



## HE Student Protection Plan

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Date: 16/5/18  
Approved by: SMT

## Introduction

This plan assesses the risks which may impact upon our students' continuity of study at the University and outlines the measures we will take in order to protect their interests. The following paragraphs outline a number of scenarios that, as a specialist University, we feel it is important we consider in order to demonstrate our preparedness to deal with any eventual risks and the likelihood of those risks materialising.

## Scenarios

1. Our courses follow a full-time attendance pattern for undergraduate provision and either full or part-time for postgraduate provision. All our higher education provision is based on one site and we have no off-site, franchised, work-based, or distance learning therefore our overall risk for continuity of study for our students is low since our resources are focused.
2. The risk that the University as a whole is unable to operate is very low since historically our financial performance has consistently been very sound and we have ensured that we have sufficient reserves that will enable us to provide a well- resourced experience in the event of short or medium economic difficulties. Our performance in this respect compares very well with the sector. Our higher education courses are all based on one site so there is no risk of separate campus closure.
3. The University first received its taught degree awarding powers in 2016 but we have been a higher education provider of long standing under the validating arrangements of different institutions. During this time, we developed and operated our own procedures for quality assuring our provision and these were regularly reviewed and approved by our validators. Successive quality assurance reviews by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) commended our provision. The rigour of the process for awarding taught degree awarding powers and its final report also confirmed the maturity of our processes and procedures. These processes continue to be subject to external scrutiny through external examiners, externals as members of key committees and a rigorous course review and revalidation process. It is for these reasons that we consider the risk of losing these powers to be low.
4. Our courses are specialised and responsive to the needs of industry. They are also in creative subjects, an area which has faced reductions in activity in schools over recent years due to an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) in school curricula. We therefore recognise that awareness of particular career paths in the arts may reduce as a result. There is a risk therefore that unless otherwise mitigated against, this may lead to a fall in demand for some courses amongst potential applicants. The University is raising awareness of creative career paths through its widening participation activities and through work with other specialist institutions, currently this risk is low since we are providing courses and students with skills that are required by the creative sector but we are aware that we need to monitor the environment closely and ensure this continues to be the case. Given the specialist nature of the subjects we offer we take considerable care to recruit and train highly skilled staff. In doing so we also recognise that we must prepare contingencies such as an annual budget allocated to Human Resources to ensure staff sickness is covered as there is a moderate risk that teaching time may be lost due to long term staff illness.

5. Although the University has not been subject to industrial action for several years and this did not affect overall services, the recent industrial action in other universities has highlighted that we should consider the possibility of lost teaching due to industrial action as a potential risk. The University's exposure to this is low. Good relations with our staff are maintained with a flat hierarchical structure and there is a staff consultative meeting chaired by the Vice Chancellor which has representations from staff across the University. In the event that there is industrial action that leads to lost teaching it will be our intention that this teaching will be rescheduled.
6. The University has a small but growing number of international students who add diversity to our student body and enrichment within study groups through different cultural experiences. We have considered the risk that our Tier 4 license may be revoked, however we have deemed this risk to be low due to the robust set of controls that we have put in place. We have a dedicated international team who report directly to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and they carefully consider all international applications prior to applicants having an interview or audition either in person or on line through skype or similar. These interviews and auditions include consideration and discussion of a portfolio of practical work or an observation of performance so that their authenticity can be confirmed.

### **Mitigation**

The main risks identified above relate to the possibility of a loss of teaching contact. To mitigate against this, the University has established a database of specialist creatives who have a freelance professional practice and/or appropriate teaching experience and have successfully been through the University's interview process, who can undertake short- term work and visiting lecturer opportunities including providing cover where needed and can be called upon at short notice.

The risk of lost timetabled instruction from staff with a specific skill-set in workshops has been addressed through the formation of a cross-institutional approach to the management of instructors. Each resource area has a subject lead and a deputy whose role is to support delivery and ensure skillsets within workshops are developed and shared. Instructors carry out sessions according to established menus that enable other staff to step in where needed to build on sessions already delivered and cover as required.

To promote the viability of careers in the arts and continue to contribute to the very successful creative sector in the UK, the University expends a considerable amount of time and resource in running classes, hosting events and carrying out outreach work for schools and colleges in the region. This generates considerable interest in our courses and has led to a consistent rise in applications rates. In this context the risk of course, closure is low. However, although remote, we feel it is important to have clear processes in the event that it is decided a course must close for any reason.

In such a case the University is committed to providing teach-out wherever critical mass allows. Critical mass in this context means sufficient students to generate pedagogic value through group dynamics and support. In the event that teach-out is not in the best interest of the students, our [Refund and Compensation Policy](#) describes the various stages of decision making and actions that follow. These range from an agreed internal transfer to the best alternative course or support for transferring to another institution.

The policy also describes the support for any additional costs of transfer if incurred along with the conditions for continuation of any financial support previously provided by the University. The University is financially secure and we have healthy cash reserves and a strong balance sheet. We are therefore confident that we are able to meet our liabilities as they fall due and reimburse any valid and approved refund or compensation claims.

## **Communication**

This student protection plan and our refund and compensation policy form part of our terms and conditions for students and are communicated through our intranet as well as being accessible through the University's website.

Some of the risks we have identified in this plan are considered through the University's student engagement activity. The Vice Chancellor and academic Pro-Vice-Chancellors have termly meetings with student representatives from all undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as termly meetings with the Student Union Executive. It is through these meetings that for example, industrial action and mitigating long term staff illness have been discussed. Student protection matters are discussed and reviewed with students on an ongoing basis using these meetings.

Where a decision to make a material change to a student's course has been made, the form of communication will be made according to the scale of change. For example, notification of the decision to close a course would be made as soon as a teach-out plan has been formulated in order that a clear trajectory can be communicated. This notification would be carried out face to face to all affected students, wherever possible. In contrast, changes to staffing to accommodate illness or to reschedule lost teaching would be through email and intranet notification or through communication directly by the course team as the situation unfolded.

Our Higher Education Quality Assurance committee (HEQAS), whose membership includes all Course Leaders, considers all minor changes to courses and makes recommendations for approval to the Academic Board. Changes arising from course review may be made according to our periodic review cycle which is responsive to academic needs and student feedback. The potential for change is signalled before review occurs and any changes communicated are made well in advance of the commencement of the academic year in which the changes take effect.

Our student support and welfare teams along with our Careers, Employability and Entrepreneurship (CEE) team act as independent advisors to students with respect to transfer and onward progression needs in the event that the student protection plan is initiated.