

The University of Exeter - Student Protection Plan 2018/19

Provider's Name: University of Exeter

Provider's UKPRN: 10007792

Legal Address: Northcote House, The Queen's Drive, Exeter EX4 4QJ

Contact point for enquiries about the student protection plan: Christopher Lindsay, Director of Compliance, Governance and Risk (c.a.lindsay@exeter.ac.uk; 01392 723016)

1. Introduction

The University of Exeter (the University) is deeply committed to excellence in teaching and learning and ensuring that all who have the potential to achieve can attend the University and reach this potential. The University has 37 disciplines in 6 colleges: Humanities, Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences, Life and Environmental Sciences, Social Sciences and International Studies, the Business School and the Medical School. All colleges are present at the Streatham (Exeter) and Penryn (Cornwall) campuses, while St Luke's (Exeter), Wonford (Exeter) and Truro (Cornwall) offer specialist provision. The Penryn campus is shared with Falmouth University.

The University is cognisant of its duties under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which requires higher education institutions to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure. The University will always aim to ensure that there are no material changes to a student's experience while at university. However this is not always possible due to a number of factors, some of which may be beyond the University's control. Therefore this Student Protection Plan looks to detail the University's plans for material changes and how it would mitigate for such changes.

The University will seek to communicate any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options, and will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to services and to affected students.

The University is in a strong position to deliver high-quality education and learning for its students and will continually review the risks around its provision and the robust plans in place to protect students. This will be done in conjunction with our student representatives from the Exeter Students' Guild and Falmouth and Exeter Union (FXU) who provide independent representation, advice and support, alongside a range of activities and services to those studying across the University.

The University has extensive educational and student service risk management processes in place across colleges and services, together with detailed business continuity plans and periodic programme monitoring and review arrangements. The University has, beyond the normal requirements of programme development and enhancement, no intention or strategic objective to change any of its programmes or modules at this point, nor is there any intention to close any existing campuses. The University is therefore not currently aware of any risks that may crystallise regarding the ultimate ability of our students to continue their studies. As a result, this Student Protection Plan does not focus substantively on those areas where risks are not likely to crystallise.

2. The University of Exeter's Assessment of the Risk of Significant Material Change and Our Proposed Mitigation Actions

Institutional Closure

The University is in a strong financial position and considers the risk of institutional closure to be **very low**. This is demonstrated by our published financial accounts and by the regular monitoring and risk management undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the regulator and company and charity law. The University is considered to not be at "higher risk" by HEFCE (at its last assessment being in February 2018), which indicates that the then regulator's analysis of our operating risk was low.

The University does, however, have substantial financial reserves set aside to enable it to respond were any such risks to materialise.

Where the University has no option other than to close, it may consider measures such as those below to protect the interests of students:

- where possible, closing in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at the University;
- where the above is not possible, by supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers;
- where there is demonstrable financial loss and detriment due to the nature of a disruption of studies, by compensating students appropriately; and/ or
- merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how these plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups.

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

Closure of a University campus, and/or part of a campus

We have assessed the risk of one of the University's constituent campuses closing (or part of one of our campuses being rendered unusable) as **very low**. However, where a campus or part of a campus is rendered unusable for activities involving students, the University will typically consider remedies such as:

- relocating provision to an alternative location; this may include hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby) and/or installing temporary buildings on the University's land (where available);
- revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected (including students);

- delivering programmes via alternative means, such as Distance Learning. Where such an approach is taken, the University will consider whether this it is appropriate for enrolled students who would be affected; and/ or
- considering whether the impact of such a closure and any required re-location has had a detrimental impact on a student(s) and assessing whether compensation or a form of refund would be appropriate.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how these plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups.

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

Change to legal status and designation

The University received its Royal Charter in 1955, and from it we derive the power and authority to carry out our activities. Since then the University has been well managed and governed and has detailed regulations which cover the operation of teaching, examinations and other matters relating to students. In the **very unlikely** event of de-designation of its programmes for 'Student Support' purposes, and/or loss of University status, the University will work with the appropriate regulatory bodies to:

- ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students;
- where the above is not possible, support students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and, where appropriate, financially compensate students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss or detriment because of disruption to their studies;
- consider assistance for affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies;
- consider financial compensation for students who have suffered significant detriment where the accreditation cannot be supplied; or
- ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how these plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups.

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

Changes to programmes

The inability of the University to continue to provide any of its programmes at any of its campuses is currently deemed to be **very low risk**. There are times however where for academic, pedagogic or business reasons, the University may need to close, materially change or alter its programmes. While these risks are more likely than institutional failure or campus closure, we believe the risk is still **low**.

Where there is any proposed change to a programme which would ultimately lead to the activation of the Student Protection Plan, the University would seek to engage with those students affected to ensure any proposed variation to any contract was agreed in writing, without duress and would consult with students to either continue to provide the programme in question and avoid the issues resulting in any discontinuation of study or would find an appropriate alternative which was acceptable to the students affected.

The University also has experience of managing programme closure, including the closure of its Chemistry department in 2005 and the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (a partnership with the University of Plymouth) in 2012. Both these major changes were managed with a strong focus on protecting the student interests, including detailed arrangements for teach through, and without any significant challenge from either the student body or professional bodies.

