

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

UKPRN: 10002094

Higher Education Student Protection Plan

A. Introduction

As a registered provider of higher education, West London College must publish a Student Protection Plan which describes how continuation and quality of study will be preserved for current and potential students if a risk to their study occurs. As an established College, we have significant experience in preserving continuation and quality of study for affected students on those rare occasions when we have either ceased to offer a particular area of curriculum or closed provision on a satellite campus. This plan builds on our experience and is intended to assure current and future students that we have appropriate arrangements in place to protect continuation of study. It outlines the types of risks, gives examples of events that might trigger action and explains what we might do to minimise the impact of these events if they happen. Our plan is also designed to take into account the differing needs, characteristics and circumstances of our student community. Failure to have this policy in place or non-adherence may result in resource implications, financial considerations and inconsistency practices leading to dissatisfaction and poor reputation as well as failure to demonstrate the expected base line regulatory requirements of a HE provider.

B. Scope of this plan

The Policy relates to all applicants and students on the College HND courses and those on university validated programmes, these programmes can be described as meeting the level descriptors of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). It involves any member of staff involved in offering Information, Advice and Guidance to prospective and current students. This therefore includes: administrative (e.g. finance, reception), support (e.g. admissions), academic (e.g. course leaders and lecturers), and marketing and management staff.

This policy is to clarify what an applicant or student can expect where an unexpected situation or problem occurs this includes where their course or campus were to close. It highlights the arrangements for informing and consulting with students so that their rights and the responsibility of the College. It is important that West London College (the College) has robust plans in place which protect higher education students if their course cannot be fully delivered or if it is necessary to change the content of their course.

This document describes;

- A. The obligations of the College to applicants and current students in relation to the units/modules that are offered on its higher education programmes and the arrangements that will be made if changes to the course content and delivery are required.
- B. The arrangements to be put in place in the event of changes to the Awarding Body or validation arrangements for a course.
- C. The exceptional circumstances that will give rise to closure of a course and the arrangements that will be put in place in such an eventuality.

The Student Protection Policy is triggered by material changes which could affect students' continued participation in their chosen course or at a campus where they are studying.

- C. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for students

Financial Management & Resources:

The College has had its financial situation monitored by the Further Education Commissioners and has seen its finances improve over the previous few years. The College has, no exposure to investments in international campuses and limited exposure to currency fluctuations. The risk that the provider as a whole is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance has improved and is stable.

Academic Quality Regime:

External assessment of the rigour of WLC's approach to quality management is evidenced by positive outcomes in:

QRV 2018

APR 2017

IQER 2012

These reviews have determined that confidence can be placed in WLC's approach to the management of risks to the continuation of study for our students. These reviews have determined that confidence can be placed in WLC's approach to the Academic Standards as well as the Quality of Learning Opportunities.

Real Estate

The risk that we decide to close the location (building or campus) in which the programme is taught and cannot find suitable premises at a nearby location is low. Our estate is extensive with four sites including one very large site close to the centre of London.

The risk that we decide to discontinue programmes on timescales that directly affect existing students is low because we plan any course discontinuations to allow current students to complete

their studies. Where a course is discontinued we would close the programme to new recruitment through our curriculum planning process and 'teach-out' current student cohorts. We have experience of managing this process successfully and it is encapsulated in the Course Closure Policy.

Enrolment

The risk that we discontinue or do not offer programmes due to insufficient enrolment and programme take-up or continuation is moderate. We regularly review the suite of programmes we offer to ensure that keep pace with student demand and may choose to close a programme to future cohorts where demand is low or as part of a refresh of our wider portfolio. We are also working with key partners including universities and employers to ensure that we are offering a relevant and good value for money curriculum offer.

Nomenclature

The risk that the qualification you obtain is significantly different from that for which you enrolled is very low because of our approach to programme development and our approach to managing course discontinuation, outlined above. We retain the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to programmes and module content year on year, as part of quality enhancement and in response to student feedback. These minor amendments do not constitute a title change and do not in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures.

The risk that we completely stop teaching a discipline is low for the majority of the College's provision. The College is in the process of completing a full review of its undergraduate provision in order to ensure that the programme portfolio is appropriate and that we are actively recruiting to programmes. Where we offer specialist programmes, teaching is delivered by a combination of permanent and contract staff which can be adjusted as required in response to changing circumstances.

