

STUDENT PROTECTION
PLAN 2020/21

Provider's name: South West College

Provider's UKPRN: 10020685

Legal address: 2 Mountjoy Road, Omagh, BT79 7AH, County Tyrone.

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Student Protection Plan

A Student Protection Plan is a document approved by the Open University that South West College (SWC) is required to have in place. It explains what actions the College would take in the event that a risk to the continuation of your studies arose, as well as how we would communicate with you about this. Examples of events that could trigger the Plan include:

- the discontinuation of a subject;
- faculty, location or campus closure;
- unanticipated or unforeseen changes that may affect our ability to provide the course to you.

Who does the Plan cover?

If you are receiving teaching or supervision from South West College employed staff and are expected to earn a recognised qualification through the College, you are **likely** to be covered by this Plan.

Introduction: What this Student Protection Plan is for

This Student Protection Plan sets out the measures we have in place to protect you as our student in the event that a risk to the continuation of your studies should arise. The type of events or changes, which might cause such a risk, are detailed below. They are in addition to the protections you have under consumer protection law, and do not impinge on your consumer rights.

Our commitments to you

We commit to:

1. being open and transparent with you should any risk to the continuity of your programme of studies arise, and inform you in a timely manner
2. taking reasonable steps to protect your studies should we discontinue a programme, close a School or discipline, close a location (building or campus) where a programme is taught or should the University close altogether
3. consulting with students and considering students' views in a timely manner before deciding to implement any substantial changes to their programme or discontinuing it, or closing a department or closing a location
4. taking into consideration the needs of all our students and the impact on them of any proposed changes and protective measures
5. informing our Awarding Bodies of any changes that may necessitate a review of this Student Protection Plan or any of the measures contained within it.

Notification, advice and support

Should the student protection plan need to be triggered, you will be notified by the Centre for Excellence Manager Higher Education or the Quality & Performance Manager. Your Course Directors and Heads of Faculty will offer advice and support in the first instance. Additional, non-academic, advice and support is available from Student Services.

What can I do if I have a complaint?

If you are not content with the proposed outcomes, you can raise the issue under our Complaints Procedure which can be found on the College website.

Student protection plan for the period 2020/21

- 1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise.**

The risks to the continuation of study for our students arise from both internal events and/or external events outside our control.

- **Internal events:**

The risk that the provider as a whole is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance is, over time, strong. The College reported total comprehensive income of £44 million in 2019/20. We also reported borrowings of £35 million related to our PFI Buildings. South West College has mature business continuity arrangements in place including plans to deal with a range of incidents. We regularly run test exercises to ensure our arrangements are fit for purpose that includes post-hoc evaluation and identification of learning.

The risk that we decide to close the location (building or campus) in which the programme is taught and cannot find suitable premises at a nearby location is low. Our estates are excellent conditions with all buildings less than 15 years old. Buildings are of a suitable size and quality. The College has an Estates Strategy in place to guide future plans and good governance of our decisions including suitable senior leadership and strong links to monitoring of the College's financial position.

The risk that we decide to discontinue your specific programme on timescales that directly affect you is low because we plan any course discontinuations to allow current students to complete their studies. Where a course is discontinued we would close the programme to new recruitment and 'teach-out' current student cohorts. We have experience of managing this process successfully.

The risk that we discontinue or do not offer programmes due to insufficient enrolment and programme take-up or continuation is low. We regularly review the suite of programmes we offer to ensure that keep pace with student demand and may choose to close a programme to future cohorts where demand is low or as part of a refresh of our wider portfolio

The risk that the qualification you obtain is significantly different from that for which you enrolled is low because of our approach to programme development and our approach to managing course discontinuation, outlined above. We retain the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to programmes and module content year on year, as part of quality enhancement and in response to student feedback. Our review and quality enhancement processes are informed by student consultation and we endeavour to communicate planned changes in a timely and helpful manner. These minor amendments in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures. The risk that we stop teaching a discipline is low for the majority of the College's provision. The College is in the process of completing a full review of its undergraduate provision in order to ensure that the programme portfolio is appropriate and that we are actively recruiting to programmes. Where we offer specialist programmes, teaching is delivered by a combination of permanent and contract staff which can be adjusted as required in response to changing circumstances. The risk that we are unable to provide suitable supervision for students undertaking dissertations in their final year of study is low. We have experience of managing changes to supervisory arrangements due to staff retirements or where staff have left the College. In the past this has included transferring supervision to new supervisors and offering support by an external supervisor.

External events:

The risk that we lose the right to provide the programme or qualification for which you are registered is low. We have a long-established track record of offering high quality provision and established relationships with relevant professional accrediting bodies across our provision. For our apprenticeship provision we have contracts in place which include clauses regarding discontinuation.

The risk that we cease operating through no choice of our own is very low. The College is a large organisation with strong management and governance arrangements in place for managing our business. We have business continuity plans in place which are regularly reviewed and tested through practice exercises. We have independent scrutiny of our activities through our independent external auditors.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

If we are unable to deliver specialist programmes in the next three years our immediate response would be to seek to use those elements of our student protection measures that were most easily within our control (see below).

In the event that the risk materialises, we will take one or more of the following measures to protect students' continuity of study.

1. Whenever possible, we will make arrangements to 'teach out' our current students where we have voluntarily decided to close a programme. This means that we commit to ensuring programmes of study can be completed by all currently enrolled students within existing timeframes determined by programme and University regulations, even though the programme is being discontinued and we will not be taking on new student cohorts. **(Course Closure Policy).**

2. Where this is not possible then we will offer an alternative programme at the College or seek support from another provider to enable students to continue their programme, utilising student transfer arrangements.

3. Where students are studying on specialist programmes, which are not readily available locally, then we will investigate alternative options which may include internal or external programme transfer.

These measures may be brought into play at any time, if, for example, doing so would reduce the impact or likelihood of any interruption to your studies.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event you are not longer able to preserve continuation of your study.

The **College Fees & Charges Policy**, which is also available on the College Website under HE section.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan.

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by making the plan available on our website and referencing it appropriately in our communications with students during the recruitment and admissions process.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose programme changes by including a reference to the Student Protection Plan in our programme approval and amendment documentation.

We will review the Plan annually and will regularly seek views on this plan from Students' as part of our student engagement processes. Any immediate views, concerns or feedback in relation to this plan, should be referred to the Centre for Excellence Manager Higher Education.

We will inform students of any material changes which may affect their studies in a timely manner. Should the student protect plan need to be triggered, Centre for Excellence Manager Higher Education or Quality & Performance Manager via email. We commit to giving you the maximum amount of notice of any changes, but at least 12 weeks prior to the intended dates of programme change or closure where this is possible.

If we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan we will use established mechanisms operated through Student Support Services to support students collectively and individually.

Advice and support will be offered in the first instance by the Centre for Excellence Manager Higher Education. Additional, non-academic, advice and support is available from Student Services.

