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Summary of the Student Protection Plan

As a registered provider of higher education, we are required to publish a Student Protection Plan (SPP) which sets out how a provider will ensure that the quality of study will be maintained and students can continue to study even if a provider, campus or course closes.

This SPP is specific to our individual circumstances and sets out the measures we have put in place to protect you as our student in the event that a risk to the continuation of your current or planned studies should arise due to our failure or a decision we take. The Plan has been approved by our regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), and it addresses circumstances and risks specific to The Open University.

Summary of significant changes since last version

February 2020:

- a) Amendments to the contact details in Paragraph 1.
- b) Amendment to the Scope “What this document does not cover” to explicitly state learners studying Microcredentials via FutureLearn are not covered by this Plan.

Plans superseded by this document

This is a new document.

Scope

What this document covers

This SPP applies to all students registered with The Open University, including students on short courses, postgraduate research (PGR) students, apprentices and students on Open University validated awards delivered in partnerships with other providers.

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What this document does not cover

Risks to students' continuation of study due to students' own circumstances (e.g. due to personal reasons) are outside the scope of an SPP. The Open University has a number of policies and procedures in place to support students who have difficulty continuing study as a result of personal circumstances. These can be found on our [Student Policies website](#).

Learners studying Microcredentials via the FutureLearn platform.

Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Academic Regulations \(Taught Courses\)](#)
- [Academic Regulations \(Apprenticeships\)](#)
- [Refund and Compensation Policy](#)
- [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [Conditions of Registration](#)
- [Conditions of Registration \(Short Courses\)](#)
- [Conditions of Registrations for PGR students](#)
- [Fee Rules \(Undergraduate\)](#)
- [Fee Rules \(Taught Postgraduate\)](#)
- [Fee Rules \(Postgraduate Research\)](#)
- [Fee Rules \(Postgraduate Research - ARC\)](#)
- [Research Degree Regulations](#)
- [Handbook for Validated Awards](#)

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The Open University Student Charter Principles

This policy aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Principles:

- Principle 2: We aim to inspire and enable learning
- Principle 3: We share the responsibility of learning

Introduction

This SPP sets out the actions we have in place to protect you as our student in the event that a risk to the continuation of your studies should arise. It has been approved by our regulator, the Office for Students, and is available to our current and potential students.

The actions contained in this SPP are in addition to the protections you have under [consumer protection law](#), and do not affect your consumer rights.

For specific guidance on how this SPP may relate to your personal circumstances, you may contact the following teams:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students: your Student Support Team via StudentHome.
- Postgraduate research students: Research Degrees Team via the [Graduate School Network](#).
- Apprenticeship students: your Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM).
- Students on validated awards: the institution you are studying with in the first instance, with any further guidance from the Open University Validation Partnerships team via OUVP-Enquiries@open.ac.uk.

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Student Protection Plan

1. Provider Details

Provider's name: The Open University

Provider's UKPRN: 10007773

Legal address: The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Contact point for enquiries about this SPP: SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this SPP is to provide assurance to you and our regulator, the Office for Students, that we have appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the continuation of study for all of our students. The SPP has been approved by our regulator, the Office for Students, and it addresses our specific circumstances and risks.
- 2.2 We will take all reasonable steps to implement the provisions of the SPP if the risks set out in the plan materialise, and we will inform the Office for Students of our actions in accordance with the Office for Students new [Regulatory Framework](#).
- 2.3 The measures contained in this SPP are in addition to the protections you have under consumer protection law, and do not affect your consumer rights.
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3. Principles

We commit to:

- a) being open and transparent in our communications with you, should any risk to the continuity of your studies materialise;
- b) informing you of material curriculum changes affecting your study in a timely manner;
- c) taking reasonable steps to protect your studies should we discontinue or substantially change a module or qualification on which you are registered or enrolled;

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- d) taking into consideration your needs and the impact that any proposed changes and protective measures may have on you;
- e) informing the Office for Students of any changes that may necessitate a review of this SPP or events, except for the closure of an individual course, that require implementation of the provisions of this SPP;
- f) seeking students' views on this SPP as part of our student feedback processes.

4. Measures we will take in specific situations

The following section identifies a number of scenarios and measures we will take in order to protect your continuation of study.

4.1 Withdrawal of individual modules, study routes, whole qualifications, or an entire study discipline.

- The likelihood of withdrawal of individual modules that you have not yet studied is high because the University offers qualifications over extended periods, up to 16 years in some cases.
- The likelihood of withdrawal of study routes or whole qualifications while you are registered to study a particular qualification is medium as qualifications are renewed as part of our normal product lifecycle and some students may start a qualification with sufficient time to complete but, due to personal circumstances, be unable to complete within the available time.
- The likelihood of withdrawal of an entire study discipline while you are registered to study a particular qualification is low. There has been no withdrawal from discipline areas for many years, however this could occur in the future if a discipline area become economically non-viable.

