

Student Protection Plan

Introduction

As a registered provider of higher education with the Office for Students, the University of Southampton must publish a Student Protection Plan which sets out what students can expect to happen should a course or campus close. The purpose of this plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies, or can be compensated if this is not possible. This plan, which has been submitted to and approved by the Office for Students as part of our conditions for registration, applies to all students.

Risks to the continuation of study for students at the University of Southampton.

The risk that the University of Southampton is unable to operate is very low.

Our financial position is published annually and our most recent financial statements show a turnover of £583 million and a surplus of £30.8 million (Financial Statements and Statistics 2017-18). Our Education Strategy places an emphasis on improving all stages of the student journey and working to ensure that our educational activity is productive and sustainable.

University Risk Register

The University's Risk Register is reviewed regularly by the risk owners and then co-ordinated by the Health, Safety and Risk Directorate. It is currently subject to six monthly review by the University Executive Board, the University's Audit Committee and Council. If there were a significant change to risk, this would result in an additional presentation to these bodies with recommendations. Each Faculty and Professional Service has a Business Continuity plan and the strategic approach to Business Continuity is in three parts: Business Continuity/Crisis Management Response/Pandemic.

Business Continuity

The University has well developed approaches to Business Continuity, which are regularly tested and audited. The University's Business Continuity Plan recognises the threats and hazards, which may affect the University, assesses the risks they pose and identifies the measures to be put in place to enable business recovery as quickly as possible. The nature of our specialist provision means that if the University lost access to some of its facilities (for example, laboratories, clean rooms, specialist computer suites), we would need to seek temporary replacements. The University has experience of successfully implementing these types of arrangements.

Closure of a Campus

The University operates over several campuses, including the University of Southampton Malaysia Campus. All parts of the University's estate undergo regular inspections reviewing maintenance, accessibility, and health and safety, with the aim of keeping all areas of the estate operational in the short, medium and long term. The University is not currently considering the closure of any of its locations.

Closure of a Discipline

The University's strategy is deliberately broad-based and does not currently anticipate the closure of any discipline areas.

The most recent discipline the University chose to close was Social Work, which followed a review of the subject area by the Faculty. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken before the final decision was taken. Existing students continued to be taught on the programme until the natural completion of their studies. Deferred applicants were provided with a range of options, including the

offer of an unconditional place on the MSc Social Work programme at the nearby University of Portsmouth, and an offer of the reimbursement of re-application fees for applications to other institutions. This approach would be our preferred model in the event of the closure of a programme or discipline area.

Closure of a Programme

Programmes are designed on a modular system and are delivered by teams of academic staff. Therefore, even if individual members of staff are unable to deliver a module, students are still able to achieve their programme's learning outcomes. Programmes are reviewed annually and validated every five years.

The University regularly takes decisions to close programmes which do not attract applicants or which are replaced with alternative programmes. All programme closures follow the Programme Closure Policy, the underpinning principle of which is that the experience of students on the programme should be assured and monitored in all cases

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/quality/programmes_and_modules/programme_closure.page.

Students who are on a programme or closely related programmes must be consulted before commencing formal procedures to close or suspend a programme. In planning for closure of a programme, we proceed on the basis that students will be 'taught out' on programmes and the individual education of no student will be harmed.

Industrial Action

In the event of risk linked with industrial action by staff, which may disrupt the provision of education to students on a temporary or longer term basis, the University has in place a team to deal with the response to industrial action and each Faculty has Mitigation Panels which work to a set of agreed principles to ensure consistency of treatment and review the effects of any disruption, and consider how to mitigate such effects and communicate the outcomes to students.

Collaborative Partners

The University delivers programmes collaboratively with a number of partners. Due diligence is undertaken on potential partners which looks at, amongst other factors, their financial and legal position, academic provision and student experience. The University does not undertake joint delivery with any partners it considers will jeopardise its education, but before any partnership arrangement is signed, the University explores how it would be able to deliver the education without the partner's contribution. This includes the expected financial consequences of taking on the delivery of the entire programme.

