, with relevant teams notified to ensure records are up to date. If any risks to quality and standards are identified during the teach out period, these should be escalated to Education and Student Experience Committee.

4.5 Where a closing programme is being replaced by a new one, the expectation is that the closure will be phased out, with Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee maintaining oversight until all students have completed, as above. In cases where students are to be transferred to the new programme, the consultation and consent process will be overseen by each Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (see section 3).

4.6 All decisions to cease recruitment constitute a material change under consumer protection legislation set by the CMA. To comply:

- Decisions to cease recruitment (suspensions/closures) must normally be approved by 1st September for intakes commencing in the following academic year to ensure timely communications with applicants and offer holders.
- If a programme has been marketed for a start date beyond the proposed suspension or closure date,

appropriate steps must be taken to communicate with applicants, potential applicants or offer holders. This includes BU students enrolled on to a programme with an integrated Foundation Year and those on a pathway at BU International College (BUINTCOL). If any of the students affected are Student Visa holders the Immigration Advice and Compliance Team (IACT) must be notified to ensure there are no consequences for joint CAS holders. Please see *3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure* for more information.

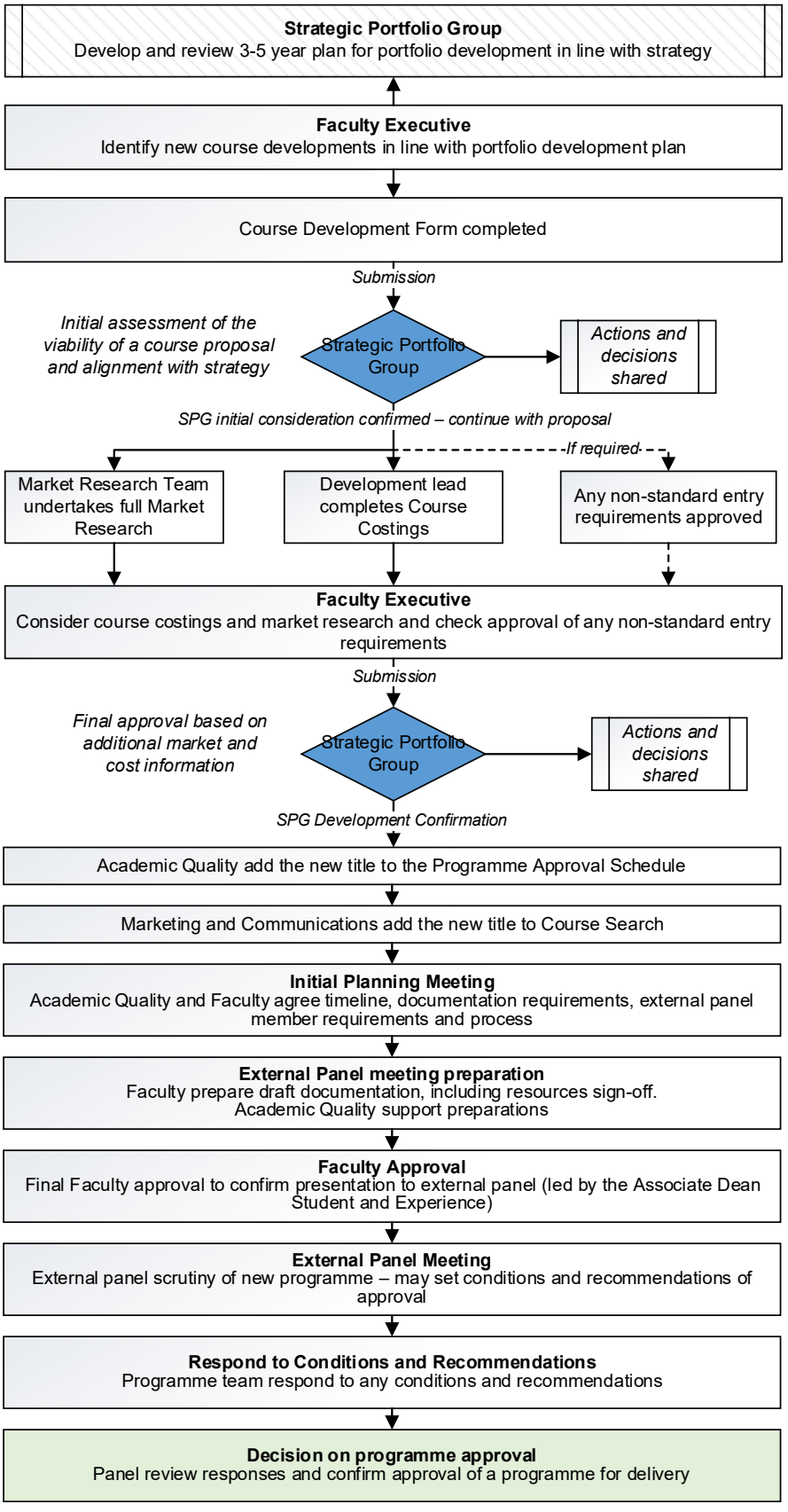
- As outlined in the Student Agreement, when a programme is closed, BU will continue teaching the programme to students until they have completed. In the highly unlikely situation that it is not possible for a student to complete a programme, we should explain why and provide reasonable support to a student in transferring to an alternative programme within BU or with another provider. In these situations, reference should be made to the student protections outlined in BU's Student Protection Plan, which will include considerations such as the student experience, the curriculum and any CMA implications.

