

Student protection plan for the period 2018-19.

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Provider's UKPRN: 10006494

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Introduction:

This Student Protection Plan applies to students who have applied for or are enrolled onto one of the College's higher education programmes.

This Student Protection Plan sets out what measures the College has in place to protect students in the event that risks arise to the continuation of their studies, and the type of events which might cause such risk are detailed below. This plan aims to assure all students, current and prospective, that the College has effective and appropriate arrangements in place to protect continuation of study. The measures contained in this Plan are in addition to the protections students have under consumer law and do not impinge on your consumer rights. This plan aligns with certain provisions in the College's Terms and Conditions.

The Plan outlines the risks and explains what we would do to minimise the impact of these events if they occur. In recognising that a 'one-size fits all' approach is not appropriate, the Plan recognises that the risks to continuation of study and the impact of changes will be different for students with different needs, characteristics and circumstances.

This plan has been approved by our regulator, the Office for Students, and is available to current and potential students.

Risks:

The College has identified a number of operational risks which it has categorised under three subheadings: governance, resources and IT:

Governance:

1. The College is no longer able to operate or has decided to cease operating

The risk that the College may no longer operate is considered to be **low**. The College's financial health is strong. Our balance sheet and cash reserves are healthy and, compared to sector averages, we are lowly geared in terms of borrowing. Financial performance has historically been rated as outstanding, and we plan to generate a surplus in our accounts at the end of this financial year. As of the last audited accounts posted (July 2017 for the year ending 31st July 2017), the College returned turnover of £19.8 million against total liabilities of £19.6. The College's credit control policies ensure that the College maintains cash reserves. The College is managed in line with a system of prudent budget setting, and there are robust controls on this exercised through regular and thorough monitoring of the College's accounts.

The College's ability to maintain a strong financial position is as a consequence of its ability to recruit students. The College's ability to recruit students is, in part, dependent upon its reputation. The College currently demonstrates high levels of student performance with successful QAA reviews in 2010 and 2014, a successful Annual Provider Review in 2017 and has been rated as Good across all headings in its most recent Ofsted inspection (April 2018). The College is confident that the standards and quality of the academic programmes offered do not pose any significant threat to current and potential students.

The College cannot foresee any other reason why the College would decide to cease trading. Organisational failure is monitored through risk management.

2. Withdrawal or non-renewal of validation.

The risk that the College is subject to a withdrawal or non-renewal of validation is considered to be **low**. The College has validation agreements in place with the University of Chester and the University of Huddersfield. The partnership with the University of Chester was re-approved in February 2018 for a period of five years. The partnership with the University of Huddersfield is due for renewal in 2022. These timescales will allow for all prospective and current students subject to this Plan to have completed their studies (including possibilities for resits and interruption to study).

The College delivers a range of programmes which are accredited by Pearson. This provision is subject to stringent checks and quality audits by way of annual Standards Verification visits and an Annual Monitoring Report. The way that the College is governed, managed and operated ensures that there is a robust quality framework with an extensive and effective system of checks and quality assurance to ensure that the College meets with the conditions of delivery as exercised by its awarding bodies and partners.

3. All or part of our estate is closed.

The College considers there to be two separate risks of estate closure; the first related to permanent closure of all or part of the estate, and the second is its temporary closure (either all or partial). The risk that there is a permanent closure of all or part of the College estate is considered to be **low**. Following the strategic closure of the College's estate in Hyde and relocation of provision into the new purpose-built Clarendon centre in 2015, the College has no further site closure plans.

The College is part-way through an ambitious property strategy which will see the ongoing re-development of the main college estate in a managed and purposeful way. All of the College's higher education provision is delivered **on one site** which ensures that there is no risk of non-availability of one or more locations.

The risk that there is a temporary closure of the college estate (all or partial) is considered to be **low**. Temporary closure is, in the main, a consequence of events outside the control of the College. Any temporary building closure as part of an ongoing annual programme of works, has been carefully planned to take place outside of term time. The College has a business continuity group and related business continuity plans in place to ensure that all is done to remain open and to protect students' continuation of study. The response from the College will be dependent upon the nature and cause of the problem leading to the closure. In the case of unplanned events, an appropriate action plan would be devised based on the initial assessment and review of risk, and the College may seek alternative accommodation. Impact assessments would be undertaken to consider the needs of different student cohorts. The College has healthy cash reserves to ensure business continuity.

