

Student Protection Plan

Document Owner	Registrar
Committee Approval	Data Registry and Compliance Board
Document Type	Policy
Version	2.0
Review Date	March 2025

Introduction

West Suffolk College has a risk assessment procedure which is reviewed by SET and Governors on a regular basis. This requires the University Studies Leadership Team to consider the viability of the provision, and courses based on student numbers, teaching provision, resources, and facilities.

Prior to applying for validation or reapproval of courses, course teams will be required to review the viability of their courses. They will be required to refer to market research and considering facilities, resources, and teaching capacity which will be considered by the Curriculum Development Board and approved by the Senior Executive Team as part of operational planning.

Course modification allows the College to respond to circumstances as they arise, to adjust the provision to suit the market need, e.g. students, employer sector, facilities, resources, and teachers.

All the above processes include discussion with existing students to ensure continuity meets their needs and expectations which is embedded within quality assurance and student voice processes.

Potential Risks

University Studies at West Suffolk College has identified a range of possible risks for its HE provisions:

- **A decision that parts or all of the University and Professional Development Centre is unusable for activities involving students** - the risk is low because the College infrastructure is well maintained and frequently refurbished and can be quickly adapted to suit different requirements. University Studies students may be provided with access to other College owned facilities within the immediate vicinity on an interim basis until the main University Campus and facilities are restored.
- **A decision to suspend a course for the subsequent year** - is a low risk because the College is committed to supporting all students to complete their programme of study.
- **The College is no longer able to deliver material components of the courses** - is a low risk because modules are designed to be taught by integrated, flexible teams of academic staff.

Loss of partnership status with validating HEIs and/or direct funding status - is a low risk because the College manages an annual quality cycle which is overseen by the relevant Governing bodies. Where courses, or the whole provision, are deemed to be at risk the College's Senior Executive Team, via the University Studies Leadership Team, oversees a risk-based monitoring process to support improvements. The Higher Education Educational Excellence Committee, the Governing committee responsible for monitoring curriculum quality and compliance with the OfS and QAA, will request close, detailed reporting on all provision until the provision is deemed to be meeting expectations. In addition to these internal

measures, University Studies at West Suffolk College will be responsible to the validating HEI which will monitor quality through its own quality assurance procedures, including institutional reviews. Further the QAA will oversee the provision from an external perspective to ensure national standards and expectations are maintained.

- **Loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. PSRB** - is a low risk because the College manages an annual quality cycle which is overseen by the Governing body. Where courses or the whole provision are deemed to be at risk the Governors committee, HE EEC, will request close, detailed reporting on all provision. Operationally any course identified as being at risk through the quality cycle will be put on a risk alert and will be monitored regularly with reports feeding into the Senior Executive Team.
- **Disruption of University Studies activity** - (e.g. temporary disruption within term-time not covered by any of the above) is low and the College has policies in place to cover disruptions, e.g. weather conditions causing closure.
- **Industrial action by University Studies staff or third parties** - is low and the College has procedures in place to ensure continuation of learning opportunities in such events.
- **The unanticipated departure of key members of University Studies staff** - this risk is low. Staff involved with HE includes staff from all areas, including learning support, pastoral support, academic staff and management and there are procedures and plans in place for temporary, short-term cover. This then provides capacity to plan more long-term replacement or strategies.

Management of Identified Risks

In relation to the specific events which could be a risk to students experiences the following measures have been put in place:

- **A decision that parts or all of University Studies is unusable for activities involving students** - University Studies at WSC, in consultation with students, will consider relocating provision to an alternative site, this may include hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby); revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal College hours or delivering programmes via alternative means, such as distance learning. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will be conducted with students, employers and other relevant stakeholders who may be affected. Where such an approach is taken, the College will consider whether this is appropriate for the enrolled students who would be affected, and appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken.
- **A decision to suspend a course for the subsequent year** - it is the requirement of any partnership agreement with the awarding HEIs that the decision to suspend or withdraw a course will be made by the validating HEI. All courses will continue to see out existing students, this provides security in line with the CMA guidance and regulations and the consumer protection law. To ensure a positive learning experience, wherever possible these students will be integrated with others to provide them with the most dynamic experience and opportunity to achieve. If this is not

possible at University Studies at West Suffolk College students will be supported to transfer to appropriate programmes at alternative HEIs where possible. During the process of making these decisions all students and stakeholders affected will be consulted and kept informed of developments.

