

Nottingham Trent University Student Protection Plan

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Legal Address: 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ, UK

Contact Point for Enquires about this Plan: Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Development and Performance)

Student Protection Plan for 2020/21 academic year: Nottingham Trent University

1. Scope and identification of Risks

Introduction:

In accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, this plan inform students of what they can expect should a course, campus or institution close. This Student Protection Plan (hereafter "the Plan") aims to demonstrate that Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has considered how students can continue or complete their studies or be compensated if this is not possible.

The University recognises that in the event of a significant course or campus closure it will be expected to work closely with the Office for Students and its own student body to ensure that students' interests are protected through any such change.

Nottingham Trent University is a large, established, high performing and financially stable provider. We would like to reassure both our students and applicants that the risks outlined in this Plan are all very low and in the case of closure extremely low.

Examples of risks to which this Plan would apply:

- Loss or restriction of University status or its degree awarding powers or its designation for student support or student intake;
- Decision to close the institution, a campus or a specialist facility;
- Long term disruption to your course that continuously and materially affects your course teaching over many months;
- No longer being able to deliver a course to students in one or more subject areas and/or departments for the subsequent year;
- Where NTU works with a partner to deliver your course (eg a Degree Apprenticeship with a particular company) and they are unable to continue, or decide to stop delivering the course;
- Loss of Tier 4 License which allows us to recruit and register international students; and
- Changes to regulatory and Professional Body requirements or loss of accreditation.

Examples of risks to which this Plan would not apply:

- Minor adjustments and improvements to a course;
- Minor adjustments to module content or non-compulsory modules;
- Changes to timetables, including rooms, buildings or locations;
- Changes that have become reasonably necessary to comply with Government prescribed requirements); and
- Changes to supervision for research students.

Who does the Student Protection Plan cover?

This plan is available to all current and potential students (including distance learning students). It covers registered undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students.

If you are an applicant and have accepted an offer to study at NTU but have not yet registered at the University, we will notify you if the Plan is triggered and will likely affect you.

You will not normally be covered by this Plan if you are registered at a partner provider and are taught by their staff. You will instead be covered by their plan.

2. Range of Risks to the continuation of study at NTU

2.1 Low Risk and related mitigation

Institutional Failure:

Closure would likely be phased to protect successive cohorts where possible. Students would be transferred to partners where prior agreements have been established e.g. the university is a member of Midlands Enterprise Universities (MEU). The East Midlands members of the MEU: University of Derby, University of Lincoln and Nottingham Trent University have agreed to provide support to each other's students where necessary and feasible in the event that the individual university found itself unable to meet its commitments to students. This is therefore an additional 'safety net' measure. The members of the MEU have also introduced measures to align their recognition of prior learning policies to support credit transfers. This will aid the mobility of students between these institutions and guidance will be available and accessible to students to provide greater awareness of this process.

Discussions are held with the University of Nottingham to identify any potential for transferring students to this institution again where reasonable and feasible to do so.

Financial Management & Resources:

NTU has been assessed as a financially robust institution with a low level of risk. This position of financial strength enables NTU to continue to invest in high quality academic resources. The University has healthy financial reserves, no exposure to investments in international campuses and limited exposure to currency fluctuations. Demand from applicants for places at the University furthermore is strong. Further information on the

University's strong finances can be found in the Annual Accounts which are available here (to insert link).

Academic Quality Regime:

External assessment of the rigour of NTU's approach to quality management is evidenced by positive outcomes in a number of Higher Education Reviews. These reviews have determined that confidence can be placed in NTU's approach to the management of risks to the continuation of study for our students. Specifically, the Higher Education Review examined NTU's processes and governance that ensure (a) courses are only approved after rigorous business evaluation of the potential risks to quality and the student experience; (b) courses are reviewed periodically (frequency and nature determined by level of perceived risk); and (c) effective mechanisms are in place to ensure the mitigation of risk, when an event arises which presents a risk to student continuation of study. We also hold a Gold Award in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).

Staff:

For a minority of courses at NTU the module choice is dependent on the availability of member of the course team with specific expertise. This is minimised at course approval and the Course Leader maintains active oversight of the staffing complement. The University maintains a flexible pool of adjunct and sessional staff to ensure continuity of supply of both general and specialist teaching.

