

Introduction and Background

West Nottinghamshire College is a large provider of primarily ESFA funded further education programmes, with Higher Education programmes offered through two partner validating universities and directly delivered HNDs and HNCs validated by the awarding body Pearson. The college is an exempt charity formed through the further and higher education act and is afforded the protections of such institutions through central government. The college has offered Higher Education programmes for a significant number of years and has long standing and positive working relationships with its validating universities, in particular, the college is the largest and longest standing partner with the University of Derby.

National Student Survey results place satisfaction ratings above further education colleges delivering higher education; the college was awarded TEF silver in 2018.

Risks and mitigating activity

The college is committed to preserve the continuity of study for its Higher Education offer, this protection plan sets out an assessment of risk and mitigating actions that the college would take to ensure that disruption to the study of students is kept to a minimum.

Whilst the college's higher education provision and provision generally is considered good or better, no business exists without risk. The college keeps a corporate risk register which considers at a high level risks which would impact in its ability to continue to offer the courses that it does. Alongside, the college has a business continuity plan which puts in place measures to minimise disruption to students and to the college's operations in the event of a catastrophic event that would close operations for more than one day. The business continuity plan is tested on a regular basis with provisions made for the delivery of curriculum at alternative venues should one of the college buildings not be usable.

The risk to the college of planned site closure and as a result the loss of specialist facilities is minimal. The college has invested £50m in the redevelopment of its estate and this has included the consolidation of provision on to one main site at Derby Road, and two specialist centres for engineering and construction. As all of these buildings are in exceptional condition and cater for large volumes of students on an annual basis there is no foreseeable plan for the future closure of sites. As such the risk of loss of provision as a result of loss of specialist facilities is negligible.

The risk of not being able to deliver whole or part of a programme as a result of staff absence or of specialist staff leaving the organisation is medium. Some of the college's higher education programmes rest on the expertise of specialist staff and in some teams this could lead to a single person dependency for specific and specialist modules. However, this is likely to affect the delivery of certain modules rather than the delivery of the whole programme and the college would rearrange delivery schedules on programme to accommodate unforeseen staff changes in order to provide time for a replacement to be employed or contracted. The college works closely with partner universities and as a result of strong partnership working would be able to call upon the expertise of staff within partner universities for programmes validated by them should the need

arise, the college also works with an extensive employer network where expertise for certain specialist modules could be acquired. The college has a range of colleagues with the ability and necessary qualifications to teach on higher education programmes more generally and is constantly developing and updating staff skills and knowledge to ensure that risks related to staffing resource are mitigated. Where the college knows of a single person dependency teams have a succession plan in place to mitigate the risks associated with the loss of this expertise.

The risk associated with the cancellation of a programme is medium. It may be necessary to review the programme offer if the minimum number of students to guarantee a positive student experience or the viability of the offer are at risk. This will primarily occur prior to the commencement of the programme and be based on the number of applications for the programme. These decisions are usually made well in advance of the commencement of the course so that these decisions can be communicated to applicants and alternatives within the college or with another provider can be explored. Specialist advice and guidance would be offered to applicants in this situation and be based on the applicant's aspirations in terms of progression and career. In the rare situation when the college makes the decision to cease a programme offer mid-year, the college is committed to 'teaching out' those programmes. This means that teaching would continue for enrolled students to the completion of their programme of study. The college has a course closure procedure which is attached to this protection plan for information.

The college may consider a change to validation body whether that be the national awarding body or partner university, the risk of such a change is medium. Such decisions will be based upon student feedback and suitability of modules and course offering to meet student needs. Changes to validating body will be made with the specific intention of adding to the student's experience and not detracting from it. However, any decision to change validating body would not affect continuing students on programme. Courses would not be offered within the college's prospectus without planning approval as a minimum from partner universities and students already on programme with the outgoing partner university would complete their programme of study with that awarding body.

There may be other circumstances which lead to the collapse of collaborative arrangement or withdrawal of accreditation, this would usually be as a result of the quality of provision on offer at the college. As such, and in light of robust quality assurance processes we would consider the risk of this as low. Nonetheless the college has a contingency plan in place with a preferred option of 'teaching out'. Transfer to another programme would be considered as a last resort.

We consider the risks of our partner universities or awarding body losing their accreditation status to be low. The college chooses to work with nationally recognised awarding bodies and works with long established and high quality university partners; these factors form a major consideration in due diligence when selecting a partner university.

Supporting policies and procedures

Closure suspension and changes to programmes – the college's policy on closure or suspension of programmes is attached for information. In essence any decision to close, amend or suspend a programme of study at Higher Education Level would be considered by HE Academic Standards Committee and would need the approval of the Head of HE and International and a member of the Executive Team. This action will only be approved once the respective area has presented a communication and mitigation plan to minimise disruption to students or potential students.

Refunds and compensation policy – the college has a refunds and compensation policy, which is attached to this document.

Requests for compensation will be considered and material detriment to the student will be taken into account. Students wishing to claim compensation should utilise the college’s complaints procedure.

Communicating with students

The college will publish its student protection plan on the college website both within its Higher Education Section and within a general policies and documents section. A copy of the plan will be published on the student portal. Student advocates have been engaged with the drafting of this version of the protection plan.

A summary of the student protection plan and related policies and procedures will be incorporated into the college’s terms and conditions document which forms part of our applicant pack, with links provided as to where students can access the full documents. All students will be provided with a link to the protection plan and related policies as part of their induction.

The protection plan has been circulated to all staff who work with and support higher education students at the college. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis, this review will include representation with any subsequent changes being notified to current and continuing students.