

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College: Higher Education Student Protection Plan 2021-2022

Provider's name: Greater Brighton Metropolitan College

Provider's UKPRN: 10004736

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Introduction

At Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (GB Met), we are committed to the quality of the student experience from application through to the end of their Higher Education (HE) programme, and how this enables their next steps into employment or further study. However, the reality is there are occasionally circumstances in which it is necessary to discontinue programmes. 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 our HE Programmes students are enrolled onto.

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

There are a number of scenarios that might impact on the delivery of programmes, these are outlined below:

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- Validation for HE programmes is withdrawn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

The impact of programme closure 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 locations to continue their studies

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

The College ceases to operate:

As a Further Education College, GB Met's approach to protecting the interests of its HE students aligns with those measures that apply to the FE sector. The statutory college insolvency regime supplements the existing intervention regime run by the ESFA and the FE Commissioner, by providing 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 new 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 programmes experienced by any students regardless of their funding source. The risk that the College is unable to operate as the result of financial performance is low.

Major Incidents:

The risk of major incidents disrupting services and access to sites is low. The College has a range of established business continuity plans enabling it to operate in the event of a major incident causing a significant but temporary disruption to its business.

Validation for HE programmes is withdrawn:

GB Met currently has three awarding bodies validating its HE programmes; the University of Brighton is the largest, validating Foundation Degrees and Honours Degrees; the College established a new validating partnership with the University of the Arts London to deliver its Honours Degrees from September 2020; a smaller proportion of the College's curriculum is validated by Pearson Education in the form Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNDs and HNCs). The University of Brighton has revalidated GB Met through a five yearly cycle of Periodic Reviews and Partner College Reviews. The College will undertake future periodic programme and institution review with the University of the Arts London. Losing validation approval is highly unlikely.

The withdrawal of provision:

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 programme offer is reasonably high in the medium to long term, though in the short term the portfolio is stable. No further plans are in place to strategically revise the HE Portfolio for the start of the 2020 academic year.

Low recruiting programmes are closed:

Where programmes are recruiting in small numbers, this potentially impacts on both the economic viability of delivering the programme and the learning experience of students. It is reasonably likely that the College will make the decision to temporarily close to new applicants any low recruiting programmes 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 programme delivery and resource requirements.

Staff crucial to programme delivery:

Some subject areas are more difficult than others to recruit teaching staff for and some programmes 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 programme.

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

Programme Delivery:

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

- The College is committed to the teaching out of 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.
- The College's Admissions team advises applicants in writing that the programme is not running and gives them details of how they can substitute the choice through UCAS.
- If there is a suitable alternative programme at GB Met, the applicants are given details of those opportunities.
- 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 programme is closed, the Admissions team will contact other providers which offer the same or similar degrees 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 would be withdrawn from marketing and admissions information in time to avoid student applications to a discontinued option. The College is committed to teaching out programmes 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 programme 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 programmes which are discontinued may be offered the opportunity to transfer to equivalent programmes provided by the validating partner subject to a mapping exercise of programme learning outcomes, content delivered to date and student achievement profile and appropriate operational considerations terms of the potential impact on resources and cohort size.

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

Students' rights to fees refunds are set out in the Greater Brighton Metropolitan College Tuition Fees Policy, which is updated annually. The policy for 2020-2021 contains the following commitments:

In the unlikely event that an HE programme is discontinued for a cohort of students who are already enrolled or are part-way through their Programme, 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 student needs to transfer to a provider whose fees are higher than those at GB Met, 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 GB Met due to a decision by the College to cancel the programme.
- The College would honour future bursaries students are entitled to at GB Met 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 a 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 satisfied that this can be delivered through the use of budget contingency or the use of cash reserves.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

The College will publish its Student Protection Plan on the College website to make it accessible to future students and on the Higher Education Landing page for current students. It will be displayed on programme notice boards, in spaces HE students use and available in on request from College staff and the Students' Union. We will draw attention to it in induction events for new and progressing students and in student handbooks.

The College will publish its Student Protection Plan to all staff via the College 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 re-design.

Should the College need to implement this Student Protection Plan, it is committed to communicating 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 Student Protection Plan has had to be implemented during the year, how well this protected the interests of the students and whether the elements of the plan are considered reliable and deliverable.

This Student Protection Plan has been developed in consultation with students through a series of Student Union led Focus Groups. Ongoing, the College will request that the Students Union includes review, evaluation and revision of Student Protection Plan in the Job Description of the Lead Student Representative (LSR). The LSR can undertake this review and evaluation with the participation of the broader student body, and this will be built into the annual process of updating and re-approving the

Student Protection Plan. The Students' Union is available to offer independent advice to any students affected by the implementation of the Student Protection Plan, and students can complain about the implementation of the Student Protection Plan through the College's Complaints Procedure.