

University Studies at West Suffolk College Student Protection Plan

WEST SUFFOLK COLLEGE
UKPRN: 10007431

Introduction

West Suffolk College has a risk assessment procedure which is reviewed by SMT and Governors regularly. This requires the HE Management 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.

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

All of the above processes include discussion with existing students to ensure continuity meets their needs and expectations.

Potential Risks

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

- **A decision that part or all of University Studies 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.
- **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 Governing body. Where courses, or the whole provision, are deemed to be at risk the Senior Management Team oversees a risk based monitoring process to support improvements. The Standards and Excellence Committee, the Governing committee responsible for monitoring curriculum quality, 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, Standards and Excellence, 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 Management 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 part 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 offered a suitable alternative at the HEI partner organisation. During the process of making these decisions all students and stakeholders affected will be consulted and kept informed of developments. Assurances will be provided that they will be able to complete their studies.

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 prospectus 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 with the validating HEI. 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 the validating HEIs 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 Standards and Excellence Committee for the Governing Body. This enables the HE 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;
; providing assistance to 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 making arrangements 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, WSC 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 management team time to prepare long term plans and recruit staff as needed.

Refund and Compensation

University Studies at West Suffolk College has a Tuition Fee Policy for its HE provision 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 make arrangements for them to continue with the validating HEI. If for any reason sessions are unable to be delivered University Studies at West Suffolk College will always make arrangements 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. In addition there is a student protection plan available for students to consider which outlines the College's commitment to a positive, continuing experience for all HE students studying at University Studies at West Suffolk College.

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

- Student protection plan
- Tuition fee policy
- Student information and consumer protection procedure
- Student Charter
- Complaints Policy
- Course Modification Policy

The student information and consumer protection procedure, the student charter and any relevant policies will be available to students through the College VLE. The location of these will be identified for students during their induction with the 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 taken into account 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 arrange for them to be able to contact the Students' Union of the validating HEI where possible. We will provide a link with the national students' union at induction and through the VLE and in the long term WSC will establish its own, local Students' Union.