

Student protection plan

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 potential risks for students studying at Abingdon and Witney College and the measures taken to mitigate those risks.

Provider's name: Abingdon and Witney College

Provider's UKPRN: 10000055

Student protection plan

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

The following risk assessment table has been compiled to evidence the College assessment of the range and level of risks to the continuation of study for our students.

Potential Risk	Probability of occurrence of risk	Evidence to support judgement
Significant financial issues leading to the College being unable to operate	Low	<p>Our financial performance is rated "Good"</p> <p>Cash at bank balance never falls below £250k .</p> <p>Financial position is regularly reviewed at Senior Management Level and actions put in place to mitigate financial underperformance against budget.</p>
Closure of a campus delivering Higher Education programmes	Low	<p>The College has made significant recent investment in the three main campuses where our Higher Education provision is located. College Estates' strategy does not include plans to close any campus.</p> <p>Both the Abingdon and Witney campuses have been refurbished throughout. Our Abingdon campus opened a new £4m Advanced Skills Centre in January 2018 which is a dedicated building for our Higher Education provision based in Abingdon.</p> <p>At our Witney campus, the Courthouse building on Welch Way has been recently replaced by a new three storey building which houses the main reception, classrooms, IT suites and staff offices. The nearby Queen Emma building was refurbished 3 years ago which includes the provision of state of the art science laboratories, used in our Higher Education provision of Equine and Animal programmes.</p> <p>Our Common Leys Farm campus in Hailey is a 60 acre campus, which boasts purpose built areas and facilities that house a range of land-based learning for subjects from Animal Care to Horticulture. Common Leys campus also has a fully functioning equine stud yard and was awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize</p>

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		<p>for its work in the equine field. The College opened a new agri-tech facility on this campus in 2019.</p> <p>The College and the LEP have invested ~£4million in a dedicated construction training centre based in Bicester which is now open.</p> <p>Materials are all available online for learners therefore where campus is closed temporarily due to pandemic (for example) students will be expected to continue their studies with the support of Microsoft Teams. Laptops are available for students without relevant hardware at home and bookable space is available in our library and learning centres.</p>
Course closure	Medium	<p>Course viability is dependent on the ability of the College to recruit students onto programmes. Whilst a robust Marketing plan is in operation, there is a risk that some courses fail to attract sufficient applications to ensure the course is both viable and able to provide a quality experience for learners.</p> <p>Course viability for Higher Education programmes is decided by the 1st June each year.</p> <p>If the decision is made to close a course, the College honours its commitment to students currently on programme to the end of their qualification.</p> <p>Where programmes are closed mid-course, the College honours its commitment to students to the end of the academic year and will provide full support to learners to find alternative providers. Should alternative providers not be found, the College would honour the programme to the end of the qualification.</p>
Loss of validation	Low	<p>The current examining body for our direct provision is Pearson which commended the College for its well-structured and comprehensive quality procedures.</p> <p>The College has a robust internal quality monitoring policy, supported by designated staff known within the Learning Innovation Team. These staff are responsible for the continued monitoring of quality of provision including the internal and external verification processes.</p> <p>Staff responsible for assessment of student work have regular training sessions hosted by the Learning Innovation Team and are encouraged to attend events organised by Pearson when there are changes to qualification specifications.</p> <p>Our Exams team have policies and procedures in place to ensure compliance with Pearson regulations and follow the guidance issued by the JCQ. Our exam department is subject to “no-notice” inspections from JCQ and has successfully retained its status with</p>

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		<p>Pearson (Edexcel previously) since establishment in April 2001.</p> <p>Key performance indicator meetings are held once per term which are chaired by the Head of Higher Education and attended by the relevant Curriculum Manager, HE Programme Lead and Quality Lead. KPIs are RAG rated and actions put in place to mitigate any potential issues which may lead to a reduction in quality of delivery.</p>
Inability to offer specific modes of study	Low	The College only offers part time onto HNC programmes at this time, which is more suitable for our students who are employed in the engineering sector.
Inability to teach specific types of students	Low	<p>The College has a transparent equality and diversity statement and publishes objectives on the College website which further the development compliance with the general equality duty (available at http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/info-centre/equality-and-diversity/)</p> <p>The College is committed to supporting all students in ensuring fair access to programmes and to secure success on those programmes. The College has a range of welfare and support services available to students, information on which can be found here http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/info-centre/welfare/</p> <p>On occasion, there may be individuals whose health issues may potentially have significant impact on both their ability to learn and the safety of those around them. Where such issues are declared or identified, the College has a Fitness to Study policy that enables key staff within the Welfare and support departments to assess the individual in a fair manner. This policy is available here http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/info-centre/terms-of-admission-2/</p>
Loss of apprenticeship placement due to employer forced redundancy, or closure of employer premises/business. Inability organisation in which the apprentice is employed to fully support the training requirements of an individual. (Applicable to Degree	Medium	<p>Information relating to the support of apprentices whilst on their programmes can be found here http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/employer-services/apprenticeships/</p> <p>The College has a robust “sign up” process where employers are obligated to sign a training agreement in order to provide a quality experience for their apprentice. It is however recognised that there is a risk to apprentices that employers may not be able to sustain a training programme that can offer a high quality experience to the learner, or may be in a situation where the apprentice may lose their placement (due to financial crisis or business closure for example).</p> <p>This is a rare occurrence according to College data, however it can occur and policies are in place to support the apprentice should this occur.</p>