Other Risks

PhD students have a supervisory team of at least two, and sometimes more, supervisors. This enables continuity in supervision even if members of staff leave the University. Annual progression reviews, carried out by independent members of staff, review the supervisory team arrangements and make recommendations for adjustments if required.

The University's approach to timetabling allows for the access needs of students and staff to be programmed into timetable requirements. If particular facilities (such as an induction loop or a fully accessible room) are required, even at short notice, the University's scheduling system will provide alternative locations.

Measures the University has put in place to mitigate against risk we consider reasonably likely to crystallise

The University does not consider that any of the risks concerning the continuation of study for its students are reasonably likely to crystallise.

However, in the unlikely event that study is disrupted, the University will draw on some or all of the following areas of support to mitigate the effect on students. These include:

- The measures identified within our Business Continuity Plans for Faculties and Professional Services.
- The use of alternative space, including – if required – the temporary hiring of space on or near existing University sites.
- The existing partnerships we have to deliver education, including our major estate partners locally in Southampton; the National and Environmental Research Council and the University of Southampton Hospitals Trust, and internationally with Iskandar Investment Berhad.
- The purchase of specialist expertise, for example the hiring of external academic staff to deliver specialist modules or leasing specialist equipment and/or premises to enable delivery of programmes.
- Use of the University’s published Programme Specifications and Academic Regulations to ensure that academic standards are maintained; assessment remains secure and robust, and award and progression decisions are made in line with University regulations.
- The use of Personal Academic Tutors for individualised advice and our 24/7, 365 days a year Student Life Team to make early contact with individual students.
- Our well defined student academic representation system to support communication planning between the University and students.
- Specific structures in place to identify and then support students who may be more adversely impacted as a result of mental health or other issues.

As previously stated, the University plans to ‘teach out’ the provision for students who are currently enrolled on programmes that are under consideration as being at risk. In the extremely unlikely event that the University chose to close a programme or discipline area and teach out arrangements were not appropriate, it will seek to support students to transition to comparable programmes at other institutions. Alternatively, there may be opportunities for students to switch to another programme at our institution if it meets their needs. While this is not the University’s preferred option, it has experience of concluding such arrangements successfully.

Policies in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs

The University of Southampton refund policy can be found at:

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/uni-life/fees-funding/paying-your-fees.page> for our UK campus.

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/my/undergraduate/fees_refund_policy.page for our Malaysia campus.

Details of funding and bursaries can be found at:

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/student-services/money-matters/student-funding/2019-funding.page>

The financial status of the University is such that it has cash reserves sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for students were we to identify any with an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

How we publicise this plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students as follows:

- We will publish statements for future students on our website under our ‘fees and funding’ webpages.
- We will include key terms in our offer letter.
- We will provide full details in our student portal.
- We will include reference to the Student Protection Plan in the University Calendar.
- We will ensure that student support teams in the University and Students Union are provided with full details to advise students should a need arise.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose changes to programmes by including reference to the plan in the Programme Validation process and in the Programme Closure process.

We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course in accordance with the process set out in Major/Intermediate/Minor Modifications to taught programmes which sets out types of changes, classification, approval method, action to be taken on change, date by which changes must be approved, how to notify students and responsibility for notification. This makes provision for new and existing students.

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/quality/programmes_and_modules/changes_to_programmes.page

In the event of implementation of any part of our Student Protection Plan, it will be re-publicised to all students through our student portal and by email, with detail about the mitigation being put in place for the specific issue. Depending on the situation, students may also be invited to individual or group meetings to discuss the issue. Students will be supported by their Personal Academic Tutors, will be able to access support through our Student Services function, and will be represented through the Student Representation System.

The Students' Union Advice Centre provides free, independent and confidential support to all students in areas including complaints, academic matters, housing and finance.

We will review our Student Protection Plan on an annual basis through the Education Committee. Our students will be involved in our review through representation of the Student Union on Education Committee.

Updated August 2019: Submitted to the Office for Students, and approved February 2020