

Student Protection Plan for Academic Year 2018-19

University of Worcester

UKPRN: 10007139

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Worcester has been operating successfully since 1946 and has an excellent reputation for teaching and practical, purposeful research. In 2005, the University was awarded full University title by Her Majesty's Privy Council following an in-depth examination of the University's educational work and governance.
- 1.2 In 2017, the University was awarded a 'silver' rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework. A diverse range of degree programmes are delivered to nearly 10,000 students and over 1,000 staff are employed. We have a wide range of professionally accredited courses, which are subject to regular independent inspection. The University has undergone significant change and growth over the past ten years, expanding into new subject areas, more than doubling student numbers and investing substantially in staff and [new facilities](#). We work with high quality partners, particularly with regard to work-based learning in Health and Education.
- 1.3 The Higher Education Act and Research Act (2017) requires Higher Education Institutions to publish a Student Protection Plan. The Plan is intended for the protection of students if an event specified in examples by the Office for Students (OfS) were to occur.
- 1.4 The University of Worcester Student Protection Plan therefore identifies a range of potential 'theoretical' risks to the continuation of study of University of Worcester students, and for each of those risks, aims to provide assurance to current and future students that the University has in place appropriate arrangements to protect the quality and continuation of study. The risks discussed are generally highly unlikely to ever materialise. They cover a range of potential situations, some on a relatively small scale, with minor changes to the programme offer, and some on a much more significant scale, such as the closure of the University.
- 1.5 The Plan explains how the University would manage the risks identified, setting out some remedial actions which the University would take. The measures identified in the Plan are

designed to lessen the impact on students of any significant changes. This includes the needs of the diverse student body, some of which may require a specific, particular response to ensure the most appropriate support is offered.

- 1.6 The Plan is an important part of the University's [Terms and Conditions](#) and is supported by the shared values contained within [The Worcester Charter for Students](#).
- 1.7 In addition to the Plan, the University maintains a detailed risk register, an Emergency Plan and a Business Continuity Plan, which are reviewed on a regular basis by the University Leadership Group and Board of Governors and monitored through the established governance arrangements.

2. Disruption to University Activity

Risk: Significant term-time programme disruption

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: The likelihood of disruption to University activity is low. The University has in place a well-tested Emergency Plan and a Business Continuity Plan which has prepared staff to take appropriate actions affecting operations, such as cyber threats, damage to buildings or equipment.

- 2.1 Where events result in significant term-time programme disruption, the University will normally consider whether it is practicable to make changes to programme delivery, rather than closing or suspending an affected programme.
- 2.2 Actions to minimise disruption may include:
 - Short-term suspension of programme delivery (e.g. where there is a change in the programme delivery location or staffing, with appropriate actions to mitigate impact on students);
 - Changes to the programme delivery location or method, which may include distance learning;
 - Changes to the staffing of a programme, for instance through a review of internal staff resources, including recruitment of area specialists, where appropriate;
 - Alternative forms of assessment or application of academic judgement based upon the grades available;
 - Offering students the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme;
 - Provision of reasonable support to students for accessing a programme run by another provider, including making arrangements for the transfer of credits and information about academic progress.

3. Industrial Action

Risk: Disruption to delivery in one or more subject area, resulting in student dissatisfaction

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: The risk of industrial action is low. The University has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions. It is highly successful at maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise occasionally.

3.1 If industrial action does occur, the University will seek to:

- Ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible;
- Take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised and students are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action.

4. Staff Turnover

Risk: Specific members of staff temporarily or permanently unavailable

Likelihood: Likely

Reason: The turnover of staff is a normal feature of every University. The University of Worcester has an excellent reputation as a fair employer and staff turnover is minimal. In 2018, the University reported the lowest gender pay gap of any university in the UK. This, and other employee benefits, encourage members of staff to value their employment with the University and to behave highly responsibly. The University strives to ensure that every programme at the University or partner organisation is appropriately staffed.

4.1 Where possible the University will:

- Seek to fill gaps in staffing as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience into the vacant post(s), or recruiting externally to avoid disruption;
- Provide teaching cover with Associate Lecturers or other appropriate temporary staff;
- Utilise the number of links with other partner providers to respond to disruption through utilising physical and staff resources at partner organisations;
- Where the University cannot avoid closing a programme, the relevant policy as outlined in this document will apply.

5. Major Changes in Year to Course Content and in Year Course Closure

Risk: Major changes that have the potential to disrupt student experience or adversely impact upon a student's ability to continue on a course

Likelihood: Very unlikely

Reason: The need to make major changes in year is considered very low. Staff within academic departments undertake an annual review of individual courses to identify matters for enhancement or development. Any proposals for significant change are managed more formally through published procedures, including the need to consult with students. Such changes are normally only implemented for the next cohort of students.

