

Student Protection Plan: Overview

The Student Protection Plan (“SPP”) sets out what students can expect to happen should a Sheffield Hallam University (“the University”) course, campus or institution close. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that students can continue or complete their studies or can be compensated if this is not possible.

The Student Protection Plan is required to be produced, published and updated by the Higher Education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) as part of their regulatory framework, which the University adheres to. More information about the OfS and the regulation of Higher Education providers can be found on its website: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

As a large, high-performing and financially stable institution, we consider the risks outlined in this plan to be unlikely or very unlikely to occur. Should an event occur that results in closure of a significant part of or all the University’s provision, we would anticipate working closely with the OfS and other regulators, education partners, staff and students to ensure students’ interests and outcomes are protected.

Further information about the University, including student funding and terms and conditions, and information on how the University makes and assures decisions, can be found on our website at www.shu.ac.uk

This SPP outlines the key risks for the University in delivering our courses. For each risk, we have described the actions we are already taking or will take to mitigate or eliminate the risk. This aims, wherever possible, to ensure continuation of study.

The provisions of this plan cover significant risks and do not include changes that may be required owing to operational matters during the general delivery of a course.

These include (but are not limited to):

- Minor amendments to a module or course and its delivery and / or assessment
- Timetable changes, including location or whether in person or online
- Changes required to a course or module to ensure continued compliance with regulatory or Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) or other external requirements
- Individual academic supervision, including research projects or for students undertaking research-specific modules or awards
- Short-term changes requiring temporary staffing cover of teaching or support activities

Where appropriate, in such circumstances, the University may consult and communicate these changes to students and staff to ensure that delivery and outcomes remain of a consistent high quality.

Communication with students and about the plan

The University is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options, including referring students to independent advice support and services provided by the Students' Union.

Information about this plan will be communicated in the following ways:

- The plan will be published on the University's external website and links made to appropriate student facing pages
- References to and a link will be included in the Student Handbook and cross-references made to other student procedures as appropriate
- Draft amendments to the plan will be provided in advance of approval and publication to the Students Union for consultation, and the final plan provided to them so that the provisions can be promoted to students accessing SU services and advice where these may be relevant.

Should it become necessary to invoke any provisions of the plan, the University will maintain due regard to student continuation and welfare and provide support and guidance in respect of financial, academic and pastoral implications. As most appropriate to the circumstances of the implementation of specific provisions of this plan, the University will:

- Follow the consultation and communication actions outlined under the specific provisions where relevant,
- Ensure that significant decisions are communicated and consulted upon in line with our standing procedures for change management,
- In the case of a serious incident, establish an incident management group that will develop and implement a direct communications strategy for students, staff and other stakeholders
- Ensure timely communication with the OfS as required by the regulatory framework.

As part of our ongoing process of review of the SPP, significant updates will be undertaken in discussion with student representatives, and revisions to the plan will be provided to the University's executive and submitted to the Academic Board for approval.

Risk: The University is no longer able to operate or no longer intends to operate

The University has a long and proud history and, over recent years, has consistently delivered strong financial performance. We are a large institution with over 30,000 students, 4,500 staff and a comprehensive range of research and teaching provision. The University, through the Board of Governors, has effective oversight of financial performance. The Board's Finance and Employment Committee monitors progress in respect of the strategic development of the University in the areas of finance, estate and capital programmes and human resources and employment matters.

The annual accounts of the University are independently audited and prepared on a going-concern basis. In line with our strategy, the finances of the University are strategically managed to ensure financial sustainability, and investments and cash flow are prudently managed over time, and in the context of an increasingly uncertain external funding environment. Our external and internal audit processes bring forward the necessary

information from the University to the Board of Governors to provide confidence in our strategy, its implementation and our future viability.

Risk: The University loses the power to award degrees

The University validates both taught and research degrees at all levels of Higher Education. The University works with a range of educational partners to franchise existing awards, to develop awards collaboratively, and to act as an awarding body. These partnerships are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes. Our ongoing monitoring of courses and educational partnerships enables the University to put in place timely interventions to address any areas of concern. If quality concerns were identified by OfS and its designated quality body, the University would work proactively with the OfS and the designated quality body to rectify any problems via our internal academic governance structure.

Our governance arrangements include oversight of the quality and standards of our academic provision and compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration by the Academic Board. The University has also established an Academic Assurance Committee, a formal sub-committee of the Board of Governors, which provides rigorous independent scrutiny of our academic governance functions and the quality and standards of our academic provision.