Potential Risk	Probability of occurrence of risk	Evidence to support judgement
Apprenticeship programmes funded via the ESFA)		
Inability to deliver components of a programme (loss of staff, failure of required plant/machinery etc)	Low	<p>The College has a robust recruitment process, details of which can be found here http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/about-us/work-for-us/recruitment-process/</p> <p>Current vacancies are advertised on the College website and in locations relevant to the post being advertised (in trade specific magazines and sites for example).</p> <p>The College holds a database of permanent staff skills and also has a bank of hourly paid lecturers which, in the case of sudden staff loss, can be accessed and temporary measures can be put in place to ensure cover is available to continue delivery until a permanent appointment is made.</p> <p>In case of plant or machinery failure which is critical in the delivery of a programme, the College holds a contingency budget for replacement or repair.</p> <p>Supplier relationships are positive (as evidenced in the financial statements) and the College has preferred supplier agreements in place with key service provider personnel such as electricians, mechanics etc. Similarly, the College holds a specific budget for veterinary services to ensure the continued welfare of livestock and other animals owned for the purpose of provision of animal based programmes.</p>

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

The following table provides evidenced statements of the measures in place to preserve continuation of study for students in those areas in the previous section that are considered medium or high.

Risk	Probability of occurrence of risk	Measure in place
Course closure	Medium	Decisions on course closure are taken by the 1 st June. This enables students to apply for alternative programmes via UCAS before the UCAS closure date of the end of June and also to use the clearing period to find alternative providers. The College will honour its commitment to students currently on programme.
Loss of apprenticeship placement due to employer forced redundancy, or closure of	Medium	Apprentices are supported by a team of key workers who ensure a quality experience both apprentice and employer. The College was Ofsted rated "outstanding" in 2017 for apprenticeship provision, and has won best training provider for the last two years running by the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship

<p>employer premises/business. Inability organisation in which the apprentice is employed to fully support the training requirements of an individual. (Applicable to Degree Apprenticeship programmes funded via the ESFA)</p>		<p>awards. Students can therefore be confident in the College's ability to ensure that processes are in place to mitigate any issues relating to their inability to continue in their work placement where circumstances are out of their control.</p> <p>The College has a robust "sign up" process where employers are obligated to sign a training agreement in order to provide a quality experience for their apprentice. Failure to comply with the training agreement may result in the removal of an apprentice from their employer. Similarly, if an apprentice loses their employment through no fault of their own, the College will undertake to secure the apprentice an alternative employer. Key personnel involved in this process are the Business Development Executives.</p> <p>On the rare occasion that an alternative employer cannot be secured, the College runs the relevant degree apprenticeship programmes as traditional degree programmes as well (in partnership with Oxford Brookes University). Apprentices and traditional degree students are integrated together within the same lectures and therefore apprentices can transfer to the traditional degree route with minimal disruption to their learning experience.</p>
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3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

The College's current related policies can be found here <https://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/about-us/reports-resources>

Refunds for cancelled courses

The cancelled course refund policy applies to all students who have paid a tuition fee either directly (have funded their own courses) or indirectly to the College (via a sponsor, a bursary or the Student Loans Company for example).

Refunds will be made where it is necessary to close a class due to insufficient numbers. Should this action prove necessary, the College will aim to contact all enrolled students at least 3 working days before the course is due to start.

Refunds in respect of a cancelled course are automatically issued to self-funding students and to sponsors. In the case of student loans/bursaries, the College will inform the student loan company/bursary team that the student will not be attending a programme.

Refunds to students no longer attending courses

If a student is unable to begin their course, has paid a tuition fee for that course and wishes to claim a refund, they must write to the finance department to request a refund. Refunds are usually only made for illness and applications for a refund on this basis must be accompanied by a doctor's certificate.

