

## Higher Education | Student Protection Plan

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### Student protection plan for the period [2021/2022]

#### Introduction

Student protection plans are required to protect the student experience under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Student protection plans are in place to protect students from unforeseen circumstances, for example, in the unlikely event that we need to change or close a course.

Gateshead College is committed to supporting all students to ensure they reach their full potential and achieve their programme of study. Situations and events beyond the college's control may occur resulting in changes to individual modules or whole programmes of study. The college will take all reasonable steps to avoid making significant changes to provision at the start of the academic year or during an academic year.

**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 crystallise.**

#### The range of risks to the continuation of study

The risk that Gateshead College as a whole is unable to operate is very low and the risk we may need to close any of our programmes in an unplanned way is very low.

The risk that Gateshead College will no longer deliver courses at any of our college sites or in specific areas in the next three years is low because the college is not considering closure of any college sites currently used to deliver education.

The college implements a robust planning process, and potential risks to continued delivery are considered as part of this process. When planning the development of Higher Education programmes, consideration is focussed on staff teams and their areas of expertise, skills and knowledge. The college may experience the loss of key delivery staff, and is deemed medium risk. In some curriculum areas, there may be smaller teams of staff with specific expertise and where this is the case, Gateshead College will recruit more suitably qualified staff where appropriate, up skill the current teaching team and utilise guest and visiting speakers and lecturers to support teaching and learning activities.

The risk that the college is no longer able to deliver specific subjects due to issues relating to subject specialist teachers in other curriculum areas is low because programmes are delivered by teams of academic staff who have a range of subject and vocational expertise.

The college may take the strategic decision to close a course or not continue delivery of a programme. The risk that a course will not run because of low enrolment numbers is low because of the clear focus

given to market demand and rationale during the business planning process and would normally be concerned with ensuring an excellent student experience. If the decision was made to close a programme, wherever possible, the college would teach out the course for any current students.

The risk that major changes to a programme's content and / or amendments to modules is considered to be low risk. All HE programmes are either validated by a validating partner such as a university or they are written by awarding bodies and this process may result in some changes being made that might alter the programme from that advertised. This would be clearly communicated to students. The college may lose accreditation from validating university partners which could result in closure of an area of provision and is also deemed low risk.

The risk that there was any term time disruption is low, for example, industrial action and changes to the programme delivery pattern in the interim would be preferred option rather than closing provision.

Other identified risks could include factors affecting college sites and physical resources due to circumstances beyond our control, for example, in the case of fire, flooding, terrorism and a critical incident or accident. The risk of these types of incidents occurring is rated as very low, but if they did occur this could result in a loss of key people, loss of key data, IT, premises and resources. There are business continuity plans in place to deal with major incidents including any changes to staffing, curriculum and physical resources as a result of fire, flooding, terrorism, pandemic and any other critical incident / accident.

**The measures in place to mitigate the risks to provision Gateshead college considers to be reasonably likely to crystallise.**

The level of risk that Gateshead College is unable to deliver a programme(s) over the next three years is low and all reasonable actions would be taken to minimise any disruption. The college has a robust business planning process which provides managers the opportunity to carefully consider resources, both human and physical, to ensure adequate staff and physical resources are in place and to identify where further investment is required. Business planning is a robust process whereby curriculum activity plans are developed on an annual basis which take into account student, local and economic developments as well as reviewing previous performance.

Prior to business planning, managers review the rationale and market demand of all programmes. In addition, all new programmes are formally approved at an HE Approval Panel meeting. This process reduces the risk that a programme would not run due to low student enrolment.

Applications and enrolments are monitored throughout the enrolment period to ensure all programmes have viable group sizes. If the college was unable to deliver a programme because of low enrolment numbers the course would be closed as soon as this was recognised. All students would be contacted as soon as possible and supported with further information, advice and guidance. This may include enrolling to a suitable alternative at the college, enrolling at another institution which offered the same / similar type of programme or starting the programme at a later date. If a programme had to close, where possible, this would be done gradually, to ensure existing students could complete their programme of study.

Alternative approaches to continue delivering a programme would also be considered and may include changes to delivery methods such as more distance learning or changes to methods of assessment and would be subject to approval from the validating or awarding body. If this approach was not possible or agreed by the validating partner, the actions outlined above would be implemented to support the student with their next steps.

Any programmes that are advertised on the college website that are under development and going through the validation process, clearly state that the programme "would run subject to validation."

Where programmes could not be delivered because of loss of physical resources such as buildings, contingency plans are in place to support delivery at alternate college sites. Although this risk is extremely low, if students were required to access partners' premises such as university partners,

employer premises or schools, accessibility of buildings for those students would be considered at that time in conjunction with the Equality Act 2010.

The college would liaise and work with partner organisations to ensure delivery was continued in the event of disruption to staffing. The college has very strong links with employers in every vocational field and would be able to utilise guest speakers from partner industries. Staff from university partners would also be utilised to ensure continued delivery of specialist subjects. The college would also work to recruit any subject specific staff and fill staff vacancies as soon as practicably possible. Timetables would be reviewed where required and changes including distance and e-learning packages implemented to enable students to continue their programme of study.

Gateshead College's business continuity plans have clear objectives and specify roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in responding to any potential business disruption. These plans are flexible enough to maintain continuity of key services throughout any disruptive events.

The loss of key delivery staff in some areas is medium risk. This type of risk is considered as part of the annual business planning and periodic review process and actions are agreed to minimise this risk. Actions include the recruitment of more suitably qualified staff where appropriate, up skilling the current teaching team, and utilising guest and visiting speakers and lecturers to support teaching and learning activities.

### **3. College Fees Policy**

The Fees Strategy and Policy to be adopted for 2021/2022 and has been developed in accordance with national/statutory guidance in relation to education and funding, including that published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). It also sets a framework for ensuring that comprehensive guidance and information regarding fees for courses is available and accessible to customers, learners and staff.

The fees policy will cover:-

- The Strategy and Policy for 2021/2022
- Full and part time fees
- Payment Methods
- Refunds and withdrawals

If it were not possible to continue delivery of a programme, the college would consider financial compensation for those students affected.

All learners studying at Gateshead College should receive the teaching and learning experience they signed up for as part of their learning agreement and the college would take the appropriate approach regarding compensation in the unlikely event that a programme of study does not meet expectations and standards agreed during enrolment. A total or partial refund may be agreed by the college to those paying for their own course, where tuition fees are paid by a sponsor and for those learners in receipt of a loan via the Student Loans Company.

Cases would be considered on an individual basis to determine if the total or partial fees should be compensated for example, where the college was not at fault, the college may deduct a proportion of the refund.

Compensation may be applied for by students if unnecessary costs are incurred because a programme is changed significantly by the college. These costs could include compensation for tuition where a course had to close and the learner was required to transfer to another provider and compensation of travel costs.

#### **4. How the student protection plan will be communicated with students**

Students protection plans will be published on the college website. They will be communicated to students at the enrolment stage and during induction.

Should the protection plan need to be implemented, students will be contacted within two working days of any change being required.

Gateshead College will work with current students in the development of the student protection plan. A range of methods are used to consult with students. These include communication via the college VLE, student representative meetings, and student involvement at a range of HE related staff meetings.

If the student protection plan needs to be implemented, the following will apply:

- Students would be informed within two working college days via email, telephone and Moodle.
- Communication will be clear and provide assurance to students in relation to any decisions and action to be taken.

If a student is dissatisfied or has a complaint in relation to the student protection plan, the student would be advised to follow the college's complaint procedure whereby their complaint will be investigated internally in the first instance. If the student is not happy with the outcome, they can proceed their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.