

Student Protection Plan - Academic year 2023/24

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Introduction

As a registered provider of higher education, the UCF must publish a Student Protection Plan (The Plan) which sets out how continuation and quality of study will be preserved for current and potential students if a risk to their continued study becomes about. As a long established and respected College, we have a wealth of experience in preserving continuation and quality of study for affected students, on those rare occasions when we have ceased to offer a course. This Plan builds on our experience and is intended to assure current and future students that we have appropriate arrangements in place to protect continuation of study. It outlines the types of risks, gives examples of events that might trigger action and explains what we might do to minimise the impact of these events if they happen. As a 'one size fits all' approach might not protect each student in each instance, our Plan is also designed to take into account the differing needs, characteristics and circumstances of our student community.

Teach-Out

In certain circumstances, an educational institution may make a strategic decision to close a programme, a site or even their entire operation. '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 UCF, 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.

Although the circumstances giving rise to the need to 'teach-out' are rare, when they do occur, 'teach-out' will usually be realistic and achievable. 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 (for example, providing certification of credit or a record of academic achievement).

Refund Policy:

The College refunds course fees in the following circumstances:

1. The course is cancelled before it starts or is closed by the College and no suitable alternative is available.
2. The student suffers a serious illness; refunds may be made on a pro-rata basis on the production of a medical certificate (please note examination and registration fees can only be refunded provided your registration has not been completed with the awarding body).

3. The student withdraws before the start date of the course, however there will be an administration fee of £30 charged.
4. For HE students that withdraw early from an HE Course the student will be entitled to a refund of 75% of the year's fee if they start but don't complete the first term*; 50% if they start but don't complete term 2; no refund is due if they start but don't complete term 3.

A refund form is available from the Department Administrator or the Information Team and must be completed and returned to the Departmental Admin Office together with the original receipt, certificate of enrolment and supporting medical documentation.

If the student withdraws from their course for any reason other than those stated above, any outstanding instalment payments will be collected by the College. In exceptional cases consideration may be given to the student's individual circumstances.

* for part-time HE students, term 1 will be deemed to have started two weeks after the first day of expected attendance, for full time HE the first day of expected attendance is the start date for this policy.

If a student withdraws from the UCF, any refund of fees that have been initially paid by a sponsor or sponsors will be repaid to the sponsor or sponsors.

Any refund of fees that have been paid by the student will be repaid to the student.

It outlines the circumstances in which we will refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary if we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study. We consider refunds and compensation to be a remedy of last resort and we are committed to doing all we can so that refunds and compensation aren't necessary. The Policy may be implemented as a result of any of the risks in this Plan occurring.

Advice, Support and Communication in the event of implementation

If any of the risks we identify in this Plan happen and their impact on the students concerned is more than insignificant, we will act swiftly and, as part of our response, offer those students suitable and appropriate advice and support. The nature of the advice and support will vary from risk to risk and depend upon the impact and will normally be determined in consultation with our Students. In doing so, we will give as much notice as is possible in the circumstances to inform you what will happen and when. We will always take reasonable steps to avoid implementing change during an academic year or making changes close to the start of an academic year but recognise that this will not always be possible. Affected students, both individually and collectively, will be encouraged to actively engage with discussions about implementation plans. Regular updates will be given via the most appropriate communication method, depending on the nature of the event and a named contact will be assigned.

General Communication

For current and future students, this Plan is available on our website. It is also referred to in undergraduate student handbooks.

For staff, this Plan is also available on the intranet. 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 Faculty Forums and providing signposts in relevant documentation.

Review

This Plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be relevant, effective and practical.

General Enquiries and Complaints

For general enquiries regarding this Plan, please contact the Dean of HE. For enquiries which have arisen because this Plan has been invoked, please use the contact provided to you as part of that process. Independent advice can be sought from you Faculty or The Hub.

Details regarding our Complaints Process can be found on the website. This process may be used, for example, if you have a complaint about the way in which we are implementing or not implementing this Plan or the way in which you have been dealt with or affected by an event.

Changes to Courses

It may sometimes be necessary to change the specification or discontinue a course. Where this occurs, as much notice as possible is provided. Sometimes the timetable may change. Any such significant changes to courses will be communicated to applicants as soon as possible. Where a course fails to recruit viable numbers the UCF will work with the 5 applicants affected to make alternative offers at the UCF, or will provide advice in seeking admission to another university or college. In addition we will discuss other options elsewhere and release applicants into UCAS clearing should they so decide. Courses that are still subject to validation are clearly promoted using established conventions so applicants are aware.

