

Student Protection Plan

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Introduction and purpose

The University of the West of England is committed to creating an outstanding student experience and to supporting students achieve their academic outcomes. The University is a large, financially stable, and sustainable organisation that also has a robust and consistent planning process. This allows us to minimise the risk of any disruption to a student's studies. The University also has a rigorous approach to risk identification and management with an engaged Vice-Chancellor's Executive and strong governance procedures through the assurances that the Board of Governors receives from Academic Board on the academic health of the institution.

The Student Protection Plan sets out the residual risks that remain and how the University would respond if such scenarios occurred.

To make sure our students have access to the best programmes of study, the University regularly reviews its curriculum and programme portfolio to ensure that it remains current, up to date, and meets the needs of employers and industry. This enables the University to identify opportunities for enhancement and development of programmes and the wider portfolio. From time to time, unforeseen events may result in the need to make changes to programmes to study which could impact the ability of students to enrol on or complete their chosen programme within the expected timeframe or circumstances.

Scope and definitions

The Student Protection Plan sets out the large, macro-level risks to the continuation of studies that would likely affect large groups of students. For individual student concerns, there are other sources of information available including:

- UWE Bristol Terms and Conditions
- UWE Bristol Terms and Conditions for Apprentices
- UWE Bristol Terms and Conditions for UWE Online
- Academic Appeals Policy
- Academic Engagement and Attendance Policy
- Bullying and Harassment of or By Students
- Consumer rights
- Fitness to Study Policy
- Professional Suitability Policy and Procedure
- Student Conduct Policy
- Tuition Fee Policy
- Procedure to Withdraw, Reject, or Defer Application

- Complaints Procedure
- Equality and Diversity policies and procedures
- Freedom of Speech Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy
- Student Protection Plan – Refund and Compensation Policy

Risks which may trigger the Student Protection Plan

Closure of the University

The risk that we are unable to operate due to financial collapse or insolvency is **low**. The UK higher education sector as a whole is experiencing some financial challenges, in large part because operating costs have risen whilst undergraduate tuition fee levels have not. However the University's own ongoing financial performance is strong, its student recruitment has remained at high levels for a number of years, and we have a diverse portfolio of activities. Our financial planning is prudent while also making the necessary investments to maintain an excellent student experience and ensure that our facilities are the world-leading learning environment that students deserve and expect. In common with many higher education providers across the sector, we have been taking active steps via our University Transformation Programme to ensure our business model is financially sustainable, affordable and efficient and continues to deliver value for all our stakeholders.

The University, via its Executive and Board of Governors, has effective oversight of its financial performance and our independently audited annual accounts prove that we are a going concern. It is right, however, to acknowledge the ongoing uncertainty of the external environment and the possibility of significant external shocks, as has been demonstrated during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The University maintains effective horizon scanning of all potential threats to its future financial and educational sustainability and responds accordingly as the external environment changes.

Closure or suspension of programmes or closure of subject area

The University may wish to close and remove a programme of study from its portfolio. This may be because of low recruitment numbers which could negatively impact student experience; changes in employment opportunities which could negatively impact graduate destinations; and replacement following curriculum review, to further enhance the offer to students. Closure of a programme means it will no longer be open for future student

registration. Suspension of a programme of study is defined by a fixed timeframe in which the programme will not be delivered and is normally reserved for new programmes of study which have yet to register students. Programmes of study cannot be closed without University approval in order that the contractual implications between current and prospective students and the University can be fully considered. Therefore, the risk of a programme closure or suspension that negatively affects the ability of students to complete their course is **very low**.

If the University planned to exit from a subject area we would follow our normal processes, which would include appropriate consultation. In the event of closure, existing students will be taught out where they are able to complete their studies within the agreed timeframe. Prospective students will be contacted by the admissions team and will be provided with advice on suitable alternatives at UWE Bristol or other institutions. The University will take responsibility for appropriate liaison with UCAS. The risk to student continuation therefore is **very low**.

Closure of a campus or loss of specialist facilities

The University has three main campus locations and works with a number of UK-based and international partners. Its estate is kept under review and changes will be made to ensure the most efficient use of space and to upgrade and improve facilities as required. The estate is largely owned and managed by the University which makes strategic planning easier. It is unlikely that we would lose a number of facilities simultaneously in such a way that would threaten deliverability of courses. If such an event did occur, we would repurpose existing facilities and make alternative space available for those students affected. Significant changes to our estate would be carefully planned and delivered to ensure that students did not face any disruption to their completion of studies.

