

# HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

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| <b>Audience:</b>          | STUDENTS (HE)   |
| <b>Requirement:</b>       | Essential   |
| <b>Policy Owner:</b>      | Executive Director of Business and Civic Partnerships |
| <b>Review Delegation:</b> | Curriculum & Quality Committee                        |
| <b>Review Cycle:</b>      | Annual  |
| <b>Last Review:</b>       | March 2025  |
| <b>Due for Review:</b>    | March 2026  |

## **SOUTH HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE GROUP**

### **1.0 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires all higher education institutions who are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) to publish and maintain a Student Protection Plan. The purpose of this Plan is to ensure that students' interests are protected and that, as far as possible, they can continue their studies in the event of changes to circumstances.

### **2.0 SCOPE**

The Student Protection Plan is an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our Higher Education students, how those risks may differ based on our students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will emerge. Identified risks have clearly outlined contingencies in place to ensure that our students are protected should the college group circumstances change.

### **3.0 DETAIL**

#### **3.1 AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RANGE OF RISKS TO THE CONTINUATION OF STUDY FOR YOUR STUDENTS, HOW THOSE RISKS MAY DIFFER BASED ON YOUR STUDENTS' NEEDS, CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THOSE RISKS WILL CRYSTALLISE**

Circumstances that might create a risk to the continuation of studies are (but are not limited to):

##### **Closure of the College Group or their franchising/validating University partners**

The risk that the College Group will need to close is low. This is because of the following mitigations:

- We have robust financial planning processes to ensure that we maintain a good financial position.
- We have a strong academic performance. Whilst the college group is not TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) rated, our validating/franchising partners carry Strong TEF ratings.
- Our student enrolment rates are healthy
- We have a robust risk management process. Key risks to the group are reported and highlighted through this process and mitigating actions are agreed and implemented in response to any emerging issues.
- Both the College Group and our validating partners (as part of our mutual agreements) will continue to ensure that you succeed on your programme even if something happens to the other party.

### **Closure of Part of the Campus**

The risk that the College Group will need to close part of its campus in a way that will prevent students from continuing their studies is low. This is because:

- We have business continuity plans. These outline how we will respond to and tackle any disasters or emergencies that might deny us the use of key buildings and facilities.

### **3.2 Closure of Courses**

The college group reviews all programmes annually ensure that they continue to be dynamic, innovative, and meet changing needs. If, because of this review, it was decided to close a course then, in most instances, the group will “teach-out” existing students to ensure that they are able to complete their programmes or ensure students can complete the remainder of their training with one of our Higher Education partners.

The risk that the closure of courses will prevent students from continuing their studies is low. This is because:

- All decisions that may pose a risk to students’ continuation of studies will be subject to careful review. The review must identify and address implications for students.
- Our annual monitoring processes explicitly scrutinises performance data, enabling early intervention if risks are identified.

### **3.3 Loss of Degree Awarding Powers**

South Hampshire College Group does not hold degree-level awarding powers however we do deliver Top-Up degrees through our Higher Education Partnerships with the University of Portsmouth, the University of Middlesex, and Southampton Solent University.

The risk that our Higher Education University Partners will lose their degree awarding powers is low. This is because:

- They maintain high academic standards and strong quality assurance processes that adhere to the expectations of external agencies. They received positive outcomes in their most recent Quality Assurance Agency reviews.
- Staff are supported and expected to develop, disseminate and incorporate best pedagogic practice in an engaging, relevant, and challenging curriculum.
- We invest in the professional development of our academic and support staff, for example by supporting staff to engage in continuous professional development and to achieve professional accreditation

- None of our validating partners have time limited degree awarding powers (DAG) and it should be noted DAG are granted indefinitely. DAP are 'only rarely' revoked and this would only ever happen should all other interventions have been fully exhausted.

### **3.4 Removal of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Accreditation**

The removal of professional, statutory, and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation is not always the consequence of failing to attain required standards. We may, from time to time, choose to pursue new accreditations and/or withdraw from existing accreditations to better align with our strategic goals. The risk that the removal of PSRB accreditation will prevent students from continuing their studies or from entering their chosen career is low. This is because:

- PSRB accreditation is not always required to enable a qualification to be awarded or for a student to enter a particular career. If we change or withdraw from an accreditation then the needs and aspirations of students will be considered.
- We liaise and work closely with PSRBs (Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies) to ensure that our accredited courses reflect the required standards for PSRB accreditation.
- We ensure that our courses comply with existing PSRB standards and have monitoring systems to ensure that we reflect new accreditation requirements in our academic planning.
- New, amended, and reviewed PSRB accreditations are overseen by our Quality Assurance Team, which can request the delivery of an action plan if any risks are apparent.

### **3.5 Suspension or Loss of UKVI Tier 4 Sponsor Licence**

South Hampshire College Group does not hold a Tier 4 licence.

### **3.6 Loss of Key Staff**

The risk that the loss of key staff will prevent students from completing their studies is low. This is because:

- Our People Strategy emphasises the importance of recruiting and retaining high-quality staff and developing succession strategies.
- We aim for our courses to be taught by integrated teams of staff.
- Our strategic curriculum themes are developed to ensure that course teams have adequate staff capacity and expertise to support the range of subjects that we offer.
- Potential over-reliance upon individual members of staff is explicitly considered and addressed as part of our periodic review process.
- Research student supervision is conducted by a first and second supervisor and sometimes by a third supervisor, to ensure continuity if a supervisor leaves the college group.