Refunds for other special circumstances are at the discretion of the Finance Director.

For self-funding and sponsor paid fees; if a student withdraws after starting the course and has paid a tuition fee, their fee is still due unless a successful application for a refund is approved by the Finance Director.

For fees paid by the Student Loan Company/bursary payments; the loan/bursary amount will still be due for the period of attendance on your course, i.e. if you attend your course from September until December and then withdraw, you will still be liable for tuition fees that period of attendance. For the purpose of this policy, attendance refers to both physical attendance on the course or in the case of remote learning, the submission of coursework/attendance to exams.

Refunds for materials/exam registrations

Refunds will not be made for any personalised kits or materials which are being retained by the learner or any registration fees which have been paid to another party by the college on behalf of the learner.

Compensation

Financial compensation may be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example, where the College has made such changes to a programme of study that attendance of learners is made impossible. Examples of this may include; 'loss of opportunity' e.g. failure to complete a placement, apply for a bursary or to seek paid employment where this arises from an act or omission by the College, expenses the student has had to pay or money they have lost as a result of any College/course failings or closure.

When considering whether financial compensation is appropriate, the College will take into account the following:

1. Any reasonable steps which have or have not been taken by the student and/or the College to minimise financial loss
2. Whether the student has unreasonably refused or rejected an option that was available
3. Whether the delays in resolving a matter may have been partly caused by the student

In all cases, the College requires the student to provide evidence of actual financial loss.

Financial Implications of Refund and Compensation Policy

Refunds and compensation are managed out of College reserves. Our cash at bank balance never falls below £250k which the College feels is sufficient for that eventuality.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

This student protection plan is published annually on our College website.

Any changes to current, or the development of new HE programmes must be submitted to the College HE Steering Group. Staff presenting changes or suggestions for new programmes will be expected to supply any additional risks arising from the plans for inclusion into the existing risk assessment and information on how they will communicate any relevant issues in a timely manner to affected students. This is in addition to the current requirements of submission of changes/new course development documentation which currently includes significant market justification, planned numbers, teaching and staffing plans and relevant costs.

The Student Protection Plan will be updated annually, when new risks are identified, or when the assessment of likelihood of a risk occurring changes. The Head of Higher Education has specific responsibility for monitoring and ensuring the risk assessment is suitable, acceptable and feasible. Heads of Faculty and Senior Management are required to inform the Head of Higher Education of relevant potential impacts as and when they occur.

Students will be involved in the review of the Student Protection Plan via our annual student conference. This is held in May of each year where representatives from each programme are invited to take part in the continuing improvement and development of our programmes.

The method of communication to students relating to material changes to their programmes will vary dependent on the specific situation.

For students currently on programme

- For significant changes, issues and resolutions will be communicated in person (where possible) to the student or students involved during an organised meeting. The meeting will be held by the Course Leader, or in the absence of the Course Leader, the Head of Higher Education will take responsibility for ensuring a meeting is arranged and attended. If an in person meeting is not an option (for example, should we be forced to close due to Government Regulations in regard to Covid-19), this message will be sent via the Higher Education Student Team, email and be clearly posted on our College website.
- For material changes where the impact on students is minimal and short term temporary (for example a water supply issue), students will be emailed to inform them of the situation, followed by a telephone call from the Faculty administrator to ensure that the message has been received and understood. Temporary issues which may result in a longer suspension of teaching, such as campus closure due to severe weather for example, will be communicated to students via the College website.
- Any temporary suspension of programmes will not impact on the planned delivery hours of a programme. Procedures are in place to extend programmes or put on additional sessions to ensure that students are not disadvantaged due to circumstances out of their control.

For applicants to Higher Education Programmes

- The College will communicate course closure (for whatever reason) to applicants by the 1st June through email, letter and telephone. The person responsible for ensuring the communication has been received and understood by the applicant is the Faculty administrator.
- Where material changes to programmes are made (for example, a change of advertised modules or day of delivery), students will be formally contacted via letter. Students will be required to acknowledge receipt of the letter and given the opportunity to accept or reject their

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place. The College will ensure that students are informed of such changes prior to the closure of clearing so that those students who choose to reject the programme due to the changes have the opportunity to apply for alternative courses.

Should situations occur that cannot be communicated to students in good time or have the potential to cause student offence or annoyance, the College complaints procedure will be clearly signposted to the students or applicants affected.

In the case of incidents that could result in significant student distress, the College will ensure that students have access to appropriate independent advice and support.