

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 in 2018, 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 £589 million and a surplus of £40.3 million (Financial Statements and Statistics 2016-17). 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 the UK

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

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.

Currently our refund policy deals with the percentage refund for students but not the method of refunding payments. Currently refunds are made to the original payor e.g. Student Loans Company, individual student, sponsor etc. We will review the policy and update it to clarify the University's position on:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee 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.
- the payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their programme.
- commitments to honour student bursaries.
- compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study.
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

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 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.

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 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

*July 2018: Submitted to the Office for Students and approved during initial registration
Reviewed May 2019; no changes made*