

BIRKBECK STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

SECTION ONE: General information about Birkbeck's Student Protection Plan

Introduction: What is a Student Protection Plan?

- 1 All universities and colleges registered with the Office for Students are required to have a Student Protection Plan in place and to review it regularly. The Student Protection Plan is designed to set out what events or other risks that Birkbeck might reasonably anticipate which, if they materialised, could pose a risk to you continuing your studies.
- 2 This document explains our approach to identifying potential risks, managing those risks, who is covered by our plan, the steps we propose to take if we need to implement our plan and how we will communicate with students. You can find detailed information about the current potential risks in the table at the end of this document.
- 3 Birkbeck will only implement its Student Protection Plan when it is necessary to protect your interest and when there is a risk of a serious disruption to the continuity of your studies. Should we activate our plan, we will do so in accordance with any guidance provided by the Office for Students or relevant government agency and will follow the three guiding principles:
 - a. Our first consideration is how we can protect the student interest.
 - b. We will establish promptly an implementation plan that relates to the particular circumstances of the risk.
 - c. We will communicate with affected students in a timely manner and we will ensure affected students know how to obtain advice and guidance including independent support from the Students' Union.
- 4 This Student Protection Plan considers the internal and external environment with an assessment of the risks associated with any potential deterioration to student experience and ability to complete their studies. The plan is regularly reviewed and will be updated in light of this assessment.
- 5 Our Plan has been approved by the Office for Students, as required. You can find out more information about Student Protection Plans from the OfS website:
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>.

Who Birkbeck's Student Protection Plan covers

- 6 This plan covers the following groups:
 - a. current students on any course/programme of study at Birkbeck at any level;
 - b. people who hold offers for admission to any course at Birkbeck at any level;

- c. current students who are undertaking reassessment or are on approved breaks in study for any reason.
- 7 If you are studying with Birkbeck and part of your study involves another institution, then you are still covered by this plan for your Birkbeck qualification. If the partner institution is separately registered with the Office for Students, then you may be covered by their Student Protection Plan.

Events which might activate the Student Protection Plan

- 8 This Student Protection Plan seeks to cover a range of foreseeable financial, regulatory and other risks and an indication of actions should this risk materialise. The types of risks that this might cover include (but are not limited to):
- learning and teaching: for example, closing a programme or subject area.
 - regulatory risks: for example, restrictions to our powers to award degrees, loss of our licence to sponsor international students, loss of access to tuition fees for specified programmes
 - infrastructure risks: for example, temporary or permanent closure of a campus, catastrophic closure of a partner institution.
- 9 Our detailed analysis of current risks is included in Section Two: Current Assessment of Risks to the Continuation of Study and these might also reference distinct arrangements to manage the impact of a particular event (for example through business continuity plans).

Communication and Review

- 10 Our Student Protection Plan is a public document, available on our website. The Plan is reviewed regularly. You can find the plan here: [Corporate policies and procedures — Birkbeck, University of London](#)
- 11 Senior staff from all directorates and faculties have an opportunity to contribute to the Plan's development through relevant Committees and networks. Birkbeck's staff will be informed about changes to the Plan through its weekly newsletter to ensure that they are aware of everyone's obligations. It is the responsibility of the Executive Deans, Heads of School, and Directors of Services to ensure that staff in their faculties and directorates are aware of the Student Protection Plan.
- 12 We consult the Students' Union about the Plan and any proposed changes to the Plan and ensure that they have up to date versions of the Plan. The Student Protection Plan is overseen by the University Strategy Board and approved by the Governing Body prior to its confirmation by the Office for Students.
- 13 As we update the Plan, we will ensure that students are notified through the weekly Student Bulletin as well as it always being available on the website.
- 14 If we activate the Plan, a communication plan for any affected students is an essential part of implementing the Student Protection Plan.

