



Student Protection Plan

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****Major change is defined as:**

Anything that represents a significant change of working practice, legal requirement, procedure or process within the organisation, or a change that impacts an employee's terms and conditions of employment.

****Minor change is defined as:**

Any change of dates, job titles or terminology that do not represent a significant change to working practice. Examples changes of terminology to reflect current legislation/ DfE/Ofsted such as the change of terminology in the safeguarding policy from peer-on-peer abuse to child-on-child abuse.

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Policy Cross References - This policy should be read in conjunction with any other associated policies, with particular reference to	
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Introduction

At MidKent College, we are committed to the quality of the student experience from application through to the end of their Higher Education (HE) programme. However, the reality is there are occasionally circumstances in which it is necessary to discontinue courses. This Student Protection Plan (SPP) sets out how we intend to look after the interests of our students should something go wrong which means we're not able to continue to offer the HE Programmes students are enrolled onto.

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 occur.

These are examples of the kinds of situations that would result in courses being discontinued:

- The College ceases to operate
- Validation for HE programmes is withdrawn
- The College makes a strategic decision to withdraw certain provision, such as individual courses, whole subject areas, modes of study or the delivery of HE
- Low recruiting courses are closed
- The unexpected departure of a member of staff crucial to the delivery of a specific programme.

The impact of course closures on individual students would vary depending on a wide range of circumstances, including:

- At what point in the student lifecycle and the academic year their programme is closed
- Whether there is a related programme within the College that the students can be offered as a transfer option
- Where applicable, whether there is a related programme at the validating University
- What relevant programmes are available locally, regionally or nationally
- Personal circumstances which may impact a student's ability to travel to a different location to continue their studies

The factors that would lead to HE courses being discontinued can be considered in light of their likelihood to happen:

- The risk that the provider is unable to operate is extremely low. In terms of financial performance, MidKent College is assessed for Financial Health by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) as its Regulator, and the current status is 'Good'. Operationally, the College maintains a business continuity plan to ensure it is able to respond to adverse events or issues.
- MidKent College currently works with four awarding bodies validating its HE programmes: the University of Greenwich, Canterbury Christchurch University, the University of Kent and Pearson. Our university partners work on a 5 year revalidation cycle and we have a strong record of annual and robust External Verification. Losing validation is highly unlikely.

The College regularly reviews its portfolio of HE programmes to ensure alignment with its strategic priorities, educational demand, and progression paths for graduates. The likelihood of the College making changes to its HE course offer is reasonably high in the medium to long term, though in the short term the portfolio is stable. No plans are in place to strategically revise the HE Portfolio for the start of the 2024-25 academic year.

Where programmes are recruiting in small numbers, this potentially impacts on both the viability of delivering the course and the learning experience of students in small cohorts. It is reasonably likely that the College will make the decision to temporarily close to new applicants any low recruiting courses in the situation where the cohort would be too small to be viable. The cohort size that is deemed viable varies across the college, depending on how a course is taught and resourced.

Some subject areas are more difficult than others to recruit teaching staff for and some courses rely on the skills of a single member of staff in the teaching. Where a single member of staff is central to the teaching of a difficult to recruit for subject, their unanticipated departure would be highly likely to disrupt the course.

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

In the circumstances of a temporary or permanent course closure because of low recruitment numbers, the course would not be closed to current students, only new applicants. The following principles and practices would be followed:

- The College is committed to teaching out enrolled cohorts for programmes withdrawn in these circumstances
- The closure decision for the next intake would be reached during the application cycle, usually by May, and certainly before the start of the academic year when the students take up their places
- The College's Admissions team advises applicants in writing that the course is not running.
- If there is a suitable alternative course at MidKent College, the applicants are given those details
- The Admissions team then facilitates changing interview arrangements and new offers for internal transfers, and the applicants are given names of tutors and admissions staff to contact if they require more support or have questions.

