

## **P901 Higher Education Student Protection Policy**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This policy is to clarify what an applicant or student can expect if unanticipated problems occur, including if their course or institution were to close. It highlights the arrangements for informing and consulting with students so that their rights and the responsibility of the College and University Centre Peterborough is clear.

### **2. PURPOSE**

- 2.2 It is important that Peterborough Regional College (the College) and University Centre Peterborough (UCP) has robust plans in place which protect higher education students if their course cannot be fully delivered or if it is necessary to change the content of their course.
- 2.3 This document describes;
- A.** The exceptional circumstances that will give rise to a decision by the College and UCP to withdraw an unconditional or conditional offer of a place on a higher education course and the arrangements that will be put in place in such an eventuality.
  - B.** The obligations of the College and UCP to applicants and current students in relation to the units/modules/Academic and Assessment Regulations that are offered on its higher education programmes and the arrangements that will be made if changes to the course content and delivery are required.
  - C.** The arrangements to be put in place in the event of changes to the Awarding Body or validation arrangements for a course.
  - D.** The arrangements required by removal of a provider's Tier 4 Sponsor License (the Home Office issued license which allows a provider to teach international students).
  - E.** The exceptional circumstances that will give rise to closure of the College and the arrangements that will be put in place in such an eventuality.
  - F.** The arrangements made if Higher Education provision was withdrawn at the College and UCP.
- 2.4 In such circumstance, the College and UCP will ensure clarity of options, timely notification and clear arrangements for consulting with students when changes occur through this policy and the policies listed in section 4.

### **3. SCOPE**

- 3.1 The Student Protection Policy is triggered by material changes as set out in section 2, particularly those which could affect students' continued participation in their chosen course or at the institution at which they are studying.
- 3.2 The Policy relates to all applicants and students on the College HNC and HND courses and those on UCP's degree programmes. It also identifies arrangements which will be made with accrediting

bodies, which in this instance is Anglia Ruskin University for UCP programmes, and Pearson's Edexcel for the College courses. It involves any member of staff involved in offering Information, Advice and Guidance to prospective and current students. This therefore includes: administrative (e.g. finance, reception), support (e.g. admissions), academic (e.g. course leaders and lecturers), and marketing and management staff.

#### 4. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- College Risk Register and Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity Plan
- P114 Risk Management Policy
- P900 Higher Education Competition Markets Authority Policy
- P921 Higher Education Recruitment and Admissions Policy
- P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy <https://www.ucp.ac.uk/policies/>
- Terms and Conditions of Admission and Enrolment Higher Education <https://www.ucp.ac.uk/policies/>
- HE Student Charter <https://www.ucp.ac.uk/policies/>
- P981 Higher Education Complaints Process <https://www.ucp.ac.uk/policies/>
- P940 Higher Education Removal of Courses, Curriculum Revisions <https://www.ucp.ac.uk/policies/>
- Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2015) [www.gov.uk/cma-cases/competition-and-regulation-in-higher-education-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/competition-and-regulation-in-higher-education-in-england)
- HEFCE statement of good practice on course change and closure (2015), <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/sp/>
- Anglia Ruskin University Senate Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision (6th Edition, September 2015)
- Pearson BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Level 4 to 7), Issue 6, September 2014 <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/quality-assurance/btec-quality-assurance-handbook/standards-verification4.html/EO>

#### 5. DEFINITIONS

<b>Class:</b>	a regular meeting of a group of learners studying for a particular qualification or range of qualifications.
<b>Qualification:</b>	a programme of study leading to recognised certification.
<b>Current Student:</b>	is one that is enrolled in a current academic year (1 <sup>st</sup> August to 31 <sup>st</sup> July).
<b>Course Closure:</b>	to no longer offer the course for an indefinite period.
<b>Course Suspension:</b>	to not offer the course for a specific period (normally until the following academic year).

#### 6. RESPONSIBILITIES

It is imperative that before a change, as outlined in Section 2, is implemented that the consequences are fully considered. Such consequences may include, for example, interrupted student experience, financial considerations, market demand, resource implications, consumer protection (students) and reputational issues.