Implementing our Student Protection Plan

- 15 The Student Protection Plan outlines a number of potential circumstances and risks which might mean we need to activate our Plan. It is the Vice-Chancellor who will decide, with senior staff, when the Plan should apply and will then set in motion an Implementation Plan. The nature of the Implementation Plan will depend on the circumstances Birkbeck faces.
- 16 The first stage will be for the Vice-Chancellor and College Secretary to assess whether events require us to use our Student Protection Plan and to set in motion an appropriate implementation plan. The specific actions and responsibilities of this might include (but are not limited to) the following items.
 - a. Notify Birkbeck's Governors (Vice-Chancellor).
 - b. Notify the Office for Students of the circumstances and proposed actions and acting as a point of contact with the OfS (College Secretary).
 - c. Appoint a senior officer to act as the Plan Implementation Lead with appropriate delegated authority to design and deliver an appropriate implementation plan (Vice-Chancellor).
 - d. Ensure that Birkbeck logs and learns from use of its Student Protection Plan (Vice-Chancellor and College Secretary).
 - e. Close any report to the Office for Students when the Implementation Plan is complete (College Secretary).
- 17 The Plan Implementation Lead will:
 - a. identify a response team;
 - b. identify appropriate steps (for example, in the event of a programme closure, this might mean teach out options and/or the internal or external transfer of students or the offer of exit awards).
 - c. consider other remedies, including financial, in the event that suitable alternate academic options are not possible
 - d. ensure that an equalities impact assessment of options is conducted and a communications plan established;
 - e. implement the Plan;
 - f. confirm with the Vice-Chancellor and College Secretary when the Plan is concluded;
 - g. participate in reviewing the implementation plan and Birkbeck's learning from the experience.
- 17 We would offer advice to all affected students providing a clear explanation about why the Student Protection Plan has been implemented, guiding students through their options in written communications (and where possible in-person or virtual briefings), signposting the Students' Union for independent advice and offering additional support through our wellbeing team including tailored support, as required, based on the individual needs of students.

- 18 We would agree clear transition arrangements and maintain close liaison with any transfer institutions to ensure the certification of students' prior learning and the availability of equivalent support and resources for students throughout and after the transfer to the new institution. Birkbeck would take all possible steps to ensure that it could facilitate transfers to institutions with equivalent or comparable programmes of study (e.g. content, mode of study etc).
- 19 Where it is not possible to identify a suitable alternative provider then the affected students will be provided with certification of their prior academic achievement (number and level of credits) which could be used to support a credit transfer arrangement to another institution in the future.

Refunds

- 20 Our first aim will be to ensure that you are able to complete the programme of study that you have embarked upon or to provide a suitable alternative either within the College or by transfer elsewhere. We will seek to honour bursary commitments to the end of the agreed period where students transfer.
- 21 The Terms and Conditions of Study [terms-and-conditions-of-study.pdf — Birkbeck, University of London \(bbk.ac.uk\)](#) indicate our approach to providing refunds to students where it has not been possible to preserve the continuity of study, noting, "if the College is forced to discontinue a programme or module after students have begun their studies, we will inform them as soon as is reasonably possible and will use all reasonable endeavours to transfer them to a suitable replacement for which they are qualified. If students are not satisfied with the replacement provided by us or if we are unable to provide a suitable replacement, students may cancel the contract and withdraw from the course without incurring any further liability for tuition fees and shall be entitled to a refund of all tuition fees paid to date."
- 22 The process outlined in our student complaints policy [Complaints Policy \(bbk.ac.uk\)](#) should be followed in cases where a student feels that any proposed solution implemented under the SPP is insufficient.