If applicants have accepted offers with the College by the time the course is closed, the Admissions team will contact other providers which offer the same or similar programmes to check the availability of places and refer students to these providers.

Strategic changes to the HE offer would be a planned process, taking into account the length of the admissions cycle. A programme or a mode of study should be withdrawn from marketing and admissions in time to avoid students applying to a discontinued option. The College is committed to teaching out for existing students in these circumstances.

The College works to avoid the risks associated with reliance on a single member of staff to deliver a specialism by developing and utilising the skills of teaching teams. However, if a course is discontinued because of the lack of available specialist teachers, teaching out an enrolled cohort would not be possible. In these circumstances, the College would identify other providers and liaise directly with them to endeavour to secure places for students who wish to transfer. The Admissions team would support the students through the process.

Students on our university partner validated programmes which are discontinued may be offered the opportunity to transfer to equivalent courses within that university subject to a mapping exercise of course learning outcomes, content delivered to date, student achievement profile, and appropriate operational considerations at the University in terms of the impact on resources and cohort size.

As a Further Education College, MidKent College's approach to protecting the interests of its HE students aligns with those measures that apply to the FE sector. An administration regime for colleges run by the ESFA and the FE Commissioner includes several lines of control:

- Governing bodies, who have a duty to ensure the solvency and viability of colleges
- ESFA, which has financial oversight
- FE commissioner, who intervenes where the college has a notice to improve
- Independent Business Review, a process for colleges in severe financial distress

Within the college insolvency regime, which is a last resort if the interventions listed above fail, the education administrator appointed by DfE has a duty to minimise the disruption to courses experienced by any students regardless of their funding source.

3. Information about the policy we have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to our students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Students' rights to fee refunds are set out in the MidKent College Tuition Fees Policy, which is updated annually. The policy for 24-25 will contain the following commitments: In the unlikely event that a HE programme is discontinued for a cohort of students who are already enrolled or are part-way through their course, the College seeks to ensure that students are not financially impacted.

A full fee refund for the current academic year for programmes discontinued by the College, whether student is in receipt of fee loans from the Student Loan Company, is self funding or whose fees are covered by a sponsor or employer.

The College will commit to pay the difference in fees where the students needs to transfer to a provider whose fees are higher than those at MidKent College, up to the level equivalent to the programme on which the students are registered. These monies will be paid direct to the new provider.

The College would not seek a repayment of any bursaries that the student has claimed during their time enrolled at MidKent College due to a decision by the college to cancel the course.

The College would honour future bursaries students are entitled to at MidKent College only where the student has transferred to a provider where they are not entitled to claim an equivalent bursary. Proof of the non-payment of bursary must be provided by the new provider to support the students' claim.

The College will offer to compensate for additional costs to students, such as travel where the provider transferred to is further away for students, changes in maintenance expenses or time lost up to a maximum of £250. The College has assessed the potential impact of having to implement any aspects of its fees and compensation policy and it is satisfied that this can be delivered through the use of budget contingency or the use of cash reserves.

4. Information about how we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

The College will publish its Student Protection Plan on the college website to make it accessible to existing and future students. It will be displayed on notice boards in spaces HE students use

and available on request from college staff. We will draw attention to it in induction events for new and progressing students. The College will publish its Student Protection Plan to all staff via the Intranet, and ensure that staff understand its implications by including information about it in induction for new staff delivering HE, covering it in staff Continuous Professional Development (CPD) events and including it as a reference for staff undertaking programme development or de-design.

Should the College need to implement its Student Protection Plan, it is committed to communicating it in a timely, transparent and open way with the affected students, who will be offered group and individual support through the process. Furthermore, the College will seek the approval of students already enrolled on a programme for any changes that are planned to the programme or modules if those changes are to be implemented for the existing cohorts.

The College will review and evaluate the Student Protection Plan annually at the end of the academic year. The process will consider any times that the SPP has had to be implemented during the year, and how well this protected the interests of the students, and whether the elements of the plan are considered reliable and deliverable.