



East Sussex College Group

HE Student Protection Plan

September 2023

Overview / Purpose:

The Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) has responded to the need for consumer protection of the UK Higher Education sector.

The OFS has been instructed as part of Higher Education Research Bill (2017) recommendations to ensure that all Higher Education providers produce a Student Protection Plan as part of their registration with the OFS from 2018.

The intention of this plan is to provide protection and assurances to all HE students at application and throughout their study stage to safeguard and provide fair and transparent information if changes to courses and institutions are likely to take place. This could be due to areas such as potential financial instability, market changes, loss of Partnership provision and relocation of local industry.

This plan outlines the intentions of The East Sussex College Group and the commitment it makes to both its applicants and current students to address any potential disruptions that are likely to impact their complete student experience and on-going study. It provides guidance and plans that the institution has in place to protect them.

Reference and responses have been made to the good practice standards in *the DFE Higher Education & Research Bill - section 9 measures to protect students:*

- **Transparency, fair and accessible plans. Any key changes shall be communicated in a timely manner**
- **Any changes to courses or closures shall be provided to students at application and enrolment cycles.**

There shall be:

- **Clarity of options**
- **Accurate information/notification**
- **Consultation with students**
- **A clear process to ensure continuity for student studies and indications of any potential negative influences which may impact on this.**
- **An arrangement set out for continuity of provision in the event of closure(s)**
- **Provision to support and facilitate where possible, students wanting to transfer to the East Sussex College Group from other institutions.**

This information will be covered in the college Student Protection Plan statement (below) that will be published on the college website, provided to applicants at application stage and in Course level Handbooks.

The intention is to provide a statement that communicates clearly to students and can be used across multiple platforms and updated when appropriate. (Reviewed annually)

Protection Plan statement

Informing students of change

Minor course changes

The college is committed to making on-going changes to courses such as the updating of the curriculum and/ or staffing but these will not trigger the Student Protection Plan. However, students will be notified of these changes if relevant prior to the commencement of their studies.

Material Changes

Material changes can trigger the Student Protection Plan; this would include the cost of the course, type of qualification, change of awarding body, location or other key factors on which student's enrolment was based (please see list below). If this is the case students will be provided with the same communication options available to all existing HE students.

The college has identified the following list of potential changes that could affect students' study and that may need to be addressed in a timely manner. These have been identified in the two categories as required. Likely and unlikely

Unlikely

- A decision to close the college
- A decision to close the campus / centre
- Withdrawal of designation for student support services
- A restructure or change to put in place an external body
- Changes to regularity framework affecting specific aspects of course curriculum
- Loss of accreditation with awarding bodies , e.g. University of Brighton
- Removal of the Tier 4 Sponcer Licence (Home Office issued licence which allows a provider to teach international students
- Disruption of college activity e.g. temporary disruption within term.
- Industrial action by College staff or third parties
- Collaborative provision affected through change

Likely

- A decision to discontinue a course
- A decision to suspend a course for one or more academic years
- A strategic decision to close a course
- A decision to close a course at application stage
- A decision to move a course to a better facility

- Unanticipated loss of key member of staff that effects this provision within the college.
- Failure to recruit students
- Loss of physical recourse
- Failure to retain and retain specialist teaching staff

General measures to be taken to mitigate the above risks

- Where applicable courses share delivery with the delivery of common modules at least 30%
- Infill of students especially P/t students within F/T modes of delivery
- Key lecture problem / research processes where applicable

Measures to Protect and ultimately inform students of changes

The college is committed to communicate any changes to students as early as possible, outlining clear information, options, process and support.

All steps will be taken to minimize any disruption, confusion or concerns

This would be communicated on an individual basis or group meeting conducted by the Higher Education Manager.

Likely scenarios could be

- To deliver a revised version of the course, whilst retaining the integrity and curriculum, with which the individual student applied for
- To teach out the course, irrespective of the students numbers on the course
- Providing guidance to affected students to move to a different provider.
- Students transferred to either another course or institution will be provided with the relevant Student Finance and support based on their own individual circumstances.

Communicating to students of any changes to the college and the courses

This plan will be held on the college website made available to all applicants and existing students. This plan will be forwarded to all students as part of the student application process, student contract, to ensure they have clear guidance and information on the possible issues regarding any change of circumstances at the college and how this might impact on their study and experience, and how the college will support students if changes are imminent.

