

New College Swindon (UKPRN: 10004579)

This document has 2 sections to it:

- 1) The Student Protection Plan presented as it will be published to students - pages 1 to 4
- 2) The closure process that will be followed by the college in the event of risks crystallising – Pages 5 to 7

1. Student Protection Plan [2021-22]

What is the Student Protection Plan?

The Office for Students (OfS) requires the college to publish a Student Protection Plan incorporating an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, the risk mitigation measures we have in place and the arrangements for supporting you in the event that the college is no longer able to preserve continuation of study.

This plan is applicable to all students, regardless of location of study, including registered, franchised and subcontracted provision.

A sample group of our HE students were consulted to ensure that the Student Protection Plan is clear and accessible.

What are the risks the College has identified in relation to my studies?

The college has considered a range of risks that could have the potential to affect our ability to be able to deliver our programmes. We detail below what these potential risks are to you as a student, and how we will do our very best to lessen the likelihood of them happening at all or if they do occur, and to minimise the effect they may have your studies.

Financial Risk

The risk that New College Swindon as a whole is unable to operate is very low because the financial performance is rated 'good' by the Education and Skills Funding Agency for 2018-19, this has continued in 2019-20. After adjusting for merger-related costs, the proposed budget for the merged college suggests that this will continue beyond the academic year.

Risk to premises

We have business continuity plans to deal with natural disasters, terrorist attack, or accidental events all of which could lead to loss of use for part or the whole campus. As the college is located on two sites each of which has a number of separate buildings, the risk to loss of use of the whole campus is very unlikely. Disruption to teaching in specific areas can be minimised by relocating classes where any temporary damage or loss to teaching areas has occurred, for example as a result of localised fire or flood.

Risk to delivery of programmes

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver programmes in highly specialised areas in the next three years is low to moderate because we have cross over of expertise in most areas within staff teams. However in some specialist areas we along with others in the sector sometimes find it challenging to recruit to posts where a very sought after expertise is required, for example within Engineering disciplines.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses is also low to moderate because our modules can be taught within teams of academic staff, with a breadth of knowledge. We

tend to have a crossover of skills within teams however in some cases certain expertise is needed for specific modules and this can be a challenge to secure as mentioned above.

We recognise that for part-time students who are only in College a short time each week, it is vital that we communicate any issues with staffing, or resulting timetable changes swiftly and effectively. Those sponsored by employers will also need information to disseminate potential changes to their employers in good time.

Risks arising from withdrawal of awarding body

The risk that our awarding bodies may withdraw from our contracts is low as our performance is regularly monitored and systems are in place to flag up any quality issues throughout the student academic year in order to take actions and safeguard your student experience. In the unlikely event of the withdrawal of an awarding body, the college will work with them to ensure your experience is protected by clear closure policies and to ensure that the agreed procedures for teaching out of programmes are adhered to, and where possible, you are able to complete your programme with us.

Risks arising from suspension or closure of a programme

A programme of study may be suspended to recruitment, or close altogether in some cases, as a result of:

- a) A lack of applications/enrolments- this is due to the need to protect the student experience in preventing courses running which have very small numbers, or those which are not financially viable, or;
- b) Where we are unable to effectively resource the programme in terms of staffing, accommodation or availability of specialist equipment.

In such circumstances where the programme has current cohorts studying or due to progress on the programme, teaching out the current cohort of students is always the preferred and usual outcome of a course closure or suspension, as is it the least disruptive to our students, and keeps the risk of disruption to students low. The teaching out agreement is formed between the college and the awarding body to allow you to continue your studies through to completion of your current award. (This may not include progression from FD to 'top-up' where this is a separate programme).

Given that in a teaching out situation, we may have a reduced staff team and/or reduced breadth of expertise, for only one or two year groups, rather than the full complement of year groups, it is a low risk that we may need to adapt the course structure or timetable, in consultation with you and your student cohort, in order to preserve our ability to teach the programme through to completion.

What could the College do to mitigate those risks that have been identified as moderate/reasonably likely to crystallise?

Risk to delivery of programmes

If we became aware that we would be unable to deliver courses in specialised programmes in the next three years, we will put in place a teaching out plan for the existing cohorts of students, to safeguard your student experience and ensure that you can continue to study and achieve the intended final award. This teaching out plan will be drafted in consultation with your student cohort, and take into account your views and wishes where practicably possible and where doing so will not jeopardise the overall aims and intended award relating to the programme of study.

If we were no longer able to deliver material components of specific courses which rely on specialist skills, such as Engineering or Computing, we would consider which of the following options would bring about the preferred outcomes for the students.

We would:

- Bring in suitable staff expertise through agency cover, or sharing expertise with other institutions, whilst continuing to recruit suitable staff in a timely manner if this did not resolve the matter, we would then:
- Consult with the students for possible changes to the modules which would allow for current staff expertise
- Consider other members of staff who might have expertise in other specialisms which students would prefer, in order to make changes to the course structure
- Provide training for existing staff to allow for delivery of specialist modules
- Consider, with the student cohort, the possibility of transfer to other institutions for continuation of studies

Once a decision has been reached on how the course will proceed, an addendum to the original Programme of Study and Handbook detailing the changes, will be issued to each student affected by the change/s for their agreement and signatory.