Future applicants for the relevant courses will be notified of the decision of closure in accordance with the UCAS deadlines.

- **The College is no longer able to deliver material components of the courses -** University Studies at West Suffolk College will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the programme in accordance with the description given in the programme specification and course information for the academic year in which a student began their programme. However, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, to provide opportunity for successful achievement by students, the College will ensure that necessary changes are restricted to the minimum to achieve the required quality of experience. Affected students will be notified and consulted as appropriate; the College will work with students to ensure the offer is still acceptable, where necessary it will allow students the opportunity to withdraw from the programme or transfer to an alternative programme at University Studies at West Suffolk College or support to transfer to appropriate programmes at alternative HEIs where possible. Where required, students will be offered reasonable support to make any transfer.
- **Loss of partnership status with validating HEIs and/or direct funding status -** this will be mitigated against by ensuring that University Studies at West Suffolk College works with relevant funding bodies to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students; the College will endeavour, as far as possible, that changes are made in a transitional manner; allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme. Where the above is not possible, University Studies at West Suffolk College will support students to transfer to appropriate programmes at alternative HEIs where possible and consider assistance for affected students by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of their studies. Where appropriate, University Studies at West Suffolk College will consider reasonable financial compensation for students where they suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to their studies.
- **Loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. PSRB, etc. -** all courses conform to the College quality cycle through which commitment to the quality assurance requirements are monitored. This is initially through the quality monitoring processes outlined in the quality cycle but then also through reporting to the HE EEC for the Governing Body. This enables the University Studies Leadership Team to identify risks and put actions in place to prevent risks. Any course deemed to not be operating in line with the regulatory framework or requirements of the accrediting body or validating HEI are put on risk alert and reviewed more frequently against actions to improve the provision and return to the required expectations.

If a course does lose accreditation, or the regulatory framework changes University Studies at West Suffolk College will consider measures to protect student experience,

such as offering affected students the chance to move to another course; helping affected students to switch to a different provider who holds the relevant accreditation.

- **Disruption of University Studies activity** - (e.g. temporary disruption within term-time not covered by any of the above). Where events result in term-time programme disruption, University Studies at West Suffolk College will consider actions that could be taken to minimise disruption. These may include changes to the programme delivery location or method of delivery. This may include distance learning; changes to the staffing of a programme, for instance through a review of internal staff resources, including recruitment of area specialists, where appropriate; offering students the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme; provision of reasonable support to students for accessing a programme run by another provider, including planning for the transfer of credits and information about academic progress.

In extreme cases the relevant West Suffolk College policy and Business Continuity Plan covers other actions affecting business continuity, such as acts of terrorism, damage to buildings or equipment and severe weather conditions.

- **Industrial action by staff or third parties** - West Suffolk College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions. It is highly committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.

Where industrial action does occur, West Suffolk College will seek to ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible. The College will take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised, and students are not, as far as is possible, disadvantaged by the action.

- **The unanticipated departure of key members of University Studies staff** - Where possible University Studies at West Suffolk College will 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. This will give the University Studies Leadership Team time to prepare long term plans and recruit staff as needed.

Refund and Compensation

University Studies at West Suffolk College has a General Terms and Conditions document for its HE provisions which outlines the details needed by students regarding:

- 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.

- commitments to honour student bursaries.

The College also has a compensation policy which outlines details for occasions when compensation would be considered.

The partnership agreements with validating HEIs ensures that the College will always see out existing students on any course or support them to transfer to other HEIs if possible. If for any reason sessions are unable to be delivered University Studies at West Suffolk College will plan, where possible, for these sessions to be delivered in an alternative manner, convenient to, and negotiated with the group of students involved.

West Suffolk College maintains cash reserves which would be sufficient to provide modest refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

Communication with Students

University Studies at West Suffolk College will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when the proposed course changes are reviewed for reapproval. We will include the need to consider student protection plan and course viability as part of the reapproval and course modification process. At this point they will be required to give an overview of how the student protection plan will relate to their course and identify any risks to be considered at reapproval events.

