

Annex D: Template for a student protection plan

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Student protection plan

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.

1.1 Introduction

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires universities and colleges to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure.

This student protection plan is to clarify what an applicant or student can expect if unanticipated problems occur. We have identified two categories of risk: the first set are those risks we think are very unlikely to happen. The second set are risks we think are reasonably likely to happen. We set out details of the mitigation measures that might be applied.

1.2 Risks categorised as “very unlikely” or “unlikely”

These events may be triggered by situations such as (but not limited to):

- a decision to close the college has been taken;
- a strategic decision by the college to close a course or campus;
- loss or restriction of Taught Degree Awarding Powers status;
- withdrawal of designation for student support purposes;
- a decision has been taken not to run a course for the subsequent year;
- major changes in year to course content;
- removal of the Tier 4 Sponsor Licence (the Home Office issued licence which allows a provider to teach international students);
- changes to regulatory framework affecting a specific course;
- loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. Ofsted, PSRB, etc;
- no longer able to deliver in a particular location, including at a partner institution.

The way in which we are governed and operate means that appropriate control systems and checks are in place to prevent or positively react to an event which would lead to the above risks coming to pass. Effective and rigorous internal and external audits are in place. We have recently created our own internal Business Assurance team that has oversight of regulatory compliance. The level of risk that might result from unplanned changes is low because viability and sustainability are planned in advance.

The risk of being unable to operate due to financial instability is low because our balance sheet and cash reserves are healthy compared to FE sector averages.

The College's Disaster Plan (incorporating our Business Continuity Plan) covers other actions affecting business continuity, such as acts of terrorism, damage to buildings or equipment. Given the mitigation outlined above we believe that the risk of not being able to provide course continuity is low.

1.3 Risks categorised as “likely”

Failure to recruit and retain specialist teaching staff

To mitigate this risk, the following general measures have been taken:

- Changes to the structure of the curriculum – for example in engineering Mechanical and Electrical Engineering share a common first year curriculum
- In our foundation degrees generic modules make up one third of the curriculum
- Staff with specialist knowledge in research methods provide institution-wide masterclasses that are available to all students
- As a Group with several colleges there is support from other colleges within the organisation
- We have recruited a team of graduate tutors across key curriculum areas (Engineering, Digital Skills, Business) to provide vocational support in specialist teaching contexts.
- We have a team of academic support specialists to provide 1-1 support for individuals, drop-ins and group workshops for a variety of academic support needs (ie referencing, presentations skills, SPSS, assignment structure, dissertations)
- In the skill-shortage subject areas market rate supplement packages are in place to successfully attract and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff
- We have a robust staff approval system that is overseen by the Assistant Director of HE Quality and Standards. Any staffing changes within programmes must be reported to HE Registry and the CVs of replacement staff will be considered at a staff approval meeting. If the staff member is inexperienced in any way then appropriate mentoring/training will be put into place.
- In these areas as part of business continuity planning there has been substantial investment in developing our teaching staff. A commitment to 3 dedicated professional development days in the academic year exploring; effective learning, teaching and assessment; undergraduates as active agents in their learning and collaborators in their learning experience.
- We have well-developed connections with regional practitioners who are experienced teachers who can deliver HE on fractional contracts. In all areas there are experienced HE staff who are now in management positions. In cases of staff absence they are able to provide cover to protect the student experience. There are detailed schemes of work and module guides which mean that managers are able to provide continuity of the student learning experience.
- Teaching materials are available on the virtual learning environment to aid continuity of delivery.
- We also have links with agencies where we can bring in teaching staff at short notice although this would be a last resort. Teaching staff are on two months period of notice which gives us time to contingency plan and recruit a replacement.

- Retain staff through opportunities of personal and professional development: Encouragement and support of colleagues to engage in personal development e.g. further and higher study either financially or with allocation of time; maintenance of staff currency with their technical or vocational sector e.g. payment of licence to practice; industrial updating release; collaborative community for colleagues engaged in research to support, share and explore their work and that of their peers. Recognition of the rounded HE professional beyond classroom teaching. Staff are retained because they can achieve their ambitions at college.

Failure to recruit sufficient students:

- All of our programmes are endorsed by regional employers to ensure that our curriculum is vocationally sound and likely to provide good outcomes for learners.
- We have built good relationships with local schools.
- Newcastle College is participating in the regional Uni Connect programme which is specifically targeting students from low participation postcodes.
- Kidderminster College is working with NCOP funding to raise participation rates through aspirational activities, working with both local schools and with specialist private dance providers.
- Annual activities to raise the aspirations of college based students in level 3 education and training courses better prepares students to access, progress and succeed.
- There are regular reviews of the curriculum portfolio to ensure that it remains attractive to students.

Disruption of college activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term-time):

- There are effective Estates teams who are well experienced at minimising disruption due to problems with buildings

Industrial action by college staff or third parties:

- NCG has recently brokered clear partnership agreements with its recognised Trade Unions. This is in addition to the existing routine and regular communication with the Trade Unions at both operational and senior level.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 NCG is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. It is important that NCG has robust plans in place if a programme cannot be fully delivered or if it is necessary to change the content of a programme.

2.2 Measures to Inform and Protect Students

2.2.1 Students are referred to the Student Agreement during the offer process. NCG is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and all options outlined to prospective and current students.

2.3 Significant Material Change (risk category unlikely)

Institutional Closure

2.3.1 Institutional failure will be monitored through risk management in accordance with HE regulatory bodies and any instance of this will be managed in accordance with College policies.

