



UNIVERSITY
CENTRE
WESTON

STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Provider's name: University Centre Weston (Weston College of Further and Higher Education)
Provider's UKPRN: 10007459

Legal address: Knightstone Campus, Knightstone Rd, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 2AL

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University Centre Weston (UCW) is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. Events may occasionally occur which mean that unforeseen changes have to be made to modules or programmes. The Higher Education (HE) and Research Act 2017 and the Office for Students (OfS) conditions of registration requires HE institutions to maintain a Student Protection Plan to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure. This UCW Student Protection Plan has been prepared in accordance with that requirement, following guidance from the OfS, and has been written in consultation with students.

This UCW Student Protection Plan applies to all students registered with UCW on validated higher education programmes from 2022-23 academic year onwards. This includes but is not limited to Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates/Diplomas, Bachelor Degrees, Honours Top-up Degrees and Higher/Degree Apprenticeships with HE qualifications.

The UCW Student Protection Plan does not apply to students studying at UCW who are registered on programmes franchised from Bath Spa University (BSU) or University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. These students are covered under BSU / UWE's student protection plans, which can be found on their websites. The list of programmes this applies to are listed in Appendix 2. All other programmes are covered by UCW's Student Protection Plan.

UCW does not have degree awarding powers and, therefore, programmes delivered at UCW are awarded by its partner institutions. The four partner institutions that UCW works with are:

- Bath Spa University
- The University of the West of England, Bristol
- Hartpury University
- Pearson

The UCW Student Protection Plan has been written in consultation with students, and partner institutions and aligns to their student protection plans where appropriate. Students can access the student protection plans through the relevant website. Whilst material changes are covered by UCW's Student Protection Plan, other policies may also apply, and there may be cases where the partner institution and UCW take the decision to use the partner institution's student protection plan.

RISKS TO THE CONTINUATION OF **STUDY FOR STUDENTS**

Risk at University Centre Weston (UCW) is managed effectively using a number of processes at multiple levels of the organisation. Risks to student continuation are included within these risk processes.

At the corporate level, risk is managed through the UCW Strategic Risk Register, which is scrutinised, monitored, and reviewed by Weston College Group senior managers and governors. The UCW Strategic Risk Register considers risks such as campus closure, withdrawal from academic partnerships and changes in strategic direction. The UCW Strategic Risk Register is also considered by the Weston College of Further and Higher Education (hereafter referred to as Weston College) Risk Management Group, who scrutinise and manage risk across the wider organisation. Through this forum risks are disseminated from the UCW Strategic Risk Register and taken in context with Weston College.

At the operational level, each programme has a Programme Health Check which identifies key areas that may pose risk to the programme, such as staffing, resources and recruitment. The Programme Health Checks are monitored by the HE Directorate and the HE Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC), who then implement actions to mitigate potential risks. In addition, National Student Survey (NSS) feedback also serves to highlight risk in terms of the NSS categories. A bespoke 'RAG rated' process is in place to address any quality-related issues that are highlighted, thereby minimising quality risks at an early stage before there is a more serious risk to continuation.

This UCW Student Protection Plan has not considered the risks of closure of Weston College, as the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) provides assurance to the OfS in respect of this.

At the strategic level, UCW recognises that there are risks that could cause disruption to its ability to deliver higher education programmes. UCW mitigates the likeliness of these risks and puts in place measures to ensure that the impact of these risks is minimised, should they occur.

These risks are monitored by the Curriculum and Quality Governance Committee (CQGC), and are identified below:

1. The risk that Weston College takes the decision to change its strategic direction away from higher education.

The likelihood of this risk is considered very low. Weston College values a diverse portfolio of provision and has a strategic commitment to expand its higher education provision as articulated in the Weston College Strategic Plan, which is available to view on the Weston College website:

www.weston.ac.uk

2. The risk that UCW's Partnerships with its awarding bodies are ineffective and/or unilaterally discontinued.

The likelihood of this risk is considered low. UCW has regular meetings with its three main awarding partners, Bath Spa University (BSU), the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) and Hartpury University (HU), at both strategic and operational levels. This ensures that the relationship between the organisations remains healthy and productive, and any potential issues are resolved before they can impact on the student experience.