SECTION TWO: Assessment of Risks to the Continuation of Study

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
Learning and Teaching Risks				
1	Birkbeck decides to close a programme for business reasons.	Birkbeck keeps its portfolio of programmes under review and will make decisions about whether to continue offering a particular programme and/or subject area. If a programme is to be closed, this will usually mean ceasing to recruit new students and teaching out the existing programme at the same location and to the same standards. The impact should, therefore, be limited on existing students. A plan for concluding the existing programme forms part of our process for withdrawing any programme or course.	<p>Should we cease to offer a programme at shorter notice for which there are offer holders, we would seek to find suitable alternatives for them.</p> <p>Should Birkbeck be required to cease an existing programme where it was not possible to teach out existing students, we would put in place a plan to offer students alternative study internally, support for transfer elsewhere and/or offer exit awards and certification of credit achieved. The Terms and Conditions of study would apply.</p> <p>Our processes for programme withdrawal include detailed plans for teaching out existing students.</p>	The overall risk to students is low
2	Birkbeck is unable to deliver key material components of a programme.	We conduct portfolio review and quality monitoring. The requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are considered in programme and module design should any changes be required. As well as alternative modules, there is the option of adjusting the sequencing of teaching or modules to	Planning arrangements for the modules offered are made in advance, so the likelihood that we will not be able to deliver key material components is low. We will consult students and notify them in advance of any changes to programmes.	The overall risk to students is low .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		make it possible to deliver all the key components of a programme.		
3	A partnership has ended or there is a failure in a partner institution.	<p>Birkbeck recognises the benefits and flexible opportunities of working in collaboration with other education institutions to enable access to and achievement of higher education within communities that are unable to engage with on-campus Birkbeck provision. However, Birkbeck also recognise the risks associated with sub-contracted and validated collaborative provision that may impact on student achievement.</p> <p>Therefore, Birkbeck undertakes rigorous academic, corporate and financial due diligence of prospective partner institutions to be assured of the ethical and strategic alignment with Birkbeck values and vision, prior to approval. This is further reviewed and reflected upon through annual monitoring and periodic re-approval as per contract. Such reflection is to mitigate against risk of students not completing or achieving their programme of study and will include contractual expectations where a partnership is to close either by natural or catastrophic circumstances, including appropriate notice periods and student protection clauses.</p>	<p>If a partnership plans to end, Birkbeck will work with the partner institution to continue to deliver provision and student support in a planned way until all affected students complete the programme.</p> <p>Where a planned end of a partnership is not feasible or to protect students from adverse impact of institutional failure, Birkbeck will consider and consult upon alternative delivery opportunities to enable students to complete an appropriate award. Such opportunities will be dependent on location of learners, subject of study and stage of programme, and may result in alternative provision including but not restricted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of studies on Birkbeck campus • Completion at another approved Birkbeck partner • Completion at another location by Birkbeck staff • Completion via on-line/hybrid learning resources • Transfer to alternative Birkbeck programmes 	The overall risk to students is medium .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		<p>Natural circumstances may be as a result of the partner progressing from sub-contract to validated delivery or a strategic change at the partner. Catastrophic circumstances may be regulatory or sector changes that a partner institution may be unable to adapt to sudden changes.</p> <p>Birkbeck expects through contractual agreements, that collaborative institutions plan and resource for successful delivery, whilst also having an attitude of risk assessment and management through a formal Student Protection Plan where the partner is registered with OfS, or otherwise internal Risk Management processes. Birkbeck maintains monitoring oversight of such plans to ensure alignment with our own plan and to protect learners studying towards Birkbeck awards.</p> <p>Where the risk of a partnership ending materialises, Birkbeck is committed to enabling students to complete their programme of study or to achieve an acceptable alternative award with minimal disruption or detriment to the individual. Such an intervention will be through close consultation and communication with</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer to alternative & appropriate HEI programme • Provide alternative exit awards <p>If it is not possible to secure adequate teach-out or transfer arrangements for students to complete as planned, we would offer a refund as indicated in the Terms and Conditions of Study.</p> <p>Where a student is principally registered with another institution for the purposes of tuition funding and studying single/multiple Birkbeck modules, we would work with that partner institution in its delivery of its Student Protection Plan.</p>	

