

Section 1:

Student Protection Plan: Overview

The Student Protection Plan (“SPP”) sets out what students can expect to happen should Sheffield Hallam University (“the University”) provision, campus or institution close. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that students can continue or complete their studies or can be compensated if this is not possible.

The Student Protection Plan is required to be produced, published and updated by the Higher Education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), as part of its regulatory framework, which the University adheres to. More information about the OfS and the regulation of Higher Education providers can be found on its website: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

Should an event occur that results in closure of a significant part of or all the University’s provision, we would anticipate working closely with the OfS and other regulators, education partners, staff and students to ensure students’ interests and outcomes are protected. This SPP outlines the key risks for the University in delivering our provision. For each risk, we have described the actions we are already taking or will take to mitigate or eliminate the risk and ensure continuation of study.

Further information about the University, including student funding, policies for staff and students, and information on how the University makes and assures decisions, can be found on our website at www.shu.ac.uk

The provisions of this plan cover significant risks and do not include changes that may be required owing to operational matters during the general delivery of a course.

These include (but are not limited to):

- Individual changes to a module or [course](#) and its teaching, delivery and / or assessment
- Timetable changes, including location or whether in person or online
- Changes required to a course or module to ensure continued compliance with regulatory or Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) or other external requirements
- Individual academic supervision, including research projects or for students undertaking research-specific modules or awards
- Implementation of existing regulations that enable the University to secure the integrity of student experience and awards in the event of short-term disruption.

Where appropriate, in such circumstances, the University may consult and communicate these changes to students and staff to ensure that delivery and outcomes remain of a consistent high quality.

Our commitments in respect of changes to circumstances for students on their course is contained within our overall Terms and Conditions which should be read in conjunction with this plan: details, including a useful overview of the student contract, can be found on our [website](#).

Applicants or those who have accepted an offer from the University, but are not yet enrolled, are protected by the pre-enrolment provisions outlined in our Terms and Conditions. If there are fundamental changes or cancellations to your course prior to enrolment, you may be entitled to compensation and refund for expenses incurred and should refer to your offer and pre-enrolment documents for further information.

Section 2:

Critical incident management at the University

Incident Management and Business Continuity

Serious incidents are rare, but regrettably cannot be ruled out. UK universities have most recently experienced significant disruption due to the global pandemic and also have to respond quickly to other unexpected events. These could include the temporary suspension of access to University buildings, IT failure/ cyber-attacks, severe weather, or impacts of significant world or local events.

The purpose of business continuity planning is to ensure that the University has robust measures in place to cope with a major disruption and ensure a coordinated, planned approach is in place to help the University sustain time-critical activities at an acceptable level, and get back to normal as quickly as possible.

The University will seek to minimise disruption to students and prioritise continuation of study as part of its incident management protocols. These protocols support an effective and immediate response to disruption, prioritising the health and safety of our community. Most incidents and disruption are temporary and will be successfully resolved with clear communication provided to students and staff on alternate access to University resources and support. Where unplanned disruption looks to be longer term, the provisions of this plan and associated communications and reporting will apply.

Section 3:

Specific risks to which this plan applies

The following potential risks have been identified in alignment with the University's wider risk management process. The University has a robust process for identification and management of strategic risks. It regularly reviews and maintains oversight of these risks through the executive and the Board of Governors' Audit and Risk Committee.

The following sets out key potential risks to continuation of study. We consider that, with the mitigation measures and controls outlined, the residual likelihood and impact of these risks remains low.

Risk: The University is no longer able to operate or no longer intends to operate

Sheffield Hallam is one of the UK's largest universities and a leading provider of health education and teacher training alongside a wide range of other provision. The University, through the Board of Governors and its Finance & Employment Committee, has effective oversight of financial performance.

The annual accounts of the University are independently audited. The finances of the University are strategically managed to ensure financial sustainability, and investments and cash flow are prudently managed over time, and in the context of an increasingly uncertain external funding environment. Our external and internal audit processes bring forward the necessary information from the University to the Board of Governors to provide confidence in our strategy, its implementation and our future viability.

Should the University be deemed to be at significant financial risk or no longer considered a going concern, measures to report this to the relevant financial and regulatory authorities will be activated and an appropriate plan put in place to secure recovery and student continuation. In the unlikely event of Market Exit, we anticipate that OfS Condition C4 will apply, and the University will comply with this direction accordingly.

Risk: The University loses the power to award degrees

The University awards both taught and research degrees at all levels of Higher Education. The University works with a range of educational partners to franchise existing awards, to develop awards collaboratively, and to act as an awarding body. These partnerships are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes. Our ongoing monitoring of courses and educational partnerships enables the University to put in place timely interventions to address any areas of concern, with reference to the expectations of the OfS, its designated quality body, and where relevant PSRBs and other external bodies. If quality concerns were identified by OfS and its designated quality body, the University would work proactively with the OfS and the designated quality body to rectify any problems via our internal academic governance structure.

