

Student protection plan for the academic Year 2018-19

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Introduction

Peter Symonds College (PSC) is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. This plan sets out how Peter Symonds College will protect the continuation and quality of study for current and potential students if a risk to their continued study materialises. The plan intends to assure current and future students that we have appropriate arrangements in place to protect the continuation of study. We recognise that all students are individuals and one solution might not suit all. We will therefore consider students as individuals in the event of an issue regarding continuation and quality of study. The plan, which can be found on our website under wider information about HE, should be read in conjunction with sections 1, 6 and 7 of our Higher Education Terms and Conditions, which can also be found on our website on the same page. The plan explains what will happen if there are changes to your programme and our refund and compensation arrangements in the unlikely event of non-continuation of study.

Teach-Out

In certain circumstances, for example low recruitment of students to a programme for a number of years, a programme may become financially unviable or unable to provide a good student experience. In these cases, the College may decide to close a programme. Teach-out refers to the phased process by which such a closure will be operated and allows affected students to complete their studies before the closure occurs. A teach-out situation does not occur often and is both a realistic and achievable approach to managing course closure with minimal effect on existing students. The College will not normally refund any tuition or other fees, or offer any compensation, where it is able to teach out a course except where there are exceptional circumstances – for example where reasonable adjustments are required for individuals.

Refund and Compensation arrangements

If the College were unable to preserve continuation of study for one or more students they should receive a **refund of fees and appropriate compensation** as set out below:

The College considers refunds and compensation to be a remedy of last resort and is committed to use their best endeavours to ensure all students are able to continue and complete their studies at the College.

A reference to the College no longer being able to preserve continuation of study means that the College has terminated or intends to terminate either:

- a. A College programme of study on which an individual has been offered or accepted a place before that individual can register as a student or
- b. A College programme of study on which a student is registered before that student has completed that programme.

Planned Mid-Programme Termination

If such circumstances arise, the College will, when preparing its plan for dealing with the termination, consult the students registered on the programme and, as a minimum, will:

- (i) ensure all students on the programme receive the award (for example, certificate or diploma) that recognises the stage they have reached;
- (ii) offer those students advice and support to help them decide whether or not to transfer to a different programme at the College or seek transfer to a suitable alternative provider to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- (iii) offer to pay reasonable travel costs to cover at least one visit per student to such an alternative provider;
- (iv) put in place, in consultation with the Students' Representative Committee, a compensation plan relevant to the circumstances of the particular termination that includes provision for compensation in respect of additional costs reasonably incurred by students as a result of any relocation;
NB: relocation costs will not apply if students were notified before the start of their programme that the location of their programme would change during their three year study period.
- (v) ensure that any student who has been in receipt of a bursary or similar funding and who would have continued to receive that bursary or funding had the programme not terminated receives the remainder of that bursary or funding whether they transfer to a different programme at the College or to the same programme at an alternative provider.

The College will also ensure that its plan for dealing with the termination includes appropriate provision for communicating with and compensating individuals who have been offered or who have accepted a place on the programme, to include as a minimum an offer of advice and support to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College or seek a suitable alternative.

Unexpected Programme Termination

An unexpected programme termination occurs when

- (i) a risk to the continuation of study materialises out of the blue and the College has no alternative but to terminate during the course of an academic year or
- (ii) the College has failed to recruit sufficiently to a programme and closes to new recruits to the detriment of individuals who have already been offered or accepted places on that programme.

If such circumstances arise, the College will treat communication and consultation with the students registered on the programme as a priority. As a minimum, the College will:

- (i) if possible, ensure all students on the programme receive the award (for example, certificate or diploma) that recognises the stage they have reached;
- (ii) offer those students advice and support to help them decide whether or not to transfer to a different programme at the College or seek transfer to a suitable alternative provider to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- (iii) offer to pay reasonable travel costs to cover at least one visit per student to such an alternative provider;
- (iv) put in place, in consultation with the Students' Representative Committee, a refund and compensation plan relevant to the circumstances of the particular termination that includes provision for a refund of tuition fees and compensation in respect of additional costs reasonably incurred by students as a result of the termination, any change of programme and any relocation; and
- (v) ensure that any student who has been in receipt of a bursary or similar funding and who would have continued to receive that bursary or funding had the programme not terminated receives the remainder of that bursary or funding whether they transfer to a different programme at the College or to the same programme at an alternative provider.

