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## **Student protection plan for the period 2018 - 2019**

### **Introduction**

This Student Protection Plan outlines how we would protect our Higher Education Students interests in the event that a risk to the continuation of studies occurs, as well as how we would communicate with you about this. Sandwell College are committed to supporting all students in the completion of their studies and will take into account individual special circumstances in making alternative arrangements

### **Corporate Governance and Management**

The highest strategic level of the College is the Corporation, and this provides the overall strategic direction for the organisation. There is a Link Governor for Higher Education, ensuring that there is a HE voice in strategic debates, and a clear line of accountability via the Vice Principal to the Head of HE.

Governors receive strategic assurances on the performance of the College's HE curriculum against key performance and quality measures, and are sighted upon the risk management plans which seek to address the key risks faced by HE at the College. Governors are also given the opportunity to challenge and support plans for HE going forward, including but not limited to key development proposals, policies, strategies and plans, and development of new and existing academic partnerships.

Senior Leaders at the College are tasked with bringing together the strategic and operational agendas, and having oversight of the full curriculum of the College, along with financial, resource based and other operational drivers. The College's management structure clearly evidences that operational responsibility for HE matters lies with the Vice Principal, and that there is a direct line management from this senior manager to the Head of HE and the Assistant Directors. Senior Leadership Team Meetings are deliberative and decision making forums, operating within the strategic framework agreed by the Corporation, and directing the implementation of a risk management based approach to the business of the organisation. Senior Leaders receive reports and assurances from the HE Quality Team in respect of the operation of the College's HE function, and monitor adherence to corporate targets in respect of quality, financial control and performance.

The College undertakes a full assessment termly to ensure that:

- Emerging risks are considered for the next 3 year period
- Changes to pre-existing risks are identified (likelihood or severity) based on the latest information
- Plans are formalised which would reduce the impact on students should the risks materialise.

**An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of your study and how those risks may differ based on your needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise**

1. The risk that Sandwell College is unable to operate is **low**.

This is because our financial systems are robust and have been assessed as good by the ESFA. The college has sound business continuity plans to deal with any unforeseen circumstances.

2. Risk of loss of validation for one or more of its courses

The risk of loss of validation for the College’s HND/HNC course is **low**

The risk of loss of validation for the College’s other HE courses is **low**

Validating / Awarding Body	Provision and Context	Detail of risk
Pearson (HNC / HND)	Pearson is a national awarding body used for our Higher National Certificates and Diplomas.	<p>The risk of loss of validation to these courses is deemed <b>low</b> because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the College has a longstanding and proven track record of satisfying quality checks and measures required by Pearson which encompass not only HNC and HND provision but also a wide portfolio of additional non HE qualifications.</li> <li>• The Centre Agreement between Pearson and the College outlines expectations of delivery. The material changes that could lead to termination have been individually assessed as low risk.</li> </ul>

Validating / Awarding Body	Provision and Context	Detail of risk
Wolverhampton University	The courses offered through this partnership are the Teacher Training (Cert Ed) and Foundation Degree in Early Years.	<p>The risk of loss of validation is deemed <b>low</b>. This is because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The College has a well-established arrangement to cover the courses with detailed contracts in place covering any changes.</li> <li>• There are two courses covered by this agreement and they too are well established with good contacts between the partners</li> <li>• The material changes that could lead to termination have been individually assessed as low risk</li> <li>• There are no plans for other partnerships to be entered into with additional providers.</li> <li>• The partnership agreement between the College and the University of Wolverhampton covers course closure as well as loss of validation.</li> </ul> <p>Therefore the risk that this partnership agreement ending would compromise student outcomes is <b>low</b> as the partnership contract has 'a teach out' clause provided.</p>

3. The risk of campus closure is **low**

This is because there are no plans to close any of our sites and our campuses are used for a range of courses including full and part time FE courses for 16 -18 year olds as well as adults and apprenticeships. As part of our commitment to our HE students, Sandwell College is continuing to invest in enhanced, dedicated provision for our HE students within our Central 6 building. The College also has the flexibility within the estate to provide a suitable and local alternative location at Central Campus in the event that the site is unable to be used due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. fire, flood, extensive damage).

