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## **Student protection plan for the year 2022/23**

### **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 happen**

The University of Surrey is committed to ensuring that it maintains a strong financial base and has in place the infrastructure and staffing required to enable students enrolled on its courses to complete their studies. Where changes to resourcing or courses on offer are planned, the University's priority will be to protect students' interests and ensure that any changes are introduced in such a way as to enable students to achieve their learning outcomes and successfully complete their courses.

#### **Institutional Level Risk**

The risk that the University will cease operations is very low. Our *latest Annual Report and Financial Statements 2020-21* show that our consolidated income remained strong in the context of the pandemic at £299.8M (£315.2M in 2019/20) and we maintain robust processes to determine the use of cash with clear thresholds and sign-off procedures by the Executive Board, Finance Committee and University Council. Additionally, the University has robust risk management processes in place that operate in accordance with national requirements for Higher Education, supported by a suite of business continuity plans to deal with a wide range of circumstances (for which the University has ISO accreditation). The University is also a UKVI Student Visa sponsor and is at low risk of losing that status, based on the outcomes of its 2018 audit and regular monitoring processes.

The University has a strong reputation. It achieves strong employment outcomes underpinned by the emphasis on professional training and experiential learning, and it delivers impactful research across many disciplines including communications, satellites, health and nutrition. As a result, there is strong demand for places on Surrey programmes which underpins our financial sustainability. However, resources are finite, and the University continues to challenge itself to improve, and to seek greater value for money, including seeking cost efficiencies. These are important to the long-term future of the University but can involve changes to the delivery and structure of taught programmes, as new pedagogic approaches are adopted, new areas of interest for students develop and resources are re-aligned to student volumes.

#### **Programme/Course or Module Level Risk**

There may be specific circumstances in which individual programmes (courses) and modules are materially changed, withdrawn, suspended or are partially delivered. These circumstances include but are not limited to:

- Reduction over a period of years in student admissions to the programmes, affected by national/international market demand and competition
- Reduction in uptake of particular module options and/or other optionality related complexity such as ability to timetable

- Operational barriers to delivery including for example, loss of staff expertise affecting the ability to cover the module or programme content, lack of availability of appropriate teaching facilities, lack of availability of placement partners etc.
- The outcomes of ongoing regular review by Schools/Departments of its academic portfolio as part of good governance and planning processes
- The loss of accreditation by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB)
- Industrial action\*
- Disruption caused by pandemic, flood, fire or other disaster

\*The University sector's main pension scheme (USS) continues to undergo reform nationally to ensure its long-term sustainability. These changes are being negotiated nationally with the unions representing staff but if agreement cannot be reached there maybe local action which can take different forms, the most impactful being strike action.

## **2. The measures that you have put in place to lessen the risks to the impact on students that may happen because of changes**

Where the University is unable to deliver a programme or modules either temporarily or permanently for reasons outside our control, then the University's relevant business continuity plan will be put into action.

The University has an overarching University Incident Management Plan supported by Threat-Specific and Restricted Plans (e.g. adverse weather, pandemic or industrial action) and by core capability plans (e.g. timetabling and exam contingency, and crisis communications) maintained by the relevant lead of area.

Each academic School and Department has their own local plan which addresses continuity of teaching and research activities, including minimum service levels, specific to that discipline, including workshops, laboratories, lectures etc. The plans cover, amongst other things, where strike action, or action short of a strike leads to a disruption of teaching activities.

If programmes or modules are planned to be materially changed, withdrawn or suspended, the process will be carried out in accordance with the relevant Codes of Practice which specify timescales and consultation with and/or notification of affected students (see the *Code of practice for programme life cycle processes*)

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An escalating series of measures will be put in place to mitigate the risks as follows:

- If resources allow, new staff will be recruited where programmes or modules are at risk of withdrawal due to lack of appropriate staff expertise
- Programmes to be withdrawn will be taught-out for existing students and closed to new students, in good time for alternative providers to be considered
- In cases where programmes include a placement year, the teach-out will include provision for students to undertake the placement year
- Where programmes are to be withdrawn and teach-out arrangements are not possible students will be offered the opportunity to transfer to another programme at the University, subject to normal entry requirements and the capacity of the receiving programme to accept more students
- Where the above is not possible, students will be supported to transfer to another institution subject to normal entry requirements and the capacity of the receiving programme to accept more students.