Risk: One or more of our courses is withdrawn, for reasons of viability

The University maintains a robust focus on its overall portfolio to continue to provide a high-quality student experience, financial sustainability and relevance of provision with our strategic aims and civic mission. We regularly review our academic portfolio and maintain our commitments to transparency and consultation with staff and students when making decisions on future developments.

The University will always put the interests of its students first when considering withdrawal of provision. Any withdrawal will wherever possible be conducted in such a manner as to ensure that all students are able to continue and complete their studies without disadvantage. Where this is not possible, the University will ensure transfer to a related course within the University or, if appropriate, at another provider. Any such arrangement will ensure that the affected students are neither academically nor financially disadvantaged.

Risk: A professional course loses accreditation

As a leading applied provider, the University operates a wide range of professionally accredited courses. We work closely with our Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) and other accreditation partners to ensure that our courses are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect appropriate professional standards. Should accreditation be withdrawn as a result of the suspension or removal of accreditation, the University will work closely with the accrediting body and students to ensure they will be supported in completing their studies with the appropriate professional outcomes. Where such changes occur, the University will implement a robust consultation and communication plan to ensure that students are aware of their options.

Risk: The University is no longer able to offer or complete Apprenticeship provision

The University offers a large Apprenticeship portfolio spanning over 33 different

apprenticeship standards. The quality of our apprenticeship provision is closely monitored through strong institutional governance which ensures that we continuously meet the requirements of the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (“RoATP”), and as of 2022 the University holds a ‘Good’ rating from [Ofsted](#) of its Apprenticeship provision.

A commitment statement between the University, the apprentice and the employer is in place from the start of each apprenticeship; this outlines the requirements on the three parties throughout the apprenticeship.

Employers are responsible for ensuring that the apprentice is given work-based opportunities in line with the knowledge, skills and behaviours outlined in the apprenticeship standard. Through the Work Based Learning Mentors (“WBLM”), we work very closely with employers to ensure that they understand the obligations placed on them. If an employer does not fulfil the requirements of the degree apprenticeship, or if an apprentice loses their role either through redundancy or dismissal, the University is not responsible.

In these circumstances, the University will support the apprentice to complete the degree and in some cases the degree apprenticeship. We will work closely with the apprentice to support them in finding a new job role or will transfer them on to the degree programme associated with the apprenticeship (where applicable).

If the University is unable to continue delivering apprenticeships as a result of being removed from the RoATP, we will seek to ensure, with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, that existing apprentices are supported in completion or transition.

Risk: Institutional or course-related failure at an educational partner, whether in the UK or overseas

The University chooses its collaborative partners carefully and applies a robust risk-based approach to determine the level of scrutiny and due diligence given to each partnership at inception. The University is committed to providing students studying at collaborative partners with the same standard of learning experience no matter where their location of study is and has a range of Quality Assurance processes to routinely monitor and review the experience and outcomes of students studying their awards with a partner institution.

Should a collaborative partnership cease, the University would ensure that students can successfully complete their studies. There is a contractual requirement to provide students with a statement informing them of the termination of the collective partnership, the agreed residual responsibilities of the University and the collaborative partner respectively, and the academic arrangements for students.

Risk: Suspension of UKVI Student Sponsor Licence

Some international students require a student [visa](#) to study in the UK for which the University is licensed by UK Visa and Immigration to act as a student sponsor.

Our advice for [international applicants page](#) provides further information for applicants, including up-to-date guidance on fees, enrolment and arrival into the UK.

The University closely monitors compliance in respect of our Sponsor status, both via monitoring at a course and institutional level, appropriate management assurances and engagement with external specialists within this area. In the event of suspension of our Sponsor status, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the disruption to affected students, for example by:

- working with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme (and support transfer to another provider, where necessary)
- allowing students already in receipt of a [Visa](#) based upon an allocated Confirmation of Acceptance for Study (CAS) from the University to enrol and commence their studies; and/or
- offering students who have not commenced their travel to the University the opportunity to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

Risk: Revocation of UKVI Student Sponsor Licence

In the unlikely event of revocation of Sponsor Licence, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students by providing assistance to affected students to switch to an alternative licensed student sponsor.

Risk: Incident Management and Business Continuity

Serious incidents are rare, but regrettably cannot be ruled out. UK universities have most recently experienced significant disruption due to the global pandemic, but also have responded to fires, floods, data breaches, IT failure/ cyber-attacks, severe weather and other unexpected events.

The purpose of business continuity planning is to ensure that the University has robust measures in place to cope with a major disruption. A coordinated, planned approach is in place to help the University to sustain time-critical activities at an acceptable level, and get back to normal as quickly as possible.

Our Incident Management Policy and Business Continuity framework seek to ensure that the University will protect our staff and students during any period of disruption. This will maintain the health and safety of our community, which is always our first priority, and enable an effective immediate response to disruption, by having relevant staff of the University trained in the same incident management techniques and working to the same basic principles.

