

Student Protection Plan for the period of Academic Year 2021/2022

1. Assessment of Risk

- 1.1. SMB College Group; (referred to interchangeably as 'the college') maintains a series of checks and balances that monitor performance throughout the college. Issues relating to continuation rates, course performance, student outcomes, NSS, TEF, partnership agreements and any outcome from internal audit, as well as anything else that the deliberative structures around higher education may highlight are presented and discussed to the senior executive team.
- 1.2. This student protection plan has been written with reference to Regulatory Notice 6: Condition C4: Student Protection Directions (Publication date 31 March 2021)¹ and the advice and guidance provided by the Office for Student's website²
- 1.3. This student protection plan is in place for the academic year 2021/2022.
- 1.4. In relation to student protection, the following areas that would put the provision of programmes at risk include:

a. Financial Risk

- i. The risk that SMB College Group is unable to operate is low due to its financial performance. The ESFA have graded our performance as good for 20/21.
- ii. Each year the Curriculum Business Planning Process clearly outlines the process to ensuring course viability and all courses offered are planned to ensure they are financially robust and well-resourced. All courses delivered as part of a franchise and/or subcontracting agreement are subject to approval and regular monitoring (either annual or periodic) by the HEI. All courses have a set minimum number to run and these are published in a range of formats. Future viability is discussed with the HEI at appropriate intervals.

b. Insufficient enrolment and course take up resulting in course closure

- i. The risk that courses will no longer be able to be delivered due to small numbers is low. The college operates with traditionally smaller numbers enrolled on to HE programmes than compared to that of a standard Higher Education Institution and so therefore has lower tolerances for minimum enrolment numbers for a course to run. Every step will be taken to review, where possible, innovative arrangements that can be made to support the course taking place. This might result in the course being combined with another course where the modules and the teaching allows, and this would be approved by the awarding organisation.
- ii. Recruitment to each course is monitored annually as part of course monitoring. Where a pattern of insufficient enrolment is highlighted, this course will be reviewed for future continuation.
- iii. Where recruitment within a given year is predicted to be lower than six, applicants will be informed as soon as is reasonably possible about the final decision to run the course. This information is included on all course webpages and prospectuses.
- iv. Where courses have been affected by attrition and there are fewer than six students progressing to the next level within the course the course will continue to be supported. The performance will be discussed at HE Board of Studies and with the curriculum area(s) affected. Actions may be put in place to combine teaching with other groups if appropriate to the subject and learning outcomes which would be discussed with the HEI.

¹ [Regulatory notice 6 condition C4 \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

² [Student protection plans - Office for Students](#)

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c. Loss of Key staff

- i. Specialised provision designed to meet the needs of the local economy, is often developed based on the expertise of staff. However, this is mitigated against through ongoing continuing professional development, talent management, appropriate recruitment techniques, recruiting industry specialists working with HE partners who would support in any such instance where module delivery might be at risk. Engagement with employers is highly valued and integrated where possible into programmes to assist with specialist subjects. However, programmes are not designed to be reliant on employers, and all experiences and access to resources required to meet the programme learning outcomes can be sourced from within the college.
- ii. Whilst new and innovative arrangements are encouraged in order to augment the student experience, every endeavour is made to cover all classes where small class sizes might be in operation.
- iii. Most of the provision is supported and overseen by HEI partners so in any case where there is a risk to students, there is a wider network that can be called on to make sure that student continuation is not affected.

d. Planned course closure

- i. Proposals to close or suspend a programme are considered by the HE Board of Studies and agreed with the relevant awarding HEI as part of the annual monitoring process and Collaborative Partnership Agreements.
- ii. Where the course closure is due to the withdrawal or end of partnership approval, the college will work closely with the awarding organisation to follow the appropriate procedure as set down in the initial partnership agreement.
- iii. This information will be shared at the next available Programme Committee Meeting (PCM) which has student membership and announcements will be made to the course members via a range of mediums including in class announcements, the VLE and formal letters where deemed appropriate. In these circumstances, it will be organised that the course will 'teach out' until the final year of students studying the course (if over multiple years) has been completed.
- iv. No further recruitment activity will be undertaken for this course.
- v. Students that require repeat study due to failed assessments or due to authorised study breaks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. If the college are unable to support individual students, arrangements will be made with an alternative provider and financial compensation will be considered for the student(s) affected.
- vi. If the college are unable to 'teach out' the same protocols stated in the 'unplanned course closure' will be followed.

