

Student protection plan

Provider's name: University of Suffolk

Provider's UKPRN: 10014001

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Student protection plan for the period 2019-20

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

Students are at the heart of the University of Suffolk's mission and ethos, and as such there is a commitment to the delivery of an excellent student experience. Where on occasion events occur which lead to unforeseen circumstances, the University is committed to acting in the best interests of students.

Our student protection plan sets out the measures in place at the University of Suffolk to protect students in the event that a risk to the continuation of their studies should arise.

Students studying for University of Suffolk awards fall into two categories:

- 1) Those taught by staff employed by the University of Suffolk
- 2) Those studying with a partner institution of the University, listed in Appendix A

Sections 1, 2 and 4 of this Plan apply to all students studying at the University or any of our partner institutions (categories 1 and 2 above).

Section 3 of this Plan links to the University Tuition Fee Policy which applies to students in category 1 but not in category 2.

The main risks to the continuation of study for students are outlined below.

- **Closure of the University**

The risk that the University is no longer able to operate or decides to cease operating is low because our financial management is sound, as evidenced by the successful assurance review by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2018 and external auditor annual assurance reports. We benefit from strong support from local stakeholder groups, including local councils who have invested heavily in the establishment of a University presence in the county as a key driver for regional economic, social and cultural development. We also have business continuity plans to enable the recovery of key business processes following a disaster or incident.

- **Loss of Office for Students (OfS) registration / taught degree awarding powers**
 The risk that the University loses its OfS registration status or taught degree awarding powers is low because we have sound structures and systems in place to manage the institution and ensure alignment with the conditions of registration set by the OfS. We have a demonstrable track record in effectively managing quality and academic standards, as evidenced through our successful application for taught degree awarding powers and our Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) higher education review outcome in 2015. We also achieved positive outcomes in the 2016-17 HEFCE annual provider review process (with no required action in relation to financial sustainability, good management and governance, and quality and standards matters) and in the HEFCE assurance review in 2018.
- **Closure of a location of study**
 The risk that the University decides to close a location of study is low because we are a small institution operating from a campus which is fit-for-purpose, with the potential for expansion as provision grows. Where the University delivers provision involving professional practice in the workplace (for example in health), strong relationships with stakeholders ensures continuity of placement provision for students.
- **Closure of a course and/or subject area**
 As a relatively small institution with some small cohort sizes, there is a modest risk that the University will make a strategic decision to close a course where it becomes unsustainable. However, the risks to continuity of study are low because it is standard practice (as outlined in the University's [procedure for the suspension or withdrawal of existing courses](#)) to teach out existing students for the remainder of their studies.
- **Suspension or revocation of the University's Tier 4 sponsor licence**
 The risk that the University has its Tier 4 sponsor licence revoked or suspended by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) is moderate. This is because of the relatively small number of international Tier 4 students recruited by the University and the resulting potential for individual visa refusals to have a disproportionate effect on the University's overall refusal rate.
- **Loss of accreditation from Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)**
 The risk of loss of accreditation from PSRBs (for example the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health and Care Professions Council) is low because the University has a sound track record in ensuring that it operates in accordance with PSRB requirements. The University maintains strong stakeholder relationships, for example with commissioning bodies and placement providers in health, with regular monitoring of performance which enables early intervention where any issues arise.
- **Disruption of University activities through sustained industrial action by University staff**
 In light of the ongoing dispute within the sector regarding the Universities Superannuation Scheme, the risk of disruption of University activities as a result of sustained industrial action by University staff is moderate.
- **Disruption to course delivery as a result of the unanticipated departure or prolonged absence of key members of academic staff**
 The risk of disruption to course delivery as a result of the unanticipated departure or prolonged absence of key members of academic staff is moderate because of the

small size of some course teams.

- **Loss of access to specialist resources**

There is a modest risk of loss of access to specialist resources for a small number of courses, predominantly in STEM and health sciences subjects where expensive equipment is used to support course delivery.

- **Termination of a partnership arrangement**

The institutional risk of termination of a partnership arrangement causing risks to the continuity of study is low. The University strives to develop long-term, stable relationships with partner institutions, and there is careful scrutiny of potential partners in order to effectively manage risk. A mutual commitment to protecting students' interests in the event of termination is outlined in all partnership collaboration agreements.