The College mitigates against estates closure through regular and ongoing risk assessment. The estate is subject to extensive safety inspections and is maintained by way of a comprehensive maintenance plan and associated schedule of works to ensure that the estate is high quality and fit for purpose.

4. One or more of the locations that we deliver programmes to students is no longer available

The risk that one or more of the locations that we deliver programmes to students is no longer available is considered to be **low**. The higher education programmes are currently delivered **d on only one** of the College-owned sites. There is no satellite provision.

Resources:

5. No longer able to deliver in one or more subject area, one or more courses or one or more mode of study.

The risk that the College is no longer able to deliver in one or more subject area, one or more courses or one or more mode of study is considered to be **low**. **The College gives students a teach-out commitment which would protect students' continuation of study** (and reflects the QAA Quality Code). Teach out is provided for in all of the College's collaborative arrangements with its partners and is applicable to Pearson accredited programmes. While delivery models may be subject to change, this tends to happen at the end of a completed programme cycle and so therefore does not affect students who would be registered/ enrolled and therefore contracted with the College. Any changes to the programme would occur prior to students accepting an offer and having a contract with the College. The system of curriculum planning is precise and robust and therefore the viability of programmes is

assessed prior to offer. The College would not close or suspend a programme part-way through due to the implications of the contractual relationships between students and the College. However, the College may decide to 'teach-out' certain programmes based on a strategic change to the direction of the organisation and its higher education provision, or as a consequence of the annual curriculum planning process, and therefore close a course to new applicants.

If the College made the strategic decision to 'teach-out' a programme and close a course to new applicants, the College would ensure that all students enrolled onto the affected programme (and those who had accepted offers and therefore had a contract with the College) completed their programme of study to the original planned time of study. This would allow for re-sits/ re-assessment and for students who had interrupted to return and finish the course. The College has prior experience of 'teach-out' and it has always been managed effectively and successfully, giving students the opportunity to complete. The standard of academic provision and the student experience is maintained throughout.

If the College deems the teach-out of a programme to be non-viable, the College will offer students an alternative course at the college, or will make arrangements for students affected to attend an alternative provider without having to re-start their programmes. In such an event, compensation for increased travel costs would be paid by the College to ensure that students were not financially disadvantaged. Full or partial refunds may be considered in special cases where the College is unable to support students with continuation of studies.

In the event of material changes to content, all students will be communicated with as soon as possible. Material changes may be made for a number of reasons; to meet requirements of the awarding body, as a result of the quality enhancement process (as a result of student voice for example); or as a consequence of circumstances beyond the reasonable control of the College such as an unplanned absence by a member of staff. Students would be offered the chance to move to another course offered by the College, or provided with assistance to move to a different provider. Any substantial changes in the methods of the delivery of a programme would be consulted with students.

The College may make the strategic decision to close a programme because of insufficient enrolments that render it non-viable from an academic, student experience, or resourcing perspective.

6. Non-delivery of material components of one or more courses.

The risk of non-delivery of material components of one or more courses is considered to be **low**. We design the programmes to meet employer need in the local and regional area and support students' progression into further study or employment. This is subject to change on an annual basis as a result of employer, staff and student feedback, and this is built into our curriculum planning cycle. We design our modules so that teams of staff can cross-deliver, with core units occasionally taught in an inter-disciplinary model. The College also has mechanisms in place for succession planning, and so single unit teaching is uncommon.

7. Permanent or temporary loss of staff.

The risk of permanent or temporary loss of staff is considered to be **likely**. The loss of staff may impact upon delivery of programmes until a replacement can be allocated. An assessment of the staffing will be actioned, and the outcome will in part be dependent upon whether the loss is planned or unplanned.

8. No longer able to recruit or teach a particular type of student.

The risk that the College is no longer able to recruit or teach a particular type of student is considered to be **low**. The college does not currently have a Tier 4 licence and so does not enrol international students. The College currently recruits and teaches a range of types of students on a range of modes.

IT:

9. Interruption to IT infrastructure.

The risk that there is an interruption to the IT infrastructure is considered to be **low**. The loss of the IT infrastructure may impact upon delivery of programmes and the extent of the impact will depend on whether the loss is as a result of internal or external factors. If internal, the extent of the impact will also be determined by whether the loss is planned or unplanned. In all cases, an assessment will be actioned and the College's response will be dependent upon the nature of the interruption.

