

Student Protection Plan for the Period 2018-2019

Provider's name: Barnfield

College Provider's UKPRN:

10000534

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Assessment of Overall Risk

1. Barnfield College is committed to providing a high quality education for all its students and works collaboratively with the student body to enhance learning opportunities and support the achievement and success of all who study with the College.
2. The introduction of this Student Protection Plan is a requirement of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to protect students from material change, such as course or College closure, which may impact on the continuation of study for students. Barnfield College considers the likelihood and risk of such material changes crystallising in the next three years to be low. Nevertheless, the College has provided measures to protect students in the unlikely event of unforeseen material changes.
3. Courses delivered by Barnfield College as part of a sub-contractual arrangement (franchise) with the University of Bedfordshire are covered by the University's Student Protection Plan.

Institutional Closure

4. The risk that the College as a whole is unable to operate is low. Although Barnfield College's Financial Health was assessed by the ESFA as inadequate in December 2017, following restructuring, improved financial modelling, rigorous budgetary control and recruitment to target, the College has secured significant financial improvement. The College's three-year financial plan demonstrates a break-even position in-year and an operating surplus in subsequent.

Merger

5. Moreover, following a Structure and Prospects Appraisal to identify a merger partner for Barnfield, the College's Board selected West Herts College. West Herts College's financial health, as graded by the ESFA, is outstanding and is forecast to remain so until at least 2021.
6. The merger process has been conducted with efficiency and enthusiasm. Following completion of legal and financial due diligence, in December 2018, both Boards resolved to progress to full merger; this will take place on 1 February 2019. Barnfield College will continue in its current locations at New Bedford Road and Enterprise Way in Luton, but strengthened by being part of a larger, financially robust and high quality educational provider.
7. As Barnfield, West Herts is a mixed economy College with higher education as part of its offer. West Herts College is committed to maintaining Barnfield's current curriculum offer and supporting it to grow through planned and targeted curriculum development which meets the needs of both the local economy and regional skills priorities. As local responsiveness and meeting local needs

is key to the future of the merged College, it is planned that the educational character of the centres in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Luton will continue to reflect and respond to local priorities both HE and FE. Thus, the College does not view impending merger as a risk to the continuation of higher education study at Barnfield. Nor, as a result of the College's strengthened financial position is financial health a risk in the very unlikely event of merger not proceeding.

Campus Closure

8. All higher Education Courses are currently delivered exclusively at the College's principal Campus at New Bedford Road. This has been a stable arrangement for a number of years. The College has a dedicated, purpose-built Higher Education Centre on the New Bedford Road Campus. The College has invested in resources and facilities at the New Bedford Road campus to accommodate HE programmes and is committed to providing a high quality learning environment for HE students. Additionally, a benefit of being located in Luton, all of the College's HE Students (including those on Pearson validated courses) have agreed access to the University of Bedfordshire's Learning Resource Centre. Barnfield College has no plans to relocate. The College's business continuity plan mitigates the risk of unexpected full or partial campus closure. The risk that the College will no longer deliver HE at the New Bedford Road Campus is very low.

Course Closure

9. Barnfield College is committed to completing the delivery of all the courses it offers and will take every step practicable to ensure this occurs. The provision of all College programmes is aligned to the College's strategic plan and curriculum business plan. Annual review of all higher education programmes is rigorously undertaken. Student recruitment rates, achievement outcomes, satisfaction and destinations are monitored and evaluated for review by programme and senior management. Decisions as to the long-term sustainability of courses are discussed at HE Academic Board, Curriculum, the College Executive Team and the Corporation Board. Should it be necessary to close a programme for any reason the College's Senior Executive will consider the position of those students' currently registered, and future applicants, to ensure their interests are safeguarded prior to any closure being approved. Such decisions are highly unlikely; the College will always endeavour to teach out its courses so that existing students are not affected.
10. Should course closure be necessary, students will be consulted as a matter of urgency and no later than thirty-six hours of the decision being reached. In the extremely unlikely event that teaching out a course is not possible, the College will support students to transfer to a suitable alternative provider. The College will pay any additional tuition costs for which the student may be liable and will reimburse any additional reasonable maintenance or travel costs incurred by the transfer. If a suitable, similar course at an alternative provider cannot be identified the College will refund the student all tuition fees paid to date and waive any fee liabilities for the course in question. Moreover, the College will provide compensation to the student(s) for travel or other out-of-pocket expenses incurred through direct engagement with the course.

Changes to Course Content or Course Offer

11. In year changes to course content are made exceptionally. They may only be implemented following approval by the executive team and through consultation and agreement with all students, in line with College Consumer Protection practices. Any proposed change to course content imposed by awarding body requirements will be shared with prospective students at the earliest opportunity. This will enable applicants to make an informed decision as to whether or not to study the course(s) concerned. The College will work with prospective students affected by externally imposed revision to course content to support their finding an appropriate alternative course.

