

# Student Protection Plan

UKPRN: 10088021



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Summary

- 1.1.1. This Student Protection Plan is a student-facing document, of relevance to current and future students. Its purpose is to:
- provide transparent and accessible information on the likelihood of unforeseen substantial course change or closure at Sarum College, and on the action which we will take in the event of unforeseen substantial course change or closure at Sarum College;
  - confirm that we will work with students, ensuring they are consulted on, and kept informed of, unforeseen substantial course change or closure;
  - enable us to ensure that student interests are protected in the event of unforeseen substantial course change or closure.
- 1.1.2. Our Student Protection Plan is published online. It is also highlighted within, and accessible from our Terms and Conditions<sup>1</sup>, included in offer letters to prospective applicants, and in the student contract.
- 1.1.3. Our modules and programmes are validated by University of Durham and University of Winchester. As such we are limited as to the extent of changes which can be proposed.

### 1.2. What do we mean by unforeseen substantial course change or closure?

- 1.2.1. At Sarum College, we are committed to helping you achieve the best possible academic outcomes from your studies. We regularly review and update our modules and programmes to reflect the latest developments and research in subject areas, and to respond to feedback from students, external subject specialists, employers and professional bodies. We have clear timelines for making changes to our curriculum determined by our respective validating partners, which take place in advance of the delivery of programmes, levels and/or modules, as necessary.
- 1.2.2. However, occasionally events may occur which mean that unforeseen and substantial changes may have to be made to our programmes. We may need to respond reactively to changes in circumstance or the external environment, or we may identify problems with provision and take proactive steps to implement improvements. It is possible that, in some circumstances, delivery of a programme – or substantial aspects of a programme – may not be feasible. We may need to discontinue or combine programmes, or to vary the location of a programme, after

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<sup>1</sup> Terms and Conditions are available at <http://www.sarum.ac.uk/policies>

delivery has begun. This Student Protection Plan is designed to provide guidance in instances where we reasonably consider such changes to be necessary.

- 1.2.3. This plan does not apply to more minor changes which may occur – for example, late and/or unforeseen changes to individual module options or timetables in light of, for example, student feedback or staff illness/unavailability – where we have practices for mitigation, and for communicating changes. Similarly, it is not designed to cover situations where circumstances beyond the College’s control (for example, flooding or travel disruptions) interfere with our ability to deliver modules or other services in accordance with the descriptions provided. In such instances, however, we are committed to using all reasonable endeavours to minimise disruption as far as it is practical to do so.

### **1.3 How likely is programme change or closure?**

- 1.3.1 Unforeseen changes to, or the closure of, programmes of study are the exception and not the norm. In general, we believe that due to the limited suite of programmes offered, the risks of unforeseen change at Sarum College are **low**.
- 1.3.2 Section 2 of this Student Protection Plan contains a more detailed assessment of the risk that a certain programme might close or change unexpectedly.

### **1.4 What happens if my programme changes unexpectedly?**

- 1.4.1 We have identified a series of measures designed to preserve continuation of study in the event that your programme does change unexpectedly. These measures are focussed, in particular, on those areas where we have identified a higher risk of change.
- 1.4.2 The measures outline what we are doing or what we will do if we have to contend with unforeseen changes in the future.
- 1.4.3 Section 2 of this Student Protection Plan contains a more detailed outline of the mitigation which we have, and will, put in place to support you in the event of unforeseen change.

### **1.5 What happens if it is not possible to preserve continuation of study?**

- 1.5.1 If we take the decision to close an academic programme and to cease admission to it, we will aim and expect to teach students to the end of their programme (‘teach out’), enabling them to complete their studies with us. This is what we have done with every programme closure undertaken to date and we will continue this practice.
- 1.5.2 In the unlikely event that we closed your programme, and were not able to ‘teach out’, transfer to another suitable programme at Sarum College may be possible. We

could also provide support (e.g. transcripts and records of study undertaken to date) to enable you to transfer to a suitable programme at another UK higher education provider.

- 1.5.3 In the event that continuation of study is not possible, or if continuation of study is preserved but at additional cost, Sarum College is committed to offer financial recompense to the student.

## **1.6 How will I know if my programme needs to change?**

- 1.6.1 Expected and routine changes (e.g. to individual optional modules) are published internally via the student VLE (SarumLearn) as we enhance your programmes in response to student feedback and developments in research, pedagogy or practice. Information on minor changes will normally be available from your programme leader or tutor in the first instance.
- 1.6.2 Where unforeseen programme closure or change becomes necessary, we are committed to informing you at the earliest opportunity. This will normally be in advance of the academic year in which change is due to take place. In the event that this is not feasible (e.g. the need for major change only becomes apparent mid-year), we will inform you as soon as we are able to do so.
- 1.6.3 When dealing with programme closure or change, we will consult affected students, and will keep you informed as we implement change. Consultation will be undertaken via virtual or face-to-face meeting and in writing.
- 1.6.4 In all instances, academic support will be available from Sarum College and welfare support and guidance will be available from programme leaders and the College's chaplaincy service.

## **1.7 What happens if I am not satisfied with the College's response to unforeseen change?**

- 1.7.1 Sarum College has a general Student Complaints Process and then a separate escalation process for each respective validated programme.<sup>2</sup> Sarum's complaints process has an informal aspect – where we will work with students to try and mitigate and address concerns – and a second aspect where, if a student is unhappy with our informal process, they may escalate the matter via a formal complaint to the College and/or to the respective validating partner of the programme. If the student is unsatisfied with the outcome after having exhausted the College's internal complaints processes and/or that of the validating partner, the student may wish to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), the external

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<sup>2</sup> University of Durham Common Awards: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/students/complaints-appeals/> and University of Winchester: <https://winchester.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-and-governance/policies-and-procedures/>

regulator for higher education complaints to which we subscribe. Further details are available online.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.8 How is this plan reviewed?

