

Student Protection Plan (Academic Year 2024/25)

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1. Introduction

This plan identifies key risks to the operation of The Sheffield College ("the College"), provides an assessment of the likelihood that those risks will crystallise, and sets out the procedures to be taken by the College should the need arise.

The College will respond supportively to any student who makes a reasonable and timely request for a change in pattern of their studies which is outside of the scope of the College's proposed actions under the Student Protection Plan; for example, a student may request to intermit their studies or to transfer to another course. In some cases, a student may wish to transfer to an equivalent course at a partner university of the College, arguing that it may cause less disruption to their learning experience than the proposed action; in such circumstances, the College would work with the appropriate validation partner(s) to facilitate this request.

The College will respond sympathetically to any reasonable request for adjustments arising from pre-existing formally-assessed disabilities, or arrangements made in response to formally-assessed learning needs that are prompted by the College's proposals, or implementation of the Student Protection Plan.

Should the College determine that action under this plan is necessary, it will conduct robust equality analysis to inform any future decision-making.

2. Notification

Where it is necessary to implement this Student Protection Plan, the College will communicate with students in a timely, open and honest manner, and will provide each of them with a copy of the plan. In the initial communication with affected students, the College will provide details of the issue, the proposed response and the timescale for implementation. It will provide a statement concerning the discussion with the Sheffield College Student Union and the College's response to Student Union feedback. As further information becomes available, affected students will be contacted in a timely way, and will be signposted to College services, including those services that deal with financial hardship payments, as well introducing them to external services, such as counselling services and student support services.

In all cases, the College will seek to arrange a meeting with affected students at a location, time and date that is suitable for those students to attend. Wherever possible, the College will schedule all student meetings to take place at a time, location and date where those students would normally be expecting to attend their course.

3. Identified risks

a. Risk to the continued operation of The Sheffield College as a whole in the next three years

The risk that the College will be unable to operate in the medium term is **very low**, as it receives income from a variety of sources (mainly Further Education) and is not reliant on a single funding model. The financial performance of the College is Good (ESFA, 2024).

The College maintains public indemnity insurance to cover against a range of risks typical for a Further Education institution. In addition, the College also has business continuity insurance, the purpose of which is to ensure continuity of educational services to Higher Education students within the College, including the provision of administrative services associated with the recording of student attainment and awards. The College undertakes reviews of its *Disaster Response and Recovery Plans*, including reviewing the level of financial resource required to operate them, on a regular basis. Furthermore, the College has disaster recovery protocols, typical for the Further Education sector, which are tested and reviewed on a scheduled basis.

b. Risk of courses moving to a different College campus in the next three years

The risk that the College will elect to move the location of the delivery of any of its Higher Education courses during the medium term is low.

The College currently delivers Higher Education courses at the following locations:

- City (Granville Road, Sheffield, S2 2RL)
- Hillsborough (Livesey Street, Sheffield, S6 2ET)
- Olive Grove (Olive Grove Street, Sheffield, S2 3EG)

Over the past fourteen years, the College has undertaken a large-scale strategic reorganisation of its Higher Education provision, the first phase of which was completed in September 2010 with the opening of the state-of-the-art City Campus on Granville Road. The College completed this project in 2015, following the closure of its Norton Campus; the displaced Norton Campus programmes were split between the City and Hillsborough campuses.

c. Risk of changes to existing course titles (and awards) in the next three years

The risk that the College will seek approval to change the course title (and therefore award) of one or more Higher Education courses during the medium term is medium. The College is innovative and responsive to potential students and employers, so its portfolio is dynamic, reflecting this. In some subject areas such as digital and creative disciplines, sector practice and terminology can change rapidly and employers may be seeking courses with a new emphasis. Equally there may be a demand for routes to become more specialised or less so to give a broader grounding across a subject area. In addition, where the College offers a programme in parallel with a validating university then there can be an external requirement to change a course title. For these reasons it is likely that the titles of routes will be subject to change.

When proposals for changing courses and titles are made, the College would seek to mitigate the effect on existing students by “teaching out” the courses in their current format. Thus, with the exception of repeating-students, the new structure and award would only affect new entrants to the courses. Any applicants for affected courses would be notified by the Admissions team, with alternative options presented to them, including (but not limited to) transferring their application to another course at the College, or to the partner university, or to withdraw their application altogether.

Students who are taking time out from their course e.g. for family or health reasons, would also be advised of the change and given the opportunity to participate in student consultation activities and receive individual advice on their options.

In the event that a student is required to repeat a year of study, they would be unable to repeat the same modules they had previously studied. In such circumstances, the College would produce information for the student(s) concerned, specifying the last available date for sitting existing modules, including resits. At this time, the College would also provide information on what effect, if any, the changes would have on the nature of the award title available to the student, where the credits for the qualification are derived from a mixture of old and new modules.

d. Risk of permanent interruption to study on highly specialised courses

The risk that there will be permanent interruption to study on highly specialised courses is **low**.

The College designates approximately half of its thirty-five Higher Education courses as “highly specialised” - chiefly because of the dependence on specialist staff required to deliver the course(s) and assess the output. Although the College operates its own agency for the supply of fixed term staff to deliver specialist teaching, or to cover short-term absence, replacement staff may not be sufficiently qualified or experienced to deliver the courses listed below, at HE Level 4 and above. Where there is a need to recruit highly specialised staff, vacancies will be advertised in specialist publications.

The College’s Business Planning process includes a mechanism for approving that specialist posts may be recruited using the “High Performance” pay range rather than using the “Normal Maximum”. The College is satisfied that this will control the above risk, as the College will be able to recruit using a higher pay range than would ordinarily be available for such a post.

