



# OAKLANDS COLLEGE

## Oaklands College – Student Protection Plan

***An Assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for students, how those risks may differ based on students’ need, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise***

Oaklands College is dedicated to helping students achieve good academic outcomes from their studies. Occasionally, circumstances occur that result in changes having to be made to the delivery of the programme. This could include a change in modules, how they are delivered and, in extreme cases, a radical change to the programme. The **Student Fees Policy and Procedure** outlines the refunds and compensation policy.

Circumstances that may affect delivery of the programme could be due to, but not limited to, one or more of the following:

- changes in course material and content – *low risk, this is in place before the start of a programme so that students are aware whilst they are applying, however students would be consulted if this was to happen in year*
- a decision to close a course – *low risk, a course would not normally be closed in year*
- a decision to not run a course for the subsequent year – *low to medium risk, occasionally if there are not viable cohorts to run a programme this may occur well in advance of any significant timelines*
- changes to regulatory framework affecting a specific course – *low risk, this would be planned for and implemented in a timely manner to ensure deadlines are kept to and prior to a course starting, training would also be provided where required to staff.*
- loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies e.g. Pearsons etc. – *low risk, this would be mitigated by effective oversight of any known or emerging risks by the Academic Quality Department working with the Higher Education Manager and academic departments to put in place robust plans to deal with any issues.*
- industrial action by College staff or third parties – *low risk, this has not yet occurred. Any industrial action would lead to a contingency planning working group being put in place and directed by the Principal*
- the unanticipated departure of key members of College staff – *low to medium risk, supported by the Consortium Colleges to infill classes, use of visiting lectures or bank staff would be put in place.*

The risk factor is considered low to medium for each of the situations. The College has sufficient contingencies in place should one of the above situations arise.

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***The measures that have been put in place to mitigate those risks that are considered reasonably likely to crystallise***

***Suspension of a course***

The College has established and tested procedures in place in the event of suspension/closure of a course. Where there is an impact on the students, the effect will be mitigated by:

- communication with current students and assure them there will be no adverse effects to their studies by the decision to suspend the course and they will complete their programme at the College;
- consultation with stakeholders who may be affected to ensure appropriate procedures and processes have been undertaken;
- current applicants will be notified in accordance to UCAS deadlines, allowing time for students to source an alternative, suitable programme;
- offering support to those current students who wish to find an alternative provider.

To date, the College has never withdrawn a course in year.

***Major changes in year to course content***

The College will endeavour to deliver programmes in accordance with the description given in the College prospectus for the academic year in which a student began their programme. However, should major in-year changes to the course occur the College will strive to ensure that:

- changes are restricted to the minimum necessary to achieve the required quality of experience, and affected students are notified and consulted with as appropriate;
- if necessary it allows students the opportunity to withdraw from the programme;
- where required, students will be offered reasonable support to transfer to another programme at the College, or to another provider.

***Industrial Action***

The College has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the recognised trade unions. It is highly committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise on occasions.

Where industrial action does occur, the College will seek to:

- ensure, as far as is possible, that normal operations and services are maintained;
- take all reasonable steps to ensure that disruption is minimal and fulfil its responsibilities to students, as far as is possible to determine, that they are not disadvantaged by the action.

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### **Loss of key staff**

Where possible the College will seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible, by moving other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience, into the vacant post(s) or recruiting externally, to avoid disruption;

Where the College cannot avoid closing a programme, the policy as outlined in the above course closure section will apply.

Students wishing to provide feedback regarding the College's management of the process of change can do this via the College website.

### **Information about the policy in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event of no longer being able to preserve continuation of study**

The College has a Student Refund Policy which can be found within our Student Fees and Finance Policy which is on the College website. It covers the arrangements for the following student refunds:-

- Refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company.
- Refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees.
- Refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.

There are four categories covered by the refunds policy:

- a. Cancellation of a course before it commences:

Sometimes we can only run an advertised course if certain conditions are fulfilled – for example, that sufficient students accept offers to make the course financially viable to run. If we cancel a course before the commencement of the programme, we will inform the students affected as soon as reasonably practicable and we will refund any tuition fees or deposit paid in advance. Where practical, we will also try to find a suitable alternative course with us or offer the opportunity to defer entry to a subsequent intake.

- b. Changes to a course before a student is enrolled:

If we decide to make a change before students have registered on the course for the first time, we will inform them as soon as reasonably practicable so that they can decide whether they still wish to study with us. If they decide not to study with us, we will refund any tuition fees and/or deposit that have been paid in advance in respect of the course in question.