4. The risk of being no longer able to deliver courses in subject or departmental areas is **low**

This is because our HE provision has been primarily developed to meet the progression needs of our current learners. This ensures that in addition the HE quality assurances in place, the range of resources and teaching staff available to ensure that courses can be delivered are regularly reviewed, monitored and addressed through the College quality cycle. As part of this termly subject review groups highlight any quality issues to be fed into the annual plans.

5. The risk of being unable to deliver material components of one or more courses due to loss of key staff is **low**

This is because the majority subjects offered for HE are those already offered within the College which means that a number of relevantly qualified staff are available to deliver content within the programme in the case of staff absence or an unplanned departure from the College. The risk of being able to deliver Certificate in Education is also **low** as there are relevantly qualified staff who currently work at the College who are able to deliver if required.

6. The risk of being unable to deliver a particular mode of study is **low**

This is because courses are planned around the needs of our students with the recognition that the majority need flexibility to combine study with work or family commitments. The College endeavours to support all learners in their preferred mode of study and offer day, evening and part time HE courses. An extensive business planning and modelling process is in place at the College to maximise opportunity of access to HE courses.

**2. The measures that we have put in place to mitigate those risks that we consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise**

Whilst we have assessed the risks as low, more details about the measures we have in place should a course cease to run, are detailed below to provide further reassurance to students of our commitment to the continuation and completion of their studies.

If unable to continue with a course due to loss of validation from our partner university or awarding body the College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that existing students complete their current programme. The College has a Teach Out clause with our partner

university to ensure that those students currently undertaking the course will be able to complete their qualification.

This arrangement will continue until all students have had an opportunity to complete the course whilst they are registered as students.

In the event of a course closure the College will always try to teach out in the first instance. This means that the course would continue for all registered students until the expected end date of their course.

If teaching out at Sandwell College is not viable we will facilitate transfer to a suitable provider including our partner university, local universities and local Colleges with HE provision within the Black Country Colleges Group.

For those students who have been accepted onto a course but have not yet started their studies, all reasonable steps will be taken to make arrangements to facilitate direct entry to a suitable alternative provider including our partner university, local universities and local Colleges with HE Provision within the Black Country Colleges Group.

Sandwell College are committed to support all students in the completion of their studies and will take into account individual special circumstances in making alternative arrangements.

### **3. Details of refund and compensation policy**

Our refund policy (under fees policy) is available here:

<https://www.sandwell.ac.uk/app/uploads/2018/09/FEES-POLICY-STATEMENT.pdf>

We are a financially good College as assessed by the ESFA. The College is able to provide sufficient funds for refunds or compensation where necessary to those students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

### **4. Information about how we will communicate with you about this student protection plan**

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by adding to our website under the HE tab along with the Colleges policies and procedures and terms and conditions. The plan will also be placed on the HE VLE for internal students and shared with HE course reps during meetings. Student reps will then disseminate the information via course meetings. Personal tutors will be available to discuss any elements of the plan should students wish to ask further questions or share any concerns.

Staff are already aware of the Colleges Course Closure Policy through team meetings; staff have access to all policies and procedures through the College intranet. We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by sharing this information during the specific HE meetings which can then be disseminated via curriculum team meetings. All staff new to teaching on a HE course at the College are required to attend a course induction meeting as part of our HE Quality measures.

We will review our student protection plan as an agenda item at our Spring Term student representative meeting. An activity has been devised in order to gain student feedback and

ensure they are involved in the development of the plan. We will also gain feedback from them about how they think we can best share this plan in a way that meets our student needs.

If any element of the student protection plan requires implementation we will ensure any policies and procedures are followed, for example, as part of the course closure policy course teams should identify any applicants who will be affected by the decision to close a course by completing a Notification of a Discontinued or Suspended Programme form, sent with a covering letter.

We ensure that students are informed of the support we offer from interview so they are able to make informed choices about whether they can commit to the course. During induction and throughout their course they are kept informed of the services we provide in order to support any students who may be experiencing difficulties that may increase the risk of them not completing the course successfully. Students receive regular one to one tutorials so any 'at risk' students are identified early and appropriate support is put in place to help them achieve.

Any changes to teaching staff (due to illness or strike action) are communicated to students via personal tutors and text message so they are reassured that there will be no disruption to their timetables or learning.

Should a situation arise in which any element of the plan requires implementation the College will ensure the correct staff are in place to offer advice and guidance, this will include (but is not limited to) staff from the careers team, personal tutors, management staff or staff to offer advice regarding finance.