Student Protection Plan

- Provider's name: North Hertfordshire College
- Provider's UKPRN:10004690
- Legal address: Monkswood Way, Stevenage , Herts SG1 1LA
- Contact point for enquiries about this Student Protection Plan:
  Deputy Principal Curriculum, Quality and Inclusion. Keith.Turner@nhc.ac.uk

Introduction

The College is a medium sized general further education College, located in the towns of Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth. We support over 8,000 learners a year on a range of programmes from 16-19 Study Programmes, Professional qualifications, Apprenticeships, SEND, online and community-based employability programmes.

Our primary focus is **helping our students get to where they want to be in life**. We help them develop both the knowledge and the skills they need to progress in their chosen sector area and the employability skills we know employers expect, including a good grounding in maths and English. The College received a 'Good' rating from Ofsted in November 2023 with its provision for supported studies students receiving an 'Outstanding' rating.

Our business development function, Hart Learning and Development (Hart L&D), is a learning and development business which helps businesses of all sizes, locally and nationally, to invest in emerging talent. Hart L&D supports businesses of all sizes to attract and retain the talent they need by providing apprenticeships in key growth sectors: health and social care, engineering and construction, business services and technology.

Our aim is to meet student and business demand for high-level skills through a rich and varied portfolio of higher education programmes and high-level apprenticeship offers in accordance with our strategic priority sectors.

Higher Education (HE) has been delivered effectively at North Hertfordshire College for over 30 years, and currently includes an offer combining mainly Extended and Foundation Degrees as well as Higher National Diplomas. HE is a key strategic progression route for College FE courses and a vehicle for local employers to develop its workforce.

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Student Protection Plan

Student Protection Plan for the period 2025-2028

This Student Protection Plan sets out the measures we have in place to protect students in the event that a risk to the continuation of studies should arise.

The measures contained in this plan apply to all students studying for a directly funded qualification (HNC/HND) delivered by North Hertfordshire College; this includes courses that may be delivered through any of our HE partnerships. These measures are also in addition to the protections students have under consumer protection law, and do not impinge on their consumer rights.

Students studying on our University of Hertfordshire franchised courses will be covered by the University of Hertfordshire Student Protection Plan, our university partner.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires HE Providers to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspension of programmes, closures of courses, College premises or business. These events may be triggered by situations such as (but not limited to):

- a decision to close the College has been taken
- a strategic decision by the College to close a course or campus
- a decision has been taken not to run a course for the subsequent year
- loss or restriction of HE provider status
- loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies, e.g. OfS, Ofsted
- loss of accreditation from awarding body (validator)
- withdrawal of designation for student support purposes
- changes to regulatory framework affecting a specific course
- disruption of College activity
- industrial action by College staff or third parties
- unanticipated departure of key members of College staff.

Assessment of overall risk

- NHC is committed to providing a high-quality education to all its students and prides itself on working collaboratively with its student body to enhance student learning opportunities and support the achievement and success of all its students.

- The introduction of this Student Protection Plan is a requirement of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to protect students from material changes such as course or module changes, course closure or whole college closure.

- NHC deems the likelihood and risk of such material changes within the next three years to be low. The college does not consider that any of the following risks are reasonably likely to crystallise but has provided measures to protect its students in the unlikely event of any unforeseen material changes.

Risk 1- Closure of Business/College/Campus - Likelihood: Extremely Low

- The risk that the NHC is unable to operate is very low because its financial health (as assessed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency) has been graded 'Good'. As an endorsement of organisational quality, the college also has an Ofsted grade of 'Good' with 'Outstanding' features.

- The risk that any of our campuses close is low as the College has a long track-record of

delivering programmes and running its business successfully. The College also has a written strategy and business plan covering the next 5 years.

- This risk is monitored through risk management in accordance HE regulatory bodies and any instance of this will be managed in accordance with the College policies.

Risk 2: Loss or Restriction as a HE provider - **Likelihood: Low**

- The risk that North Hertfordshire College loses its status as a HE provider is to be considered as low for the following reasons:
  - NHC has been delivering Higher Education for the past 30 years.
  - HE is a key strategic progression route for College FE courses and a vehicle for local employers to develop its workforce.
  - NHC is an active member and key player of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium, a partnership between the University of Hertfordshire and the 4 Further Education corporations in the county.
  - NHC has been a HEFCE directly funded institution since 2010.

Risk 3- Loss of Validator (awarding body) - Likelihood: Low

- The risk that North Hertfordshire College loses one of its validators (currently the University of Hertfordshire and Pearson's Education Ltd) as a HE provider is to be considered as low for the following reasons:
  - North Hertfordshire College has been delivering Higher Nationals for 30 years and has been a member of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium since 2002.
  - The successful outcomes of all validation and revalidation events that took place on all programmes delivered at the College since the creation of the Consortium.
  - All University of Hertfordshire students are covered by the University's Student Protection Plan, Consumer Protection Law statement and (where relevant) the University's Access and Participation Plan. However, NHC would support any students impacted by the highly unlikely event of its validating partner retracting its partnership with the college.
  - The College has not been subject to any special measures imposed by its HE awarding body (Pearsons), such as loss of accreditation due to poor quality, management or malpractice.
  - The successful outcomes of all Quality Assurance Reviews.

