

## Truro & Penwith College Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: **Truro & Penwith College**

Provider's UKPRN: **10007063**

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### Student protection plan for the period 2018/19 to 2020/21

This plan is written to provide applicants to and students of Truro & Penwith College with information about how the college aims to minimise the risk of any interruption of their studies or change to the nature of their programme while they are enrolled. The College takes a serious view of ensuring that students have every opportunity to succeed and will aim to mitigate any circumstances that could disrupt a student's study, whether due to the college, the student, or to external influences.

#### **1) Risks to the continuation of study of students, how those risks may differ based on students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will occur.**

Truro & Penwith College (T&PC) previously had an Higher Education Programme Changes and Closure Policy<sup>1</sup> and procedure that took into account modifications of programmes and the opportunity for refund of fees to students. This is replaced by two new policies<sup>2,3</sup> that better reflect the more detailed level of student protection with regard to registration with the Office for Students.

The range of risks that could impact on the ability of students continuing with their studies are identified below and considered in turn with regard to the impact and likelihood of risk and the mitigation of any impact on students:

- a strategic decision to close a course or campus;
- exit from the HE market;
- loss of key staff;
- insufficient enrolment and course take-up resulting in course suspension or closure;
- changes to funding available for student support purposes;
- removal of a provider's Tier 4 Sponsor Licence (the Home Office issued licence which allows a provider to teach international students);
- the removal of approval for the awarding of qualifications by an Higher Education partner.

<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Programme Changes and Closure Policy

<sup>2</sup> T&PC Student Protection Policy

<sup>3</sup> T&PC Policy for compensation and refund following closure of a higher education programme

Further changes that could occur but would be in the interest of the student include:

- developments in theories or practices in academic, professional and/or research areas, which will be in the interests of students;
- changes in law or compliance with the instructions of the awarding university or a professional body;
- implementing enhancements recommended by External Examiners or identified through quality assurance processes, for example Annual Programme Review;
- responding to any changes in external funding arrangements; and/or to ensure compliance with best practice in the sector in the interests of students.

### **1.1 Strategic decision to close a course or campus**

The risk of course or campus closure is small because of the level of engagement at both HE campuses within the college. T&PC's continued commitment to recruit at two campuses in the county and to focus on a bespoke Higher Education building at each site means that there is a level of activity 'within year' to which the college is committed. T&PC is undertaking a review of its HE portfolio and will operate a 'phased closure' of any courses that may be closed following the new T&PC Student Protection Policy. This policy confirms that any course identified for closure will 'run to a close' for all learners who are enrolled and engaged with the programme. In the unlikely event that a course were to close with students enrolled, those students would be offered an alternative option either (in a few cases) the same course at a different campus, or an alternative course at the same college. This may not be an appropriate approach for all students, and the College has a reciprocal agreement with the other Further Education College in Cornwall, Cornwall College, that, if a course were to close and a similar course was available at the other college and if learning outcomes were able to be satisfactorily mapped, the other college would agree to consider a student transfer.

Transferring students would be provided with certification of credit achieved or a record of academic achievement to facilitate transfer to the receiving college. Financial arrangements between institutions would ensure the remaining pro-rata fee would follow the student and any difference would be paid by the originating institution. If the option of Accreditation of Prior Learning was required, the process would be undertaken by the originating institution. The originating institution would take all responsibility for arranging the transfer and notifying the relevant bodies.

If these options were not appropriate, the college would work with students to support them with regard to finding an appropriate alternative option at another institution.

### **1.2 Exit from the HE market**

The likelihood of an exit from the HE market is small, with the college investing in Higher Education equipment, staff and development and continuing to follow its HE strategy (2015 to 2020)<sup>4</sup>. The Board of Governors and Senior Management Team remain committed to HE and at recent Governor's Conferences there has been a commitment to continue to develop Higher Education opportunities for the people of Cornwall and beyond. There are no financial issues that could impact on the College which continues to maintain strong reserves<sup>5</sup>. The latest audited accounts for the college show no borrowings and net assets of £54m. If for some reason the college chose to exit from an HE market, the policy identifies that all courses would be managed to ensure they run to a close and that students would be advised regarding the various alternative options available to them (see course closure, [above] and loss of key staff [below]).

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<sup>4</sup> HE strategy (2015 to 2020)

<sup>5</sup> T&PC Audited Accounts 2016-17

### **1.3 Loss of key staff**

On some programmes within the college's portfolio, the specialist nature of some module delivery creates a risk that provision could be affected by the loss of key staff. The short-term impact of any unplanned absence could be high but long-term the impact would be low. Within the college there are highly qualified members of staff delivering to Level 3 vocational and A level courses in every curriculum area. The majority of staff delivering the College's HE programmes would be 'covered' through a re-allocation of staff from within these FE areas in the college. In the few areas where the level of expertise of individual staff might create a greater challenge, the unplanned absence of staff could be managed from within the team over the medium term. The ability to engage industry and sector experts with skill sets that match the expert staff on these programmes would be possible in the long-term.

Planned changes to the staff body on programmes is managed through supporting staff development to gain skills and experience, and to use sector or industry expertise as an alternative method of delivery.

### **1.4 Insufficient enrolment and course take-up resulting in course suspension or closure**

During the 'application cycle', there is a risk of early course closure because of low recruitment due to increased competition in some areas. The impact on learners is minimal because as an institution the policy<sup>6</sup> is to ensure that all courses would 'run to a close' for all learners who are enrolled on the course. Any decisions to suspend or close a programme is taken through the Student Protection Policy and aims to minimise the impact on applicants and/or students. Any suspension or closure requires a decision that is agreed by the Chair of the College Board of Studies for Higher Education (CBSHE).

