

Annex D: Template for a student protection plan

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Student protection plan for the period [2019/20]

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

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

As a registered provider of Higher Education, Bury College is committed to the student experience and to supporting students to achieve their academic outcomes. In support of this, the college publishes a Student Protection Plan to set out how continuation and quality of study will be preserved for current and potential students if a risk to their continued study crystallises.

This Plan builds on our experience of successful delivery of higher education over many years, and is intended to assure current and future students that we have appropriate arrangements in place to protect continuation of study. Whilst the college is committed to ensuring students are able to complete their studies and will make all reasonable efforts to enable them to do so, it recognises that, from time to time, unforeseen events may necessitate changes to programmes of study which could impact the ability of students to enrol on and complete their chosen programme within the expected timeframe or circumstances.

The college is committed to ensuring students are able to complete their studies and will make all reasonable efforts to enable them to do so. This includes:

- In the event of a programme closure the College will take all reasonable steps to 'teach out' the provision and allow students to complete their programme of study
- Should a decision be made which results in the need to trigger the Student Protection Plan students will be informed in writing within 10 working days of the decision being made
- Where changes result in prospective students being unable to study their intended programme every effort will be made to secure a suitable alternative at the College or elsewhere

In relation to continuation of study, the following areas of risk have been identified:

- significant material changes
- decision to close a course
- issues with a university / awarding body partner
- loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. QAA, Ofsted, OfS
- temporary disruption of College activity
- industrial action by College staff or third parties
- unanticipated loss of key members of College staff
- interruption or damage to IT infrastructure

The following section of the plan outlines examples of the risks which may trigger the Student Protection Plan and explains what we do to minimise the impact of these events if they happen.

Significant material change, such as part or full closure of campus, or poor financial performance

Current Risk Rating: Low

The risk to either part or full institutional closure is rated low (the college is currently expanding overall estate size, and HE provision is delivered predominantly out of one dedicated Centre that was built recently). Bury College's financial health is currently rated as Outstanding by the ESFA and the College current meets all its statutory requirements to provide higher quality Higher Education.

Should part or all of the campus becomes unusable for activities involving students, the College will typically consider remedies such as:

- relocating provision to an alternative location, this may include hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby) and / or installing temporary buildings on the College's land where available
- revising timetabling to allow scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal office hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected

- investigating potential to deliver programmes via alternative means, such as Distance Learning. Where such an approach is taken, the College will consider whether this is appropriate for those students who would be affected

Decision to close a course

Current Risk Rating: Low/Medium

Bury College HE provision operates on relatively small cohort sizes, where student numbers determine on-going viability, and so are heavily monitored to ensure programmes are able to run / continue. The College has mitigating processes in place to measure risk to course closure. Where the College decides for strategic reasons that a course is not viable to run; the College will consider the following:

- communicating any changes to students with clear information and options within a 6-weeks' notice
- offering suitable IAG support

Issues with a university / awarding body partner

Current Risk Rating: Low

Bury College has developed close working relationships with university partners University of Bolton and University of Cumbria over a number of years and carries out regular due diligence. This has led to strong working arrangements, with no indication that this will change, or that partner HEIs will be losing/restriction any of our programmes. If the college does suffer restriction or loss from its awarding university partners, we will work collaboratively with the lead provider to implement the student protection plan of the awarding HEI, while aiming to minimise the disruption to students.

Loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. QAA, Ofsted, OfS

Current Risk Rating: Low / Medium

Latest QAA report confirms Bury College meets UK expectations on all aspects of our Higher Education provision, with multiple examples of good practice identified. Becoming regulated by the Office for Students will ensure continued full compliance to the ongoing conditions of registration. The College has a well governed and managed Higher Education provision with processes to mitigate these risks.

- In the event of loss or restriction of College's status as a registered provider of Higher Education, the College will work with the regulatory body to:
 - ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students
 - ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner.
- In the event of loss or restriction of the College's status as a registered provider of Higher Education for 'Student Support' purposes (resulting in the withdrawal of statutory student finance for its courses) the College, will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resulting disruption to students by, for example:
 - working with relevant funding bodies to enable enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme
 - where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and, where appropriate, financially compensating students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies
 - considering assistance for affected students by providing evidence / letters / statements in support of the continuation of their studies
 - partner with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision

Temporary disruption of College activity

Current Risk Rating: Low

There has been no history of previous events that have caused disruption to the normal operating patterns to the College, and good management and governance process mitigate any in-year risk of disruption. Where events result in term-time programme disruption, the College will consider whether it is practicable to make changes to programme delivery, rather than closing or suspending an affected programme. Actions to minimise disruption may include:

- temporary short-term suspension of programme delivery (e.g. where there is a change in the programme delivery location or staffing, with appropriate actions to mitigate the impact on students)
- changes to the programme delivery location or method, which may include distance learning
- changes to the staffing of a programme, for instance through a review of internal staff resources, including recruitment of area specialists, where appropriate
- offering students the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme
- provision of reasonable support to students for accessing a programme run by another provider, including making arrangements for the transfer of credits and information about academic progress

