

Arts University Plymouth Student Protection Plan

This approved Student Protection Plan is published on the University website and aims to provide assurance to current and future students, and to the Office for Students (OfS), that Arts University Plymouth has in place appropriate arrangements to protect the quality and continuation of study for students in higher education.

1 Introduction

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) requires Higher Education (HE) providers to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect higher education students' interests in the case of material change. These events may be triggered by situations such as (but not limited to):

- a decision to close the University;
- a strategic decision by the University to close/discontinue or suspend a programme;
- loss or restriction of degree awarding status;
- major changes in year to programme content;
- removal of the Tier 4 Sponsor Licence (the Home Office issued licence which allows a provider to teach international students);
- disruption of University activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term-time not covered by any of the above);
- industrial action by University staff or third parties;
- the unanticipated departure of key members of University staff

Student protection plans are required as an initial and ongoing condition of registration (C3) with the OfS and set out what students can expect to happen should their academic programme, the campus or the University itself close. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies, or can be compensated if this is not possible. In the event of a change in a provider's circumstances the OfS will work closely with the University and students to ensure that students' interests continue to be protected through any changes.

2 Assessment of range of risks to continuation of study for higher education students

The University risks are assessed as follows:

- the risk of the University no longer being able to operate, or deciding to cease operating is assessed as **Low**
- the risk of one or more of the locations at which we deliver courses to students being no longer available, particularly if we are considering closure or significant change to a location, is assessed as **Low**
- the risk of no longer being able to deliver courses to our students in one or more subject areas and/or departments is assessed as **Low**
- the risk of being no longer able to deliver material components of one or more courses,

particularly if there are areas of particular vulnerability such as single person dependencies for teaching is assessed as **Low**

- The risk of no longer being able to recruit or teach a particular type of student, such as international students is **Low**.

3 Measures to mitigate risks of continuation of study for higher education students

Over the past decade the HE sector has experienced a period of significant change, from the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2012 and removal of student number controls in 2013 to the introduction of the Office for Students as the regulator for Higher Education in England in January 2018, replacing the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Over that period there was a fall in the demographic population for 16-18 year olds, which is now set to recover and increase rapidly. More recently, the impact of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns through 2020 and 2021 and the war in Ukraine from February 2022 have created considerable turmoil, with concerns in the UK now over inflation and increasing costs of living.

The past decade has also been one of significant change for the University. Arts University Plymouth, (as Plymouth College of Art), achieved transfer from Further Education College to Higher Education Institute (HEI) in 2014, performed strongly in the formal, routine review of its Higher Education provision by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in 2015 and was awarded Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) by Privy Council in March 2019 following detailed scrutiny by the QAA through academic year 2017-18. During those years the University developed strongly, enhancing its reputation and national and international profile and evolving as a stronger, more flexible and adaptive HE provider from its previous FE status. Operating independently with TDAP from 2019/20, University Title was awarded in May 2022.

Our financial position demonstrates continued solvency and strength in cash balances, with the majority of our income based on publicly funded teaching. The vast majority of income for the University therefore lies with tuition fees, and so the key risk lies with recruitment of new students and retention of those students continuing to successful completion of their studies. We have managed the short term decline in student numbers, which arose across the sector from the demographic fall in the student applicant population and are now in the process of restoring full capacity across current and new courses. Our resilience in the increasingly competitive environment of student recruitment is helped by the strength of our attractiveness to UK students on both a regional and national basis as well as increasing interest from international students, including from Europe. To maintain cost-effectiveness and value for money in terms of delivering the highest quality student experience, the University exercises strict budgetary control and maintains close scrutiny of all operational activities. This is supported by proven risk management procedures and accompanying close oversight by the Board of Governors.

Risk of complete closure

The risk of the University no longer being able to operate, or deciding to cease operating, is assessed as **Low**. In extreme circumstances that could lead the University to consider closure, measures such as those below may be considered in order to protect the student experience:

- closing in a gradual way over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at AUP;

- supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and (where appropriate) compensating students for adverse financial impact of such disruption to their studies;
- merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision

Any form of closure would mean loss of the University in its current format, and detailed proposals would be shared with students as soon as possible to provide clarity for all regarding their options of continuing to successful completion of studies, options as appropriate for transferring to identical or similar programmes at other providers, and/or clarity as to how a proposed merger would protect student interests. Should these circumstances ever arise, the overriding objective would be the protection of student interests across all courses and all levels of study, meaning the continued quality of teaching, learning and supporting services, supported by open and detailed consultations with all students.

