

Policy

Student Protection Plan

Provider Name: **Buckinghamshire New University**
UKPRN: **10000975**
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Appendix: Student Protection Plan – Risk Register

Note: Hyperlinks have been provided for ease of reference. For other documents please see the Policies page on the main University website (<http://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/governanceand-policies/policies>) or visit the Academic Advice webpages (<http://bucks.ac.uk/students/academicadvice>)

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This document has been designed to be accessible for readers. However, should you require the document in an alternative format please contact the Academic Registry.

Background

- 1 Student Protection Plans (SPPs) are intended to provide assurance to current and future students that higher education providers have in place appropriate arrangements to protect the quality and continuation of study for their students.

Note: For the avoidance of doubt, where this document refers to 'students' contextually it may refer to both current and future students (i.e. applicants).

- 2 All higher education providers are required to produce and submit an SPP as part of their registration with the Office for Students (OfS) and to publish and maintain these plans as a condition of ongoing registration.
- 3 This SPP has been developed in accordance with requirements for initial and ongoing registration with the Office for Students (OfS); it also takes account of the 2015 HEFCE *Higher education course changes and closures: statement of good practice* and the 2015 *UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law* published by the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA).
- 4 Overall, Bucks New University has an established record of providing higher education to students and ensuring that it meets its responsibilities to them; this is reflected in the range of policies and processes already in place to protect the student experience. However, we welcome the opportunity to set these out in one place to provide further assurance to students.

Scope

- 5 This *Student Protection Plan* ("the Plan") covers all students currently enrolled on or applying to a programme of study leading to an award of Buckinghamshire New University whether they are studying directly with the University or indirectly through one of the University's partners in the UK or overseas.

Responsibilities

- 6 The Plan is owned by Council, the University's Governing Body. As set out in our [Articles of Government](#), Council is responsible for corporate policies, regulations and procedures to assure the effective governance of the University and to meet statutory and other legal obligations.
- 7 Day to day management of the Plan is devolved to the Academic Registry who support the University's Governance and Quality Assurance activities and to whom any queries should be addressed. The Academic Registry are also responsible for many of the ancillary policies and procedures referred to.

Guiding Principles

- 8 The following principles have underpinned development of the Plan and accord with the principles set out in the University's published [Terms and Conditions of Admission](#) which sets out the contractual responsibilities for all parties.
- 9 The University:
- Will make every effort to ensure that the programmes that it offers to students are delivered as validated;
 - Accepts that it may be necessary to make changes to its provision to maintain currency and validity;
 - Will seek to minimise disruption to students;
 - Will consider the specific impact of changes to its provision by assessing its impact on the student population, including any perceived differential impact on particular stakeholder groups, e.g. its widening participation population;
 - Will endeavour at all times to keep students appropriately informed with regard to changes that may be necessary and will bring these to their attention as soon as possible;
 - Will inform the Office for Students of events, not including the closure of an individual course, that require the implementation of the provisions of this Plan.

Assessment of risks

- 10 In developing the Plan, the University's Risk Register methodology has been employed:
- a Identification of a range of **scenarios** to the University or its educational partners and their impact on students;
 - b An analysis of the **probability** of a particular scenario occurring and its **impact** on a student or cohort of students to determine a **raw risk rating**;
 - c Identification of **mitigations** either already in place or to be put in place to reduce the risk identified leading to a **mitigated risk rating**;
 - d Identification of **activities to help protect the student experience** should the scenario occur, including refund and compensation where this is applicable and how this can be secured.
- 11 The *Student Protection Plan Risk Register* which is appended to this document is maintained in accordance with the above methodology, and is reported to and reviewed annually by Council. Scenarios identified broadly fall into the following categories:
- a **University-level scenarios**, such as closure / market exit or institutional merger, withdrawal of designation for student support which impact on all students;
 - b **Other significant changes at institutional level**, such as: the closure of a specific campus; the need to find a new partner for the purposes of the awarding of research degrees; or loss of a Tier 4 Sponsor Licence. Collectively, these changes will impact on specific parts of the student population, e.g. campus-based students, research degree students, and international students respectively;

- c **Partner-level scenarios**, such as the closure or termination of one of the University's Educational Partnerships, which will impact on students from those partnerships who are registered with the University as the awarding body;
- d **Programme-level scenarios**, such as programme closure, or amendment to programmes / modules either voluntarily or as required by the sector / an accrediting body, which will impact on students on those particular programmes (either at the University or at one of its partnerships).