In the event of unforeseen unexpected loss of facilities (e.g. through fire or flooding) the University has a well-defined business continuity protocol and a plan which outlines the steps we would take in the event of a loss of specialist facilities or essential buildings such as the Library or student residences. In the event of a loss of these facilities the business continuity protocol would be followed. This may include the need for the University to secure alternative facilities off site but the individual impact on students in accessing and continuing their studies would be considered and prioritised in these circumstances.

Therefore, the risk to a student's programme of studies as a result of foreseen or unforeseen changes in the University's estate is **low**, but due to uncertainty around unforeseen events, some risk remains.

Inability to deliver material components of a course

Ordinarily this risk is low but as the recent Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, for some programmes the risk is **moderate**. The majority of our courses are intended to be delivered with at least some face-to-face elements and the pandemic meant that many modules went to online delivery out of necessity. The University has robust procedures in place to protect

learning outcomes while having to deliver some or all of its content remotely and has learned lessons from the experience of the pandemic and the move to online provision if such a similar external shock were to happen in the future. For placement years, the University's response will be informed by the circumstances of the disruption, for example, it provided advice for students about the workplace Covid requirements during the pandemic. Where individual students are not satisfied with the quality of the course content they have received as a result of these necessary changes, then they have the Student Complaints procedure and other avenues to pursue that.

Updating programme content, regulation and policies

The University is committed to the ongoing enhancement of programmes and student experience and as a result may wish to make changes to programme content, regulation or policies. Where material changes (such as several changes to the structure or content of the programme) are made the University will draw these changes to the attention of students and prospective students as soon as possible. Changes to policies and regulations which impact students will normally come into effect at the start of an academic year and following the conclusion of process, which will include student consultation.

In normal circumstances, material changes will not be made to a programme after registration, but if this is necessary students will be informed at the earliest opportunity and wherever possible their views will be taken into account. If a student reasonably believes that a material change to their programme of study adversely affects them, they may cancel their contract with the University as outlined in the Student Terms and Conditions. In such circumstances the University will offer information and advice to a student to facilitate transfer to another institution which offers a suitable alternative programme of study or a mutually agreeable alternative UWE Bristol programme.

While the University will continue to make changes to programmes during the course of a student's studies in order to improve the quality, enhance the content, and meet the latest requirements of an accrediting body or in response to student feedback, the risk to continuation of study is **very low** and it will be very unlikely that such changes will trigger the Student Protection Plan.

Loss of UKVI Student sponsor licence

The risk to the University's UK Visas and Immigration Student sponsor licence is **very low**, given the safeguards and robust procedures it has in place to ensure it complies with its sponsorship requirements. In the unlikely event that the sponsorship is withdrawn, the University will:

- Contact all prospective international students to support them in securing a place elsewhere.
- Contact all current international students to advise them of their rights, whether they are able to remain at the University to complete their studies or whether they should return home to secure a place elsewhere and to make a new visa application.

- The University will support students in securing a place at another institution with a UKVI Student sponsor licence.

Loss of Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation resulting in withdrawal of associated programmes

The University works in partnership with PSRBs and has a long and successful track record of securing and sustaining accreditation for its programmes. The risk therefore that accreditation is withdrawn is **low**. In the event that accreditation is withdrawn, the University would work with the PSRB to try wherever possible to secure the option to teach out existing students on the programme with no impact to their accreditation. If this is not possible the University would provide support to each student to secure suitable alternatives at the University or elsewhere.

Cybersecurity

The University has robust cybersecurity measures in line with other organisations of its size and complexity. However, with the sophistication of cyberattacks increasing, this is an increasingly important area of focus. We have a comprehensive suite of data protection and cybersecurity related training for all staff and have implemented a number of measures to reduce the risk of a major hack, including Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and mandated complex passwords. There is also a Security Toolkit available to staff and students to further understand cybersecurity related issues.

The risk to the University of a major cybersecurity incident that would negatively affect student completion is **low**, but the University continues to monitor and update its systems in line with the latest developments to ensure that that risk is managed.

Industrial action

The University is committed to maintaining positive and effective relationships with its employees. It will work with the recognised Trade Unions to achieve outcomes that minimise the impact on the student experience with established arrangements in place for consultation and negotiation in areas of dispute. However, occasionally industrial action does occur and therefore the risk to aspects of the University's operations is **moderate**. Learning from previous instances of industrial action, the University has in place measures to ensure that disruption to students is minimised, that normal operations are maintained as far as possible, and that teaching sessions and assessment submission dates are rescheduled where required to ensure that learning outcomes are met, and assessments remain fair and effective. The University has established protocols for providing clear and timely communication to students in the event of industrial action.

