

## Student Protection Plan, 2020/21

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Regulator: Office for Students

### Contact details

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### 1. Introduction: Purpose of the Student Protection Plan

The University of Leicester (the University) is deeply committed to ensuring that all of its students receive a high quality educational experience, and that all students have the opportunity to complete the qualification for which they registered. The University has in place robust processes to monitor and assure the quality of your course, and also operates detailed risk management procedures to assess and manage ongoing risks. The University has a long standing commitment to ensuring that where circumstances mean that we may need to alter or withdraw either individual courses or areas of study all registered students will be supported to complete their studies.

As part of this commitment the University has developed and published this Student Protection Plan which meets the requirements of the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) and Condition C3 of the Office for Students Regulatory Framework. The Plan has been submitted to and approved by the Office for Students. This plan is made available to all applicants and current students, as well as to staff and the University's governing body, Council.

As a University we will always aim to ensure that there are no material changes to your course other than those which are required in response to external factors such as conditions of organisations which provide accreditation professional accreditation for some of our programmes. Unfortunately this is not always possible due to a wide range of factors, many of which are outside of our control and there may be circumstances under which the University has to make amendments to your course.

This Student Protection Plan sets out the University's assessment of risk relating to the ongoing delivery of our courses and the mitigating actions that the University would take to protect your studies in the event that any of the risks were to crystallise. This plan has been designed in consultation with our student representatives and has been approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee, Senate and Council.

The measures contained in this plan are in addition to the protections available to students under consumer protection law and do not impinge on your consumer rights. All students have recourse to the University Complaints process and then to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

### 2. Our commitments to our students

The University commits to:

- Being open and transparent with our students should any risk to the continuity of studies arise and inform you in a timely manner
- Taking reasonable steps to protect you should the University discontinue a programme or discipline, close a location where a programme is taught or close altogether
- Taking into consideration the needs of all of our students and the impact on them of any proposed changes and protective measures
- Supporting our students with advice and guidance and other support as appropriate, in the event of significant changes that impact your studies.
- Ensuring that the processes for raising a complaint to the University are transparent and accessible

The University commits to informing the OfS of any changes that may necessitate a review of the plan or any of the measures contained within it. The University will ensure that students have the opportunity to contribute to the development and review of this plan.

The University will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the Student Protection Plan when proposing programme changes or reviewing our portfolio of courses. The core requirements of this plan are reflected in the University's Code of Practice on Programme Development and Approval and this plan will be circulated within the University's academic governance framework on an annual basis.

### 3. Risks and Mitigation

This section sets out the frameworks for how the University manages risk, the risks that the University has identified in terms of its ability to deliver your course, our assessment of how likely this risk is to occur and what actions the University would take in the unlikely event that it did.

#### 3.1 Risk Management

The University maintains oversight of a wide range of risks through its Risk Management Committee Structure and the University Risk Register. The risk areas are regularly reviewed and updated in response to changing internal and external circumstances. The Risk Register is also regularly reviewed by Council, as the Governing Body for the University.

The University has extensive risk management processes in place along with detailed business continuity plans. The University has presently identified no strategic risk that may result in its ability to operate and deliver programmes across its locations. The following plan sets out the assessed risk level associated with various risks. In the majority of cases the University does not consider that these risks are likely to crystallise.

We recognise, however, that in the unlikely event that any of these risks did crystallise these could have a significant impact upon our students and this Plan is designed to set out what actions we would take to protect your interests and ensure that you can complete your studies.

#### 3.2 Institutional Sustainability

The risk of market exit, or that the University as a whole is unable to operate is **very low**. In the most recent Annual Provider Review (February 2017) the review group identified no concerns on quality and standards matters, and no concerns on financial sustainability, good management and

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governance matters relating to the University. The University continues to engage with all standard internal and external mechanisms for assuring and enhancing academic quality, and complies with all relevant external regulatory requirements for individual programmes.