4.1.1 The [Academic Regulations \(Taught Courses\)](#) (Section B) and [Research Degree Regulations](#) (Section 1) specify the situations where we may take a strategic decision to withdraw curriculum, e.g. to comply with changes in regulatory requirements or to ensure the efficient and economic use of our resources. In such cases we will follow the teach-out policy included in these regulations, as well as our policy on refunds, compensation and cancellation as per

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our [Conditions of Registration](#) and [Fee Rules](#) documents for undergraduate, postgraduate (taught) and PGR students and our [Refund and Compensation Policy](#).

4.1.2 Unless it is necessary to comply with the requirements of a professional, statutory, validating, accrediting or regulatory body, the minimum teach-out period given for taught students will be sufficient to complete the qualification or component at a study intensity of half of the full-time equivalent rate, assuming you do not defer or fail any module or take any study break. This means that, for example, if you are studying a 360-credit undergraduate degree programme and you have already been awarded 60 credits of study towards that qualification, the notice period will be 5 years of teaching. An additional year (+1) will be added for resits or resubmissions only (if a module provides a resit/resubmission opportunity) and will not feature any teaching. Please see Table 1 for details.

Table 1: Minimum notice period by qualification and student type

Qualification	Credits	Minimum notice period for those who are already studying/have already been awarded 60 credits
Integrated Masters/ Scottish Undergraduate Social Work Degree	480	7 years (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Undergraduate Honours Degree	360	5 years (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Undergraduate Ordinary Degree	300	4 years (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Diploma of Higher Education /Foundation Degree	240	3 years (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Masters Degree	180	2 years (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Certificate of Higher Education/ Postgraduate Diploma	120	1 year (teaching) +1 year (resits/resubmissions)
Postgraduate Certificate/OU Undergraduate Certificate	60	1 year (resits/resubmissions)

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4.1.3 Proposals for taught qualifications and modules to be discontinued or amended are approved by our Qualifications and Assessment Committee. This committee also scrutinises teach-out plans to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for students to complete their qualification.

4.2 No mutually agreed, suitable alternative qualification is available to students who are unable to complete their withdrawn or amended qualification within the notice period provided.

The likelihood of this occurring is medium to low. In most cases, an alternative qualification or qualification route can be identified that is both suitable and satisfactory to most students. In some cases, an alternative qualification or route may not be identified or may not be suitable or satisfactory to every student affected.

4.2.1 In such an event a range of options will be provided to students wherever practicable, as per our teach-out policy (see Section B of the [Academic Regulations](#) and Section 1 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#)) and [Refund and Compensation Policy](#). This includes resources such as:

- a) Information, advice and guidance to help students make an informed decision about their studies, e.g. to move to a similar qualification under a new structure, to a related qualification or, if they are an undergraduate student, to a qualification under the Open Programme.
- b) Details about refunds and compensation that may be available to affected students.
- c) Support for students who choose to transfer to another provider where a suitable qualification can be identified and the students' needs can be met. This could include different needs of students sharing particular protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

4.3 Students being prevented from obtaining an Open University qualification due to the termination of a validated partnership, including market exit.

The likelihood of this occurring is medium to low. In recent years, only a small number of validated providers in the sector have required intervention from their validation partner.

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As part of an initial assessment and ongoing review we require validated partners to have their own risk assessment and SPP in place, including an option for students to transfer to an alternative provider where the risk of whole institution failure is assessed as high or medium. This alternative provider may be The Open University itself. We also require our validated partners to notify us if it is likely that the risks identified in their SPP may materialise or have materialised. We will work with any validated partner whose relationship with us is being brought to an end with the aim of ensuring that you are able to complete your qualification or a suitable alternative.

- 4.4 Students being prevented from obtaining an Open University qualification due to a breakdown in the relationship between The Open University and a delivery partner, e.g. a subcontractor, international partner, an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) or industrial partner.

The likelihood of this occurring is low. It is exceptionally rare for such disputes to occur.

Due diligence is undertaken for all Open University delivery partners. Teach-out clauses and other protective clauses are included in contractual documents with such partners. For apprenticeships we will follow the [Education & Skills Funding Agency \(ESFA\) guidance](#). For PGR students (non-ARC) we will endeavour to underwrite any financial loss for the student so that they can continue to successfully complete their qualification. PGR ARC students will have an opportunity to transfer and continue with their studies with direct support from The Open University wherever possible.

- 4.5 Postgraduate Research (PGR) supervisors leaving The Open University which results in a PGR student losing their expertise and mentorship.

The likelihood of this occurring is medium to low. While PGR supervisors do leave the University, robust procedures are already in place to ensure that research supervision is uninterrupted.

In line with [Research Degree Regulations \(RD 5.9\)](#), we will aim to source an alternative supervisor or permit the student to follow their supervisor and transfer their registration to another Higher Education provider subject to agreement with that supervisor and their new institution.

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5. Refunds and Compensation Policy

Our [Refund and Compensation Policy](#) is available on our student policy website. We have sufficient cash reserves to provide refunds and compensation to students in line with that policy. The Refund and Compensation Policy will apply in a limited number of circumstances as specific within that policy.

6. Communication

6.1 Any material changes to our curriculum will be supported by a Communication Plan that will set out which student types are expected to be impacted by the changes.