The College will also ensure that it communicates with and compensates individuals who have been offered or who have accepted a place on the programme, to include as a minimum an offer of advice and support to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College or seek a suitable alternative.

Compensation

The refund and compensation plan referred to above will include appropriate provision for

- (i) lost time;
- (ii) additional tuition costs;
- (iii) travel costs as a result of relocation of provision.

Our degree programmes are vocational in nature and delivered one day a week. As a result students are in paid employment during the rest of the week, live locally and do not have additional maintenance costs as a result of studying with the College. Consequently, the College will not normally offer compensation for maintenance.

Relevant guidance published by either the Office for Students or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education will be taken into account in preparing any such plans.

Payments

Refunds will normally only be made to the bank and account holder (or other financial institution) that originally paid the tuition fee and will not be paid in cash. 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.

Advice, Support and Communication in the event of implementation of our student protection plan

Should any of the risks identified in this plan occur we will take action and offer students suitable advice and support on an individual basis as appropriate. We will always give as much notice to students as possible, in the circumstances and seek to minimise the impact to students. We will 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 will not always be possible. Affected students will be encouraged to participate in discussion about implementation plans. Regular updates will be given, via the most expedient communication methods and a named College contact will be assigned.

General measures to inform students and staff about our student protection plan

The College is committed to open and transparent communication to prospective and existing students and will communicate any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options. Our student protection plan and our higher education terms and conditions, which contain our provisions for refund and compensation are available for future and current students on our website.

In addition, prospective students are provided with a copy of the Peter Symonds College Higher Education Terms and Conditions at interview. These contain our provisions for and inform prospective students where to find out student protection plan on our website. It is also publicised at student induction.

For staff the plan can also be accessed via the website and will included in the staff handbook and reference made to it during our start of year annual HE briefing. Our committee structure ensures that the implications of the plan will be considered should any relevant activities such as changes to a course or course closure be considered.

General

This Policy will not normally apply to individuals who have completed the studies for which they registered as a student with the College.

We can deliver the financial implications of our refund and compensation arrangements for students because we have cash and short term deposit reserves of £4.4M which represents 74 cash days in hand. In addition, we also have Business Interruption Insurance to cover up to £1m of increased cost of working in the event that we were unable to use our existing premises.

Review

Our student protection plan will be regularly reviewed by our student representative committee and annually reviewed by staff and governors as part of the College's overall student policies and procedures. This review is supported by the PSC Higher Education Academic Risk Register, which is reviewed by our Academic Board and our Risk Management committee on annual basis.

Support for the wider higher education sector and its students in the event of course, department or provider failure elsewhere.

Where the College had appropriate expertise or could acquire the appropriate expertise and necessary physical resources the College would enter discussions with the institution where course, department or provider failure were occurring and use its best endeavours to provide appropriate support for that institution. This could include, but is not limited to:

- Supporting teaching and learning through provision of College HE teaching staff to the failing institution
- Management support in terms of course organisation, delivery and meeting UK HE Standards
- Transfer of failing institution's students to the College

Risks to continuation of Study

- We have assessed the risks to continuation of study and classified them according to the likelihood/probability that those risks will crystallise:

High	Definite / highly probably – has happened or is expected to happen
Moderate	Possible / probable – could well happen in the near future
Low	Unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future

