

# University Centre Sparsholt

## Student Protection Plan



Provider's name: University Centre Sparsholt ("UCS"), Sparsholt College Hampshire Provider's UKPRN:10006050

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## INTRODUCTION

This plan ("the Plan") is the student protection plan for UCS as required by the Office for Students ("OfS") pursuant to Part 1 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA 2017).

The Plan provides a clear and accessible statement of the risks to the continuation of higher education (HE) study of University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) students, the likelihood that those risks will crystallise, and the severity of the impact of the impact on students should those risks crystallise. The Plan sets out the measures that UCS has put in place to mitigate these risks including how and when such measures would be triggered. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure that students' interests are protected and that, as far as possible, they are able to continue their studies in the event of any change in circumstances.

UCS is an integral part of Sparsholt College Hampshire (the College), which provides students regionally (and in some cases nationally) with land-based higher education (HE) and further education (FE) from its campus at Sparsholt near Winchester. The College also provides a range of FE and sixth form education, plus small provision a Level 4 from its Andover College campus, as well as a wide range of apprenticeships from its campuses at both Sparsholt and Andover. UCS currently delivers Foundation degrees (FdSc), Bachelor of Science degrees (BSc), BSc top-up degrees and Masters in Science (MSc), all of which are delivered full-time and campus based. Additionally, there is 1 part-time, campus-based BSc top-up programme. Therefore, the specialist land-based HE portfolio is small and managed within one discrete faculty.

The fact the College has been established over many years and has consistently demonstrated strong financial and academic health means that the overall risk of it ceasing to be able to honour its commitments is very low: historically this has never happened. Nevertheless, UCS recognises the importance of identifying and monitoring the full range of risks that could affect the ability of higher education students to complete their studies: this includes the critical need to reflect the student perspective and accordingly students are involved with the creation and implementation of the Plan.

UCS is committed to the continuation of study for all current and potential students: this is central to its role as a higher education provider.

This Plan was initially developed in 2018 by a Higher Education Governance Working Group (HEGWG), consisting of five governors plus one student governor and three members of the Higher Education Strategy group. The governors provided peer review of documents, feedback on key messages and guidance on some of the legal elements. The UCS student community was represented by the student governor who additionally provided student opinion and promoted participation in the student survey.

Following full registration with OfS in September 2018, this document is reviewed annually and updated where appropriately by the HE Strategy group.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

This Section addresses OfS Question 1 (below) primarily by reference to the range of risks that are identified by the OfS in paragraph 383 of the OfS's Regulatory Framework.

### Risk Classification:

Risk management is a central part of the College's strategic governance arrangements. It is the process whereby the College methodically addresses risks attached to its activities which may impact on the achievement of its strategic objectives. Furthermore, it is a continuous and developing process which runs throughout the College's strategic planning and implementation process and is monitored by the Audit Committee which advises the Board of Governors. It is integrated into the culture of the College through development of an effective Risk Management Policy and Strategic Risk Register. The evaluation and prioritisation of risks for the Student Protection Plan was achieved through a simplified risk scoring model that incorporates two factors that affect risk, namely impact (materiality) and likelihood. Risks were banded and scored as high (3), medium (2) or low (1) category and the overall risk score was calculated from impact multiplied by likelihood. Overall scores were then categorised as: Very low – score of 0 to 1; Low – score of 2 to 3; Moderate – score of 4 to 6; High – score of greater than 6.

The College adopts an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the identified risks have been reviewed in consideration of this.

### **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**

#### **RISK 1: Cessation of operations**

OfS risk: "UCS as a whole is no longer able to operate or intends to operate"

#### **Likelihood of Risk crystallising: VERY LOW**

#### Evidence:

- UCS forms part of the College whose financial performance has consistently been assessed annually by the Department for Education as at least 'good', with an operating surplus in each year of the forward financial plan. The College has produced operating surplus for each of the previous 3 years. There are no anticipated conditions that would alter the surplus position in the foreseeable future.
- The majority of HE provision is delivered at the Sparsholt campus, with only small provision at level 4 delivered at the Andover campus. If the provision at Andover were to grow, then management strategies consistent with those for the Sparsholt campus would be put in place.
- Both campuses recruit predominantly local students with appropriate levels of on-site residential accommodation available at Sparsholt for non-local students. Bursaries and Hardship funds associated with study, transport and accommodation costs will continue to be available to students identified as under-represented within the approved Access &

Participation Plan.

- A strong academic performance. The validating partner performs periodic reviews and the 2025 review offered commendations and no concerns with regards to the quality and standards of the UCS provision.

