



## **STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN**

**2019-2020**

### What is the Student Protection Plan?

The Office for Students (OfS) requires all registered HE providers to publish a Student Protection Plan. This plan outlines all potential risks to our students and their studies and the ways in which we plan to minimise or mitigate these risks. This extends to any courses where the college can no longer provide continuation of study and the support we will provide to students if this occurs.

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

The College has evaluated a range of potential risks to students and their studies below. Each risk is explained and includes the steps taken to mitigate this risk, and action that will result if the risk should emerge.

#### 1. Financial rating/position risk

This risk is considered very low. Harlow College has maintained a 'good' financial health rating with the ESFA for the last three years. Financial planning for 2019-20 shows this will be maintained. The College has multiple funding streams to mitigate against this risk, so any decline in one stream has a less significant effect. The College is ever resourceful in sourcing new funding streams, again to mitigate against any potential risks.

#### 2. Risk to course offer

There is a medium risk to the College not being able to offer a specific course programme due to low numbers recruited. The College operates a minimum number of 10 for exiting courses and a lower number for new starters of 8. Our website and UCAS states the minimum number and students are advised on offer of place if the course is at risk. Students will be supported to find an alternative offer in due time. Our Harlow College Terms and Conditions (t&cs) of the Student Contract – HE outlines our procedure for dealing with course closure prior to enrolment and any changes to modules that may occur

#### 3. Specialised resources risk and Estate

There is a low risk of resources for the College on specialist programmes such as Engineering. The College has a small number of HE courses on offer, all of which are currently well resourced. This specialist equipment is used across a variety of programmes and by employers and is not just reliant on HE income to maintain it; this reduces the risk level. Significant employer involvement and investment means the college has state of the art, industry standard equipment.

The College updates annually its disaster continuity plans. This ensures we have robust plans in place in the case of any loss of buildings or campus. The main Harlow campus is spread over many different and separate buildings, meaning any one building being out of action will not affect the rest of the campus and allows for relocation of classes. In the case of

specialist workshops e.g. engineering, students would be relocated to the Stansted Engineering Campus with support.

The plan includes emergency evacuation in light of any terrorist attacks or other disasters/accidents.

#### **4. Competition risk**

Competition from nearby providers or London based providers is deemed a medium risk level. The College is situated in easy commutable distance from London. In addition there are two nearby by university providers. However, the college assesses the market offer and selects courses where there is the local need/demand and that are not replicated at our nearest neighbours. This helps to minimise the risk of a course not running due to poor recruitment.

#### **5. Risks arising from loss of a validating partner**

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 the student experience. In the unlikely event of the withdrawal of an awarding body, the College will work with them to ensure the students' experience is protected through a 'teach out' agreement to ensure students are able to complete their programme.

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

#### **1. Financial risk**

The Skills Funding Agency in their letter to the Principal confirmed the conclusion that the College's financial health grade for 2017/18, based on the outturn forecast, was Good and that the College's underlying financial health grade was Good. The College has maintained a financial health grade of Good for four financial years. The projections and assumptions approved by governors in the Financial Forecast 2019-2021 indicate that the College will continue to maintain Good financial health 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21 and that bank covenants will be met. This mitigates against any risks to our HE offer, staffing, resources or estate. The College relies extensively on the education sector funding bodies for its principal funding source. In 2017/18 this represented 78% of the College's total income (2016/17 83%), the change is due to the Colleges' success in bidding and obtaining funding.

The College has no formal Reserves Policy, but recognises the importance of reserves in the financial stability of an organisation, and ensures that there are adequate reserves to support

the College's core activities. It is the Corporation's intention to increase income and expenditure reserves by the generation of annual operating surpluses.

## **2. Course offer risk**

Our Terms and Conditions for HE students (see website) states how students will be supported to find alternative provision either within the college or outside of it in a timely fashion. In all the HE courses on offer at the College also have FE provision, so staffing levels are good and the likely hood of staffing levels not be adequately are very low. This will ensure that if course at an HE level were to discontinue staffing levels would be maintained in order to complete delivery of the programme.

## **3. Resources risk**

In 2017-18 the College accumulated reserves of £15,231K (2016/17 £13,121k) before pension deficits including the Enhanced Pension Provision and revaluation reserve and has closing cash balances of £2,883K. The College wishes to continue to accumulate reserves and cash balances in order to create a contingency fund to support the strategic plan and create funding for future improvements and developments. The College under takes an annual curriculum planning process which fully considers resources implications of existing or new course proposals. This includes the opportunity for capital requests related to specific courses. This ensures equipment and learning materials are up to date and industry standards.

## **4. Competition risk**

The College is proactively identifying market competition and keeping informed about market/business developments so that suitable action can be taken to mitigate the risk of any specific competitor. On-going marketing campaigns keep the profile of the College high, also supported by a continued investment in high quality resources to support teaching and learning to attract students. Courses are reviewed annually and new course proposal scrutinised in relation to demand, resources and competition to ensure only viable courses are approved. This ensures the continuity and continuation of our courses on offer.

## **5. Validating partner risk**

The College has one operating partner, Pearson. The College produces an Annual Programme Monitoring Report (AMPR) to Pearson as well as a Centre Engagement Report. Both of these reports form part of the Quality Monitoring Report process (QMR) that Pearson applies to Harlow College as a delivery centre. Since 2016 the College has received excellent annual monitoring visit reports, receiving only commendations, no recommendations or conditions. The likely hood of losing Pearson as a validating body is extremely low. In the case that this might happen, the College would work with each student, due to small numbers, on a one to one basis to find suitable alternative course at the nearest provider and assist in any paperwork in order for the learners to transfer. The College would firstly negotiate an action

plan to mitigate the removal of validation if at all possible, in order to complete all live learners for their intended course outcome, where this was not possible it would be to complete the current academic year for the learners to enable a transfer to another provider.

#### **College policies that support students - in the case of course closure or course changes.**

Student should be aware of the following policies available on the VLE and website to support them in the case of any course changes:

- Harlow College terms and conditions of the Students Contract HE
- College Fees policy
- College Compliant Procedure

The College will be able to meet any costs incurred as a result of refunds or compensation as already outlined in our financial report. The policies listed above provide information to students who wish to claim compensation or refunds due to course changes or course dis-satisfaction.

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

The College will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by displaying on the website under the HE search tab and provide a link to this in your Student Course Handbooks and HE Guide provided during Induction.

The College 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 student experiences of the plan and how it was implemented, should it become relevant during your period of study.

HE Students will be involved in the review of the plan at each Spring SSLC meeting.

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

If the College needs to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan, initially 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 any of the identified risks. 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, Head of Academy and/or HE Manager.

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 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:**

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