

# Higher Education Student Protection Plan 2021/2022



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## INTRODUCTION

1. This Student Protection Plan sets out the College's procedures for closing, suspending or changing any programme of study. It is designed to reflect the Sector advisory guidance within the CMA UK Higher Education Providers-Advice on Consumer Protection Law (March 2015), the requirements of The UK Quality Code for Higher Education-Part C and The Equality Act 2010.
2. Hopwood Hall College is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. It will make every effort to protect the student interest and ensure continuity in the event of course, campus or College change or closure. We are aware that events may occasionally occur which mean unforeseen changes need to be made to modules or programmes.
3. The College has undertaken an assessment of potential risks associated with the continuation of study from a student's perspective and the likelihood of these risks crystallising
  - a. The College has lost validation for one or more of its courses
  - b. A decision by the College to close a course
  - c. Major changes in year to course content
  - d. Disruption of College activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term time)
  - e. Industrial action by College staff
  - f. The College is unable or no longer intend to operate as a whole due to financial stability
4. Measures to Inform and Protect Students Inclusion of the following scenarios should not be assumed to mean that the College considers it likely to occur.

## SCOPE

5. These regulations apply to all Higher Education courses offered by the College.
6. Where a student is undertaking a HE course validated by a partner university or awarding organisation, additional regulations may apply. These will be listed in partner handbooks and policy documents.

## POLICY STATEMENT

7. This policy will not discriminate either directly or indirectly against any individual on grounds of sex, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, disability, inclusion need, gender identity, socio-economic status or any other protected characteristic.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

8. The College will ensure that students both current and prospective have access to the Student Protection plan

## RISK ASSESSMENTS AND PROCEDURES

### **9. The College has lost validation for one or more of its courses – Low Risk**

- a. Hopwood Hall College currently offers a number undergraduate and level 4/5 courses which form its Higher Education curriculum portfolio.
- b. This is made up as follows:
  - Foundation Degree's in Early Years which is delivered through a direct funded franchised agreement with the University of Bolton and part of a collaborative partnership with six other providers. This partnership has been in place with the University of Bolton since 2004. Course is offered both full and part time and modules are delivered together where possible. This creates substantial group sizes and ensures financial efficiency.
  - Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching which is delivered through a franchised agreement with the University of Salford. This successful partnership has been in place since 2017. Recruitment and enrolment numbers are good and support from the partner university is strong.
  - Higher National Certificate/Diplomas in partnership with Pearson. Our current suite of HNC/D's have been developed with strong employer relationships and in line with current local, regional and national skills shortages as well as student demand. Teaching and delivery methods vary to accommodate students who work alongside their study and a number of Part time / full time pathways are available.
- c. The College has strong relationships with both of the Universities that validate the Foundation Degree Programmes. In both cases, a partnership manager has been allocated to the college and regular partnership meetings are held with the relevant programme managers, the College HE lead and the Head of Quality.
- d. The College is co-operative and responsive to all provider review and due diligence activity that is carried out by the partner University or exam board.
- e. In the event that the University or exam board will no longer validate a course and therefore the College has to close a course, it may consider measures such as those below 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 collaborative partners at another institution to maintain the current provision
- f. A formal approval process is in place for all new provision. This includes, partner Universities validation, business planning, labour market intelligence and market assessment, recruitment, quality and sustainability.

### **10. A decision by the College to close a course – Low Risk**

- a. Proposals for courses to be discontinued, whether for reasons of strategic fit or operational viability, are approved in accordance with the closure of courses procedure. The programme manager is required to submit a

request for the closure of the course to the Higher Education Committee. This must include an outline of the rationale for the closure and the arrangements for the teaching out or transfer of affected students or applicants.

- b. Any decisions made by the Higher Education Committee to close a course will be escalated to the Senior Management Team and the Governing Body for approval.
- c. A programme area cannot close or suspend a programme without the approval of the Higher Education Committee because of the implications for the contractual relationship between current and prospective students and the College.
- d. If the College is unable to continue to offer a specific course we will ensure the following;
  - 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 collaborative partners at another institution to maintain the current provision
  - We will cease marketing, stop advertising and recruiting to the course, inform any prospective students in sufficient time so that their opportunities are not jeopardised, inform all enrolled students and teach out the programme in a similar manner as if the programme was not being closed. We will make clear in this exercise that we are committed to protecting student interests and that all enrolled students will have the opportunity to complete their course. The College would continue to offer support and guidance in relation to progression and graduation.
  - If we have to suspend or withdraw your course whilst you are holding an offer from us, we will, if you ask us, try to provide you with a suitable alternative course, or take reasonable steps to help you find an alternative course at another provider (but we cannot guarantee that you will be accepted onto a course); and in circumstances where you do not apply for or are not accepted onto an alternative course, we will refund any fees and /or costs in accordance with our Fees Policy.
- e. The College's vision, mission statement and strategic direction include a discreet plan for higher education. This is supported by a formal quality assurance process and effective quality review and monitoring by the partner Universities.

