



**Wirral Met College**

# **Student Protection Plan 2023/24**

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## **Introduction**

This policy should be read in the context of the College's statutory responsibilities under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA), as well as the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) and the institution's registration with the Office for Students (OfS).

The College seeks to make policies and practice in relation to its students fair, consistent, clear and inclusive. If a student wishes to make a complaint in relation to any aspect of their programme, the College has a formal complaints procedure and the Quality department can assist any student who wishes to progress a complaint. The analysis of the College's complaints are reported through to the board of governors.

The College has undertaken an assessment of potential risks associated with continuity of provision and the likely hood of those risks occurring. The risks have been assessed for continuing students and applicants to the provision.

## **Student Protection plan for the period (2023/24)**

### **1. Assessment of Risk**

- 1.1. Financial Health – **Risk Low**. The College has a robust financial strategy that is regularly monitored by the Board of Governors and the Board Audit Committee. The annual review by the ESFA has judged the College's financial health as 'outstanding'. The College's business plans for the next two years also confirm the measures used to judge financial health will be outstanding.
- 1.2. Programme Viability – **Risk Low**. The College undertakes an annual marketing review, working closely with its university partners and using marketing information and analysis to determine market needs and trends. This ensures that programme demand and currency are continuously under review. In the event of a programme becoming financially unviable, due to for example low take up, the College may choose to remove or replace a programme. In this instance the College undertakes to ensure that it supports all existing students to complete their programme and all applicants would be assisted with alternative provision.
- 1.3. Resources – Staffing - Teaching. **Risk Low**. The College employs c500 staff that have skills to design, deliver and support provision in every sector subject area. The College Staff Development programme provides good continuous professional development to support staff including CPD to specifically support Higher Education delivery, working closely with our University Partners.

- 1.4. Resources – Staffing - Support. **Risk Low.** The College has been judged outstanding in its support of students with high needs in two consecutive Ofsted inspections. This is an important aspect in relation to engaging non-traditional Higher Education students.
- 1.5. Resources – Physical Resources – **Risk Low.** The College has invested over 20 million pounds in the last 5 years to secure high quality resources and learning facilities. The College has an active estates strategy to ensure the highest standards of resources are current, effective and efficient.
- 1.6. Quality – **Risk Low.** The College has an effective Higher Education quality monitoring process that has been approved by the Board and Partner Universities that assures validation, teaching and learning and student contribution.
- 1.7. The risk to existing/continuing students being affected by any of the identified risks is **very low**, only in the most exceptional circumstances would we fail to continue to offer the programme 'as advertised' to continuing students.

## **2. Measures to Mitigate Risk**

- 2.1. The College has a formal governance structure that includes a Board of Governors, a separate Audit Committee, and a separate Finance and Resource committee both comprising of members of the governing body. Each of these committees include a professionally qualified specialist in finance and audit. This is underpinned by a formal risk management process and procedure which identifies and regularly reviews risks that are detailed in the risk register.
- 2.2. The College has two independent professional audit organisations that review risks with the College and agree an independent audit plan to monitor performance and compliance.
- 2.3. The College's vision, mission and strategic direction include a discreet plan for Higher Education; supported by a formal quality assurance process that has been approved by our Partner Universities.
- 2.4. The WMC People Strategy maintains links with temporary recruitment agencies and a database of staffing including retired members of staff.
- 2.5. In the event a programme is not viable, the College would suspend new admissions. Existing/continuing students would not be affected as the college would maintain the delivery of the programme to these students. Applicants affected would be supported by an alternative programme of study, within the college or with the Partner Higher Education Institute, who validate the programme.
- 2.6. A formal approval process is in place for all new provision. Which includes Partner Higher Education validation, business plans, labour market intelligence and market assessment, recruitment, quality and sustainability.

### **3. Refunds and Compensation**

3.1 The College considers refunds and compensation to be a last resort. It is committed to ensuring students are able to continue and complete their studies at the College or a Partner University. It is however important to explain how the College will refund or compensate students if the College is unable to preserve that continuity of study.

