



Student Protection Plan for the academic year 2026-27

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Sussex was established by Royal Charter in August 1961. The University delivers education provision in its own right and with a range of partner organisations. The University maintains overall responsibility for the integrity of its awards, irrespective of delivery organisation, location or method of delivery.
- 1.2 As a provider registered with the Office for Students (OfS), the University is required to have in place a Student Protection Plan designed to preserve the continuation and quality of study for all potential and current students if a risk to their continued study is identified and crystallises. The Sussex Student Protection Plan is designed to outline the University's approach to managing impacts on prospective and continued study and to provide assurance to students that the University has in place appropriate measures to protect continuation of study.

2. Institutional Risk Management and Governance

- 2.1 The University has a number of committees, operational groups, policies and procedures responsible for the oversight and ongoing ability to deliver quality education. These include, but are not limited to:
- Senate
 - University Education Committee
 - Audit and Risk Committee of Council
 - Risk Management Policy
 - Business Continuity Management Policy
 - Emergency Management Plan

- 2.2 These structures and guidelines have been established to ensure the continued oversight of operation and the ongoing viability of provision. The University assures itself through these means that it has the ongoing ability to deliver quality education with a focus on the student experience and student outcomes.
- 2.3 The potential for Institutional failings across the full spectrum of the University's provision are monitored through risk management principles in accordance with the OfS and other HE regulatory bodies' guidance and will be delivered in accordance with prescribed institutional policies.
- 3. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for Sussex students, how these risks may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise.**
- 3.1 The University of Sussex is an established higher education provider with a sound evidence-based record of financial health, academic quality and compliance. The University exercises its degree awarding powers autonomously and responsibly and with due regard to UK standards and norms. The University operates on a single, well-managed campus and has in place appropriate business contingency plans for incident management.
- 3.2 The University takes seriously its responsibilities to students in relation to continuity of study and consumer law protections. The University has carefully considered the range of possible risks, and the likelihood of these crystallising. This considered assessment highlights eight possible risks as outlined below:
- The University decides for financial sustainability or strategic reasons to discontinue one or more subjects or courses of study.
 - The University makes material changes to courses, raising implications for the rights of students or applicants under consumer law.
 - The University loses its Student Visa Sponsor licence (formerly UKVI Tier 4) and is no longer able to recruit and retain international students.
 - The University loses professional accreditation for one or more of its courses.
 - The continuity of study of students on validated courses in partner organisations is disrupted by factors beyond the University's reasonable control.
 - The continuity of study of students on a University of Sussex award delivered in partnership with an international partner as Transnational Education (TNE) is disrupted.
 - The University is no longer able to offer or complete Apprenticeship provision.
 - A partner of the University involved in student recruitment and student support is no longer able to deliver this service.
 - Industrial action taken by any University of Sussex employed staff affecting students.

Further commentary on each of these risks, along with the mitigation measures in place is provided below.

4. The measures that the University has put in place to mitigate those risks that it considers to be reasonably likely to crystallise.
- 4.1 ***The University decides for financial sustainability or strategic reasons to discontinue one or more subjects or courses of study.***
- 4.1.1 The University has in place rigorous portfolio planning arrangements to ensure that there is a viable market for each of its courses.
- 4.1.2 If the University voluntarily decides to close a course, it would make arrangements to 'teach out' current students. This means that the University commits to ensuring that the course of study can be completed by all currently registered students, even though new students would not be admitted. In doing this the University would carefully manage its approach to staffing and other resources to ensure student's studies are affected as little as possible.
- 4.1.3 In the event that the University were not able to 'teach-out' a degree, in advance of a discontinuation it would liaise with other higher education providers to support students to transfer to another suitable provider, including through the provision of information to support curriculum mapping and transcripts of achievement to date.
- 4.1.4 If the University decided to close a course after making offers to applicants, who have yet to register with the University, it would:
- Offer a similar programme at the University of Sussex, refunding any deposit paid if the student chose not to take up that offer.
 - If the applicant did not want to transfer to the suggested alternative, the University would provide support to identify an alternative provider and release each applicant from any obligations to the University including relating to accommodation matters. For undergraduate applicants, the University follows the processes set down by UCAS around a student's right to substitution.
- 4.2 ***The University makes material changes to courses, raising implications for the rights of students or applicants under consumer law.***
- 4.2.1 The University has in place rigorous and detailed arrangements for ensuring compliance with consumer law including: knowledge and awareness training; procedures to manage curriculum change linked to the provision of information to applicants and students at all stages and a complaints procedure developed in line with good practice guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE).
- 4.2.2 The University is committed to timely consultation with all affected students relating to major course changes and in the event that agreement cannot be reached, or a transfer to an alternative course is not possible, the University would release each affected student from any further obligations to the University. If a student were materially adversely disadvantaged the University will refund fees paid.

