

Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: West Herts College Group

Provider's UKPRN: 10007417

Legal address: West Herts College Group, Watford Campus, Hempstead Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD17 3EZ

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Assessment of overall risk

1. West Herts College Group (trading as West Herts College and Barnfield College) is committed to providing a high quality education to all its students and prides itself on working collaboratively with its student body to enhance student learning opportunities and support the achievement and success of all its students.
2. The introduction of this Student Protection Plan is a requirement of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to protect students from material changes such as course or module changes, course closure or whole college closure. WHC Group deems the likelihood and risk of such material changes within the next three years to be low. The college does not consider that any of the following risks are reasonably likely to crystallise but has provided measures to protect its students in the unlikely event of any unforeseen material changes.

Institutional closure

3. The risk that the WHC Group as a whole is unable to operate is very low because its financial health (as assessed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency) has been graded 'Outstanding' and is forecast to remain so until at least 2021.

Campus closure

4. HE courses are currently delivered at our Watford Campus and New Bedford Road Campus (Luton). The college has prioritised significant investment in resources and facilities (software and hardware) to accommodate HE courses (new and existing) and is committed to providing a high quality learning environment for our students. The WHC Group maintains a Business Continuity Plan to mitigate against any unexpected full or partial campus closure. The risk that the college will no longer deliver HE provision in the next three years is very low.

Course closure

5. The WHC Group is committed to completing delivery of the courses it offers and will always endeavour to ensure this occurs. The provision of all courses is considered in line with the WHC Group Strategic Plan. Annual review of all HE courses is undertaken at the end of each academic year. Rates of student recruitment, outcomes, satisfaction and employability are all monitored and evaluated each year by senior managers. Decisions regarding the long term sustainability of courses are discussed at HE Committee and within the College Leadership Group. Should it be necessary to close a course for any

reason, college senior leaders will consider the position of those students currently registered on the course, and future applicants, to ensure their interests are safeguarded prior to any closure being approved. Any decision to close a course will be approved by senior college leaders and in such rare circumstances, the WHC Group will always endeavour to teach out its courses, so that existing students are not affected. Should course closure be necessary, then students will be consulted within two days of any decision being reached. In the extremely unlikely event that teaching out a course will not be possible, the WHC Group would support students to transfer to a suitable course at an alternative provider and would pay any additional tuition costs and reimburse any additional reasonable maintenance or travel costs incurred as a result of the change. If a suitable similar course at a different provider cannot be found, the college would refund the student all tuition fees paid to date and waive any future tuition fee liabilities. Furthermore, it would compensate the student for travel or other associated out of pocket expenses incurred, associated with engagement with the course.

6. Decisions to close courses due to low applicant numbers, in advance of a course starting, are rare. However, in the unlikely event that it is necessary to close a course, the WHC Group will liaise directly with applicants and support them to secure a suitable course at an alternative provider and would pay any additional tuition costs and reimburse any additional reasonable maintenance or travel costs incurred as a result of the change. If a suitable similar course at a different provider cannot be found, the college would refund the student all tuition fees paid to date and waive any future tuition fee liabilities. Furthermore, it would compensate the student for travel or other associated out of pocket expenses incurred, associated with engagement with the course.

Changes to course content

7. In year changes to course content can only be approved through consultation and agreement with all students on course and through approval from appropriate senior management, in line with WHC Group Consumer Protection policies and practices. Any prospective changes to course content imposed by awarding body requirements, will be shared with applicant students at the earliest opportunity, to enable them to make an informed decision regarding whether or not to study one of our courses. The WHC Group will support any prospective student affected by imposed course content revisions, to find an alternative course.

Loss of key staff

8. All HE courses are delivered by academic teams and college staff are employed on the basis that they can teach across a range of academic levels. Consequently, each HE course has a variety of qualified staff able to support programme delivery if required and we are not therefore dependent on particular members of academic staff delivering core teaching. In addition, all teaching materials and resources are stored electronically at the start of each semester and are accessible by all departmental staff. Consequently, should a member of staff unexpectedly be unable to continue with course delivery a suitably qualified alternative member of staff will be able to resume course delivery with minimum disruption to student learning. The risk that we are no longer able to deliver programmes in highly specialised areas in the next three years is very low.
9. The WHC Group has a well-resourced Additional Learning Support (ALS) department, which is accredited with the Quality Assurance Award in recognition of the high quality of support provided for students who have a learning difficulty. ALS is specifically provided to HE students in receipt of a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). The WHC Group is able to accommodate the ALS needs of HE students and there is a very low risk that this

support would not be available for students. However, the group works closely with other local Non-Medical Helper (NMH) agencies and would be able to support students to receive any support required if it was unable to provide this through its own ALS provision. Should this occur the WHC Group would host NMH support on campus to minimise disruption to its students.

Loss of validating partner

10. All University of Hertfordshire and 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. However, the WHC Group would support any students impacted by the highly unlikely event of its validating partner retracting its partnership with the college.

Student refunds and compensation

11. A copy of the WHC Group Refund and Compensation Policy is provided to the OfS. The group maintains a Reserves Policy within its Financial Regulations which requires it to plan to maintain minimum cash balances of £5m at any point. This would be more than sufficient for any potential refunds or compensation covered by this Student Protection Plan. We would consider the number and likelihood to be very low.

Communication, guidance and publication

12. Our Student Protection Plan (SPP) will be issued to all applicants. All HE students also receive a copy of the WHC Group Refund and Compensation Policy and HE Student Fees and Finance Policy, which support the SPP, in advance of commencing their studies. Course tutors will introduce key components of the SPP to students during induction or initial tutorials conducted within the first two weeks of course commencement. Late applicants will receive a copy of the plan either at enrolment or during their induction, depending on how late they join their course. The document will be shared and discussed with returning students during their induction to Level 5. Any students returning to repeat modules will be emailed a copy of the plan and offered an opportunity to discuss this with their course tutor. Student Reps will be consulted to ensure the plan is sufficiently student friendly. Students will be canvassed to contribute towards any future amendments to the plan that might be deemed necessary. This will remain an annual Student Representative agenda item.
13. The SPP will be displayed within the HE section of the college website for prospective students and will be available to students on course via the student intranet.
14. Staff are aware of the impact course changes may have on students and a process was previously introduced to ensure course content changes can only be approved by senior college leaders. The SPP will be presented to and reviewed by HE Committee and HE Operations Group before being presented to wider academic staff and those staff that provide ALS during future staff development activities.
15. The WHC Group strives to engage its students throughout their educational journey and aims to be clear and transparent with all aspects of the courses it delivers. Should it prove necessary to implement the SPP, then students will be informed via a variety of mechanisms within two days of any strategic decision to implement the SPP, with 30 days' advance notice of any material changes being provided to students wherever possible.

16. Students will be consulted collectively through interaction with their relevant course tutor supported by their relevant Head of School. Information discussed, will be captured and shared in writing via email to each individual student and via an official letter to be issued to each affected student's home address. All affected students will be offered an opportunity to discuss SPP related matters further with an appropriate senior manager, should they wish to do so. Any student receiving ALS will receive information from their allocated ALS Advisor and be provided with an opportunity to discuss this further with them should they wish. All students will have access to the college Student Support team, who will be able to provide further advice and guidance and steer students towards appropriate independent advice should it be required.

17. Covid 19 response

In the event of national lockdown the College will move to online delivery and will return to face-to-face teaching once restrictions are lifted. Students will continue to receive timetabled delivery of sessions from teachers via online platforms.