University Studies at West Suffolk College has a series of policies and procedures that are available to students to ensure they fully understand how the College will handle any of the situations outlined in this plan:

The full list of policies which support the student protection plan include:

- General Terms and Conditions and Tuition Fee Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Student Charter
- Student Transfer Plan
- Non-Academic Complaints Policy

In addition to:

- Programme Initiation and Course Modification Processes

These policies will be available to students through the College VLE. The location of these will be identified for students during their induction with University Studies, West Suffolk College.

University Studies at West Suffolk College developed this student protection plan in consultation with students in focus groups and at the Student Voice Forum. We will continue to review the student protection plan annually by sharing it at the Student Voice Forum, this

will allow students to give their views and input on the development of this. It will be reviewed annually and updated accordingly.

Should our student protection plan need to be implemented, we will arrange to meet with the student cohort affected at a time that is convenient to them. We will use this time to explain the situation, discuss options and negotiate the most suitable and reasonable outcome for students. The views of the students will be considered when making the final decision.

We will inform all students if there are to be material changes to their course by email, letter and/or telephone call as best suited.

Students will be given a minimum notice period in line with the College policies for making material changes to a course, this allows for short notice changes if necessary.

Advice and guidance will be available to students regarding alternative courses choices, finance implications and other options for all students and we will provide student welfare support where required.

At this stage University Studies at West Suffolk College does not have a local students' union. However, to ensure that students have access to independent advice and guidance we will provide a link with the national students' union at induction and make them aware of advice and guidance available to them through the Office for Students.

Student Protection Plan Operating Procedure

Where University Studies becomes aware of an event under the Student Protection Plan, as soon as reasonably practicable the College will determine the measures to be proposed to each affected current student to preserve their continuation of study and minimise disruption and/or disadvantage. These measures will be determined by a Student Protection Panel.

University Studies will contact affected students within two working weeks of being aware of the event occurring. However, there may be events that take considerably longer for the University to detail the proposed measures; in this eventuality the College will keep the affected students updated as the work progresses. The measures proposed to each affected student will be communicated in writing, to their University Studies and personal e-mail address. Students will be given a period within which they must confirm their acceptance or otherwise of the measures. They will be required to respond in writing by the deadline communicated to them.

Where an alternative offer of study or location:

- a) is not possible.
- b) is not acceptable for an individual; or
- c) results in additional individual costs, above the alternative offer,

the College will consider the nature and value of the impact on an individual student and any further adjustments, or refunds, compensation or goodwill gesture that may be payable to the

student as a result. This will be done in line with the Refund and Compensation Policy, as detailed within the Student Protection Plan.

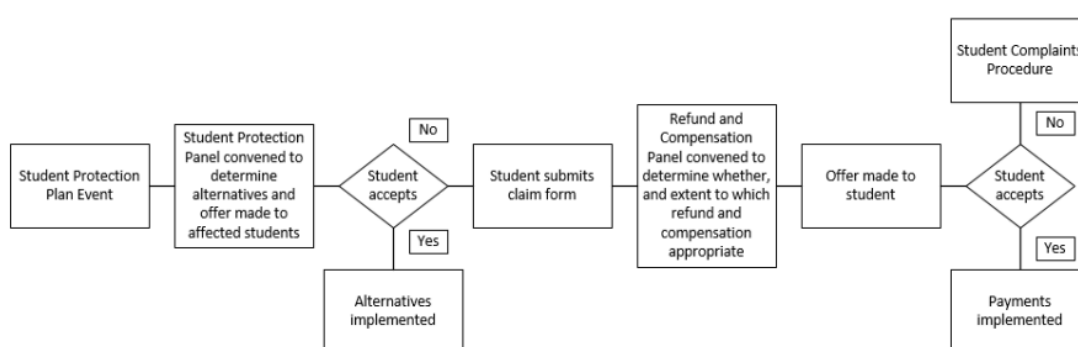
As set out in the Compensation Policy, the College recognises that there may be situations in which the measures we seek to take to preserve students' continuity of study may not be successful; it is in such situations that the Compensation Policy may be invoked.