UCW has a ten-year Strategic Partnership Agreement with UWE; a ten-year Memorandum of Understanding with BSU; an annual centre declaration with Pearson; and a five-year Academic Partnership Memorandum of Agreement with HU, demonstrating commitment to the partnerships from all parties. These formal agreements are reviewed within operational and strategic partnership meetings to ensure they are updated and extended appropriately.

The close working relationship between UCW and its awarding partners was identified as good practice through a QAA Higher Education Review:

"The close working relationship with the awarding bodies, which facilitates a reflective and responsive approach to assessment design and practice" – Higher Education Review – Weston College of Further and Higher Education (2015).

3. The risk that one of UCW's awarding body partners is no longer in the position to award degrees.

The likelihood of this is considered low. UCW considers it extremely unlikely that any of its partners will lose their degree awarding powers. Pearson, BSU and the UWE have considerable experience in delivering and awarding higher education qualifications. HU is new to Degree Awarding Powers but has extensive experience of delivering higher education. It achieved commended judgments for the quality of student learning opportunities and enhancement in its QAA Higher Education Review. It also achieved a 'Gold' Teaching Excellence Framework rating.

4. The risk that UCW cannot operate at one or more of its campuses.

This risk is considered low. UCW's HE Directorate is in regular communication with Weston College Estates department who together with the HE Directorate ensure that all UCW facilities are safe, accessible and meet the expectations of the student body and awarding partners. Regular audits and checks are undertaken to ensure that there are no health and safety issues or concerns at any UCW campus. Although UCW leases some buildings, legal agreements are in place and appropriate notice periods. UCW commits to providing the best possible facilities for its students and sometimes this may involve relocating delivery of courses. If this was the case UCW would work with students to give appropriate notice and make alternative plans.

In the circumstance where there is a closure at a campus with specialist resources, or a lease is not extended, UCW commits to providing alternative facilities that allow the student to complete their programme of study. Weston College has invested tens of millions of pounds in the past five years into its facilities and accommodation, which continue to be a priority for the organisation.



5. The risk that UCW can no longer deliver the material components of a specific programme of study.

The likelihood of this risk is considered low. UCW undertakes programme level 'health checks' of all of its HE provision and where necessary has a policy of intervention by the HE Directorate. Teaching is undertaken by teams, which usually consist of a mixture of full-time and part-time lecturing staff, and UCW consults with partners to include specialist expertise.

This ensures that UCW has the versatility within its teams to arrange appropriate cover in case of staff member absences/ departures. UCW also monitors staff retention to ensure that we have the capacity to deliver programmes. In terms of faculty closure, this is deemed low risk as Weston College as a whole functions on a faculty structure.



6. The risk that UCW takes the decision to close a specific programme of study.

UCW does discontinue courses of study for a variety of reasons. Where demand for a programme is low, UCW reserves the right to suspend or discontinue a programme in-line with the UCW Programme Discontinuation Statement, but UCW would work with applicants to offer alternative appropriate courses with UCW or its partners. This policy is available through the UCW website's Wider Information Set:

www.ucw.ac.uk/about/wider-information-set

In these cases, existing students will usually be 'taught out' until they complete the qualification and UCW commits to appropriately resource the programme (including staffing) until all students have graduated, subject to academic regulations. In such cases a formal discontinuation plan is drawn up to ensure a plan is in place to allow all students to complete their course. This plan is monitored by UCW and the appropriate awarding body.

UCW has recently taken the strategic decision to change some of its provision from the Foundation Degree with Honours Top-up model to a three-year full Honours Degree programme model. In these cases, while the Foundation Degree programme will be discontinued, students have either been enabled to complete their original programme of study or transfer to the new three-year honours programme. Students would be consulted through this process and change would only be implemented with the agreement of all students.

Programmes are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are current, industry relevant, and provide graduates with the skills required for progression. Generally, any changes would be implemented for new students and significant changes would not be made to a student's programme without their express permission.

