West Thames College Higher Education Student Protection Plan

The Office for Students (OfS) requires the College to publish a Student Protection Plan incorporating an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our Higher Education students, the risk mitigation measures we have in place and the arrangements for supporting students in the event that the college is no longer able to preserve continuation of study. This plan has been approved by members of our Higher Education Student Representative Group.

West Thames College is dedicated to providing a stable and supportive learning environment for all higher education students. This Student Protection Plan outlines our commitment to maintaining high standards of education and addressing any potential risks to ensure students can successfully complete their studies.

What are the risks the college has identified in relation to our Higher Education courses?

Detailed within this document are the range of risks that the College considers possible in relation to our Higher Education Courses. We will do our best to lessen the likelihood of them happening but if they do occur, we will minimise the impact they may potentially have on your studies.

The measures contained in this plan are in addition to students 'statutory rights, which remain unaffected.

Risks arising from suspension or closure of Higher Education courses

A Higher Education course may be closed or delayed due to:

a) **A lack of applications and enrolments**. (Moderate risk)

If there is low recruitment at the beginning of the academic year before the start of the course such that the course is deemed as not financially viable then students will be contacted promptly to inform them of the course cancellation. We consider this to be a moderate risk. In this instance the teaching team at the College will contact other similar providers and help students to transfer to a suitable alternative course in a timely way if they wish.

In the event of enrolment numbers being low for a two-year Higher National Diploma course there may be a risk of the course being closed after the first academic year (once the Higher National Certificate has been completed). Students will be fully informed and consulted in this instance. The teaching team will also identify suitable alternative providers and help affected students to transfer to complete their full qualification if they wish to do so. We consider this to be a moderate risk.

If a risk to course continuation arises due to student numbers declining during the year the College will remain committed to teaching-out the current cohort of students for the academic year until the relevant higher education course has been completed. For the Diploma in Education & Teaching (DET) in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University, the College will be committed to teaching-out these courses for the full two academic years.
Risks to courses not running in the future. The College curriculum planning process is completed during the spring term. If the College makes the strategic decision not to run a particular, HE course or pathway this will be taken down from our website and from the

UCAS website. Any students who have made an application to the course will be informed promptly about the closure of the course. We consider this to be a moderate risk.

b) **Where we are unable to effectively resource the programme in terms of staffing, accommodation, or availability of specialist equipment.** (Moderate to low risk)

If the College has been presented with an unexpected staffing shortage before the start of the course, then students will be contacted promptly to inform them of the course closure or a delay in starting the course. We consider this to be a moderate risk. In this instance the teaching team at the College will contact other similar providers and help students to transfer to a suitable alternative course in a timely way if they wish.

Course closure in the event that we do not have the appropriate specialist equipment to deliver courses correctly is considered to be low risk as the College makes a large annual investment in maintaining our equipment and estate through capital expenditure. We would not offer to run a course if we did not have the correct equipment. All courses are reviewed annually to ensure everything is in place correctly. There is a course approval process in place for new courses that ensures we have sufficient human and physical resources to offer new programmes. If, however, an expensive piece of equipment was to become unusable during the academic year and we were unable to repair or replace the item, we would adjust the course accordingly in consultation with the students and our awarding body.

In the event that accommodation was damaged, classes would be moved into an alternative space until repairs have been made. The College has many specialist and non-specialist teaching rooms and equipment, so this presents a low risk.

Risk to delivery or changes to delivery of the course

The risk that we are unable to deliver aspects of courses in specialised areas because of unexpected staffing shortages. We consider this to be a moderate risk. However, there is a large teaching staff team at the College who have a wide range of qualifications, knowledge, and skills. We also work with a wide range of employment agencies to further mitigate this risk. In this event we may need to adapt the course structure or timetable, in consultation with you and your student group while we secure suitable alternative staffing. This would be done in liaison with our awarding bodies including our partner universities.

Risk to premises

West Thames College has business continuity plans to deal with the unlikely event of natural disasters, terrorist attack, cyber-attacks, or accidental events all of which could lead to loss of use for part or the whole campus, we consider this to be a low risk. Disruption to teaching in specific areas can be minimised by relocating classes where any temporary damage or loss to teaching areas has occurred, for example because of localised flood or fire.

Updating of course content, regulations, and policies

At West Thames College we are committed to continuous quality assurance and enhancement. This means that from time-to-time programme content of our Higher Education Programmes may change (in liaison with our awarding organisations and HEI partners), and as a result our regulations and policies may be updated.

Existing students and prospective students will be informed about any updates to content that are made, for example substitution of units, changes to unit content or assessment activities. Changes to units or assessment activities will be made with the full knowledge of our Pearson External Examiners for the specific programme. These changes will be available through our website for prospective students and presented to existing students by their relevant curriculum teams.

Financial risk and college closer

The financial risk of the College as a whole being unable to operate is very low. The College has over many years consistently been assessed by the Education & Skills Funding Agency as having good or outstanding financial health. Financial performance is strong with the College consistently budgeting and delivering an operating surplus. The College also has healthy cash reserves.

Risk to withdrawal of partnership arrangements

The College does not hold degree awarding powers and therefore we rely on our HEI partners to validate our programmes. We have a mature and well-established relationship with Pearson and a longstanding record of accomplishment in delivering Pearson qualifications to a high standard. Pearson keeps the College fully informed of changes to their qualifications and accreditation status with Ofqual.

The risk that Pearson may withdraw from our contracts due to poor performance by the college is low. Our performance is regularly monitored, and systems are in place to identify quality issues throughout the academic year to safeguard your qualification and your student experience. In this unlikely event the College will work with our Pearson External Examiners to ensure your qualification is protected.

Our other HEI validating partner for our Teacher Education provision is Canterbury Christ Church University. Our partnership agreement makes provision to protect students' continuity of study should our partnership agreement come to an end. This will normally permit students to complete their intended studies at the college subject to normal timescales.

Please visit Canterbury Christ Church University website at this address:

https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/asset-library/policy-zone/Student-Protection-Plan-student.pdf

How can the college ensure I am not financially disadvantaged in the event that due to any of the identified risks occurring, I am not able to continue to study here?

The College's Fees Policy incorporates policy and procedures for refunds that may be payable to eligible students in the event of a programme being closed, or all or part of a programme becoming unavailable.

The policy makes provision for:

- Refunds for students in receipt of a tuition fee loan from the Student Loans Company
- Refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees
- Refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor

In such an event the College has sufficient cash reserves to provide refunds.

College policies relating to Higher Education courses can be found at-

http://www.west-thames.ac.uk/higher-education

How will the College ensure that students and staff will know about the student protection plan, and that it is kept up to date?

We will publicise our student protection plan by displaying it on our website in the Higher Education and Policies section and provide a link to this in your Student Course Handbooks provided during Induction.

We will ensure that college staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes. We will review our Student Protection Plan annually with staff and students from the Higher Education Student Representative Group.

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan
Katrin Lehmann – Vice Principal for Inclusive Learning, Creative and Students Experience