

Guidelines:

Terminations

These guidelines offer advice and identify considerations in support of the development of comprehensive proposals for terminations of a program or a specialization (major) within a program.

The *Programs of Study Regulation* stipulates that the Minister's approval is required for a post-secondary institution to terminate an approved program of study.

Terminations involve instances where institutions wish to permanently cease from offering a program or specialization.

The ministry requires institutions to seek approval for terminations of all ministry-approved programs or specializations since such terminations represent a shift in system offerings. The ministry reviews proposals to ensure that system offerings remain reflective of the needs and interests of current and prospective students and in alignment with institutional mandates and Campus Alberta priorities.

Termination approvals also ensure that institutional offerings remain aligned with the Provider and Program Registry System (PAPRS), on which many ministry departments (e.g., Alberta Student Aid) and reporting system (e.g., LERS, ASI, and PFD) depend for their operations.

Terminations are normal and necessary. Institutions need to monitor their program offerings and periodically refresh them. This process is part of the natural life cycle of programming at an institution.

Scope

All categories of ministry-approved programming fall under the requirement for institutions to request ministry authorization for program termination, including:

- non-credentials;
- certificates;
- diplomas;
- applied degrees;
- and degree programs.

Guiding Principles

- Advance planning and transparent communications are important underpinnings of effective termination decision-making.
- Consultation processes are key to effective planning and implementation.
- Proposed terminations should be supported by appropriate rationales as they have potential impacts for enrolled students and faculty and staff as well as for the Alberta post-secondary sector and employers.
- Programming changes should align with the institution's mandate and role within the Campus Alberta system and should not expose to risk the institution's ability to carry out that mandate.
- Prior to termination, institutions should honour commitments made to active students and make reasonable efforts to accommodate stop-out students.
- The proposed termination should take into account system capacity and coordination considerations.

Comprehensive and Integrated Planning

The ministry expects that proposed terminations are part of a broader strategic programming plan and, as such, are reflected in the Comprehensive Institutional Plans that institutions submit annually to the ministry. While there will be cases in which unforeseen circumstances necessitate changes in programming not identified previously, these instances should be relatively rare.

Institutions should consult with the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) in cases where a degree program was previously reviewed and recommended by CAQC.

Timeline Considerations

Institutions should submit termination proposals at least 6 months in advance of the proposed effective date of the termination. Failure to submit a timely proposal may result in the proposed termination being deferred to the start of the following academic year (see *Guidelines: Proposal Timelines* for detailed information).

Termination proposals should have an effective date of July 1 to align with system-wide protocols, and should be submitted 6 months before this date. In special cases where circumstances warrant, alternate effective dates can be accommodated.

Need for Prior Suspension

In most cases, a ministry-approved suspension of the program will precede a termination proposal (see *Guidelines: Suspensions*).

A suspension in advance of a termination is the best practice if active students remain in the program. The suspension creates a process that closes programs to new admissions while allowing active students to complete the program of study in a timely manner.

If there are no active students in a program, institutions can move directly to the termination proposal stage.

Definitions

Termination: ending a program of study leading to conferral of a ministry-approved credential. Students may no longer register or be enrolled in this program, and institutions may no longer issue parchments or award credentials for that program. Once terminated, a program cannot be reactivated.

Active Student: a student currently enrolled in the program of study, including a student on an institutionally approved leave of absence from the program or an applicant who has accepted an admission offer.

Stop-Out Student: a student who is not an active student as defined by admission policy, but who has previously enrolled in the program and may be planning on returning to the program at a later date.

Termination Proposal Considerations

- Comprehensive and Integrated Planning
- Timeline Considerations
- Need for Prior Suspension
- Formulating a Rationale
- Assessing Institutional and System Impacts
- Consultations and Internal Approvals
- Learner Access
- Communicating the Program Change

Formulating a Rationale

Institutions should provide compelling evidence and a data-based rationale for requesting a termination.

There are many possible rationales for an institution to request a termination, including (but not limited to):

- changing labour market considerations;
- financial or other resource constraints;
- modifications in regulatory requirements for a program;
- substantive and/or substantial changes/redirection in a field of study;
- changes in legislative requirements (including those pending proclamation);
- negative assessment of program quality; and
- shifting provincial priorities.

If a suspension preceded the termination proposal, an explanation should be provided if there are any differences between the rationales provided for the termination and suspension proposals.

While low-enrolment demonstrates a lack of learner demand for a program, such circumstances should be further contextualized since chronically low enrolment for a program is only a symptom of a larger systemic issue. In these situations, the ministry expects institutions will have investigated and identified possible causes of this lack of demand before proposing a termination.

If possible, institutions should also have made good-faith attempts at addressing the underlying issue causing the low enrolment before proposing a termination; however, the ministry understands that such actions may not always be feasible given the competing priorities and fiscal challenges that institutions face.

In cases of programs being proposed for termination due to budgetary considerations, the proposal should address the following questions:

- What were the enrolment and graduation numbers for the past five years?
- What is the likely impact of the proposed change on current and potential future students?
- Is there a market demand for students with this education that will not be met in the absence of this program?
- To what extent have there been efforts to resolve the budgetary situation to allow the program to continue?
- Has potential for collaboration (with other units internally or with other programs externally) been explored?

