

Solent University

Student Protection Plan

2021-2022

Provider's name: Solent University

Provider's UKPRN: 10006022

Legal address: East Park Terrace, Southampton, SO14 0YN

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan: Jim Irving, University Secretary and Registrar (jim.irving@solent.ac.uk)

Contents

Introduction	3
Risks and mitigations.....	4
Communication and support	7
Complaints	8
Review and further information.....	8

Introduction

What is a Student Protection Plan and who is it for?

Student Protection Plans set out what actions would be taken if a situation arose which meant that students might not be able to continue to study and to complete their course at Solent. The Plan is aimed at all current students and applicants who have accepted a place on a course.

All universities registered with the Office for Students are required to have a Student Protection Plan. We hope that we do not need to implement it, but it is there to reassure students and to offer them protection to enable them to continue their studies if it is needed.

What does a Student Protection Plan cover?

The Plan identifies the main risks to students being able to continue studying - these range from changes to courses to major University wide events, such as a university not being able to continue offering degrees. A range of risks has been assessed and are discussed in the following pages.

The University cannot be held liable in the event of severe circumstances outside of the University's control ('force majeure' events such as, but not limited to, riot, war, explosion, national emergency, or natural disasters). If such events occur the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to students, but cannot guarantee that it would be able to do so.

How does the University manage risk?

The University's approach to risk management is set out in its policy which states that:

Risk is defined as the threat or possibility that an action or event will adversely affect the University's ability to achieve its objectives. Effective risk management is integrated into the business processes and activities of the University. It mitigates the effects of negative influences and increases stakeholders' confidence. Risk management is embedded in the University's internal controls and corporate governance arrangements.

This Student Protection Plan is based on a bespoke and accessible risk assessment in which the key risks of students not being able to complete their studies have been assessed as either low, moderate or significant in terms of both the likelihood of the risk materialising and the impact this would have on students.

The risks identified and the arrangements in place to mitigate their effects, should they crystallise, are embedded in the University's risk registers, in committee papers and in the processes which the University follow when action is taken which could give rise to a risk of students not being able to complete their studies.

Risks and mitigations

What happens if the University closes or is unable to award degrees?

The risk that the University would close is LOW. We have launched our new strategy, Solent Future Ready which will see the University grow its student body and continue to improve its financial sustainability.

We monitor our financial performance closely: as of 31 July 2020, the University has net assets of £32.9m.

The risk that the University is unable to award degrees because degree awarding powers are revoked or limited is LOW. We have a good track record for the quality assurance of our courses and have performed well in all previous review exercises by national quality bodies. We review all courses annually, focussing on a range of key indicators and including the views of external examiners.

In the unlikely event that the University had to close or there were a change to our powers to award degrees we would make every effort to enable students to complete their courses as planned. If this were not possible, we would support students to transfer to another university.

What happens if the University loses its Home Office Student Route licence to admit and teach international students?

The University monitors activities and takes action as needed in relation to its Student Route licence. However, the award and continuation of the licence are also influenced by external factors, and it is therefore judged that there is a MODERATE risk of this occurring.

If the University either lost its licence or had restrictions placed upon it, we would work with the Home Office, regulatory bodies, other providers and students to find suitable alternative arrangements.

What happens if the University is subject of a Cyber-attack or my data is lost?

The University takes comprehensive steps to minimise the threat of a cyber-attack but given recent attacks on education providers we remain vigilant and routinely monitor the potentially SIGNIFICANT risk of this occurring. For this reason we encourage and support students to develop strong cyber safety habits, actively protect personal data and report any attempts on data security. We have not had any major data breaches, but we are, of course, active in doing all we can to prevent such an occurrence.

If there were to be a successful cyber-attack or a serious data breach we would put into action our response plan, working with external specialists and keeping students fully informed.

What happens if the University decides to close my course?

The risk of this is LOW. Like all universities we review our courses and, from time to time, make planned course closures. We have recently undertaken a major review of our undergraduate course portfolio, so future changes are unlikely.

When we do close a course we implement our policies that protect the interests of students. We would make every effort to ensure that students are informed, and we put in place a “teach out plan”, meaning that current students are taught and supported until they complete their course.

[Approval, Monitoring and Review of University Provision Policy](#)

If an applicant is holding a place on a course that the University has to close, we will offer a place on the closest alternative course available. If this is not suitable, we would release the student from their place to enable them to seek an alternative course elsewhere, and support applicants in this process if required.

What happens if there are major in-year changes to my course?

The risk of this is LOW. It is very unlikely that we would make major changes in your course which come into effect the same year. Very occasionally this could happen if the changes significantly enhanced the course and if students supported the changes. We have a schedule for changes and generally only minor changes are made on this basis. Students on the course will be consulted and will be asked to approve major changes.

The risk of an unplanned event, such as a member of staff not being available to teach and this leading to a major change in the course, is also LOW. Programmes are staffed as a team and therefore it is unlikely that it would not be possible to teach a programme. However, if this proved not to be possible, the University would explore the feasibility of bringing in temporary external expertise until such time as the usual teaching arrangements resumed. The University has very good networks for areas of high specialism, and it is very unlikely that it would not be able to provide teaching leading to a major change in the course.