How can the college ensure I am not financially disadvantaged in the event that due to any of the identified risks occurring, I am not able to continue to study here?

The College has a Study Agreement and Refund policy which refers to procedures to ensure that refunds and/or compensation can be paid out to eligible students in the event of a programme being closed, or all or part of a programme becoming unavailable.

The college makes provision for:

- Refunds in full or part, subject to attendance for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company*.
- Refunds in full or part, subject to attendance for students who pay their own tuition fees.
- Refunds for students in full or part, subject to attendance whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor*.
- The payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course.
- Commitments to honour student bursaries (where these are paid by the College)
- Compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study.
- Compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

Where a student's tuition fees are paid through student finance or by an employer sponsor, these will be refunded to those organisations according to the individual percentage of course attendance recorded.

In such an event the College has cash reserves sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those groups affected.

How will the College ensure that students and staff will know about the student protection plan, and that it is kept up to date?

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by displaying it on our website and provide a link to this in your Student Course Handbooks.

We will also ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes, by adding our plan and the process diagram to our suspension and closure policy, and provide a link to this information in our Course Handbooks.

We will review our Student Protection Plan annually. Comments about the plan will be collated as and when they arise, from students or staff, and the review would also be based on your experiences of the plan and how it was implemented, should it become relevant during your period of study.

All of you as HE Students will be involved in our review as the plan will be added as an agenda item for the Student Experience Forum during Semester two, for each Programme cohort. Feedback provided by students would inform any amendments to be made to the plan.

What happens if the plan needs to be put into action?

The college Academic Board ensures that there is good governance and that any risks to provision is identified and discussed in order to take swift and appropriate action. In the event of a potentially significant loss of provision, for example due to loss of franchise, the board will initiate the Student Protection Plan accordingly, and have oversight of the process, including any refunds or compensation deemed appropriate in the circumstances which have arisen.

, In all circumstances where the plan is activated, we will hold a course team meeting with the students and staff to ascertain if the course is being changed, suspended or closed as a result of the crystallisation of any of the identified risks. We will give you 10 working days' notice if we need to make material changes to your course.

In the event of a course closure or suspension decision, we will then write to you and all students affected to inform you of the results of these discussions. This may include an invitation to a further meeting with the course team, and a management representative.

We would then arrange for appropriate guidance such as financial and careers advice and support to be available to students collectively and individually. This would be extended to include communication with employers where students are financially sponsored, or where material changes to the course might have an impact on job roles, promotion or required skills.

We would also consult with other institutions to be able to provide advice on alternative courses and, with due regard to the Student Transfer Policy, how you might be able to transfer with credit, and if so, how this can be arranged, should a transfer of institution be necessary.

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan:

Lynne Plested, Vice Principal HE & Curriculum: lynneplested@swindon.ac.uk and
Nicola Pedley, HE Manager, nicolapedley@swindon.ac.uk.

2. Course Suspension/Closure Process

This process is designed to outline the actions and communications that must take place when a decision is reached to suspend or close a programme of Higher Education. Please note that for suspension/closure of franchised programmes, the relevant University process must be followed in consultation with the appropriate University and College management.

The College has a Student Protection Plan, which identifies the risks that the College will no longer being able to continue to deliver specific Unit/Module subjects or courses, where suspension or closure may occur. This Plan outlines the actions the college will take to mitigate these risks, and how students will be consulted and informed of any decisions relating to non-continuation of studies. This document, together with the Student Protection Plan, should be considered in decision making and are available on our website under Higher Education, Policies and Processes.

The attached form should be completed by the Curriculum Manager with responsibility for the programme in question. The form should be completed following consultation with the staff involved in the delivery of the programme, and once agreement for closure or suspension has been reached, details of the rationale for closure and teaching out arrangements can be included.

The Suspension/Closure form once completed (see appendix 1), should be signed off by the named relevant departments to ensure the required actions are taken. This is to minimise the effect on applicants, notifying them in good time, and to avoid any misinformation to stakeholders and interested parties in removing the course from both internal and publicly available information.

Preserving the student experience

It is crucial that when discussing suspension/closure of a programme, the experience of the remaining students on the programme is safeguarded. It is usual practice that remaining groups are informed of the decision in a timely manner, or involved in the process of reaching that decision.

Attention needs to be given to the impact of the removal or temporary loss of the programme and the resulting reduction in student cohort/s on staffing, student support, reduced accommodation or resourcing etc. and any potential impact this may have on quality assurance. Enhanced monitoring of the student experience during a teaching out period is best practice, and additional questions can be added to the Student Experience Forum agenda as deemed appropriate.

The process diagram (see appendix 2) should be used as a tool for guidance for both staff and students to ensure the suspension or closure of a programme is managed effectively.