### 3.7 Changes with Partner Institutions

The risk that changes at partner institutions will prevent students from continuing their studies is low. This is because:

- We undertake robust due diligence of all potential partners and only enter partnerships when we are satisfied that there are no undue risks associated with the potential partner.
- We undertake comprehensive ongoing due diligence of the financial and academic health of our partners and their regulatory status.
- We have robust legal contracts with our partners that clearly stipulate respective responsibilities, and we liaise closely to ensure that relationships are effective.
- We undertake annual and periodic review of our partnerships to identify and take action to address any risks to the student experience and to academic standards and quality.
- We have predetermined arrangements in place to ensure that students are able to complete their studies if the partnership draws to a natural conclusion.
- We have contingency plans with our partners to help us to manage unforeseen changes.

### 4.0 THE MEASURES THAT YOU HAVE PUT IN PLACE TO MITIGATE THOSE RISKS THAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE REASONABLY LIKELY TO CRYSTALLISE

We do not consider any of the risks identified above to be reasonably likely to crystallise in the foreseeable future. However, of the risks identified above, we feel that the following have the most likelihood of crystallising and have identified the following mitigating actions to address them;

#### **A, B , C and D- Closure of Courses, the College group or a Campus or Loss of Degree Awarding Powers**

Our Education Strategy outlines our commitment to review all programmes an annual cycle to ensure that they continue to be dynamic, innovative, and meet changing needs. If, because of this review, it was decided to close a course then, in most instances, the group will “teach-out” existing students to ensure that they are able to complete their programmes. If this is not possible then we will offer the students concerned, where practical, opportunities that will include:

- Transferring to other courses offered by the college group.
- Studying a modified version of the same course.
- Studying via distance learning to complete their course if appropriate.

Each instance will be treated on a case-by-case basis and the group will work proactively to identify and secure other feasible solutions that work best for affected students. In the rare event that the group is unable to provide for continuation of studies then it will:

- Facilitate opportunities for affected students to continue studying at another provider; and/or
- Provide affected students with proportionate, reasonable, and fair refunds, reimbursement, and compensation.

#### **Removal of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Accreditation**

If we lose or withdraw from PSRB accreditation and this leads to students being unable to continue their studies then we will offer the students concerned, where practical, opportunities that may include:

- Transferring to other courses offered by the college group.
- Studying a modified version of the same course.
- Aiding with transfer to a different provider who holds the relevant accreditation.

Each instance will be treated on a case-by-case basis and the group will work proactively to identify and secure other feasible solutions that work best for affected students.

#### **Suspension or Loss of Tier 4 Sponsor Licence**

The college group does not hold a Tier 4 licence.

#### **Loss of Key Staff**

If key staff leave the college group or are otherwise unavailable to teach or supervise then we will provide an appropriate member of staff to teach or supervise either on a permanent or interim basis.

#### **Changes with Partner Institutions**

If there is a change to our Partner Institutions that may impact our students, we will work closely with them to ensure that impact is mitigated, a link to UOP student protection plan is provided in section 8 for students studying UOP courses from our Eastleigh Campus.

## **5.0 INFORMATION ABOUT THE POLICY YOU HAVE IN PLACE TO REFUND TUITION FEES AND OTHER RELEVANT COSTS TO YOUR STUDENTS AND TO PROVIDE COMPENSATION WHERE NECESSARY IN THE EVENT THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO PRESERVE CONTINUATION OF STUDY**

### **Refunds and Compensation for Non-Continuation of Study**

Our Refund and Compensation Policy for Non-Continuation of Study is linked in section 8.

### **Delivery of the Financial Implications of the Refund and Compensation Policy**

The Group maintains sufficient cash reserves which it currently deems adequate to provide any refunds, reimbursement and compensation that might be necessary. This position will be reviewed in the light of any changes to the Group's risk profile that may have implications for continuation of studies or if we implement changes to the way that we manage our cash that might impact upon our cash reserves.

## **6.0 INFORMATION ABOUT HOW YOU WILL COMMUNICATE WITH STUDENTS ABOUT YOUR STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN**

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by publishing it on our website and on our virtual learning environment. We will also include reference to the Plan in the information that we provide to applicants.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when course changes are proposed by ensuring that its implications are considered as part of our annual monitoring course processes. Coverage of the Plan will also be included in the induction programme for new Faculty Directors and Curriculum Area Managers of academic departments.

We are committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options. This will include offering affected students:

- 21 days clear notice will normally be given of any changes to their courses that may affect their ability to continue their studies.
- Opportunities for consultation and comment on any proposals.
- Opportunities to receive information, advice, and guidance to consider alternative options that meet their interests and needs.

## **7.0 REVISING THIS PLAN**

We will formally review the Student Protection Plan every 12 months to identify any required revisions, or more frequently if changes to our risk profile make this necessary. The review will be undertaken by the Group's Higher Education Board of Studies (HEBos) and then progressed to the Curriculum & Quality Committee.

In addition, we will align the Student Protection Plan with consideration of our Corporate Risk Register. Our Corporate Risk Register is reviewed in detail by ELT and The Corporation 3 times a year. We will review whether there is any alteration to the Group's risk profile that requires the Student Protection Plan to be reviewed and potentially revised. This will help to ensure that the Plan is regularly and proactively considered and, if required, consulted upon as a "live" document.

HEBoS will also consider whether amendments are necessary to the Plan when considering any specific changes or proposals that may have implications for continuation of studies.

## **8.0 LINKS TO RELEVANT POLICIES**

SHCG (South Hampshire College Group) fees policy can be found here;

[Fees Policy \(shcg.ac.uk\)](https://shcg.ac.uk/fees-policy)

University of Portsmouth (for Students studying UOP courses at our Eastleigh Campus) policies can be found via these links;

Student Protection Plan [PDF Rendition \(port.ac.uk\)](https://port.ac.uk/pdf-rendition)

Fee's Policy [Tuition Fee Policy](https://port.ac.uk/tuition-fee-policy)