4.3 *The University loses its Student Visa Sponsor (formerly UKVI Tier 4) licence and is no longer able to recruit and retain international students.*

4.3.1 The University is a Student Visa Sponsor with a track record of compliance. This is due to rigorous compliance arrangements which are subject to continuous review and improvement. The University's Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) data, the primary indicator of compliance, remain within UK Government Home Office thresholds and continues to be monitored on a regular basis.

4.3.2 If Student Visa Sponsor status was lost or suspended, the University would:

- Work, where possible, with UKVI to allow students already registered to complete their year of study or programme.
- Provide international students with support to identify an alternative provider, including through the provision of documentation including transcripts of achievement to date; specialist advice on immigration matters; sponsorship and funding and the release of students from any other contractual obligations e.g. accommodation licences.
- Offer the opportunity for applicants to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

4.3.3 At all times in any management of the impact on students of the loss or suspension of the Student Visa Sponsor licence the University would act in accordance with the provisions set out by UKVI in the Student Sponsor Guidance document 2: Sponsorship Duties and Guidance Document 3: Student Sponsor Compliance.

4.4 *The University loses professional accreditation for one or more of its courses.*

4.4.1 The University's relationships with its professional accreditation bodies are well-managed and in good standing. If any risk is identified the University would work assiduously with professional bodies to remedy such risk(s) and to minimise any disruption to students.

4.4.2 If the University lost professional, statutory or regulatory body accreditation for one of its degrees, it would:

- Assist students to find places with another accredited provider by every possible means, including through the provision of documents and transcripts of achievement.
- Offer students refunds of fees to date, if the University were unable to procure alternatives. The University would also release affected students from any other contractual obligations e.g. accommodation licences and make provision for students to receive reasonable financial reimbursement so they are not financially disadvantaged.
- Notify applicants of the situation and support them to find an alternative course at Sussex or release them to substitute an alternative application elsewhere.
- Where practical, seek to accredit the University of Sussex programme, via an accredited partner.

4.5 *Industrial action taken by any University of Sussex employed staff affecting students*

- 4.5.1 In the event of industrial action taken by any University of Sussex employed staff, the University will put in place a contingency plan. This will prioritise the delivery of education and minimise disruption to students. Measures will be put in place to mitigate disruption if this happens. If the contingency plan fails to deliver the student experience compensation will be paid. Support will be provided. Relevant details of the contingency plan and compensation will be communicated clearly and in a timely fashion to students.

Provision offered in Partnership

4.6 *The continuity of study of students on validated courses in partner organisations is disrupted by factors beyond the University's reasonable control.*

- 4.6.1 The University validates degrees with a small number of carefully selected partner organisations and applies rigorous oversight to these relationships through the monitoring of academic standards, learning resources and staff resource. Nonetheless, the University considers that the different operating context of its partners may mean that student protection issues are more likely to emerge for students studying with partners than at the University itself.
- 4.6.2 The University recognises that under the regulatory framework it is the responsibility of the provider where the student is registered to put in place student protection measures, and that its partners therefore have primary responsibility for this. However, the University will always work closely with its partners to mitigate the impact of any disruption upon students including through the provision of advice, guidance, and academic oversight when necessary and appropriate.
- 4.6.3 The University undertakes extensive financial, legal and academic due diligence on all potential partners before approval of any new partnership (and on a period basis following approval.) This process itself is designed to minimise at the outset the risks of the partnership being disrupted or ending prematurely or the partner failing to deliver the courses validated by the University. On an ongoing basis the University continues to monitor the risks that an educational partner will be unable to continue teaching students to ensure that any risks identified are mitigated in order to protect the student experience.
- 4.6.4 In the context of partnership more broadly the University runs the joint Brighton and Sussex Medical School with the University of Brighton. This is a longstanding and well-managed partnership, and the University anticipates that the risk of student protection issues emerging is low. Both universities would work together to manage continuity of services and provision for students in the event of their being disrupted or discontinued.