If planned, the College will time essential works to minimise disruption to teaching and learning, and this is, in the main, outside of teaching weeks. Where unplanned, the college will initiate business continuity plans linked to the cause of the interruption. The College mitigates against the risk of internal system failure through an ongoing programme of review, including the rating of potential threats. This is supported by a robust system of maintenance of the College's firewalls and back-up. Students and staff adhere to a comprehensive IT User Policy and the College runs its learning platform through an external learning server so students will continue to access resources.

Mitigation against risks:

The College has rated the majority of the risks outlined as 'low'. Where a risk is considered to be higher than that and therefore the impact be greater, the College mitigates against that risk from crystallising.

Loss of staff:

The loss of staff is a possibility at any time within the organisation.

The College mitigates against any loss of staff through the application of a broad range of standard policies issued and monitored through the Human Resources Department and which are operationally instigated and adhered to through the curriculum management of the organisation. The staffing of the College is formally reported on and monitored at various committees.

In the case of an immediate but temporary loss of staff (for example, through illness), staffing will be sought internally. Immediate changes in staffing **may include minor alterations to delivery models** eg some additional use of the College's learning platforms but this would not present a risk to continuation of study. If the loss is temporary but longer-term, a more permanent solution will be sought. This may be either internally or externally depending upon which is most appropriate.

In instances of permanent loss of staff, the robust monitoring of staff ensures that replacement posts are advertised and recruited to in a timely fashion so as to afford a transition time between members of staff.

The College continues to review its policies and procedures as part of an ongoing quality compliance and improvement cycle.

Refund and Compensation:

The College is assured that refunds and compensation are only effected as a 'last resort', and believes that it has appropriate strategies in place to protect students in the event that risks arise to continuation of study. In instances where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study for one or more students, the College has a Refund and Compensation Policy.¹

The policy clearly articulates the circumstances in which the College will refund tuition fees and other relevant costs, for example travel costs. It also outlines where the College would provide compensation if it is unable to preserve the continuation of study.

Refunds will be made to the bank and account holder (or other financial institution) that originally paid the tuition fee. This applies whether the student is in receipt of a tuition fee loan from the Student Loans Company, pays their own tuition fees or has their tuition fees paid by a sponsor. Where the College is required to refund any Student Loan payments that it has received, it refunds in accordance with Student Finance England guidelines.

Prospective students are signposted to the College's Terms and Conditions several times during the application and enrolment process. Information includes outlining their rights and responsibilities in relation to changes that may occur after they have enrolled.

Complaints about the refund decisions made or the process in general should be made in accordance with the College's Customer Care Policy and associated procedure.

The College currently has sufficient cash reserves to provide refunds and compensation for students that we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

Communication:

This plan has been written in consultation with the student body through liaison with Student Representatives from across the higher education provision. The College will publish this Student Protection Plan to current and prospective students on its website, and will be referred to in the Programmes Handbooks. It will also be sent out in hard copy with offer letters. The College will bring the Student Protection Plan to attention of all staff and make it available on Sharepoint. Regular training across the teaching and support staff will take place alongside updates from the Central Admissions Team. We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of this Plan when they propose course changes within the annual curriculum planning cycle.

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis through the Higher Education Quality Management Group in consultation with the student body. The reviewed plan will be shared with the Higher Education Student Representatives and approved by the Senior Leadership Team and the Curriculum and Standards Committee. Any updating following the annual review or the College's risk assessment cycle will be drawn to the attention of staff through the Staff Newsletter.

In accordance with the College's Terms and Conditions, enrolled students will be given advance notice of any material changes to their course. In the case that changes occur as a result of circumstances beyond the control of the College, enrolled students will be informed as soon as possible.

If we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan, students will be informed by way of digital media, by formal letter and/ or email and where possible through meetings to assist students. The College will ensure that all students are given access to independent advice as appropriate. The nature of the advice will be dependent upon the risk that materialises. Depending upon the nature of the event, regular updates will be given and the College will allocate a named contact for students.

The College will always take reasonable steps to avoid implementing change during the academic year.

¹ http://www.tameside.ac.uk/Pages/About_Us/qual_gov/policies_reports.aspx?trk=footer

Details regarding the Colleges Customer Care Policy can be found on the website. This process may be used if you have a complaint about the way in which this plan is or is not being implemented, or the way in which you have been dealt with.