**Appendix 1
HE Suspension or Closure: Withdrawal from Recruitment Form**

Programme title:	
Programme code:	
Curriculum Area:	
Awarding Body:	

Programme Leader:	
Curriculum Manager:	
Please tick as appropriate:	<input type="checkbox"/> Suspension <input type="checkbox"/> Closure/withdrawal
Date of decision:	

RATIONALE: *Please detail how the decision to close/suspend was arrived at, and the rationale for the decision, which could include low applications, quality concerns, changes to employer needs etc.*

CONSULTATION: *Please explain how the remaining students and those in the application process will be consulted or informed of the suspension/closure, and what advice and help will be given to applicants.*

TEACHING OUT INFORMATION: *Please detail below the number of students remaining on the programme and estimated date for final completion of programme delivery.*

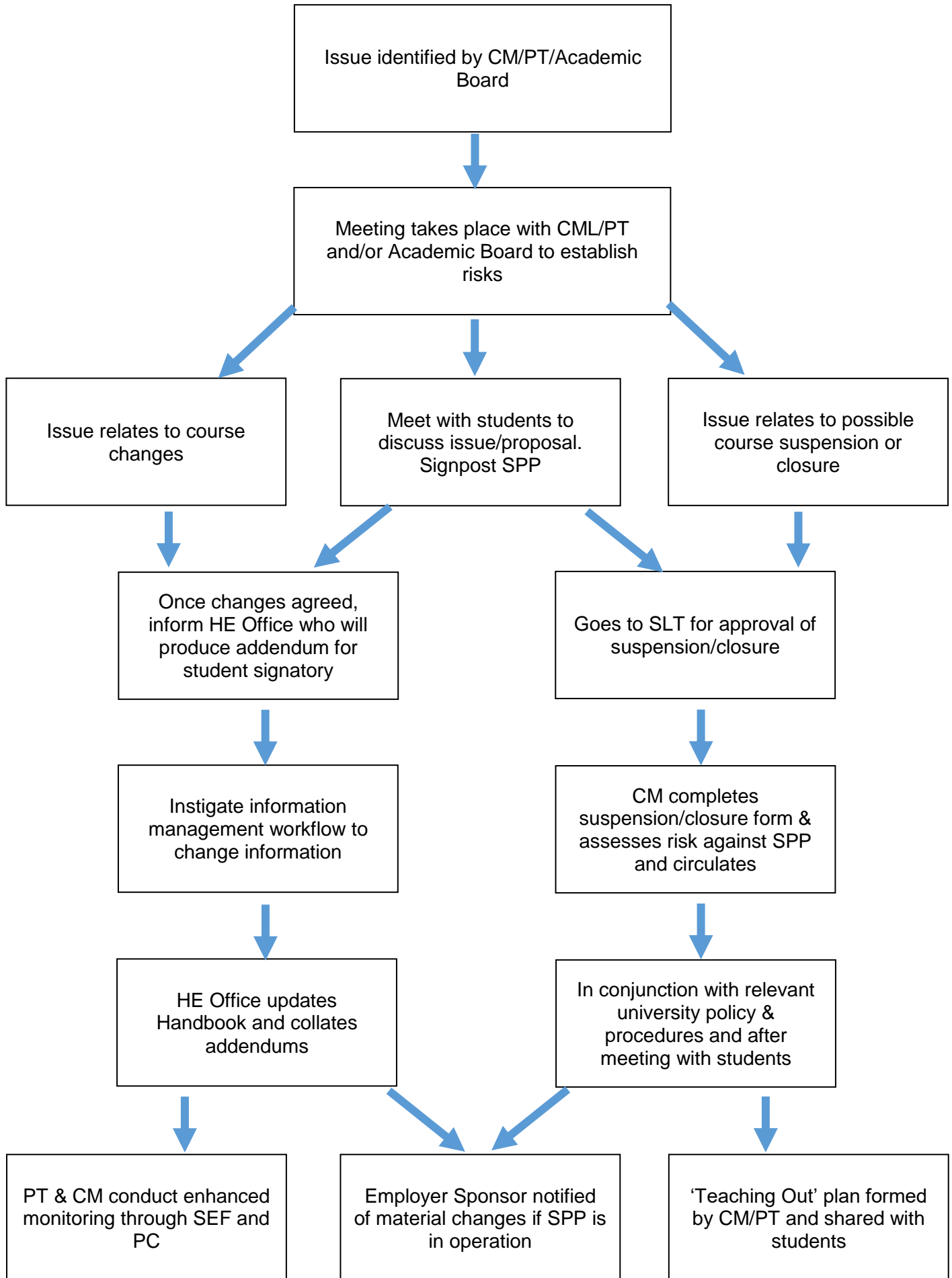
Date of last recruitment:

Reporting/Notification of suspension/closure decision:

Student Services		Finance	
HE Office		Marketing	
MIS		CDU/Library	

CONFIRMATION OF ACTIONS:

FINANCE	Amend Finance information SFE portal	DATE:
HE ADMISSIONS	Suspension/Removal from UCAS and notification of applicants	DATE:
MARKETING and CDU/Library	Removal of programme details from all information (web and hard copy)	DATE:
ACADEMIC BOARD	Agenda item and minutes	DATE:



Key					
CM	Curriculum Manger	PC	Programme Committee	SEF	Student Experience Forum
		PT	Programme Team	SPP	Student Protection Plan