Student protection plan for the period 2019/20

For any enquiries about this student protection plan, please email: dse@sussex.ac.uk

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<th>Student protection plan for the period 2019/20</th>
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<td>1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, how these risks may differ based on our students’ needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise</td>
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<td>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. We operate on a single, well-managed campus and have in place appropriate business contingency plans for incident management. Therefore we are confident that the risk of the University being unable to operate as a whole entity is very low.</td>
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<td>The University takes seriously its responsibilities to students in relation to continuity of study and consumer law protections. We have carefully considered the range of possible risks, and the likelihood of these crystallising. Our considered assessment highlights five possible risks as outlined below:</td>
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<td>i. The University decides for financial sustainability or strategic reasons to discontinue one or more subjects or courses of study;</td>
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<td>ii. The University makes material changes to courses, raising implications for the rights of students or applicants under consumer law;</td>
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<td>iii. The University loses its Tier 4 licence and is no longer able to recruit and retain international students;</td>
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<td>iv. The University loses professional accreditation for one or more of its courses;</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. The continuity of study of students on validated courses in partner organisations is disrupted by factors beyond the University’s control.</td>
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<td>Further commentary on each of these risks, along with the mitigation measures in place is provided at section 2 below.</td>
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2. The measures that we have put in place to mitigate those risks that we consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

i. The University decides for financial sustainability or strategic reasons to discontinue one or more subjects or courses of study

The University has in place rigorous portfolio planning arrangements to ensure that there is a viable market for each of its courses. This mitigates the likelihood of having to close a course for reasons of financial sustainability.

If the University voluntarily decided to close a course, we would make arrangements to ‘teach out’ current students. This means that we commit to ensuring the course of study can be completed by all currently enrolled students, even though new students would not be being admitted. However, in the event that we were not able to ‘teach-out’ a degree, in advance of a discontinuation we 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.

If we decided to close a course after making offers to applicants, we 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 we would provide support to identify an alternative provider and release each applicant from any obligations to the University including relating to accommodation matters.

ii. The University makes material changes to courses, raising implications for the rights of students or applicants under consumer law

The University has in place rigorous and detailed arrangements for ensuring compliance with consumer law including: a complaints procedure developed in line with good practice guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE); procedures to manage curriculum change linked to the provision of information to applicants and students at all stages. These arrangements are set out in detail in the University’s self-assessment on consumer law protection guidance.

We are committed to consultation with all affected students relating to major course changes and in the event that agreement cannot be reached, the University would release each affected student from any obligations to the University and make provision for students to receive reasonable financial reimbursement so they are not financially disadvantaged.

iii. The University loses its Tier 4 licence and is no longer able to recruit and retain international students

The University’s status as Tier 4 Sponsor is in good standing. Our visa refusal rate – a primary indicator of compliance – is low, with our annual rate in August likely to be below 1%. This is due to rigorous compliance arrangements which are subject to continuous review and improvement.

If Tier 4 Sponsor status was lost or suspended, we would provide our 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.

At all times in our management of the impact on students of the loss or suspension of our Tier 4 licence we would act in accordance with the provisions set out by UKVI in the Tier 4 Sponsor Guidance document 3: Tier 4 Compliance.

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

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. If the University lost professional accreditation for one of its degrees, we would assist students to find places with another accredited provider by every
possible means, including through the provision of documents and transcripts of achievement. 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.

v. The continuity of study of students on validated courses in partner organisations is disrupted by factors beyond the University’s control

The University validates degrees with a small number of carefully-selected partner organisations. We apply rigorous oversight to these relationships through the monitoring of academic standards, learning resources and staff resource. Nonetheless, we consider that the smaller scale and different operating context of our partners may mean that student protection issues are more likely to emerge for students studying with partners than at the University itself.

We recognise 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 our 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.

We also note in relation to partnership more broadly that we run a joint Brighton and Sussex Medical School with the University of Brighton. This is a longstanding and well-managed partnership and we anticipate 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.
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 you we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Arrangements for refunds for students are described in the University’s terms and conditions¹, including the right to a refund if material changes to courses are such that, following consultation with students, there is deemed to have been a breach of contract under consumer law.

The University is making further updates to its suite of policy documents to ensure that its broader refunds policy covers student protection issues including compensation for maintenance and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuity of study.

These updates will be based upon the principle that provision will be made for students to receive reasonable financial reimbursement so they are not financially disadvantaged. These new policy provisions will be in place by July 2018.

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

¹ http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/terms-and-conditions
4. Information about how we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

The University is committed to openness and transparency for students in the event that any of the measures in the Student Protection Plan need to be invoked.

We will share and explain our student protection plan with students via the following mechanisms:

- Continued and regular dialogue with the Union of Sussex Students' Union (USSU)
- Publication of the SPP on our 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

We 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

We are committed to developing the Student Protection Plan as a living document by:

- Annually reviewing the Student Protection Plan in conjunction with our 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 our 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 our students

We will meet our obligation to ensure that affected students are informed when the plan needs to be implemented by:

- Notifying students via the Head of School or Director of Student Experience 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 advice and support from School Offices, the Student Life Centre
- Engaging with the Students Union in relation to the identifying sources of independent advice
- Notifying students that they have recourse to the University’s complaints procedure in the event that they are unhappy about the way in which the plan is being implemented