Programme closure/suspension

If a programme is cancelled for reasons other than circumstances beyond the University's control, the University will use reasonable endeavours to:

- provide a suitable alternative programme;
- if the student does not wish to accept the alternative programme, the student shall be entitled to withdraw from the programme. In the event of such withdrawal, the University shall provide appropriate compensation capped at a maximum of a refund of tuition fees, where it believes there is a fair case to do so; or
- where required, students will be offered support to transfer to another programme at the University, or to another provider.

In Year Programme Material Content Changes to Core Modules

If the University's ability to deliver programmes or other services in accordance with the descriptions provided is compromised by circumstances beyond the control of the University and this results in material changes to the programme (or delivery of the programme) (for the avoidance of doubt this relates to core module content), the University will minimise disruption as far as it is practical to do so, and will aim to ensure that changes are restricted to the minimum necessary to achieve the required quality of experience.

If a programme is substantially varied from that described in the Prospectus (or any other pre-contract information) for reasons other than circumstances beyond the University's control, the University will use reasonable endeavours to:

- provide a suitable alternative programme;
- if the student does not wish to accept the alternative programme, the student shall be entitled to withdraw from the programme. In the event of such withdrawal, the University shall provide appropriate compensation capped at a maximum of a refund of tuition fees, where it believes there is a fair case to do so;
- identify an alternative method of continuing to provide the same content, in consultation with the impacted students (if required); or
- where required, students will be offered support to transfer to another programme at the University, or to another provider.

Loss of Programme Accreditation

The University has a long history of delivering accredited programmes by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) over many years. In the highly unlikely event that programme accreditation is lost, the University will:

- work with the PSRB/accrediting body to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
- offer affected students the chance to move to another programme;
- deliver a modified version of the same programme; or
- provide assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider who holds the relevant accreditation.

Changes to academic staff

Whilst the University does have a range of specialist high quality programmes, many of which are based on specific areas of our academics research, we have contingency provisions in place to address any issues which may arise in the event of the departure of key academics. We would seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid disruption.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how all these programme-focused plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups;

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

Tier 4 Sponsorship

In the highly unlikely event of suspension of our Tier 4 Sponsor status, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption affected students by, for example:

- working with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme;
- allowing students already in receipt of a VISA based upon an allocated CAS from the University to enrol and commence their studies;
- offer students who have not commenced their travel to the University, the opportunity to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

If the University's Tier 4 Sponsor Licence was revoked (**very low risk**), the University would take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to affected students and would look to provide assistance to those students to switch to an alternative provider.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how these plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups.

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

Industrial Action

The University has well established fora for consultation and negotiation with our recognised trade unions. We are highly committed to maintaining effective employee relations and working with our trade union colleagues to achieve solutions to matters that may arise. Where industrial action does occur, the University will seek to:

- ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible;
- take steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised and students do not suffer ultimate detriment, particularly in relation to the attainment of the intended learning outcomes. This may include ensuring that missed teaching content is either rescheduled or provided in an alternative format;
- ensure timely and clear communications with students about any mitigation action the University is taking; and/ or
- compensate students on an individual basis that reflects the particular circumstances of each case, and in line with the approach set out in section 3 below, where because of disruption to their studies, they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss and/or detriment.

Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken to assess how these plans may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances and whether any remedial or mitigation actions are required for particular cohorts or groups.

The University would also look to ensure access to independent advice (usually through its affiliated Students' Unions) and access and support to wellbeing support.

3. Compensation and Refunds

If the University was faced with the **unlikely situation** where it risked any discontinuation of study, it would seek to mitigate this so far as it was able and would also utilise its financial surpluses and any insurance proceeds to seek to ensure it was able to deliver the on-going continuation of study. This would be before considering paying out compensation, as the University is committed to delivering its contractual obligations to its students, focussing particularly on the academic outcomes. Where students are able clearly to demonstrate they have suffered demonstrable, material financial loss and/or detriment, the University will look to compensate these students on an individual basis that reflects the particular circumstances of each case as appropriate.

Outside of the specific consideration of programme, campus or institutional closure, the University does have an approach to refunding tuition fees in specific circumstances, such as where a student withdraws, interrupts or transfers (before a specific date). Details on this approach can be found at: <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/otherregs/finance/>

There are specific variant approaches taken in relation to modular courses, online courses and in relation to postgraduate taught and postgraduate research studies. Additionally, on a case by case in exceptional circumstances, the University will also consider refunding fees, including specific medical issues, the death of a student etc.

4. Feedback and Communication with Students

The University will publicise its Student Protection Plan on its website, and as part of its annual student registration process, so it is available to all including current and potential future students. The University will also publicise its Student Protection Plan with staff to ensure they are aware of the commitments made by the institution and also the commitments made to its students.

The University will regularly review this plan alongside its financial and risk management processes. We intend to maintain an open dialogue with our students – through their representatives in the Exeter Students' Guild and FXU – about the risks and mitigation identified within this plan. This will be achieved through the Student Experience Advisory Board (SEAB), a jointly convened Board between the University and Unions which reports into the University's Council and both Union Trustee Boards.

The University has a Complaints Procedure which is readily available to students. Where students deem that there has been an issue in the provision of their studies and concerns are raised regarding the academic outcomes received, they can raise this with the University in accordance with our Complaints Procedure.

The complaints procedure can be found at:

<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/otherregs/complaints/>

April 2018