

UCO HE Student Protection Plan

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Originator:	Director of Finance/HE Head of Quality and Registry
Approved by:	HE Quality Improvement Committee
Date for Review:	Annually

1. Scope

- 1.1 This policy applies to all Higher Education (HE) students studying at the Oldham College, in response to the requirement to maintain a Student Protection Plan under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The Policy document will be communicated to students via the University Campus Oldham (UCO) website and the UCO Moodle site. It will also be included in the HE Student Handbook. This Plan will be reviewed annually, via our quality assurance structure and scrutinised by our quality committees, which include student representative, to ensure current data and conditions are incorporated into the Plan.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires institutions delivering Higher Education courses 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.

These events may include, but not limited to:

- significant material change;
- a decision to close the College has been taken;
- a strategic decision by the College to close a course or campus;
- loss or restriction of validation or franchise status with our awarding university partners;
- withdrawal of designation for student support purposes;
- a decision is taken not to run a course for the subsequent year;
- major changes in year to course content;
- changes to regulatory framework affecting a specific course;
- loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. Ofsted, Office for Students, etc;
- disruption of College activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term-time not covered by any of the above);
- industrial action by College Higher Education staff or third parties;
- the unexpected departure of key members of Higher Education staff.

3. Measures to Inform and Protect Students

- 3.1 The College is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options.
- 3.2 All reasonable steps will be taken to minimise the resultant disruption to those services and to affected students by, for example:

- 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.

3.3 Where a student is required to transfer to another course, or move to another institution, there are likely to be implications for student finance arrangements. The HE Student Services team will be notified of students affected in the event of any the above steps being taken. The HE Student Services team will contact affected students and provide information, advice and guidance to support them through the transfer.

4. Significant Material Change

4.1 Institutional Closure

Institutional failure, whilst extremely low at our institution, will be monitored through risk management in accordance HE regulatory bodies and any instance of this will be managed in accordance with College policies.

4.1.1 Where the College had no option, other than to close, it may consider measures such as those below to protect student experience:

- where possible, closing in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at the Institution;
- where the above is not possible, in supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and (where appropriate financially) by compensating students where because of disruption to their studies they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss (see [Refund and Compensation Policy](#));
- merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

4.2 Closure of the HE Campus

Where part or all of the HE campus is rendered unusable for activities involving students, the College will typically consider solutions such as:

- relocating provision to the main FE campus, or an alternative premises, this may include hiring spaces for course delivery (where possible nearby);
- revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal office hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected; appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken;
- delivering programmes via alternative means, such as Distance Learning. Where such an approach is taken, the College will consider, with agreement from its awarding partners, whether this it is appropriate for any enrolled students who would be affected.

5. Loss or Restriction of Institutional Approval or Validation/Franchise Status

5.1 The loss of institutional approval or validation/franchise status is very low. The College has developed strong partnerships with several university partners and has robust processes in place with these partners for approving, developing and assuring quality of the course it delivers. The College enters into a contract with its awarding partners, which creates a legal obligation to teach students until the end of their course. Our Quality Handbook is aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and national benchmarks for academic standards. All academic staff participate in mandatory staff development sessions, which include sessions on developing best practice in teaching, learning and assessment. All new

staff receive an induction to the College's quality systems, academic quality and enhancement.

In the event of loss or restriction of status the College will work with the awarding partner to:

- produce an Exit Strategy detailing how the interests of the students and potential applicants will be protected;
- ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students and applicants;
- ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner, e.g. teach-out;
- providing assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider who holds the relevant accreditation.

6. Withdrawal of Designation

6.1 This risk is considered very low by the College. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses are automatically designated for Student Finance, this allows students to access tuition fee and maintenance grant support from the Student Loan Company. The risk of courses no longer being designated for Student Finance may apply if the College failed an inspection by the Quality Assurance Agency or to secure and maintain registration with the Office for Students.