Routine changes to courses to secure ongoing enhancement will not trigger this plan. The University's approach to making such changes and the required consultation with students is detailed in the [procedure for the approval of changes to existing courses](#). Changes may also be made in consultation with students as part of cyclical University course re-approval processes as outlined in the [procedure for the reapproval of existing courses](#).

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

In the event that those risks that we consider to be moderate or modest above materialise, we will take the following steps to mitigate the risks to students' continuity of study.

- **Closure of a course**

The University's [procedure for suspension or withdrawal of an existing course](#) outlines the approach to handling course closure both within the University and in partner institutions, including arrangements for student consultation. The procedure has been informed by the expectations of the UK Quality Code, the [Higher Education course changes and closures statement of good practice](#), and relevant consumer protection legislation. In order to seek approval for course closure, course teams are required to provide an exit strategy (as part of a course discontinuation form) which outlines a clear plan for students to be able to complete their course without compromising academic standards and the quality of their learning experience. This exit strategy must be informed by full and early consultation with all affected students.

In the event of course closure the University will, in the first instance, make arrangements to teach out current students. This means that we commit to ensuring the course can be completed within the University or at the relevant partner institution by all currently enrolled students, even though the course is being discontinued and we will not recruit any further students to the same course. If the decision to close the course is prompted by concerns about quality or academic standards, we will secure internal and/or external academic advice and guidance in order to ensure that academic standards are safeguarded and that the quality of the student learning experience maintained during the teach out phase.

If, exceptionally, teach out is not possible, we will support individual students in transferring to an alternative course. Depending on student's individual circumstances and aspirations, this may either be within the University/partner institution or at another provider (utilising student transfer arrangements and facilitating transfer of credit through issue of relevant certification).

In handling course closure and potential student transfers, we will be mindful of the needs of students, including those with protected characteristics, and will ensure full consultation and the availability of appropriate support services (in accordance with our course withdrawal procedure).

- **Suspension or revocation of the University's Tier 4 sponsor licence**
Robust procedures to monitor international student recruitment, attendance and achievement are in place, in line with UKVI expectations. These have been subject to internal audit where a number of recommendations have been implemented to enhance existing practice. Guidance for staff on UKVI requirements is available on the University intranet (MySuffolk) and training is provided on an ongoing basis.

In the event that the University's Tier 4 licence is suspended or revoked, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to affected international students. This will include, as appropriate:

- working with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their current year of study
- working with UKVI to allow students already in receipt of a visa based on an allocated Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) from the University to enrol and complete their studies
- offering students who have not commenced travel to the University the opportunity to postpone their application until the suspension or revocation has been resolved
- providing support to affected students to make an application to an alternative sponsor.

In all circumstances, we will ensure full consultation with affected applicants and students, as well as the availability of appropriate support services.

- **Disruption of University activities through sustained industrial action by University staff**

The University has in place established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with recognised trade unions, and is committed to working closely with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise. In the event that there is disruption to continuity of study as a result of sustained industrial action, the University will seek 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 that as far as possible students are not disadvantaged by the action with regards to their academic progress.

- **Disruption to course delivery as a result of the unanticipated departure or prolonged absence of key members of academic staff**

The University seeks to mitigate the risk of single person dependencies for teaching by encouraging a team-based approach to course delivery. In the event of the loss or

sustained absence of key academic staff, the University will seek to fill vacancies or provide temporary cover as soon as possible. We will achieve this through reassigning staff with equivalent skills and expertise, or through internal or external recruitment. In the case of provision at partner institutions, we will work with the relevant partner institution (through the associated partnership management group) to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to minimise disruption to course delivery.

- **Loss of access to specialist resources (predominantly in the STEM and health sciences areas)**

The University seeks to mitigate the risk of loss of access to specialist resources through a range of measures including the purchase of high quality equipment (with duplication of vital resources), maintenance contracts, interim replacement arrangements, the establishment of networks of collaborators, and training of staff and students in appropriate use of equipment. In the event of loss of access to specialist resources and the lack of interim replacement arrangements, the University will draw on collaborative networks to secure temporary access to specialist resources until access is restored internally, or in the case of partner institutions will work with them to ensure appropriate temporary arrangements are in place.

