



STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN 2019/2020

Introduction

Bexhill Sixth Form College is a large sixth form college in East Sussex providing 16- 19 Education, along with adult and community learning and a small cohort of Higher Education. Trading as Bexhill College, it is an independent Corporation with exempt charity status formed under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Bexhill College has its own governing body.

Higher Education has been offered at Bexhill College for a number of years. Initially this was Teacher Training in partnership with Canterbury Christchurch University which has latterly expanded into the provision of Higher |National Diplomas through Pearson. All Higher Education is delivered at Bexhill College, Penland Rd, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2JG. We do not deliver any provision anywhere else.

The College has strategically invested in a small number of vocational work based HE courses to meet the needs of the local community. A high proportion of young people in the area go onto higher education, but many do not return to the area. However, 100% of our students who completed in 2017 and 2018 have remained local in employment, completing the degree top up one day a week.

The design, delivery and cost of our HE courses, all of which are work based, is integral to our strategic objectives and our inclusive ethos which we regularly review through our quality assurance processes. Applicants who are in paid employment are able to continue and study alongside with all our courses at level 4 and above and for those who require work experience and skill development, there is opportunity to achieve this.

Bexhill College is financially strong. The total turnover in 2017-2018 was £9.734,000. Its total assets are £17,948,000 with Total Net Assets of £12,304,000. (Bexhill College published accounts)

With these figures in mind, Bexhill College believes that the risks of institutional financial failure is very low and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has rated our financial position as 'Outstanding'. Therefore, the college believes we have financial resilience to be able to continue to offer courses to students.

Nevertheless, Bexhill College is very aware that our HE students, both enrolled students and potential applicants must have assurances that our courses are effectively quality assured and guaranteed to be accessible for the entirety of the course. This document sets out our assessment of the range and level of risk to course continuity.

Risk Assessment

Although Bexhill College is in a strong financial position, no business exists without risks and the key risks are usually financial, operational, reputational and circumstantial or environmental risks.

The College maintains a Risk Register and has a comprehensive risk management process in which identified risks are evaluated for materiality and probability. Each risk is scored and a RAG rated and is able to provide a framework about how Bexhill College will test, review, adjust and update performance and risks. All risks are assigned to a senior member of staff whose responsibility it is to ensure that the agreed mitigation is put in place. The Risk register is reviewed the Senior Management Team on a termly basis. In addition, each academic section has a risk register which feeds into the College Risk Register. Each risk on the register is allocated to a Committee of the Governing Body to review at their meeting each term as well as the overview by the Audit Committee and the Corporation.

The College has a Disaster Recovery Plan which details how we would ensure business continuity plans should an unforeseen incident impact severely on our operation. The plan provides guidance of the actions a recovery team will need to take in the event of an emergency both short and long term for a return to business as usual. It also considers continuity preparations and how to make the organisation more resilient to risk.

The College considers circumstantial or environmental risks such as disease, fire, floods and or Force Majeure are the same as for any major college. The College ensures ongoing risk assessments, regular safety inspections and the maintenance of appropriate insurance and cash reserves to support business continuity in the event of such unforeseen circumstances.

The College does not have any plans to close or move its site on Penland Road where all courses are delivered. There are no plans to move the HE provision however if there was to be a relocation of building this would have minimal impact on course continuity.

The risk of not being able to deliver whole courses or programmes due to staffing or resource issues is low. Each curriculum area has staff with a range of skills, experience and expertise that ensures students receive a positive experience. Each curriculum area has contingency plans in place to mitigate the impact of any loss of specific skill sets that are dependent on only one member of staff. Each area is also well resourced with specialist equipment and investment in these areas is on-going, with opportunities to bid to upgrade these available each year through the College's budget planning process.

