



STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN 2019/2020

1. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RANGE OF RISKS TO THE CONTINUATION OF STUDY, HOW THOSE RISKS MAY DIFFER BASED ON STUDENTS' NEEDS, CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THOSE RISKS WILL CRYSTALLISE

1.1 What is the risk of Holy Cross College being unable to operate (financially)?

Holy Cross College (HCC) considers the risk of being unable to operate as very low given its strategies to budget appropriately. HCC controls expenditure carefully and has a prudent approach to financial management. HCC places great emphasis on financial stability and qualifies as outstanding in terms of the ESFA calculation of financial status for the next two academic years 2019/20, 2020/2021. The college has corporate objectives to ensure continued financial viability. It has a robust Balance Sheet with cash reserves of £2.4M in July 2019. Strong controls in relation to cash management have enabled HCC to fund an extensive programme of capital work (£15 million over the last 10 years) without bank borrowing.

HCC regularly undertakes detailed financial modelling and sensitivity analysis on a range of scenarios. As a result it can respond quickly to changes in government policy or unexpected threats or opportunities. HCC budget process ensures that the minimum surplus position is protected while student facing services (academic and support) are prioritised.

The appointment of all staff is subject to a rigorous process and all appointments require the approval of the Principal and/or Governors. There is no automatic replacement of vacancies and all appointments are challenged, with resources directed to those areas of greatest need. Allocation of financial resources is directly linked to student requirements to ensure value for money and a high quality student experience.

1.2 What is the risk of our academic provider Liverpool Hope University (LHU) losing its degree awarding powers?

LHU considers the risk of losing its power to award degrees as very low. LHU does not rely upon any partners to validate its undergraduate or postgraduate provision. In December 2015, LHU underwent a higher education review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency. The report is available at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk>. The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at LHU.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards meet UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is commended.

In 2017 HCC's academic provider LHU, was given the award of TEF Gold. Last year, HCC was given the TEF Bronze Award. The teaching excellence framework (TEF) is a system that assesses the quality of teaching in HE providers in England. The conclusion is that the quality of teaching by LHU, and its academic standards are of a high quality and the likelihood of the university losing degree awarding powers is very small.

1.3 What happens if one of the campuses of HCC is not available?

The three campuses for Holy Cross, Carmel College and St Mary's are located in Bury, Saint Helens and Blackburn, respectively. Should any be subject to a major incident rendering the campus unable to operate, the provision could be taught at the other campus or alternative space within the respective locality. In the event of a major incident at HCC, such as a fire, HCC has a business continuity plan in place which would be funded by business interruption insurance. This would enable HCC to quickly find alternative facilities to ensure continuation of student studies. The Colleges have no plans to close any part of their campuses. The buildings are well maintained and there are no concerns about the quality of any of the facilities or a need to close any of its buildings due to a poor state of repair. HCC has very

secure financial status and consistent recruitment both in its sixth form and HE work. This would enable adequate off site accommodation to be secured for its HE commitments in the unlikely event of a temporary need arising.

1.4 What will happen if LHU is unable to deliver a programme in one or more subject areas or departments?

LHU has undertaken a full risk assessment of all of its current provision at HCC and there are no courses that are considered to be at risk of closure. In the event of a course being terminated, HCC in consultation with LHU will use its reasonable endeavours to provide exit routes for all students enrolled on the Programme at the time of termination. This will enable them to receive, in respect of that part of the Programme which has been completed, either

- a. an award of the University; or
- b. a record of achievement and to take reasonable steps to ensure that students enrolled on Programmes at the time of termination are placed on suitable courses at HCC or the University or at another institution in order to complete their studies.

If LHU decides to remove a course from its portfolio this decision is made at the Vice Chancellor and Principals meeting and ratified at Senate. Normally, and wherever possible, in the event of a programme closure, LHU will operate a “teach out” policy so that students currently registered on the programme will continue to be taught as outlined in the legal agreement.

1.5 Is it possible that material parts of a programme may not be delivered?

The risk that LHU is no longer able to deliver material components of its programmes is low because of the way the programmes are designed. LHU programmes are based on an integrated curriculum model. As such, the University does not have small modules in its UG programmes, all being based either on two 60 credit blocks or one 120 credit block. Thus each programme can be delivered by a range of academic staff rather than being reliant on specific individuals and the order of delivery of essential material can be easily changed if necessary. This reduces the risk for the student and provides stability for the teaching of the undergraduate courses.

