

Provider's name: Solent University

Provider's UKPRN: 10006022

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Student protection plan for the period 2018/19

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, how those risks may differ based on our students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

Risk of the University being unable to continue to operate as a whole

The risk that the University as a whole is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance is very strong. This is evidenced by:

- i. The University achieving the rating of "not at higher risk" in the latest annual assessment carried out by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).
- ii. The University complies with HEFCE's guidance on financial sustainability with the recommended practice of preparing an Annual Sustainability Assurance report which is voluntary but considered best practice by HEFCE. The report is sent from the governing body and confirms that the governors:
 - a. make an annual assessment of institutional sustainability using a rigorous process;
 - b. select a small number of key performance indicators (KPI) that are relevant to the institution and assess performance against these on a regular basis and over a reasonable period of time (both historic and forecast, the FSSG recommendation is a minimum of 3-5 years actual and forecast);
 - c. assess the sustainability of each area using a RAG rating (Red, Amber, Green) and make an aggregate assessment for the whole institution;
 - d. report the required financial KPI to HEFCE, the Margin for Sustainability and Investment (MSI);
 - e. provide assurance over the process used in assessing sustainability by signing the template provided and submitting to HEFCE.
- iii. In line with previous Committee of University Chairs (CUC) guidance, the University has adopted KPI metrics to measure institutional performance in key areas. The KPIs have targets which are set by the University and are RAG rated. The financial measures are all on target.
- iv. The last financial forecast submitted to HEFCE (July 2017), maintains a surplus (before actuarial gains/losses) for the duration of the forecast period (2014-15 to 2019-20).

Risk of the University being unable to deliver courses at its sites

The risk that the University will no longer be able to deliver courses at any of its sites due to site closure is very low and there are currently no plans to close any of the sites. Teaching takes place in several buildings within a largely integrated campus. The University seeks to enhance the student experience

through improvements to buildings and facilities; any changes are planned in order to maintain the continuity of support for learning and teaching.

These risks, or the lack of, do not differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances.

Risk of the University being unable to deliver its highly specialised courses

The risk that the University is no longer able to deliver courses in highly specialised areas is very low as courses go through robust and thorough approval and monitoring processes. This includes scrutiny of the longevity of the course and whether the course relies on specific specialist staff and/or equipment.

The risk that the University will not be able to deliver material components of its provision is low as courses are designed to be taught by integrated teams of academic staff. Schools and services have confirmed that their courses and units do not rely on the knowledge and expertise of specific individuals. Therefore, all units can be delivered by appropriately qualified staff and there are processes in place to ensure replacement staff can be recruited as required. Where the delivery of particular subject areas depends on specialist staff this is identified in the risk register and appropriate controls are identified to ensure the continued delivery of the course in case specialist staff leave.

Risk of a University's partner organisations being unable to continue to deliver franchised or validated provision

This student protection plan applies to students studying on a franchised or validated course at a partner organisation. A thorough due diligence exercise is carried out on each potential partner organisation before the University approves the partnership arrangement; this includes a desk based due diligence and a site visit. The due diligence exercise includes a risk review and identifies risks the University needs to take into consideration. This covers academic/professional reputation and the potential partner's legal and financial standing (amongst other checks).

The University has a small number of collaborative partners which includes one validated partner and six franchised partners (two in the UK and four outside the UK).

The risk that students studying a franchised or validated course in the UK, which is partly or wholly delivered at a partner organisation, being unable to continue and complete their studies is very low. If it became necessary due to the premature termination of a partnership arrangement then the University will ensure that the continuity of studies for existing students is a high priority. The University has many options in those situations, these include transferring students to the University to complete their studies or finding suitable alternative institutions where students can complete their studies. The actions that will be taken will depend on the location of the partner and the courses being delivered; but throughout the process the interests of the students will be protected.

The respective responsibilities of the University and partner organisations are set out in the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed by the two parties.

The student protection plan of the University's only validated partner institution, the New College of the Humanities (NCH), confirms the risk of its students being unable to continue and complete their studies is low; the plan confirms the College's strong financial performance.

2. The measures that have been put in place to mitigate those risks that the University considers to be reasonably likely to crystallise

Measures in place in case any of the University's sites are unable to deliver its courses

The risk of any of the University's sites being unable to deliver courses is very low as evidenced above. The University's Incident Management plan would provide a short-medium term response in the event of a major incident.

In the unlikely event of a teaching site closing due to an event beyond the control of the University such as an act of God including (but not limited to) fires, explosions, earthquakes and floods, the continuation of studies for students will be a key priority for the University. Insofar as possible the University will ensure a suitable alternative location is found and that students are appropriately supported with the change. Where students incur additional costs due to the unexpected relocation, the University will seek to reimburse any reasonable costs incurred.