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c. Discontinuance of a course:

In exceptional circumstances, we may have to merge or even discontinue a course for one or more of the following reasons:

- to comply with legal, regulatory or governmental requirements
- where accreditation or validation of the course is withdrawn
- in other circumstances outside our reasonable control which make it impossible or prohibitively impractical to continue the course

If we decide to merge or discontinue a course in these circumstances, we will inform the students as soon as reasonably practicable. Where appropriate, we will try to find a suitable alternative course with us or suggest a suitable alternative course with another education provider. If the students do transfer to another education provider in these circumstances, we will co-operate with the new provider in respect of any transfer of credit/ academic progress. We will pay any additional travel expenses incurred for the remainder of the programme.

If a student does not want to transfer to an alternative course either with us or with another provider, we will keep a record of their credit/academic progress in case they return to higher education in the future.

Below is a summary of the refunds available to students prior to or at the point of commencing their studies.

**Refunds and/or adjustment will be made as follows:**

When	Refund/Adjustment of	Application Required
Course is discontinued	All fees and compensation for any additional expenses occurred if travelling to another provider (see below)	<b>NO</b> In this situation we do not expect an application to be made. We will ensure full fees are refunded back to debit/credit card or a cheque is posted
Student withdraws more than 7 days before the start of the course	All Fees	<b>YES</b>
Student withdraws for medical reasons directly affecting course attendance	Pro-rata tuition fees	<b>YES</b> Along with a medical certificate
Transfer to new course within 4 weeks of start of original course	Any fee difference in full	<b>NO</b> Fees refunded back to debit/credit card or Cheque posted (after tutor advises of transfer)
Student makes a written complaint regarding the course and/or quality of teaching which is upheld by the Director of Quality	Fees as recommended by the Director of Quality	<b>YES</b> Together with details of complaint in writing

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Compensation under the Student Protection Policy will cover:

- compensation for additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course;
- commitments to honour student bursaries;
- compensation for maintenance costs and lost time in the unlikely event that it is not possible to preserve continuation of study;
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to change course or provider.

Any claims for compensation will be considered on a case-by-case basis dependent on the context and the circumstances in which a student finds themselves. The mechanism by which a student may apply for compensation will involve communication with the relevant students concerned outlining how to apply for any refund and/or compensation.

We currently have, and foresee that the College will continue to have, substantial cash reserves which will be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for ad-hoc claims. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome, the student can initially follow the College's internal complaints process. If a student exhausts all internal College processes and remains dissatisfied, they may take their claim to the OIA, which has its own compensation policy that applies in the event that they find in the student's favour.

d. Withdrawal from the course after commencement

Students will be liable for their tuition fees for the entire year of study unless they formally notify the College (by sending an email to the programme manager and HE co-ordinator) that they wish to withdraw, defer, or apply for a suspension of their studies.

***Information about how we communicate with students about our student protection plan***

When an offer is made students the ***Student Fees Policy and Procedure***.

We will publicise our **Student Protection Plan** to current and future students by displaying it on both our external website and internal intranet site. All students will be made aware of the student protection plan at induction as well.

Alongside the advice and guidance provided to staff regarding Consumer Protection Law we will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan especially when they propose course changes but also in regard to compensation and refund policies.

The Student Protection Plan has been approved by the Principal of the College and the College Higher Education Committee.

The student protection plan will be reviewed on an annual basis with HE student representatives and staff within the College.

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All reasonable steps will be taken to minimise any specific disruption to services and to affected students by:

- providing support to students who wish to transfer to a different provider.
- delivering a modified version of the same course;
- supporting students who wish to move to another course either at College or another provider.

For any student seeking to transfer into Oaklands College or transfer to another higher education institution, we would ensure they are fully supported through the credit transfer process.

For students transferring to another institution we will liaise as appropriate and provide relevant course documentation to enable credit achieved to be transferred. We will also ensure that students have a notification of performance/certificate of unit credit from the awarding body to enable the institution to consider their credit application.

Similarly for students transferring into Oaklands College, we will undertake a mapping exercise of the relevant credit achieved against the course to maximise appropriate credit transfer. Credit will only be recognised if it is relevant, recent, ie normally within 5 years and achieved at the same academic level.

Where a student is required to transfer course or move to another institution there are likely to be implications for student finance arrangements. Students will be supported by the HE Co-ordinator and Student Advice.

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