- 5.1 The University regularly reviews and updates the courses and modules offered in order to ensure that they remain current and reflect best practice. These reviews are intended to improve and enhance the student experience of a programme, or to incorporate changes arising from student feedback for the benefit of students, or from external examiner or employer feedback. In exceptional circumstances, this means that a course or programme may cease to exist, or the University may no longer be able to teach a programme or an aspect of a programme to a specific group of students, or the University may introduce a substantial change, which will affect applicants and/or current students.
- 5.2 In all instances where courses are considered for closure, suspension or substantial change to an undergraduate or taught postgraduate course, the University will follow [a set of published procedures](#). These procedures align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and take account of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) statement of good practice on course change and closure (2015), as well as the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2015).
- 5.3 The University will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the programme in accordance with the description applied to it in the University's prospectus for the academic year in which a student began their programme. However, in the event of major in-year changes to course content the University will ensure that:
- Changes are restricted to the minimum necessary to achieve the required quality of experience, and affected students are notified and consulted as appropriate;
 - It works with students to ensure the offer is still acceptable;
 - Where necessary it allows students the opportunity to withdraw from the programme;
 - Where required students will be offered reasonable support to transfer to another programme at the University, or to another provider.

6. Course Suspension and/or Closure

Risk: A course is suspended or closed at a point where applicants have accepted a firm offer

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: Course suspension takes place occasionally, especially for some courses where applicant numbers are particularly small. It tends to only impact applicants directly rather than students at the University. If the applicant wishes to study at the University it is usually possible to offer an alternative course. If the course is delivered by a partner organisation this can sometimes be more challenging with a smaller number of alternatives available. Under these circumstances the institution would seek to utilise its links with other partners to offer alternative provision to applicants.

- 6.1 In the event of suspension and/or closure of course, the University will normally seek to 'teach out' all of the students currently registered on the programme. Where there is a material impact on the students, the effect will be mitigated by:
- In the case where an applicant is wishing to study at a partner organisation it may be possible to offer an opportunity at another partner or with the University;

- Communication with current students to provide assurance that they will not be adversely affected by the decision, and provide assurance that they are able to complete their studies at the Institution;
 - Where possible, provision will be made to allow for the completion of studies where ‘mitigating circumstances’ have been presented and agreed;
 - Students who have taken an approved break in their studies are always warned that the University cannot guarantee continuation on the same course and/or modules when they return;
 - Where practicable, the regulations will be used flexibly to permit reassessment opportunities rather than requiring a student to retake a module;
- Consultation with stakeholders who may be affected to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken;
- Future applicants will be notified in accordance with UCAS deadlines, allowing time for students to source an alternative suitable programme (where relevant) at the University.

7. Loss of Course Accreditation

Risk: The loss of accreditation by an external, professional or accrediting body

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: Loss of accreditation for a course is considered to be low risk. Staff in academic departments undertake an annual review of individual courses, taking account of students, external examiner and where relevant, professional, statutory or regulatory body reports or feedback.

7.1 In the event of a University award no longer being accredited by an external, professional or accrediting body, the University will consider measures to protect student experience, such as those listed below:

- Offering affected students the chance to move to another course;
- Delivering a modified version of the same course;
- Providing assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider who holds the relevant accreditation.

8. Suspension/Revocation of Tier 4 Sponsor Licence

Risk: The University of Worcester’s Tier 4 licence is lost or suspended

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: The University has been successfully inspected prior to April 2018 on two occasions by the UKVI since being a Tier 4 sponsor. The University has good systems in place for monitoring student engagement, including international students.

8.1 In the event of suspension of Tier 4 Sponsor status, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to those services and to affected students by, for example;

- Working with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
- Allow students already in receipt of a visa, based upon an allocated CAS from the University, to enrol and commence their studies;
- Offer students who have not commenced their travel to the University the opportunity to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

8.2 The University, in the event of revocation of Tier 4 Sponsor Licence will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students by, for example, providing affected students with assistance to switch to an alternative sponsor.

9. Institutional Closure of Part of Campus

Risk: The closure of a site, facility or campus that impacts upon the University's ability to deliver its programmes

Likelihood: Very unlikely

Reason: The University operates on a number of sites within Worcester and students could be re-timetabled for teaching on any one of them. The impact of closing a site therefore would be low and would have minimal impact on students. The impact of Institutional closure following an incident in the city would have a significant impact and would invoke the Business Continuity Plan.

