



## **HE Student Protection Plan**

**2021/22**

**UKPRN: 10001476**

## **1. Introduction**

The Student Protection Plan (SPP) sets out what higher education (HE) students or applicants of the United Colleges Group (UCG) can expect to happen should any of our courses, campuses, or institutions face disruption or closure.

The purpose of the plan is to ensure that all students can continue and complete their course, or receive effective communication, contingency arrangements, and/or be appropriately compensated if this is not possible.

All HE providers are required to have a SPP in place in order to register with the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of HE in England. The SPP is written in accordance with the OfS template and guidance for Student Protection Plans and, as one of our validating partners, Middlesex University's SPP and Student Protection Plan and Contingency Arrangements (SPPCA). The plan will be reviewed regularly in consultation and collaboration with students through our HE Student Council (HESC), HE Development and Operations Group (HEDOP), and governing HE Oversight Committee (HEOC).

The SPP applies to all students on Level 4 and above programmes. The HE offer at UCG is delivered across three of our campuses at Paddington Green, Willesden, Wembley Park as well as sub-contracting to the University of Westminster. We offer a range of HE programmes with a range of accrediting bodies and validating partners. UCG's Strategic Plan 2020-24 clearly outlines values, themes and objectives which reflect the purpose of the SPP, and we take our responsibility for the protection of students incredibly seriously.

## **2. Assessment of Risk**

The SPP is based on an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation and completion of study for our students, how those risks may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that the risks will crystallise.

### **2.1 Loss of programme validation**

There is a low risk that UCG will lose validation or accreditation for any of our HE programmes. UCG shows historic trends of robust quality assurance procedures in line with the expectations of our partners, external examiners (EE) and standards verifiers (SV). UCG maintains strong relationships with all validating partners and accrediting bodies and, in all cases, has a direct link contact with the partner/body. UCG is compliant and responsive to all due diligence protocols carried out by any validating partner or accrediting body.

### **2.2 Programme closure**

There is a low risk that UCG will close any of our programmes. UCG plans to continue all current courses into 2021/22, monitoring the maintenance of recruitment and cohort sizes large enough to do so. In the event of any future changes to our offer, UCG will strive for students to be able

to complete their course of study with us. In the event of changes to or closure of ongoing courses, UCG will minimise any disruption to students and their learning, supporting them to transfer to an alternative provider if required. Students, validating partners and awarding bodies will be consulted on any of the above and provided with regular communication regarding the continuation or completion of their programmes.

## **2.2 Changes to programme content/delivery**

There is a moderate risk of changes to programme content and delivery due to the ongoing impact and development of UCG's merger. Several programmes are duplicated across our campuses and will be reviewed in annual Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Plans to guarantee the best possible use of our resource. Students, validating partners and awarding bodies will be consulted and provided with regular communication on any changes to ongoing programmes.

There is a low risk of changes to programme content and delivery due to staff churn in specialised areas, such as Civil Engineering. UCG has robust employment policies and procedures in place to allow for the efficient recruitment and re-deployment of appropriately qualified members of staff if required. Pearson HNC/D qualifications provide room for adaptation of delivery in line with the expertise of the teaching staff.

**There is a moderate risk of changes to programme content and delivery due to the impact of Covid-19 upon UCG and the wider HE sector. These may include (but not be limited to) changes to deadlines or assessment requirements, alternate rooming arrangements, incorporation of online/blended learning or reduced practice-based-learning. UCG monitors and adheres to all government guidance on Covid-19 and will provide regular updates, promptly and clearly communicating any changes to programme content and delivery with all students. Bursary funding will be available on application for students without sufficient IT access, who are required to attend online lessons.**

## **2.3 Financial sustainability**

There is a low risk that UCG's financial sustainability would impact the continuation or completion of HE programmes. UCG has a governor-monitored business continuity plan assuring our sustainability. UCG has 'Outstanding' financial health as determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). There are a range of robust controls in place to ensure effective budget monitoring.

## **2.4 Enrolment of International and EU Students**

**There is a moderate risk to the continuation and completion of International and EU students. UCG do not currently hold a Tier 4 license and will not be recruiting or continuing international students. We currently have no continuing international students on our HE programmes, so will not be required to support any students in transferring to an alternative provider. A renewed HE admissions procedure will mitigate against the risk of recruiting or enrolling international applicants. International applicants will be provided with appropriate advice and**

**guidance to locate an alternative provider. Admissions will report into HEDOP where applications will be promptly and closely monitored in conjunction with curriculum staff. All applicants requiring fee or settlement status assessment will be identified, referred and promptly communicated with.**

## **2.5 Apprenticeships**

There is a low risk that employers with apprentices enrolled on our HE programmes would become unable to support these students. The large majority of our Level 4 apprentices are recruited via our Business Development Unit who show historic trends of developing successful, robustly assessed, long term contractual partnerships with established employers and recruiters. In the event that an employer became unable to support one of our apprentices, we would support the student in finding a new employer and/or study programme in order to continue their studies.