Measures in place to protect the interests of our students when a course closes

The University has policies in place to protect the interests of students in the event of a course closing. The University's course withdrawal policy expects courses to be run out, which means that the course continues to be delivered until all existing students have completed or exited the course. The policy requires the University to "take all reasonable steps to keep students informed and to protect the interests of the students", and that "reference should be made to the published CMA guidelines regarding contractual obligations with students where this becomes necessary".

Link to the withdrawal policy: <http://portal.solent.ac.uk/documents/academic-services/academic-handbook/section-2/2d-approval-monitoring-and-review-of-university-provision.pdf>

Measures in place to protect the interests of students studying franchised and validated provision at our partner organisations

The contractual arrangements between Solent University and partner organisations delivering franchised or validated provision are contained in the relevant Memorandum of Agreement (MoA). The MoA includes provision for the management of the closure of provision, with details of the responsibilities of the University and the partner organisation to safeguard the interests of students. This includes provision to enable students to complete their studies and receive an equivalent award to that they enrolled on.

3. Information about the policies the University has in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that it is no longer able to preserve continuation of study

University's refund and compensation policies

The University does not have a compensation policy; it will deal with claims for compensation on a case by case basis and with due regards to relevant UK and national laws and OIA guidance.

The University's refund policy is contained within the fees and payment regulations; there is one for Home, EU and Island students and one for Overseas students (links are provided below).

Home, EU and Island students:

<http://portal.solent.ac.uk/documents/academic-services/compliance/2018-19-fees-regulations-for-home-eu-and-island-students-compliance-5.12.17.pdf>

Overseas students:

<http://portal.solent.ac.uk/documents/academic-services/compliance/2018-19-fees-regulations-for-overseas-students-compliance-5.12.17.pdf>

The regulations make provision for students who pay their own fees, who are in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company and those who have their fees paid by a sponsor. The regulations state that any refund of tuition fees will be made to the original payee, which may be the student or a person or organisation paying on the student's behalf.

Delivering the financial implications of the University's refund and compensation policies

The University plans for a minimum level of working capital/cash, which it deems appropriate to meet all of its operational needs including refund and compensations.

4. Information about how the University will communicate with students about the student protection plan

Where will the University's student protection plan be publicised

The student protection plan will be publicised to current and future students by placing the plan prominently on the University's website within the 'Student Support' page. This page is accessible from the University's home page by selecting the 'studying at Solent' option and then 'Student Support'. The page is not password protected and is open to the general public.

Assessing the implications to the plan when staff propose changes to courses

University staff will be referred to the student protection plan when they propose course changes to ensure they consider any potential implications to the plan. The course approval and course modification templates have been updated to refer staff to the student protection plan, to enable them to assess any impact the new course or the changes to an existing course has on the plan. Any impact on the plan will be reviewed carefully and appropriate action will be taken to update the plan as necessary. Changes will be communicated to existing students and staff.

Reviewing and developing the plan with our students

This plan was developed in liaison with Students' Union sabbatical officers.

The student protection plan will be reviewed annually through Academic Board and the newly established Student Board; both boards include student representatives as members, the Student Board will be co-chaired by the president of Solent Students' Union and the Vice-Chancellor.

Students will be involved in the review of the plan through their student representatives on the Student Board. The student representatives would also be members of any task and finish group that is set up to conduct a detailed review of the plan.

Informing existing students of material changes to courses

The University will inform existing students of potential changes to their course by involving them in the consultation stage of the course modification process. In order for a modification to be approved, evidence must be provided by the proposer to show that students have been consulted regarding the change. Where material changes are proposed to the course, i.e. major modifications such as changes to core units, the express consent from all current students studying the course is normally required. The membership of the modification approval panel includes a Students' Union representative.

Students will normally be given at least 6 months' notice when material changes are made to their course. Changes come into effect the following academic year from when the change was approved. The University's course modification approval panel meets in January and aims to process all modification requests by the end of February.

The University does not accept any in-year modifications to courses, unless in exceptional circumstances and with the express consent from current students. Similarly any late changes for the following academic year would not be approved unless evidence is provided that the change is required to address any standards issue or where feedback has been received from students or external examiners proving the urgency of the change.

Support for students when measures in the plan need to be implemented

The University would work with the Students' Union to support students collectively and individually in the unlikely event that any of the measures in the plan had to be implemented. Students would have access to support from their course teams, school/service management teams and professional services support teams.