Nottingham Trent University Student Protection Plan

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Student Protection Plan for 2018/19 academic year: Nottingham Trent University

1. Scope and identification of Risks

1.1 Introduction:

In 2017 the Higher Education and Research Act placed a requirement on institutions to 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.

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;
- No longer being able to deliver a course to students in one or more subject areas and/or departments for the subsequent year;
- No longer being able to deliver material components of one or more courses particularly where there are areas of vulnerability such as single person dependencies for teaching; and
- Changes to regulatory and Professional Body requirements or loss of accreditation;
- Disruptions to access to learning resources.

1.2 Range of Risks to the continuation of study at NTU

1.2.1 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 others’ 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. Discussions are also to be progressed 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. Recently published data by HEFCE\(^1\), the predecessor of the Office for Students, shows NTU able to generate cash after the costs of teaching and research in excess of the mean for all universities in England. This position of financial strength enables NTU to continue to invest in high quality academic resources despite the freezing of the undergraduate tuition fee maximum. The University has healthy financial reserves, no exposure to investments in international campuses and limited exposure to currency fluctuations.

Academic Quality Regime:

External assessment of the rigour of NTU’s approach to quality management is evidenced by positive outcomes in:

1. Higher Education Review (February 2015)\(^2\)

2. HEFCE Annual Provider Review (2016/17)

3. HEFCE Assurance Review (May 2017)

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. A very small percentage of courses close or are suspended each year.

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:

\(^1\) [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/finhealth/] which shows net cash inflow from operations as a % of income

\(^2\) [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/Nottingham%20Trent%20University/Nottingham-Trent-University-HER-15.pdf]
The vast majority of the University’s students are on campus based courses on one of the University’s four 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.

**Learning Resources:**

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

**Courses delivered off campus:**

**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.

**1.2.2 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.

**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 and College.

- 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 closures. These are available as supplements to the NTU Quality Handbook. Course Leaders, Heads of Departments and School Standards and Quality Managers consult this supplement whenever a College Management Team (CMT) approves 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

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3 https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/documentuploads/quality_handbook/138217.pdf
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. 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 Pro Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) for resolution.

3. Communication & Collaboration with Students

This Plan has been reviewed by the Nottingham Trent Students’ Union (NTSU) Vice President Education. The NTSU has full membership of the Governing Body, Academic Board and Academic Standards & Quality Committee 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 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.

4. 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  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

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

NTU has cash reserves which are more than sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified a moderate risk of non-continuation of study.

**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.

**Governing Body:** the University’s independent Board of Governors.

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

**Tier 4:** – Home Office Visa Category.