

What is the Student Protection Plan?

The Office for Students (OfS) requires the college to publish a Student Protection Plan incorporating an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, the risk mitigation measures we have in place and the arrangements for supporting you in the event that the college is no longer able to preserve continuation of study.

A sample group of our HE students have been consulted to ensure that the Student Protection Plan is clear and accessible.

What are the risks the College has identified in relation to my studies?

The college has considered a range of risks that could have the potential to affect our ability to be able to deliver our programmes and as they may affect you as a student we detail below what these risks are and how we will do our very best to lessen the likelihood of them happening at all or if they do occur, minimise the effect they may have your studies.

Financial Risk

The risk that Swindon College as a whole is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance is rated good by the Education and Skills Funding Agency for 2016-17, this has continued in 2017-18, at the time of writing this statement, and we anticipate it will continue beyond the academic year.

Risk to premises

We have business continuity plans to deal with natural disasters, terrorist attack, or accidental events all of which could lead to loss of use for part or the whole campus. As the college is located on a single campus which has a number of separate buildings the risk to loss of use of the whole campus is very unlikely. Disruption to teaching in specific areas can be minimised by relocating classes where any temporary damage or loss to teaching areas has occurred, for example as a result of localised fire or flood.

Risk to delivery of programmes

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver programmes in highly specialised areas in the next three years is moderate because we have cross over of expertise in most areas within staff teams. However in some specialist areas we along with others in the sector sometimes find it challenging to recruit to posts where a very sought after expertise is required, for example within Engineering disciplines.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses is also moderate because our modules can be taught within teams of academic staff, with a breadth of knowledge. We tend to have a crossover of skills within teams however in some cases certain expertise is needed for specific Modules and this can be a challenge to secure as mentioned above.

We recognise that for part-time students who are only in College a short time each week, it is vital that we communicate any issues with staffing, or resulting timetable changes swiftly and effectively. Those sponsored by employers will also need information to disseminate potential changes to their employers in good time.

Risks arising from withdrawal of awarding body

The risk that our awarding bodies may withdraw from our contracts is low as our performance is regularly monitored and systems are in place to flag up any quality issues throughout the student academic year in order to take actions and safeguard your student experience. In the unlikely event of the withdrawal of an awarding body, the college will work with them to ensure your experience is protected by clear closure policies and to ensure that the agreed procedures for teaching out of programmes are adhered to, and where possible, you are able to complete your programme with us.

Risks arising from suspension or closure of a programme

A programme of study may be suspended to recruitment, or close altogether in some cases, as a result of:

- a) A lack of applications/enrolments- this is due to the need to protect the student experience in preventing courses running which have very small numbers, or those which are not financially viable, or;
- b) Where we are unable to effectively resource the programme in terms of staffing, accommodation or availability of specialist equipment.

In such circumstances where the programme has current cohorts studying or due to progress on the programme, teaching out the current cohort of students is always the preferred and usual outcome of a course closure or suspension, as is it the least disruptive to our students, and keeps the risk of disruption to students low. The teaching out agreement is formed between the college and the awarding body to allow you to continue your studies through to completion of your current award. (This may not include progression from FD to 'top-up' where this is a separate programme).

Given that in a teaching out situation, we may have a reduced staff team and/or reduced breadth of expertise, for only one or two year groups, rather than the full complement of year groups, it is a low risk that we may need to adapt the course structure or timetable, in consultation with you and your student cohort, in order to preserve our ability to teach the programme through to completion.

What could the College do to mitigate those risks that have been identified as moderate/reasonably likely to crystallise?

Risk to delivery of programmes

If we became aware that we would be unable to deliver courses in specialised programmes in the next three years, we will put in place a teaching out plan for the existing cohorts of students, to safeguard your student experience and ensure that you can continue to study and achieve the intended final award. This teaching out plan will be drafted in consultation with your student cohort, and take into account your views and wishes where practicably possible and where doing so will not jeopardise the overall aims and intended award relating to the programme of study.

If we were no longer able to deliver material components of specific courses which rely on specialist skills, such as Engineering or Computing, we would consider which of the following options would bring about the preferred outcomes for the students.

We would:

- Bring in suitable staff expertise through agency cover, or sharing expertise with other institutions, whilst continuing to recruit suitable staff in a timely manner if this did not resolve the matter, we would then:
- Consult with the students for possible changes to the Modules which would allow for current staff expertise
- Consider other members of staff who might have expertise in other specialisms which students would prefer, in order to make changes to the course structure
- Provide training for existing staff to allow for delivery of specialist modules
- Consider, with the student cohort, the possibility of transfer to other institutions for continuation of studies

Once a decision has been reached on how the course will proceed, an addendum to the original Programme of Study and Handbook detailing the changes, will be issued to each student affected by the change/s for their agreement and signatory.

How can the college ensure I am not financially disadvantaged in the event that due to any of the identified risks occurring, I am not able to continue to study here?

The College has a fees policy which refers to procedures to ensure that refunds and/or compensation can be paid out to eligible students in the event of a programme being closed, or all or part of a programme becoming unavailable.

The Policy makes provision for:

- Refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company.
- Refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees.
- Refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.
- The payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course.
- Commitments to honour student bursaries (where these are paid by the College)
- Compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study.
- Compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

In such an event the College has cash reserves sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those groups affected. We also have insurance arrangements in place sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for any of our students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

How will the College ensure that students and staff will know about the student protection plan, and that it is kept up to date?

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by displaying on our website in the policy section, and provide a link to this in your Student Course Handbooks and HE Guide provided during Induction.

We will also ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes, by adding our plan and the process diagram to our suspension and closure policy, and provide a link to this information in our Course Handbooks.

We will review our Student Protection Plan annually. Comments about the plan will be collated as and when they arise, from students or staff, and the review would also be based on your experiences of the plan and how it was implemented, should it become relevant during your period of study.

All of you as HE Students will be involved in our review as the plan will be added as an agenda item for the Student Experience Forum during Semester two, for each Programme cohort. Feedback provided by students would inform any amendments to be made to the plan.

What happens if the plan needs to be put into action?

If we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan, initially we will hold a course team meeting with the students and staff to ascertain if the course is being changed, suspended or closed as a result of the crystallisation of any of the identified risks. We will give you 10 working days' notice if we need to make material changes to your course.

In the event of a course closure or suspension decision, we will then write to you and all students affected to inform you of the results of these discussions. This may include an invitation to a further meeting with the course team, Head of Learning and/or HE Manager.

We would then arrange for appropriate guidance such as financial and careers advice and support to be available to students collectively and individually. This would be extended to include communication with employers where students are financially sponsored, or where material changes to the course might have an impact on job roles, promotion or required skills.

We would also consult with other institutions to be able to provide advice on alternative courses and how you might be able to transfer with credit, and if so, how this can be arranged, should a transfer of institution be necessary.

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan: Lynne Plested, Vice Principal Quality: lynneplested@swindon.ac.uk and Nicola Pedley, HE Manager, nicolapedley@swindon.ac.uk.