External events:

The risk that we lose the right to provide the programme or qualification for which you are registered is low. We have a long-established track record of offering high quality provision and established relationships with relevant professional accrediting bodies across our provision.

The risk that we cease operating through no choice of our own is very low. The College is a large organisation with strong management and governance arrangements in place for managing our business. We have business continuity plans in place which are regularly reviewed and tested through practice exercises. We have independent scrutiny of our activities through our independent external auditors.

D. Responsibilities

1. The decision to close a course

It is imperative that before a change, is implemented that the consequences are fully considered. Such consequences may include, for example, interrupted student experience, financial considerations, market demand, resource implications, consumer protection (students) and reputational issues. It is the responsibility of the Higher Education Board to make any recommendations to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to oversee the changes to courses including course closure. The Higher Education Board will;

1. determine whether the reason for removal of a course from the current College portfolio is valid and acceptable. This must include consideration on how applicants/students will be supported;
2. consult with students and staff (through course boards) on curriculum revisions and provide an opportunity to raise queries and concerns;
3. in cases of collaborative provision, consult with the other institution to close, suspend or change course content and ensure that they are aware of the policy and processes;
4. agree and document the reasons for changes and complete the appropriate documentation (must complete the 'Request for Closure, Suspension or Course Modification' form) and submit to the SLT;
5. agree an action plan for managing the impact which must be drawn up with all internal and external stakeholders;
6. to write formal communication to applicants/students after agreed action confirmed.

2. The HE Senior Admissions and Enrolment Officer;

1. ensure that the course is removed from, or information amended, on the UCAS database, the College website;
2. implement the Higher Education Admissions Policy in respect of any applicant holding an offer of a place;
3. check and update internal and external publicised information;
4. follow the College Terms and Conditions of Admissions and Enrolment Higher Education to be clear on the obligations to applicants and students;
5. inform the College Marketing team.

As outlined in the Public Information and Communications Policy the College will aim to deliver course provision as described in course handbooks, unit/module guides, website information and other available information. However, at times it may be necessary to change this provision either before or after a student enrolls.

Reasons for a suspension of a course could include;

1. insufficient enrolment and course take-up makes it unviable to run and detrimental to the student experience;
2. restricted number of units/modules being offered in a particular curriculum area due to resource restraints;
3. developments in the subject and QAA subject benchmark statement revisions;
4. to safeguard academic standards for example, in response to external examiner feedback;
5. changes implemented by the awarding or accreditation body;
6. following student feedback.

Course suspension is agreed for one academic year or one intake. Where a course has been suspended for two consecutive years, the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality should consider if it is appropriate to close the course.

The process;

1. All planned course suspensions will be submitted to the HEG for approval to ensure that implications of removing a course of study are discussed;
2. The SLT will be informed. Where necessary, Chair's Action will be sought when meeting schedules would delay the process;
3. To ensure that restrictions on the number of classes offered in a particular subject area are agreed by the Curriculum Head in conjunction with the Assistant Principal.

If a course is suspended at application stage, the applicant will be informed by letter or email as soon as it is reasonably practicable in order for the applicant to decide whether or not they still wish to continue with their application to study. Substitute provision will be considered, and applicants informed of the alternate course options. An offer of a place may be deferred for an academic year, but the College cannot guarantee that the course will run. If, as a consequence of the course suspension, the applicant decides not to study with the College, the College will refund any tuition fees and/or deposit that they have paid in advance.

3. Change in course content or delivery

In certain circumstances, the College may need to make changes to the previously advertised course content, structure and/or method of delivery of a course or individual modules offered after an applicant has accepted their offer, or as an enrolled student progresses. This may include discontinuing some units/modules.