Measures to mitigate risks

- 12 The following measures are in place to mitigate these risks from occurring in the first place and to manage them should they subsequently occur:
- a **Good governance** of the University is key to mitigating risk generally.
 - i. **Council** is responsible for the University's educational character and mission and oversees financial probity, the employment policy for staff and the corporate policies, rules and procedures that underpin how the University is governed. [Terms of reference](#) have been agreed for Council and its sub-committees (including Audit and Resources Committees);
 - ii. **Senate** is the senior academic committee and advises the Vice-Chancellor on the University's academic activities, including matters relating to the awarding of degrees. Authority is delegated by Senate to various sub-committees including Academic Planning, Education and Research and Enterprise Committees. See the [Terms of Reference](#).
 - b Our [Strategy 2016-2021](#) includes activity to review all areas of the University and ensure that we remain competitive in an increasingly changing higher education landscape. Progress is tracked by Council via **Key Performance Measures**.
 - c The [Risk Management Strategy and Policy](#) outlines the overall approach taken to the identification and management of risk. The **Strategic Risk Register** assesses a broad number of risk areas, including partnership activity, the quality and delivery of academic programmes, student recruitment, financial sustainability and human resourcing. The Register is updated on a termly basis and contributes to an annual **Risk Management Report**; both the Register and the Report are considered by Audit Committee.
 - d Audit Committee also receives an annual **Organisational Resilience** report; prepared in accordance with our [Resilience Policy](#) it enables the University to anticipate, prepare for, respond and recover from the effects of unplanned or undesired events and to follow systematic, resourced processes to mitigate them.
 - e Our [Financial Regulations](#) provide assurance that resources are being properly applied and the University will remain solvent. A rolling **financial plan** and regular **financial forecasts** are submitted to Resources Committee and formally approved by Council.
 - f Our HR **People Strategy** is designed to ensure that the University has the right people at the right time, competent and motivated to deliver the organisation's

- goals. Academic staff generally have a contractual three-month notice period to ensure the continuity of delivery to students within a given academic year.
- 13 Specific measures have also been agreed to protect particular types of student enrolled on programmes across the University:
 - a The Research and Enterprise Committee is mandated to monitor the University's **research student** body.
 - b The Compliance Oversight Group ensures compliance to requirements for **all students** in relation to the Act (including consideration of guidance from the CMA).
 - c The Compliance Oversight Group also monitors compliance to requirements for **international students** who are enrolled under the University's Tier 4 Sponsor's Licence.
 - 14 The development of Educational Partnerships forms a significant part of the University's Strategy. All of our UK partners seeking registration will develop their own SPP to manage and mitigate their own levels of risk. Additionally, however, the University has a **Partnerships Board** to maintain a risk register for all partnership activity, and undertake due diligence and other quality assurance activities. Our legal agreements will set out requirements for all non-OfS-registered partners for areas covered by this Plan ensuring contractual compliance.
 - 15 At the programme level, the following measures are in place to ensure that programmes are delivered as validated or, where changes are necessary, to ensure that these are fully consulted upon prior to implementation:
 - a Our [Approval of Academic Provision](#) process ensures that new programmes are developed which are consistent to national frameworks and expectations. Strategic, resource, financial, market demand and market intelligence are also formally considered as part of the process.
 - b Our [Annual Monitoring](#) process supports the ongoing enhancement and monitoring of provision as part of a continual cycle of review and enhancement including consideration of programme performance. Annual Monitoring is further supported by our [Periodic Review](#) process (below).
 - c Our [Course Amendment](#) process recognises the need to maintain the currency (both academically and professionally) of an award and to respond to market forces by proposing and agreeing amendments to awards. In accordance with CMA guidelines, the process builds in a requirement to ensure that students are consulted before any change is made and this is then clearly communicated to both students and applicants allowing them to make an informed and timely decision.
 - d Our [Periodic Review](#) process reviews the continuing currency and validity of programmes in the light of developments in the subject area. It also looks at levels of student achievement on programmes to ensure that subjects are being successfully delivered. Periodic reviews typically take place on a 5-6 year cycle and may trigger a requirement to amend or close an individual programme via the relevant procedure.

- e Our [Programme Closure and / or Suspension](#) process allows the University to withdraw programmes either temporarily (suspension) or permanently (closure). Programmes are generally withdrawn because new programmes have been developed to replace those being closed but programmes may also be withdrawn where there is a reduced market demand impacting on recruitment. A key part of the process is consultation with both current students and applicants to minimise impact of the changes.
- 16 The University actively promotes equality and values the diversity and inclusivity of our student community. We recognise that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not always provide sufficient protection for individual students. As such, **Equality Impact Assessment** is embedded in many of our processes and used to consider if there are any unintended consequences for some groups when considering any change in direction, such as the decision to close a course or area of provision.