The risk of a course or programme cancellation at the start of an academic year is low. This may occur if the minimum number of students to enhance the student experience are not recruited or in situations where a strategic decision is made to discontinue a course or programme. In the event of insufficient student recruitment of viable student numbers, the students will be kept informed of the situation and the College will ensure that there is a minimal impact on students, ensuring appropriate procedures for course closure procedure are followed. Potential students will be supported to find alternative provision locally. In situations where a decision is made to discontinue a course or programme, the College is committed to teaching out those courses or programmes and offers to new entrants will cease to be made.

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver components of courses is low. The courses we deliver are from curriculum areas where we have a range of staff with a range of specialist vocational skills. The HE programmes delivered by Bexhill College are closely linked to

placement and work skills, this holistic delivery further supports skill development in specialist areas. (All the EE reports for HE commended this holistic approach)

The College's appraisal process is used to ensure staff members are accessing courses and events that minimise the impact to students in terms of any changes in staffing. Budgets for staff development have been maintained during recent reductions in funding so that staff have up-to-date and wide-ranging technical and vocationally relevant skills. Staff complete experience in industry and work closely with placements and employers to maintain knowledge in different contexts. Staff collaboratively plan and work alongside tutors with different specialisms so that they are familiar with the module/ unit descriptors and course content. Recruitment of new staff is focused on hiring people who have a wide range of relevant skills. There is no significant impact on students if a change of teacher is required.

There is a risk that some students on courses with internal progression routes may choose not to continue to study at the college. This could result in very few learners remaining on the course, leading to a different experience for the students. In these circumstances, each course would be looked at to see if there were opportunities to bring, for example, HNC and HND student's together, covering topics or units where the content can reasonably be linked across teaching.

Mitigation Measures

Bexhill College will uphold its obligations to students enrolled on any of our higher education course for the duration of their registration. In the unlikely event that the College decided to discontinue provision we would normally seek to teach-out cohorts of enrolled students.

In the unlikely event of a programme or course being considered for discontinuation (either for strategic or operational reasons) this would be considered by the SLT and the academic board and the decision made prior to starting a new cohort of students.

Where the College has a collaborative partner e.g. CCCU for teacher training, the College ensures that there is a contingency plan which considers how best to allow students to continue their studies in the event of the collapse of a collaboration agreement. A 'teaching-out' arrangement is the preferred option as it is the one that has the best interest of the students. We have worked in partnership with CCCU for 20 years and see this a low risk. In the unlikely event we would look at alternative awarding bodies.

In any situation, the SLT ensures that in all cases students are consulted and their interests are protected.

Refund and Compensation Arrangements

In the event that it is not possible to preserve continuation of Higher Education study for a student or students Bexhill College has a Refund Policy to which we will follow. Students will still be liable for 100% of the annual fee, unless they are within the 14 day cooling off period.

In exceptional circumstances, (for example serious illness) where requests for refunds fall outside the refund policy criteria, students are required to put their requests in writing with supporting evidence which would be considered by the HE Strategic Lead and make a recommendation to the Principal. Any decision to refund or write debt off would be taken within the colleges Financial Procedures and approved by the Principal. This would be on an individual case basis reviewing circumstances and evidence provided.

In the same way, compensation will be considered on a case-by-case basis and awarded, without prejudice, in accordance with the Office of Independent Adjudicator's for whom Bexhill College is a member. (I <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/121676/remedies-and-redress-april-2018.pdf> Remedies and Redress Leaflet April 2018) The College's refund policy is reviewed annually and will be updated to reflect advice from OIA.

Communicating with Students

Bexhill College is committed to ensuring that their assessment of the range and level of risk to the quality and continuation of their Higher Education courses is shared with enrolled and prospective students. Bexhill College will publish the Student Protection Plan on the website http://www.bexhillcollege.ac.uk/docs2/about/higher_education.shtml

A summary of the Student Protection Plan and a link to the document will also be included in all Course Handbooks, which are updated each year and provided to students for each year of their course.

Bexhill College will continue to ensure that all academic and support staff involved in HE provision are aware of the implications of consumer protection compliance in general and the content of the student protection plan through; the HE Board, curriculum planning meetings, HE staff training / mentoring and through procedures for course modification, and provision of new courses or the closure of programmes.

