

Provider's name: Wakefield College

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## **Student protection plan for the period 2018-2021**

### **Introduction**

As a registered provider of higher education, Wakefield College is required to publish a Student Protection Plan ("the Plan") by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The purpose of the plan is to protect the interests of our students in circumstances which lead to a material change in their studies, for example through course closure or programme changes.

The Plan will identify the types of risk the College considers may be relevant, and the types of event which may lead to these risks. It will outline what the College will aim to do to minimise the impact of the events. The Plan will also outline the perceived likelihood of each type of risk.

The College has been delivering higher education provision since the early 1990s and has partnerships in place with well-established Universities – the University of Hull, Leeds Beckett University and the University of Huddersfield – as well as with Pearson for the delivery of higher national certificates and diplomas.

For those students on programmes franchised by the University of Huddersfield, the Student Protection Plan published by the University is the document relevant to your studies.

This plan is considered to have a duration of three years – the duration of the longest programme of full time higher education study that the College currently offers. It will however, undergo annual review.

### **Risk Assessment**

The risk that the provider is unable to operate is very low because Wakefield College has enjoyed robust financial health in recent years. The financial health of the College is evaluated on an annual basis by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). In doing so, the ESFA consider a range of financial performance indicators, and assess the robustness of financial planning undertaken by the College. In recent years, we have been assessed as having outstanding financial health; the highest category available. The College has a business continuity plan in place which covers those risks likely to be faced by any large organisation, for example flood or fire. Mitigation for these kinds of risks includes ongoing risk assessments and a regular safety inspection programme by our Estates department.

Although the College is publicly marketing for sale the Thornes Park campus, alternative arrangement plans are already established and will be formally implemented during the 2018/19 academic year. The risk attached to no longer delivering provision at Thornes Park Campus is therefore very low.

The risk of our validating Universities withdrawing their validation support is moderate, as the College has already experienced this on two separate occasions. Relationships with our validating Universities are, however, very strong and all our partners have provided assurances that validation is an ongoing element of their strategic direction.

The risk of closure of the part of the College campus dedicated to higher education provision is considered very low as the building (the Advanced Skills and Innovation Centre) was only completed towards the end of academic year 2016/17.

The risk of programme closure is moderate due to the need to maintain specific levels of student numbers to maximise student experience and ensure the financial viability of the programmes. Bursaries and scholarships are available to all our qualifying higher education students.

The risk of changes to programme content is moderate, with in-year changes considered to be low risk. This is because programmes are annually reviewed by the delivery teams, drawing on student and external stakeholder feedback, and this can often result in moderations to programmes.

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**Risk Mitigation**

If one of our validating partners withdraws from our collaborative partnership, the College will be given an appropriate notice period which allows all registered students to complete their studies, irrespective of duration of programme or mode of attendance (a process known as 'teach out'). Depending on the timing of the notice within the recruitment cycle, the University may permit one final cohort to enrol as offers of study may have already been made. The College has two validating partners in order that alternative programme validations can be undertaken if one were to withdraw. The College already has experience of this risk occurring and has successfully managed it on both occasions with the full support of the relevant validating partner.

If a circumstance arose whereby the Advanced Skills and Innovation Centre was unavailable for the delivery of programmes, alternative accommodation would be found elsewhere on the College campus, although this may lead to necessary timetable changes. This would be implemented following consultation with the affected student cohort(s). Equality impact assessments will also be carried out.

If the College were to have to implement course closure on one or more of its programme of studies, all currently registered students will be communicated with to provide reassurance that they will not suffer disadvantage as they will be permitted to complete their studies, irrespective of duration of programme and mode of attendance. Students within a recruitment cycle and therefore not yet enrolled on the programme will be communicated with as soon as a decision to close has been made and provided with advice and guidance on their next steps. This will include information relating to other suitable courses at the College which they may wish to transfer to. In addition, the College is a member of two District wide partnerships – Go Higher West Yorkshire and the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges – and students in the recruitment cycle will be advised of suitable alternative courses delivered by other members of those partnerships where no viable alternative exists within the College.

The annual review cycle for the College's higher education provision can lead to modifications being made to programmes. Many of these will be minor in nature but will be fully considered by the validating University to ensure that they do not adversely impact upon the academic integrity and quality of the programme. Wherever possible, the changes are made at the end of an academic year and implemented in readiness for the start of the next academic year to minimise disruption to students. On occasion however, changes are required in year and, at times, may comprise major changes. In all such cases students, and other relevant stakeholders, will be consulted as part of the process. The validating University will convene a panel to consider the proposed changes and ensure that academic integrity is maintained. The implications of any approved changes will be communicated to the relevant student cohort and mitigation put in place to ensure no disadvantage occurs, for example, an extension of summative deadline or arrangements for additional tuition will be agreed. In recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach would be inappropriate in most cases, the individual circumstances of the relevant student cohort will be taken into account at all times.

**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**

- *The College's draft Refund and Compensation policy forms part of this application.*
- *This policy must progress through usual College approval processes and is therefore currently in draft only and not yet available to students. It will be in place and fully available on the public website and via the College's HE Student Moodle VLE page in conjunction with the publication of the Student Protection Plan once approved*

**Refund and Compensation**

The College will publish its approved Refund and Compensation Policy on its public website and on its HE Student Moodle VLE site.

The Policy provides clear and accessible guidance to students around the circumstances under which refunds, or compensation may be payable to students, their sponsor or employer and the Student Loans Company. The Policy also sets out the process for considering claims and acknowledges that each case will have its own set of specific circumstances to take into account.

**Communication with Students**

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by uploading it to our public website, in our higher education section. We will also ensure that it is available on our HE Student Moodle page (Moodle being the College's VLE) – this page is embedded in each programme page and students are attached by their study cohort.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes by requiring written confirmation of such consideration as part of the proposal. Any changes to the Plan (either as a result of the annual review, or by necessity during the academic year) will be highlighted to staff and students.

In any circumstance whereby, the risks identified in the Plan happen and the impact upon the students is more than insignificant, as much notice as is possible will be given to all of those affected. Communications will include information about what will happen and when and regular updates will be issued when new information becomes available. Communication will be made via the method which the affected cohort deem to be most appropriate for their needs. A named contact will always be assigned to the action. Advice, information and guidance will be provided to students, both collectively and individually, and all relevant service areas will be engaged in this process (for example, Finance and the Higher Education Student Support Team)

The Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Higher Education Quality and Standard Group which includes a Student Representative and also representatives from our validating partner Universities.