Schedule of risks associated with continuation of study

Risk	The College as a whole is unable to operate.
Likelihood	Low
Reason	As of the last audited accounts posted with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) (December 11th, 2017 for the year ending July 31st, 2017), the College returned turnover of £22.10M and held total assets of £23.21M against total liabilities of £14.84M. With these figures in mind, the College believes that the risk of institutional financial failure is very low.
Risk	The College would make a strategic decision to close the AHED campus
Likelihood	Low
Reason	AHED provides a positive financial contribution to the College and there is little excess room capacity on either the AHED or the Sixth Form campus.
Risk	The risk of withdrawal of designation for student support purposes, meaning students will not have access to student loans is low.
Likelihood	Low
Reason	The College had a successful Higher Education Review from the QAA in 2015, has successfully fulfilled the requirements of Annual Provider Review and is currently preparing a submission for OFS Registration to ensure student designation for 2019 entry onwards.
Risk	Disruption to teaching and learning through industrial action

Likelihood	Low
Reason	The majority of tutors do not belong to a union and there is a no strike culture within the Adult & Higher Education division of the College. We have a very flexible staff as many are part-time so if there were to be a strike then alternative arrangements could be put in place to ensure no/minimal disruption. Greater use of VLE delivery over any period of disruption is also an option.
Risk	Major changes to in year course content
Likelihood	Low
Reason	The College has to follow our awarding university processes for course change, which means that any major changes are unlikely to obtain approval for in year course content. We have appropriate plans in place to communicate and obtain student agreement in the unlikely event of this occurring.
Risk	One of our professional body accreditations is lost or suspended (e.g. BACP, FHT)
Likelihood	Low
Reason	We are aware of and up to date with the requirements needed in order to be accredited by such bodies and have processes in place to regularly review and renew such accreditation.
Risk	Loss or damage to our university validation partnerships
Likelihood	Low
Reason	We have appropriate governance and quality assurance processes to ensure that there are rigorous controls, systems and check in place to prevent or positively react to an event which would lead to loss or damage to our university validation partnerships
Risk	Lack of appropriately qualified academic staff
Likelihood	Low
Reason	Our philosophy is to employ staff with appropriate qualifications but also recent relevant professional experience. Staff CV's approved by partner institutions, Staff development funding to support and promote further qualifications
Risk	Loss or interruption to our IT Infra structure and VLE Moodle
Likelihood	Moderate
Reason	Considered possible given the global threats to cybersecurity
Mitigation	Scope: planned interruption e.g. upgrade to software/ migration of software or unplanned eg malicious attack by third party. An assessment of the problem would be taken and an appropriate action plan devised possible actions include: Structure the timing of implementation to minimise disruption to teaching, students and impact Consider alternative means e.g. face to face delivery/ paper assessment submission where VLE not available. Use other unaffected systems for communication e.g. email/skype/facetime/facebook etc Initiate disaster recovery plans
Risk	Permanent or temporary Loss of key staff

Likelihood	Moderate
Reason	Unplanned loss is largely out of the college's control and is a realistic possibility at any time.
Mitigation	Implement holding position through providing cover from existing staff (this is realistic and achievable as many staff are part-time and we have common modules across many programmes where staff may have had experience teaching similar material in a different context and can therefore cover). Discuss with university partner if they have available staff who could be borrowed to cover. Seek temporary or permanent replacements internally or externally Adjustment of delivery e.g. increased VLE content
Risk	College would make a decision to not recruit to a programme for a particular year
Likelihood	Moderate
Reason	This would only happen if there were insufficient student applications to a particular programme to make the programme financially viable/ ensure a good student learning experience. Applications to all programmes show viable numbers for September 2018 for all programmes Furthermore, the majority of our programmes are designed with common modules, which means that students on different degree programmes can be taught together for some modules and this enables smaller group sizes to continue to be financially viable. The likelihood is categorised as moderate because for September 2017 there was no recruitment to Management and Business due to low application numbers.
Mitigation	In 2017 two students were affected and were provided with advise and support to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College or seek a suitable alternative in line with sections 1 and 7 of our terms and conditions.
Risk	Student numbers in a particular programme become unsustainable
Likelihood	Moderate
Reason	As the College serves its local community there can be limited demand for programmes/ demand for a particular programme is exhausted over time.
Mitigation	The preferred approach is to teach out which is realistic and achievable. If it were not feasible then we would approach our partner university and other local institutions to arrange for our students to complete their programme with them. We will treat each student as an individual recognising that not one solution will suit all.