Activities to help protect the student experience

Preserving continuity of study

- 17 Wherever possible, the University will seek to preserve continuation of study for all students who may be affected by one or more of the scenarios identified in paragraph 11 above. This will include continued access to other support mechanisms at the University, such as learning resources and other central services.
- a The University’s expectation is that it will take all reasonable steps to ‘teach out’ academic programmes. This involves a phased process which maintains continuous delivery of validated programmes to all currently enrolled students to the completion of their studies (either as validated or with approved modifications). It may also involve transferring students to another location to study, e.g. in the instance of a campus being closed.
 - b Where ‘teach out’ is not possible, the University will seek to offer similar, alternative programmes of study either at Bucks or at one of our educational partners for applicants to individual programmes being withdrawn.
 - c The University ensures that it has a contractual commitment from its educational partners to ‘teach out’ their current students or to offer an alternative programme. An exception to this would be where a concern over quality and standards has been identified – in which case the University would take appropriate action as the validating body and monitor through its Partnership Board.
- 18 The University will make every effort to support individual students and applicants throughout the relevant process, including support to find alternative provision at other higher education providers; working with both them and other stakeholders involved to make any transition as smooth as possible; and to ensure that where necessary more tailored support is offered.

Refund and compensation

- 19 In the rare event that it is not possible to arrange alternative provision, for example on programmes where the University is a niche provider (e.g. some of our aviation programmes), the University commits to refund fees and compensate other costs

incurred by students while studying on its own courses. The University further commits to honour the conditions of any student bursary that may have been agreed on admission to the original programme being studied. Our *Refund and Compensation Policy* sets out the arrangements for making claims and any limitations that may apply. All claims will need to be evidenced.

- 20 As an experienced higher education provider, the University has had sufficient finance to provide refunds and compensation where appropriate and this is built into our budget and financial planning. However, the University recognises the changing nature of the higher education financial landscape and the potential for such claims to increase. While the University intends to continue to underpin the majority of this Plan from its own cash resources, it is also actively investigating opportunities to insure refund and compensation against relevant costs. These will further protect students against those low risk yet high impact scenarios that fall outside the scope of the University's resources.
- 21 Funding of the SPP will be the subject of an annual review and, together with a financial assessment in conjunction with the University's Council, will inform and determine whether additional funds need to be set aside to fund the SPP. This is not envisaged to be necessary at this time.
- 22 Students studying on programmes offered by **educational partners** of the University where it is not possible to arrange alternative provision should refer to that partner's refund and compensation policy for further details over eligibility. Generally we would expect each partner to follow similar arrangements to those set out above.

Timescales for implementing changes and other arrangements

- 23 The University commits wherever possible to provide students and applicants with a minimum of 90 days' notice in the event of the planned closure of a programme, campus or educational partner.
- 24 The individual processes referred to above set out in more detail arrangements for consulting and communicating with students over planned changes to provision.
- 25 Independent advice and support on planned changes implemented through this Plan can be accessed via the Students' Union Advice Centre (suadvice@bucks.ac.uk).
- 26 Complaints about the implementation of any of the changes through this Plan should be raised via the University's *Student Complaints Procedure*, accessible via our [complaints webpages](#).

Communication

- 27 This Plan will be published in full on the [policies section](#) of our website where it can be accessed internally and externally by current students and applicants as well as by all staff of the University and other stakeholders.
- 28 The Plan will also be referenced within our **Terms and Conditions of Admission** also [published](#) on our website. Terms and Conditions are:
 - Updated annually and approved by the University's *Compliance Oversight Group*
 - Provided to applicants as a link within their formal offer letter

- Accepted by students at the start of their studies via our formal enrolment process
- Reconfirmed by students at the start of each subsequent academic year on re-enrolment

Consultation over development

29 Development of this Plan has been undertaken in consultation with representatives of the following bodies across the University:

- Senior Management Team (SMT), via the Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Finance Directorate
- Academic Registry
- Marketing and Student Recruitment
- Representation from teaching areas
- Students' Union

Updating of this Plan

- 30 This Plan will be reviewed and – where necessary – updated annually by the Vice-Chancellor's Strategy Group (VCSG) and/or Senior Management Team (SMT) acting on behalf of Council. This will subsequently be reported to Council for information together with an overview of the operation of the Plan.
- 31 Updates will ensure that the Plan remains relevant to the changing needs of the University and its educational partners and will incorporate feedback from stakeholders involved in development of the original Plan itself.