4.7 For all closing programmes which have been in approval for 5 years or less, Academic Quality will complete a programme closure evaluation form to collect information about the history of the programme and reasons for the closure.

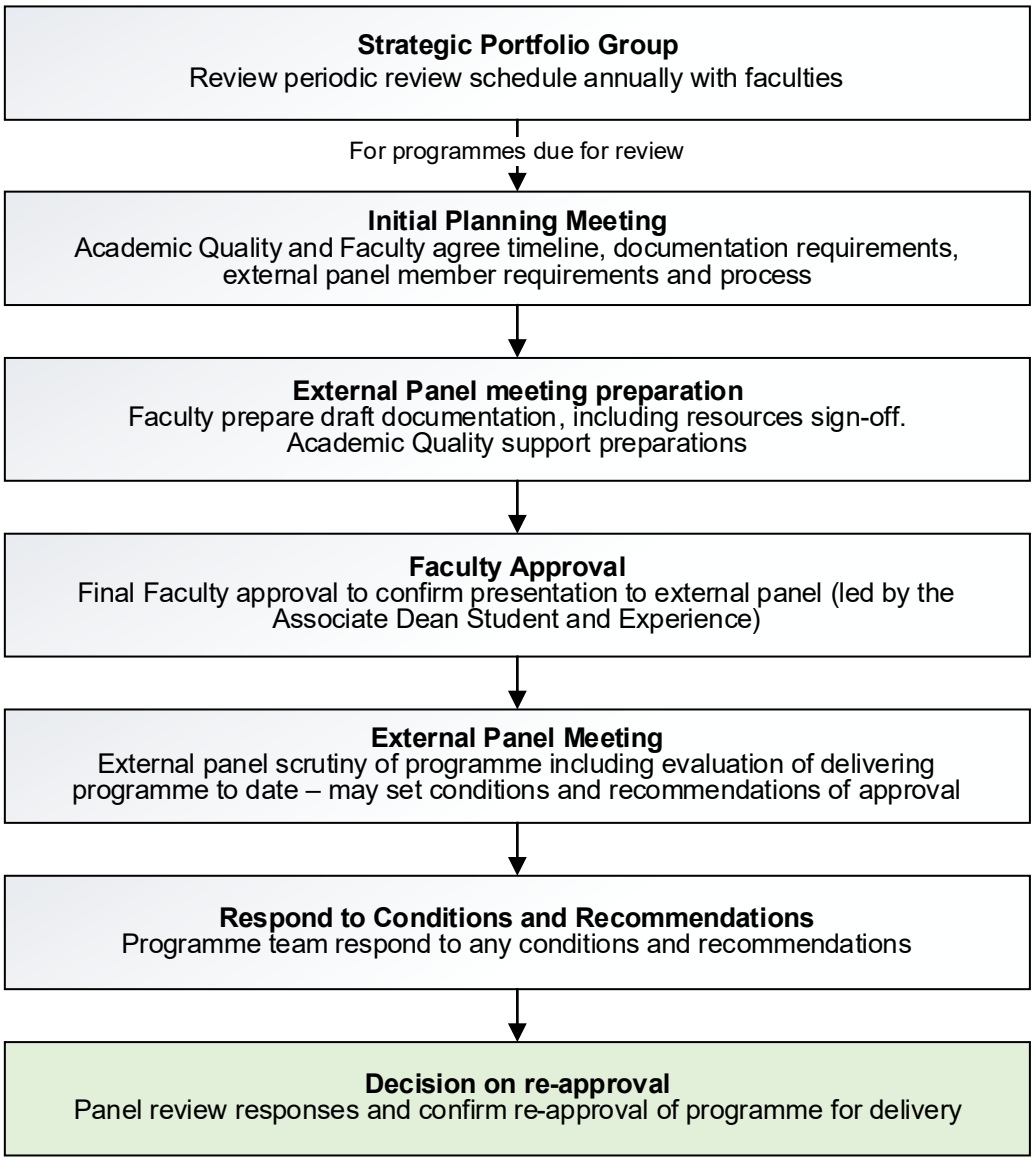
4.8 If closure of the programme also brings a partnership to an end, Academic Quality will check the period of notice in the contract and to agree if there are additional requirements for consideration by the Strategic Portfolio Group. Once there are no students left on the programme, Academic Quality will formally terminate the contract and send a letter to the Partner confirming that closure is complete.

