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Student protection plan for the period academic year 2019-20

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

There is very low risk that the college, as a whole, will be unable to operate because our financial performance is good and we have business continuity plans to deal with adaptations to course delivery and services. This includes responses to emergency situations, including flood and fire, or threats to security.

The risk to the delivery and opportunity for expansion of courses, including those in highly specialised subjects at specific campuses in the next three years is moderate as we respond to fluctuations in enrolment patterns and student demand.

There is little risk to opportunities to study for students, as access will be available at one of the college campuses. The college will employ its strengths in blended learning and Information Learning Technologies, ILT, the use of bursaries to support travel costs and will continue to ensure students have access to any specialist equipment or facilities through its partnership work and on-campus resource, in responding to any emergent situation. There are no specific clusters of student groups that are more likely to be influenced by these adaptations.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

Course closure or suspension is normally considered for the following academic year, except where it is due to circumstances beyond the College's control. The decision can be based on financial or academic grounds (e.g., the course is financially unviable due to low demand, or the course is no longer considered relevant to the needs of students and is to be replaced by another, more suitable course).

All decisions to close or suspend a course take into account the interests and position of students currently enrolled on the courses or anyone who has applied for admission. Applicants will be notified by the College in a timely manner, and receive advice on other suitable courses and study options available.

Where a course closes and there are students currently enrolled on the course, the College will operate a "Teach Out" approach for all situations not directly tied to performance. The college will strive to fully mitigate the impact of the course closure on all students, taking specific action for students with additional support needs or other factors that may unequally affect their ability to achieve the qualification. Efforts will be made to support those students to the conclusion of the course and to keep them fully informed of the College's plans, the impact this could have on their studies, and the options available to them.

Where the College is not able to deliver the course to its conclusion for existing students, including performance-related issues it will work to place students on alternative provision of equitable value, including examining arrangements to transfer to partner providers. If these are not possible, the College will make proportionate reimbursements and accredit achievement.

Where the course is provided in partnership with a university or professional body, the decision may be led by that body, and their procedure followed, in collaboration with the College and this procedure.

Whilst the decision to close a course will normally be initiated by the course delivery team, the final decision to close or suspend a course is made by the Senior Leadership Team and communicated in written form before the course closure procedure commences. All decisions will be presented to the Academic Board.

The college operates an annual risk register to highlight, mitigate and plan to improve a variety of risk to the continuation and delivery of courses and services across the organisation. This risk register is reviewed termly and presented and overseen by the Governing Body and Audit Committee.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver specific components or units of courses is low because we design our modules to be taught by integrated teams of academic staff and wherever possible in association with students' interests and background. Additionally, the college through its' partnership arrangements with other higher education providers has access to a plethora of highly skilled and experienced academic staff who support the management of programmes. For our Law courses however this risk is moderate because we are more dependent on particular members of specifically qualified academic staff to deliver core teaching.

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

The College details all arrangements for fees and reimbursement for issues around continuation of study in the Colleges Fees Policy and this applies to refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company, students who pay their own tuition fees, and students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.

The Heart of Worcestershire College HE Tuition Fee Policy is available on the College website <http://www.howcollege.ac.uk/media/2297/he-fee-policy-2019-20.pdf> The college has insurance arrangements up to £5 million to cover any eventualities arising through refunds or compensatory action.

General Principles of the policy are:

1. The college will provide proportionate refunds or waivers where the College has cancelled a course, there is a justified complaint, or due to exceptional personal circumstances. This is regardless of the nature of how the fees have been paid, loan, direct payment, etc.
2. This excludes sums have been paid over to an external body, nor any sums where an invoice has been waived.
3. A refund of fees is the repayment of fees already received by the College; a waiver occurs when the College discharges part or all of a learner or sponsor's obligation to pay outstanding fees.
4. A refund of fees is the repayment of fees already received by the College; a waiver occurs when the College discharges part or all of a student or sponsor's obligation to pay outstanding fees.
5. Refunds of tuition fees will be given in the following circumstances,
 - When the college cancels a course.
 - When a student withdraws from a course before any costs have been incurred, traditionally, the first meeting date, a full refund will be provided although an administration fee may be chargeable).
 - In all other situations refunds or compensatory action will be at the discretion of the Principal if, as the result of a complaint, the college is found to be at fault.
6. The College will provide proportionate refunds or waivers where the College has cancelled a course, there is a justified complaint, or due to exceptional personal circumstances. This is regardless of the nature of how the fees have been paid, SLC loan or direct payment etc.
7. If a course is cancelled the department concerned will complete a refund request on behalf of the student and pass this form directly to the Finance Manager who will authorise the refund and process these requests as a priority.
8. With the exception of cancelled courses, all other students requesting a refund of fees must complete a "Tuition Fee Refund Request". These are available through the Student Portal.
9. Refunds will normally be made by cheque, or directly back onto the payment card originally used. Evidence of the original payment must be provided in order to support the refund claim.