2.3.2 Where NCG has no option, other than to close, it may consider measures such as those below to protect student experience:

- where possible, closing in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at the Institution; where the above is not possible,
- in supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and (where appropriate financially) by compensating students where because of disruption to their studies they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss; merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

2.3.3 Where part or all of the campus is rendered unusable for activities involving students, NCG will typically consider remedies such as:

- relocating provision to an alternative location, this may include hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby) and/or installing temporary buildings on the land owned by NCG (where available);
- revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal office hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate

consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected; appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken; delivering programmes via alternative means, such as distance learning. Where such an approach is taken, NCG will consider whether this it is appropriate for enrolled students who would be affected.

Withdrawal or restriction of Taught Degree Awarding Powers

2.3.4 Working with relevant regulatory bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and, where appropriate, financially compensating students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies; considering assistance for affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies.

Withdrawal of Designation

2.3.5 In the event of de-designation of its courses for 'Student Support' purposes (resulting in the withdrawal of statutory student finance for its courses) NCG, will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resulting disruption to students by, for example:

- working with relevant regulatory and funding bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
- where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and, where appropriate, financially compensating students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies; considering assistance for affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies; merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

Suspension of Course

2.3.6 NCG has established and tested procedures in place of the event of suspension/ closure of course. Where there is a material impact on the students, the effect will be mitigated by:

- communication with current students to provide assurance that they will not be adversely affected by the decision, and provide assurance that they are able to complete their studies at the Institution; where possible, provision will be made to allow for the completion of studies where 'mitigated circumstances' have been presented;
- consultation with stakeholders who may be affected to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken; future applicants will be

notified in accordance with UCAS deadlines, allowing time for students to source an alternative suitable programme (where relevant) at the College.

Suspension of Student Sponsor Licence

2.3.7 In the event of suspension of Student Sponsor status, NCG will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to those services and to affected students by, for example:

- working to meet the requirements of any compliance action and/or action plan implemented by UKVI;
- working with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their current study/programme;
- allow students already in receipt of a visa based upon an allocated CAS from the College to enrol and commence their studies;
- offer students who have not commenced their travel to the College, the opportunity to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

Revocation of Student Sponsor Licence

2.3.8 The College, in the event of revocation of Student Sponsor Licence will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students by, for example:

- providing assistance to affected students to switch to an alternative Student sponsor.

No longer able to deliver in a particular location, including at a partner institution

2.3.9 NCG employs staff with responsibility for the management of partnership arrangements. This enables effective management of these arrangements to support the student experience and deliver excellent outcomes. NCG has also a clear procedure for withdrawing awards and process to manage partner exit via our withdrawal of awards policy.

All of our partners have their own student protection plans to manage and mitigate their own levels of risk. Additionally, however, NCG has a Partnerships Board to maintain a risk register for all partnership activity and undertake due diligence and other quality assurance activities. Our legal agreements set out requirements for all partners for areas covered by the student protection plan ensuring contractual compliance.

2.4 Changes to Regulatory Framework Affecting Specific Course (risk category unlikely)

Loss of accreditation

2.4.1 In the event of NCG losing PSRB or accreditation we will consider measures to protect the student experience, such as those listed below:

- offering affected students the chance to move to another course; delivering a modified version of the same course;
- providing assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider who holds the
- relevant accreditation.

2.5 Disruption to College Activity (risk category likely)

2.5.1 Where events result in term-time programme disruption, NCG will consider whether it is practicable to make changes to programme delivery, rather than closing or suspending an affected programme, for example, by providing on-line learning materials. NCG will ensure that provisions are put in place so that they are able to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programme.

2.5.2 Actions to minimise disruption may include:

- temporary short-term suspension of programme delivery (e.g. where there is a change in the programme delivery location or staffing, with appropriate actions to mitigate impact on students); changes to the programme delivery location or method, which may include distance learning; changes to the staffing of a programme, for instance through a review of internal staff resources, including recruitment of area specialists, where appropriate; offering students the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme;
- provision of reasonable support to students for accessing a programme run by another provider, including making arrangements for the transfer of credits and information about academic progress.

Industrial Action

2.5.3 NCG has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions. It is highly committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.

2.5.4 Where industrial action does occur, NCG will seek to:

- ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible;

- take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised and students are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action.

Loss of Key Staff

2.5.5 Where possible NCG will:

- seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience, into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid disruption;
- where NCG cannot avoid closing a programme, the policy as outlined in section 2.3.6 will apply.

2.6 Feedback

2.6.1 Students wishing to provide feedback regarding the management of the process of change should follow the NCGs Complaints and Compliments policy.

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 Refund and Compensation Policy (available at <https://www.ncgrp.co.uk/guide-to-information/policies-and-procedures/>) outlines the circumstances in which we will refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary if we are no longer able to provide continuation of study. We consider refunds and compensation to be remedies of last resort and we are committed to doing all we can so that refunds and compensation aren't necessary. The Policy may be implemented as a result of any of the risks in this plan occurring.

Our Refund and Compensation policy contains information on the following circumstances:

- refunds for students in receipt of 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.
- the payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course.
- commitments to honour student bursaries.
- compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study.

- In some circumstances offer compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

4. 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 including it on our website (<https://www.ncgrp.co.uk>)

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by providing guidance and training. The information will also be made available to staff new to teaching HE as part of their induction process. Our students have been involved in discussions about the development of the student protection plan at HE Academic Board and the HE Governance Committee.

The student protection plan will be reviewed annually.

Our students will be involved in our review through focus groups, discussions at Programme Committees, HE Academic Board, HE Governance Committee and also HE student forums.

We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course through the VLE, emails, letter and Student Representatives.

We will give students 14 working days' notice when we need to make material changes to their course.

If we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan we will provide information, advice and guidance on the range of options that are available to them to support students collectively and individually.

We will put in place an action plan incorporating student access to independent advice and guidance to ensure that our students can make the right decisions for themselves should we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan.