UCQ
UNIVERSITY
CENTRE QUAYSIDE

Higher Education: Student Protection Plan

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What is a Student Protection Plan?

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect the interests of students in the case of material change. The purpose of the Student Protection Plan is to preserve the continuation and quality of study for all students whenever a risk to the continued study materialises.

This Plan explains how UCQ manage risk in relation to the higher education we deliver, and the actions that we would take if a risk to the continuation of your studies arose. It also describes how we would communicate with you and support you if these events should happen.

This Plan should be read alongside the Terms and Conditions of the offer you have accepted for your place at UCQ.

Who is covered by the Plan?

All applicants who have been issued a letter of acceptance and current students at UCQ are covered by this Plan. This Plan applies to all levels of study for higher education provision.

What is covered by the Plan?

This Plan covers:

- Risks and mitigation for the continuation of studies as a result of material change
- Our policy on refunds and compensation
- Options for complaints
- Details of how we will communicate with students
- Details of the publication of this Plan

UCQ considers risks to the continuation of the delivery of education at least termly. It maintains a Strategic Risk Register, and reviews the content thoroughly across the year, identifying updated threat levels and new mitigations. The Senior Leadership Team is actively involved in monitoring risk and receives and scrutinises reports of our risks at the same frequency.

What is not covered by the Plan?

Risks to students' continuation of study due to students' own circumstances (e.g. due to personal reasons) are outside the scope of this Plan.

The measures contained in this Plan are in addition to the protections you have under consumer protection law and do not affect your consumer rights.

UCQ has business continuity and disaster recovery plans in place that address other risks, such as failure of IT systems, fire or other incidents.
Any changes to the Apprenticeship Status will be carried out in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) apprenticeship rules of funding.

Risk Assessment

Scenario 1: We are no longer financially sustainable leading to institutional closure or programme closure or suspension

Likelihood: Low risk

Risk mitigation

UCQ have a very strong financial standing. Risks to our financial sustainability is mitigated through:

- Conducting financial risk management and performance monitoring on a termly basis
- Having an established framework for financial performance in place

Student recruitment at UCQ continues to rise, even during the initial impacts of COVID-19. We mitigate the risk of reduced student recruitment and retention through:

- Having permanent alternative delivery methods in place for students who are unable or no longer willing to attend face-to-face sessions due to the impact of COVID-19
- Track applications through the application cycle, looking at any trends arising from declined placement offers. Where additional risks are identified through this process, these are added to the Master Improvement Plan and Strategic Risk Register and monitored on a termly basis.

Measures to be taken

If we are considering suspending or closing a programme, we would consult current students as part of the decision-making process, taking account of the impacts on current and prospective students, the academic quality of the provision, market demand and strategic fit.

If closure due to financial viability were to materialise, the Office for Students (OfS) could withdraw our status as a registered provider or restrict our ability to enrol new students. The impact of such an event would be significant for all our students. If such circumstances arose we would work closely with the OfS to put in place arrangements that allowed our students to complete their studies where the teach-out of part or of a full year of study was viable, or transfer to another provider with an exit award and/or certification of credit for studies already successfully completed.

Teach-out

Where possible, UCQ provision will close gradually over a period of time that would allow currently enrolled students to complete their studies. If we need to teach-out your programme we will ensure that the quality of your programme, the teaching provided, and your student experience are maintained to the same level as you could expect if your programme were continuing for future students. We will provide you with information, advice and guidance on your options, including transfer to another programme or externally to another provider. We will communicate with you and provide opportunities for you to have individual meetings with your Professional Development Assessor. All quality assurance processes such as annual monitoring of programmes will continue for any programmes in teach-out until all students have completed, to provide assurance on the maintenance of quality and standards.

Internal transfer

We may offer an internal transfer to another UCQ programme, for example where an apprenticeship student transfers to a stand-alone degree. Where a student does not wish to internally transfer due to funding restraints or for another reason, we will follow either a teach-out, external transfer or exit award/certification pathway.

External transfer

Where teach-out is not possible, we will support you and your employer (where applicable) to move to another programme at an alternative provider. We will provide you with information, advice and guidance on your options, including the differences provided in academic and student support. We will communicate with you and provide opportunities for you to have individual meetings with your Professional Development Assessor. All quality assurance processes such as annual monitoring of programmes will continue until a programme is closed, to provide assurance on the maintenance of quality and standards.

Exit awards and certification

Should you need to transfer or choose to withdraw from your programme for any reason, we will provide you with an exit award (where sufficient credit has been earned) and certification to evidence your academic achievement.

Scenario 2: Closure of a delivery location due to an external event

Likelihood: Low risk

Risk mitigation

The risk that a UCQ delivery location, including an employer premises, will be closed due to an external event. We mitigate this risk by:

- Having permanent alternative delivery methods in place for students who are unable to attend face-to-face sessions due to the event
- Operate Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans to reduce the potential impact for students and staff
- Operate Health and Safety Vetting of all delivery venues prior to delivery taking place

Measures to be taken

Where a delivery location requires closure as a result of an external event, the following measures will be taken:

- All provision currently using the location for training purposes will be relocated to an alternative location where possible
- Timetabling will be revised for all affected provision to allow for the change of location and any disruption to the student's studies
- Where appropriate, UCQ may utilise alternative means of delivery

Scenario 3: Loss of institutional approval and/or programme validation by a validating body

Likelihood: Low risk

Risk mitigation

In 2021, we received a 5-year extension to our institutional approval and programme validation for the BA (Hons) Professional Management. Any risks affecting these arrangements will be mitigated by:

- Regular engagement and annual monitoring overseen by the validating body and the implementation of any changes deemed necessary to continue to meet our quality benchmarks

Measures to be taken

We will work with the validating body to teach out existing programmes, where this is not possible, we will aim to identify an alternative validating arrangement or an alternative provider to minimise any disruption to students. Students will be advised and supported by us with regards to their study options throughout this process.

Scenario 4: Grade 4 Ofsted Inspection resulting in limit/removal to deliver apprenticeship provision

Likelihood: Low risk

Risk mitigation

In partnership with Ofsted and the higher and further education regulatory bodies, we conduct regular risk management exercises and monitoring to ensure we continue to meet our quality benchmarks. This includes:

- Undertaking regular compliance and data quality audits
- Undertaking lesson reviews to ensure quality of learning, teaching and assessment
- Submitting regular and accurate data to the DfE and HESA
- Adhering to the DfE and Combined Authorities rules of funding
- Collecting regular stakeholder feedback to understand and act on programme quality concerns

Measures to be taken

In the unlikely event of a Grade 4 Inadequate Ofsted inspection, we will:

- Work with Ofsted and the DfE to mitigate impact on students
- Offer to internally transfer apprenticeship students to the stand-alone degree
- Where students do not wish to internally transfer due to funding restraints, we will follow the same measures in place following programme closure (Scenario 1)

Scenario 5: Loss of key staff

Likelihood: Moderate risk

Risk mitigation

As a small organisation (0-49), the risk of losing key staff is moderate. We will mitigate these risks by:

- Having business development plans in place to recruit additional staff at certain points in the business' growth
- Having robust Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place to ensure minimal disruption to business continuity
- Having an effective Committee Structure in place to provide staff with access to members at all levels of the organisation for help and support
- Having access to an external range of highly qualified academic and administrative staff during points of unexpected growth or loss of key staff
- Maintaining our Investors in People Platinum award and continuing to attract and retain the right people
- Having robust flexibility and work-from-home arrangements in place to meet individual staff needs

Measures to be taken

Should a loss of key staff occur, UCQ will seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience, into the vacant position(s) or recruit externally, to avoid disruption.

Scenario 6: Changes to programme content, regulations and policies

Likelihood: High risk

Risk mitigation

We are committed to ongoing quality assurance, enhancement and listening and acting on feedback from students, employers and staff. For this reason, programme content, regulations and policies will be updated from time to time. No student will be treated disadvantageously during the implementation of these types of amendments.

Measures to be taken

All changes to programme content, regulations and assessment must undergo a formal approval process. Within UCQ, this process involves robust consultation and discussion at an internal committee level, before seeking approval by members of our Academic Council. Following this approval process, the validating body would then need to approve, through their processes, all major changes to the programme, regulations and policies.

All students will be notified of any programme or policy amendments that have a direct impact on their studies. No student will be treated disadvantageously during the implementation of these types of amendments.

Refund and Compensation Policy

If UCQ are unable to preserve continuation of study through either an internal or external transfer, or the student reasonably rejects the offers made, we will make all efforts to return the student to the position they were in before beginning study. This will include:

- A refund of tuition fees to the method used to pay for completed modules that can no longer be counted towards a qualification (such as an exit award). This includes refund to government funding providers such as Student Finance or the Student Loans Company, where the student has not already started repaying their loan. This will include a refund of any previous module fees paid in relation to study of the qualification that is being withdrawn.
- Compensations for maintenance costs incurred as a result of the study that cannot be completed
- Compensation for losses suffered as a result of not completing the qualification that is being withdrawn

Students will be required to provide evidence for any claims that cover maintenance costs or losses suffered to enable us to consider the claim appropriately and make a suitable award of compensation.

Compensation awarded for lost time where there is no financial loss will be based on the indicative compensation bands for awards for distress and inconvenience outlined by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicative compensation bands for awards for distress and inconvenience

Level of distress or inconvenience	Description	Indicative compensation band
Moderate	An act of omission of the provider caused some distress and inconvenience in the short term (e.g. less than 6 months)	Up to £500
Substantial	An act or omission of the provider caused some distress and inconvenience in the long term (e.g. more than 6 months)	Between £501 - £2000
Severe	A more significant case of distress or inconvenience where, for example, the provider has failed to consider its responsibilities under discrimination legislation, or where there has been a clear material disadvantage to the student that has not been remedied	Between £2001 - £5000

How to apply

As part of any plan for the withdrawal of a qualification, we will identify and contact all affected students to provide full information, advice and guidance on both the withdrawal of their qualification and their options for continuing their study. Any decisions taken and offers made, will take student preferences into consideration.

Payments of refunds and compensation

Wherever possible, refunds will be made to the original payment method. This may include a refund to Student Finance (England, Wales or Northern Ireland) or the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, or to a third party who has provided payment via sponsorship or third-party credit or debit card. Where it is not practical for us to make payment to the original payment method we will liaise with the student and the appropriate body.

Compensation will usually be paid via cheque or BACS and paid within 28 working days of the date of written confirmation of the agreement.

UCQ have sufficient cash reserves to provide refunds and compensation for all of our students.

Employer apprenticeship service account

This information is underpinned by the DfE Apprenticeship funding rules for main providers.

As an apprentice of the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, the student is **not** permitted to contribute to tuition fees or end-point assessment in any way. All training and associated costs of the apprenticeship are paid for by the employer. These costs are agreed between UCQ and the employer prior to the start of the apprenticeship and detailed in a written agreement. To use funds in an employer's apprenticeship service account for the apprenticeship, UCQ must:

- Retain evidence of the apprentice's employment
- Be satisfied that the apprenticeship is the most appropriate learning programme and have evidence that it is either:
    - A new job role that requires new knowledge and skills; or
    - An existing job role, where the individual needs significant new knowledge and skills to be occupationally competent
- Have evidence that the apprentice will spend at least 6 hours per week of their time on off-the-job training, recognising that apprentices may need more than 6 hours per week off-the-job training
- Have evidence that the job allows the apprentice to gain wider employment experience as part of the apprenticeship
- Only use funds from an employer's apprenticeship service account for activity directly related to the apprenticeship, including:
    - Off-the-job training through UCQ
    - Registration and examination costs associated with mandatory qualifications
    - Regular planned on-programme assessments to discuss progress to date
    - Formative assessment costs associated with a mandatory qualification
    - Materials used in the delivery of the apprenticeship
    - Any administration directly linked to training and assessment, including end-point assessment
    - Costs to re-sit an exam linked to a mandatory qualification
    - Additional learning required to retake a mandatory qualification or an end-point assessment

- Accommodation costs for training delivered through residential modules (in the case of the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship this is not applicable)
- Costs of an apprentice taking part in a skills competition if the employer and provider have agreed that participation in the competition directly contributes to helping the individual achieve the apprenticeship

UCQ is **not** allowed to:

- Use funds from an employer's apprenticeship service account or government-employer co-investment for any part of any apprentice's programme where either UCQ or another party claim funding from another government department or agency for the same purpose
- Claim funding for any part of any apprentice's programme that duplicates training or assessment they have received from any other source.
- Use funds from an employer's apprenticeship service account to pay for the following:
  - Enrolment, induction, prior assessment, initial diagnostic testing, or a similar activity
  - Travel costs for apprentices under any circumstances
  - Apprentice wages
  - Personal protective clothing and safety equipment required by the apprentice to carry out their day-to-day work
  - Development of original teaching materials related to the delivery of a new apprenticeship offer
  - Off-the-job training delivered only by self-directed distance learning
  - Any training, optional modules, educational trips or trips to professional events in excess of those required to achieve the apprenticeship.
  - Any fees to third parties associated with a license to practice.
  - End point assessment costs incurred by UCQ not included in the price negotiated between the employer and the end-point assessment organisation.
  - English and maths up to level two (this is funded separately)
  - Repeating the same regulated qualification where the apprentice has previously achieved it, unless it is a requirement of the apprenticeship
  - Accommodation costs where the apprentice is resident away from their home base, because of the requirements of their day-to-day work or because this is convenient for the employer or provider
  - Capital purchases including lease agreements
  - Maintenance of capital purchases
  - Time spent by employees/managers supporting or mentoring apprentices, where this is not delivering training required as part of the apprenticeship
  - Specific services not related to the delivery and administration of the apprenticeship

Recovery of funds Apprenticeship funds

The DfE will review and monitor whether the training we provide represents good value for money. If the DfE consider that the funds in an employer's apprenticeship service account or government-employer co-investment they have provided is significantly more than the cost of the education and training, they may reduce the amount of funding they pay UCQ after consultation with us.

DfE apprenticeship payments (levy and non-levy) are paid to UCQ monthly in arrears, and 20% of the overall amount is retained as an Achievement Payment, paid only on successful completion and achievement of the apprentice. The DfE have determined this payment schedule to minimise the risk to themselves and their funding.

The DfE may take action including the recovery of all or part of the government funding from UCQ if they are satisfied that there has been a breach of the funding rules. This includes where claims are

made for funding through the employer's apprenticeship service account, government co-investment or additional payments to which UCQ and/or the employer is not entitled.

If an apprentice is required to transfer to an alternative provider, the funding for the programme would also immediately transfer. Therefore, the requirement of loss of time/maintenance compensation is unlikely. There could be additional travel costs if an alternative provider is not able to be secured in the same location.

Complaints

We aim to resolve quickly and fairly any complaint that a student may have about different aspects of their relationship with UCQ. The process for making a complaint can be found in our Complaints Policy. This Policy includes options for escalation to the validating body and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Further information is available from the OIA website: http://www.oiahe.org.uk

How we will communicate with students

Should this Student Protection Plan need to be implemented we will inform all affected students and applicants as early as possible, no later than 25 days before the change to their programme comes into effect.

We will communicate with you via our Virtual Learning Environment, email or telephone, with clear information and options regarding any material changes to your programme. We will also direct you to your Professional Development Assessor and our range of student support services.

Apprentices are encouraged to contact the Apprenticeship helpline (0800 015 0400; nationalhelpdesk@apprenticeships.gov.uk), for independent advice and guidance on their apprenticeship and their rights as an apprentice.

Publication of this Student Protection Plan

UCQ will publish this Student Protection Plan on our website so that it is available to current and prospective students. This document will also be made available to all members of staff so that they are aware of the implications associated with course changes and other risks associated with the delivery of the programme.

This Student Protection Plan is available at: https://ucq.ac.uk/tc/

We will review this Student Protection Plan on an annual basis. Where our Academic and Institutional Policy Committee deem the Plan requires major amendments this will be completed through consultation with the Staff Student Liaison Committee and the Senior Leadership Team.