The College will make every effort to manage the processes of negotiation and consideration of individual circumstances in ways which are transparent, reasonable, evidence-based, and proportionate. The College consider making refunds and paying compensation as determined to be appropriate for each individual situation. The sector definitions of refund and compensation are:

- A refund relates to the repayment of sums paid by a student to the College or an appropriate reduction in the number of sums owed in future by the student to the College.
- Compensation relates to some other recognisable loss suffered by the student. This normally falls into two categories, either: (a) recompensing the student for out-of-pocket expenses they have incurred, which were paid to someone other than the College (such as travel costs) or (b) an amount to recompense for material disadvantage to the student arising from a failure by the College to discharge its duties appropriately.

Students may not make a group application as individual circumstances will differ, however the outcomes for students will be agreed on a consistent basis. Any student who has reached the end of the procedures and remains dissatisfied with the offer made may take their concerns through the Non-Academic Student Complaints process.

Diagrammatic representation of the process:



Where the alternative(s) offered under the Student Protection Plan are not accepted by a student due to their individual circumstances, if the student then wishes to pursue a claim for a refund and / or compensation they will need to make a claim within 15 working days of communicating their non-acceptance of the offer to the College. Students should make a claim

by completing and submitting a claim form. This must include all relevant information and appropriate supporting documentation, with reasons as to why the alternative is not appropriate for their individual circumstances. The information must be sufficient to allow the College to determine whether a refund or compensation amount is payable, and if it is determined that it is, to calculate the amount. No compensation will be payable for hypothetical or speculative financial loss.

Students will be able to access support to complete the claim form from the Pastoral Support Tutor or Personal Academic Tutor. Forms and relevant documentation should be returned to University Studies at the address on the claim form.

Panel Review Decisions on refunds and compensation will be made by the Refunds and Compensation Panel. The Panel will be convened whenever the College has implemented its Student Protection Plan and will consider possible refunds or compensation that should be offered due to this eventuality. Individual students will not normally be invited to attend the Panel meeting; however they may be called to do so in some situations – where this is the case the student can be accompanied by a member of the student body.

Refunds and Compensation Panel's role: to consider possible refunds or compensation that should be offered due to this eventuality, including in response to claims submitted by students.

The Panel will consider the circumstances and details of the claim(s) and determine whether an additional adjustment(s) or refund(s), compensation, goodwill payment(s), or a combination should be payable or not.

The Panel will review each case on its merits and in a fair way, regarding consistency between cases but without resorting to set formulae.

The Panel will refer to any current national guidance from the OfS, UUK, QAA, OIA or other relevant bodies. The Panel will consider the impact on the student, and the level of the College's accountability for this in all cases.

Students will receive a written response which explains the Panel's decision within 28 days of a claim being submitted. The individual then has 14 days to inform the College, in writing, of their decision as to whether to accept the offer. Any financial payments or adjustments to liabilities or future fees will be actioned within 14 days of the offer being accepted. If these timescales are likely not to be met, the reasons for this will be communicated to the student(s) promptly with a revised timescale.

If the Panel determines that refunds, compensation, or a goodwill gesture is / are payable, this will be made in one of the following ways:

Refunds of tuition fees paid by the Student Loan Company (SLC):
Fees will be refunded directly to the SLC by the College.

Refunds of tuition fees paid by a sponsor:

Fees will be refunded directly to the organisation, or individual, by the College.

Refunds of tuition fees paid by a student:

Fees will be refunded to the payment source, for example, to the originating credit or debit card or a bank account. Where this is not possible, alternative arrangements will be agreed with the student. Refunds will not be made in cash.

Reduction in outstanding debt: The financial remedy offered by the College may result in a reduction of the tuition fees that were chargeable for the year, but which have not yet been paid. In this case, the outstanding debt amount will be reduced via a credit note and this will be communicated to the student.

Reduction of future fees payable:

Fee levels will be reduced, and the lower amount will be billed when the fee becomes due at a future date.

Payments of compensation or goodwill gesture:

These will be made via a bank transfer to the student. In some cases, where, for example, compensation relates to more than one academic year, payments may be made in instalments. The timing of payments will be confirmed within the written response from the Panel.

Complaints:

If a student is not satisfied with the decision of the Panel, a complaint may be made under University Studies Non-Academic Complaints Procedure and thereafter a student has recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.