4.7 *The continuity of study of students on a University of Sussex award delivered in*

partnership with an international partner as Transnational Education (TNE) is disrupted or is impacted by circumstances beyond the University's reasonable control.

- 4.7.1 As with the provision of validated provision, the University is in partnership with a small number of overseas providers in the delivery of Transnational Education (TNE) that leads to University of Sussex awards. The University undertakes very careful due diligence of any new partners before approval and has in place extensive contractual documents to govern the arrangement which reduces the risk to provision of this kind.
- 4.7.2 If provision offered through a TNE partnership were disrupted, the University would pursue the following options, as appropriate and depending upon the specific circumstances:
- Work with the partner to allow students already registered to complete their year of study or programme.
 - Offer a similar programme at the University of Sussex.
 - Provide support to identify an alternative provider that would enable students to complete a programme of study.

4.8 *The University is no longer able to offer or complete Apprenticeship provision.*

- 4.8.1 The quality of the University's apprenticeship provision is closely monitored through strong institutional governance which ensures that it continuously meets the requirements of the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR), the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted, the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework and any other relevant external bodies or professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements.
- 4.8.2 Apprenticeship agreements, initial assessments and training plans must be in place between the University, the apprentice and the employer from the start of each apprenticeship, which outline the requirements on the three parties throughout the apprenticeship.
- 4.8.3 Employers are responsible for ensuring that the apprentice is given work-based opportunities in line with the knowledge, skills and behaviours outlined in the apprenticeship standard. Through the Work Based Learning Mentors (WBLM), the University works closely with employers to ensure that they understand the obligations placed on them in meeting all apprenticeship requirements and supporting and ensuring off the job learning takes place and is monitored. This is further supported and monitored by the WBLM undertaking planned tripartite reviews during the duration of the apprenticeship. If an employer does not fulfil the requirements of the degree apprenticeship, or if an apprentice loses their role either through redundancy or dismissal, the University is not responsible.

4.8.4 In these circumstances, the University will support the apprentice to complete the degree and in some cases the degree apprenticeship. The University will work closely with the apprentice to support them in finding a new job role or will transfer them on to the degree programme associated with the apprenticeship (where applicable).

4.8.5 If the University is unable to continue delivering apprenticeships as a result of being removed from the APAR, it will seek to ensure, with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, that existing apprentices are supported in completion or transition.

4.9 *A partner of the University involved in student recruitment and student support is no longer able to deliver this service.*

4.9.1 The University works with a small number of commercial partners who are involved in the delivery of services related to for example marketing, student recruitment and on-course support. The University applies rigorous oversight to these relationships through shared strategic objectives, sound contractual arrangements and robust governance structures and detailed contingency planning.

4.9.2 In the event that one of these partners was unable to continue to work with the University, contingency plans would be activated, and the University would:

- Notify applicants of the situation and support them to complete their application to Sussex.
- Notify current students of any changes, signposting them to alternative in-house support and guidance as appropriate.

5. Information about the policy the University has in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to Sussex students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that the University is no longer able to preserve continuation of study.

5.1 Arrangements for refunds for students are described in the University's terms and conditions¹ including the right to a refund if a course is cancelled and there are no suitable alternatives (or a student is dissatisfied with the alternatives available). If there are material changes to courses the University shall consult with students and take steps to minimise any adverse effects, including transfers to alternative courses. Students can withdraw without any further fee liability if they are dissatisfied; if they are materially adversely affected, they may be entitled to a refund of course fees – this would be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

5.2 The University's arrangements for Refunds are published on the University's website: <https://student.sussex.ac.uk/money/fees/refunds>.

