

Birkbeck, University of London

Student protection plan

For OFS Registration condition C3

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Student protection plan for the period [2018/19]

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

Birkbeck's governance structures ensure that it has effective strategic leadership and executive management to fulfil its mission as a leading research and evening teaching institution, and safeguard students' interests. Our Audit Committee ensures financial and organisational probity and control. It oversees external and internal audit processes and is responsible for considering the soundness of arrangements in relation to the annual financial statements, in the presence of an external auditor. The Audit Committee also reports to the Governors on the College's risk management, control and governance arrangements and its arrangements for ensuring economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The range and level of risks to the continuation of study for Birkbeck students is minimal. This has been determined through analysis and discussion of risks to the continuation of study by a project group, comprising of senior staff from the College. There are robust and effective processes and controls that operate at various different levels to identify and minimise risk. For example, at a strategic level Birkbeck operates a Risk Register that is compiled by the Risk Management Group, consisting of senior academic and professional services staff. Significant current and potential future risks are identified and evaluated together with the controls in place to mitigate them. Birkbeck is also in a sound financial position with a strong cash base to invest in our future and this is reflected in the latest Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2017¹. Consequently, the risk that Birkbeck as a whole is unable to operate is very low.

The risk that Birkbeck will lose the power to award degrees is low, as we have been a longstanding partner of the University of London and award University of London degrees. We also have our own degree awarding powers, and although we do not currently exercise them, they are an important insurance policy for the future and a means of confirming our position as a nationally regarded higher education institution.

Birkbeck operates at two locations: Bloomsbury and Stratford and the likelihood of either location closing is very low; there are no plans to close either site and current plans exist for further estate development at Bloomsbury and plans to increase teaching activity at Stratford.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses is low because we have flexible teaching staffing arrangements and our delivery of teaching is well planned and stable.

Birkbeck is committed to ensuring that students have the opportunity to achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. As such, the continuation of study for our students is of paramount importance and is a moral imperative for Birkbeck. By exception, Birkbeck may be unable to run a

¹ See: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/fin/reporting/financial_statements/finstats17

course for reasons of operational viability and student experience. The risk that a particular course will be closed and negatively impact on students' continuation of study is low. However, the risk of module closure, either as part of a course or as a stand-alone module, negatively impacting on students' continuation of study is medium due to the viability of student numbers.

The risk to continuation of study for international students through loss of the College's Tier 4 Licence is low. This is because we have engaged the services of independent auditors to assess our systems and processes relating to the oversight of student visas and made appropriate adjustments where necessary to ensure we have thorough controls in place to maintain our responsibilities and obligations as a Tier 4 sponsor.

Birkbeck recognises that the risks to continuation of study and the impact of changes will be different for students with different needs, characteristics and circumstances. The demographic of the Birkbeck student body is broad and encompasses both part time and full time mode of study. With this context in mind Birkbeck is committed to minimising the risks to the continuation of study for our students and mitigating risks on a case by case basis, providing tailored support, and taking into account our students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that the risks identified will crystallise.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

In terms of where a decision is taken to close a course, there is a formal process for consideration and approval that must be adhered to and when courses are withdrawn course entry is closed to new students and a commitment is made to ensure all continuing students are able to complete the course. The process for closing a course operates through Department, School and College level in order to safeguard the interests of students. These controls serve to mitigate any risk to students' continuation of study resulting from course closure to be reasonably likely to crystallise.

In the unlikely event that Birkbeck may be unable to run a course for a new cohort of students for reasons of operational viability and student experience we will advise applicants at the earliest possible opportunity and provide support and guidance on transferring course at Birkbeck or another provider. Applicants will be provided with the opportunity to change course, where possible, or to receive a full refund of any deposit or tuition fees paid. We are confident in our ability to teach out students as we have never closed a course and not taught out students who were currently enrolled.

In the more likely event that Birkbeck may be unable to run a module due to viability of student numbers, a decision on closing the module would be taken at the earliest possible opportunity and would take into account consequences and impact on students of doing so. To mitigate any potential negative impact on affected students the communication of the module closure would be done well in advance of any closure.

Where we offer stand-alone modules alongside our full courses of study there is a higher risk of these modules not running due to the viability of student numbers. To mitigate any potential negative impacts to students we would endeavour to inform students at the earliest possible opportunity and provide an alternative module wherever possible.

Birkbeck is committed to making every effort to support individual students to find an alternative course at another provider if students wish to continue their studies elsewhere. Support for any transfer of study will include the certification of credit and/or a record of academic achievement to facilitate admission to the receiving provider.

Where a course offers recognition by a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) the University will endeavour to ensure that it meets the PSRB's requirements and work with the respective PSRB to maintain accreditation for a given accredited cohort.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Birkbeck has a comprehensive Fees Policy in place that is reviewed regularly and which details arrangements to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to Birkbeck students. The Fees Policy is available online from: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/registry/policies/documents/fees-policy.pdf>

As highlighted above the range of risks for Birkbeck no longer being able to preserve continuation of study for students enrolled on current courses and likelihood of such risks crystallising is low.

Where module or course closure occurs, Birkbeck will fully consider on a case by case basis the impact on affected students both financially and the commitments made by students to undertake study at Birkbeck.

Birkbeck are committed to ensuring that students are not unreasonably disadvantaged by decisions to close courses or modules. In making any decisions on compensation or mitigation each case will be considered on its merits and context with due consideration given to the terms of the original contract and the resolution options available to the students.

As stated in the terms and conditions of study², Birkbeck will not normally make material changes to modules or courses that students have agreed to study, except where the changes will benefit the student experience or changes are necessary due to circumstances outside of the control of the College. Where material changes are necessary or proposed, student representatives will be consulted and the College will provide appropriate support, guidance and independent advice. We will advise applicants and enrolled students at the earliest possible opportunity regarding any changes.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

Birkbeck will communicate the provisions in our student protection plan to current and future students by publishing the plan on our public website³.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our plan when they propose course changes by communicating the information contained in the plan to key senior staff, with details being further cascaded at a local level to academic and professional staff. We will also consider the plan at relevant internal senior committee meetings and provide staff briefings where appropriate.

We will review our student protection plan regularly and should any circumstances change we will take the necessary steps and actions to update our plan.

² See <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/registry/policies/documents/terms-and-conditions.pdf>

³ See <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/registry/policies/policies-1>