What happens if the University is unable to deliver core components of my course?

The risk of this is LOW. Courses are designed so that a number of staff deliver across the programme. If covering a core component of your course were not possible, we would explore the possibility of bringing in external expertise until such time as the usual teaching arrangements resume.

What happens if the University is not able to continue to offer a course through a particular mode of study?

At the time of writing this plan, Covid19 continues to affect university provision and therefore the risk of this is MODERATE, as there is a higher risk of this than at other times. However, we have been successful at continuing to teach throughout the pandemic as we have developed high quality teaching material that enables remote as well as face-to-face teaching. If we were unable to teach students in the way originally planned, arrangements would be made for the expected delivery to be resumed at the earliest opportunity.

We are planning for a full return to campus, but if any future restrictions occur we are well prepared to enable students to continue to study.

I am on one of the University's highly specialised courses. What happens if Solent is unable to continue to teach it?

Generally, the risk of the University not being able to deliver any of its specialist courses because of an unplanned event is LOW. However, during 2020-21 Covid restrictions meant that we were temporarily not allowed to continue with some teaching in person for short periods. Our high-quality online teaching arrangements minimised the impact to areas requiring in-person access to specialist facilities, and we made this available to students at the earliest point that government restrictions allowed. We are planning for a full return to campus, but if any future restrictions occur we are well prepared to enable students to continue to study.

What happens if a course loses its professional, statutory, or regulatory accreditation?

The risk of the is LOW. This is unlikely to happen as courses are designed to meet the needs of professional bodies and we make sure that they continue to comply with their requirements. If we were to lose accreditation we would work closely with the professional body to consider the action to be taken. We would keep students fully informed and work with them to explore options which might include transferring to another course. Alternatively, we would support students to transfer to another university.

What happens if a partner college is unable to deliver a course?

There is a LOW risk that a partner college will not be able to continue to deliver a course as the University and the partner work extensively before we agree to work together to make sure that courses will be taught through to completion.

From time to time, the University or a partner makes a decision to discontinue working with each other. In such an event, in line with contractual agreements, a full teach out plan is agreed to ensure students are supported to the completion of their course.

What happens if the University makes changes to my course - will the Plan be implemented?

When changes to a course are proposed, staff look at the impact on students and consider whether the Student Protection Plan should be implemented. This is reviewed very carefully, and appropriate action taken.

Communication and support

How will I know if the University is making changes to my course?

If we plan to make changes to a course, we inform students by involving them in the consultation stage of the course modification process. Students must be consulted about the change for it to be approved.

Where material changes are proposed to a course, the express consent from all current students studying the course is normally required. The proposed changes are considered by a panel which includes a Students' Union representative.

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

We do not allow any in-year modifications to courses unless there are exceptional circumstances and with the express consent from current students if the proposed changes are material. Similarly, we would only allow any late changes for the following academic year if 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.

How will students be supported if the Plan needs to be implemented?

This Plan has been written in liaison with the Students Union and in the unlikely event that the measures in this Plan needed to be implemented, the University and the SU would work together to support students collectively and individually. Students would have access to support from their course teams, faculty/school/service management teams and professional services support teams.

This plan is intended to meet the needs of all students affected by the potential situations outlined. The University recognises, however, that it is not possible to provide an overarching plan that will necessarily meet the needs of its diverse student body in any specific circumstances: arrangements that might suit one group of learners may not meet the needs of others.

The University will also be mindful of its statutory obligations under the Consumer Rights Act (2015) and the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) and its duties under the Equality Act (2010) in ensuring continuation of appropriate support takes into account individual circumstances covered by the Act.

Complaints

What can I do if I am not satisfied with the proposed solutions?

If you are not satisfied with the arrangements proposed you should make a complaint through the student complaint procedure, which will ensure that all matters are dealt with fairly and consistently. On completion of the University procedures students are able to take their complaint to the national Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education if they remain dissatisfied.

Further information on the complaints procedure can be found [here](#).

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](#)

[Overseas students](#)

The regulations include students who:

are in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company

have their fees paid by a sponsor

pay their own fees

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.

The University has robust budgeting and reporting processes, and it plans to maintain working capital/cash levels which are deemed appropriate to meet its operational needs including refund and compensations where necessary.

Review and further information

How will the Plan be publicised to students and to staff?

The Plan will be published on the University's website as part of the 'Student Support'. This page is not password protected and is open to the public.

Students and staff will be informed of the updated plan through regular communications channels such as the staff and student portals. We will also work through the Student Board, with the students' union and student course representatives to publicise the Plan.

How will the Plan be reviewed?

The Plan will be discussed and reviewed at the Student Board, whose membership includes student representatives from across the University, Students Union sabbatical officers and is co-chaired by the Students' Union President and Vice Chancellor. The Plan will be approved by Academic Board, which also includes student membership.

Where can I get further information?

If you have any questions about the Student Protection Plan, please contact the Head of Quality Management by emailing ga@solent.ac.uk. You can also contact the Students' Union at: students.union@solent.ac.uk.