Appendix 1 – Unlikely Risks

- Risk:** our accredited status is lost, varied or suspended
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: extreme
Reason: the way in which we are governed and operated means that appropriate control, systems and checks are in place to prevent or positively react to an event which would lead to loss, variation or suspension of our relationship with the University of Surrey. Should this happen we would teach out so that no current students are effected.
- Risk:** we are unable or no longer intend to operate as a whole due to our financial performance
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: extreme
Reason: the risk of being unable to operate due to financial instability or unsustainability is low because our balance sheet and cash reserves are very healthy compared to sector average and we have no long-term borrowings. Historical financial performance has been excellent and we plan to generate positive net cash-flow from operations for the foreseeable future.
- Risk:** our Tier 4 sponsor license is lost or suspended
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: minor
Reason: we have very few overseas students, currently 3, this would only have a minor impact on operations.
- Risk:** loss or suspension of other regulatory licenses (e.g. Home Office) or loss or suspension of accreditation from regulatory bodies (e.g. QAA)
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: moderate
Reason: we are aware of and up to date with the requirements needed in order to be accredited or licensed by such bodies and have processes in place to regularly review and renew such accreditation or license.
- Risk:** one of our profession body accreditations is lost or suspended (e.g. AAT, CIPD)
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: major
Reason: we are aware of and up to date with the requirements needed in order to be accredited by such bodies and have processes in place to regularly review and renew such accreditation. Any issues with such bodies are normally in the form of recommendations or conditions which we always comply with.
- Risk:** we become unable to charge higher fees (beyond fee cap) damaging our financial stability
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: minor
Reason: our HE delivery is only a small part of our overall delivery and our fees are already below the fee cap for our HND/C's and would therefore not have a major impact. We are aware of and up to date with the requirements needed in order to charge fees above the fee cap. (Access Agreement).

Risk: all or part of our campus is closed for a period of time
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: extreme
Reason: we currently deliver 100% of our HE on one campus at Farnborough Main but it is also mostly available online, despite the recent pandemic it is unlikely that the campus will be closed.

Risk: we lose key equipment or facilities (e.g. TV Studio breakdown)
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: moderate
Reason: there is only a minimal threat to access to key equipment or facilities for our students (for example failure of or damage to equipment, facility/premises access restrictions by third parties). The equipment and facilities which we provide are generally not "one offs" and alternatives could be found. We could hire in replacement equipment to be able to achieve module outcomes.

Risk: non-completion of delivery (i) in one or more subject area (ii) on one or more course, module or material component of a programme or (iii) one or more mode of study
Likelihood: unlikely
Impact: moderate - extreme
Reason: this risk is considered unlikely because we give our students a 'teach-out' commitment. Although our delivery model will inevitably change shape, these improvements are gradual and usually occur over a long cycle and so have little to no impact on the students concerned. Similar to 'business as usual' improvements, we also consider the same risk resulting from unplanned changes to be unlikely because viability and sustainability are planned in advance so are unlikely to occur.

Note: this risk is also addressed in our Refund and Compensation Policy

Appendix 2 – Likely Risks

Table One

<p>Risk: pandemic</p> <p>Likelihood: unlikely</p> <p>Impact: moderate to major</p> <p>Reason: the risk that we will close the physical campus or not be able to use buildings on our own premises is possible. We are working on a strategic plan to improve our online and virtual teaching facilities.</p>		
<p>Shape: Our response will depend on the nature of the pandemic. We are now able to switch to online delivery without adversely effecting most students. We currently have the option to watch lectures from home on most of our programmes.</p>	<p>Mitigating Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> loaning computer laptops and mobile wifi dongles for those who are struggling <input type="checkbox"/> delivery by alternative means or methods (for example, virtually through Team/Zoom); <p>We have a Pandemic Strategy and Plan which caters for planned switch to online. It includes an assessment of impact on students. Certain problematic areas that require specialist equipment may require specialist plans. We are set to respond and recover quickly. We do have some students who need specialist equipment such as a TV Studio or a Sports Science Lab and for these special arrangements will be made. We will also adapt assessments as necessary. Where students incur additional costs in relation to a change in delivery, the Refunds and Compensation Policy would apply.</p>	<p>Student Circumstances: those on programmes which require access to immovable specialist equipment (for example, photo labs, TV & Radio studios,) and those with access/mobility needs will need to be given special consideration.</p>

