Student Protection Plan

Introduction

As a registered provider of Higher Education, Loughborough College must publish a Student Protection Plan. This is intended to provide assurance to current and future students and the Office for Students (OfS) that there are appropriate arrangements in place to protect the continuation and quality of study, if a risk to a student's continued study materialises.

This plan identifies the different types of risks, the likelihood of them happening and the actions we will implement to mitigate these risks and minimise the impact they may have.

Risk Assessment

Loughborough College is a single campus Further Education College providing Higher Education through a number of validating agreements with partner HEIs. Within this section we have identified a number of potential risk which could result in non-continuation for students.

Within this section 'Teach-Out' is referred to as a mitigation measure for course closures. This is a phased method, allowing affected existing students enrolled on a programme to complete their studies in the original timescale before the closure of the programme occurs.

The assessment of risks resulting in non-continuation for students are as follows:

Risk: That the Loughborough College as a whole is unable to operate due to financial performance.
Likelihood: Low
Reason: We have a strong track record of 'good' rating with the ESFA and are predicted to remain above minimum thresholds moving forward.
Mitigation Measures: In the unlikely event that the College is forced to close, we have agreements in place with our validating institutions that those students studying on such programmes would transfer to the HEI provider. For those students studying HN programmes, the College will work with the network of Further Education Colleges in the region to ensure a suitable place is available and students are offered appropriate advice and guidance. This support would include advice and guidance, certification of credits, academic reference and record of achievement.

Risk: The risk that we are no longer able to deliver a programme due to low recruitment and therefore rendering the programme not viable.
Likelihood: Low
Reason: Many of our programmes have elements that infill into other programmes, meaning our cost base remains efficient.
Mitigating Measure: In the unlikely event that a course is required to be closed due to low student numbers, the College is committed to 'teach out' all students already enrolled on the programme. We will review all courses annually to ensure the College's provision still meets the needs of students and the College community.

For applicants to courses that have to be closed, we will make every effort to facilitate and support individual students to find an alternative course here at Loughborough College or with another provider.

Risk: The risk that a validating institution no longer chooses to validate the programmes that we deliver.
Likelihood: Low
Reason: We have a long standing relationship with our validating partners with no cause for concern. The College enjoys a Silver TEF award, and successful QAA & APR outcomes over recent years.
Mitigating Measure: In the unlikely event that a validating institution withdraws from the partnership, the agreements that we have in place allow a notice period to enable the College to 'teach out' all existing students.

Risk: The College loses its Tier 4 licence for international students.
Likelihood: Low
Reason: We have robust systems in place to ensure compliance and have demonstrated this over a number of years without cause for concern.
Mitigating Measure: For minor/medium breaches we would 'teach out' existing students and offer advice and guidance to applicants and work with partner HEIs and local Colleges to find suitable alternatives for them. This would also be the case for existing students should a major breach occur.

Risk: Loss of key teaching staff
Likelihood: Medium
Reason: We have demonstrated that we are able to maintain a stable staffing structure, however unplanned loss of staff is largely out of our control and is a realistic possibility at any given time.
Mitigating Measures: In the unlikely event that the College loses a large number of staff at short notice and in the same subject area, (meaning that the College is unable to run a particular programme) the College has, in the past, been able to recruit staff readily, often at short notice from a large pool of PhD students at partner Universities. This resource has enabled the College to recruit in areas requiring high specialism and we see no reason why this route should diminish.

The College does not offer any post graduate provision where subject specialism would be a higher risk, undergraduate provision is likely to present less of a risk in this area with staffing available in higher volume. The College has also employed staff to deliver on a short-term basis through employment agencies, as a measure of last resort. The loss of support functions would be managed by utilising support from other departments across College in the short term.

Curriculum design will continue to be scrutinised to ensure maximum utilisation and integration of modules and staff across programmes to ensure there is sufficient cover across specialisms. In rare cases more drastic action may need to be taken such as material/ module changes within programmes which will be communicated to students and applicants appropriately.

Risk: External attack of and internal system failure of electronic/IT equipment/systems/networks
Likelihood: Medium
Reason: The college has robust systems in place to monitor and combat cyber-attacks and threats to college systems, however given the global threats to cyber security and the potential impact, particularly on computing and blended programmes, this risk is considered possible.
Mitigation Measure: Planned events such as software updates will be scheduled at times to cause minimal disruption to staff/students and ensure that this is communicated effectively to staff and students. Unplanned events such as malicious acts or cyber-attack can look to be mitigated by ongoing monitoring of potential cyber threats, robust maintenance of College firewalls and daily fireproof back up of college systems.

Refund and Compensation Policy

The college has a refund policy included within its Fees Policy, which is available to students and staff via the website:

http://docs.loucoll.ac.uk/Publication%20Scheme/5.%20Policy%20Documents/Fees%20policy%202017-18.pdf

The College does not currently have a formal policy in place for compensation. In respect of successful student complaints, compensation is considered and awarded on a case-by-case basis, without prejudice and in accordance with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's remedies and redress leaflet (November 2016). The College will ensure that a formal policy is in place by 1st August 2019.

The College considers refunds and compensation to be a remedy of last resort and is committed to working and communicating with students in a timely manner, so that refunds and compensation are unnecessary.

In the unlikely event that compensation is payable to students, the College has (in the past) had reserves / sufficient funds available. The College will actively investigate whether insurance against these costs could be procured. The College will ensure that adequate arrangements are in place to cover these assessed risks by 1st August 2019. The College also intends to invest in initiatives to assist, therefore reducing risk in this area.

Should a course closure result in transfer of a student to a neighbouring institution, the College will communicate with both the student and partner College to ensure that this transition is as smooth as possible and that the student is not disadvantaged as a result. Any outstanding student bursaries that are not subject to an annual award would be honoured.

Communication

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by publishing it on our website and we will include a hard copy to all applicants as part of their information pack. For staff, a copy of this will be available on StaffZone.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by including it in our course change documentation and processes, and in our new programme approval procedures. In addition, the College is developing mandatory training for staff to ensure that any proposed changes to the curriculum or programme of study is not completed without a) consultation with students and b) communication with existing students and applicants.

The student protection plan will form one of a suite of documents that will be highlighted during the student induction process.

Review

This plan will be regularly reviewed during our Academic board meeting cycle to ensure it continues to be relevant. Risk assessments will be analysed by this Board, which will inform an annual refresh of the plan. Our students will be involved in our review by consulting with them via both the Student's Union and through programme representative meetings. Students also have a place on the Academic board, which will ratify any proposed changes.

Actions for the Implementation of the Student Protection Plan

If any risks identified in the plan arise, and the impact on students is deemed more than insignificant we will act immediately, and as part of our response, offer those students suitable and appropriate advice and support. This will differ depending on the type of risk arising, however, we will give as much notice as possible to inform students what will happen and when.

In the event of having to change course structure/ materials, we will inform our existing students by holding wide scale consultation prior to the process commencing. Upon approval of changes, we will communicate with all students in a timely manner and as early as possible, through email and the tutorial process. We will also provide sufficient advice and support for students as is necessary. We will endeavour not to make changes during an academic year and will make every effort to ensure that students engage with the consultation and amendment process. Additionally we will engage with the Student's Union, from whom we will also encourage students to take additional advice and support should the need arise.

We will communicate with new applicants via e-mail, and any other appropriate communication method as identified, as soon as possible, informing them of any changes that have occurred since their application was made.