7. Loss of Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation.

This risk is considered low as UCW works closely with our PSRBs to ensure we continually meet their requirements. In these circumstances, we would work with the relevant PSRB, and our appropriate partners, to see if it is possible to put in place appropriate actions to support the existing students to complete the accredited programme in the expected period and location. If this is not possible, then the same actions as in Risk 6 would be implemented.

8. UCW loses its Home Office licence to admit or continue teaching overseas students.

This risk is potentially moderate as there are elements of the licence and the law or regulation on which the licence is based which may be affected by external factors. In such a case UCW would work with the Home Office, regulatory bodies, and other providers, especially our partners, to find acceptable alternatives for students on both a collective and individual basis. The University's activities in relation to compliance with Home Office requirements are monitored both internally via Governors, Corporate Leadership Board (CLB) and regular risk reports to senior management and externally by auditors and the Home Office.



9. Data loss/Loss of IT services

The risk of this is increasing given the global rise in instances of cyber-attacks and has the potential to result in the loss of the students' Virtual Learning Environment, access to library services, internet connection and loss of saved work and ability to submit work online. Staff undertake regular training to reduce this risk and IT have incident response management procedures, which is reviewed regularly via different management meetings including CLB and Governance. UCW has the ability to recover data from backups to mitigate short term severity of incidents. In such circumstances the University would take all reasonable steps to ensure continuity of study.

10. Other risks considered:

- All awarding partners are considered secure in their capacity to validate qualifications and loss of their awarding capacity is low risk.
- UCW operates both full-time and part-time programmes and there are no current plans to discontinue either mode of study. The risk of such discontinuation is therefore considered to be very low, given the established nature of these programmes and mode of study.
- UCW shall not be liable for failure to perform any obligations under the terms and conditions of study if such failure is caused by any act or event beyond UCW's reasonable control ("force majeure event"). If UCW is the subject of a force majeure event, it will take all reasonable steps to minimise the disruption to students.

MEASURES TO MITIGATE RISK

UCW considers the overall likelihood of any of the above risks to crystallise to be low. The risks identified within UCW’s risk management processes are all considered to be low, or very low.

However, in the case of programme closure, or any of the risks identified above crystallising, UCW will undertake all reasonable measures to ensure that students can complete their chosen programme of study, outlined in the UCW Programme Discontinuation Statement. The document outlines UCW’s approach in the case of the discontinuation of a named award, which aligns to all awarding partner discontinuation statements. The below diagram details the process followed to ensure that student continuation is ensured in the case that UCW is no longer able to deliver a programme. This process is applicable across all of the risks UCW has identified. UCW recognises that ‘one size’ will not always fit all, and so will consider a range of options and measures to protect student experience. Further information on each stage can be found in Appendix 1: UCW Exceptional Refunds and Compensation Policy.

UCW PRESERVING CONTINUATION PROCESS DIAGRAM

Throughout all stages of the process, UCW recommends students access independent advice through the student union or the National Union of Students.

1. TEACHING OUT

In the event that UCW closes or suspends a programme of study it will, under most circumstances, continue to teach students until completion.


2. CONTINUATION AT A PARTNER INSTITUTION

Most programmes at UCW have equivalent provision at one of its partner institutions. If UCW is unable to or chooses not to teach out a programme, it will work with its partner universities to find an alternate programme for affected students to complete their studies.

3. CONTINUATION AT ANOTHER INSTITUTION

If it is not appropriate or possible for the student to continue onto a programme at UCW or one of its a partner institutions, UCW will (in consultation with the student) look for other opportunities for continuation with other UK HE providers.

4. EXCEPTIONAL REFUND AND/OR COMPENSATION

Where all other options have been exhausted UCW will provide a refund and  compensation to students in-line with the UCW Exceptional Refund and Compensation Policy.

UCW operates a few programmes which could be considered “niche”, with few comparable programmes at other providers. However, as there are no programmes in which UCW is the sole provider, in the event of discontinuation of one of these programmes, UCW anticipates that arrangements could be made with relevant other HE providers. In the circumstance that a student wishes to change programme, UCW will support the student in facilitating the change. If the alternative programme is at a different provider, UCW will liaise with the new provider to attempt to ensure that appropriate credit is given for studies already completed.