e. Unplanned course closure within the same academic year or course disruption

- i. In the case of a major emergency the College's Disaster Recovery Plan will be implemented in the case of any major form of disruption to provision. This document details the process of moving provision to other campuses, provision of temporary classrooms, or movement to online learning within two weeks of any disastrous event. Students will be communicated with as quickly as possible to inform them of arrangements. There would be detailed discussions with partner HEIs to investigate any support they could offer at the time.
- ii. Any unplanned course closures will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and circulated via HE Board of Studies, along with collaboration with the awarding HEI. Should it be the case that the course is due to close within an academic year, and 'teach out' arrangements are not possible or viable (e.g., from sudden loss of facilities) and suitable support from partner HEI's is not a viable option, the college will seek to support enrolled students to transition to a comparable programme at another institution with broadly similar entry tariffs. Alternatively, there may be an opportunity to transfer to a programme at the awarding HEI that meets the needs of the students. In these cases, it is subject to normal entry requirements and the receiving programme's ability to accept additional students.

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- iii. Should it prove impossible to make alternative provision students affected by an unplanned closure and the student is required to undertake repeat study in a different location or transfer to a different provider, financial compensation will be considered.

f. National or global disruption

- i. In the case of national or global disruption to the provision of higher education, the college will react in accordance with any necessary guidance or policy that may be distributed from central government.
- ii. If unable to attend campus, where possible students will be supported in their homes via distance learning mechanisms. This will include email, online learning platforms, internet video calls, telephone, 1 to 1 and group sessions.
 - a. Every effort will be made to support student with the provision or access to specialist equipment should their course require it. Where this is not practicable, the college will review the courses learning outcomes and make adaptations necessary to assessments to meet the learning outcomes without disadvantaging the students' performance potential.
- iii. All courses will be evaluated from an assessment perspective, and if necessary, in accordance and with approval from the HEI/AO, changes to assessment will be made in order to facilitate completion of the qualification. This may also involve the adoption of appropriate policies such as a 'No Detriment Policy' or equivalent to best support the students.
- iv. Communication to students in event of this scenario will be via the college website, through their course virtual learning environments and via email.

g. Campus Support

- i. Currently HE is delivered on three of the College's campus with the most significant provision being at the Brooksby Campus, then Stephenson Campus followed by the Melton Campus. Campuses have bespoke HE spaces dedicated to HE students. There is planned and sustained investment into these spaces.
- ii. Detailed planning and programme approval happens which is communicated via the HE committees to ensure that development and alterations to provision is well managed with clear oversight. Thus, the College, operating within the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 is carefully planning resource investment and ensuring parity of programme.
- iii. All programmes go through a rigorous initial validation process (in most cases with a HEI) along with regular periodic reviews, providing senior leaders across all institutions involved are assured of the College's capacity to deliver and sustain programmes, which is reviewed on a regular basis.
- iv. There is planned growth and integration in the use online and virtual platforms to support teaching and learning from a remote perspective.

h. Planned changes to programmes

- i. The procedure for considering and proposing major modifications to programmes is set down by the awarding organisation/HEI. As a general principle, modifications should be implemented for the next entering cohort, and not for current students. SMB College Group will ensure compliance with minor modifications to a programme as designed and approved by the awarding institution.
- ii. Currently registered or enrolled students are consulted on proposed modifications to programmes. The financial impact of different models for providing for a student who is returning to a modified programme following a break in study will be considered. For example, if the programme modification is such that it is necessary for a student to repeat study in order to resume their programme, the potential cost (including, but not limited to, any fee waiver approved by the college) will be borne by the college.
- iii. Where changes to programmes require to be made within a very short timeframe, this will always be in consultation with the validating organisation, with as much notice being provided to students as is reasonably practicable.

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i. Closure of a collaborative partner

- i. We operate in partnership and collaboration with a range of other higher education providers. Where this is the case, our partners also have robust plans for student support should there be closure, either at course or institution level.
- ii. For University of East Anglia approved programmes, their Student Protection Plan can be accessed here: [Student Protection Plan 2021/22³](#)
- iii. For the University of Derby approved programmes, their Student Protection Plan can be accessed here: [Office for Students registration - Governance - University of Derby](#) with particular reference to section 1.7.

j. Market Exit

- i. Our risk of market exit (meaning that there would be no higher education programmes offered at SMB College Group) is extremely low. SMB College Group has no intention in the current climate to reduce or remove the higher education portion of its educational provision.

³ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/20142/1553813/OfS+Student+Protection+Plan.pdf/8f8e0b04-ec51-befb-ba5b-5ce5bbbceee6?t=1611680709514>