

Provider's Name: Heart of Yorkshire Education Group

Legal Address: Margaret Street, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 2DH

UKPRN: 10007289

## **Student Protection Plan for the period March 2022 – August 2024**

### **Introduction**

As a registered provider of higher education, the Heart of Yorkshire Education Group ('the Group') is required to publish a Student Protection Plan ('the Plan') by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The purpose of the plan is to protect the interests of our students in circumstances which lead to a material change in their studies, for example through course closure or programme changes.

The Plan will identify the types of risk the Group considers may be relevant, and the types of event which may lead to these risks. It will outline what the Group will aim to do to minimise the impact of the events. The Plan will also outline the perceived likelihood of each type of risk. The Plan builds on our existing knowledge and has been created with the intention to assure current and future students that we have suitable provisions in place to protect the continuity of their studies. It outlines the types of risks, gives examples of events that may generate action and explains what we might do to diminish the consequences of these events if they happen. As not all processes may protect each student in each instances, the Plan is designed to take into account the differing needs, characteristics and circumstances of each individual.

The Group consists of three sites: Wakefield College, Selby College and Castleford College. Higher education has been delivered at the Wakefield and Castleford sites since the early 1990s and at Selby since the early 2000s. Partnerships are in place with well-established Universities: the University of Hull, Leeds Beckett University and the University of Huddersfield. Additionally a long standing partnership is in place with Pearson for the delivery of higher national certificates and diplomas.

The plan is considered to have a duration across three academic years – the duration of the longest programme of full-time higher education study that the Group currently offers. It will however, be reviewed annually.

This plan forms an important part of the Student Terms and Conditions.

### **Risk Assessment**

The risk that the Group is unable to operate is **very low** because it has enjoyed robust financial health in recent years. The financial health of the Group is evaluated on an annual basis by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). In doing so, the ESFA consider a range of financial performance indicators, and assess the robustness of financial planning undertaken by the Group. In recent years, the Wakefield College site has been assessed as having outstanding financial health; the highest category available. In addition, there are sufficient cash reserves in place for the payment of any compensation or refunds that may be granted to students. Detailed financial planning has been undertaken in respect of our recent merger, which has been validated by two independent firms of specialists (the auditors RSM and ICCA). Our post-merger financial

plan ensures that the Heart of Yorkshire Group will continue to enjoy outstanding financial health going forward.

The Group has a business continuity plan in place which covers those risks likely to be faced by any large organisation, for example, flood or fire. Mitigation for these kinds of risks include ongoing risk assessments and a regular safety inspection programme by our Estates Department.

The risk of our validating universities withdrawing their validation support is **moderate**, as the Group has already experienced this on two separate occasions. The current relationships with our validating partners are very strong and all of our partners have provided regular assurances that validation continues to be part of their strategic direction.

The Wakefield College campus has a dedicated higher education building. The risk of closure of this building is considered **very low** as it was only completed and opened for the start of the 2017/18 academic year. There are no plans to close any of the facilities at the Selby College campus and so the risk here is also **very low**.

The risk of programme closure is **moderate** due to the need to maintain specific levels of student numbers to maximise student experience and ensure the financial viability of the programmes. However, the Group operates a 'teach-out' approach which refers to the phased method by which any closure will operate, allowing affected students to complete their studies before the closure occurs.

There may, on rare occasions, be exceptional circumstance which would prevent teach-out occurring, for example, an issue relating to quality and standards – the risk of these exceptional circumstances arising are considered to be **very low**. In such circumstances, the Group would offer a transfer to a similar or replacement programme or would assist any affected students with support to transfer to an alternative provider.

### **Risk Mitigation**

If one of our validating partners withdraws from our collaborative partnership, the Group will be given an appropriate notice period which allows all registered students to complete their studies, irrespective of duration of programme or mode of attendance. Depending on the timing of the notice within the recruitment cycle, the University may permit one final cohort to enrol as offers of study may already have been made. The Group has two key validating partners in order that alternative programme validations can be undertaken if one were to withdraw. The Group has already had experience of this risk occurring and has successfully managed it on both occasions with the full support of the relevant validating partner.

If a circumstance arose whereby accommodation allocated for higher education delivery became unavailable, alternative accommodation would be found elsewhere on the relevant campus, although this may lead to timetable changes. This would be implemented following consultation with the affected student cohort(s). Equality impact assessments would also be carried out to ensure the suitability of the alternative accommodation.

If the Group were to have to implement programme closure on one or more of its programmes of study in higher education, all currently enrolled students would be communicated with to provide reassurance that they would not suffer disadvantage, as they would be permitted to

complete their studies, irrespective of duration of programme and mode of attendance. Students within a recruitment cycle and therefore not yet enrolled on the programme will be communicated with as soon as a decision to close has been made and provided with advice and guidance on their next steps. This will include information relating to other suitable courses within the Group which they may wish to transfer to. In addition, the Group has membership of partnerships – for example, Go Higher West Yorkshire, UniConnect, the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges – and affected students within the recruitment cycle will be advised of suitable alternative courses delivered by other members of those partnerships where no viable alternative exists within the Group.

The annual review cycle for the College's higher education provision can lead to modifications being made to programmes. Many of these will be minor in nature but will be fully considered by the validating University to ensure that they do not adversely impact upon the academic integrity and quality of the programme. Wherever possible, the changes are made at the end of an academic year and implemented in readiness for the start of the next academic year to minimise disruption to students. On occasion however, changes are required in year and, at times, may comprise major modifications. In all such cases, students and other relevant stakeholders will be consulted as part of the modification process. The validation University will convene a panel to consider the proposed changes and ensure that academic integrity is maintained. The implications of any approved changes will be communicated to the relevant student cohort and mitigation put in place to ensure no disadvantage occurs. For example, and extension of summative deadline or arrangements for additional tuition will be agreed. In recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach would be inappropriate in most cases, the individual circumstances of the relevant student cohort will be taken into account at all times.

#### **Information about policies in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide continuation of study**

The Group has a Refund and Compensation policy which forms part of the overall Student Protection Plan documentation.

This Policy is published on the Group's public website and also on the higher education student VLE sites.

The Policy provides clear and accessible guidance to students around the circumstances under which refunds, or compensation may be payable to students, their sponsor or employer and the Student Loans Company. The Policy also sets out the process for considering claims and acknowledges that each case will have its own set of specific circumstances to take into account.

#### **Communication**

The Group's Student Protection Plan will be uploaded to its public website so that it is accessible for current and future students. It will also be available on the higher education student VLE system, available to all enrolled higher education students.

All Group staff will be made aware of the implications of the Student Protection Plan when they propose programme changes and these implications will be considered as part of the modification process. Any changes to the plan, either as a result of the regular review schedule, or by necessity during an academic year, will be highlighted to staff and to students.

In any circumstances whereby the risks identified in the Plan happen, and the impact upon students is more than insignificant, as much notice as possible will be given to all those affected. Communication will be made via the method which the affected cohort deem to be most appropriate for their needs. A named contact will always be assigned to the action. Advice, information and guidance will be provided to students, both collectively and individually, and all relevant service areas will be engaged in this process (for example, Finance and the Higher Education Student Support Team),

The Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee which includes a Student Representative and also representatives from our validating partner Universities.