PROTECTION FOR STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR A SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFERENCE

UCW recognises that it regularly recruits a significant number of students who identify as having a disability or a specific learning difference. As such, it invests significantly in support for these students to ensure that they have an equal chance at success on their chosen programme of study. In the event that continuation cannot be preserved for students with disabilities or learning difference, UCW will work with any other institutions that are involved in preserving continuation to ensure that equivalent provision is in place for the student. UCW will also consult with the students themselves to seek to find a mutually agreeable solution.



REFUNDS AND COMPENSATION

UCW has a Tuition Fees Policy, which outlines for students and applicants the cost of UCW delivered programmes. This is supported by the UCW Exceptional Refunds and Compensation Policy which details under which circumstances UCW students may apply for a refund and (if eligible) compensation. Both of these policies are available through the Wider Information Set on the UCW website:

www.ucw.ac.uk/about/wider-information-set

The UCW Exceptional Refund and Compensation Policy is also appended to this Student Protection Plan.

As detailed in the policy, refunds will only usually be granted if all other avenues, including 'teaching out' or continuation at another university have been exhausted. In all cases of material change UCW will work with affected students to implement measures that ensure that the student is not adversely affected. This may include provision for travel, accommodation, childcare or financial support to enable the continuation of support for additional learning needs.

In the case that a student is in receipt of a UCW managed student bursary, UCW will continue to honour the bursary for the duration of the agreed programme of study.

Compensation for maintenance costs and time lost, or compensation for additional tuition or maintenance costs at another institution will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. However, UCW will usually cover any costs over and above those that student would reasonably expect if they had continued to study at UCW.

Weston College is considered by the ESFA to be in good financial standing with significant reserves, providing assurance that UCW is able to cover compensation or refunds to students in the exceptional case that it is unable to preserve continuation of study.

COMMUNICATING THE UCW STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

Publicising the Plan

This UCW Student Protection Plan is published on the UCW website in the Wider Information Set. Students and staff should always refer to the version of the Student Protection Plan on the UCW website to ensure that they are referring to the most recent version. In addition, staff are instructed to draw the students' attention to the UCW Student Protection Plan at induction (and at enrolment at the start of each academic year), it is listed on the Induction Checklist and it is included in the pre-contract information provided to all offer holders.

The UCW Student Protection Plan will be made available to staff through the A-Z of Policies and Procedures on the staff intranet. Changes to regulation and policy at UCW are communicated to staff through mandatory Higher Education Continuing Professional Development (HECPD) events. These are held once a term and give UCW the opportunity to explain to staff the implications of this UCW Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes in the future.

For further information about this Plan, staff and students can contact the UCW helpline on 01934 411409.

Updating and review

The UCW Student Protection Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to review the risks and consider if the risks / document needs to be updated. If revision is required this would be done in consultation with students and presented to the Student Representatives Committee before consideration at AQSC, CQGC and finally reported to the OfS. As students attend AQSC and CQGC students will be given the opportunity to input into the further development of the Plan and be a voice on the approving committees.

Informing and consulting students if implementing this Plan

Because UCW does not have degree awarding powers, its awarding partners retain responsibility for modifications to existing programmes. When considering changes to a programme of study, UCW follows the processes and procedures of its awarding partners. When material changes are proposed to a programme or the UCW Student Protection Plan is implemented, each student affected will be contacted at least 30 working days prior to implementation to explain the changes, and engagement and consultation with individual students will take place. Material changes to a programme will only be implemented if all students on the programme consent.

When implementing this Plan, UCW will endeavour to consult with all individual students, face to face where possible. In most cases, no steps will be taken under the Plan, until such consultation has taken place.

Independent advice

In the case that the measures identified in the UCW Student Protection Plan are implemented, students are advised to seek independent advice through the Student Union or the National Union of Students:

www.nus.org.uk/en/advice

Complaints

If a student wishes to make a complaint about the UCW Student Protection Plan or its implementation, it should be made through the complaints process as outlined in the UCW Complaints Policy and Procedure. This policy is available through the Policies and Procedures page of the UCW website:

www.ucw.ac.uk/students/policies-and-procedures



APPENDIX 1

UCW Exceptional Refunds and Compensation Policy

The University Centre Weston (UCW) Exceptional Refunds and Compensation Policy only applies to programme discontinuation where it is not possible, or feasible, to ‘teach out’ a programme at UCW.

