

# **STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN 2019-20**

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FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

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## FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN, 2019-20

Provider's name: Falmouth University

Provider's UKPRN: 10008640

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### STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2019-20

#### **1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise**

1. The risk of institutional closure is very low because the University has consistently met its financial objects, which are founded on long-term sustainability. In order to monitor financial health and sustainability the University Key Performance Indicators linked to the institutional 'measures of success' are monitored on a regular basis and are supplemented by financial KPIs which have been informed by the work of the sector body, the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group. These feed into the annual return to the regulator as a condition of the Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability. In the most recent assessment by HEFCE, the University was rated as 'not being at higher risk' which is considered an acceptable outcome. Consolidated financial statements are published at the end of each academic year and are available on the University's external website:  
[https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/financial\\_review\\_2017\\_-\\_final\\_signed.pdf](https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/financial_review_2017_-_final_signed.pdf)  
[https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/falmouth\\_university\\_finance\\_figures\\_2016-2017.pdf](https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/falmouth_university_finance_figures_2016-2017.pdf)
2. The University has no plans to close either of our campuses; the full ongoing utilisation of facilities on both the Penryn and Falmouth campuses is a key element in the University's 2030 Strategy.
3. The University considers the loss of degree awarding powers to be very low because the university has a consistent record of meeting all the associated requirements for this designation. The University operates a robust system of quality assurance, mapped against sector quality expectations, including the previous QAA Quality Code and informed by best practice. The University has demonstrated that it meets quality standards, previously via Institutional Review and latterly via Annual Provider Review. The University has also achieved Gold in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (2017).
4. Departmental/Subject level closures present a low risk to students. As part of ongoing long-term strategy objectives, the University may determine to reorganise the structure of provision, primarily to ensure the maintenance of the integrity of the student experience. Where reorganisation may have an impact on students, it is carefully managed over a

sufficiently long timeframe to mitigate against this. (See section 2 for further detail on the University's approach to mitigating against the risk of closures).

5. The risk presented to existing students by any institutional decision to close a course is considered low, given the University's established process for course suspension and cessation, which has been designed to ensure that decisions are made within such a timeframe as to not impact on any potential applicants, and to maintain the academic experience of existing cohorts through to the completion of their course (more detail on the University's Course Suspension and Cessation procedures is provided in section 2).
6. The risk that the University will not be able to deliver particular modes of study is considered to be limited due to the depth of knowledge within teaching teams, HR contractual arrangements and our processes of planned phased withdrawal, ensuring existing students are whenever possible able to remain on course and mode of study to which they have enrolled for the duration of their studies.
7. Similarly, the risk presented to students by the departure of academic staff members is considered by the University to be low. Falmouth University courses are very much developed to instil the knowledge and skills required for professional practice and industrial engagement; they do not rest on the expertise of individual members of staff.
8. Suspension/revocation of Tier 4 Sponsor Licence: the likelihood of this risk materialising is considered to be low, based on the recent actions taken and planned actions as recorded in the University's Strategic Risk Register. Further, the University's most recent internal audit of staff and student UKVI compliance reported positive outcomes.

## **2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise**

The University recognises that occasionally to meet the requirements of long term strategic planning, or to respond to changes in demand for Higher Education subjects, it may become necessary and appropriate to modify, suspend or cease offering a course or mode of delivery. To meet these challenges and, in particular, to safeguard the student experience Falmouth University has developed a procedure for course suspension and cessation. The procedure takes into consideration the impact of such decisions on current students, potential applicants, applicants, academic and support staff. The procedure applies to all courses offered by the University, including sub contractual arrangements. In all cases where a course is placed in cessation an exit strategy will be prepared and implemented. The exit strategy must:

- Ensure that the student experience is secured;
- Ensure that the quality and standard of award maintained for the remaining cohorts;
- Take into account intermitting students and those requiring late or re-assessment;
- Indicate a clear and appropriate timescale of cessation of the course and cohort completion;
- Be discussed with Students' Union representatives and with all affected student cohorts;
- Be communicated to academic and administrative staff and their representatives.

There is an expectation that the exit strategy will be one of "teach out" to enable students currently registered on the course to continue and complete their studies. On occasion, and with the agreement of the enrolled students, it may be possible to provide transfer to an alternative completion course or route. In such cases, the rationale must be fully articulated, together with a

mapping of course learning outcomes to the proposed alternative course or route, to ensure that standards are maintained and that students are not disadvantaged. Where neither of the above arrangements is available, the University will record the amount of credit the student has achieved and advise on any options that may be available for transfer to another institution. Exceptionally, where teaching cannot be completed or where none of the proposed options is acceptable to the student, the University will refund fees for the academic year in question and award any credit obtained by the student. Where the student is eligible for an intermediate award they will be given the option to have it conferred. Additionally, the University will provide appropriate financial redress.