When documenting a rationale in termination proposals, sufficient detail and evidence should be provided so that governance committees and department reviewers can understand the situation.

Assessing Institutional and System Impacts

Proposals should include full and relevant information about both institution considerations and system impacts.

Post-Secondary System Impacts

Institutions should make reasonable attempts to identify larger system accessibility impacts resulting from the proposed termination, particularly the impact of the termination on:

- learner pathways within the Campus Alberta system;
- educational opportunities for the communities that the institution serves; and
- potential impacts on specific programs at other institutions.

In cases where potential impacts on programs at other institutions are identified, the specific programs should be named and potential impacts described. For example, in some cases programs may experience greater or fewer applications, or may need to alter or revise transfer information.

If this program serves an important or unique need (academic, social, or economic) within the Campus Alberta system, or in the region(s) that the institution serves, and/or if this program is unique in the Campus Alberta system, institutions should show evidence of consultation with other institutions and key stakeholders regarding the proposed programming change. Consultation with other institutions is intended to facilitate transferral of programs and/or students or collaboration on delivery to optimize efficiencies for all partners.

In some circumstances, the department may participate in discussions with the institution and work with stakeholders in the system to find alternate solutions to a program termination such as a program transfer. Whenever possible, the department wishes to have unique or one-of-a-kind programs remain available to Albertans, although each proposal needs to be considered on its own merits.

Institution Impacts

Institutions should show how they have adequately and appropriately considered the consequences of a proposed termination decision on their operations.

Institutions should attempt to identify other programs that they offer which the termination may affect. For example, the institution should identify:

- programs into which graduates ladder;
- programs from which graduates ladder;
- related programs involving service courses or which share faculty or resources; and
- similar programs to which prospective students may apply because of the program termination.

Institutions should ensure that these affected programs remain sustainable and/or discuss ways of mitigating potential risks to these programs stemming from the proposed termination.

Institutions should also identify resource reallocations resulting from the proposed termination, particularly those that have an impact on system and institutional capacities. In particular, institutions should discuss:

- any staffing implications (including collective agreement matters) related to the proposed termination;
- reallocation of classroom, lab, and other physical space as a result of the proposed termination; and
- reallocation of the operating budget of the proposed termination.

Since a termination represents a shift in both system and institutional resources, these reallocations should be reflective of the institution's broader priorities as reflected in Comprehensive Institutional Plans.

Consultations and Internal Approvals

Institutions should include descriptions of both consultations undertaken and internal approvals in termination proposals.

Consultations

Because circumstances vary significantly concerning termination proposals, institutions should use a variety of strategies when consulting with key constituencies. Documentation of concurrence or support by affected stakeholders is an important strategy for demonstrating that the proposal is sound. In most cases, institutions will consult with:

- advisory committees;
- students; and
- faculty and staff.

Depending on the kind of program and specific circumstances of the proposal, institutions may also need to document consultations undertaken with:

- regulatory, accreditation, and quality assurance bodies;
- professional and industry associations; and
- employers.

When appropriate, institutions should provide information about the kinds of consultations that occurred, dates of the consultations, and a summary of the feedback received. Attaching relevant documentation, such as meeting minutes or survey results, is also useful.

Internal Approvals

Institutions should conduct an internal proposal review and approval process in compliance with their own institutional policies and governance committee mandates prior to submitting a termination proposal to the ministry. Typically, this process begins with program evaluation or strategic planning initiatives, with a proposal proceeding through the required internal approval bodies.

As part of the termination proposal, institutions should demonstrate that they have obtained the necessary internal approval for the proposed termination by identifying the approval body or administrator and the date of approval.

In the process of planning for a program termination, institutions should also consult with institutional colleagues in related programs in order to both gain their input and advise them of possible programming changes affecting them.

Learner Access

As part of the planning process for the program termination, institutions should confirm that no students remain in the program. If there are active or stop-out students requiring accommodations, a suspension proposal should be submitted (per *Guidelines: Suspensions*) unless other arrangements acceptable to the ministry and the students are in place (e.g., accommodations in another program.)

Efforts should be made to inform prospective students that their program of interest is no longer available, when feasible, and to explain to them what other program options are available.

Sufficient advance notice should be given so that prospective students are not making educational decisions based on a program that may become unavailable to them.

Communicating the Program Change

Institutions should develop a communications plan so that stakeholders are appropriately advised of the termination. Institutions should follow their internal policies and practices concerning website notices, calendar information updates, and key institutional planning documents.

In some circumstances, it may be prudent to advise potential applicants that a program is slated for termination in advance of approval from the ministry to allow learners to make informed decisions about their educational futures.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

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Related Guidelines:

- Proposal Timelines
- Suspensions

Other related documents:

- PAPRS Template: Terminations

To obtain a copy of other guideline documents, or to ensure that you have the most recent copy of this guideline, please send a request via email to ae.psp-paprs@gov.ab.ca.