10. Students requesting a refund will have a refund / cancellation fee deducted from any refund awarded, and in addition any external fees already paid over to awarding or other bodies will not normally be refunded.
11. Refunds will normally be made within 10 working days of receipt of an authorised refund request.
12. Where a learner withdraws from a course before any costs have been incurred, traditionally, the first meeting date, a full refund will be provided, (although an admin fee may be chargeable). In all other situations refunds or compensatory action will be at the discretion of the Principal if, as the result of a complaint, the college is found to be at fault.
13. The College does not refund tuition fees where a learner simply decides to stop attending a course.
14. Where a course is closed or suspended and students transfer to an alternative provider, compensation may be available in line with regulatory requirements for additional costs incurred to students such as childcare and travel. This will be determined and shared in the course suspension or closure action plan and information shared with relevant parties.
15. With the exception of cancelled courses, all other learners requesting a refund of fees must complete a "Tuition Fee Refund Request". These are available through the Student Portal.

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

Students will be made aware through the college website, during application and in any course level handbooks or online course pages. Students will be involved in the production and renewal of this policy through the HE Student Community meetings and Academic Board. This will include scrutiny of all parts of the policy by selected Course Representatives.

Procedure

Stage One: Make the decision to close or suspend a course

- The course team, working with management teams, determine the reason for the course to close or suspend, and identify whether this is on financial, academic, or other grounds.
- The decision from the course team is agreed by senior management and communicated in written form to the HE or Professional Coordinator.

Stage Two: Implement the Action Plan

- An action plan (see below) is followed that will ensure that the course closure or suspension is managed in a timely and professional manner.
- The actions taken must specifically address the needs of current students, including students who may have temporarily suspended their studies, and applicants (whether or not they have received an offer). Decisions must be made as to how the course will be 'run out' where that is applicable, and how the needs of students who have suspended their study can be best met. Applicants for the course to be closed/suspended should be dealt with

by a standardised procedure administered by the HE and Professional Admissions team working with Marketing.

- The action plan should be agreed in communication with the Assistant Principal for Higher Education and Standards.

Stage Three: Communication to the relevant parties

- Communication is vital to a successful course closure or suspension. All regulatory guidance emphasises the importance of communication with a range of relevant parties as essential to ensuring that prospective and current students' rights are respected.
- The Action Plan should ensure a clear line of communication from the decision to close a course through to the achievement of the remaining students on the course.

The following table outlines actions and responsibilities

Issue	Action (as applicable to the course)	Responsibility
Decision to close or suspend a HE or Professional course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine whether this is on financial or academic or other grounds • Ensure the agreement of SLT to this decision • Notify partner universities or professional bodies for their agreement and communicate this to the HE Coordinator. 	<p>SLT</p> <p>CRQ Manager/ Director</p>
Initial notification of course closure or suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE Admissions team is notified (it is vital that Admissions know, as it is this team who will notify applicants in a manner which is compliant with the Competition and Markets Authority Guidance for Higher Education Providers.) • Marketing team is notified (the marketing team have the responsibility to change the website and other promotional materials, and amend UCAS) 	<p>HE or Professional Coordinator</p>
Actions to be taken by Admissions team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify any existing applicants that the course is not going to run (AFTER marketing has made UCAS changes) • If the applicant has not replied to their offer an alternative course can be requested and agreed. If the applicant chooses a course at another provider the choice can be substituted with UCAS until the 30th June. • If the applicant has replied, if possible, a HE Admissions suitable alternative should be offered. Alternatively the applicant may be able to accept an offer at another provider they previously declined or applicants can substitute the discontinued course until 30 June by contacting UCAS. For further guidance please refer to the UCAS Admissions Guide. 	<p>Professional Admissions Team</p> <p>HE Admissions Team</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check that marketing changes are accurate • Notify MIS • Notify Finance 	
Actions to be taken by the Marketing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make appropriate amendments to the College website • Notify relevant professional bodies to amend their websites and other promotional material • Notify marketing departments of university partners • Inform UCAS using the UCAS collection tool to update the course's status BEFORE Admissions Team contact applicants • Amend Course Information Sheets if necessary and send to HE & Prof Coordinators. 	Marketing Team
Teaching out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching out will be the College's usual course of action when suspension or closure of a current course is planned. Where arrangements to 'teach out' are put in place, we commit to ensuring a course of study can be completed by all currently registered students to the date at which they were expected to complete the course, plus a further year if necessary and allowing for any approved interruption of studies. • If teach out arrangements cannot be put in to place e.g. market exit, the college will facilitate transfer or direct-entry to another provider and ensure any relevant support arrangements were in place prior to transfer. • If a student were interested in a provider outside of those with whom we were able to facilitate your transfer or direct- entry, then we would support the student to transfer through appropriate credit transfer. 	