Stages in the Programme Approval, Periodic Review and Review for Closure Process

1. Process stages for **New Programme Approvals**

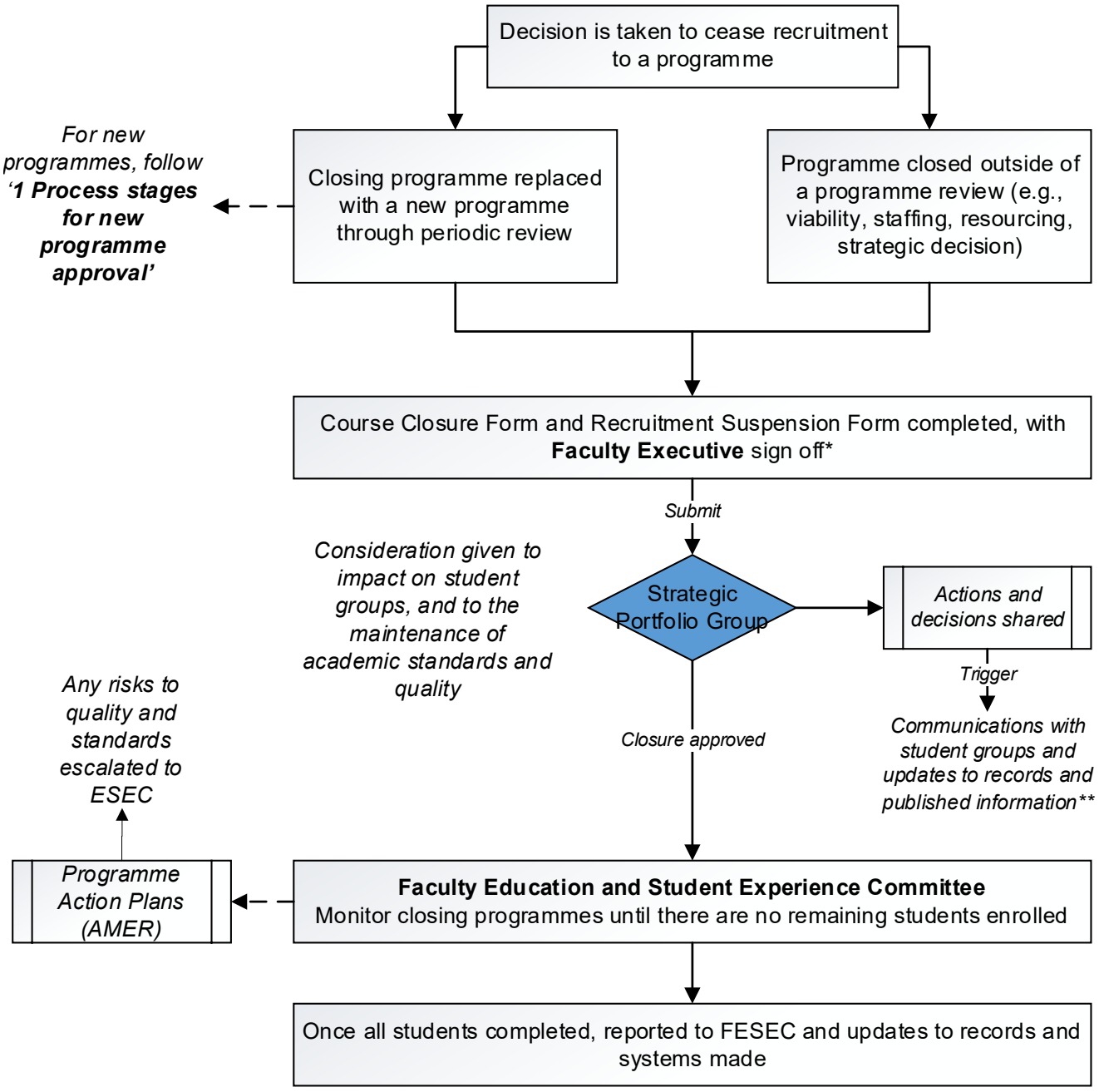


2. Process stages for **Periodic Review**



Where, through programme review, changes are proposed that will lead to the introduction of a new award title at the same level and in a similar subject area, the existing course will need to be closed (see '3. Process stages for Review for Closure of a Programme), and the new course to replace it approved (see '1. Process stages for new programme approval').

3. Process **stages for Review for Closure of a Programme**



Notes
**Recruitment Suspension Form only required where recruitment is not already suspended*
Processes set out in **3R – Programme Update Decisions and Communications: Procedure** and **Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures

When closing a programme, consideration will be given to the impact on different student groups and partners, as well as to the teaching arrangements required to maintain academic standards and quality until all students have completed. Where a closing programme is being replaced by a new one, the expectation is that the closure will be phased out. Changes to this are exceptional and must be approved by the Strategic Portfolio Group.