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		affected students and in collaboration with the partner institution where appropriate.		
4	Birkbeck experiences the departure/loss of key specialist staff (in teaching or student support).	<p>As a smaller university, Birkbeck naturally will have areas where there is not the duplication of specific expertise within both academic and professional services staff. This creates a slightly heightened risk for coverage in all subject areas offered and in our supporting services. We have undergone a period of organisational change including new School/Faculty structures and further transformation within central professional services. In some areas this includes centralising services so that staff can work across different subject areas (for example, learning support tutors) rather than be specifically linked only to a single School.</p> <p>Birkbeck has policies and mechanisms to manage and monitor academic workload allocation and Recognition Agreements which govern its relationships with the relevant trades unions and the regular meetings with those bodies.</p> <p>The provisions around module and programme management and delivery also apply in ensuring that Birkbeck is appropriately staffed to deliver its portfolio of programmes.</p>	<p>Our course closure policy includes a requirement to plan and resource teach-out.</p> <p>Our learning support team is centralised and support is delivered across a wide range of subject areas, so provision is resilient to individual staff departures</p> <p>Our proximity and links to other providers within the University of London who retain staff in specialist subject areas would enable us to make arrangements with those providers to draw on those resources.</p>	The overall risk to students is low to medium .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		Finally, Birkbeck is part of the Federation of the University of London, located in an area of dense provision of higher education with good networks and relationships which it can draw on to support the delivery of its programmes should that be necessary.		
5	There is a loss of professional accreditation for particular programmes or subject areas.	<p>Professional accreditation is important for Birkbeck programmes in some of its areas, but not for all students. Programme change processes require explicit confirmation that accreditation requirements continue to be met.</p> <p>We maintain oversight of accreditation compliance through Faculty Education Committees reporting to the Education and Student Experience Committee. Re-accreditation exercises are owned by Schools and overseen by senior management.</p> <p>Requirements to meet professional accreditation requirements where applicable are embedded in programme approval processes.</p> <p>Our financial forecasting and forward planning, overseen by our Audit Committee and Governors, include an assumption that resources must be available to maintain accreditation when</p>	<p>If teach-out became impossible, we would immediately implement plans for exit awards/transfers out to accredited courses with comparable content and mode of study and, for those with unregulated tuition fees, comparable fees, at other institutions for students affected.</p> <p>Birkbeck will take all possible steps to ensure that we can facilitate transfers to institutions with equivalent or similar programmes of study. In cases where it is not possible to identify a suitable alternative provider then the affected students would be compensated through provision of a refund of the relevant fees along with an exit award or certification of their academic achievement to date (number and level of credits) to support a credit transfer to another institution in the future.</p> <p>As our students include commuters, students requiring financial support, students with particular</p>	The overall risk to students is low .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		teaching out students already enrolled on courses.	<p>mobility/accessibility needs and students with work and caring responsibilities, we would plan for transfers to institutions located close to Birkbeck and with support and resources on a par with those available at Birkbeck.</p> <p>We would offer advice to students and maintain close liaison with the institutions students were transferring to, in order to ensure availability of support and resources to students throughout and after the transfer.</p>	
		Regulatory Risks		
6	The College is unable to operate as a provider of Higher Education because of its financial position.	<p>As a registered provider, we are subject to an ongoing Condition of Registration by the Office for Students (condition D: Financial Viability and Sustainability) and are required to comply with the OfS's requirements with respect to financial viability and sustainability. The OfS monitors individual providers' financial viability and sustainability on an ongoing basis</p> <p>The overall situation for the HE sector is currently difficult, with reduced demand, limited ability to raise domestic fees and unfavourable policy for international student intake. Birkbeck's management team and Governors closely monitor these</p>	<p>If we did become unable to operate, we would immediately implement plans for exit awards/transfers out to accredited courses with comparable content and mode of study and, for those with unregulated tuition fees, comparable fees, at other institutions for students affected.</p> <p>Birkbeck will take all possible steps to ensure that we can facilitate transfers to institutions with equivalent or similar programmes of study. In cases where it is not possible to identify a suitable alternative provider then the affected students would be compensated through provision of a refund of the relevant fees along with an exit award or certification of</p>	The overall risk to students is low to medium .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		<p>risks and the action taken to mitigate them.</p> <p>Whilst this is a risk for Birkbeck, the impact on current students and their ability to complete is closely managed so that learning and teaching continues as planned. Our regulatory provisions are fairly generous in completion periods (up to ten years) compared to other institutions, given our heritage in providing education to part-time students, so our risk assessment and financial projections are based on students being able to complete within the usual planned period for their mode of study.</p> <p>Our strategy to retain financial sustainability is to reduce costs and increase income. Cost reduction has been achieved through restructuring. Income increase will be delivered through improved efficiency in student recruitment, and developing new courses and markets including partnerships, and attracting more students.</p> <p>Our financial forecasting and forward planning, overseen by our Audit Committee and Governors, include an assumption that resources must be available for teaching out students already enrolled on courses.</p>	<p>their academic achievement to date (number and level of credits) to support a credit transfer to another institution in the future.</p> <p>As our students include commuters, students requiring financial support, students with particular mobility/accessibility needs and students with work and caring responsibilities, we would plan for transfers to institutions located close to Birkbeck and with support and resources on a par with those available at Birkbeck.</p> <p>We would offer advice to students and maintain close liaison with the institutions students were transferring to, in order to ensure availability of support and resources to students throughout and after the transfer.</p>	

