

# Consumer Protection Law

## Applicable to Higher Education Programmes (under-graduate courses).

This document has been submitted as part of our registration process with the Office for Students (OfS). It outlines the approach that Abingdon and Witney College take to complying with consumer protection law and the mechanisms we use to monitor and ensure compliance with consumer protection law.

Provider's name: Abingdon and Witney College

Provider's UKPRN: 10000055

### Your overall approach to ensuring compliance with consumer protection law

The College is fully compliant with consumer protection law. Our current approach to compliance with consumer protection law involves the following mechanisms of assurance:

#### Subscription to relevant networks

The Head of Higher Education at the College is a subscriber to a number of information networks including the Association of Colleges, OfS, OIA, QAA and UCAS who provide information relating to policy amendments directly to key personnel within Colleges to keep them informed.

Abingdon and Witney College continually monitors the following websites to ensure we are compliant in issues relating to consumer protection law:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-guide-to-consumer-rights-for-students>

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en>

<https://www.aoc.co.uk/>

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

#### Networking Meetings

The College is a franchise of Oxford Brookes University where bi-monthly meetings are held with all Associate College Partnership (ACP) members to inform and guide franchisees on any relevant external policy changes or significant new case law.

The Marketing Team at the College attends Oxford Brooke's Marketing Hub meetings, which are held four times per year and where CMA is on the agenda as a standing item. In addition to the meetings, Oxford Brookes also operates a Digital Marketing Hub where members can access information specifically relating to CMA and Unistats publication guidance.

Consumer protection law issues are discussed at the HE Steering group which takes place once per term (three times per year). The purpose of this group is to provide:

- a strategic direction and leadership to ensure that the HE Strategy is adhered to;
- the strategic lead on the development, implementation and evaluation of HE provision;
- a forum to review all quality issues relating to HE provision and make recommendations to ensure that all internal and external quality standards are adhered to;
- appropriate documents and policies to support the development of the HE provision;
- a forum for discussion of progress against the HE Strategy.

#### Training and Dissemination of staff

Relevant CMA information gathered from the above meetings and information sharing hubs are disseminated to relevant Higher Education teaching staff via email and via the Higher Education Staff Microsoft Team. Changes to processes or ways of working are further supported by training sessions for relevant staff involved in the delivery and quality monitoring of Higher Education. Monitoring of compliance is carried out by Marketing staff and the Head of Higher Education in relation to our website and published materials.

The College holds Staff Development Days twice per year where all staff involved in Higher Education are informed of key policy changes. Staff involved with franchised Oxford Brookes Programmes also attend an annual conference specific to FEC partners.

### **Ensuring Student Awareness**

This policy is on our website.

There is a "Help me HE" link on each programme MS Team where questions relating to any aspect of their studies can be asked. This will be confidentially monitored by the Head of Higher Education who will respond to queries within 5 working days.

### **Your approach to providing information to applicants and students: research and application stage, offer stage and enrolment stage**

#### **Research and Application Stage**

Information relating to our programmes of study are easily accessible via the College website at <http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/>

We ensure that the information is accurate by issuing key Higher Education staff (Heads of Faculty and Course Leaders) with a "CMA Compliant form" for completion and checking. This exercise is carried out once per year in May/June (prior to publication of the following academic years website and prospectus). Once completed/checked, the information contained within is then signed off by the Deputy Principal, who then instructs the marketing team to update the website/HE prospectus as appropriate.

Monitoring of website information is continually undertaken by the Marketing Team and Head of Higher Education to ensure continual compliance throughout the academic year.

In addition to current checks, there is also an information section at the top of the Undergraduate and Professional Programmes that outlines the key changes that may happen as a result of the pandemic. This can be found here <https://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/undergraduate-professional/>

#### **Offer Stage**

At offer stage, students are not sent any specific information relating to their programme. It is common that students may have further questions relating to fees, course content etc which are dealt with on an ad hoc basis and by the relevant Course Leader. All information given is as per the signed off CMA compliant form (mentioned above).

#### **Enrolment Stage**

At enrolment stage, applicants are fully informed of the requirements of enrolment prior to their actual enrolment day, i.e payment of fees, and the College refund policy. This is achieved through the sending of standardised emails to all applicants which is overseen by the Head of Higher Education and performed by the College Admissions team.

Enrolment is normally undertaken in a face to face format, however due to Covid 19 this year, enrolment has been wholly online (and will continue to be in the future). The only aspect of enrolment that will not be online is the checking of prior qualifications and ID checks. Enrolment of students is

arranged and overseen by the College Admissions team in liaison with the Head of Higher Education. Students at the point of enrolment are given further information relating to their programme such as the finalised timetable.

### **Dealing with Changes**

Where previously unforeseen changes in course information occur (for example, an increase in cost of an external visit), these changes are communicated to students via email and, where possible, in person to ensure the message is received. Responsibility for this process lies with the Course Leaders and is overseen by their relevant line manager.

Policies relating to the timely information, advice and guidance can be found on the College website at <http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/>

### **Covid-19**

Any impact of the pandemic on specific courses, including our approach to online learning, is communicated via the Undergraduate Student Team (via MS Teams), directly by Programme Leads and also on our Coronavirus page available here <https://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/coronavirus-college-information>

### **Your contract terms and conditions**

The College enrolment form forms the contract between the learner and the College. The enrolment form is revised annually in line with ESFA funding requirements by the Vice Principal of Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement. The validity and compliance of the form is monitored in year by our external auditors Mazars <https://www.mazars.co.uk/>

Documents relating to terms and conditions are held on the College website at <http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/info-centre/>

All policies such as terms and conditions are subject to impact assessment which ensures that the information held therein is clear and accessible to the intended audience. Once impact assessment is complete, policies are subject to approval by the Corporation Board. Policies are reviewed annually in line with College regulations.

Currently items relating to terms and conditions are held within a number of different policies (the Admission Policy and Fee policy for example). In relation to the “ensuring student awareness” section above, on approval of the Consumer Protection Policy, clear and transparent guidance will be available on the College website that indicates which policies hold relevant information relating to terms and conditions.

## **Your complaint handling processes and practices**

The College complaints procedure is available at <http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/>

For Higher Education Students, the complainant will use the college complaints procedure in the first instance. A Completion of Procedures letter will be issued to the complainant at the close of all complaints. If, once the college complaints procedure has taken place, the complainant is still unsatisfied then s/he retains the right to pursue the matter further with the relevant university or directly with the OIA.

Before bringing a complaint to the OIA, a complainant must complete the college's internal complaints or appeals procedures. If the complainant is not satisfied with the college's final decision and would like the OIA to review their complaint, they should complete an OIA Complaint Form and submit this, along with the Completion of Procedures letter. The OIA must receive the signed OIA Complaint Form within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter; otherwise they will consider the complaint to be out of time.

Students are informed of the College complaints policy as a standing item during their initial induction session with the College. Students have access throughout their MS Team to the College Office 365 site which has a link to both the complaints procedure and a template for completion.

We ensure that staff know and are competent at following the process as we have standardised induction materials that all Higher Education Course Leaders are required to deliver to students at the start of their programme. The College has a standardised MS Teams site specific to Higher Education courses, which includes links to the College complaints and appeals process. All Higher Education students are also included in an Undergraduate MS Team where they can use the chat function to talk directly to the Head of Higher Education.