

University of Chester: Student protection plan

Provider's name: University of Chester

Provider's UKPRN: 10007848

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Student protection plan for the period 2022/23 – 2023/24

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

Institutional

The University has a robust approach in place for risk management at institutional level. The University regularly reviews its risk register via the University's Strategic Executive Team and the University Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

We consider the risk that the University as a whole is unable to operate is extremely low. The University's financial statements and associated annual reporting demonstrate good financial management and performance. The University's auditors have agreed the financial statements without qualification. The University continues actively to monitor compliance with all requirements, covenants and conditions set by lenders.

Programme Changes and Withdrawals

Through its Portfolio Development and Management Committee, the University regularly reviews its academic portfolio to ensure that programmes are current, accord with demand and are of high quality. The risk of the University withdrawing any programme or subject area with immediate effect is low, as the University has established planning and quality management processes in place to ensure continuation of study for current students until they complete.

Loss of UKVI Student Visa Licence to Sponsor International Students

The risk of loss of the University's UK Home Office Visa & Immigration (UKVI) sponsor licence is assessed as low. The University has robust immigration compliance procedures in place, overseen by the University's Legal and Compliance Office and International Centre. These procedures are subject to regular internal audit by the University's externally contracted internal audit service.

Loss of Key Staff

The risk that the University is unable to deliver a programme or to supervise postgraduate research students due to the unexpected departure of key members of academic staff is assessed as low. As a large provider of taught programmes the University ensures through its business planning and quality processes for Faculties that there is appropriate staffing in place to deliver the curriculum. The University's management of its large staffing complement means that the loss of individuals can be managed in both the short and longer term to ensure students' continuation of studies. In the case of postgraduate research students, established procedures are in place to ensure continuity of supervision for students in the event of staff changes.

Loss of Sites, Buildings or Facilities

We consider the risk of closure of the University's main delivery sites (Chester, Warrington, Birkenhead and Shrewsbury) to be low overall but low/medium in relation to Shrewsbury. Provision in Chester and Warrington is long-established, with provision at Warrington successfully relocating from an out-of-town to a town-centre site during 2021/22. Provision at Shrewsbury is developed in partnership with Shropshire Council and is supported by other regional stakeholders. The University is in the process of negotiating extended lease provisions with Shropshire Council for the Shrewsbury Campus and it is anticipated that this will be successful with a focused strategic approach to the provision at Shrewsbury to fully reflect the needs of the local communities. Once the negotiations have concluded the University anticipates that the risk will revert to low, however in the interim and in the interests of good governance, further responsible mitigations have been explored and cited below under "Loss of sites, buildings or facilities".

Provision at Birkenhead is focussed in a dedicated health and nursing education facility which has been operating since September 2018 and is now well established.

There is a reasonable possibility that the University would have to temporarily close a building or facility due to a major incident, fire or other damage or health and safety issues. The University has business continuity procedures in place to manage such an eventuality, which were tested and further developed during the Covid pandemic. In the event of a building or facility being unavailable or unsuitable, the University has an extensive estate which would be utilised to make alternative provision. The University therefore considers the risk of a building or facility closure materially affecting the continuation of a student's study to be low.

Loss of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory (PSRB) or Government Accreditation

The University works in partnership with Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and has a long and successful track record of securing and sustaining accreditation for its programmes. The University also holds Government accreditation for its teaching and apprenticeship provision. There is seen to be a low risk of the loss of accreditation. In the event that an accreditation was lost, the University would work with the PSRB or relevant Government department to secure the option wherever possible to teach out current students with no impact to their accreditation.

Industrial Action

The University considers that the risk of a student's study being disrupted due to industrial action is normally low, as the University has well-established employee relations. However events at sector and national level beyond the University control may lead to periods of industrial action which could impact students, either within the University or within key partners such as the NHS.

Provision Delivered by Partners

The University manages relationships with partner providers proactively and monitors quality assurance and similar matters closely. The University seeks to ensure through the contractual arrangements with partner providers that partners provide similar levels of protection to students. Where partner delivery is via a sub-contractual arrangement the University will work closely with the relevant provider to ensure that suitable protections and mitigations are in place.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallisea) Programme Changes and Withdrawals

The University will always take reasonable steps to minimise the impact of taught programme changes and withdrawals. In the event that a significant risk cannot be adequately mitigated, the University would undertake (and has an established record of undertaking) the following actions:

- Where a programme of study or discipline area is withdrawn, the University may 'teach out' a programme to enable current students to complete their period of study.

- Students may be offered alternative provision within the University or a modified version of their programme of study.
- Students would be supported to identify and transfer to similar provision at another provider, in consultation with affected students.
- Liaising regularly with partners to ensure that the above actions or equivalent arrangements are in place and implemented as required.

b) Loss of key staff

Our programmes are taught by integrated teams of academic staff, so we would not normally expect the departure of a single individual to impact on core programme delivery. In the event of the unanticipated departure of a key member of staff, the University would look to replace that member of staff through either external appointment or through internal redeployment as soon as possible. In the immediate term, we would consider the moving of other suitably qualified staff to cover teaching commitments.