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		We have minimal exposure to borrowing and debt.		
7	The College loses or is restricted in its ability to award degrees and other qualifications.	<p>Birkbeck is a mature provider of higher education (for 200 years) and holds both its own taught degree awarding powers and also offers degrees of the University of London as a Federation member.</p> <p>We have robust mechanisms in place to manage the quality and standards of the education we offer and to ensure compliance with the relevant Conditions of Registration required to be able to award qualifications. We also routinely review the effectiveness of mechanisms to ensure compliance, through external expertise and using our internal audit service. We continue to meet requirements for awarding degrees as a member institution of the University of London.</p> <p>We also maintain independent degree awarding powers and continue to meet the requirements to use them.</p> <p>Birkbeck recognises and supports the scrutiny into subcontract provision by the DfE and OfS in protecting the student interest and appropriate use of public funds, that has led to de-designation of</p>	<p>If we became unable to award degrees and other qualifications, we would immediately implement plans for exit awards/transfers out to accredited courses with comparable content and mode of study and, for those with unregulated tuition fees, comparable fees, at other institutions for students affected.</p> <p>If collaborative provision were to be de-designated for tuition fee, Birkbeck would implement a plan to support affected learners.</p> <p>Birkbeck will take all possible steps to ensure that we can facilitate transfers to institutions with equivalent or similar programmes of study. In cases where it is not possible to identify a suitable alternative provider then the affected students would be compensated through provision of a refund of the relevant fees along with an exit award or certification of their academic achievement to date (number and level of credits) to support a credit transfer to another institution in the future.</p>	The overall risk to students is low .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		provision at partner institutions. Birkbeck undertakes detailed due diligence and ongoing monitoring of academic and student experience in all collaborations	<p>As our students include commuters, students requiring financial support, students with particular mobility/accessibility needs and students with work and caring responsibilities, we would plan for transfers to institutions located close to Birkbeck and with support and resources on a par with those available at Birkbeck.</p> <p>We would offer advice to students and maintain close liaison with the institutions students were transferring to, to ensure availability of support and resources to students throughout and after the transfer.</p>	
8	The Office for Students withdraws registration.	<p>Birkbeck's Governors maintain close oversight of compliance with the OfS conditions of registration and reporting obligations to ensure that it is maintained, including financial, quality and standards, access, governance and other compliance.</p> <p>Compliance with OfS conditions of registration is assured through an annual report on compliance with each individual condition, made to Audit Committee.</p>	<p>If we became unable to retain OfS registration, we would immediately implement plans for exit awards/transfers out to accredited courses with comparable content and mode of study and, for those with unregulated tuition fees, comparable fees, at other institutions for students affected.</p> <p>Birkbeck will take all possible steps to ensure that we can facilitate transfers to institutions with equivalent or similar programmes of study. In cases where it is not possible to identify a suitable alternative provider then the affected students would be compensated through provision of a refund of the relevant fees</p>	The overall risk to students is low to medium .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
			<p>along with an exit award or certification of their academic achievement to date (number and level of credits) to support a credit transfer to another institution in the future.</p> <p>As our students include commuters, students requiring financial support, students with particular mobility/accessibility needs and students with work and caring responsibilities, we would plan for transfers to institutions located close to Birkbeck and with support and resources on a par with those available at Birkbeck.</p> <p>We would offer advice to students and maintain close liaison with the institutions students were transferring to, in order to ensure availability of support and resources to students throughout and after the transfer.</p>	