5.3 The University's cash reserves will enable it to underwrite any likely costs emerging from student protection issues, as evidenced by statutory financial returns.

¹ <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/terms-and-conditions>

- 5.4 The University does not accept liability for any consequential or other economic loss (including loss of profits, loss of goodwill or loss of opportunity) resulting from the matters covered by this Plan. Only foreseeable loss will be covered by the University.

6. *Exceptional Circumstances and Arrangements*

- 6.1 Despite every effort to provide an excellent, consistent academic experience to students, there may be occasions where exceptional external circumstances, beyond the control of any institution, impacts not only the University, but the entire higher education sector and/or the country.
- 6.2 The University has built into its Award and Progression regulations provision that can be used in the event that the academic business of the University is significantly disrupted by circumstances beyond its control. These provisions provide a framework through which we will limit the impact of unforeseeable circumstances on the assessment of students and the Institution's capacity to take decisions about progression and awards.
- 6.3 The University takes reasonable steps to identify potential events which might disrupt the delivery of its academic provision and to mitigate those risks, including through its Risk Management Plan and practice. To reduce the impact of an unplanned event to continuation of study, the University has in place a Business Continuity Management Policy and Emergency Management Plan and Incident Response Protocols.
- 6.4 All of these are intended to help the University, withstand or recover from an unplanned event and will help to minimise disruption and to mitigate the situation, with the aim of protecting student interests and to provide continuity of teaching and research.

7. *Communication and Access to Information*

- 7.1 The University is committed to openness and transparency for students in the event that any of the measures in the Student Protection Plan (SPP) need to be invoked. We will share and explain the Sussex Student Protection Plan with students via the following mechanisms:
- Continued and regular dialogue with the University of Sussex Students' Union (USSU)
 - Publication of the SPP on the website
 - Reference to the SPP in the University's offer letters
 - Reference the SPP in the University's Terms and Conditions
 - Reference to the SPP in the online enrolment process
 - Drawing the SPP to the attention of current students through inclusion in the University Student Handbook on the virtual learning environment
- 7.2 The University will share and explain the Student Protection Plan to staff by:

- Publication of the SPP on the staff intranet
 - Inclusion of the SPP and guidance on consumer law in the University's suite of guidance documents on course development, withdrawal and curriculum change
 - Include training on the Student Protection Plan in training workshops on curriculum development for directors of teaching and learning and curriculum and assessment officers
- 7.3 The University is committed to developing the Student Protection Plan as a living document by:
- Annually reviewing the Student Protection Plan in conjunction with the annual cycle of
 - meetings to review the University's terms and conditions.
 - Drawing on sector best practice in relation to Student Protection Plans as this emerges,
 - as relevant and proportionate to the University's own operating context.
 - Building discussion of the Student Protection Plan into regular engagement with the Students' Union and student representatives, in order to ensure that the Plan reflects those issues which are of most concern and relevance to Sussex students.
- 7.4 The University Education Committee (UEC) is charged with the annual review of the Student Protection Plan or as risk assessment changes; membership of UEC includes Students' Union representation.
- 7.5 The University will meet its obligation to ensure that affected students are informed when the Plan needs to be implemented by:
- Notifying students via the Executive Dean (or their nominee) of the need to trigger measures in the Student Protection Plan at least three months prior to the intended date of course change or closure
 - Providing strong appropriate advice and support
 - Providing specific advice and support for students with registered disabilities
 - Engaging with the Students Union in relation to identifying sources of independent advice
- 7.6 The University reserves the right to amend this Plan from time to time based on legal or regulatory change affecting students or the University or best practice in the higher education sector.
- 7.7 The University's Student Complaints procedure is set out on the website and sets out how registered students may complain about any aspect of their interaction with the University, including if they wish to complain about how the Student Protection Plan is implemented. The University operates a separate Applicant Complaints Procedure, details of which are set out on the University website.

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