Should a programme be discontinued, UCW will always seek to complete the provision to ensure that the student academic experience is maintained, with every effort made to minimise inconvenience to students. The design of the programme should also ensure that the qualification holds its value over time.

If it is not possible to ‘teach out’ the programme at UCW, in the first instance students will be supported in transferring to an appropriate HE provider. If this is not feasible, the UCW Exceptional Refunds and Compensation Policy is then applicable.

Continuation at a partner university

If it is not possible to ‘teach out’ a programme, UCW will seek to transfer students into a subsequent year of study at one of its partner universities. In the majority of cases equivalent qualifications are available at these institutions. In the event of such a transfer occurring, any difference in tuition fees will be met by UCW, along with any reasonable agreed maintenance costs agreed, such as accommodation, childcare and/or travel.

If a student was awarded a Bursary from UCW, there will be a commitment to ensure that this is paid for the subsequent years of study, as if the student had continued their studies at UCW.

Continuation at a different HE provider

If it is not possible for students to continue at UCW or one of its partner universities, UCW will explore the options that are available to students to enable them to transfer into a subsequent year of study at a different HE provider. In the event of such a transfer occurring, any difference in tuition fees will be met by UCW along with any reasonable agreed maintenance costs agreed, such as accommodation, childcare and/or travel.

If a student was awarded a Bursary from UCW, there will be a commitment to ensure that this is paid for the subsequent years of study, as if the student had continued their studies at UCW.

Restarting of studies

Where it is not possible for students to continue their studies either at a partner university, or a different HE provider, it may be necessary for the students to restart their studies. Although this scenario is highly unlikely, should it occur UCW will normally refund all reasonable maintenance costs incurred as agreed during the students study at UCW.

This will usually include the refund of tuition fees, maintenance loans and any reasonable additional costs incurred. Depending on the source of funding the refund will be paid to the individual themselves, or to the appropriate body. In addition, students may be eligible for compensation (see below).

Where it is not possible to continue their studies at either a partner university or a different HE provider, then should a student choose not to continue with their studies at an alternative HE provider, they would still normally be eligible for refunds and compensation. However, in the event that a student unreasonably rejects an offer to continue their studies at either a partner university or a different HE provider, there will be no obligation on UCW to refund costs or pay compensation to them.

Compensation

Any monetary compensation for distress and inconvenience caused would be negotiated on an individual basis and considered by a panel which would normally comprise of the following people (or personnel with equivalent status):

- Assistant Principal: Higher Education (The Chair)
- Finance Director
- Academic Registrar

Applications for compensation for distress and inconvenience need to be made in writing to the Assistant Principal: Higher Education and can only be applied for up to a maximum of six months after the event. If approved, payments will normally be in line with the Office of Independent Adjudicators advice regarding the level of distress or inconvenience incurred:

- Moderate: Up to £500
- Substantial: £501-2000
- Severe: £2001-5000

If a student is not satisfied with the decision made by the panel they have the right to appeal. Appeals must be made in writing to the Principal and Chief Executive of Weston College within five working days of the date of the written notification of the decision. The decision of the appeal will be communicated to all parties involved within five working days.

UCW as part of the Weston College Group is able to deliver the financial implications of the Exceptional Refunds Policy as it has Good Financial Status as confirmed by the ESFA; it has significant reserves and insurance in place to provide refunds and compensation if required.

APPENDIX 2

List of qualifications offered by UCW but not covered by UCW’s Student Protection Plan but instead covered under Bath Spa University’s Student Protection Plan

- BA (Hons) Acting and Performance Making
- BA (Hons) Contemporary Art and Professional Studies (top-up)
- BA (Hons) Dance for Commercial Performance
- FdA Early Childhood Studies
- FdA Early Years
- BA (Hons) Early Years Education (top-up)
- BA (Hons) Graphic Design
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre
- BA (Hons) Professional Music Performance and Production

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Weston College Group

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