

Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: City of Sunderland College

Provider's UKPRN: 10001475

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Student protection plan

1. Assessment of Risk

1.1 Introduction

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires universities and colleges to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure.

Sunderland College's Student Protection Plan builds on our experience of delivering higher education and is intended to assure current and prospective students that we have appropriate arrangements in place for the protection and continuation of study. The Student Protection Plan outlines the risks, provides examples of the events that might initiate an action and explains how we plan to minimise the impact of these events if they arise.

1.2 What is covered under the Student Protection Plan

The measures contained in the Student Protection Plan are in addition to any protections provided under consumer protection law. The Student Protection Plan does not cover students whose studies are terminated at their own request, or as a result of action taken relating to individual student conduct, academic performance, non-payment of tuition fees or determination the student is not fit to study.

We maintain the right to make minor amendments and improvements to our programmes and modules content year on year; to move the location of a programme of study where the move is to another building on campus; and to modify the method of delivery where the method will deliver equal to or better quality of educational experience. The College will normally only make changes where it considers it necessary to do so or in the best interests of students. However, if you feel that the programme as delivered varies significantly from your expectations, you can raise this through the College's Complaints Policy and Procedure.

1. Examples of situations where the College would believe it is necessary to make changes, and where it would be in the best interest of students.

An example of a minor amendment or improvement could be a module minor modification or programme update to ensure the module and programme are kept up to date as an industry or sector skills are updated or as sector-recognised standards are updated. A further example could be the move from an older building to a new campus building with more up to date resources.

2. How the College defines the student interest.

We define the student interest as a combination of student experiences and high-quality academic experience, resources and support, that matches or exceeds what students have been promised. It is about working with students during their higher education journey with fairness and honesty, taking reasonable steps to ensure that all students receive the resources and support they need to succeed on their programme and after graduation.

3. How you would communicate and consult with students if this were the case.

The College would communicate any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options. This will include written communication from the College to outline the changes and to detail the options. Communication with any directly affected students or groups would also be through face-to-face meetings. Our formal reporting meeting and committee structure have student representatives where they can be updated and consulted.

This Plan forms an important part of your Student Contract [Terms and Conditions](#)

1.3 Assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study

Risk 1 The risk that the College as a provider as a whole is unable to operate is very low

The College has strong and robust governance with a controls system in place. Overall, the College's financial performance is good. The College's [financial accounts](#) detail the College's financial position, including the independent auditor's report to the Corporation of their audit of the College's financial statements. The College is an established FE and HE provider and has a strong risk management framework in place including business continuity and disaster recovery plans.

Risk 2 The risk of loss of facilities and utilities (including IT infrastructure) is moderate.

Whilst the College has never experienced a major cyber incident, any such incident will have a significant impact. The College has in place enhanced and robust security measures which are regularly reviewed and tested. Additionally, as we grow all provision, there may be a strain on the estate to provide suitable facilities for HE students at some of our campuses. This may result in HE provision being moved to a different campus.

Risk 3 The risk of sudden discontinuation of HEI partnerships or course closure is very low.

The College undertakes robust due diligence with partners and legal partnership agreements that include protective provisions (for example, requirements to give early notice of issues affecting ability to deliver or to commit to 'teach- out') as a matter of course.

Risk 4 The risk of loss of specialist teaching staff or the ability to recruit and retain specialist staff is moderate to high.

The College recognises the current economic crisis may lead to specialist staff leaving to work for more compensation in industry or for a competitor. The risk also extends to the risk of loss of staff due to long-term absence due to sickness. The College has worked to improve the awards and benefits for staff, including the implementation of a staff wellbeing programme.

Risk 5 The risk of a temporary disruption to normal delivery caused by an event outside of the control of the College (such as a pandemic) is moderate

The College has robust business continuity and disaster recovery plans in place as well as procedures for maintaining delivery of quality education stemming from our experience during COVID-19.

Risk 6 The risk of temporary disruption due to industrial action is very low

The College has partnership arrangements with its recognized trade unions and regular meetings between the unions and senior leaders.

Risk 7 The risk of the inability to secure work placements for students is low

The College has strong relationships with many local and regional employers working collaboratively to ensure the College's programmes are meeting local and regional needs. The risk comes from growth on any programmes where a work placement is mandatory to achieve competencies, which is a small number of current HE programmes.

2. Measure put in place to mitigate risks

The College will consider and implement any mitigation measures it concludes are reasonable and proportionate in the relevant circumstance to mitigate any of the low, moderate and high risks identified above. The mitigation measure will make reasonable adjustments for all students affected by the circumstances.

In the event that a risk materialises, we may take one or more of the following measures to protect your continuation of study.

2.1 Closure of a whole programme

In certain circumstances, the College may make a strategic decision to close a programme. 'Teach-out' refers to the phased method by which such closure will operate, allowing affected students to complete their studies before the closure occurs.

If such circumstances were to arise at the College, our priority would be to ensure as many of our students as possible completed their programme of study to the original timescale. This priority applies regardless of the type of event with which we might be faced and should be kept in mind when reading this Plan.

Teach out arrangement will be clearly set out to our students, and we will ensure that the arrangements allow the students to achieve their learning outcomes and have a suitable learning experience.

The arrangements will include information for students who may need to redeem failure during the teach-out period, or who may not be able to complete assessments at the time due to extenuating circumstances.