In any case where one or more specific courses is considered to be at high risk, the College will always, in the first instance, seek support and guidance from the appropriate partner university. As students on Higher Education courses at the College are also students of the validating institution, the College would look to our partners for assistance in mitigating the risk and avoiding non-continuation of study (e.g. by helping the College source and recruit replacement staff).

Should this not prove possible, the College would look to transfer its learners to other providers, or to implement teach out so as to ensure continuity of study.

e. Risk of course closure on any Higher Education provision delivered at the College

The risk that there will be instances of course closure which would not allow the students to complete their course is **low**.

Once provision has started, the College will ensure that the course continues to run. The College will not close a course on grounds of reduced numbers at any point following its commencement.

Should a course be at threat of closure due to circumstances such as, but not limited to, lack of appropriate teaching staff or loss of suitable accommodation, the College would look to our validating partners for assistance in mitigating this risk (e.g. by helping the

College to source and recruit replacement staff, by providing alternative accommodation and so on)

Should this not prove possible, the College would look to transfer its learners to other providers, or to implement teach out so as to ensure continuity of study.

f. Risk of termination of validation contracts

The risk of the termination of validation contracts by our validating partners is **low**.

The College has a robust Quality cycle, and within this has regular review processes with all of its validating partners.

All formal Awards Boards and formal Periodic Reviews have been completed successfully.

In the highly unlikely event that a validation contract is terminated by a validating partner, the College would look to transfer its learners to other providers, or to implement teach out so as to ensure continuity of study.

4. Refunds and compensation

The College has a *Tuition Fees and Charging Policy* which makes provision for refund and compensation payments. The policy is approved by the College Executive team and reviewed annually prior to publication. The Governing Body formally assesses the College's ability to meet the financial commitments of the refund and compensation clauses of the *Tuition Fees and Charging Policy* and this is recorded in the College's *Risk Register*.

The College has cash reserves in excess of £4m, which would be sufficient to provide refunds and/or compensation payments to the likely number of students at any one time who might be identified by the College as being at significant risk of non-continuation of their studies.

The *Tuition Fees and Charging Policy* is reviewed and republished on an annual basis by the Executive Director of Finance. The annual policy review occurs in two stages - the initial stage consists of a formal meeting with student representatives enrolled on Higher Education courses, followed by a review by the College Executive.

5. Communicating the provisions of the plan to students

This plan will be published and made available to students and applicants through:

- The College website.
- The Student Hub.
- The Student Hub Mobile App.
- Reception desks at each campus.

- The Learning Resource Centre.
- Linked policy documents.

Links to the plan will also be provided through:

- Letters/emails inviting applicants to interview.
- Letters/emails making offers to applicants.
- Letters/emails to employers that are paying for students to study at the College.
- Letters/emails to employers that are delivering learning and assessment in partnership with the College, at the time at which the College makes offers of places on these courses.
- Letters/emails communicating the unavailability of a course where the College had previously offered a place, except where that offer had expired within the UCAS system because the applicant has not made a timely response.
- Policies and application forms to transfer to a Higher Education course at the College.
- Letters/emails in which the College responds to an application from an existing enrolled student of the College to transfer to another of the College's higher education courses, prior to processing.

6. Ensuring that staff are aware of the implications of the provisions of the Student Protection Plan during the development or amendment of courses.

The College will include consideration of the provisions of the Student Protection Plan in the various formal planning stages associated with curriculum development, amendment or delivery for example:

- Documentation required for course development approval through the Product Development Steering Group.
- Documentation associated with each stage of the Business Review process.
- Documentation associated with each stage of the Business Planning process.
- Papers for the College executive meeting concerning course development, course modification, proposals for material changes in course delivery or papers addressing the risk of the implementation of the Student Protection Plan.
- Papers for the Governing Body concerning the development of and changes to the College's course portfolio, Higher Education strategy and estates strategy ensuring that changes have regard to the provisions of the Student Protection Plan.

7. Implementing the Student Protection Plan

When the College first identifies that one or more risks is likely to crystallise, affected students will be notified in writing, and will be provided with a copy of the Student Protection Plan. The correspondence will identify a time and place where a meeting with affected students will be held; this will normally be a working day within the academic year, using dates in the published College academic calendar as the reference point. The College will also provide the Sheffield College Students' Union with a copy of any correspondence, to facilitate communication with individual students and representation of students.

Where practicable, the College will meet with the Sheffield College Students' Union prior to taking any of the actions identified in the Student Protection Plan. The purpose of this meeting will be to provide a forum for the Student Union to comment, including making suggestions on the form and implementation of the proposed action, or alternatively making suggestions for how the issue might be addressed without the need for the Student Protection Plan to be implemented. Where the College has met with the Student Union, it will provide a written response to the Student Union prior to proceeding with the implementation of the Student

Protection Plan. This response may also be used to confirm that the Student Protection Plan will not be implemented, or to outline the steps the College is proposing to take where the College considers further consultation would be helpful. The College will make an electronic copy of the response to the Student Union available to affected students within 72 hours. The College will also send a text message to affected students to advise that the electronic copy is available.

Where a course is recognised or accredited by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (or equivalent body) named in a validation document or course specification, the College will provide that body with details of how students are affected, together with details of the issues and the College proposals for responding to those issues in a timely way.

In cases where employers are providing sponsorship, work-based learning or work-based assessment of the affected students, the College will provide details of the students that they sponsor who are affected, together with details of the issues and the College proposals for responding to those issues, within the meaning of the Student Protection Plan.

8. Reviewing the Student Protection Plan

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed annually as part of the College's document review schedule.