Our governance arrangements include oversight of the quality and standards of our academic provision and compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration by the Academic Board. The University has also established an Academic Assurance Committee, a formal sub-committee of

the Board of Governors, which provides rigorous independent scrutiny of our academic governance functions and the quality and standards of our academic provision.

Risk: A subject area or mode of study is closed or substantially withdrawn during a course of study as a result of portfolio change

The University maintains a robust focus on its overall portfolio to continue to provide a high-quality and up-to-date student experience, portfolio sustainability and alignment of provision with our strategic aims and civic mission. We regularly review our academic portfolio and maintain our commitments to transparency and consultation with staff and students when making decisions on future developments.

The University will always put the interests of its students first when considering withdrawal of provision. Any withdrawal will wherever possible be conducted in such a manner as to ensure that all current students are able to continue and complete their studies without disadvantage and as set out in our course materials. Where this is not possible, the University will enable transfer to a related course within the University or, if appropriate, at another provider. Any such arrangement will ensure that the affected students are neither academically nor financially disadvantaged.

Risk: Loss of institutional or course professional approval / accreditation

As a leading applied provider, the University operates a wide range of professionally approved and / or accredited provision. We work closely with our Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) and other accreditation and regulatory partners, including Ofsted, to ensure that our provision is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect appropriate professional standards.

Should institutional or course approval or accreditation be suspended or withdrawn, the University will work closely with the relevant body and students to ensure they will be supported in completing their studies with the appropriate professional outcomes. Where such changes occur, the University will implement a robust consultation and communication plan to ensure that students are aware of their options.

As a significant provider of Apprenticeship provision, the University is compliant with the requirements of the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP). If the University is unable to continue delivering apprenticeships as a result of being removed from the RoATP, we will seek to ensure, with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, that existing apprentices are supported in completion or transition of their programmes.

Risk: Institutional failure at an educational partner, whether in the UK or overseas

The University chooses its collaborative partners carefully and, at inception, applies a robust risk-based approach to determine the level of scrutiny and due diligence given to each partnership. The University is committed to providing students studying at collaborative partners with the same standard of learning experience no matter where their location of study is and has a range of Quality Assurance processes to routinely monitor and review the experience and outcomes of students studying their awards with a partner institution.

Should a collaborative partnership cease with an associated change to student contract or material circumstances, the University would ensure that students can successfully complete their studies. There is a contractual requirement to provide students with a statement informing them of the termination of the collective partnership, the agreed residual responsibilities of the University and the collaborative partner respectively, and the academic arrangements for students.

Risk: Our courses become academically compromised due to loss or absence of staff

We recognise that our staff base is one of our greatest assets, and the University has comprehensive processes to manage the experience of students through the transition of responsibilities for individual colleagues whether by promotion or changes of role. The University reassigns responsibilities of staff or engages Associate Lecturers to provide high quality teaching cover at short notice if required to address any short-term issues caused by absence or turnover. Where there are significant staff changes or absence, student impacts are assessed and any potential detriments mitigated by the appropriate decision-making forums and, if necessary, through the incident management process.

Risk: Suspension or revocation of UKVI Student Sponsor Licence

Some international students require a student [visa](#) to study in the UK for which the University is licensed by UK Visa and Immigration to act as a student sponsor.

Our advice for [international students](#) provides further information, including up-to-date guidance on fees, enrolment and arrival into the UK. The University works closely with and sets high standards for the activities of international agents working on our behalf.

The University closely monitors compliance in respect of our Sponsor status, both via monitoring at a course and institutional level, appropriate management assurances and engagement with external specialists within this area. In the event of suspension of our Sponsor status, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the disruption to affected students, for example by:

- working with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme (and support transfer to another provider, where necessary)
- allowing students already in receipt of a visa based upon an allocated Confirmation of Acceptance for Study (CAS) from the University to enrol and commence their studies; and/or
- offering students who have not commenced their travel to the University the opportunity to postpone their application pending the resolution of the suspension.

In the unlikely event of revocation of Sponsor Licence, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students by providing assistance to affected students to transfer to an alternative licensed student sponsor.

Risk: Our courses are unable to continue owing to unanticipated permanent loss or change to a location or specialist facilities

The majority of the University's students are based at one of the University's two campuses in

Sheffield. There has been significant investment in the development of new buildings which will provide additional facilities for students, reducing the reliance on older buildings and the risk of building closures resulting from unforeseen maintenance issues.

If any building needs to be taken out of service for a prolonged unanticipated period, an incident management structure will be invoked to coordinate the response.