Risk over availability of buildings

The risk of losing the availability of one or more of the locations at which we deliver courses is considered **Low**. The University has in recent years invested heavily in the estate and the condition of the building stock is good to very good, with a fully costed buildings maintenance plan included in ongoing plans. All buildings operated by the University lie relatively close to the main campus within the city of Plymouth. Comprehensive arrangements and procedures relating to site security and safety are monitored and regularly reviewed by the University. The University owns all buildings on the main HE campus and otherwise rents two relatively small buildings off campus utilised in HE delivery, with the lease arrangements considered to offer flexibility for changing University requirements and forward planning.

Should the loss of a building become clear, for example due to fire/flood, notice being served on a lease agreement, a building considered by the University as no longer necessary to deliver courses, or no longer viable to continue to operate, consultations with affected students would be arranged as soon as possible to ensure clarity for the continuation of equivalent resources and protection of the quality of the student experience.

Risk over delivery of specific courses

The risk of no longer being able to deliver courses to our students in one or more subject areas and/or departments is assessed as **Low**, as is the risk of being no longer able to deliver material components of one or more courses, particularly if there are areas of particular vulnerability such as single person dependencies for teaching.

Arts University Plymouth will continue to validate new programmes and revalidate ongoing programmes, continuing our strong record of delivering high quality programmes of study. In the event of consideration regarding programme closure or major change to a programme or programmes, this will continue to be planned carefully and in consultation with students to ensure minimum disruption and the maintenance of a high quality student experience whilst 'teaching out' the programme. In the past, major changes to programmes including, for example, those that have involved changes in programme names, have been managed effectively and in consultation with students. Teaching out of programmes ensures students are able to complete the programme of study on which they embarked, and where it is possible to do so the option to transfer to a new programme may be offered.

The University has a very small number of programmes that may be considered 'niche', dependent on specific staff members and where student numbers are relatively low. Should a key member of staff decide to give notice to leave the University and an appropriate replacement could not be found, or should student numbers fall to levels below which the student experience would be compromised, a decision to close the programme or to suspend recruitment to the affected programme may be made. This would always be accompanied by the decision to 'teach out' the remaining years for current students, unless there are a set of extreme circumstances that mean this is not viable.

In the normal course, there is complete confidence in the ability to replace staff in 'niche' subjects such that 'teaching out' existing students always remains viable. Some re-organisation may be necessary to provide the most appropriate combination of staff skills and experience. 'Niche' experience is often provided through part time staff who are also pursuing accompanying careers relevant to their specialism but for whom a part time teaching role is both an attractive and fulfilling experience. This helps to ensure a breadth and depth to the pool of potential candidates for new posts or for replacement staff as and when opportunities arise. Full-time staff invariably offer a broader range of both industry and academic skills and experience that can support different skills sets from different part time staff. It is highly likely therefore that 'teaching out' any programme of study is always a viable option.

Despite viable staffing, it could be that very low student numbers compromise the quality of student experience such that programme closure is the only option. If such extreme circumstances arise where a programme would have to close, the University would support students in seeking to transfer to an alternative programme either internally, or to a different provider, utilising links with other similar institutions in the UK as appropriate. Refunds and compensation would be offered in accordance with the Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy as appropriate.

Risk of no longer being able to recruit or teach a particular type of student

With regards to no longer being able to recruit or teach a particular type of student it is pertinent to note that the University has always successfully met all requirements to continue to make offers to candidates with Tier 4 student visas, and to operate with international students. To date, we have attracted small numbers of international students, and are targeting modest increases in international students going forward. To date, we have also continued to attract more significant numbers of students from non-UK European backgrounds/residence and aim to continue to do so, subject to any challenges arising relating to considerations associated with Brexit. Whilst part-time student numbers are also relatively low, the majority of our programmes offer a part time pathway and the University is successful in attracting mature students across both full and part time study. The University is very proud of its record on equality and widening participation, with relatively high numbers of students from backgrounds that are generally under-represented in the higher education sector.