Industrial action by College staff or third parties

Current Risk Rating: Low/Medium

Further and Higher Education is in a regular state of change, where industrial action remains a possible outcome of changes. To help mitigate against industrial action, the College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with recognised trade unions. It is committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time. Where industrial action does occur, the College always seeks to:

- ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible
- take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised, and students are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action

Unanticipated loss of key members of College staff

Current Risk Rating: Low / Medium

The College does not have a high turnover of Higher Education staff and all staff have a three-month notice period to terminate employment. Where there are any instances of unanticipated staff departures, the College will seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, including moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid disruption. Ongoing investment in development of our HE staff helps to expand the skills across our HE team and minimise risk. The college has established links with educational recruitment consultants which would help mitigate against this risk. The college would also explore potential to adjust delivery, e.g. through enhanced Canvas content.

Interruption or damage to IT infrastructure

Current Risk Rating: Low/Medium

A range of potential IT issues exist, ranging from software updates, network issues, or malicious attacks by a third party. In each case, an assessment of the problem would be taken and an appropriate action plan devised. Those on programmes with a higher dependency on IT would be given special consideration, as would those who rely on IT for other reasons, e.g. distance learners / those with learning differences. The college would structure implementations to minimise disruption, e.g. software updates running overnight. Consideration of alternative delivery would also take place, e.g. greater use of face to face where the VLE is not available, or paper submissions where Turnitin is not available. We will also work with external partners to help identify workarounds, minimise downtime and initiate external disaster recovery mechanisms for more serious breaches.

If any of the risks we identify in this Plan happen and their impact on the students concerned is more than low/medium, we will act swiftly and, as part of our response, offer those students suitable and appropriate advice and support. The nature of the advice and support will vary from risk to risk and depend upon the impact and will normally be determined in consultation with students and other stakeholders. In doing so, we will give as much notice as is possible in the circumstances to inform what will happen and when. We always take reasonable steps to avoid implementing change during an academic year or making changes close to the start of an academic year but recognise that this may not always be possible. Affected students, both individually and collectively, will be encouraged to actively engage with discussions about implementation plans. Regular updates will be given via the most appropriate communication method, depending on the nature of the event and a named contact will be assigned.

This Plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be relevant, effective and practical. This review will be supported through quarterly risk assessments which align with important dates in the academic calendar. The risk assessments will be carried out by a group comprising representation from faculty and relevant service areas. The risk assessments will inform an annual refresh of the Plan. The annual refresh will be carried out by the appropriate committee, and will include student representation.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Please see attached a copy of Bury College's Higher Education Refund and Compensation Policy (Non-Continuation of Study), which makes appropriate reference to areas such as:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuition fee loans from the Student Loans Company, for students who pay their own tuition fees or has their tuition fees paid by a sponsor
- payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course
- commitment to honour student bursaries
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs

There are currently no programmes at risk of non-continuation, which we will continue to carefully manage. Bury College will also ensure that should such an occasion occur that we can deliver the financial implications of our refund and compensation policy through measures such as retention reserves. In the latest published financial statements, to year end 31 July 2017, the college had accumulated reserves of over £20m, and cash balances of over £5m, and the college is currently rated Outstanding for financial health by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

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

Communicating Student Protection Plan

Bury College will provide information about the student protection plan to make sure that students receive up front, clear, timely, accurate and comprehensive information throughout their journey.

Bury College will make students aware of relevant policies and procedures through a range of mechanisms, including:

- Visually, such as through the college's University Centre website (where all key documents are located in the same place - available at: <http://www.burycollegeunicentre.co.uk/legal>) and the college student Intranet / Virtual Learning Environment
- In Writing, e.g. through including information and links to relevant policies and procedures within the college's Terms and Conditions
- Verbally, i.e. in person at our open events, induction events, ongoing tutorials, through liaison with HE Student Representatives

Student Involvement

Bury College has established a Student Engagement process that enables student representatives to take an active role in the management of Higher Education. This includes being the voice of students; active engagement with how decisions are made; and representing their peers' opinions and interests and to work with Bury College to develop policies and educate students about important issues regarding their education. This established process will be extended to include the Student Protection Plan to ensure that students are involved in its development and on-going review.

Staff Awareness

Regular training is provided to all HE staff on the different policies and procedures, how to will be provided to staff so that they are aware of the Fees, Refund and Compensation Policy, and implications relating to any proposed course changes.

Affected Students

Bury College will develop appropriate arrangements to ensure effective communication with affected students, should the student protection plan need to be implemented. These could follow, for example,

- Ensuring that all affected students are contacted where there has been a material change to their course
- Ensuring that all affected students are given sufficient time to consider the changes to their course before accepting
- Ensuring that appropriate support is put in place to assist students respond to the changes to their course
- Ensuring that independent advice is available for students where there has been a material change to their course