The University's most recent published financial statements from 2018/19 that the University has in place significant financial reserves and also has robust management structures in order to take further action to protect the sustainability of the both the University and the courses that you are studying in the event of external disruption. The University makes annual returns to the Office for Students regarding our management and financial sustainability, and in the most recent return (December 2019) the OfS raised no concerns.

Council, our governing body, regularly reviews the sustainability of our strategies, plans and processes using a number of KPIs. In particular, that our academic strategies are financially sustainable and take account of the environment in which we operate as an institution.

### *Mitigation*

If circumstances arose where the University had no option but to cease operation measures such as the below would be considered in order to protect the interests of students.

- Where possible a managed closure over a period of time which would allow students to complete their studies before the institution ceased operations;
- Consider partnership or merger with another institution in order to allow students to complete their studies in areas where delivery can be maintained;
- Where the above is not possible, support students to transfer to other providers.

Equality Impact Assessments would be undertaken to understand the impact of these plans on different student groups in light of their characteristics or circumstances, and whether any further mitigations are required for specific groups.

### **3.3 Loss of legal status or Degree Awarding Powers**

The risk that the University could lose its Degree Awarding Powers is **very low**. The University of Leicester was given degree awarding powers by Act of Parliament (University of Leicester Act, 1958), as set out in its Charter, granted by Queen Elizabeth II. The University met expectations on all four core judgements in its most recent Higher Education Review by the Quality Assurance Agency (February 2016) and was commended for, among other things, our commitment to widening participation and inclusivity. The University is registered as an approved provider (fee cap) with the Office for Students and continues to meet the ongoing conditions of registration set out in the OfS Regulatory Framework,

The University has in place robust measures to ensure the quality of your course, which are set out in our Academic Codes of Practice and Policies. The University adheres to the expectations and practices set out in the UK Quality Code published by the Quality Assurance Agency for HE.

External Advisors are engaged to support the University in the development of our programmes through the Programme Development Process, to review the quality of our provision through Monitoring and Review Processes and to confirm the standards of our awards through the External Examining process. The University regularly reviews external feedback which consistently confirms the overall quality and standards of the University's provision.

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### *Mitigation*

In the unlikely event that the University were to lose its degree awarding powers, it would consider the following potential steps to ensure that students were able to continue with their studies.

- Agree an action plan to regain Degree Awarding Powers prior to student's graduation'
- Establish a short term partnership with another institution with appropriate degree awarding powers to allow students to complete their current courses and achieve an award validated by another institution;
- Facilitating the transfer of students to other institutions to complete their studies, where this is possible and academically appropriate;

Equality Impact Assessments would be undertaken to understand the impact of these plans on different student groups in light of their characteristics or circumstances, and whether any further mitigations are required for specific groups.

### **3.4 Closure of a teaching location**

The risk of closure of a teaching location leading to the inability to deliver programmes is **very low**. The majority of the University's teaching takes place at the University Campus in Leicester. The University has a number of specialist facilities in these campuses for the delivery of programmes. The University does not make significant use of external premises for teaching delivery. The University has robust contingency and business continuity plans in the event that teaching facilities become unavailable.

For programme delivery that takes place via placements or through partnerships, see the sections below.

### *Mitigation*

In the event that the University lost access to key teaching facilities at short notice it would:

- Reschedule teaching where possible within appropriate alternative facilities within or outside of the University estate, or restructure the delivery schedule for programmes;
- Deliver courses in part or fully online using our established expertise in distance learning and our extensive digital learning environment;
- Where the University lost long term access to teaching facilities that could not be replaced or replicated in a reasonable manner, facilitate the transfer of students to other institutions where possible to complete their programmes

Equality Impact Assessments would be undertaken where necessary to understand the impact of these plans on different student groups in light of their characteristics or circumstances, and whether any further mitigations are required for specific groups.

### **3.5 Loss of license to sponsor Student Visas**

The risk that the University could lose its license to sponsor international student visas to study in the UK is **very low**. Our compliance with Home Office and UKVI requirements is very high and is overseen by a robust internal governance structure. On the most recent Basic Compliance Assessment (September 2020) the University demonstrated an extremely low visa refusal rate of 0.22% and an enrolment rate of 99.96%. We also undertake regular external audits, including in 2016, 2018 and 2019, and successfully underwent a Home Office UKVI HEAT audit in April 2017 with no further action taken.