## **2.6 Industrial action from trade unions**

There is a low risk of industrial action from trade unions affecting the continuation of our HE programmes. UCG supports a range of trade unions and assists members in this support function. There are frameworks in place for negotiations. As detailed in the values, themes, and objectives of UCG's 2020-24 Strategic Plan, we are dedicated to maintaining a good working relationship with all staff members and supporting a positive culture. During periods of industrial action, UCG would take the necessary steps to minimise and clearly communicate any disruption to students.

## **2.7 Circumstantial and environmental risks**

Circumstantial and environmental risk to the continuation of our HE programmes is low. These are regularly risk assessed and inspected according to the appropriate health and safety guidelines. The College Group have the necessary staff teams and insurance policies in place to mitigate this risk along with a financial rating of 'Outstanding' for longer term assurance.

# **3. Measures in Place to Mitigate Risk**

UCG have a number of robust measures in place to preserve the continuation and completion of study for our students in areas where we consider there to be any risk. These include:

## **3.1 A HE organisational structure**

Including HE Student Reps, HE Course Team Meetings, HESC, HEDOP and HEOC providing sufficient oversight, monitoring and development of HE risks and KPIs.

## **3.2 Robust HE student voice mechanisms**

Including HE focus groups, HE pulse surveys, HE slicing of student survey data, promotion of NSS, timetabled HE tutorials, elected HE student reps, HESC, HE student representation at HEOC

and standardised HE inductions and course handbooks detailing communications and complaints procedures.

### **3.3 Regular HE student communications**

Focused on student voice, student experience, and updates to programme content or delivery.

### **3.4 Quality Standards Review (QSR) Action Plan**

Regularly reviewed at HEDOP and HEOC to continue developing QAA Core Practices identified as not met during our previous QSR.

### **3.5 Quality assurance procedures**

These are robust, tested, proven and consistent in line with the expectations of validating partners, accrediting bodies, EEs and SVs.

### **3.6 Relationship with validating partners and accrediting bodies.**

We maintain strong relationships and direct link contacts in all cases.

### **3.7 Annual HE TLA plans**

To guarantee best possible use of course teams and resources.

### **3.8 HE admissions procedure**

This is UCAS driven, extending to a regular report in HEDOP. This allows HE and curriculum management to monitor and act upon matters arising in recruitment, ensure adherence to the Access and Participation Plan, set and achieve recruitment targets, and develop TLA Plans and resources accordingly. This includes the prompt identification and communication with International and EU students, employer-funded students and those declaring ALS needs, to signpost them to the correct course or support area.

### **3.9 Employment policy and procedures**

Robust policy in place to allow for the efficient recruitment and re-deployment of appropriately qualified members of staff.

### **3.10 Business continuity plan and budget monitoring**

### **3.11 Trade union negotiation frameworks**

### **3.12 Health and Safety**

Appropriate policy and staff teams are in place.

## **4. Refunds and Compensation**

In line with our HE Tuition Fee Policy (),UCG may offer refunds in cases where action taken by the College results in a student being unable to take up, continue, or complete a HE programme.

Any claims for compensation will be dealt with on an individual basis due to the individuality, complexity and level of support required in each case.

UCG has a governor-monitored business continuity plan assuring our financial sustainability and ability to deliver the financial implications of our Tuition Fee Policy. UCG has 'Outstanding' financial health as determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). There are a range of robust controls in place to ensure effective budget monitoring.

## **5. Communication**

UCG are committed to the effective communication of the SPP with our students and applicants through: student consultation on plan, accessible publication of the plan, and transparent, evidence-based implementation of the plan if and when required.

Strategies to ensure effective and accessible communication of the SPP include:

### **5.1 HE Focus groups**

To include a review of the 2021/22 SPP and review and approve student voice mechanisms by 28/05/21. To be absorbed by HESC in 2021/22.

### **5.2 HESC to review SPP annually**

### **5.3 HEDOP/HEOC to approve**

Following HESC consultation, SPP changes will be reviewed and approved by HEDOP and HEOC before being confirmed/communicated with students, validating partners/accrediting bodies, and regulators as appropriate.

### **5.3 SPP accessible online**

Through standardised HE webpages and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), adapting the format of the plan according to the diversity of students' and applicants' needs.

### **5.4 SPP distributed to students**

Students should be explicitly introduced to the SPP through standardised course handbooks and induction, adapting the format plan according to the diversity of students' needs.

### **5.5 SPP to be distributed and explained to HE managers and teaching staff.**

### **5.6 If the SPP is implemented:**

**5.6.1** All students involved will be informed promptly and clearly of the reason for implementing the plan.

**5.6.2** All students involved will be re-directed to the plan.

**5.6.3** All students involved will be given the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the plan collectively and individually with their course team and/or management.

**5.6.7** UCG will adapt the implementation of the plan according to the diversity of needs of all students involved.

**5.6.4** HESC will be consulted on the implementation of the plan.

**5.6.5** If necessary, UCG will support students in finding an alternate provider.

**5.6.6** If necessary, UCG will consult validating partners, accrediting bodies and regulators.