To ensure that students continue to receive scheduled teaching sessions and minimise detriment to the student experience in the event of a building being taken out of service, the University will take measures that may include:

- Relocate teaching activities to other University buildings where available
- Revise the scheduled teaching timetable to take into consideration the availability of appropriate facilities
- Consider other mitigations such as increasing the length of the teaching day or providing catch-up sessions when buildings are back in use
- Deliver courses through alternative means, for example, using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Blackboard, on-line materials, or any combination of these, as a short- or longer-term mechanism for delivering the curriculum.

Students will be advised of the closure of the building and alternative arrangements through the VLE, social media, text message and/or email, local communications from academic department and the University's external website and intranet.

The University maintains a robust approach to digital systems integrity, but we recognise that, for reasons outside of our control, systems may become unavailable. The University has clear procedures for short and long-term outages including communication to staff and students and procedures for alternative arrangements for teaching and assessment submission.

Section 4:

Student communication

Communication about the plan

The University is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options, including referring students to independent advice support and services provided by the Students' Union.

Information about this plan will be communicated in the following ways:

- The plan will be published on the University's external website and links made to appropriate student-facing pages
- References to and a link will be included in the Student Handbook and cross-references made to other student procedures as appropriate
- Draft amendments to the plan will be provided in advance of approval and publication to the Students Union for consultation, and the final plan provided to them so that the provisions can be promoted to students accessing SU services and advice where these may be relevant.

Should it become necessary to invoke any provisions of the plan, the University will maintain due regard to student continuation and welfare and provide support and guidance in respect of financial, academic and pastoral implications. As most appropriate to the circumstances of the implementation of specific provisions of this plan, the University will:

- follow the consultation and communication actions outlined under the specific provisions where relevant;
ensure that significant decisions are communicated and consulted upon in line with our standing procedures for change management;
- in the case of a serious incident, establish an incident management group that will develop and implement a direct communications strategy for students, staff and other stakeholders;
- ensure timely communication with the OfS as required by the regulatory framework.

As part of our ongoing process of review of the SPP, significant updates will be undertaken in discussion with student representatives, and revisions to the plan will be provided to the University's executive and submitted to the Academic Board for approval.

Section 5: Refunds and compensation

Refunds & Compensation

If the University is unable to preserve continuation of study owing to one or more of the events identified within this Plan, the University will, in accordance with its Terms and Conditions of study, provide as much notice as possible and work closely with the students concerned to minimise the disruption and impact on them.

The University may identify circumstances in which financial compensation is appropriate. In most cases this will entail the offer of a full or partial refund of tuition fees in recognition of the loss of service and the impact on the student.

Exceptionally, the University may also decide to offer additional financial compensation in recognition of the distress and inconvenience caused to students, or where a student has demonstrated financial loss as a direct result of non-continuation of study. Decisions on whether to offer additional financial compensation will be guided by the University Complaints Panel in accordance with our student [rules and regulations](#), and the expectations of the Office for Students and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Students can submit a complaint under the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure if they are dissatisfied with the actions taken to minimise the disruption and action on them.

All students at the University will pay a tuition fee for their course or research programme unless the course/research programme is provided under a contract for funding by a third party and students are not required to pay a tuition fee. A student is liable to pay tuition fees for the full period that they are enrolled as a student, unless exceptions and exemptions apply which are detailed in the fees and funding provisions of our [Terms and Conditions](#).

Students are entitled to a refund of any over-payment of tuition fees and other specific circumstances as detailed in our [Terms and Conditions](#). Terms of payment are also set out in this document. Refunds are conditional on the receipt of the specified University documentation.

Further information about specific fees and funding and where students can access further support and guidance can be found on the [University's website](#).

Section 6:

General sources of support for students

Support and advice for students

We recognise that change and significant unexpected events can be unsettling and the wellbeing of our students is important to us. Should an identified risk materialise, we will communicate clearly, usually through a range of channels, with our staff and students and advise them of actions they need to take and specific support mechanisms in place to support their study.

The University offers a wide range of support services, from academic support to advice on extenuating circumstances and signposting to wider wellbeing services which can be accessed in person and online through the Support at Hallam [directory](#). The first line of support for students is the [Hallam Help](#) service where appointments can be booked in person or online for both general and specialist queries.

Financial difficulties and urgent financial support

Student life can be complicated, the University provides a range of targeted [financial support](#) for unforeseen individual circumstances which may be having an impact on the ability to study. Students who are financially affected by circumstances that they could not have planned for can seek support from the Hallam Hardship Fund, Emergency Voucher Scheme or International Student Emergency Fund. Some students may also be eligible for external funding for specific health or education related courses.

The Hallam Help team can be contacted for advice and assistance to access support and guidance on the funding available.

Section 7:

Contacts and sources of University information

If you have any queries about this plan please contact: Governance Services on governance@shu.ac.uk.

For information about studying at Sheffield Hallam visit <https://www.shu.ac.uk/study-here> or to see the latest news from the University's visit <https://www.shu.ac.uk/news>, where you can also find links to follow us on social media.