

Student protection plan

Provider's name: Brunel University London

Provider's UKPRN: 10000961

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Mrs Lesley O'Keeffe, Registrar

Student protection plan for the period 2020/21

Introduction:

The Student Protection Plan sets out the arrangements the University has in place to protect the continuation of study for our students. The University recognises that the risks to continuation of study and any impact of change will potentially affect students with different needs, characteristics and circumstances. The University has considered students on differing educational pathways such as full time study, distance-learners, part time students or collaborative students overseas. In particular, consideration has been given to the possible different needs of students sharing particular protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this Student Protection Plan.

For further information about this plan, please contact the Registrar:

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1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for students, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise:

The University has assessed a number of possibilities and the associated level of risk to the continuation of study for our students. These risks are recorded on the University's Risk Register which is monitored by the Executive Board on a monthly basis, and quarterly by the Audit Committee and the University Council.

Each of the identified risks have undergone a comprehensive assessment to determine the likelihood of the risk arising. The assessment includes defining additional measures to mitigate the risk, resulting in a residual risk assessment which is shown against each risk below:

- **The University decides to discontinue a specific course:** the residual risk and likelihood of this is low and will only be enacted if the student numbers are very low in current recruitment rounds, and are predicted to remain low in the foreseeable future. Market analysis of future and ongoing demand for a particular course will determine predicted student numbers in this instance. To mitigate this risk, all new courses are assessed for student number viability at the approval stage. The majority of current courses the University offers are traditional courses of study, which are main-stream with strong historic demand. On an annual basis the University rigorously analyses market and demand trends to monitor the viability of all courses being offered. However, if a course is viewed as non-viable then the measures listed below will be implemented.

- **The University stops teaching a specific subject area:** the residual risk and likelihood is very low and as above, will only be enacted if the numbers recruited to a whole subject area are very low, and forecasted to remain low for the foreseeable future, thus indicating a diminishing demand. Alternatively, in the event of a re-focusing of the institutional disciplinary breadth or a change to the income and cost structure of a subject area, the University may determine to stop teaching a subject area. The risk measures in place to ensure this is monitored and mitigated against are primarily: trend analysis, demand for qualifications by both students and employers, technological advancements which determines that a particular field or area of expertise is changing, and the use of a financial resourcing model to ensure viability at a College level. This allows the College to make decisions of cross subsidy or support and ensures autonomy in supporting high cost areas. In addition, many of our subjects have a strong research excellence presence, thus creating an expectation that research funding (QR) will continue to support all areas, and hence teaching continues. However, despite these considerations, should the University stop teaching a specific subject, the measures outlined in the plan will be enacted.
- **We can no longer provide teaching:** because, in the event that the University's Tier 4 licence is revoked (the ability to recruit overseas students granted by UK Visa & Immigration (UKVI)), the right to recruit overseas students is lost. In particular, this would negatively impact overseas students of the University and the affiliate College, London Brunel International College (LBIC). LBIC has its own Student Protection Plan in place as part of its registration with the OfS. The assessed risk is low; the University has a Compliance team in place who train and advise staff on our obligations to meet the UKVI requirements, in order to retain our licence. In addition, the University has integrated all areas of student employment within the University's HR recruitment to ensure compliance and oversight of procedures. There is monthly monitoring of all the compliance measures required by UKVI to ensure the University meets its obligations. These are reported within the University to Executive Board and Senate. The UKVI equally monitors and reports on compliance measures using a Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) monitoring system. Should this unfortunate circumstance occur, the measures outlined in this plan would be enacted to mitigate and minimise any impact on those students affected.
- **We can no longer provide teaching:** because we lose the right to provide the programme or qualification; for example, by losing external accreditation. The residual risk and likelihood is low; many of the University's courses are professionally accredited and have to meet external standards and requirements. These are audited on a regular basis by external assessors, and the annual internal and external monitoring ensures that course delivery and assessments meet the external body requirements. However should this occur, the measures as outlined in this plan would be enacted to mitigate and minimise any impact on those students affected.
- **Our IT facilities are adversely impacted:** incidents such as infrastructure failure, an external service failure or an information security incident. In order to mitigate any such circumstances, we have secured and replicated critical elements of our infrastructure with uninterruptible power supplies and dually connected these to the internet; use up-to-date versions with full support for critical services; and we continuously monitor our information security.
- **There are changes to our physical infrastructure:** for example, closing a building or campus facility which could directly impact the students' course. The risk of this is low as at the current time the University has no plans to do this; in fact there are considerable plans to improve and enhance our physical facilities and resources. To this end the University has a long term Development, Maintenance and Replacement Infrastructure Plan set at £10m pa which ensures that the physical estate is maintained, fit for purpose and continually improved. There are also medium and long term capital investment plans of £60m over 5 years to develop new buildings, facilities and services on campus to improve and enhance the student experience. In addition, the University monitors the suitability of space as one of the University KPI's.

