

Student Protection Plan

Dudley College of Technology

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Student Protection Plan for the period 2022/23 Dudley College of Technology contributes to the prosperity of the town, the Black Country and surrounding areas as a key provider of high quality education, training and skills development and has many features in place to ensure our higher education is successful.

Dudley College of Technology is committed to ensuring that you achieve the best academic outcome for your studies. However, there may be unforeseen circumstances, often outside the College's control, which result in changes having to be made to your studies. Whilst risks are rare, this plan discusses them and how we may mitigate them.

Dudley College of Technology has many systems in place to ensure Higher Education success. The likelihood of the risks outlined of occurring are considered to be low. However, we have considered a wide range of potential scenarios and set out what we could do in each eventuality to ensure you understand our commitment to the successful completion of your studies.

What does the plan cover?

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires the College to have a Student Protection Plan, like this Plan, to protect your interests and detail the steps we would take where significant changes had to take place affecting the quality and/or continuation of your study, such as (but not limited to):

- The college not being able to operate

- Partial or full closure of a site
- Change to programmes
- Loss of accreditation
- Ceasing to deliver programmes or changes to delivery mode
- Staffing issues
- Industrial action

Which students does this plan apply to?

This plan covers Dudley College of Technology students on Higher Education courses. If you are studying with us through a partner institution, because of the nature of our agreement with the relevant University's Student Protection Plan will apply.

How we communicate this plan

We publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by including it as part of the essential information provided to you at enrolment and during your induction period to the College. This plan is also published on the college website and in induction materials.

Student protection plan for the period 2022-23

I. 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 risk that Dudley College of Technology is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance is strong with EBITDA in excess of £4.3m annually.

The risk that we are no longer about to deliver programmes in high specialised areas or material components of our courses is low because all courses are taught by teams of academic staff. Should there be a specific staff absence other academic staff are able to deliver content within the programme.

The risk that a course would need to move sites is small, as Dudley College of Technology provision for HE is deliberately a local model of delivery. Arrangements with partner providers are agreed on that basis.

The risk that a partnership agreement ending would compromise student outcomes is negligible as all contracts around partnership have a teach out clause provided.

The risk that high needs students would not be provided for is very low because we have substantive experience in delivering through FE provision for high needs learners.

The risk that delivery times or mode would need to change is low due to the extensive business planning process within Dudley College of Technology.

Where we anticipate changes which will affect your studies we are committed to:

- Letting you know as soon as possible
- Where appropriate working with student representatives through the student enhancement group to discuss the changes
- Providing you with advice and guidance on the proposed changes and the options that you have applying, where relevant, our Refund Policy

Delivery of HE at Dudley College of Technology is focussed on widening participation for students in employment, from low-income backgrounds, of wide range of ages and from the local community. Our courses are planned to allow students to work, arrange consistent childcare and to travel easily to their place of study. Our priority is in maintaining consistency of delivery.

In the unlikely event of the College losing its accreditation for your programme, full consideration will be given to the nature of our student population. We would consider measures to protect your student experience, such as those below:

- Working with relevant bodies to allow you to complete your year of study/programme
- Where the above is not possible, supporting you to transfer to an appropriate programme at another provider and, where appropriate, financially compensating you where you suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption to your studies
- Assisting you by providing evidence/letters/statements in support of continuation of your studies

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

In order to mitigate risk of not being able to deliver a course component other alternate module would be available to students. Students will be consulted in the event of a material change being necessary. Progression arrangements and recognition of prior learning agreements with HEIs would be reviewed before this change was made.

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We produce a transparent review of financial stability within the college. Changes in material circumstances would be evident to the public and to students before enrolment.

We have a continued staff development programme to ensure that we grow expertise in potential shortage areas. We operate a progression planning system to ensure that trained staff are available throughout the taught and management sectors of college. In the event of staff shortages we would look to recruit temporary staff if we were not able to cover this internally. Temporary staff would be extensively supported by our outstanding practitioners to ensure consistent quality of delivery.

We have external funding in place to support the building works and facility development for our HE provision. The risk that we do not have suitable space to house new provision is small – new provision is business planned around estate growth and development.

Dudley College of Technology has grown year on year over the last 5 years and has committed substantial resources to increasing HE provision with robust business continuity plans in place for all college business, including HE. We have no plans to reduce any existing HE provision or facilities but will aim to improve HE facilities and to offer provision in transformational sectors to align with the college's strategic plans.