Table Two

Risk: building closure or unavailability – eg flooding

Likelihood: likely

Impact: insignificant to moderate

Reason: the risk that we will close or not be able to use buildings on our own premises is possible because we are working on a strategic plan to improve our teaching facilities. This means that building(s) or parts of building(s) may be

Shape: Our response will depend on the nature of the problem and whether it is a planned or unplanned event. A planned estates issue may be the decision to temporarily close a building/part of a building for improvement or permanently close a building/part of a building because it no longer serves a purpose. Unplanned estates issue may include floods, fires etc. In each case, an assessment of the problem would be taken and an appropriate action plan devised.

Mitigating Actions:

- seeking temporary or permanent alternative premises (whether on-campus or off-campus, hiring spaces, installing temporary structures etc on a like-for-like basis where necessary);
- delivery by alternative means or methods (for example, virtually through Canvas/VLE);
- revising the timetable to avoid or limit exposure to estates works and scheduling estates work to minimise impact on teaching, students and study;
- transfer to or seek temporary support from alternative providers who have the relevant space and equipment.

We already have an Estates Strategy and Plan which caters for planned works. It includes an assessment of impact on students. Certain losses may be covered by insurance which would underpin our ability to respond and recover quickly. Where students incur additional costs in relation to a change in location, the Refunds and Compensation Policy would apply.

Student Circumstances:

those on programmes which require access to immovable specialist equipment (for example, photo labs, TV & Radio studios,) and those with access/mobility needs will need to be given special consideration.

Table Three

<p>Risk: interruption or damage to IT infrastructure</p> <p>Likelihood: likely</p> <p>Impact: insignificant to major (depending on the nature of the event)</p> <p>Reason: this risk is considered possible given the global threats to cybersecurity</p>		
<p>Shape: Our response will depend on the nature of the problem and whether it is a planned or unplanned event. A planned IT issue may be changing the supplier of key software. An unplanned IT issue may be a malicious attack by a third party. In each case, an assessment of the problem would be taken and an appropriate action plan devised.</p>	<p>Mitigating Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> structure the timing of implementation to minimise disruption to teaching and students and the impact; <input type="checkbox"/> consider alternative means of delivery during the event (for example, face-to-face delivery where the VLE is not available or paper submission where Turnitin is not available); <input type="checkbox"/> making the best use of alternative, unaffected systems; <input type="checkbox"/> where a third party is involved, we will work with them to minimise downtime and initiate external disaster recovery mechanisms. <p>As part of the Resilience Strategy, we are building a map of critical services across faculties and service areas identifying dependencies, work-arounds, responsibilities and other information essential to an effective response.</p>	<p>Student Circumstances:</p> <p>those on programmes with a high dependency on IT (for example, those on computing programmes) or who rely on IT for other reasons (for example, disabilities or distance learners) will need to be given special consideration.</p>

Table Four

<p>Risk: permanent or temporary loss of key staff</p> <p>Likelihood: likely</p> <p>Impact: moderate</p> <p>Reason: unplanned loss of staff is largely out of our control and is a realistic possibility at any given time.</p>		
<p>Shape: Loss of staff may impact upon our delivery. Our response will depend on the nature of the problem and whether it is a planned or unplanned event. Planned losses include redundancies, strikes or restructuring. Unplanned losses include for example an unexpected death or a specialist lecturer leaving to take up another post in a different institution. In each case, an impact assessment and an appropriate action plan would be drawn up.</p>	<p>Mitigating Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> seek temporary or permanent replacements internally or externally noting that temporary cover may be needed whilst permanent appointments are made as these take time; <input type="checkbox"/> providing cover from existing staffing; <input type="checkbox"/> adjustment of delivery or content (for example enhanced Moodle content); <input type="checkbox"/> in rare cases more significant action such as material changes to course structure or transfer to an alternative programme or provider. <p>We have established relationships with educational recruitment consultants. Depending on the scale and nature of the event, we may consult with the affected students in formulating our response and will always try to minimise the impact on our students for example, by carefully timing the event and giving notice where this is possible.</p>	<p>Student Circumstances: dealing with this risk is likely to be less problematic as we don't run any post graduate courses. Undergraduate courses can generally be covered or temporary staff brought in.</p>