9.1 Where part or all of the campus is rendered unusable for activities involving students, the University would typically consider remedies such as:

- Relocating provision to an alternative location, this may include hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby) and/or installing temporary buildings on the University's land (where available);
- Revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal office hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected; appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken;
- Delivering programmes via alternative means, such as distance learning. Where such an approach is taken, the University will consider whether this is appropriate for students who would be affected.

10. A Decision by the University (or Partner Organisation) to Terminate a Partnership

Risk: The unplanned termination of a partnership affects students' ability to complete their course of study

Likelihood: Unlikely

Reason: The University has well-established and successful partnership arrangements. Key academic staff work in close collaboration with the Academic Quality Unit, Registry Services and Finance department. Regular reviews assess the ongoing viability of partnerships as well as regular partnership meetings, where any issues would be raised at the earliest opportunity.

10.1 In the situation where a relationship with a partner organisation ends, the University would normally follow the policy as outlined in the section on course suspension/closure above.

11. De-registration with OfS Affecting the Ability of Students to Access Student Loans

Risk: Students registered on courses are unable to access funding from the Student Loans Company to cover both course fees and maintenance loans.

Likelihood: Extremely unlikely

Reason: The University governance and operating procedures contain appropriate controls and systems and checks to ensure our continued ability to operate within the regulatory framework.

11.1 In the event of de-registration with OfS affecting the ability of students to access student loans the University, will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resulting disruption to students by, for example:

- Working with relevant funding bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
- Where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and, where appropriate, financially compensating students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies;
- Assisting any affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies;
- Working as appropriate with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

12. Closure of the University

Risk: The University ceases to be viable and must close

Likelihood: Extremely unlikely

Reason: The risk that the University as a whole is forced to close is very low because our financial performance is strong, as evidenced in our financial information, and we have Business Continuity Plan to deal with the material risks. Institutional performance is monitored through effective risk management.

12.1 If the University had no option other than to close, it would consider measures such as those below to protect student experience:

- Where possible, closing in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at the Institution;
- Where the above is not possible, in supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and (where appropriate financially) by compensating

students because of disruption to their studies they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss;

- Working as appropriate with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

13. Refund and Compensation Policy

- 13.1 In the event that it is not possible to preserve continuation of study for one or more students, a Refund and Compensation Policy will set out the arrangements for refunding student tuition fees and other relevant costs. The University is committed to taking all reasonable steps to avoid the need for refunds and compensation by working closely with our students and Worcester Students' Union to find alternative remedies.
- 13.2 Where a student is required to transfer course or move to another institution there are possible implications for student finance arrangements. The University's Money Advice team will be notified of students affected in the event of any of the above steps being taken and will implement the appropriate support. The Students Services team will ensure higher risk students are given additional advice and guidance based on their individual circumstances.
- 13.3 The Director of Finance and Resources ensures that sufficient funds are available each year for student financial support, including the rare occasion a refund/compensation is required.
- 13.4 The Refund and Compensation Policy will be adopted and published prior to registering students and following successful OfS registration.

14. Communication, Advice and Support

- 14.1 This Student Protection Plan will be made available online, in order to ensure its visibility to both current and future students.
- 14.2 A link to the Plan will also be provided within the [University's Terms and Conditions](#), which are sent to all students who are offered a place and are accepted by students when they register annually with the University. The University's Terms and Conditions bring to the attention of applicants and students all key documentation including University regulations, the Student Charter, policies & procedures and the Student Protection Plan.
- 14.3 Should any part of the Student Protection Plan need to be implemented, the University will inform students and staff as soon as possible. Students will be offered advice and support to understand what is happening, including the options available to them. Independent advice and guidance will also be available from Worcester Students' Union.
- 14.4 The University will work closely with Worcester Students' Union to ensure changes to a course are effectively communicated and, where possible, sufficient notice is given. An ongoing dialogue will be established with the students impacted by the change to ensure the Plan is delivered in a supportive way for these students. Students will have a named contact to discuss any concern they may wish to raise. A member of the senior executive team will take specific responsibility for supporting the students, normally the Pro Vice Chancellor Students.

15. Review and Feedback

- 15.1 A review of the Student Protection Plan will be conducted annually alongside the University Risk Register and will be approved by Academic Board and the Board of Governors. Each of these committees includes representatives from Worcester Students' Union.
- 15.2 Students wishing to provide feedback regarding the University's implementation of this Plan will be able to do so through the established student representation systems, including regular student forums and meetings with the elected representatives within Worcester Students' Union. The University's [Student Complaints Procedure](#) is available to support the resolution of any issues in the rare event that a resolution cannot be agreed through the informal process.

End.