Risk 4: Loss of course accreditation - Likelihood: Low

- The risk that North Hertfordshire College loses the accreditation from one of its validators (currently the University of Hertfordshire and Pearson's Education Ltd) to deliver a particular programme is to be considered as low for the following reasons:
  - The College has never lost the entitlement to provide any of its HE programmes.
  - Each programme delivered at the College is subject to a thorough awarding body validation process that includes a detailed assessment of the College resources, capacity and expertise to deliver the course as well a well-established targeted market.
  - The rigorous Quality Assurance mechanisms in place ensure compliance with awarding bodies requirements.

Risk 5- Programme Discontinuation - Likelihood: Low

- NHC is committed to completing delivery of the courses it offers and will always endeavour to ensure this occurs. The provision of all courses is considered in line with the NHC's Strategic Plan. Annual review of all HE courses is undertaken at the end of each academic year. Rates of student recruitment, outcomes, satisfaction and employability are all monitored and evaluated each year by senior managers. The risk that the College decides to discontinue a specific programme on timescales that directly affect students is low because any course discontinuations in HE are planned at least one year in advance to allow current students to complete their studies.

- The risk that we discontinue or do not offer programmes due to insufficient enrolment and programme take-up or continuation is low and extremely rare. We regularly review the suite of programmes we offer to ensure that we keep pace with student demand although may choose to close a programme to future cohorts where low recruitment trends become evident.

RISK 6- Change of Qualification/Course content - Likelihood: Low

- The risk that the qualification a student obtain ends up significantly different from that for which the student enrolled is extremely low because all our directly delivered courses and those delivered by our partners are nationally endorsed qualifications (Higher Nationals) and are subject to the rigorous awarding body rules and regulations.

- For our consortium franchised courses, they are subject to the University of Hertfordshire policies and regulations. The university's approach to programme development and approval, and approach to managing course discontinuation, are well established.

- We retain the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to a programme's content year on year, as part of quality enhancement and in response to and agreement with student voice.

- Any prospective changes to course content imposed by awarding body requirements, will be shared with applicant students at the earliest opportunity, to enable them to make an informed decision regarding whether or not to study one of our courses.

- Our review and quality enhancement processes are informed by student consultation and we endeavour to communicate planned changes in a timely and helpful manner.

Notification, advice and support

Student Protection Plan

North Hertfordshire College Commitment to Students

We commit to:

- communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and instructions.
- being open and transparent with all students should any risk to the continuity of their programme of studies arise, and inform them in a timely manner.
- taking reasonable steps to protect student normal studies completion should we discontinue a programme, close a department or discipline, close a location (building or campus) where a programme is taught, or should the College close altogether.
- consulting with students and considering students' views in a timely manner before deciding to implement any substantial changes to their programme or discontinuing it, or closing a department or closing a location
- taking into consideration the needs of all our students and the impact on them of any proposed changes and protective measures
- Informing the OfS of any changes that may necessitate a review of this Student Protection Plan or any of the measures contained within it.
- Free advice and support being offered, in the first instance by the Head of Curriculum and supported by the relevant Directors of Curriculum.
- Additional, non-academic, advice and support being available from Student Support Services (or delegate) and University partner
- providing access to independent advice from the Students' Union if we need to implement the plan.

What can students do if they have a complaint?

- You can use the Contact Us form available on the North Hertfordshire College website.
- You can make your complaint in writing to:

  Deputy Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality – Quality and Curriculum Hart Learning Group Engineering and Construction Campus Fulton Close Stevenage SG1 2AF

- You can email us at complaints@nhc.ac.uk. Please ensure the email is marked for the attention of the Deputy Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality – Quality and Curriculum

Contact point for general enquiries about this Student Protection Plan:

Deputy Principal Curriculum, Quality and Inclusion. Keith.turner@nhc.ac.uk

In the rare event that any of the risks identified are likely to crystallise, the following measures will be actioned. In all cases, we will inform students of any changes, which may affect their studies in a

timely manner.

Risk 1A- College closure

Where the College has no option, other than to close, it may consider measures such as those below to protect student experience:

- where possible, closing in a phased way, over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies at the Institution.
- where possible, the College will use its existing network partners such as local schools or local employers to source the necessary facilities to allow the completion of studies.
- where possible, the College will hire spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby) to allow completion of studies.
- the College will provide the necessary transport arrangements to allow students access the new site.
- where the above is not possible, in supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers.
- In case of dispute with registered students as a result of risk 1A, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Risk 1B: Closure of one of the College's Campuses

Where one of the College's campuses is unusable for activities involving students, the College will typically consider actions such as:

- Relocating provision to an alternative location, this may include using another of the College's campuses or hiring spaces for programme delivery (where possible nearby).
- Revising timetabling to allow all of the scheduled teaching to take place in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside of normal office hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will normally be conducted with stakeholders who may be affected; appropriate equality impact assessments will also be undertaken.
- In case of dispute with registered students as a result of risk 1B, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

2: Loss or Restriction as a HE provider

In the event of loss or restriction as a HE provider, North Hertfordshire College will work with the OfS regulatory body to:

- ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise disruption to affected students.
- ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner.
- working with relevant funding bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme.

- ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner.

In case of dispute with students as a result of risk 2, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Risk 3- Loss of validator

In the event of the College losing one of its validators, the following steps will be taken:

Franchised Courses: University of Hertfordshire

- The College will work with the University directly to regain approval. This would require agreed specified actions carried out by the centre within agreed timescales.
- If the relationship with the University breaks down, the College will support student transfer to one of the Consortium Colleges of their choice delivering the same programme.
- In case of student non-agreement, the College will try to source an alternative institution that delivers a programme with similar specification This approach will require full agreement from all students registered initially.

In case of dispute with students as a result of risk 3, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Directly Funded Courses – Pearson's Education Ltd (Edexcel)

- The College will work with Awarding Body directly to regain approval. This would require specified actions agreed with the Awarding Body and carried out by the centre within agreed timescales.
- If the relationship with the specialist Awarding Body breaks down, the College will support student transfer to an alternative institution with specialist Awarding Body approval.
- In case of student non-agreement, the College will try to source an alternative Awarding Body with similar specification and work with students to achieve alternative assessment measures. This approach will require full agreement from all students registered initially.

In case of dispute with students as a result of risk 3, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Risk 4: Loss of course accreditation

In the event of the College losing its accreditation from one of the awarding bodies (UH, Pearson's Edexcel) and if we are unable to deliver a programme in the following year, our immediate response would be to protect students' continuity of study. All reasonable steps will be taken to minimise the disruption to those services and to affected students by, for example:

- offering affected students, the chance to move to another course.
- delivering a modified version of the same course.
- providing assistance to affected students to switch to a different provider.
- consultation with stakeholders who may be affected to ensure appropriate equality impact

assessments will also be undertaken.

- future applicants will be notified in accordance with UCAS deadlines, allowing time for students to source an alternative suitable programme.
- Whenever possible, arrangements will be made to ensure programmes of study can be completed by all currently enrolled students within existing timeframes determined by the awarding body and College regulations, even though the programme is being discontinued and we will not be taking on new student cohorts.

In case of dispute with students as a result of risk 4, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Risk 5- Programme Discontinuation

- Where a course is discontinued, we would close the programme to new recruitment and ensure that current student cohorts complete their full qualification
- The College is committed to put the necessary resources to ensure that existing students complete their programme.

In case of dispute with students because of risk 5, the College will trigger its compensation and refund policy.

Risk 6- Change of Qualification/Course content

- All of our programmes are subject to validation by the awarding body and therefore this risk will not happen without the full revalidation process taking place.
- Students on the course will not be affected by these changes as transitional arrangements are always made to cater for existing students.
- We retain the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to a programme's content year on year, as part of quality enhancement and in response to student feedback, without changing the qualification title.
- Our review and quality enhancement processes are informed by student consultation and we endeavour to communicate planned changes in a timely and helpful manner. These minor amendments in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures.

Student refunds and compensation

A copy of the NHC Group Refund and Compensation Policy is provided to the OfS. The college maintains a Reserves Policy within its Financial Regulations which requires it to plan to maintain minimum cash % of 5% of its turnover. This would be more than sufficient for any potential refunds or compensation covered by this Student Protection Plan. We would consider the number and likelihood to be very low.

Policies relating to refund and compensation are available on the College website.

Communication, guidance and publication

Student Protection Plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by:

- Making the plan available within the HE section of the college website for prospective students.
- Referencing it appropriately in our communications with students during the recruitment and admissions process.
- Ensuring that all students are sent an electronic copy of the plan during their induction periods.
- Consulting students collectively through interaction with their relevant course tutor supported by their relevant Head of Curriculum. Information discussed, will be captured and shared in writing via email to each individual student and via an official letter to be issued to each affected student's home address.
- All affected students will be offered an opportunity to discuss matters further with an appropriate senior manager, should they wish to do so.
- Any student receiving ALS will receive information from their allocated ALS Advisor and be provided with an opportunity to discuss this further with them should they wish.
- All students will have access to the college Student Support team, who will be able to provide further advice and guidance and steer students towards appropriate independent advice should it be required.

The College will also:

- Ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan, through staff development, when they propose any programme changes, by including a reference to the Student Protection Plan in our programme approval and amendment documentation.
- Review the plan annually with senior management and make any relevant updates/ammends.
- Regularly seek views on this plan from our student representatives as part of our student engagement processes.
- Any updated plans will also be presented to the Quality committee.

NHC strives to engage its students throughout their educational journey and aims to be clear and transparent with all aspects of the courses it delivers. Should it prove necessary to implement any aspects of this plan then students will be informed via a variety of mechanisms within five days of any strategic decision to implement, with 30 days' advance notice of any material changes being provided to students wherever possible.