Although the circumstances giving rise to the need to 'teach-out' are rare, when they do occur, we would support students in finding another provider and facilitate transfer or direct entry to the other provider. An example of exceptional circumstances where we might not be able to 'teach-out' would be if issues relating to standards or the quality of the academic experience arose. In such a case, we would seek to protect continuation of study by offering a transfer on to a similar or replacement programme or by giving support to transfer to an alternative supplier. If any students are in receipt of travel passes provided by the College, we would continue to support students with the costs of travel between their accommodation and place of study. If a student is in receipt of a College bursary, the terms of this will continue to be honoured in the event of a change of programme, site or campus or during any teach-out or continuity periods. The College's [HE Refunds and Compensation Policy](#) will apply.

2.2 Loss of facilities and utilities (including IT infrastructure)

If the College were to experience the loss of a major facility or utility, we would follow the provision set out in the relevant Business Continuity Plan or Disaster Recovery Plan to ensure we are able to continue to offer provision and resources (educational and support) to students. This may involve the temporary relocation of services or facilities to another College campus, another site subject to geographic distance or remote delivery. Where any temporary change will cause access or financial difficulty for individual students, the College will provide additional support in terms of bursary, transport or other access arrangements. If students are in receipt of travel passes provided by the College these would continue to be valid.

The College has a robust cyber incident response plan in the event of a cyber incident resulting in the loss of IT infrastructure. This includes prioritising, where appropriate, infrastructure supporting student learning.

2.3 Loss of specialist teaching staff or the ability to recruit and retain specialist staff

In the event that Sunderland College suffers loss of key delivery staff or we are unable to recruit specialist staff, we will seek temporary or permanent replacements and provide cover from existing staff to ensure that delivery was not affected. Where there are delays in providing an alternative tutor, we may adjust the style or timetable of delivery including enhanced Virtual Learning Environment content.

2.4 Temporary disruption due to an unforeseen event out of the control of the College

If the College were to experience temporary disruption due to an unforeseen event out of the control of the College, we would follow the provision set out in the relevant Business Continuity Plan or Disaster Recovery Plan to ensure we are able to continue to offer provision and resources (educational and support) to students. This may involve the temporary relocation of services or facilities to another College campus, another site subject to geographic distance or remote delivery. Where any temporary change will cause access or financial difficulty for individual students, the College will provide additional support in terms of bursary, transport or other access arrangements. If students are in receipt of travel passes provided by the College these would continue to be valid.

2.5 Inability to secure work placements for students

Students are encouraged to find their own relevant placements and are also supported by their Programme Lead. To mitigate the risk of the inability to secure a placement, the College maintains a bank of employers used to support student placements across different industry sectors.

On any of the HE programmes with a mandatory work placement; the curriculum teams have skills development coaches available to help source and support placements when required. When a work placement is necessary to achieve the programme competencies, this would be explored during programme validation before approval to run and during any pre-enrolment conversations with the student.

3. Information about the policies we have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Please see the following [link](#) to Education Partnership North East's HE Refunds and Compensation Policy which demonstrates how we ensure:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuition fee loans
- refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees
- refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor
- the payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course
- commitments to honour student bursaries
- compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible for the college group to preserve continuation of study
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

We have cash reserves which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students on programmes for which we have identified an increased risk of not being able to preserve continuation of study e.g. low recruitment numbers, an unviable course. Any payment will align with our policy.

Our Refund and Compensation Policy is reviewed every 3 years but may be amended by the College from time to time, as is deemed necessary.

Any changes made will follow the formal approval process via an EPNE Executive Leadership and to the Board of Corporation.

4. Informing Students

We publicise our student protection plan to current and future students through our website ([Higher education - Student Protection Plan](#)) For current students, this Plan is also available via the Virtual Learning Environment and referred to in the student handbook.

We ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by discussion at Curriculum and Quality Team (CQT) meetings, HE Curriculum and Quality Forums, and Quality Reviews.

The College is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options. This will include written communication from the College to outline the changes and to detail the options. A programme meeting or a wider consultation with students may be offered consistent with our Programme Changes, Suspension and Closure Policy. Students should approach their tutor in the first instance if there are any questions.

The College is committed to contacting students as soon as the need for any closure scenario arises, and to give as much notice as practicable, which could be months. In the unlikely event that the College has to give notice, a minimum of four weeks' written notice will be given prior to the intended dates of programme change or closure. Advice, guidance and support will be offered in the first instance by your Programme Leader or Curriculum Manager.

We will put in place an action plan incorporating student access to individual advice and guidance to ensure that our students have access to independent advice if we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan. Arrangements will be put in place to allow you to have access to independent advice where appropriate. This might include facilitating support from the NUS nationally.

If students are not content with the proposed outcomes, they can raise the issues first via the [College's Complaint Procedure](#) and if, you remain dissatisfied they can raise the issue with the Office for the Independent Adjudicator at www.oihe.org.uk

5. Informing Staff

For staff, this Plan is also available on the Virtual Learning Environment / Student Life. Refreshed plans and any changes which have become necessary following a mid-cycle risk assessment will be drawn to the attention of all staff via the Staff-Bulletin (email communication with briefing) and made available on the Virtual Learning Environment /Student Life. We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the Plan when they are engaging in relevant activities (such as proposing changes to a course) by delivering training at full college events and providing signposts in relevant documentation.

6. Review

This Plan will be regularly reviewed and approved at least once every two years to ensure it continues to be relevant, effective and practical. Students will be given the opportunity to be involved in the regular review of the plan through the student representative system. This review will be supported through quarterly risk assessments, which align with important dates in the academic calendar. The risk assessments will be carried out by the HE Board. The refreshed plan will be carried out by the HE Board, which includes a representative from the students, and presented for approval to the Executive Leadership Team.

7. Feedback

If you would like to give feedback regarding the College's Student Protection Plan, please email the Head of HE Academic Standards and Quality at quality@educationpartnershipne.ac.uk