Loss of Key Staff

12. All HE courses are delivered by programme teams. College staff are employed on the basis that they can teach across a range of academic levels. Consequently, each HE course has a number of staff qualified and able to support programme delivery if required. The College is thus not dependent on any one particular member of academic staff to deliver core teaching. In addition, teaching materials and resources are stored centrally at the start of each term and are accessible by all staff. Consequently, should a member of staff unexpectedly be unable to continue a suitably qualified alternative member of the staff team will be able to take up course delivery with minimal disruption or impact on continuity of teaching, learning and assessment. Additionally, Barnfield does not run courses that require teaching staff in niche areas or specialisms. Taken in the round the College is therefore not dependent on particular members of academic staff to deliver core teaching and the risk that it is no longer able to deliver HE programmes as a result of loss of key staff is very low.

Student change in circumstance

13. The demographic of the Luton area (see: Barnfield College Access and Participation statement) demonstrates a high proportion of students from low income backgrounds. Courses are competitively priced with part-time options made available to support students who need to work. By teaching full-time and part-time students together, the College is able to support students who have a change in circumstance which requires them to transfer to part-time, enabling them support themselves through additional paid work while studying. The majority of students studying on HE courses are supported by loans approved by student finance England. Should a particular student's individual circumstances require, the College operates a discretionary learner support fund, from which students may be supported through difficult times.
14. The college maintains high quality standards and good achievement. Students – many of whom are from non-traditional academic backgrounds - who require additional academic support can access support through the College's student services and ALS teams. Specialist Additional Learning Support is provided to students in receipt of a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA).

Part-time courses are of two years' duration and typically, their delivery is embedded into full-time. This offers flexibility to students who can plan their route flexibly should a change in circumstances require and places the risk of both part-time and full-time students being unable to complete as low.

Loss of Validating Partner

15. All University of Bedfordshire students are covered by the University's Student Protection Plan, Consumer Protection Law statement and, where relevant, the University's Access and Participation Plan. The College will, however, support any students impacted by the highly unlikely event of its partner university summarily withdrawing from partnership and or validation agreements. Internal and external annual reporting, External Examiner feedback and student achievement shows strong historic and current success supported by annual improvement evidenced in NSS data and supported by the QAA report for Barnfield College. The College meets the requirements of validation for the delivery of Pearson and University of Bedfordshire qualifications, with good working relationships supporting these arrangements. The awarding bodies are large organisation and have their own risk strategies.

Student Refunds and Compensation

16. A copy of the College's Refund and Compensation Policy is provided to the OFS and the Board and Executive team are fully aware of the College's commitment to students therein. The College's financial health and operating position is sufficient to meet any potential refunds or

compensation covered by the student protection plan. The College considers both the likelihood and potential number to be very low.

Communication, Guidance and Publication

17. This Student Protection Plan will be issued to all applicants in conjunction with the relevant HE Handbook. All HE students also receive a copy of the College Refund and Compensation guidance and Student Fees Policy, in advance of commencing their studies. Course Tutors will introduce key components of the SPP to students within the first two weeks of the course commencing, either during induction or initial tutorials. Late applicants will receive a copy of the plan either at enrolment or during induction. The documents will also be shared with returning students during their next level induction. Student representatives will be consulted during 2018-19, following approval of the plan by the OfS, to ensure the Plan is suitably accessible and to contribute to future amendments and improvement deemed necessary. This will remain an annual student representative agenda item.
18. The SPP will be displayed within the HE section of the College website to ensure it is available to any prospective student and will be available to students on course via the student intranet. Copies of the Plan will be available from the College's Student Services Team and in the College's HE Centre.
19. Staff at Barnfield are acutely aware of the impact course changes may have on students and a process has been in place for some time to ensure changes can only be approved by members of the Executive team. Any such decision will be taken in the context of the college's wider business strategy and the potential impact on students will be central to this review process. The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) allows students to input on any considered changes. Further gathering of student voice will be led by the student engagement team and not by staff responsible for teaching or assessing on the course. How the quality of the academic experience will be maintained will form part of a student and College discussion prior to deciding course closure.
20. The quality of courses is monitored closely by the College and also either by the University of Bedfordshire or Pearson. All student grade awards recommended at exam board have been upheld. There are no Blocks to qualifications or awards for any HE courses and robust quality review is in place to maintain quality assessment practice. There are good levels of success and achievement.
21. The College strives to engage its students throughout their educational journey and aims to be clear and transparent in all its interactions with students and with regard to all aspects of the programmes it delivers. Should it prove necessary to invoke the Student Protection Plan, then students will be informed within thirty-six hours of any strategic decision, with a minimum of thirty days' advance notice of any material change being provided to students wherever it is possible to do so, Barnfield will offer advice and guidance and tailored academic and pastoral support, as required, to support students in their decisions. Tutorial advice will link specialist academic knowledge and related career path guidance to enable students to make informed choices.
22. Students will be consulted collectively led by the relevant course tutor and supported by the relevant Subject Area Leader (SAL). Information discussed will be captured and shared in writing via email to each individual student and formally, in writing, by letter to each affected student's home address. All affected students will be offered an opportunity to discuss matters relating to the SPP with a senior manager. Any student in receipt of ALS will receive information from their allocated advisor and be provided with an opportunity to discuss this further should they wish. At all times the College will ensure affected students have access to support and guidance from the College's Student Services Team. This Team is experienced in providing impartial guidance and in sourcing and signposting to further independent advice should it be requested or required.

Link to SPP on the Barnfield College Website:

<https://www.barnfield.ac.uk/about/policies-reports/#HE>