Risks to specific groups of students

PGR students: loss of supervisor

Due to staff turnover, it is impossible to guarantee that a PGR supervisor will remain at the University for the duration of any student's studies. However, because UWE operates a supervision team model comprising a Director of Studies plus at least one other supervisor, the risk that an individual student may find themselves without any suitable supervisor is **low**. Where a member of the supervision team leaves, the University will make every effort to ensure that the student is able to successfully complete their research studies. This may include identifying a replacement supervisor within the University, supporting a continued relationship with the existing supervisor from a different institution, or securing supervision from another higher education institution.

Apprentices: withdrawal of employer support; institutional loss of approval to deliver apprenticeships

The risk of employers voluntarily withdrawing support for an apprenticeship programme is **low** as the University maintains good working relationships with all employers. In the event that an employer closes or is otherwise no longer able to support an apprentice, the University will work with the apprentice in line with the apprenticeship funding rules to explore a suitable alternative for the apprentice.

The University's overall apprenticeship provision is also subject to Ofsted inspection, which could mean a loss of provision if it is found to be rated inadequate. However, given the University achieved a Good rating in its most recent Ofsted inspection in December 2022, this risk is currently **low**.

Triggering the Student Protection Plan

The University is committed to ensuring students are able to complete their studies and will make all reasonable efforts to enable them to do so. This includes:

- In the event of a programme closure the University will take all reasonable steps to 'teach out' the provision and allow students to complete their programme of study.
- Should a decision be made which results in the need to trigger the Student Protection Plan, students will be informed in writing within 10 working days of the decision being made.
- Where changes result in prospective students being unable to study their intended programme, every effort will be made to secure a suitable alternative at the University or elsewhere.
- We will always take account of the diversity of our individual students, and we will consider their individual needs and circumstances when affected by changes outlined in this plan and/or when the plan is triggered.

- We will take account of the different modes of delivery and any differences arising from level of provision when considering the impact of the changes outlined in this plan and/or when the plan is triggered.

Refund and Compensation Policy in event of Student Protection Plan being triggered

The University Student Protection Plan Refund and Compensation Policy sets out the provision for refund of fees and compensation in the event of the Student Protection Plan being triggered. The policy includes information on the provision to recognise and compensate students where other alternative arrangements are inappropriate or not available and/or where refund or compensation is deemed appropriate. The Refund and Compensation Policy is applied in a fair and proportionate way ensuring students are not disadvantaged.

Partner provision

Through its academic agreement with partner providers, the University seeks to ensure that students are protected against adverse events that may affect the provision that the partner provides. The University works closely with its partners on an ongoing basis to assure the quality of provision they deliver. The University is liable for ensuring that student outcomes are met in situations where a partner is no longer available to provide that provision. When a collaborative programme is discontinued or a partnership terminated, a detailed teach out plan is implemented to ensure that the quality of the academic experience of students is not affected and that appropriate support for students still on those programmes is maintained. These agreements are reviewed as part of the University's ongoing quality assurance and oversight of its partnerships to ensure that each partnership is appropriate to the needs of students.

General information about the Student Protection Plan

The Student Protection Plan forms an important part of the student contract and as such will be reviewed annually alongside the terms and conditions and other important policies. Through our student representation structure, we will consult with students when making changes to the Plan.

The policy will not normally apply to graduates who have already completed their studies at the University.

The Student Protection Plan has been approved by the University's regulator, the Office for Students, and is available to all current and potential students. The plan is referred to and accessible from our student terms and conditions which are sent to students with their offer letters and are available again as part of the registration process. It is also published on our [website](#).

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint about your experience under this plan you should do so by following the University Complaints Policy.

If you have any views, concerns, or feedback in relation to this Plan, please contact complaints@uwe.ac.uk.

Ownership and oversight

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Senior Policy Owner:	Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Registrar
Policy Author:	Academic Registrar
Overseeing committee:	Academic Board
Compliance measures:	Monitoring through Academic Board via the Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards and the Annual Student Casework Report
Related policies, procedures and codes of practice:	As listed on pp.3–4
Related legislative and/or regulatory requirements	OfS Conditions of Registration (C3) Competition and Markets Authority guidance (Higher education: consumer law advice for providers)

Version history

Version	Date	Summary of changes	Author
V1.0	23/05/2018	New plan	Director of Student and Academic Services
V2.0	18/05/23	Updated to reflect changing risk profiles following the Covid-19 pandemic, and new risks added	Academic Registrar; Academic Governance Manager
V3.0	02/07/25	Minor updates to reflect financial environment and ensure currency	Academic Registrar