The University will seek to minimise any disruption to students by prioritising incident management and its associated actions and resuming activities to ensure continuation of study.

Risk: Our courses are unable to continue owing to temporary or permanent loss of or change to a building

The majority of the University's students are based at one of the University's two campuses in Sheffield. There is a campus plan in place which will open new buildings and reduce reliance on older buildings that are increasingly requiring more maintenance. This reduces the risk of building closures resulting from unforeseen maintenance issues.

Business Continuity Plans are in place at University level, and will be implemented in the event of any loss of function within the University's critical activities.

If any building needs to be taken out of service, an incident management structure will be invoked to coordinate the response.

To ensure that students continue to receive scheduled teaching sessions, the University will:

- Relocate teaching activities to other University buildings where available
- Revise the scheduled teaching timetable to take into consideration the availability of appropriate facilities
- Consider other mitigations such as increasing the length of the teaching day or providing catch-up sessions when buildings are back in use
- Deliver courses through alternative means, using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Blackboard, on-line materials, or distance learning, or any combination of these, as a short- or longer-term mechanism for delivering the curriculum.

Students will be advised of the closure of the building and alternative arrangements through the VLE, social media, local communications from academic department and the University's external website and intranet.

These measures will minimise detriment to the student experience.

Risk: Industrial Action prevents effective delivery of significant amounts of our provision

The University is committed to maintaining effective working relationships with its employees and works with the campus trade unions to achieve outcomes that enhance and, where necessary, minimise any impact on the student experience. However, it may be the case that national action in respect of joint negotiation leads to industrial unrest.

The University has a voluntary agreement with the recognised trade union representatives. This agreement outlines how the University will inform and consult staff.

Where the University is affected by industrial action, the University will seek to re-arrange its services to minimise the disruption to students; where significant disruption is likely, the University will invoke its business continuity procedures and implement the actions required to maintain operations.

Risk: The unanticipated departure or unavailability of members of staff

Although staff turnover at the University is historically low, and in normal circumstances is planned and/or anticipated, members of staff engaged in course delivery will occasionally leave the University at short notice or might be unavailable because of ill health or other personal circumstances.

The University seeks to limit this through appropriate succession planning and arranging its teaching workloads so that cover can be provided, and single points of failure are limited. In the event of this risk crystallising, the University will seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience (e.g. experienced associate lecturers) into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid

disruption to students or to programme delivery.

Risk: Recurrence of Covid-19 Pandemic associated restrictions

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and periods of varying restrictions the University has monitored and continues to routinely monitor learning and progression arrangements to ensure high-quality student experience and outcomes. Should future pandemic restrictions be necessary, the University will comply with Government guidelines in respect of educational settings and may adjust delivery models and regulations to ensure the safety of our communities. Where delivery changes are unavoidable, these will be communicated in a clear and timely fashion to students and staff and additional or exceptional support mechanisms and regulations are put in place as necessary.

Refunds & Compensation

If the University is unable to preserve continuation of study owing to one or more of the events identified within this Plan, the University will, in accordance with its Terms and Conditions of study, provide as much notice as possible and work closely with the students concerned to minimise the disruption and impact on them.

The University may identify circumstances in which financial compensation is appropriate. In most cases this will entail the offer of a full or partial refund of tuition fees in recognition of the loss of service and the impact on the student.

Exceptionally, the University may also decide to offer additional financial compensation in recognition of the distress and inconvenience caused to students, or where a student has demonstrated financial loss as a direct result of non-continuation of study. Decisions on whether to offer additional financial compensation will be guided by the University Complaints Panel in accordance with the [Student Complaints Policy and Procedure](#), and the expectations of the Office for Students and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Students can submit a complaint under the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure if they are dissatisfied with the actions taken to minimise the disruption and action on them.

All students at the University will pay a tuition fee for their course or research programme unless the course/research programme is provided under a contract for funding by a third party and students are not required to pay a tuition fee. A student is liable to pay tuition fees for the full period that they are enrolled as a student, unless exceptions and exemptions apply which are detailed in the fees and funding provisions of our [Terms and Conditions](#).

Students are entitled to a refund of any over-payment of tuition fees and other specific circumstances as detailed in our [Terms and Conditions](#). Terms of payment are also set out in this document. Refunds are conditional on the receipt of the specified University documentation.

Further information about specific fees and funding and where students can access further support and guidance can be found on the [University's website](#).

Who to contact about this plan

If you have any queries about this plan or its provisions, please contact:

Governance Services on governance@shu.ac.uk.