The risk of a partnership delivered programme ceasing to run is small. Should this be the case our contracts with lead partners have a 'teach out' clause which would prevent any impact on enrolled students. An alternate course would be in place once that arrangement had ended. Information would be published on the college website and any students who had enquired or applied for the programme would be contacted with full details.

The risk of an individual course not running is small. In the event of interested parties or enrolled numbers being non-viable financially an alternate model of delivery would be proposed which may involve different modes of delivery, module choices or students being infilled with other student groups.

Days and modes of delivery are published on the college website. In the event that any details change they will be updated and any students who have applied will be notified. We endeavour not to make changes to the published days of study. For courses with a high proportion of employer funded places delivery days will remain consistent from the point of publication as the highest priority.

In the event that there is disruption to programme delivery we will, rather than closing the programme, take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption. These may include any one of the following, depending on what is appropriate for the circumstances:

- temporary short-term suspension of programme delivery
- changes to the delivery location or method, which may include distance learning.

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- delivering a modified version of the same course.
- offering you the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme
 - providing reasonable support to you to access a programme run by another provider, including making arrangements for the transfer of your credits and information about your academic progress. We also have progression agreements with local universities partners that allow students to transfer to continue their programme of study.
- provision to 'teach out' a course for existing students.

We are committed to letting you know about any proposed closures as early as possible, setting out clear information about what we plan to do and what your options are. We have a formalised procedure for closing or withdrawing programmes/courses, taking account of the need to safeguard the interests of any students and interests of applicants. A decision will normally be made giving students approximately two-weeks' notice.

Where you are required to transfer your programme/course, or move to another campus, there may be implications for your student finance arrangements and you may need support from the College to access new arrangements such as through transport, support with childcare or caring responsibilities etc.

If you are affected, the College's Student Services team will contact you and provide detailed information, advice and guidance based on this plan, our Fees Refund Policy.

Should industrial action affect your studies we have established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with recognised Trade Unions. We are committed to maintaining employee relations culture and working with Trade Union colleagues to achieve solutions to matters that may arise. Should industrial action occur, we will endeavour to ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible and take any reasonable steps to ensure learners are not disadvantaged by the action.

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

Our refund policy is available here:

<https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/portals/0/downloads/College%20Fee%20Refund%20Policy.pdf>

We have appropriate cash reserves, given our high EBITDA which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study. We would anticipate both the number and the likelihood to be very low.

We do not feel it necessary to have insurance in place to cover refunds as our cash reserves are greater than the sums in question.

The risk of not being able to preserve continuation of study is very low.

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

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students via the college website and within induction materials, given to students after enrolment onto the HE course.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by validating all course changes through the Key Client Group meetings to ensure that changes to courses do not have a detrimental impact on students.

Our students will be involved in our review by through learner voice meetings and directly through discussions with the lead HE rep, who runs a student enhancement group.

We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course both by email and through discussion within their tutorials and with tutors.

We will endeavour to give students 30 days' notice when we need to make material changes to their course, though we would perceive this to be extremely low risk.

If we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan we will use our extensive learner support process to support students collectively and individually.

Through learner services and with support from partnership HEIs, we will put in place arrangements to ensure that our students have access to independent advice if we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan.

How we review this plan

We will review our student protection plan within the HE Board of Studies meeting, which is attended by the lead HE student representative

We review our Student Protection Plan during the academic year by ensuring it is included within the existing annual reviews of documents related to students. There is also an extensive programme of focus groups carried out with a range of groups throughout the year. We ensure the wider student population can become involved with the review process by publicising and promoting these.

Staff are made aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes by an impact assessment as part of the process of curriculum planning and programme validation. The Student Protection Plan is approved by the HE Board of Study Committee, the Senior Leadership Team (SLG) and the Corporation. Higher education risks form part of the College's Risk Register which is regularly reviewed by the SLG and our Corporation. The Student Protection Plan is in place to address circumstances which may arise and result in the College making changes which may affect current students. We reserve the right to amend the Student Protection Plan from time to time based on legal or regulatory change affecting you, us or best practice in the higher education sector. The College does not accept any liability for any consequential or other economic loss (including loss of profits, loss of goodwill or loss of opportunity) resulting from any of the matters covered by this Plan. Only foreseeable loss will be covered by the College.