- 1.8.1 The plan will be reviewed annually at our College Leadership Team, with any proposed changes reported to the respective management and/or student committees for each programme as necessary. Students are represented at the management or student committee meetings.

## 2. Risk and Mitigation

### 2.1. Institutional Risk

- 2.1.1. **Our annual financial statements show that we have sufficient cash reserves.** We are confident that the risk that Sarum College as a whole is unable to operate is **low** due to:

- our sustainable financial position;
- our clear strategic direction;
- our rigorous, structured approach to risk management and business continuity planning;
- the high quality of our programmes, academic standards, and student outcomes.

There are a number of mitigating steps in place that we have ample opportunity to address any financial difficulties. These steps are as follows:

- Annual budget process
- Monthly management accounts
- Regular review of cash flow forecast
- Initial quarterly review by trustee subgroup on finance and general purposes and then wider trustee body scrutiny at each quarterly trustee meeting. Trustees keep a close eye on the finances of Sarum College and action would be taken quickly to address the issue if anything did arise.

- 2.1.2. **Our strategic direction is clear.** The Sarum College vision and strategy which are held at Board level enable us to secure the College's future by delivering long-term sustainability and innovative research, education and wider student experience.

- 2.1.3. **Our approach to risk management and business continuity planning is structured and rigorous.** Operational risk registers are reviewed regularly at a senior level providing a mechanism for the escalation of any issues which might impact business continuity to our Board of Trustees.

- 2.1.4. **We provide a high-quality education, delivering excellent student outcomes while maintaining core academic standards.** The high quality of the education which we

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<sup>3</sup> Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA); <https://www.oiahe.org.uk>

provide, and the strength of our standards, are evidenced by student outcomes and all recent evaluations. We passed both of our recent external audits: 2021 Revalidation of Programmes via the University of Winchester and our 2019 Periodic External Review, conducted by Ministry Division, both with commendations as to the quality of our delivery. Our external examiners routinely praise the quality of the education which we provide.

- 2.1.5 **As we only teach one core discipline (Theology) across our formal educational programmes, our capacity to resource the teaching of that discipline is of low risk.** Furthermore, most faculty members teach across several theological sub-disciplines which reinforces our capacity to robustly resource our curricula and respond to needs for temporary cover and other absences. In the event that we faced particular staffing challenges, we can also avail of existing relationships with visiting lecturers to ensure continued educational provision (see 2.2.2).

## 2.2. Risks to Programmes

- 2.2.1. Our programmes require a minimum number of applicants to justify their delivery. The risk that we are unable to deliver particular programmes due to number of applicants is **moderate**. In the event that a programme does not receive adequate numbers of applicants, prospective students will be offered either to postpone their year of entry or to transfer to an alternative programme subject to meeting the admissions criteria for entry requirements.
- 2.2.2. Sustainability is core to programme approval, curriculum development and departmental planning. Our programmes are designed to be delivered by academic teams with assistance from visiting lecturers who go through a rigorous registration process to confirm academic standing and quality of teaching and research. In the event that we faced particular staffing challenges, we would seek to make use of our relationships with visiting lecturers. The risk that we are unable to deliver specific programmes – or material aspects of specific programmes – in relation to staffing provision is therefore **low**.
- 2.2.3. In the event of programme closure, we will seek to ensure that students can be taught out to complete their programme as expected. In the unlikely event that a teach out is not possible, we will offer students the opportunity to transfer to another suitable programme at the College.

## 2.3 Risks to Validation

- 2.3.1 Our programmes validated through University of Winchester recently underwent a regular revalidation review. A 6-year contract for validation of relevant programmes was subsequently signed in February 2021. We therefore consider the risk of loss of validation of programmes by University of Winchester is **low**.

- 2.3.2 Our programmes validated through University of Durham are part of the Common Awards scheme, an agreement between the Church of England and University of Durham which we, alongside 20 other TEIs, participate in. We therefore consider the risk of loss of validation of programmes by University of Durham is **low**.
- 2.3.3 As we are partnered with two validating universities, loss of validation from both institutions is very unlikely which affords flexibility and additional mitigation against institutional loss of validation and therefore the risk is **low**.
- 2.3.4 The agreements we have with our two validating universities, Durham and Winchester, provide for the orderly 'teaching out' of existing students, in the event of the agreements being terminated.
- 2.3.5 In the unlikely event of the removal of validation of either or both as detailed above, however, we would expect to mitigate this by:
- Alerting all affected students to the end of the validating arrangements and their options for being taught out under their existing university regulations and programmes, or transferring to a new appropriate offer that we had negotiated with a different validating partner.
  - Negotiating a fresh validation relationship with some new institutions and securing transitional arrangements for existing students.
  - Taking the strategic decision to implement new validation arrangements only with new students, allowing time for teach out of old arrangements, and for faculty to develop new modules and teaching materials year on year, ensuring academic quality.
  - During the transition years, ensuring each student has access to bespoke academic advice and handbooks following their specific regulations.

#### **Document Information**

Prepared by: Jayme Reaves, Director of Academic Development

Approval Date: 21 May 2021

Approved by: Sarum College Leadership Team

Date of Next Review: 21 May 2022