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## STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN 2023-2024

### 1. Assessment of risks

This Student Protection Plan (SPP) sets out what measures the University has in place to protect its students in the event that a risk to the continuation of their studies should arise while they are registered to study. The type of event or changes which might cause such a risk are also detailed below.

This plan has been approved by the higher education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), and is available to all current and potential students and applicants. The measures contained in this plan are in addition to the protections students have under consumer protection law, and do not impinge on their consumer rights.

The University retains the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to course, programme and module content year on year, and these in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures. However, if a student believes that the course as delivered varies significantly from what they expected, they can raise this through the University's established complaints procedures, including taking their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. In addition, they may be able to seek recourse under consumer or contract law

In designing and seeking approval for this plan, the University has worked with its regulator, the OfS, to ensure it addresses the institution's specific circumstances: the diverse nature of the University's provision, which includes campuses in three cities; collaborative arrangements with a number of partners in the UK; programmes with professional accreditation; and programmes in specialised areas where there are not many other providers in the UK.

This plan will be triggered if the University:

- decides to discontinue a specific course (which is managed through the University's Programme Termination and Suspension Policy);
- stops teaching a specific discipline;

- decides to close the campus location in which a course is taught and cannot find suitable premises at a nearby location;
- ceases operating altogether; and/or
- can no longer provide the course for any other reason, for example:
  - it ceases operating through no choice of its own; ○ it loses the right to provide the course or qualification; or
  - it loses its Tier 4 licence which permits us the recruitment and enrolment of international students.

**The risk that the University as a provider as a whole is unable to operate is very low.**

The University achieved the initial conditions for registration with the OfS and complies with the ongoing conditions for registration. In addition, the University has clear financial planning which it has submitted to the OfS as part of its ongoing registration. There are also clear continuity plans in place which cover interruptions to the University's business through risks to the estate or to business systems.

**The risk that the University will cease to deliver in complete subject areas is low.** The University keeps its curriculum under regular review to ensure it meets current and future expectations and student demand. However, it may, from time to time, make decisions to cease to recruit to an area of the curriculum. Any such change would trigger the measures in this plan.

**The risk that the University will no longer deliver courses at its London campus is low.** The University's strategic and business plans involve consolidating and, where appropriate, expanding our delivery of courses on the London campus.

**The risk that the University will no longer deliver courses at its Hong Kong campus is low.** The University has several years of experience of operating a campus in Hong Kong. However, there are external and other risks which means the operation in Hong Kong is under regular review.

**The risk that the University will no longer be able to deliver programmes to TNE partner students is low.** The University enters into partnerships following extensive due diligence, and with binding agreements on the governance and operation of the partnerships. These agreements include provision for teach-out and student protection (see section 2 below). These arrangements for collaborative provision were found to meet national standards in the last Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) review of the University.

## **2. Measures put in place to mitigate risks**

In the event that a risk materialises, the University will take one or more of the following measures to protect students' continuity of study:

- If a course can no longer be offered, the default position is to put teach-out arrangements in place within the University for those students already enrolled on the course. Teach-out is where the course is still taught to completion for all students currently enrolled, but there are no new intakes to

the course. When the last existing student completes, the course is then closed.

- Teach-out arrangements will be clearly set-out to the students. They will ensure that the arrangements enable the students to achieve the learning outcomes of the course and to have a satisfactory learning experience.
- The arrangements will detail what will happen to students who need to redeem failure during the teach-out period, or who are not able to complete assessments at the time set due to illness.
- The University's Collaborative Provision Agreement states that in the event of termination of an agreement between the University and a partner, the parties would ensure that students already enrolled on the course would be given the opportunity to complete it within the normal period. They also require the partner to co-operate with the University to ensure that any such students are able to complete the course.
- If teach-out is not possible, the University will offer suitable alternative courses, and will facilitate transfer to other providers, including advice, and transfer of credit. The University may offer alternative locations of study, even if that means securing alternative premises, or alternative modes of study, to allow students affected to complete.
- In the event of a closure in London, for example, the University would offer transfer to its courses in Sunderland, or to facilitate transfer to other providers in London. Students studying at Sunderland's further education (FE) partners would similarly be offered a transfer to courses at Sunderland. For students in Hong Kong, and students studying at TNE partners, teach-out would remain the primary option but, where necessary, transfers to other local providers would be facilitated.

All these measures have been tested through consideration of how the processes would work, or from past experience of operating teach-out or other measures.

The University will take into consideration the needs of all its students, including those with mobility considerations or special educational requirements. Measures contained in the plan may be brought into play at any time; if, for example, doing so would reduce the impact or likelihood of any interruption to students' studies.

### **3. Information about refunds and compensation**

The University has developed a Course Closure Compensation Policy (CCCP) which it will use as appropriate if required by this plan.

The University has the financial capacity to meet any of the obligations arising from this

CCCCP. It has a significant income, and regularly generates a surplus and has a positive cash balance. Its future financial planning includes significant levels of unallocated expenditure contingencies that are designed to cover the need for this sort of one-off, unplanned cost.

#### **4. Information about communicating with students**

The University's Student Protection Plan will be published as part of the Student Handbook and will be publicised on publication via an email to all enrolled students. From then on, attention will be drawn to the plan via an explicit reference to it in the online enrolment process, and in the terms and conditions which all applicants receive.

The plan will be circulated to all teaching staff with a cover note explaining the implications of the Plan for the proposal of course closures. The University's process for review of its programmes already charges review panels (which include external panel member) with considering 'specific measures to notify and protect the interests of students on programmes being discontinued'. This too will be amended to explicitly reference the Student Protection Plan.

The University will review the SPP on an annual basis in January of each year for the academic year ahead. The Students' Union will be involved in the review process, and their consultation with their members will inform the review.

The University will notify students of any changes which may affect their studies in a timely manner. Should the SPP need to be triggered, students will be notified in writing by their Dean of Faculty.

The University commits to contacting students as soon as it has decided to close a course. It will seek to give as much notice as is practicable, which could be a number of months.

In the unlikely event of any situation where it is not possible for the University to give that much notice, a minimum of four weeks' notice will be given prior to the intended dates of course change or closure. Advice and support will be offered in the first instance by the relevant programme leader. Additional, independent, advice and support is available from the Students' Union.

If a student is not content with the proposed outcomes, they can raise the issue firstly via the University's internal complaints procedure and, if they remain dissatisfied, with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. The University commits to:

- being open and transparent with students when the continuity of their studies may be perceived to be at risk, and inform them in a timely manner;
- ensuring that it sets out how key elements of the student experience will be managed in such a situation;
- taking reasonable steps to protecting students' studies should it discontinue a course or discipline, close a location (building or campus) where a course is taught, or close altogether;

- considering students' views after the decision has been taken to discontinue a course, or stopping teaching a discipline, or closing a campus location;
- taking into consideration the individual and diverse needs of all its students and ensuring that no student group or individual is unfairly disadvantaged;
- informing the OfS of any changes that may necessitate a review of the plan or any of the measures contained within it;
- regularly seeking students' views on this plan as part of its student feedback processes; and
- ensuring that all students have access to evidence of academic achievements, such as certification, transcripts, and information about course content, especially for any students who wish to transfer.

If students have any immediate views, concerns or feedback in relation to this plan, they can contact the Academic Registrar – [jain.rowan@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:jain.rowan@sunderland.ac.uk)

## **5. Governance**

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed annually by the University's Executive and its Regulatory Framework Group, in consultation with the Students' Union. Any subsequent revisions will be approved by the University's Academic Board.