The Student Protection Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with the lead student representative who meets with student representatives for each course and year group. The lead student representative meets with the Vice Principal to formally voice student contribution and approval. This will be approved by the HE Board which has the lead student representative as a member.

Every registered student will be informed of any minor or major changes or variations to courses no later than six weeks of the term preceding the term in which the change or variation shall take place. In the case of changes due to circumstances beyond the College's control (e.g. illness, sudden departure or death of key staff), registered students will be informed as soon as practically possible.

In the unlikely event that our Student Protection Plan needs to be implemented, Bexhill College has the following arrangements in place to ensure that students that are affected by the changes are notified and supported to meet their individual needs and preferences. Bexhill College will:

- Work closely with our local providers of HE to identify and secure possible alternative courses for which our students can transfer.
- Involve local providers of HE in supporting our students affected by the material changes to their courses so transfer can be as seamless as possible.
- Give students that are affected by a course closure a minimum of 28 days' notice with clear guidance about our support, information and guidance plans in place.
- Inform students if there is to be any material changes to their course by letter and email.
- Ensure that key personnel are informed and available to support the different needs and preferences of students affected by any material change.
- Invite affected students to a meeting with key senior management responsible for HE at a convenient place and time for open discussion relating to any material change to their courses.

- Publicise the proposed meeting details on the college Website (www.bexhillcollege.ac.uk) and via social media to maximise opportunities for students to attend.
- Complete and publish minutes taken at the meeting after they have been checked by student representatives to confirm they are fair and accurate before publishing these on the college's website (www.bexhillcollege.ac.uk).
- In the event that students wish to complain about the way in which we implement our plan they will be facilitated to follow Bexhill College's complaints policy.

Appendix

Refunds Policy

Bexhill College has a 'no refunds' policy, however, refunds may be considered in the following circumstances:

- The College terminates a course which has already started
- The College is not able to provide an advertised course
- The College changes the time or location of a course from that advertised
- The College recommends a student transfers to a course with a lower fee
- The College has overcharged a student or assessed their fees incorrectly
- Medical conditions, illness or death certified by appropriate medical professionals, resulting in the student having to leave the college completely
- The student notifies the College, in writing, that they are withdrawing at least 7 days before the course starts

If, after enrolment, you decide to withdraw from your course for any other reason you will not get a refund. If we have agreed for you to pay in instalments then you must pay all unpaid instalments immediately. Fees will be calculated from the time you complete and submit a change of academic circumstances form .

Refund applications will only be considered if received in writing as per the refunds procedure.

Where the college terminates a course which has already started, you will receive a full refund of all amounts paid. Any other approved refunds will be subject up until the change of academic circumstances form has been receive. Including registration fee (where applicable with awarding bodies and the college having already registered you) unpaid fees in respect of other programmes of study and an administration fee of £30.

International students

If a student fails to get a visa or decided to withdraw after their Visa has been granted, the College will refund the tuition fees less an administration fee of £500. The student must apply for the refund in writing, enclosing a copy of the Rejection/Acceptance letter from the UKVI as appropriate.

The College reserves the right to keep more of the tuition fees if there is any suspicion that the visa application was not genuine or if a withdrawal is requested by the UKVI.

If you have made your visa application from within the UK and have not received the UKBA's decision prior to the commencement of the course you must enrol and start your course to maintain your visa eligibility; however you do so at your own risk as no refunds will be made

in the event your visa is refused. If you choose not to enrol and/or attend classes then your study offer will be withdrawn and your entire tuition fee will be forfeited.

If your visa is refused before you start your course, you will receive a refund of any tuition fees paid less a £500 administration charge. If you start your course and your visa is subsequently refused, the College may agree to support you in appealing the UKVI decision and in exceptional cases may consider a full or partial refund.

All UKVI decision letters should be forwarded to the International Admissions Office within 4 days of receipt. If you successfully obtain your visa but elect not to study at the College then you will forfeit your entire tuition fee.