The University will mitigate the risk of losing accreditation by a PSRB by a process of thorough preparation for accreditation events that utilises where appropriate external experts in the discipline.

Information on how the University would respond in the event of future disruption as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and how this relates to student protection, is provided in an Addendum to this Plan.

### **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**

The University's *Student fee and debt management policy* makes provision for the refund of tuition fees where appropriate. The University's *Procedures for Complaints* allows for a remedy to be offered at the various stages of the complaint process which can include financial compensation. Policies and procedures are subject to regular review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and take account of changes in national regulatory requirements. The Students' Union provide support for any student wishing to explore the complaints option.

The University maintains detailed cash flow forecasts which include a buffer to allow for variation in the cash cycle as well as unforeseen circumstances. This combined with appropriate insurance arrangements for business disruption are enough to provide any refunds and compensation if necessary.

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

We will seek to proactively publicise this plan to our students through various communication channels, plus staff they will interact with, including the Students' Union.

The University's Student Protection Plan will be made available to prospective and current students on the University's web pages for students (MySurrey) on the Policies page, but also include links via Student Finance. We will actively promote to all students via MySurrey newsletters. In the letter we will outline the circumstances where the Plan may be pertinent.

For prospective students the plan will be referenced in Contract 1 issued at offer stage and in Contract 2 issued at online initial registration stage.

Staff will be made aware of the implications of the Student Protection Plan via reference in the University's *Code of practice for programme life cycle processes*. Programme and module modifications and requests for programme suspension and withdrawal are processed via an automated on-line system which will flag when proposed actions could require invocation of the Plan.

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed regularly via the University's management and governance structures, the latter of which include student representation at all layers.

The *Code of practice for programme life cycle processes* requires that students are informed prior to any material change to their programme. Further information can be found within the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) FAQ, appended to the *Code of practice for programme life cycle processes*. The method used to collect this information is required to be documented as part of the modification approval process. All modifications are considered and approved at Boards of Studies meetings which include student representatives. In addition, students can also be consulted or kept informed through other means such as Student/Staff Liaison Committee meetings.

Material changes to a programme are introduced at the beginning of an academic year, unless there are exceptional circumstances outside of our reasonable control which make these unavoidable, and so students will be aware before the end of the academic year of any changes to be introduced for the following year.

If material changes to be introduced will affect prospective students the need to contact applicants to inform them of such changes is documented in the on-line system, relevant departments then review this information and act, where required.

If the University needs to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan students will be supported collectively and individually via a range of measures. This will include initial discussion within their local department and, information and advice from professional service areas such as student support, money advice, wellbeing, careers and employability and accommodation.

The University publicises our approach to fees and other funding, and loans where a student takes a leave of absence on our pages about applying for a leave of absence. This describes the circumstances in which we would offer a fee waiver for repeat study and expresses the University's commitment to explore alternatives to repeat study. This information is reiterated to students in the documentation sent to them when their leave of absence is approved.

The *Students' Union* provide independent advice for all students on any matter relating to their experience at the University (email [ussu.advice@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:ussu.advice@surrey.ac.uk)).

## **Addendum to the University of Surrey Protection Plan Contingency plan for teaching and learning in pandemic conditions**

The University has continued to take steps throughout the period of the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure it is able to maintain continuity of study for students in a range of possible future scenarios. This document outlines a contingency in the event of a return of pandemic conditions as a result of Covid-19 or other similar concerns.

Based on the current position outlined by the UK government, the University is planning to deliver a full campus-based delivery of its teaching during 2022/23. This is primarily face-to-face delivery with online elements where it provides the best educational experience. Both online and face-to-face assessments will take place in line with the relevant programme and module descriptors.

## **Scenarios and contingencies**

Our experience of hybrid learning allows us to continue to plan for contingencies given the still unpredictable nature of the Covid-19 pandemic as outlined in scenarios below. While we have reasons to be optimistic, we have continued to scenario plan to deal with any outbreaks or changes to government requirements, such as local lockdowns.

In these scenarios, we are working on the assumption that any lockdown would be local rather than national. In the case of a local lockdown, we anticipate expecting students based in university-owned accommodation to remain there. We will work with our student community to facilitate options that are afforded to us.