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### *Mitigation*

In the highly unlikely event that the University were to lose its right to sponsor international student visas we would take the following actions:

- The majority of courses would continue to be delivered online using our well developed expertise in distance learning and extensive digital learning environment. The University would support students who wished to transfer to another institution under these circumstances.
- Where there were courses which required attendance on campus that was prevented by the change in status the University would, where possible, work with students to facilitate their transfer to other institutions to complete their studies as may be appropriate.

Equality Impact Assessments would be undertaken to understand the impact of these plans on different student groups in light of their characteristics or circumstances, and whether any further mitigations are required for specific groups.

### **3.6 Withdrawal of Programmes**

The risk that programmes of study could be withdrawn in the next three years is **moderate** as the University undertakes annual review of its programmes. If programmes are found to have low student numbers which may impact on the student experience or the University is unable to provide staff to deliver teaching, the University could choose to withdraw the programme.

Furthermore, as a research intensive University with world class academic expertise in certain areas the University also offers a number of highly focussed programmes. Due to the highly specialist nature of these programmes there is a **moderate** risk that the University may be required to withdraw one or more programmes due to the loss of key academic staff in the subject area.

### *Mitigation*

If the University chooses to withdraw a course in the next three years:

- We will make arrangements to 'teach out' current students. This means the University commits to ensuring the programme of study can be completed by all registered students, even though the programme is being discontinued and will not be taking on new student cohorts. If the student does not wish to continue their studies with the University, they will be supported in seeking another provider with which to continue their studies.
- A programme will not typically be withdrawn where there are applicants holding offers, but in the unlikely event that this does become necessary students will be informed at least 25 days before the planned commencement of the programme, and supported to find alternative programmes at the University if that is their wish.
- Our agreement to teach out can be found in our [Code of Practice](#), items 70-76. Our agreement to provide support to students in finding an alternative provider can be found in our [terms and conditions](#), item 5.6.

The University would at all stages take account of the impact of programme withdrawal on particular student groups.

### **3.7 Major amendments to programmes of study**

Review and enhancement of programme content, learning and assessment methods is inherent within academic study in order to ensure that our programmes reflect the current status of the

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discipline. As such a level of change is appropriate for your course. Every year each school reflects upon the delivery of its programmes using a range of inputs which include student feedback and outcomes, plus input from external sources such as External Examiners and Professional Bodies.

The risk of major programme change is therefore considered to be **moderate**, noting however that the driver for such change is typically the further enhancement of programmes for the benefit of your degree and your student experience.

### *Mitigation*

Where these changes are small (such as the distribution of workload hours or changes to the optional modules offered within a year) and do not affect the core of your programme you will be informed of these and given the opportunity to discuss them with your school. Where the changes may be more substantial the University Code of Practice for the Development, Approval and Modification of Taught Programmes sets out the processes that the University will undertake to consult with students regarding these changes.

The University would at all stages take account of the impact of programme change on particular student groups.

## Placements

The risk that compulsory placement elements not delivered or administered by the University of Leicester could not be maintained is **low to moderate** because the University has limited control of the placement facilities and estate management. The University has in place detailed plans with all of its placement providers which include regular review of placement capacity, and contingency plans in the event that one or more providers is unable to deliver placements.

### *Mitigation*

If one of our placement providers is no longer able to offer a particular placement for a compulsory element of the programme in the next three years, the University will undertake all reasonable efforts to find an alternative provider to ensure that all registered students are able to continue their programme of study without interruption. Where this is not possible students will be supported to transfer to another provider.

## 3.8 Partnerships

The risk that programmes of study offered in an agreement with a partner institution could be withdrawn is **low to moderate** because the University has limited control of the facilities and estate management. The risk is also low because our student numbers in this area make up only approximately 3% of our student population.