Applicants / New students

- The college will communicate any possibility of changes of circumstances to an individual, group or employer of students, if the course they have applied for fails to recruit against college targets resulting in a decision by the college

not to deliver that course for the new academic year. (*ESCG Admissions / Policy and Procedures 2023*). This applies to students who have accepted confirmed firm places on any of the college's level 4, 5 & 6 courses funded by OFS.

- All students will be informed by letter outlining and explaining changes and possible options that could be taken up with the support of the college HE team. This might include options to study at other local HEI's or partner colleges dependent on travel, places, financial and work commitments.
- HE Student fees per annum will not change (i.e., remaining as advertised on the college website)
- Bursary information will remain as provided to all students at application and enrolment stage.

Existing students

- The college will guarantee delivery and the timely completion of its HE courses for all existing cohorts of students. If for any reason it has been decided to close a particular course in the future, or make changes to mode of delivery, campus site or staffing, the college will honor the commitments made at the commencement of their course.
- Course meetings or wider communications with students will be made available with HE College Management, to ensure any potential changes to the delivery of the course (s) are clearly communicated by the college and a period of consultation is undertaken with the students to ensure decisions are transparent, fair and manageable for the students.
- The college is committed to continuing the support processes featured in its student agreement for its existing students.
- The college will support intermitting and repeating students, enabling them to complete their studies within the timeframe commensurate with its respective awarding body, this would include the provision of bespoke tutorial support for non-available elements of provision.
- Students may also be offered the opportunity:

to transfer their award to a new validating authority (where there is continuity of teaching but a change in validating institution);

to transfer to equivalent courses within the University subject to a mapping exercise of course learning outcomes, content delivered to date and student achievement profile, and appropriate operational considerations in terms of the impact on resources and cohort size.

- Full or partial refunds will only be considered in special cases where the college is unable to support students with continued study, if students decide to leave the college.
- No changes to Course fees will be made mid course.

Refund and Compensation

In the unlikely event that the SPP is triggered and the College cannot teach out the course, the College will make the following minimum commitments for students registered on the course:

The College will ensure that the students on the course will receive the award they are entitled to for the academic level they have reached e.g. a certificate or a diploma.

The College will offer student advice and support to help them decide on the best option for them, including a transfer to another course or to an alternative HE provider.

Offer to pay reasonable costs for students to visit an alternative provider for potential transfer

Will work with goodwill with students affected to put in place an individual refund and compensation plan relevant to the circumstances of those students affected by changes

Those students who have been offered or accepted a place on a course will be offered guidance on whether to accept a place on a different course at HCA or a place at a different provider.

As there could be many different scenarios that trigger the SPP and the circumstances of all students affected are likely to be different this will affect the refund and compensation options available.

All enrolled students identified as affected will be told what is being put in place and ensuring students are not disadvantaged and the process is fair and proportionate.

The plan will take into consideration:

- Travel costs as a result of relocation of provision;
- Student fee refunds in cases where the SPP is triggered mid-year;
- Bursary entitlement – if a student would have received a bursary at HCA if the course continued, then the College will continue to pay that bursary as long as that student is enrolled on a different course whether at HCA or an alternative provider, assuming no equivalent bursary is available on the new course;
- Compensation for additional tuition and maintenance costs where a student has to transfer courses or provider and as a result the time to complete the course is extended;
- The College will also consider other forms of action beyond refunds and financial compensation.

Relevant guidance published by Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Office for Students (OfS) or the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) will be taken into account when preparing such plans.

The College has sufficient cash reserves to fund the SPP if it is triggered.

Payments to students affected by change against the criteria of the Student Protection Plan

- No payments or refunds will be paid in cash.

Communication to Applicants and Students

- This Student Protection Plan will be published on the Colleges website.
- The electronic copy of the Plan will be the current version. Any significant changes to the will be made in consultation with student representatives.
- If the SPP is triggered, the SPP will be shared with those students affected by the event.

Feedback and Questions

Any questions relating to the SPP should be addressed to Ashley Heminway Head of Higher Education at the Hastings Campus:

ashley.heminway@escg.ac.uk

Or Meg Sullivan Head of Higher Education at the Eastbourne/ Lewes campus.

meg.sullivan@escg.ac.uk

If you wish to make a complaint about your experience under this plan, this can be done using the College Complaints procedure.

If you wish to make an appeal against a judgement made by the college with this Student Plan then you have 10 working days to complain, all appeals should be sent to the ESCG (East Sussex College Quality department Quality@escg.ac.uk)