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the Vice Principal Curriculum and the Academic Director UCP to;
- Determine whether the reason for closure is valid and acceptable. This must include consideration on how applicants/students will be supported;

- determine whether there should be a restriction on the number of classes in the particular subject area;
  - determine whether the reason for removal of a course from the current College/UCP portfolio is valid and acceptable;
  - consult with students and staff on curriculum revisions and provide an opportunity to raise queries and concerns;
  - in cases of collaborative provision, consult with the other institution to close, suspend or change course content and ensure that they are aware of the policy and processes;
  - agree and document the reasons for changes outlines in section 2 and complete the appropriate documentation (must complete the 'Request for Closure, Suspension or Substantial Change of Courses' form and submit to the HE Academic Board and Senior Leadership Team see Appendix A);
  - to agree an action plan for managing the impact which must be drawn up with all internal and external stakeholders;
  - to write formal communication to applicants/students after agreed action confirmed.
- 6.2 It is the responsibility of the HE Senior Admissions and Enrolment Officer, UCP Marketing & Events Officer and Management Information Services, if required, to;
- ensure that the course is removed from, or information amended, on the UCAS database, the College and UCP website;
  - follow the P921 Higher Education Recruitment and Admissions Policy in respect of any applicant holding an offer of a place;
  - check and update internal and external publicised information;
  - follow the College Terms and Conditions of Admissions and Enrolment Higher Education to be clear on the obligations to applicants and students;
  - inform the College and UCP Marketing team.

## 7. RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 This policy is required to ensure that correct procedures are in place and followed by all involved in the closure or revision of courses and guidance offered to higher education students.
- 7.2 **Analyse risks of non-adherence to this policy:** The College and UCP are committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and transparent information ensuring accurate, relevant, and current procedures are followed enabling applicants and students to make an informed decision. Failure to have this policy in place or non-adherence may result in resource implications, financial considerations and inconsistency practices leading to dissatisfaction and poor reputation as well as failure to demonstrate the expected base line regulatory requirements of a HE provider.
- 7.3 **Staff training needed:** Induction and refresher training to be made available to staff.
- 7.4 **Compliance** reduces the risks described above.

## 8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 This policy has had a stage 1 impact Assessment.

## **9. PROCEDURE**

### **A. Course suspension or closure**

- 9.1 As out lined in the Terms and Conditions document the College and UCP will aim to deliver course provision as described in course handbooks, unit/module guides, website information and other available information. However, at times it may be necessary to change this provision either before or after a student enrolls.
- 9.2 Reasons for a suspension of a course could include;
- loss of key staff whose expertise was required or changes in staffing;
  - insufficient enrolment and course take-up makes it unviable to run and detrimental to the student experience;
  - restricted number of classes being offered in a particular curriculum area due to maximum room or resource restraints;
  - developments in the subject and QAA benchmark revisions;
  - to safeguard academic standards for example, in response to external examiner feedback.
  - changes implemented by the Awarding or accreditation body (PSRB);
  - following student feedback.
- 9.3 Course suspension is agreed for one academic year or one intake through the process outlined in section 6. Where a course has been suspended for two consecutive years, the Vice Principal Curriculum and the Academic Director UCP should consider if it is appropriate to close the course.
- 9.4 The Academic Director of UCP (or identified delegate) will make potential students aware and the College Academic Director's will inform teaching staff if course numbers are low at application stage and if the advertised course is at risk of suspension or closure. See Section 10 for information about how this is communicated to students.
- 9.5 The decision to suspend a course will follow the process outline in section 6.
- All planned course suspensions will be submitted to the HE Academic Board for approval to ensure that implications of removing a course of study are discussed. The Senior Leadership Team will be informed. Where necessary, Chair's Action will be sought when meeting schedules would delay the process.
  - To ensure that restrictions on the number of classes offered in a particular subject area are agreed by the Academic Director UCP (HE) in conjunction with the Vice Principal of Curriculum.
- 9.6 If a course is suspend at application stage, the applicant will be informed by letter or email as soon as it is reasonably practicable in order for the applicant to decide whether or not they still wish to continue with their application to study. Substitute provision will be considered and applicants informed of the alternate course options. An offer of a place may be deferred for an academic year but the College and UCP cannot guarantee that the course will run. If, as a consequence of the course suspension, the applicant decides not to study with the College or UCP, the College or UCP will refund any tuition fees and/or deposit that they have paid in advance and in accordance with P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy or the UCP Rules, regulations and procedures for students (3rd edition, June 2017).

