

Annex D: Template for a student protection plan

Provider's name: Southport College

Provider's UKPRN: 10006038

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Student protection plan for the period [2021/22]

1. Assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, how those risks may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

The risk that the College as a whole is unable to operate is very low because its financial performance is satisfactory and there is a prudent year plan to raise financial performance to outstanding. In order to minimise risks to the organisation and its stakeholders the College has a robust risk management framework, which enables current and emerging risks to be regularly reviewed and reported on. The Risk Management Policy is approved annually by the Corporation on recommendation of the Audit Committee. This is done through a comprehensive Risk Register which covers all aspects of the College's business including academic and financial aspects. The register is discussed by the College Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and monitored by the Audit Committee on a termly basis. Decision-making at Corporation and committee level includes consideration of the risks associated with a particular proposal or change.

The risk that the College will no longer be able to deliver programmes in specific curriculum areas in the next three years is low because the College reviews staffing on a weekly basis, works with more than one awarding body, course approval processes include review of resources required and the College regularly reviews its provision at the Curriculum Development Group which meets on a monthly basis in order to ensure it is fit for purpose and in line with local need.

The risk that there could be 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 is very low. This risk is considered unlikely because the College provides students with a **'teach-out' commitment**. Although delivery models may inevitably change, these improvements would only be gradual and so would have minimal impact on the students concerned. *Note: this risk is also addressed in the College's Refund and Compensation Policy.*

The risk that the College would lose validation for one or more of its courses is low because:

- The College has strong relationships with both of its validating partners and adopts a robust approach to the quality assurance of its provision including higher national programmes (awarded by Pearson). Curriculum leaders and course team members attend regular partnership meetings and the Assistant Principal T, L & Q and relevant Heads of Faculty will continue to work closely with partnership leads in order to maintain academic standards.
- The College is co-operative and responsive to all provider reviews (whether periodic or ongoing) and any due diligence activity that is carried out by University partners and awarding bodies.

The risk of industrial action by College staff or third parties is moderate but the likely impact is low as the College undertakes a number of preventative actions including union forums and staff communications in order to reduce the likelihood of such an event.

The risk that a critical incident could lead to significant disruption or loss of operations is low and should such an incident occur a Recovery Plan is in place. College risk management processes and business continuity plans ensure that there are procedures in place to ensure sustainability of the business.

2. Measures that we have put in place to mitigate those risks that we consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

The College will incorporate provisions within its annual budget for the potential payment of tuition fees, other refunds and compensation payments to students. Cash reserves will be designated for those students where an increased risk of non-continuation of study has been identified.

Where a course is deemed no longer viable the College is committed to its “teach out” policy in order to ensure that students are not adversely affected for the duration of their programme of study. In practice this means that the College will ensure that students enrolled on a programme will be taught until the end of the higher education programme on which they are enrolled in order to ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

In the unlikely event that a partner University will no longer validate a course and therefore the College has to close a course, it may consider a course of action such as those indicated below in order to protect the student experience:

- Where possible, closing in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies
- Where the above is not possible, merge the course with one of the local collaborative partners at another institution in order to maintain the current provision
- Support the students in finding a relevant programme at a nearby institution in order to complete the remainder of their studies.

As set out in its Higher Education Refund and Compensation Policy, where it is necessary as a result of action by the College for students to transfer to an alternative provider in the unlikely event of course closure (following commencement of the programme) or there is a change in the location of the course (which was not notified to the student prior to the commencement of the academic year) the College will consider appropriate compensation for additional travel or other costs directly attributable to the non-preservation of continuation of study.

The College’s priority will always be to ensure that students receive the educational experience outlined in College course information (whether on-line or in hard copy format) and in their learning agreement. Where as a result of an investigation through the Complaints Procedures it is concluded that this has not been the case appropriate financial or other compensation may be offered. Alternatives to financial compensation might include an apology or goodwill gesture, an offer of alternative learning methods if the course cannot be delivered in the way it was originally intended or repeat delivery of the relevant course element may be offered where possible.

If industrial action was to occur, the college will take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring any disruption is minimised and students are not disadvantaged by the action. The College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions and is committed to working with employees and trade unions to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may occasionally arise.

3. Information about the policy 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

The College's Refund and Compensation Policy is available on the College website. This policy sets out how the College will offer:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company.
- 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 to preserve continuation of study.
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

Financial implications of the College's refund and compensation policy.

The College has a course continuation policy which means that, following commencement of the programme, the College will continue to teach out a course until all students have completed the programme, even where it is not financially viable to do so.

The College has cash reserves which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for students for whom there could be an identified risk of non-continuation of study.

The College will incorporate provisions within its annual budget for the potential payment of tuition fee and other refunds and compensation payments to students. Cash reserves will be designated for those students where an increased risk of non-continuation of study has been identified.

4. How we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

How we will communicate the provisions in our student protection plan to current and future students.

For current and future students, this Plan will be available on the College website, as part of the Wider Information Set for HE and via the Policies and documents page. It will also be detailed within Terms and Conditions which will be articulated in offer letters and within the Prospectus and will be set out in induction activities.

In order for staff to be articulate the core elements of this plan, the Plan will also be available on the Staff Intranet. Annually reviewed plans and any changes which have become necessary following a mid-cycle risk assessment will be publicised to all staff via the Quality and Support e-Bulletin (email briefing) and made available on the Intranet. The College 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 Board of Studies, Curriculum Leaders' Briefings and briefings for admissions and guidance staff.

How we will work with current students in the development of our student protection plan.

This Plan will be reviewed with representation from the student body at least annually in order to ensure it continues to be relevant, effective and practical. This review will be supported through mid-cycle risk assessments which align with important dates in the academic calendar. The risk assessments will be

carried out by a group comprising representation from relevant curriculum and business support areas. The risk assessments will inform the annual review of the Plan. The annual review will be carried out by the Higher Education Curriculum and Quality Group which includes a representative from the student representative body and relevant Heads of Department.

Arrangements we will put in place to communicate with affected students should our student protection plan need to be implemented.

In the highly unlikely event that the protection plan would need to be implemented the College is committed to communicating any changes to guidance staff and affected students as early as possible, with clear information and options. All reasonable steps will be taken to minimise the resultant disruption to those services and to affected students by, for example:

- equality impact assessment of those affected
- offering affected students the chance to move to another course;
- delivering a modified version of the same course;
- providing assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider, through support from curriculum and guidance staff.

In the highly unlikely event that a student is required to transfer course, or move to another institution there are likely to be implications for student finance arrangements. The College's Guidance team will be notified of students affected in the event of any the above steps being taken. The Guidance team will contact affected students and provide detailed information, advice and guidance based on their individual circumstances.

The College will put in place support from the guidance team to ensure that students have access to independent advice if it needs to implement the measures in the student protection plan and will consult with local HEIs in order to secure transfers to courses that best fit individual needs.

References:

Competition and Markets Authority 2015. Higher education: consumer law advice for providers, CMA.

Office for Students (OfS) 2021. *Guidance for providers about student and consumer protection during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*, OfS, viewed 29th May 2021

<<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-student-and-consumer-protection-during-the-pandemic>>

Office for Students (OfS) 2018, *Student Protection*, OfS, viewed 12th June 2020

<<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/student-protection/students-as-consumers/>>