The University recognises that closure of a course or mode of study may have a differentiated impact upon a diverse group of students and may potentially present a differing set of challenges or concerns for students with protected characteristics (under the 2010 Equality Act). To mitigate against any specific adverse impact on particular individuals or groups of students, Equality Impact Assessments will be included as part of the preparation of exit strategies.

The process of teach-out will be closely monitored by the University through Academic Board and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, to ensure that the quality of the student experience is safeguarded.

The University's policy and procedure for course cessation and suspension is available here: [https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/course\\_suspension\\_and\\_cessation\\_procedure\\_2017-18\\_01september2017.pdf](https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/download/course_suspension_and_cessation_procedure_2017-18_01september2017.pdf)

This is published alongside the Terms and Conditions so it is available to both prospective and current students.

Where courses are subject to material change, this is fully consulted on with the students. Where students do not agree, the University's approach is similar to course suspension and cessation, with the expectation that rather than teach out, the guidance is to phase in changes for new cohorts. Where this is not possible students are fully consulted and where they are not happy with the proposed change alternative arrangements made. An example of this approach can be seen in the recent title change of BA(Hons) Performance Sportswear Design to BA(Hons) Sportswear design. Although this change was prompted by industry considerations, two students opted to receive the original award title.

### **3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study**

Tuition fees and other monies paid to the University are only refunded to the individual or organisation that paid the University originally. Examples of this include but are not limited to:

- Where students' fees were paid by Student Finance England (or similar body) as part of a tuition fee loan or grant, the refund will be to that organisation. This also applies for interest accrued on any tuition fees paid by a third party (e.g. Student Finance England) to the University;
- Similarly, where an employer has paid tuition fees on behalf of a student, the funds will be returned to the employer; where the University's agreement is primarily with the employer, the employer will also receive any relevant compensation;

- Where a student has received funding from family or employment or other sources and subsequently passed this to the University, the University is only responsible for refunding and compensating the student;
- For the purposes of tuition fees, only monies paid to the University will be refunded. e.g. scholarships or fee waivers will be accounted for within any refund.

For the 2019/20 academic year, the Tuition Fee policy and procedure for course cessation and suspension Policy will be updated to:

- Highlight that in accordance with the Office for Students Conditions of Registration, the Policy covers refunds and compensation.
- Make it explicit that students are not required to accept alternative arrangements offered by the University;
- Include financial redress: In all cases, where necessary, the University's approach to financial redress is to recognise and compensate for where other remedies and alternative arrangements are inappropriate or unavailable. Falmouth University adopts the same principles of compensation of the OIA and will generally seek to compensate for actual financial loss incurred (e.g. loan interest, travel costs) etc.
- Distress and inconvenience in-line with the OIA Indicative Compensation Bands.
- In addition to the OIA's guidance, the University will consider refunds of day-to-day living expenses at a rate that reflects actual expenditure of the student during the academic year, up to the maximum weekly amount published in the University's indicative budget guide. This will be payable from the start of teaching, up to the point that the University is unable to deliver the advertised programme.
- Highlight that discretionary payments (e.g. bursaries) made by the University will not be recouped against any overpayment because of a programme of study ending sooner than expected. Where future payments for such funds were due these will not be payable where a student leaves the University. Instead the impact of their absence will be considered in any financial redress offered.

Following the update of the relevant policies this SPP will be re-drafted, resubmitted to OFS and republished to students.

#### **4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan**

The Student Protection Plan will be published on the University's website and via links to staff and student portals, VLEs and University SharePoint sites. The Student Protection Plan will be highlighted to all students on their initial registration and subsequent enrolment at the University.

The Student Protection Plan has been developed in conjunction with the Students' Union (FXU) and will be reviewed on an annual basis with continued involvement from the Students' Union.

The implications of the Student Protection Plan to any proposed course changes will be highlighted to staff members through inclusion in the training for and use of the University's curriculum management system.

Where material changes have been proposed to one of our courses these will generally only be made for future applicants and cohorts on the course. Where the changes are proposed for existing applicants and/or current students their explicit agreement is required prior to the proposed changes going ahead.

Where a proposal is made to suspend or cease a course, the University will initially hold discussions with student and staff representatives whilst the proposal is under consideration. Our course suspension and cessation procedure is clear that in such discussions the University's prime concern is to its applicants and enrolled students, who should be the first to be informed once a formal decision to suspend or cease a course has been taken. Directors of Academic Departments have a responsibility to produce an action plan, which will include consideration on how best to co-ordinate communications to ensure that applicants, students and staff are informed in a timely manner and an appropriate sequence. The Director of the Academic Department is responsible for informing students on the course in writing of the decision and advised of the timescale. This includes those students intermitting from the course. The Director also has responsibility for preparing and implementing an exit strategy, which must be discussed with Students' Union representatives and with all affected student cohorts.

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