- 9.7 If on the rare occasion a course with enrolled students may become no longer available the College will identify a suitable alternative course to transfer students onto or assist in finding an alternative provider. See Section 10 for information about how this is communicated to students.

#### **B. Change in course content or delivery**

- 9.8 In certain circumstances, the College or UCP may need to make changes to the previously advertised course content, structure and/or method of delivery of a course or individual modules offered after an applicant has accepted their offer, or as an enrolled student progresses. This may include discontinuing some units/modules.
- 9.9 Reasons for a change in a course structure or content could include;
- to meet the requirements of an accrediting, professional, statutory and/or regulatory body;
  - to comply with legal, regulatory or governmental requirements;
  - to respond to sector good practice or quality enhancement processes, such as in response to student feedback;
  - to keep programmes contemporaneous by updating practises or areas of study;
  - to safeguard academic standards for example, in response to external examiner feedback;
  - because of circumstances outside of the reasonable control of the College and UCP such as an unplanned absence of a key member of staff or if an external provider is no longer available to contribute to a module/unit;
  - where insufficient numbers of students have chosen an optional module/unit making it unviable to run or where a member of staff whose expertise was required to run it is no longer available;
  - to abide by the revisions made by the Awarding Body (Pearson Edexcel/ Anglia Ruskin University).
- 9.10 It is possible that as a result of this, substantial changes in the methods of delivery of a course, such as the timetable, location, number of classes, methods and timings of assessments is required. The College and UCP will make all reasonable efforts to minimise any adverse effect the change may have on students and will endeavour to consult with potentially affected students as early as possible where it is able to do so. Student's opinions are sought through the Class Rep system, by gathering opinion at Student Council meetings and through engagement with the Student Officer. Students also sit on key decision making committees which policies are reviewed at.
- 9.11 If the College or UCP makes a change after a student has enrolled, or an applicant as accepted an offer of study, the student/applicant will be informed by the course lecturer, by email, or in tutorials as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so. The College and UCP may offer the student a place on an alternative course or assist the student in finding an alternative provider including help to transfer credits where possible. Any entitlement a student may have to a refund of fees will be determined in accordance with P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy or the UCP Rules, regulations and procedures for students (3rd edition, June 2017).

#### **C. Awarding Body or validation changes**

- 9.12 Changes to the validation or Awarding Body of a course would normally be initiated for the next academic year unless there are circumstances outside of the College's control.

9.13 Reasons for changes to Awarding Body and validation agreements could include:

- as a result of periodic review or course re-approval process;
- failure to gain course approval;
- developments in the subject mean that changing to an alternative Awarding Body or validating partner is in the interests of students;
- the validating partner has decided to cease to provide the validation for that course;
- receiving an unsatisfactory outcome following a QAA review;
- External Bodies (such as PRSB) require changes, suspension or closure of a course;
- closure of a validation partner or awarding body resulting in the withdrawal of the course;
- on successful award of Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) the College and UCP would seek to validate their own provision and as such engagement with existing awarding/accrediting bodies would change. Students would be informed and consulted with when such occurs;
- post TDAP unsatisfactory judgements at the time of the QAA review affecting renewal of the degree-awarding powers

9.14 An action plan should be implemented to ensuring existing students can complete their course even if their specific qualification has changed or been withdrawn and will not run in subsequent years. On rare occasions a course with enrolled students may no longer be accredited and the College will try and identify a suitable alternative course to transfer to or assist in finding an alternative provider.