9	The College's Student visa sponsorship licence is suspended or revoked.	We have a dedicated International Student Administration team supporting compliance with Home Office obligations for our Student visa licence. Compliance is reviewed regularly by internal auditors and any actions documented and followed.	<p>Regular review and reporting to ensure compliance with Home Office student visa requirements.</p> <p>Should this risk be realised for international students, Birkbeck would immediately implement plans for exit awards/transfers out to other institutions for international students affected.</p>	The overall risk to students is low .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
Infrastructure risks				
10	The College must close a teaching site.	<p>Birkbeck has a single campus site located within Bloomsbury/Fitzrovia in Central London, distributed through a number of buildings. Our Estates Strategy, overseen by the Strategic Estates and Infrastructure Committee is to actively manage the portfolio of buildings comprising our campus. Whilst the specific buildings might be subject to change (to accommodate the needs of students and staff), we do not have plans to close our campus: it retains its current location on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Given the still-recent experience of a global pandemic, it would not be reasonable to discount the possibility that we might need temporarily to close the campus or change our mode of delivery owing to government regulations and restrictions. Birkbeck had an effective strategy for managing during the Covid-19 pandemic, shifting to online learning for all students and has further enhanced its capability to deliver in flexible modes following the 2020-2022 period. This includes building further capacity for HyFlex teaching (both online and in person).</p>	<p>Management and monitoring of campus building infrastructure. Our campus is consolidated in a single location.</p> <p>Continuing expansion of online and virtual learning and student experience facilities.</p> <p>A Business Continuity rapid response team of senior management would be convened if an unexpected campus issue arises. Maintaining or restoring education delivery, student services and learning facilities and resources would be prioritised.</p>	The overall risk to students is low .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
		We have an Estates Risk Register and Emergency Management Procedures in place with Faculty Business Continuity Plans to secure a continuity of service to students.		
11	There is disruption owing to industrial action by staff.	<p>The higher education sector has experienced industrial action by its trades unions in the past few years and this has included Birkbeck alongside many other universities.</p> <p>We have policies in place establishing our position and procedures for consulting and negotiating with our recognised trades unions. The senior management team seeks to maintain effective working relationships with officials.</p> <p>Where industrial action has occurred, the College has taken steps to minimise the impact on its student body wherever possible and informed students of their right to complain if they consider they have not received an expected service. This has generated a body of experience and regulatory provisions which could be put into action should there be similar future disruption to minimise the impact on students.</p>	<p>Constructive relationship with campus Trade Union branches, so any action taken minimises impact on students.</p> <p>Alternative arrangements would be put in place to deliver learning resources and assessment if staff are unavailable through industrial action.</p> <p>Alternative regulatory arrangements can be implemented in extremis enabling degree award and progression while maintaining academic standards.</p>	The overall risk to students is low to medium .

No	Risk	Commentary	Mitigation	Assessment
12	There is a loss of service due to IT failure or cyber-attack preventing delivery of course material	Birkbeck has a robustly managed Digital Strategy, Information Security Policy, and Digital Risk Register, overseen by the Digital Committee. This risk would have a high impact on staff and students' access to course materials if it were realised. Our Digital Strategy and Information Security Policy includes clear policies around equipment use, multi-factor authentication of access and mandatory training for staff.	A Business Continuity rapid response team of senior management would be convened if an unexpected IT issue arises. Maintaining or restoring education delivery, student services and learning facilities and resources would be prioritised.	The overall risk to students is low to medium .

Created:	Initial version, 2018
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