All postgraduate research students are provided with a supervisory team of appropriately qualified academics, with established procedures in place to ensure continuity of supervision for students. In the event of a member of the supervisory team leaving, continuity of supervision would be ensured in the immediate term by the other team members. If required, additional supervisory team members would be added and/or an external supervisor would be appointed to ensure that the affected student(s) are able to complete.

c) Loss of sites, buildings or facilities

In the event of a site, building or facility being temporarily unavailable, the University would initially seek to relocate that provision to another site or building within the University estate, or to revise students' timetables to ensure that teaching can take place at another suitable time. If necessary, the University would look to hire additional space. Where appropriate, the University may consider offering transport to students to the alternative location or reimbursing additional travel expenses. The University would consult with affected students and with the Students' Union in assessing and mitigating impact. Where postgraduate research activities are significantly affected, students would be advised and supported regarding extensions to study as and where appropriate.

The University would also draw on established business continuity procedures as appropriate, for example, in the event of a building flood or fire. A specific flood risk plan is in place in the event of disruption at University Centre Shrewsbury.

Circumstances in which a campus closure is planned over a medium to longer period could potentially require some closure of programmes, the mitigations considered by the University are as follow but are not exhaustive

- protection of students' learning, assessment and experience through 'teaching out' of courses to completion (see above under Programme Changes and Withdrawals);
- revising the timetable to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take place. This may include student contact sessions delivered outside of normal office hours. The University will consult with students and undertake equality impact assessments to assess the effect on students with different needs, characteristics and circumstances;
- delivering programmes or parts of programmes via different delivery modes, such as Distance Learning. Where such an approach is taken, the University will consider carefully whether this is appropriate for the enrolled students who would be affected;
- facilitation of students to make the best transfer choices to other UoC Campuses or other registered providers to suit their individual needs;
- arrangement of delivery of certification and exit awards, as well as formal records of achievement for those students who have yet to complete their qualification;

- provision of refund and compensation if/when appropriate;
- cessation of recruitment and communication with applicants in the pipeline;
- sourcing of alternative premises and/or facilities where applicable and appropriate.

d) Loss of PSRB or Government accreditation

In the event that external accreditation of a programme is removed, the University would make reasonable efforts to identify an alternative accrediting body. For programmes where external accreditation is mandatory for progressing to a specific profession (for example Nursing, Social Work, Law, Teaching), the University would consult with students to identify and facilitate transfer to an alternative provider.

e) Industrial action

In the event of industrial action by University staff, we would seek to minimise disruption and manage such a situation in accordance with the principles and processes agreed by the University's Education Committee. If industrial action is prolonged, we would put in place appropriate measures to ensure that students were not disadvantaged by such action. This could include rearranging missed classes or providing a suitable alternative to ensure that learning objectives are still fulfilled, and/or reviewing assessments to account for any topics missed or disrupted.

In the event of industrial action by a placement provider, the University would work closely with that provider to minimise disruption to students and to rearrange or compensate for any missed placement hours.

f) Collaborative Partners

Should the University consider a collaborative arrangement no longer viable, we might end the agreement for financial or educational reasons. In some circumstances our partner institutions may no longer offer courses to students registered with them or may be unable to do so.

If the partnership ends for whatever reason, we will discontinue student recruitment immediately by the partner to the courses concerned. Our agreements with our partners include a requirement for the partner to teach-out a course when the agreement ends. Some of our partners will be registered with the Office for Students and will have their own Student Protection Plans in place.

Should a partner institution not teach out the course, the University will take all reasonable steps to protect the students' interests. In managing risks to students completing their studies, the University considers all of the circumstances including the number of students on the course and the point reached in their studies. We look at why the partner is unable to continue to provide the course. We will identify the options available through discussions with the partner and consultation with students wherever possible.

Examples of the action the University might take include:

- supporting the partner in the teach-out for a reasonable period until all current students completed the course;
- investigating, in conjunction with the partner, the possibility of an alternative provider continuing to teach out the course, or with the student's agreement transferring to a similar course with the alternative provider;
- where feasible, offering the students a transfer to the equivalent course at the University.

3. 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

Our approach to offering refunds is set out in our [Student Enrolment Conditions](#) and in our [Withdrawals Policy](#). We do not have a fixed policy with regard to offering compensation. Rather, we consider cases on their individual merits through our [Student Complaints Process](#).

The University also has Business Interruption insurance in place to insure against the financial impact of a major incident. This would enable the University to set up alternative arrangements in light of such an incident and to provide additional student support as appropriate.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

The University's Student Protection Plan is available on the University website and on our intranet (Portal), alongside the University's Student Enrolment Conditions and associated information. Current and prospective students are signposted to the Plan via communications about our Student Enrolment Conditions during application, enrolment and re-enrolment.

The University's initial Student Protection Plan was developed in consultation with the Chester Students' Union and with the input of our Student Voice and Experience Committee. It is now reviewed on an annual basis (or more regularly as needed), including consultation with the Chester Students' Union. The Student Protection Plan is approved by the Strategic Executive Team and by the University Senate.

Members of the University's Portfolio Development and Management Committee (PDMC), a senior committee which reports to Senate, consider the Student Protection Plan on at least an annual basis as part of the committee's established schedule of business. This ensures that student protection measures are routinely considered as part of portfolio review.

In the event that the University was required to implement its Student Protection Plan, affected students would be given as much notice as reasonably possible in open meetings of affected cohorts and in writing. We would then take students' views in response into account and take reasonable steps to minimise any significant adverse effects, through implementation of the actions noted above alongside appropriate advice and support from University services and academic departments. The University would also signpost students to the Chester Students' Union Advice Centre for independent advice.