3.2 In this Policy a reference to the College no longer being able to preserve continuity of study means that the College has terminated or intends to terminate either:

- (i) a programme of higher education study on which an individual has been offered or accepted a place before that individual can enrol as a student or
- (ii) a programme of higher education study on which a student is enrolled before that student has completed the programme.

It does not include changes to or termination of programmes where all enrolled students who would normally have been expected to complete at the date of termination have done so.

3.3 The College recognises two sets of circumstances, planned mid-programme termination and unexpected programme termination.

#### **3.4 Planned Mid-Programme Termination**

A planned mid-programme termination occurs when the College can no longer preserve continuity but is able to plan and align the termination with the end of an academic year. If such circumstances arise, the College will, when preparing its plan for dealing with the termination, consult the students enrolled on the programme and, as a minimum, will:

- (i) ensure all students on the programme receive the award (for example, certificate or diploma) that recognises the stage they have reached;
- (ii) offer those students advice and support to help them decide whether or not to transfer to a different programme at the College or with the Partner University or seek transfer to a suitable alternative provider to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- (iii) ensure that any student who has been in receipt of a bursary or similar funding and who would have continued to receive that bursary or funding had the programme not terminated receives the remainder of that bursary or funding whether they transfer to a different programme at the College or to the same programme at an alternative provider.

The College will also ensure that it communicates with and compensates individuals who have been offered or who have accepted a place on the programme, to include as a minimum an offer of advice and support to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College, at the Partner University or seek a suitable alternative.

### 3.5 Unexpected Programme Termination

An unexpected programme termination occurs when

- (i) the College has no alternative but to terminate during the course of an academic year
- (ii) or the College has failed to recruit sufficiently to a programme and closes to new applicants to the detriment of individuals who have already been offered or accepted places on that programme.

If such circumstances arise, the College will treat communication and consultation with the students enrolled on the programme as a priority. As a minimum will:

- (i) ensure all students on the programme receive the award (for example, certificate or diploma) that recognises the stage they have reached;
- (ii) offer those students advice and support to help them decide whether or not to transfer to a different programme at the College, at a Partner University or seek transfer to a suitable alternative provider to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- (iii) ensure that any student who has been in receipt of a bursary or similar funding and who would have continued to receive that bursary or funding had the programme not terminated receives the remainder of that bursary or funding whether they transfer to a different programme at the College or to the same programme at an alternative provider.

The College will also ensure that it communicates with and compensates individuals who have been offered or who have accepted a place on the programme, to include as a minimum an offer of advice and support to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College, at the Partner University or seek a suitable alternative.

3.6 In the event of a programme being terminated for reasons outside the control of the College, the College is under no obligation to provide a refund of fees paid. Should monies be refunded in such a situation, this would constitute a gesture of good will and be made without obligation or liability.

## **Compensation**

The refund and compensation plan referred to above will take into consideration all relevant guidance published by the Office for Students, the Students Union or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

## **Payments**

Refunds will normally only be made to the bank and account holder (or other financial institution) that originally paid the tuition fee and will not be paid in cash. This applies whether the student is in receipt of a tuition fee loan from the Student Loans Company, pays their own tuition fees or has their tuition fees paid by a sponsor.

## **General**

This document forms an important part of the Student Contract (enrolment form). It will be reviewed annually.

This policy does not normally apply to individuals who have completed their studies for which they registered as a student with the College.

## **4. Communication with Students**

We publicise our student protection plan to current and future students on the organisation's website and intranet. Hard copies will be made available at enrolment each year to all students studying a HE programme, typically included in their course handbooks.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by incorporating this into the curriculum planning process, new course proposal proforma and providing regular updates, particularly in the HE Forums held throughout the year.

We will review our student protection plan annually at Senior Leadership Level and will seek comments for improvement from staff and students through the HE quality processes.

Our students will be involved in our review by invitation to participate in the College's HE quality assurance process and through strong links with our course representatives with all levels of College management and governance