### *Mitigation*

If one of our partner institutions is no longer able to deliver teaching in the next three years, the University has agreements in place to ensure that participating students have a right to complete their programme of study. In the event that that it is not possible to sustain the partnership arrangement, the University commits to taking all necessary steps to identify partners within the region to ensure the continuation of study for registered students, and where possible to offer the opportunity for students to transfer to complete their studies at the University if they wish.

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### 3.9 Loss of Accreditation

The University has a number of well-established courses which are accredited by Professional Bodies. These programmes undergo regular review and re-accreditation and the University is highly responsive to the requirements of Professional Bodies to ensure that our programmes remain accredited and students are able to achieve the awards for which they registered. The University has recently undergone re-accreditation for a number of programme areas and successfully achieved accreditation in each case.

On this basis the risk of the University losing accreditation is considered to be **low**.

#### *Mitigation*

In the event that the University were to lose accreditation for one of its programmes the following mitigating actions would be taken:

- Work with the PSRB in question to agree an action plan for re-accreditation before the point at which any students affected were due to graduate
- Offer transfer to another programme of study
- Where re-accreditation is not possible, deliver a modified version of the programme
- Where none of the above are possible, facilitate transfer of any students who wished to programmes at alternative providers

### 3.10 Research Supervision

The risk with regard to students being unable to continue their research is assessed to be **low**. The University has a strong and vibrant community of postgraduate research students. All PGR students have at least two supervisors and there are extensive policies in place to govern ongoing supervision of research students. In the event that one supervisor leaves the University or is otherwise unable to continue with supervision students will have access to their second supervisor, and a further replacement supervisor will be appointed.

#### *Mitigation*

In the exceptional circumstances that both a student's supervisors become unavailable and the University is unable to offer alternative supervision, we will support students to transfer to another institution with appropriate expertise and higher degree awarding powers to allow them to complete their qualification.

## 4. How will this Student Protection Plan be triggered?

The Student Protection Plan will be triggered in the event of major changes including circumstances in which the University:

- decides to discontinue a specific programme or stop teaching this discipline
- decides to close the location (building or campus) in which the programme is taught and cannot find a suitable alternative location for delivery
- decides to cease operating altogether
- can no longer provide the programme for any other reason for example:
  - the University ceases operating through no choice of our own
  - the University loses the right to provide the programme or qualification
  - the University loses our licence to sponsor international students

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The University retains the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to programme and module content year on year and these in themselves do not warrant the triggering of student protection measures. However, where the Student Protection Plan is not triggered but students feel the programme as delivered varies significantly from what they expected, they may wish to raise a complaint through the University's Complaints process.

### 5. How will we communicate with students

The University will notify you of any changes which may affect your studies in a timely manner. Should the student protection plan need to be triggered, all affected current students will be notified as soon as possible and no later than 25 days before the change to their programme comes into effect. Where the change may affect applicants holding an offer they will be contacted by the Admissions Office at least 25 days before the scheduled commencement of their programme, advised of the change and their options with regard to cancelling their offer with the University.

This commitment is outlined in our [terms and conditions](#). Affected students will also be directed towards an offer of support from the University's Student Support Services. They can access advice in relation to financial hardship and any pastoral support required. Students will also be directed to their personal tutors for additional support.

### 6. Student Complaints

If you are not content with the proposed steps taken under our Student Protection Plan, you should first speak with your school and subsequently you can raise a complaint with the University.

If the University is unable to ensure a reasonable outcome for students by the measures described in section 3 above, the University will consider refunds and compensation as necessary. The University policy on refunds for students is available for current students [here](#). This is taken from our refund information provided in the [University Senate Regulations 3.30-3.39](#). The University [Policy on Student Compensation and Refund](#) is also widely published.

We hope to resolve all complaints but if you are not satisfied with the outcome of the University complaints process you can submit a further complaint to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#). This is an independent body which reviews the decisions of Universities with respect to student complaints. Students may also have the right to complain to the Competition and Markets Authority.