- **Termination of a partnership arrangement**

All partnership arrangements are subject to due diligence scrutiny to ensure that there is a sound academic, financial and legal case to support the proposed new partnership in line with institutional and/or school level strategic objectives, in accordance with the approval processes outlined in the University's [Partnerships Handbook](#). Legal agreements underpinning partnership arrangements are all required to include clauses relating to grounds for termination of the agreement and an appropriate exit strategy that ensures that the quality of the experience of students is not compromised in the event of the termination or expiry of the agreement.

In the event of the termination of a validated or sub-contractual partnership arrangement, the University will consider the following options in consultation with the partner institution and the students concerned:

- wherever possible, withdrawing from the partnership in a gradual or phased approach, over a period of time that would allow current students to complete their studies at the partner institution
- where this is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate courses at the University or at other providers (depending on their individual circumstances) and facilitating any associated credit transfer (this may involve courses being delivered via alternative means, including distance or blended learning, where this would be beneficial and acceptable for the students concerned).

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

Arrangements for the refund of tuition fees and the award of compensation in the event of course closure or withdrawal of provision are outlined in the University's [Tuition Fee](#)

[Policy](#), Section D. Section D of this policy applies to students studying an award of the University delivered by staff employed by the University. Where students are studying for a University of Suffolk award which is delivered by a partner of the University, students should refer to the Student Protection Plan of the partner provider. The University will consider an appropriate award of compensation on a case-by-case basis, informed by the circumstances and context of the situation.

The University's Board of Directors require the institution to maintain a minimum cash balance of 10% of turnover at all times, as a cushion against unexpected events. We would regard refunds and compensation for students who may be affected by non-continuation of study as one such event. At 31 July 2019 we forecast our cash balances will reach £11.5m, which is around 22% of turnover.

4. Information about how we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

The student protection plan will be published on the University website to ensure that it is accessible to current and future students. It will also be signposted from other relevant student-facing documentation (such as the University's generic online student handbook) and in relevant student events (such as induction).

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan through incorporation of references to it in relevant University procedures and associated guidance (for example those relating to course modification, suspension and withdrawal).

The plan will be subject to annual review as part of our established cycle of policy and procedure review, coordinated by the University's Policies and Procedures Working Group and reporting to both the University Executive and the Senate. Students are represented on the Policies and Procedures Working Group and on Senate, facilitating student input.

More frequent reviews may also be required where there are changes to the University's risk register that have implications in terms of preserving continuity of study for students, in order to ensure a joined up approach. This will be overseen by the Executive.

The University will notify students of any changes which may affect their studies in a timely manner. Should this student protection plan be triggered, individual students will be notified by the Academic Registrar's office via email within two working days. Opportunities for both individual and collective discussion of the implications for students and options to ensure continuity of study will be provided. Advice and support will be available from the Academic Registrar via academicregistrar@uos.ac.uk. Additional independent advice and support is also available from the [University of Suffolk Students' Union](#).

Material changes to courses that do not result in course closure will continue to be discussed and communicated with students in accordance with the timescales outlined in the [procedure for the approval of changes to existing courses](#).

Students with concerns about the implementation of the student protection plan may submit a complaint using the University's established [complaints procedure](#). On

completion of the procedure, if a student is dissatisfied with the outcome they may have recourse to the [Office for the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA), the ombudsman for the higher education sector.

Appendix 1: Partner institutions of the University of Suffolk

If you are studying for an award of the University of Suffolk at any of the following partner institutions, you are **not** covered by Section 3 of the University's Student Protection Plan. However, you may be covered by the Student Protection Plan of the partner provider and you should check this with them.

If you are studying on a programme delivered in partnership with the University, but where the University is not the awarding body (including Higher National Certificates and Diplomas) you are also not covered by this Student Protection Plan but may be covered by the plan of your provider.

UK partner institutions

- Billericay Education Consortium
- East Coast College
- Global Banking School
- Inspiration Teacher Training
- London School of Commerce
- North Essex Teacher Training
- Suffolk and Norfolk School Centred Initial Teacher Training
- Suffolk New College
- Unitas
- West Suffolk College

International partner institutions

- British School of Commerce, Sri Lanka
- London School of Commerce, Malta
- UNICAF