### **Scenario 1 Reintroduction of restrictions affecting face to face teaching**

This scenario covers a range of possibilities where the government asks educational settings to take precautions to limit the transmission of the virus, such as the reintroduction of social distancing in the classroom environment. Following a reassessment of the capacities of our teaching spaces, we would seek to maintain as much face-to-face delivery as possible while minimising disruption for students by minimising timetable changes mid-semester. Sessions that are unable to be delivered in person would be delivered online. If such restrictions allow for the delivery of practical sessions, we will continue to prioritise this form of face-to-face delivery.

### **Scenario 2 Lockdown for 1 – 7 weeks**

We will cease all face-to-face teaching and delivery of teaching for the majority courses will take place online. Courses with more specific requirements for teaching and delivery will be reviewed to confirm whether continuity of study can be maintained during the anticipated period of lockdown. All assessments will be conducted online, and confirmation will be sought from PSRBs to ensure accredited courses continue to meet necessary requirements. All essential lab/simulation/studio-based teaching will be rescheduled in the second half of the semester that are necessary for the professional body requirements and cannot be delivered in an alternative online format. More blended provision would resume after the lockdown has been eased by the government.

### **Scenario 3 Lockdown for 8 – 15 weeks**

In the case where the lockdown period was to last for 8 – 15 weeks stretching over a full semester, the University will review the impact on delivery, on a course-by-course basis. Some courses would be able to continue to be delivered for a further period utilising online approaches. Other courses may need more substantial changes to accommodate delivery of essential tutorials/workshops/lab/simulation/studio-based teaching sessions once lockdown ceased, primarily in the following semester, due to the nature of delivery required to meet learning outcomes and/or professional body requirements. This may result in a change to delivery dates and timings. In the case where lockdowns are continuing to be enacted beyond the end of a Semester, we will review the timescales for delivery of hybrid learning with the possibility of extending delivery into the next Semester or over the Summer. A key consideration will be the intention of students to complete their course of study to the original schedule where possible.

The University's regulations would be considered to ensure that students were not disadvantaged by the impact of a further period of lockdown. Any proposed emergency amendments to the regulations would be developed in collaboration with the Students' Union and fully communicated to students once approved through the appropriate governance channels.

### **Scenario 3 Lockdown for 16 – 40 weeks**

This is a scenario where lockdown could potentially last the whole academic year covering both semester 1 and 2 and/or beyond the end of an academic year. Some courses would be able to continue to be delivered for a whole academic year utilising online approaches. Other courses may need more substantial changes to accommodate delivery of essential tutorials/workshops/lab/simulation/studio-based teaching sessions once lockdown ceased, primarily in the summer period, due to the nature of delivery required to meet learning outcomes and/or professional body requirements. This may result in a change to delivery dates and timings. In the case where lockdowns are continuing to be enacted beyond Semester 1 and 2, we will review the timescales for delivery of hybrid learning with the possibility of extending into the summer. A key consideration will be the intention of students to complete their course of study to the original schedule where possible.

### **Scenario 4 Large scale sickness and/or isolation of teaching staff**

In this Scenario the University would enact the following contingencies:

- a) Continue to offer teaching by cover from other staff
- b) Continue to offer teaching by recruiting temporary staff
- c) Pause teaching for a short period of time (i.e. 10-14 days) to allow for recovery and this would be made up through local arrangements, discussed with students e.g. concentrated hours in remaining weeks
- d) Cease teaching of the module(s) for the remainder of the Semester and restart in the next Semester to be taught alongside planned modules. This will require careful management of workload for students and staff.
- e) In the case where workloads would exceed reasonable hours for the following Semester, regulations would be reviewed to assess how progression/completion could be achieved without completion of the full number of requisite credits.
- f) In exceptional cases, courses may need to be suspended and restarted the following year.
- g) The re-introduction of emergency regulations e.g. safety net, will be considered and communicated to students.

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### **Review**

The Covid-19 pandemic remains an unstable situation, we will seek to keep up with changes as they develop but within a reasonable timeframe. This plan will be reviewed regularly.

### **Publish**

This plan will be published alongside the Student Protection Plan. Any updates following review will be communicated to students.

September 2022