- **Short term impacts on the University Estate:** incidents such as a loss of utilities or damage to a building that disrupt teaching or services are covered through the details within the University's Incident and Business Continuity Plans. All Academic and Professional Service areas have stress tested Business Continuity Plans monitored by the Infrastructure Strategy Committee. These are also included in the University's Risk Register. All areas have continuity plans in place should a service or activity be temporarily disrupted or displaced; in the main, alternative facilities would be provided.
- **A collaboration agreement with a partner coming to an end:** the risk and likelihood of this is moderate. The University has agreements with selected partner institutions both in the UK and overseas, all of which have contractual obligations to ensure that all students continue to be taught in the event of the partnership ceasing. These contracts are reviewed regularly, and each has defined governance, management and reporting structures to ensure long term sustainability of the partnership; that the terms of the agreement are met; and to ensure continuation of academic provision. Therefore students are protected by these contracts.
- **The risk of collaboration with a partner institution coming to an end due to not meeting the required academic standards:** the risk and likelihood of this is low as the responsibility for academic standards rests solely with the University and is assured through the work of the Panel and Board of Examiners, whose membership includes External Examiners. Detailed oversight of the programme, including academic standards, is achieved through the Annual Monitoring processes. In addition, the Periodic Programme Review has a rigorous academic audit to ensure the partner is meeting the required quality assurance standards and assures students of a high standard of education.
- **The risk of a significant change to a University Support Service:** for example, to a support service such as student Welfare and Wellbeing, Counselling, Disability and Dyslexia Service, or the Library. It is assessed that the risk to this is medium; all Professional Service areas have stress tested Business Continuity Plans monitored by the Infrastructure Strategy Committee. These are also included in the University's Risk Register. All areas have continuity plans in place should a service or activity be temporarily disrupted or displaced; in the main, alternative facilities, services and staff (for example agency staff) would be provided.
- **The risk that Brunel University London is unable to operate due to financial management, performance or sustainability:** the risk and likelihood of this is assessed as low; the University's financial position is monitored regularly by Council and the OfS.

We report annual financial results, published by December each year in respect of the previous 12 month period to 31st July; the annual external audit process includes an assessment of the University's Going Concern status, and the University also prepares its own analysis, considered and approved by Council.

We previously submitted four year forecasts on a regular basis to our regulator (HEFCE until April 2018), these have now changed to six year forecasts for the OfS. Our first was submitted in September 2018 for the years to 2022/23. This forecast gives visibility of the University's expected future annual performance, and its contingency options in the event of adverse events.

The University therefore has the governance, the control environment, the external regulation and the cash reserves to ensure that the risk to the ongoing operation of the University, including with regard to non-continuation of students' study, is minimised.