Campus Business Continuity:

The vast majority of the University's students are on campus based courses on one of the University's campuses in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. All of these campuses are currently undergoing further enhancement through capital investment programmes and there is no plan to close any of the campuses.

Real Estate:

The University owns the freehold of 95% of its campuses in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. It is therefore in control of the deployment of its built estate and not subject to landlord intervention which could impact students. Close working with the relevant Local Authorities has created an environment supportive of the University's estate developments and our plans for new courses and student facilities which protects future provision. Comprehensive Business Continuity Plans minimise impacts on teaching for example, there is sufficient scope within the estate to ensure that if a building is out of action, then teaching can be transferred elsewhere. The majority of the University's delivery is situated in a city with a plentiful supply of privately run conference and office accommodation which can also be used to ensure continuity of teaching.

Information Systems:

A robust Information Systems business continuity plan includes recovery times and recovery points for key systems. Infrastructure is backed up e.g. continuity servers on a separate campus to ensure that IT provision can be maintained. The University's strategy to acquire an increasing proportion of cloud based services also mitigates the risk of IT disruption. The University's Virtual Learning Environment has the sufficient capacity and capability of delivering online content, both in terms of teaching and assessment.

Learning Resources:

All students are supported by a Library and Learning Resources department which facilitates access to online resources sufficient to meet students' needs if the physical facilities become unavailable.

Specialist Equipment:

We would support you to access equipment elsewhere if highly specialist equipment or academic supervision were no longer available.

Workbased students:

Students studying in the workplace e.g. on an apprenticeship or a work placement have bespoke support and individual monitoring through the Apprenticeship team, the Employability team and Academic Schools. This monitoring includes regular checks that the workplace continues to provide students with the appropriate environment to achieve course learning outcomes. Regular liaison with the employer via a shared online Portfolio also avoids any discontinuity in a student's progress.

Distance learning students:

The University has a small number of distance learners. The majority are on courses delivered in partnership with a private provider. This mitigates the risk of technical failure causing non-delivery to distance learners as the provider's systems provide a backup. In the event of the failure of the partner the University's Virtual Learning Environment has the sufficient capacity and capability of delivering the online content. The contractual arrangement includes provision of a 24/7 advice line and robust business continuity arrangements.

Applicants:

If the University was required to permanently or temporarily close a course for which Applicants hold an offer we would contact applicants to discuss their options. This might include being considered for another course at the University, being considered for the next year of entry (where closure is temporary), advice on finding a suitable course elsewhere and help with any issues that may arise with UCAS.

2.2 Moderate Risk and related mitigation

Home Office Compliance/Loss of Tier 4 License affecting international students:

The University has some 3000 international students in any one year, the majority of whom require a Tier 4 visa. The University's Academic Registry closely manage Tier 4 compliance. Regular internal audits test the effectiveness of attendance monitoring for contact points to ensure that any risk to the University's licence is minimised.

Overseas collaborations:

The dependency on international partners for resources or teaching staff adds an additional element of business continuity risk. These are managed through sub committees of Academic Board and monitored through the Academic Standards and Quality Framework. Approval of new collaborations and teach out of collaborative courses follows a well-established set of procedures. All proposed changes are debated at these committees and staff are deployed in country where staff training or direct delivery is required to maintain the educational experience of students. Any high risk collaborative agreements are subject to oversight from the University's Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Course change or closure:

The imperative to maintain a current, up to date portfolio which delivers employability outcomes for students means that courses are frequently scrutinised and continually improved. The following mitigation steps are in place:

- All proposals for new courses and changes to existing courses are assessed for their market, financial or consumer rights impact under the appropriate Business Evaluation process within the home School.
- A Development & Approval Group may be used where proposed changes to an existing course impacts on other modules or aspects of the course which themselves require adjustment (for example, changes to assessment weightings or changes to the delivery pattern). This avoids an accumulation of minor changes becoming in effect a major change which has not been scrutinised by students and staff. Particular thought is given to the timescale for enacting changes and any effect on current cohorts of students. Those affected are provided with details and an opportunity to comment on changes before they are implemented. This feedback may modify any proposed changes. The external examiner will be asked to comment on major modifications.
- Where events materialise which present a potential risk of course closure, NTU has a demonstrably effective policy to ensure the continuation of study for students enrolled and wherever possible for those applicants who have accepted an offer. This includes the preparation of contingency plans which are developed to address the range of potential outcomes. These contingency plans are approved at School and institutional level. Specific recent examples relate to closure of courses and campuses at validated partners overseas. If a course does close, NTU's policy for the management of closures and suspensions determines that: students are clearly informed and that a plan is put in place to ensure that students are enabled to pursue a course of study aligned to that which is being withdrawn.
- An extensive set of academic policies and guidance avoid an *ad hoc* approach to course closures¹. These are available as supplements to the NTU Quality Handbook. Course Leaders, Heads of Departments and School Standards and Quality Managers consult this supplement for approving the withdrawal or suspension of a course and where students are enrolled on, or are to be admitted onto, that course. The purpose of the supplement is to ensure that the quality of the learning experience is maintained for students completing or embarking on the course.
- Similarly, teach out of courses follows a well-established set of procedures.² In summary the requirement is that the learning experience of students on courses in teach-out will be maintained. When a course ceases to recruit students, a School Academic Standards Committee or University Research Degrees Committee has to ensure that adequate standards are maintained for any remaining students or those such students are enabled to transfer to a suitable alternative course elsewhere. Teach-out arrangements are reported to the Centre for Academic Development & Quality (CADQ;) where CADQ considers that the arrangements do not meet University expectations, it will refer the matter to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development and Performance) for resolution.

¹ https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/document_uploads/quality_handbook/138217.pdf

² https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/document_uploads/quality_handbook/148377.pdf

3. Reasonable Adjustments and Equality Impact Assessments

If any of the measures outlined in this Plan were invoked but you had special circumstances that required reasonable adjustments, such as a disability or reduced mobility or if you had additional responsibilities (such as being a carer), we would consider these on a case by case basis. On invoking any measures within the Plan we would carry out an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that we were considering the needs of different groups of students.

4. Communication & Collaboration with Students

The NTSU has full membership of the Academic Board at which this Plan will be considered on an annual basis.

The Plan will be referred to in student course induction and will be readily available to applicants and current students via the University's website. The NTSU Vice President Education will include it in the Academic Representatives' training sessions each year.

Staff guidance on the Plan will be regularly updated by the University's Organisational Development department and the Plan will be included in new staff induction and staff development such as the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Key networks such as the Deputy Deans groups will also be used to ensure staff familiarity with the Plan.

If there is to be a change to the material information related to a course this will be communicated to affected students via a notification to the staff/student course committee, held virtually if necessary. The NTSU Academic Representation system, led by the Vice President Education will be used to target communications where required. Students will be communicated to individually thereafter via their University email. Additional routes such as social media and face-to-face meetings will be used as needed.

By working with the NTSU and its Information & Advice function we will ensure our students have access to individual and /or independent advice if the University needs to implement any of the measures in its Plan.

5. Complaints Procedure/ Refund and Compensation Policy

Students who are dissatisfied with the University's management of a change to material information under this Plan are referred to NTU Complaints Procedure ³ in the first instance.

Should a student or affected individual remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure the University has also developed a Refund and Compensation Policy. This includes provisions on when tuition fee and other costs may be reimbursed and where compensation may be appropriate if NTU cannot preserve continuation of study. The University's Student Support Service and the NTSU both have financial guidance specialists and these will work together to ensure students receive appropriate independent guidance. This may include direct liaison with the Student Loans Company on behalf of a student.

³ http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/current_students/resources/student_handbook/complaints_summary/index.html

Glossary

Academic Board: the senior academic committee of the University with responsibility for all academic matters.

Academic Standards & Quality Committee: a sub-committee which reports to Academic Board.

School Standards & Quality Managers: – academic staff with specific responsibility for quality assurance of courses in each Academic School.

Tier 4: – Home Office Visa Category.