### **RISK 2: Loss of Validating Partner**

OfS risk: “UCS is no longer able to award the qualifications for which its students are registered because a validating partner has withdrawn validation”

#### ***Likelihood of Risk crystallising: LOW***

Evidence:

- All FdSc and BSc programmes are validated by one partner, the University of Portsmouth. The risk of this partnership failing and validation being withheld is rated as low. The partnership has been in place since 1995 and is subject to full Review every six years with the most recent review in 2025. The Review Meeting Panel made two judgements. The first judgement relates to Academic Standards and Student Outcomes, and the second relates to Quality and Student Experience. For each judgement, there is an Outcome. Outcomes can be differentiated per course.
- On both judgements, the panel finding was that the UCS offer meets university expectations. Two areas of good practice were identified including the investment made to student support and the quality of the reporting.
- There were two recommendations - neither of which pose a direct risk to delivery on continued partnership with UoP:
  1. To strengthen partnership through increased collaboration and contact to enhance practice ensuring compliance with OfS registration conditions, student feedback and future annual monitoring process.
  2. UoP and UCS to explore reporting of student feedback.

### **RISK 3: Inability to deliver courses**

OfS risks: “UCS is no longer able to deliver courses to students in one or more subject areas and/or departments, one or more courses to students, particularly if course closures are likely in the next three years.”

Apart from financial constraints which are addressed in Risk 1 above, UCS’s “inability” to deliver a course is likely to reflect a lack of specialist resource or a loss of the professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) approval required to deliver the course.

#### ***Likelihood of Risk crystallising: LOW***

Evidence:

- The risk that the College would be unable to deliver programmes in highly specialised areas of land-based provision is rated as low. Specialist industry standard resources are good and are intrinsic to the specialist institution which is UCS. Investment in specialist facilities, including

more recent investment in the new UCS Research & Science Centre, the Robotic Dairy and the Agritech provision including a vertical farm ensures that the campus and the student experience is at the cutting edge for the subject. This is in addition to the College wide capital fund that has seen updates in Vet Nursing equipment in the past 12 months and the purchase of a new Bomb Calorimeter.

- The risk of loss of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) approval is low. FdSc Veterinary Nursing results in Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) status for the students and is regulated by the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory body (PSRB), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). We liaise and work closely with the RCVS to ensure that our approved course reflects the required standards for RCVS approval. We ensure that our course complies with existing PSRB standards and have monitoring systems to ensure that we reflect new accreditation requirements in our academic planning. To ensure that the risk remains low, ahead of the 2026-2027 re-accreditation process, to be held in January 2027, the organisation is working with an external consultant to support the team and the continued introduction of industry best practice into the course that was identified in the most recent OSCE reports.
- The installation of classroom technology to enable synchronous in person and remote teaching delivery ensures that all students can access their learning.

**RISK 4: Withdrawal of Mode of Study**

OfS risk: “UCS is no longer able to deliver one or more modes of study to students, particularly if the withdrawal of a mode of study is likely”

***Likelihood of Risk crystallising: LOW***

Evidence:

- All provision, with the exception of the part time applied animal behavior top up course, is full-time campus based with no expectation of withdrawal of mode of study.
- The primary mode of delivery for UCS is in-person classroom with a strong emphasis on practical and experiential learning. Blended delivery is used where appropriate for the student experience and learning. However, in exceptional circumstances, a more blended approach can be taken to ensure the continuity of delivery.
- The installation of classroom technology to enable synchronous in person and remote teaching delivery ensures that all students can access their learning.
- The risk that UCS would be unable to deliver part-time blended learning is low. UCS only deliver one top-up degree programme on a part-time blended learning basis. This programme consistently recruits a small viable cohort who access resources on-line using a virtual learning environment (VLE), in addition to attending six campus-based block weeks over the duration of the course. In recent years the course has been redeveloped, and all resources have been updated and reviewed for their accessibility and currency.
- The teaching team for all courses is experienced and has been enhanced by the addition of HE Academic Learning and Support tutors and the academic personal tutors to further support delivery and support for all students.

## **RISK 5: Ability to recruit or teach**

OfS risk: “UCS is no longer able to recruit or teach a particular type of student”

### ***Likelihood of Risk crystallising: MODERATE***

- Evidence: The risk that the College would no longer be able to deliver postgraduate provision in Applied Zoo Biology, and Equine Behaviour, Performance & Training is rated as moderate. The College is dependent on a very limited number of members of the academic staff to deliver modules that require specialist knowledge and vocational experience. This group of staff are committed to their roles, but the relatively small number of these for the postgraduate provision, does present a slightly higher level of risk than undergraduate teaching areas where there are greater numbers of staff to be able to call upon. The increase of staff with PhD from 3 to 6 this year is a positive enhancement.
- The risk that the College is unable to deliver certain programmes of study given the niche and specialist nature of the provision due to low numbers of applicants e.g., HNC programmes, is moderate. The decision to suspend delivery of one of these programmes would be made prior to enrolment and commencement of delivery. All cohorts of students already enrolled onto one of these programmes would be taught through to completion.