6.1.1 For qualification or pathway/study route withdrawals, this would include those current students who, for example, are registered for/linked to an affected qualification (including Access students) and students on a study break. For module withdrawals where the structure of a qualification is impacted, this would include those current students who, for example, are registered for/linked to a qualification for which the withdrawn module is compulsory.

6.1.2 We will inform you as soon as possible after the relevant committee approval if there are to be material changes to your study. The purpose of such communication will be to outline your rights and responsibilities, to explain the changes, notice periods and timescales, and to inform you how to seek further advice on your options to make appropriate study choices. A dedicated team of advisors will ensure that you are provided with relevant, individual and consistent advice that reflects your individual needs, characteristics and circumstances.

6.2 We publicise our SPP to current and potential students by publishing it on the Open University [website](#) together with our [Conditions of Registration](#), [Fee Rules](#), [Refund and Compensation Policy](#) and other student policies and regulations. This means that the SPP is accessible to all students and potential students. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students are signposted to the policy and regulations site from the Help Centre (the central resource available to all students to support their studies) and StudentHome (student-specific portal). PGR students are signposted from the [Graduate School Network site](#).

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- 6.3 We have consulted with our students on this SPP. The SPP is incorporated into our annual review cycle of all registration-related documentation. In the case of significant, material change to this SPP, which may happen after the SPP is triggered and changes to procedure are recommended as a result, students will be consulted on any significant revisions.
- 6.4 We will ensure that our staff are aware of the implications of our SPP through:
- Publication of the SPP to all staff (including Associate Lecturers) on Open University intranet pages;
 - Ongoing briefings, training and advice about [Consumer Protection Law and Competition and Markets Authority Guidance \(CMA\)](#);
 - Information about teach-out, [CMA compliance](#) and the SPP being included in the Curriculum Management Guide for staff involved in curriculum management and development.
- 6.5 We will also engage with our Open University Students Association and (Research) Graduate School when it is likely that the SPP will need to be triggered and inform them of any developments.
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7. **Complaints and Appeals**

If you have concerns or complaints about how the Student Protection Plan is being implemented, please follow our [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#).

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Glossary of terms

Apprentice

An apprentice is a student aged 16 or over, who is in paid employment for the duration of their apprenticeship and who has in place an Apprenticeship Agreement with their employer. The apprentice will combine working with studying for a work-based, academic or combined qualification which forms part of an Apprenticeship Standard or Framework.

Current student

You will be a current student of The Open University for the purposes of this SPP if you are currently registered for a qualification or, if you are not registered for a qualification, you are either currently registered for a module or you have studied a module in either of the previous two academic years.

Curriculum Management Guide

The Curriculum Management Guide is a reference for Open University staff involved in the planning, production or presentation of modules, qualifications and Board of Studies. It provides information on policies, procedures and practices associated with the lifecycles of these components of the Open University's curriculum.

Module

A module is a self-contained unit of teaching, learning and assessment which may be studied as a standalone course or in combination to form a qualification. Each module, other than a short course, is assigned a credit value and a level of study. Students enrol on modules that they are studying as part of a registered undergraduate qualification, and register on modules that are taken as standalone or postgraduate study.

Open Programme

The Open Programme is an Open University programme which allows students to design their own qualification to study a wide range of subjects. Qualifications offered within the Open Programme are BA/BSc (Honours) Open, BA/BSc Open, Diploma of Higher Education Open, Certificate of Higher Education Open, and MA/MSc Open.

Postgraduate taught student

A postgraduate taught student is a student who is registered for a module that is designated as a postgraduate module.

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Postgraduate research (PGR) student

A postgraduate research student is a student who is registered for a postgraduate qualification which is designated as a research degree.

Short course student

A short course student is one who is registered for any of the non-credit bearing modules set out in the short courses sections of our prospectuses.

Teach-out arrangements

Teach-out arrangements apply where The Open University has given notice of a change to the structure or study requirements of a qualification or for its withdrawal. They are the arrangements for students who have registered for or declared that qualification to enable them to complete it within the notice period before the change or withdrawal takes effect.

Undergraduate student

An undergraduate student is a student who is either:

- a) registered for a module that is designated as an undergraduate module; or
- b) registered for a qualification that is designated as an undergraduate qualification or as an integrated Master's degree. An integrated Master's degree involves study at undergraduate and postgraduate level which leads to the award of a Master's instead of a Bachelor's degree. You will be an undergraduate student even if you are currently enrolled on a postgraduate module as part of that qualification.

Us/We

Us/we refers to The Open University.

Validated award

A validated award is an Open University award that has been developed and is delivered by a partner of The Open University. The Open University makes sure the award meets the required quality and academic standards.

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Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact the following teams:

- a) Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students: your Student Support Team via StudentHome. Alternatively, you can contact your Student Support Team through the 'Contact Us' option on the [Help Centre](#) if you are a current Open University student.
- b) PGR students: Research Degrees Team via research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.
- c) Apprentices: your Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM).

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to APG-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the following teams:

- a) Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students: your Student Support Team via <http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/> (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or your dedicated Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student.
- b) PGR students: Research Degrees Team via research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.
- c) Apprentice: your Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM).

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