2. The measures we have put in place to mitigate those risks:

- In the event that any of the above occurs, we will take one or more of the following measures to protect students' continuation of study. The University acknowledges that a single measure to allow students to continue their studies might not be uniformly appropriate for each student in each instance with different students having different needs. Each student impacted will have their own requirements assessed and supported.
- Whenever possible, the University will continue to teach students until the end of the programme, even though the programme is being suspended, or withdrawn to new applicants.
- If this is not possible, or if the student would prefer to change programme, the University will seek to offer a suitable alternative programme at the University for which the student is qualified (subject to the student meeting any relevant conditions for the programme).
- If the student does not wish to or are unable to accept the University's offer of an alternative programme, or the University is unable to offer an alternative programme, we commit to making every effort to support individual students to find an alternative course at another provider, and will provide students with reasonable assistance in seeking to transfer to that institution.
- If the student does not wish or are unable to accept the University's offer of an alternative programme, or the University is unable to offer an alternative programme, or they do not wish to transfer, they will be entitled to withdraw from the University.
- In the event that the student decides to withdraw, the University will make an appropriate refund to the student, loan company or sponsor of tuition fees and any deposits paid in accordance with the [Student Financial Policy](#), as appropriate.
- If the location at which the programme is delivered changes, we will seek to find an alternative location as geographically close as possible to the original location. Consideration will be given for compensation and refund as outlined in the [Student Financial Policy](#) sections 5 and 6, and in particular where any student has a disability, or requires additional assistance and support.
- For Research students, we will endeavour to provide alternative, appropriate University supervision. If this is not possible, we commit to making every effort to assist the student to find an alternative supervisor at another suitable institution. Consideration will be given for compensation and refund as outlined in the [Student Financial Policy](#) sections 5 and 6, and in particular where any student has a disability, or requires additional assistance and support.
- In the event of a University Support Service or activity be significantly temporarily disrupted or displaced; in the main, alternative facilities, services and staff (for example agency staff) would be provided. In particular where any student has a disability, or requires additional assistance and support, an agreed adjusted measures and support package would be put in place.
- We will consider with the students any personal impact that they consider the event has had on them; this will be done via the University Programme Suspension and Withdrawal Policy which sets out the steps that will be followed in the event that a programme is to be suspended or withdrawn, and includes the formation of a Continuity Group to oversee the arrangements.

<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/quality-assurance/documents/pdf/Programme-Suspension-and-Withdrawal-Policy.pdf>

3. Information about refund and compensation policy of tuition fees and other relevant costs where necessary in the event that we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study:

The University has a detailed [Student Financial Policy](#). Sections 5 and 6 of the Student Financial Policy deal with the issues of refunds and compensation, in particular:

- Refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company.
- Refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees.
- Refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.
- The payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course.
- Commitments to honour student bursaries.
- Compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study.
- Compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

4. Information about how we will communicate with students about our Student Protection Plan:

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to prospective and current students through:

- the University web pages
- including the plan in student offer letters
- student induction information
- student handbooks
- student newsletters
- via the Student Support website: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/life/supporting-you>
- any associated academic institutions and partners will also publish the relevant Student Protection Plan and associated policies such as refunds and compensation.

The University, as part of the Student Charter, makes the following commitments to students:

- To be open and transparent in relation to risks to the continuation of your studies, and to inform you as soon as reasonably possible if risks materialise
- To take reasonable steps to protect the continuation of your studies should such risks become apparent
- To consider students' views (whenever reasonably possible) before implementing changes which may pose a risk to the continuation of their studies
- We will communicate with students about changes generally and in order to mitigate their position as soon as practically possible.
- To take into consideration the diversity of our students' circumstances, including our international students and those with particular support needs, when assessing risks to continuation of study and the impact of changes we might make
- To seek regular feedback from our students on our Student Protection Plan

We will also make our Student Protection Plan available to staff through:

- the University web pages
- staff induction information
- staff newsletters
- staff training including general OfS and "CMA" related briefings

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes by including it within the formal papers which need to be submitted through College Management Boards and the Committee structure when course changes are requested.

How we will communicate with affected students should the plan need to be implemented:

Should this Student Protection Plan need to be triggered, students will be notified individually by the Dean of their College as soon as reasonably possible prior to the intended date of the course change or closure, and at a minimum of one term's notice.

Advice and support for students:

Advice and support will be offered to students in the first instance by the Associate Dean Student Experience within each College, or the Senior Tutor. Students will be provided with a dedicated person who will be the key liaison point.

Full support and advice is available to students through the range of services within Student Services both in person and online: <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/life/supporting-you>

Additional, independent advice and support is available from the Advice and Representation Centre (ARC) of the Union of Brunel Students.

What students may do if they are unhappy with the measures we take under this plan:

If students are unhappy with the measures taken by the University under the Student Protection Plan, they may raise their concerns using the University's Student Complaints Procedure:

<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/life/supporting-you/student-complaints-conduct-and-appeals>

If a student is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may take it to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator www.oiahe.org.uk

The measures contained in this plan are in addition to the protection students have under consumer protection law, and do not impinge on their consumer rights.

How we will review our plan:

This plan has been consulted upon with the Union of Brunel Students' Officers as representatives of the student community. It has also been discussed and reviewed by Senate, which includes representatives of academic staff in the University.

The plan will be reviewed annually by the Executive Board, and by the Student Experience and Welfare Committee (a subcommittee of Senate) which is co-chaired by the President of the Union of Brunel Students and also has a range of student representatives within its membership.

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