## **RISK MITIGATION**

This Section addresses OfS Section 2 (below) in respect of Risk 5 being the only risk identified in Section 1 that is rated as Moderate or higher.

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

#### **RISK 5: Ability to recruit or teach**

UCS is no longer able to recruit or teach a particular type of student

Details of measure put in place:

- HE teaching staff are supported through the Staff Development fund to undertake Level 7 and Level 8 qualifications to ensure that appropriately qualified staff are available for teaching at post-graduate level.
- In all scenarios involving course closure the College anticipates that it would be able to complete the delivery of a degree programme without necessitating the transfer of students or mid-course closure. The College would be committed to teaching out any cohorts enrolled on the programmes, however, in the unlikely event of course closure, the following measures would be put in place:

#### **Loss of suitably qualified teaching staff:**

If the College is unable to recruit appropriately skilled and vocationally experienced staff to deliver our postgraduate courses in Applied Zoo Biology, and Equine Behaviour, Performance & Training

which would result in course closure prior to students being enrolled on these programmes of study, the College will:

- Notify all applicants by 31<sup>st</sup> May prior to enrolment in the following September to enable applicants to select alternative courses.
- Provide advice and guidance to applicants on suitable alternative courses and providers.

If the College is unable to recruit appropriately skilled and vocationally experienced staff to deliver the postgraduate courses in Applied Zoo Biology, and Equine Behaviour, Performance & Training which would result in course closure whilst students are already enrolled on these programmes of study the College will:

- Provide advice and guidance on alternative providers of comparable courses utilising the College's Landex membership to facilitate transfers. Landex (Land Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence) is a national subscriber organisation with members in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Provide proportionate, reasonable and fair compensation to cover additional course fees, additional travel and additional accommodation costs that might be incurred as a result of the transfer.
- Reasonably facilitate the transfer and enrolment onto a similar degree programme at the college, or at another provider of similar degree courses. Where a student refuses the offer of a reasonable transfer, the College will have no liability to provide compensation.
- Liability for additional fees, transport and accommodation will be limited to the number of years of study outstanding at the point of transfer from the course that the student was enrolled on at University Centre Sparsholt.
- Provide proportionate, reasonable and fair compensation to cover a refund for fees, travel and accommodation costs that have been incurred where continuation of study is not possible.

#### **Lack of applications:**

If the College is unable to deliver certain programmes of undergraduate study the college will:

- Notify all applicants by 31<sup>st</sup> March prior to enrolment in the following September to enable applicants to select alternative courses.
- Offer alternative degree programmes, if available that will be running and ensure that the student can focus their assessment to their particular area of interest where appropriate.
- Provide advice and guidance to applicants on suitable alternative courses and providers.

## **COMPENSATION POLICY**

This Section addressed OfS Question 3 (below).

### **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**

See the UCS Fees, Refund and Compensation Policy available on the website found at <https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/>.

We have cash reserves of 20% of annual Higher Education fee income which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for any students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

## COMMUNICATION OF PLAN

This Section addresses OfS Question 4 (below).

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

UCS will publicise the Plan to current and prospective students by:

- Uploading it to our website <https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/>
- Advising prospective students of the Plan within future publications of the prospectus.
- inserting a hyperlink to the Plan into the Course Handbook that is available on-line for each student

UCS will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the Plan when they propose course changes by including Plan familiarisation in the staff induction process and probationary reviews for all new staff.

Arrangements that will be put in place to communicate with affected students should the Plan need to be implemented will be:

- UCS will inform affected students if there are to be material changes to their course by adopting the University of Portsmouth 'Portfolio Approval, Modification and Closure Policy' policy (June 2023).
- UCS will inform undergraduate applicants of course closure by 31st March prior to their enrolment the following September.
- UCS will inform postgraduate applicants of course closure by 31st May prior to their enrolment the following September.
- UCS will inform enrolled students of potential non-continuation of their course a minimum of 1 term in advance of course closure.

If the UCS needs to implement the measures in the student protection plan, we will support students by providing:

- One to one tutorials to discuss transfer options available
- Meeting space for alternative providers to visit and discuss appropriate provision options
- Guidance on refund and compensation entitlement
- Financial summaries of refunds and compensation that will be available
- Guidance and support to complete Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to facilitate transfer to another provider
- Support from the wellbeing and learning support team to underpin student welfare

- ‘Handover’ notes and documentation relating to (Disabled Students Allowance) DSA support and exam access arrangements as appropriate to another provider where a transfer has been agreed.

If UCS needs to implement the measures in the Plan, we will also provide access to independent advice from the:

- College’s qualified Careers Advisor
- Director of Quality Enhancement at Landex.