**University of Sunderland**UKPRN: 10007159

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**STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2019/20**

**1. Assessment of risks**

This Student Protection Plan sets out what measures we have in place to protect you as our students in the event that a risk to the continuation of your studies should arise. The type of event or changes which might cause such a risk are also detailed below. This plan has been approved by our regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), and is available to all current and potential students and applicants. The measures contained in this plan are in addition to the protections you have under consumer protection law, and do not impinge on your consumer rights. We retain the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to course, programme and module content year on year, and these in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures. However, if you feel the course as delivered varies significantly from what you expected, you can raise this through the University’s established complaints procedures, including taking your case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, and may be able to seek recourse under consumer or contract law

In designing and seeking approval for this plan, we have worked with our regulator, the OfS, to ensure it addresses our specific circumstances: the diverse nature of the University’s provision, which includes campuses in three cities, and collaborative arrangements with a number of partners in the UK, programmes with professional accreditation, and programmes in specialised areas where there are not many other providers in the UK.

This plan will be triggered if:

* we decide to discontinue your specific course
* we stop teaching this discipline
* we decide to close the campus location in which the course is taught and cannot find suitable premises at a nearby location
* we decide to cease operating altogether
* we can no longer provide the course to you for any other reason, for example:
	+ we cease operating through no choice of our own
	+ we lose the right to provide the course or qualification
	+ we lose our tier 4 licence which permits us to recruit and enrol international students

**The risk that the University as a provider as a whole is unable to operate is very low.** The most recent assessment from HEFCE in the Annual Provider Review round was that with regard to financial sustainability, good management and governance matters the university is ‘not at higher risk’. The University has business continuity plans which cover interruptions to business through risks to the estate or to business systems.

**The risk that the University will cease to deliver in complete subject areas is very low.** The University has undertaken a comprehensive Quality and Sustainability Review of its provision in 2017/18 academic year, examining data to decide whether any subject or programme areas should be discontinued. This Review has completed and no significant change is taking place.

**The risk that the University will no longer deliver courses at our London or Hong Kong Campuses is low.** The University’s strategic and business plans are to consolidate and expand our delivery at those campuses and grow student numbers further. The University has several years of experience of operating our campus model in London, and is now applying that experience to development of a similar model at our newer campus in Hong Kong.

**The risk that the University will no longer be able to deliver programmes to TNE partner students is low.** The University enters into partnerships following extensive due diligence, and with binding agreements on the governance and operation of the partnerships. These agreements include provision for teach-out and student protection (see section 2 below). Our arrangements for collaborative provision were found to meet national standards in the last QAA Higher Education Review.

**2. Measures put in place to mitigate risks**

In the event that the risk materialises, we will take one or more of the following measures to protect your continuity of study.

If a course can no longer be offered, the default position is to put teach out arrangements in place within the University for those students already enrolled on the course. Teach out is where the course is still taught to completion for all students currently enrolled, but there are no new intakes to the course, and when the last existing student completes the course is then closed. Teach-out arrangements will be clearly set-out to the students, and ensure that the arrangements enable the students to achieve the learning outcomes of the course and to have a satisfactory learning experience.

The arrangements will detail what will happen to students who need to redeem failure during the teach out period, or who are not able to complete assessments at the time set due to illness.

The University’s Collaborative Provision Agreement states that in the event of termination of Agreement between the University and a Partner, the parties would ensure that students already enrolled on the course would be given the opportunity to complete it within the normal period, and that the Partner will cooperate with the University to ensure that any such students are able to complete the course.

If teach out is not possible, the University will offer suitable alternative courses, and will facilitate transfer to other providers, including advice, and transfer of credit. The University may offer alternative locations of study, even if that means securing alternative premises, or alternative modes of study, to allow students affected to complete. In the event of a closure in London, for example, the University would offer transfer to its courses in Sunderland, or to facilitate transfer to other providers in London. Students studying at Sunderland’s FE partners would similarly be offered a transfer to courses at Sunderland. For students in Hong Kong, and students studying at TNE partners, teach-out would remain the primary option but where necessary transfers to other local providers would be facilitated.

All these measures have been tested through consideration of how the processes would work, or from past experience of operating teach-out or other measures, and we are confident they are viable. We will take into consideration the needs of all our students, including those with mobility considerations or special educational requirements. Measures contained in the plan may be brought into play at any time, if, for example, doing so would reduce the impact or likelihood of any interruption to students’ studies.

**3. Information about refunds and compensation**

The University has developed a Course Closure Compensation Policy which it will use as appropriate if required by this Plan. The University has the financial capacity to meet any of the obligations arising from this Policy. It has a significant income £132.0m in 17/18), and regularly generates a surplus and has a positive cash balance. Its future financial planning includes significant levels of unallocated expenditure contingencies that are designed to cover the need for this sort of one off, unplanned cost.

**4. Information about communicating with students**

Our Student Protection Plan will be published as part of our Student Handbook, and will be publicised on publication via an email to all enrolled students. From then on, attention will be drawn to our Plan via an explicit reference to it in the online enrolment process, and in our terms and conditions which all applicants receive.

The Plan will be circulated to all teaching staff with a cover note explaining the implications of the Plan for the proposal of course closures. The University’s process for review of its programmes already charges Review Panels (which include external panel member) with considering ‘specific measures to notify and protect the interests of students on programmes being discontinued’. This too will be amended to explicitly reference the Plan.

We will review our Plan on an annual basis in January of each year for the academic year ahead, and the Students’ Union will be involved in the review process, and their consultation with their members will inform the review.

We will notify you of any changes which may affect your studies in a timely manner. Should the student protection plan need to be triggered, you will be notified in writing by your Dean of Faculty.

We commit to contacting you as soon as the University is aware of any closure situation, and give as much notice as is practicable, which could be a number of months. In the unlikely event of any situation where it is not possible for the University to give that much notice, a minimum of four weeks’ notice will be given prior to the intended dates of course change or closure. Advice and support will be offered in the first instance by your programme leader. Additional, independent, advice and support is available from the Students’ Union.

If you are not content with the proposed outcomes, you can raise the issue firstly via the University’s Complaints Procedure and, if you remain dissatisfied, with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, at http://www.oiahe.org.uk/.

We commit to:

* being open and transparent with students should any risk to the continuity of your studies arise, and inform you in a timely manner
* taking reasonable steps to protecting your studies should we discontinue a course or discipline, close a location (building or campus) where a course is taught or close altogether
* considering students’ views before discontinuing a course, or stop teaching a discipline or close a campus location
* taking into consideration the needs of all our students and the impact on them of any proposed changes and protective measures
* informing the OfS of any changes that may necessitate a review of the plan or any of the measures contained within it.
* regularly seeking students’ views on this plan as part of our student feedback processes.

If you have any immediate views, concerns or feedback in relation to this plan,

please contact the Academic Registrar, Academic Registry, Gateway Floor 1, City Campus – iain.rowan@sunderland.ac.uk