

City of Portsmouth College, Higher Education Student Protection Plan

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1. Registered details and duration

Provider's name:	City of Portsmouth College
Provider's UKPRN:	10007945
Legal address:	City of Portsmouth College, Tudor Crescent, Portsmouth PO6 2SA
Applicable period :	2021/2022

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2. Rationale

This policy sets out the College's procedures for closing, suspending or changing any of their Higher Education programmes that it is either

- approved (via an Awarding Body),
- franchised or
- validated (via a Partner University).

2.1 Regulatory Framework

This policy is designed to reflect the Sector advisory guidance within the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) UK Higher Education Providers-Advice on Consumer Protection Law (March 2015), the requirements of The UK Quality Code for Higher Education-Part C, The Equality Act 2010 and OfS Regulatory Framework which sits in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

It has also been designed to meet the requirements for the CMA Student Protection Plan.

2.2 Risks

The College is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. It will make every effort to protect the student interest and ensure continuity in the event of course, campus or College change or closure. We are aware that events may occur which mean unforeseen changes need to be made to modules or programmes.

The College has undertaken an assessment of potential risks associated with the continuation of study from a student's perspective and the likelihood of these risks happening and has identified the following risks:

- The College has lost validation for one or more of its courses or a decision by the College to close a course
- The course programme is changed in order to reflect local market intelligence which may include major changes in year to course content
- Disruption of College activity (e.g. temporary disruption within term time) including industrial action by College staff or emergent Health constraints
- The College is unable or no longer intend to operate as a whole due to financial stability

2.2.1 Closure and Suspension

The College may seek to close and remove a Higher Education programme from its offer. The closure of a programme means that the College will cease to recognise the programme as one for which a student may be registered.

Suspension of a programme of study is defined by a fixed timeframe in which a programme will not be delivered.

- Decisions to close or suspend a College Higher Education programme approved by the

Awarding Body must be formally approved by the College's Academic Board and ratified by the Senior Management Team (SMT) because of the implications for the contractual relationship between current and prospective students and the College.

- Decisions to close or suspend a College Higher Education programme that is franchised or validated by a Partner University must be formally approved by the College's Academic Board and ratified by the SMT. Once these steps have been taken processes linked to the Partner Universities relevant Student Protection Plan will be followed because of the implications for the contractual relationship between current and prospective students and the Partner University.

Any request to close or suspend a programme must be made by the Vice Principal in which that programme is located. In the case of joint programmes that span more than one school, the relevant school must consult on the closure or suspension. The Vice Principal is required to make a business case to the Academic Board who will make a proposal for the SMT who will make the final decision.

Where there are any expected changes to staff/staffing structure consultation must be sought. On receipt of a request to close or suspend a programme, the SMT may agree one of the following:

- Decline
- Approve without conditions
- Approve with conditions

The College will always plan to complete teaching for students who are enrolled on one of our HE programmes should they become under consideration as being at risk. If this is not possible then we will work with the students to make alternative arrangements to enable them to complete their qualification.

2.2.2 Programme Changes

The College may be required to make changes to programmes between publication of the prospectus and registration as well as after registration in order to update the materials, sessions and units taught to reflect what is best for the students based on local marketing intelligence (LMI).

Where materials have been changed between the publication of the prospectus and registration, the College will draw these changes to the attention of applicants as soon as possible and advise them of their right to seek entry to another College programme for which they may be qualified or to withdraw their application and seek entry to another institution. Where the applicant has already accepted an offer, they shall be invited in to the College for further advice and guidance to help them make an informed decision on their future course of action. In normal circumstances, material changes to programmes should not be made after registration, but where this is unavoidable, students and their representatives shall be consulted at the earliest opportunity on the changes and, where practicable, their views shall be taken into account.

If a student reasonably believes that a material change to their programme adversely affects them, they may cancel their contract with the College. In such circumstances the College will offer suitable information, advice and guidance to a student and, where possible, facilitate their transfer to another institution which offers an appropriate programme for which they are qualified.