9.15 The action plan should include;

- assessing the impact on course management and delivery;
- formal communication to students, staff and notification to other stakeholders (e.g. external examiners, student's employers) to include the reasons for the decision;
- managing the implications for progressing students who require to retake units/modules;
- taking into account the needs of students who have intermitted their studies. Although, it should be noted that the College and UCP are unable to guarantee to students that the pathway for which they originally registered will still be available when they resume their studies ( as stated under P960 Higher Education Academic and Assessment Regulation Policy and the Academic Regulations of Anglia Ruskin University);
- abiding by the policies and procedures of the Awarding Body.

#### **D. Removal of the College Tier 4 Sponsor Licence**

9.16 If the College Tier 4 sponsor licence is revoked by the Home Office it is no longer allowed to support international students requiring a student study visa. A licence may be revoked if the College does not have a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating. Students already enrolled and studying at the College may be allowed to continue until the expiry date of their CAS. Any applicants who have yet to enrol should be informed, by letter or email, as soon as it is reasonably practicable. The College will refund any tuition fee and/or deposit that they have paid in advance and in accordance with P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy or the UCP Rules, regulations and procedures for students (3rd edition, June 2017). Where possible, the applicant may be given advice on how to apply to an alternative provider.

### **E. Closure of the College**

- 9.17 If in the exceptional circumstance, the College or UCP had to close, and the curriculum offer ceased, key measures as stated in the College Risk Register and Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan would be invoked.
- 9.18 Exceptional circumstances could include;
- a strategic decision by a provider to close a campus and exit the market altogether;
  - damage to the building, critical infrastructure or key resources as a result of fire, criminal damage or accident;
- 9.19 Where possible the College and UCP should make arrangements for affected students to switch to a different provider without having to start their course from the beginning, including help to transfer credits where possible and the issuing of a formal transcript. Any entitlement a student may have to a refund of fees will be determined in accordance with P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy or the UCP Rules, regulations and procedures for students (3rd edition, June 2017).

### **F. Closure of Higher Education provision**

- 9.20 If a decision was made to close the higher education curriculum offer there must be early and ongoing discussions with students. These should include informing students of the plans, and outline the measures that will be taken to safeguard their educational experience. All students affected should be met with and not just student representatives. Where possible, meeting should be held when students are timetabled to attend UCP/College.
- 9.20 Where possible the admission cycle and academic calendar should be taken into account allowing the best possible options for students to transfer to alternative providers. Arrangements for affected students to switch to a different provider without having to start their course from scratch including help to transfer credits where possible. Any entitlement a student may have to a refund of fees will be determined in accordance with P922 Higher Education HNC/D Fee and Refund Policy or the UCP Rules, regulations and procedures for students (3rd edition, June 2017). See Section 10 for information about how this is communicated to students.

## **10. COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS**

- 10.1 The College and UCP are committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and transparent information ensuring accurate, relevant, and current procedures are followed enabling applicants and students to make informed decisions.
- 10.2 Students and applicants will be informed by the HE Curriculum Leader and the Academic Officer, by email, telephone or in tutorials of any changes to their course or module/unit. If their offer of study is withdrawn for any reason outlined in section 2.3 they will be informed as soon as it is reasonably practicable to do so and this communication will be formal written communication emailed by the Academic Director of UCP (or nominee).

## **11. RIGHT OF APPEAL**

- 11.1 The College takes into account student interests in decision making and ensures that decisions are fair, accessible, transparent and explicit. Guidance is published through the HE Student Charter

and the Terms and Conditions of enrolment and application document. Adherence to the Competition and Markets Authority guidance on consumer law for UK HE providers (2015) also ensures that the guidance given is accurate, clear, unambiguous and timely.

- 11.2 Where a decision is made to close some provision, all higher education courses or close down the site altogether it might not be possible for an applicant or student submit a complaint. For example where decisions are made due to factors outside of the College or UCP's control such as the withdrawal of a validation partner. However, students concerns and feedback will be sought at all opportunities. In controllable circumstances the P981 Higher Education Complaints Process should be followed.