4 Refund and Compensation Policy

The University has a Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy. This details the refund of tuition fees where appropriate and whether paid by or on behalf of a student. The policy also covers circumstances when it is not possible to continue to study for one or more students.

The refund and compensation policy makes provision for:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuition fee loans from Student Loans Company
- refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees

- refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor
- payment of compensation to students to cover living/study costs that have been incurred or committed but are no longer necessary because the University has been unable to preserve continuation of study
- payment of travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course or funding to offset additional costs incurred by relocation,
- commitments to honour student bursaries.

The University recognises the financial implications of the Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy and has adequate cash reserves in place to cover the risk of such eventualities.

5 Communication with higher education students and staff

We commit to publishing our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by making it available on the University website and student portal, also linked through the Student Handbook. University Terms and Conditions for students make reference to the Student Protection Plan and these are routinely made available to prospective students through the website and with offers made to prospective students, and to new students as part of registration and enrolment.

The University ensures that staff are aware of the implications of the Student Protection Plan if they are considering proposals for programme changes by making the Plan available on the staff portal, through including consultation of the plan in meetings discussing programme change, and by making reference to the Student Protection Plan in the University procedures that provide guidance to staff on making proposals regarding programme changes, including withdrawal/suspension. As necessary and appropriate, the Student Protection Plan will also feature in staff learning and teaching workshops and/or staff briefings.

As stated above, the arrangements put in place will be linked to the Terms and Conditions provided to students during the recruitment cycle and in advance of enrolment. The University's Procedure for Withdrawing or Suspending a Higher Education Programme, and the Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy are located on the Student Portal and signposted in the HE Student Handbook.

We will continue to review our Student Protection Plan on an annual basis and otherwise exceptionally as required, through consideration by the Senior Leadership Team and/or Academic Board with student consultation as part of the process and oversight by the Board of Governors. When changes are deemed necessary, the final approved draft will be submitted to the Office for Students (OfS) for their final approval prior to publication, as required by the OfS.

Should any changes indicate any reduction in commitment to students by the University, unless full consultation is conducted with all students, these would be introduced only for new students joining in the academic year after the year in which enrolments will result from the current recruitment cycle. Full consultation with all students will include communication with students who have either deferred their entry to the next academic year, or have interrupted their studies with the intention of returning the next academic year. Additionally, and as part of the annual ongoing review, the Student Protection Plan will be considered by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, with particular emphasis on how students with specific needs may be affected; students are represented in these meetings. In addition, opinions on legibility and whether it is clearly written with students in mind will be sought from the Students Union (President and Executive Officers).

The Students Union was consulted in developing the first Student Protection Plan for the University. On an ongoing basis, there will remain close liaison with the President and Executive Officers of the Student Union regarding the Student Protection Plan.

Should the Student Protection Plan ever need to be implemented, arrangements would be made to communicate effectively with students affected with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and/or University Registrar leading the provision of necessary information in person.

We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their programme by meeting with them and initially advising them of potential changes under consideration and ensuring full consultation in the development of firm proposals.

In the normal course, we will give students a minimum of 90 days' notice when we need to make material changes to their programme.

We will ensure that our students have access to independent advice if we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan through arrangements for access to business support areas such as Student Support services and the Registry for professional advice. In addition, the Students Union will be available to provide independent advice.

We will make clear to students the opportunity for them to use the Complaints Procedures for Students should they wish to complain about how the Student Protection Plan is implemented.

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Related Statutes, Ordinances, & General Regulations	OfS Registration
Related policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy ● Student Transfer Policy
Related procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Procedure for Withdrawing or Suspending HE Programmes ● Validation, Revalidation & Modification Procedures ● Complaint Procedure for Students
Related information:	https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/
Policy owner and Lead contact:	Registrar Email: rkirby@aup.ac.uk Head of Compliance & Quality Systems Email: jwright@aup.ac.uk