In the event of de-designation of its courses for 'Student Support' purposes (resulting in the withdrawal of statutory student finance for its courses), the College will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resulting disruption to students by, for example:

- working with relevant funding bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/course;
- where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate courses at other providers or its partner universities and, where appropriate, financially compensating students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies;
- considering assistance for affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies;
- merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

7. Suspension or Closure of Course

7.1 This is considered a moderate risk by the College. Course suspensions and closures can be the result of low applicant numbers, delayed course validations or other strategic decisions. The College has established a policy and procedure in the event of suspension/ closure of course – see [HE Course Closure Policy](#). Where there is a material impact on the students, the effect will be mitigated by:

- communicating with current students to provide assurance that they will not be adversely affected by the decision, and provide assurance that they are able to complete their studies at the College via a teach-out period;
- where possible, provision will be made to allow for the completion of studies where 'mitigated circumstances' have been presented;
- consultation with stakeholders who may be affected to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken;
- where the delivery of a course is uncertain because it is subject to validation approval, this will be made clear in publicity materials. Should the course subsequently not achieve validation approval, every effort will be made to identify a suitable alternative.

- Where delivery of a course is uncertain because of low applicant numbers, applicants will be notified at the earliest stage and every effort made to identify a suitable alternative in the event the course is subsequently cancelled.

8. Major Changes to Course Content

8.1 This is considered low risk. Validation processes with our partner universities are rigorous and robust, this minimises the need for major changes. The College undertakes an annual review process, during which courses and their associated modules are reviewed to ensure validity. The College works with its partner universities to make minor amendments to courses/modules, via their minor change policies and procedures. These minor amendments help reduce the need for major changes and ensure currency and relevance.

The College will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the course in accordance with the description applied to it in the prospectus and the programme specification for the academic year in which a student began their course. However, in the event of major in-year changes to course content the College will ensure that:

- changes are restricted to the minimum necessary to achieve the required quality of experience, and affected students are notified and consulted with as appropriate;
- it works with students to ensure the offer is still acceptable and will evidence student consent before changes are approved;
- where necessary it allows students the opportunity to withdraw from the course;
- where required students will be offered reasonable support to transfer to another course at the either at the College, or to another provider.

As minor changes would be considered on an annual basis to ensure currency and relevance of the course, the College would consult with student representatives and its awarding partners before these changes were introduced.

9. Disruption to College Activity

9.1 Where events result in term-time course disruption, the College will normally consider whether it is practicable to make changes to course delivery, rather than closing or suspending an affected course.

9.2 Actions to minimise disruption may include:

- temporary short-term suspension of course delivery (e.g. where there is a change in the course delivery location or staffing, with appropriate actions to mitigate impact on students);
- changes to the course delivery location or method, which may include distance learning;
- changes to the staffing of a course, for instance through a review of internal staff resources, including recruitment of area specialists, where appropriate;
- offering students the opportunity to transfer to an alternative course;
- provision of reasonable support to students for accessing a course run by another provider, including making arrangements for the transfer of credits and information about academic progress.

The likelihood of closure is considered low risk.

10. Industrial Action

10.1 The College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions. It is highly committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.

10.2 Where industrial action does occur, the College will seek to:

- ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible;
- take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised and students are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action.

The likelihood of closure due to union action is considered low risk.

11. Loss of Key Staff

11.1 The College considers the risk of losing key course delivery staff, for example, due to sickness, relocation etc., as medium. Therefore, the College has plans in place to mitigate the impact and will address such cases by:

- seeking to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of college staff with appropriate skills and experience, into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid disruption;
- where the College cannot avoid closing a course, the policy as outlined in the HE Course Closure Policy will apply.

11.2 The College's Risk Register covers other actions affecting business continuity, such as acts of terrorism, damage to buildings or equipment.

12. Related Documents

[HE Course Closure Policy](#)
[Refund and Compensation Policy](#)