Further to the start of the programme and during the course of a student's studies, the College may make minor amendments to programmes in order to improve the quality; to meet the latest requirements of an accrediting body; or in response to student feedback. Where such minor amendments to the delivery of a programme are necessary, the College will consult with or inform current and future students and their representatives of these changes, as appropriate, and in line with College quality assurance processes.

2.2.3 Disruption of College activity (catastrophic event, force majeure and industrial action)

The College's circumstantial/environmental risks are the same as for any other institution, namely those associated with a catastrophic event such as disease, fire or flood and/or those associated with Force Majeure. Mitigation includes ongoing risk assessment, regular safety inspection and the maintenance of appropriate insurance and cash reserves to ensure business continuity in the wake of said event.

College business continuity plans ensure that there are procedures in place to ensure sustainability of the business.

Industrial action by College staff can also disrupt College activity, However the College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognized trade unions to hopefully avoid these actions taking place. It is committed to maintaining effective employee culture and working with trade unions to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.

If industrial action was to occur, the College will keep students informed and take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring any disruption is minimized and students are not disadvantaged by the action.

2.2.4 Financial Stability

The College has 'Requires Improvement financial health as determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). There are robust financial controls and procedures in place including effective budget monitoring and control to ensure the College continues to maintain a sound financial base in terms of both solvency and liquidity.

Key Financial Objectives underpin the annual budget to ensure the College remains financially sound in order to provide high quality resources to support teaching and learning; protect itself from unforeseen adverse changes in enrolments and funding; generate sufficient funds to invest in improved accommodation and technology.

With these risks in mind it is in the College's best interest to ensure all of their students are protected no matter which course they study or are about to study if the programme of study has not yet started.

In the unlikely event that the College was unable to operate due to financial instability then the College will work with the students to make alternative arrangements which enable them to complete their qualification

3. Student Protection

Current students will normally be allowed to complete the programme of study for which they are registered unless each gives their explicit written consent to the contrary. Such consent must not be sought until a closure or suspension recommendation has been agreed. Where a programme is being closed to new entrants only, the College's proposed arrangements for students currently registered on the programme (including those whose registration is suspended but have not yet completed the programme) must comply with the following:

- Current students should be informed of their options. The College will provide all necessary information, advice, guidance and support to facilitate students in deciding which option to follow.

- The standard of academic provision and the student experience must, as far as is reasonably practicable, be maintained throughout their period of registration. In particular, the conditions must be maintained to enable the stated learning outcomes in the relevant Programme Specification to be achievable by students who are being 'taught out'.
- To ensure the student experience and to support the students, the relevant Vice Principal, together with the Quality & Standards Managers will monitor their experience.

3.1 Withdrawals and Refunds

If the College cancels a course then a full refund will be given and no administration fee will be charged, this will be processed by the Business Intelligence Team and the Finance Department.

Students will be compensated for any expenditure they may have incurred prior to the course being cancelled by the College including any travel, accommodation or maintenance costs and any costs that may be incurred where a student is transferred to another provider or course. Such claims must be substantiated by evidence of the costs.

The volume of students at risk is exceptionally low as we currently have only a small cohort of HE learners so any compensation will be provided from the normal business of the College.

3.2 Communication

The College will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by placing it on the College website, in Course Handbooks and publicise it at enrolment and induction.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan by making sure it is validated through the academic framework which includes the Board of Studies, Academic Board and Board of Examiners. It will also feature on H.E. Planning Days and as part of H.E. practitioner meetings.

We will work our current students to develop our Student Protection Plan via student focus groups, the H.E Board of studies (which H.E students attend) and at final approval at Academic Board (which students also attend).

In the unlikely event that we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan and given the small numbers of H.E students that we have we will communicate with them on an individual and group basis. This will be carried out by our Quality & Standards Manager.