#### **11. Major changes in year to course content – Low Risk**

- a. The College will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the programme in accordance with the description applied to its Higher Education prospectus for the academic year in which a student began their programme. However, in the unlikely 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

- Changes to course content on the two Foundation Degree courses must be decided by the relevant University Partner and disseminated to the College in a timely manner
- The College works collaboratively with students to ensure the offer is still acceptable
- Where required students will be offered reasonable support to transfer to another provider

## **12. Disruption of College activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term time) – Medium Risk**

- a. The College's circumstantial/environmental risks are the same as for any other institution, namely those associated with a catastrophic event such as disease, fire or flood and/or those associated with Force Majeure. Mitigation includes ongoing risk assessment, detailed contingency planning, regular safety inspection and the maintenance of appropriate insurance and cash reserves to ensure business continuity in the wake of said event.
- b. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic the risk rating for temporary disruption to college activities has been moved to a medium risk. The college has Covid-19 specific continuity plans in place to facilitate a smooth transition to online and blended learning should the college be required to close or further lockdowns announced. Students will receive detailed guidance in induction weeks, online and in student handbooks to detail this process and ensure that students have the required technology or equipment to facilitate this.
- c. College business continuity plans ensure that there are procedures in place to ensure sustainability of the business.

## **13. Industrial action by College staff – Low Risk**

- a. The College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognized trade unions. It is committed to maintaining effective employee culture and working with trade unions to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.
- b. If industrial action was to occur, the college will take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring any disruption is minimized and students are not disadvantaged by the action.

## **14. The College is unable or no longer intend to operate as a whole due to financial stability – Low Risk**

- a. The College has 'Outstanding' financial health as determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). There are robust financial controls and procedures in place including effective budget monitoring and control to ensure the College continues to maintain a sound financial base in terms of both solvency and liquidity.
- b. Key Financial Objectives underpin the annual budget to ensure the College remains financially sound in order to:
  - Provide high quality resources to support teaching and learning;
  - Protect itself from unforeseen adverse changes in enrolments and funding;
  - Generate sufficient funds to invest in improved accommodation and technology.

- c. Sensitivity Analysis and contingency plans are put in place each year as part of the financial management of budgets to effectively manage any large adverse changes to learner numbers, other income sources or changes in expenditure. Strong liquidity and large general reserves also allow the College to be more resilient to unexpected changes in funding to ensure a sound financial base is consistently maintained.

## **15. Refund and Compensation Arrangements**

- a. The College Student Protection Plan has not highlighted any existing courses or groups of students where it is considered likely that the students will have to transfer courses or provider, as the College assesses that it has adequate financial resources to ensure the teach out of existing courses.
- b. The College Financial Regulation and Procedures and the Fees Policy clearly explain the College procedures for making refunds. Tuition fee refunds will only be granted in accordance to the Refunds Policy. The College has updated the Tuition Fees Policy containing Refunds policy to clearly specify refund arrangements depending on whether the student is self-funding, sponsored or has a tuition fee loan and compensation offered in the event of the College being no longer able to offer continuation of study.
- c. Any claims for compensation would be dealt with on an individual basis and in line with the College Complements and Complaints Policy. Any refunds or compensation offered would initially be paid from operating budgets in year. If the refunds were of a magnitude that could not be absorbed by in year budgets (and associated offsetting savings elsewhere) and/or if they were considered of an exceptional nature from an accounting perspective, they could be paid for from reserves (see Financial Statements for details). The College has strong general reserves and cash reserves.

## **16. Communication with Students**

- a. The Student Protection Plan will be shared with all course student representatives at the Student, staff Liaison Committee and during in year tutorials
- b. The College will publish this Student Protection Plan on its website at for all future students and on the HE area on the VLE for current students
- c. The College will continue to ensure that its academic and administrative staff are aware of the implications of consumer protection compliance in general and this Student Protection Plan in particular through its Higher Education Committee.
- d. The College will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the Student Protection Plan when changes to courses are proposed by including reference to it within the approval procedure.
- e. The Student Protection Plan will be shared with all staff through Net Consent where staff agreement and acknowledgement will be sought.
- f. The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed through formal governance arrangements that will include formal consultation with students and involvement of student representation at the Higher Education Committee for approval

- g. In order to communicate effectively with students should the Student Protection Plan be implemented; the following actions will be taken:
- The College will undertake formal consultation through tutorial sessions to support students collectively and individually
  - If the College need to suspend recruitment or close a programme, applicants will be given as much notice as possible. Programme teams will provide as much information and evidence as possible on how students currently studying the course will be able to complete the course and the support they will receive. This will include contingency plans should students need to take reassessments or retake modules/units

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The College reserves the right to make reasonable changes to the regulations where it will assist in the proper delivery of education. These changes will normally come into effect at the beginning of each academic year. The College may introduce changes during the academic year when it reasonably considers these to be in the interests of students or where this is required by law. Any and all such changes will be communicated clearly to students.

## DOCUMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS POLICY

Fees Policy  
HE Student Transfer Policy  
Compliments and complaints policy