



# STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

**Policy and procedures for applicants, offer-holders,  
prospective students and students**

AU-LTC-19-2292-B

2019/20

### Policy Summary

This Policy, approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and Senate, sets out what applicants, offer-holders, prospective students and students can expect to happen if a course/programme, or the whole University, should close.

### Related Regulations, Policies, and Guidance

This policy cross references to the *Policy for Withdrawing a Programme or Suspending Recruitment to a Programme*, approved by the Senate, November 2019.

### Version Control

Ref No	Version	Responsible Officer	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date
AU-LTC-19-2292	B	Sarah Davies	Learning and Teaching Committee Senate	20 November 2019	20 January 2020

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The risk that the University should need to close is extremely low, and the risk of your programme of study being discontinued is also low. The University assesses those risks on a regular basis and, in common with all other higher education providers, is required to submit an estimate of risk and a Student Protection Plan as part of its registration with the Office for Students.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 If the University's Student Protection Plan should need to be implemented, the University Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor will communicate with affected students via email, the University student portal and VLE.
- 1.3 In following any of the measures set out below, the University will take into consideration the needs of all students, including those with mobility considerations, those registered with the University's Enabling Team and those studying off-campus or outside the UK.
- 1.4 The Plans set out below are reviewed on an annual basis at a Students' Union Senate and University Senate meeting.
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

## 2 Definitions

**Material components of programmes:** material components of programmes are those elements of a programme that the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has defined as being the information students need to make an informed decision about which programme to follow<sup>2</sup>. It includes: the programme title; the duration of the programme; the programme's core modules, the expected workload; the methods by which the programme is delivered; the general level of experience of the staff involved in the delivery; overall methods of assessment; location; award and the awarding body; whether the programme is accredited and by whom, and tuition fees if they alter beyond any provisos included in offer letters or the Terms and Conditions of Enrolment.

**Programme:** an approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

## 3 University Closure

In the event of the closure of the University, or part of the University, for example a School or Department, the University will put in place the business continuity plans currently in place for each School and Department and:

- use reasonable endeavours to revise the delivery timetable to allow programmes to be taught in buildings that can still be used;
- consider the use of other suitable temporary accommodation within a reasonable distance of the University;
- work with other higher education institutions to enable programmes to be delivered, or implement gradual closure to allow students to complete their studies.

## 4 Programmes and material components of programmes

### Closure or suspension of programmes

If the University is unable to deliver programmes or suspends recruitment to programmes, and that decision has been approved by either the Programme Approval Steering Committee or (for recruitment) the Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee, we will advise applicants, offer-holders, prospective students, students and other stakeholders (such as employers and placement providers), as soon as is reasonably possible. We will also amend any marketing and publicity material and advise the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) as soon as is reasonably possible.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/428549/HE\\_providers\\_-\\_advice\\_on\\_consumer\\_protection\\_law.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428549/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf)

### **i. Offer Holders**

Applicants who have been made offers, but have not yet accepted them, will also be advised of course closures or suspensions and that they may be able to choose another programme or institution.

### **ii. Prospective students**

Where the University has made an offer to an applicant which has then been accepted, the offer holder becomes a prospective student and a contract exists between the University and the student. Therefore, decisions to close or to suspend recruitment to a programme where there are already prospective students may only be made in extreme circumstances and subject to the provisions of the University *Policy for Withdrawing a Programme or Suspending Recruitment to a Programme*. The measures set out in section iii for Current students will apply.

### **iii. Current students**

The University will undertake the following measures to protect a student's continuity of study:

- make arrangements to 'teach out' current students to ensure the programme of study can be completed by all students currently enrolled on the programme;

or

- use all reasonable endeavours, which may include working in partnership with other providers, to deliver a modified version of the same programme or transfer students internally to a similar programme;

and/or

- support students in seeking another higher education provider to enable them to continue their studies.

Students will be informed of their options and the University will provide information and support to assist students in deciding which option to follow. The students on any programme that needs to be taught out will continue to be monitored under the University's normal review processes to maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, the quality of the student experience, and to enable the stated learning outcomes to be achieved.

The above procedures apply to all University students irrespective of where they are studying or their mode of study. For research students, if the area of research could no longer be supervised internally, the University will aim to transfer students to a supervisor at another institution.

## **Changes to material components of programmes**

### **i. Applicants and Offer Holders,**

If the University is unable to deliver material components of programmes we will amend marketing and publicity material as soon as is reasonably possible and advise applicants, and offer-holders of those changes.

### **ii. Prospective and Current Students**

If we are unable to deliver material components of any programme we will advise prospective and current students (current students via the Blackboard VLE, via email and in Student-Staff Committees), setting out what measures will be taken to, wherever is reasonably possible, assure the quality of the student experience, and to enable the stated learning outcomes to be achieved. Students will be informed of their options and the University will provide information and support to facilitate students in deciding which option to follow. Prospective students may choose to cancel their contract with the University.