Reasons for a change in a course structure or content could include;

1. to meet the requirements of an accrediting, professional, statutory and/or regulatory body;
2. to comply with legal, regulatory or governmental requirements;

3. to respond to sector good practice or quality enhancement processes, such as in response to student feedback;
4. to keep programmes contemporaneous by updating practises or areas of study;
5. to safeguard academic standards for example,
 - a. in response to external examiner feedback;
 - b. because of circumstances outside of the reasonable control of the College such as an unplanned absence of a key member of staff
 - c. if an external provider is no longer available to contribute to a module/unit;
6. where insufficient numbers of students have chosen an optional module/unit making it unviable to run or where a member of staff whose expertise was required to run it is no longer available;
7. to abide by the revisions made by the Awarding Body.

It is possible that as a result of this, substantial changes in the methods of delivery of a course, such as the timetable, location, number of classes, methods and timings of assessments is required. The College will make all reasonable efforts to minimise any adverse effect the change may have on students and will endeavour to consult with potentially affected students as early as possible where it is able to do so. Student's opinions are sought through the Course Boards.

If the College makes a change after a student has enrolled, or an applicant as accepted an offer of study, the student/applicant will be informed by the course lecturer, by email, or in tutorials as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so. The College may offer the student a place on an alternative course or assist the student in finding an alternative provider including help to transfer credits where possible. Any entitlement a student may have to a refund of fees will be determined in accordance with the Refund Policy Rules.

An action plan should be implemented to ensuring existing students can complete their course even if their specific qualification has changed or been withdrawn and will not run in subsequent years. On rare occasions a course with enrolled students may no longer be accredited and the College will try and identify a suitable alternative course to transfer to or assist in finding an alternative provider.

The action plan should include;

1. assessing the impact on course management and delivery;
2. formal communication to students, staff and notification to other stakeholders (e.g. external examiners, student's employers) to include the reasons for the decision;
3. external examiners, student's employers) to include the reasons for the decision;
4. managing the implications for progressing students who require to retake units/modules;
5. taking into account the needs of students who have intermitted their studies. Although, it should be noted that the College are unable to guarantee to students that the pathway for which they originally registered will still be available when they resume their studies;

6. Policy and the Academic Regulations – compliance with the policies and procedures of the Awarding Body.

If in the exceptional circumstance, the College had to close, and the curriculum offer ceased, key measures as stated in the College Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan would be invoked.

Exceptional circumstances could include;

1. a strategic decision by us to close a campus and exit the market altogether;
2. damage to the building, critical infrastructure or key resources as a result of fire, criminal damage or accident;

In the case of 1. above the decision to exit the market, the 'teach out' policy will be invoked. In the case of 2. Above, where possible the College should make arrangements for affected students to switch to a different provider without having to start their course from the beginning, including help to transfer credits where possible and the issuing of a formal transcript. Any entitlement a student may have to a refund of fees will be determined in accordance with Fee and Refund Policy.

E. Closure of Higher Education provision

If a decision was made to close the higher education curriculum offer there must be early and ongoing discussions with students. These should include informing students of the plans and outline the measures that will be taken to safeguard their educational experience. All students affected should be met with and not just student representatives. Where possible, meeting should be held when students are timetabled to attend College.

1. Measures to protect students

The College has plans to protect students and minimise disruption to their studies when material changes occur. These may include any one of the following, depending on what is appropriate for the circumstances:

1. provision to 'teach out' a course for existing students, this will always be the preferred option and any deviation from this must be ratified at the Higher Education Board and through SLT;
2. offering students an alternative course, facilities or venue at the College, this may include non-prescribed HE where this would be the wish of the student;
3. making arrangements for affected students to switch to a different provider without having to start their course from the beginning;
4. full or partial refunds will only be considered in in-keeping with the Fees and Refund Policy, where at all possible the College is unable to support students with continuation of studies.

F. Communicated to students.

The College is committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and transparent information ensuring accurate, relevant, and current procedures are followed enabling applicants and students to make informed decisions.

The College takes into account student interests in decision making and ensures that decisions are fair, accessible, transparent and explicit. Guidance is published through the Terms and Conditions of enrolment and application document. Adherence to the Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2015) also ensures that the guidance given is accurate, clear, unambiguous and timely.

Students and applicants will be informed by the HE Course Leader and Curriculum Head by email, telephone or in tutorials of any changes to their course or module/unit. If their offer of study is withdrawn for any reason they will be informed as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so and this communication will be formal written communication emailed by the Curriculum Head.