Should a curriculum area recruit low numbers in an academic year, every effort will be made to retain a group of courses that allow students to engage with each other and that creates an environment where a group of staff work across programmes and engage in research and scholarship. Students will also be given the opportunity to work in combined sessions that allow them to operate within an increased cohort during their study. Students who are returning following interruption or repeating the year will be supported through a range of different types of study based around tutorials rather than formal lectures or given the option to interrupt and return the following academic year with a larger cohort. The study process and learning plan will be agreed through discussion with the student.

### **1.5 Changes to funding available for student support purposes**

The college has a significant commitment to its student support<sup>7,8,9</sup> and will maintain its registration with the Office for Students and the commitment to allocate funds from within its Access and Participation Plan to provide both academic and non-academic support as identified at the start of a student's programme. Similarly, commitments to provide financial support such as bursaries will be maintained as identified at enrolment on any new programme (for the normal length of the programme). Bursary payments are subject to attendance, income levels and fee payment criteria. In the case of students engaging on a new programme (including level 6 top-ups) the financial information relevant to the year of enrolment on that programme will apply.

### **1.6 Removal of a provider's Tier 4 Sponsor Licence (the Home Office issued licence which allows a provider to teach international students)**

The college has a commitment to maintain its support for International students with a number of international students engaged on Further Education as well as Higher Education programmes. The numbers remain small (less than 1% of HE students) which enables the college to engage fully with all

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<sup>6</sup> T&PC Student Protection Policy

<sup>7</sup> HER Review

<sup>8</sup> UoP Periodic review Stage 1 College Review

<sup>9</sup> Student Support Handbook 2017-18

the international students and provide a level of support and guidance that might not be possible in other institutions.

### **1.7 Removal of approval for the awarding of qualifications by an Higher Education partner.**

The college is aware that in the recent past there was a case where an HE Provider has withdrawn its approval to award degrees from FE colleges which had been part of an established partnership. With this in mind the college continues to review the partnership policy with its HE provider and undertakes a regular review of alternative partners should there be a change in the strategy of its main partner Higher Education Institution (HEI). T&PC's partner HEI is also committed to ensuring its students are covered by a Student Protection Plan.

## **2) Measures to mitigate those risks that are considered to be reasonably likely to occur**

If, in the short-term, T&PC is unable to deliver HE courses in a specific curriculum area at either campus, T&PC will aim to provide short courses and stand-alone modules that can be delivered in a more developmental fashion and that will provide an opportunity for smaller numbers of students to continue to enrol on HE level modules. The opportunity to continue to enrol students on appropriate programmes would still be present because many of the staff are employed to deliver on FE programmes and therefore the college would retain its staff base. T&PC is currently engaged in the development of new HE programmes as a response to successful Periodic Review by the University of Plymouth (UoP).

The college has an Higher Education Programme Risk Register<sup>10, 11</sup> for any programme with a potential risk. This will enable Programme Team Leads (PTL) to manage the risk and ensure that an agreed mitigation strategy can be put in place as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring process.

## **3) Policy to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that T&PC is no longer able to preserve continuation of study.**

T&PC has a new compensation policy<sup>12</sup> which makes provision for:

- 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.

T&PC has cash equivalent reserves of over £10m which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for any students who might suffer from non-continuation of study.

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<sup>10</sup> Higher Education Programme Risk Register

<sup>11</sup> Higher Education Programme Risk Assessment Procedure

<sup>12</sup> T&PC Policy for compensation and refund following closure of a higher education programme

T&PC does not feel there is a need to put in place insurance arrangements to provide refunds and compensation for students at risk of non-continuation of study. The T&PC policy identifies that students are able to complete their programme of study which will 'run to a close' and any closure is undertaken at a point of time in the recruitment cycle that will avoid any risk of non-continuation.

#### **4) Communication with students about the College student protection plan**

T&PC will publicise this Student Protection Plan to current and future students by ensuring that their attention is drawn to it within the 'offer letter' that is sent to all successful applicants and again within the 'enrolment details' that are sent out to applicants during the summer prior to enrolment.

T&PC will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of this Student Protection Plan and the associated Student Protection Policy when they propose course changes by including regular training sessions for existing and new staff.

The T&PC Student Protection Plan, Student Protection Policy and Compensation Policy were reviewed by the Lead Student Representative before submission to the Office for Students and they will be presented to a panel of Student Representatives for further review during 2018/19. The plan and policy are subject to an annual review by College Board of Studies for Higher Education.

T&PC will inform students if there are to be material changes to their course by arranging a meeting with the Programme Lead and Programme Team Lead during group tutorial time, at the start of a module known to have high attendance and by college email. Normally the College would aim to make students aware of material changes to their programme of study as quickly as possible and Programme Leads would inform their students of any short-term issues that disrupt a timetable. In the medium and long-term any changes will be communicated in a face-to-face meeting with the affected students followed by an email that confirms what was said at any meeting.

If T&PC needs to implement the measures in the Student Protection Policy the strategy will be agreed on a cohort by cohort basis, working within the framework laid down within the new policy to support students collectively and individually.

If the college has a need to implement any measures within Student Protection Policy, advice, information and guidance would be made available from the College Student Services team and from academic staff within subject area. If these arrangements are not considered adequate, the option of independent advice will be open to any students involved through the appointment of an appropriate consultant.