



St Helens College



University Centre
St Helens

Student Protection Plan

Relating to: UCSH

Document reference: USHCProUcs01

Document owner: Director of Adults and HE

Date of approval: 16 May 2024

Date of next review: 16 May 2025

What is the Student Protection Plan?

The Office for Students (OfS) requires the College to publish a Student Protection Plan that sets out the measures we have in place to protect our students in the unlikely event that a risk to the continuation of their studies should arise. This Plan incorporates an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, the risk mitigation measures we have in place, and the arrangements for supporting you in the event that the College is no longer able to preserve continuation of study.

What are the risks the College Group has identified in relation to my studies?

The College has considered a range of risks that could have the potential to affect our ability to be able to deliver our programmes and how they may affect you as a student. We detail below what these risks are and how we will do our very best to lessen the likelihood of them happening at all, or if they do occur, minimise the effect they may have on your studies.

Financial Risk

The risk that the College as a whole is unable to operate is low because our financial health is carefully monitored by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This financial health assessment looks at a range of key finance metrics including performance, financial obligations, and assets.

Risk to Premises

We have business continuity plans to deal with natural disasters, terrorist attack, or accidental events all of which could lead to loss of use for part or the whole campus. As the College is located across several campuses comprising a number of separate buildings the risk to loss of use of the whole of all campuses is very unlikely. Disruption to teaching in specific areas can be minimised by relocating classes where any temporary damage or loss to teaching areas has occurred, for example because of localised fire or flood.

Risk to Delivery of Programmes

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver programmes in highly specialised areas in the next three years is moderate because we have crossover of expertise in most areas within staff teams. The College also has a good track record of being able to attract specialist teaching.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses is also moderate because our modules can be taught within teams of academic staff, with a breadth of knowledge.

We have a crossover of skills within teams, however, in some cases certain expertise is needed for specific modules. As above the College has a good track record in sourcing these skills.

We recognise that for part-time students who are only in college a short time each week, it is vital that we communicate any issues with staffing or resulting timetable changes swiftly and effectively. Those sponsored by employers will be provided with information to disseminate potential changes to their employers in good time.

Risks Arising from Withdrawal of Awarding Body

The risk that our awarding bodies may withdraw from our contracts is low as our performance is regularly monitored and systems are in place to identify any quality issues throughout the student academic year, in order to take actions and safeguard your student experience.

In the unlikely event of the withdrawal of an awarding body, the College will endeavour to safeguard the student experience and will implement the 'Management of Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study Policy'. The Management of Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study Policy can be found in the Public Information section of the College's website. The College ensures that contracts with awarding bodies contain effective teach out clauses.

Risks Arising from Suspension or Closure of a Programme

A programme of study may be suspended to recruitment, or closed altogether in some cases, as a result of:

- a) A lack of applications/enrolments - this is due to the need to protect the student experience in preventing courses running which have very small numbers, or those which are not financially viable, or;
- b) Where we are unable to effectively resource the programme in terms of staffing, accommodation, or availability of specialist equipment.

In such circumstances where the programme has current cohorts studying or due to progress on the programme, teaching out the current cohort of students is always the preferred and usual outcome of a course closure or suspension, as it keeps the risk of disruption to students low. The teaching out agreement is formed between the College and the awarding body to allow continuation of studies through to completion of the current award. (This may not include progression from Foundation Degree to 'top up' where this is a separate programme).

Given that in a teaching out situation, we may have a reduced staff team and/or reduced breadth of expertise, for only one or two year groups, rather than the full complement of year groups, it is a low risk that we may need to adapt the course structure or timetable, in consultation with the student cohort, in order to preserve our ability to teach the programme through to completion.

What could the College Group do to mitigate those risks that have been identified as moderate/reasonably likely to crystallise?

Risk to Delivery of Programmes

If we became aware that we would be unable to deliver courses in specialised programmes in the next three years, we will put in place a teaching out plan for the existing cohorts of students, to safeguard the student experience and ensure that enrolled students can continue to study and achieve the intended final award. This teaching out plan will be drafted in consultation with the affected student cohort and take into account their views and wishes where practicably possible, and where doing so will not jeopardise the overall aims and intended award relating to the programme of study.

Should the College determine that it is no longer possible to deliver material components of one or more courses, particularly if there are areas of specific vulnerability, such as single tutor dependencies for teaching we would consider which of the following options would bring about the preferred outcomes for the students.

We would:

- Bring in suitable staff expertise through agency cover, or sharing expertise with other institutions, whilst continuing to recruit suitable staff in a timely manner.
- Where the pursuance of temporary staff is unrealistic, or results a significant gap in the studies, then the College would, in consultation with the awarding body, be prepared to extend the students' term time, in order to complete all work that is necessary with the remaining staff, or additional staff brought in later.

Should neither of these options be achievable, we would then:

- Consult with the students and the awarding body for possible changes to the Modules which would allow for the utilisation of current course team expertise.
- Consider other members of staff who might have expertise in other specialisms which students would prefer, in order to make changes to the course structure.
- Provide training for existing staff to allow for delivery of specialist modules.
- Consider, with the student cohort, the possibility of transfer to other institutions for continuation of studies.

Once a decision has been reached on how the course will proceed, an addendum to the original Programme of Study and Handbook, detailing the changes, will be issued to each student affected by the change/s for their agreement and signatory.

How can the College Group ensure that a student is not financially disadvantaged in the event that due to any of the identified risks occurring, they are not able to continue to study here?

The College Group has a Tuition Fees Policy, which refers to procedures to ensure that refunds and/or compensation can be paid out to eligible students in the event of a programme being closed. This also covers the scenario of the College being unable to deliver all of the programme or individual components where this is considered by the College to adversely impact on student academic outcomes. This policy can be found in the Public Information section of the College website.

The Policy makes provision for:

- Refunds for students in receipt of a tuition fees loan from the Student Loans Company.
- Refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees.
- Refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.

In such an event the College Group has cash reserves sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those groups affected.

How will the College Group ensure that students and staff will know about the student protection plan, and that it is kept up to date?

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by displaying it on our website in the policies and procedures section and provide a link to this in the Student Course Handbooks provided during Induction.

We will review our Student Protection Plan annually. Comments about the plan will be collated as and when they arise, from students or staff, and the review would also be based on student experiences of the plan and how it was implemented, should it become relevant during their period of study.

HE students will be involved in the review as the plan will be added as an agenda item for the HE Student Forum during Semester 2, with HE students and Programme representatives being invited.

Feedback provided by students will inform any amendments to be made to the plan.

What happens if the plan needs to be put into action?

If we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan, initially we will hold a course team meeting with the students and staff to ascertain if the course is being changed, suspended, or closed as a result of the crystallisation of any of the identified risks.

In the event of a course closure or suspension decision, we will implement the Management of Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study Policy. We will then write to all students affected to inform them of the results of these discussions. This may include an invitation to a further meeting with the course team, Head of School and/or relevant College Director.

We would then arrange for appropriate guidance such as financial and careers advice and support to be available to students collectively and individually. This would be extended to include communication with employers where students are financially sponsored, or where material changes to the course might have an impact on job roles, promotion or required skills.