## **5 Placements, Degree Apprenticeships, Accredited Programmes**

### **i. Placements**

In the event of an employer or institution no longer being able to offer an agreed student placement, there is a range of support mechanisms to enable suitable alternatives to be found, provided by the Careers+Placements team.

In the event of a student not being able to find a placement, or where a placement has been withdrawn and an alternative cannot be secured, some students may have the option of being transferred to a full-time version of their programme. If the placement is a compulsory part of the degree, the Careers+Placements team will work directly with the student to try to source an appropriate alternative.

### **ii. Degree Apprenticeships**

If a student undertaking a degree apprenticeship is made redundant, the University's Careers+Placements team will provide support to that student to try to find alternative employment that will allow them to continue with their studies.

### **iii. Loss of accreditation**

The risk of the University losing accreditation to any of its programmes is low and mitigated by its internal quality assurance procedures.

Where a programme is accredited by an external body and the loss of that accreditation does not substantially alter the value or use of the degree, the University will aim to ensure that no students currently enrolled on the

programme will lose the accreditation status. All applicants, offer holders and prospective students will be informed of the change of accreditation status and supported in transferring their application to another University should they so wish.

Where a programme is accredited by an external body and the loss of accreditation removes the validity/professional pathway for the programme, the University will aim to ensure that no students currently on the programme will lose the accreditation status. All applicants, offer holders and prospective students will be informed of the change of accreditation status and supported in transferring their application to another University should they so wish.

Where a programme loses its accreditation with immediate effect, including all current students, the University will use their best endeavours to recover the accreditation before the end of that academic year and specifically aim to ensure that no final year students receive an unaccredited degree. Should this not be possible the University will seek to transfer all affected students to appropriate degree programmes at other institutions.

Medical students have the additional protection of an arrangement with the University of Leicester which will allow students to transfer their studies to Leicester should there be any removal of General Medical Council authority to deliver the MBChB Medicine programme.

## **6 Partner Provision**

The University works in collaboration with a number of overseas institutions to deliver Aston awards through transnational education (TNE) programmes. The University also works with Further Education colleges and other providers to deliver Aston awards in the UK.

Collaborative Agreements between the University and the delivery partner include arrangements, if necessary, for the planned termination of a programme, cessation of recruitment and the organised teach out of the programme, protecting existing students.

In the event that a partner cannot deliver a planned teach out, the University and the partner will, wherever possible, support the delivery of the programme to current students by:

- working with other educational institutions in the country where the student are based to continue delivery of the programme;
- or
- working with the partner to identify other suitable locations for delivery of the programme by either the partner or Aston's staff .

The University and the partner will provide advice and support to students and to employers of the students (if relevant) before and after termination of a Collaborative Agreement and during a teach-out. The programmes remain

subject to University monitoring and review arrangements until all students have completed.

## **7 Tier 4 Licence**

In the event of the University's Tier 4 licence being suspended and/or revoked, the University will:

- work with UKVI to ensure students can complete their current year of study; or
- allow those students already in receipt of a visa based upon an allocated Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), to enrol and commence their studies; or
- offer students the opportunity to postpone their study until the matter has been resolved; or
- offer the students the ability to switch to another sponsor.

The Advice Zone based in the University Hub is able to offer advice and support to students in the first instance and additional independent advice and support would also be available from the Advice and Representation Centre in the Students' Union.

## **8 Financial Implications**

Where a student needs to transfer programme, or, move to another institution, there may be implications for a student's financial arrangements and the University's Advice Team accessed via the Hub Reception, will be notified of students affected in the event of any the above scenarios. The team will contact affected students and provide detailed information, advice and guidance based on their individual circumstances.

If the University is unable to maintain continuation of study, the refund of tuition fees and other relevant costs will initially be considered in principle by the University's Programme Approval Steering Committee (PASC), which also has within its terms of reference responsibility for considering the withdrawal of programmes of study. PASC will then delegate responsibility to its Chair, in consultation with relevant University Officers, and, depending on the individual circumstances, will determine the level and nature of any compensation to be provided to student(s).

The University's Tuition Fees Charging Policy makes provision for the refund of tuition fees in the usual course of a period of study, for example, withdrawal or a leave of absence, and will apply the following considerations when it is no longer able to preserve continuation of study:

- The University carefully considers losses on a case-by-case basis. The University accepts that these losses can include additional tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider due to a discontinuation of study.

- Students have a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to mitigate their loss. This means that if the University puts forward a reasonable alternative way of delivering the content or activities affected by the discontinuation of study, students will be expected to take it up. If they choose not to, then they may not be able to recover any or part of the loss attributable to the discontinuation of study.
- The University will pay any refunds to the account that originally made the payment. If a student has their fees paid through the Student Loan Company or equivalent, or an employer/other sponsor, the refund will be made to the Loan Company/sponsor. The University has well-established procedures for making payments to the Student Loans Company in respect of students who have taken out tuition fee loans who are deemed to be entitled to a refund of their tuition fees.

## **9 Complaints**

In the event that students are not content with the proposed measures taken by the University to protect the continuation of their study and wish to make a complaint, they are able to do so in accordance with the University's complaints procedure.