1.6 What happens if a mode of study is no longer available?

HCC students experience a blended learning model including face-to-face sessions and a Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle). If this mode of study were to be changed, HCC would seek to consult with students and LHU in the same way that it would with any material change to a programme. The focus of the discussion would be to reach an amicable decision ensuring the quality of the student academic experience.

2. MEASURES IN PLACE TO MITIGATE THE RISKS CONSIDERED TO BE REASONABLY LIKELY TO CRYSTALLISE

2.1 Degree offer changed before enrolment

In the event that a degree programme is changed, suspended or withdrawn, including before enrolment, applicants will be contacted by a support tutor to discuss options/alternative programmes.

2.2 Course identified for closure

If a course is identified for eventual closure, HCC, St Mary’s or Carmel College, in consultation with LHU, will ensure the full quality of the academic experience, including teach-out for the remaining duration of the course, for all students enrolled.

2.3 Issues with staffing or accommodation at St Mary's or Carmel College

As independent institutions, it is acknowledged that there is less control over staffing or accommodation there on the part of HCC. If any issues arose that might threaten the student academic experience these would be resolved jointly between the colleges and the university. However, HCC accepts its responsibility to ensure an outcome that does not disadvantage its students.

3. INFORMATION ABOUT THE POLICY IN PLACE TO REFUND TUITION FEES AND OTHER RELEVANT COSTS TO STUDENTS AND TO COMPENSATION PROVIDED IN THE EVENT OF NON-CONTINUATION OF STUDY

Holy Cross College already has in place a *Tuition Fee and Other Charges Policy*. The policy includes information for the refund of tuition fees and other costs in the event that HCC can no longer preserve continuation of study. The policy will be re-submitted to the Core Leadership team or Governing Body for annual approval. HCC recognises that every case is different and that it is not possible to produce a pre-defined answer that would cover every possible situation where compensation may be sought. Therefore every case will be considered on its own merits, but within the principles of justice, equality and fairness that underlie our ethos.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT HOW WE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH STUDENTS ABOUT OUR STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN (SPP)

This SPP is on HCC website, and there is a hyperlink in the online *Student Handbook*. Information regarding the SPP will be communicated during student induction. The SPP will form part of the *Student Guide to Regulations and Policies*. This will be sent to all applicants as part of the pre-contract information and students will also receive a paper copy during induction. The Colleges' staff are aware of the implications of the SPP.

5. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SPP NEEDS TO BE IMPLEMENTED? HOW WILL THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATE WITH ITS STUDENTS?

If any element of the SPP has to be implemented, students will be informed as soon as is reasonably possible. HCC will use all reasonable endeavours to provide students with at least 30 days' notice of any activation of the SPP but there will be some very rare occasions when this may not be possible.

All students affected will be taken into consideration when HCC decides how best to communicate with students over any implementation of the SPP. The HCC University Centre management team will be responsible for putting together a communication mechanism to ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstances, are able to actively engage with discussions. In most cases, HCC will seek to use a taught session (wherever possible) to speak to students on a group basis, and offer one to one meetings for individual concerns to be raised. HCC will also use the online learning portal and student email to convey messages but this will be in conjunction with other more personal methods of communication.

The Student Union will be made aware of any implementation of the SPP so that they can offer independent advice to students. Students who have concerns regarding the way that the SPP has been implemented would be invited to discuss their concerns with a support tutor or member of the university centre management team. If this did not lead to satisfactory resolution the HCC complaints procedure would be followed.

6. REFUND OF TUITION FEES AND OTHER COSTS IN THE EVENT THAT HOLY CROSS COLLEGE CAN NO LONGER PRESERVE CONTINUATION OF STUDY

HCC is required by the Office for Students to outline its Tuition Fees Policy. This includes setting out the circumstances in which HCC will refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and provide

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compensation where necessary if HCC is no longer able to preserve continuation of study for one or more students. The Student Protection Plan identifies this as an unlikely risk but HCC recognises that if it were to occur, affected students would need to receive a refund of fees and appropriate compensation in accordance with this policy.

HCC considers refunds and compensation to be a remedy of last resort and is committed to using its best endeavours to ensure all students are able to continue and complete their studies at HC.