

University of Cambridge Student Protection Plan (Updated April 2024)

Provider's name: University of Cambridge

Provider's UKPRN: 10007788

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Context

The purpose of this Student Protection Plan is to provide transparent guidance for both applicants and current students at the University of Cambridge regarding the measures in place to safeguard their academic progress. It outlines the University's identified potential risks, along with the corresponding mitigations and procedures for managing these risks, while reaffirming the institution's commitments to its students.

Students at the University of Cambridge are safeguarded against unfair practices under consumer law. It's important to note that this plan respects and upholds students' rights as consumers without encroaching upon them and follows CMA guidance for consumer rights for students¹.

Given the length of courses, changes in available options may occur due to factors such as staff changes, illness, sabbatical leave, or developments in the subject matter. Typically, students are informed of these changes by their College Director of Studies or the respective Faculty or Department in a timely manner. While the essential components of a course are unlikely to change, exceptions may occur for the benefit of students or to maintain external accreditations. Any proposed changes to a course undergo thorough justification and approval by the University's Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC), ensuring fairness and transparency. The Committee, inclusive of student representatives, is dedicated to preventing any student disadvantage resulting from course adjustments.

Similarly, for students engaged in research activities, changes may occur in relation to supervisors, advisors, or support staff due to various factors, including staff changes, illness, or sabbatical leave. While efforts are made to maintain continuous access to research facilities, it's important to acknowledge that absolute continuity cannot always be guaranteed. Any changes to research provision are overseen by the relevant Degree Committee, ensuring effective management and communication.

Explanation of Scoring Matrix

Risk Likelihood Scale

The risks identified below may potentially affect students' ability to continue their studies. The 'risk likelihood' indicates the possibility of these risks occurring in the future. Various risks were considered, including those suggested by the Office for Students, with only those rated as low or above being addressed in this document.

1. Very Low: No indication that the risk will occur and it has not occurred previously.

¹ [Higher education: guide to consumer rights for students - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/higher-education-guide-to-consumer-rights-for-students)

2. Low: Risk is highly unlikely and has not previously occurred.
3. Medium: Risk is possible but not likely to be frequent.
4. High: Risk is likely to occur frequently.
5. Very High: Risk is highly likely.

Risk Impact Scale

The 'risk impact' evaluates the foreseeable consequences should a risk materialize.

1. Insignificant: Little to no impact on students' studies.
2. Minor: Brief impact with few repercussions for students.
3. Moderate: Adverse impact on studies, requiring mitigation by the University.
4. Serious: Hinders studies, leading to temporary substitutions and cancellations.
5. Very Serious: Severely impacts studies, potentially prohibiting continuation indefinitely.

Total Risk Residual Score

The overall risk assessment is determined by multiplying the risk likelihood and risk impact. Please note that this calculation does not account for the mitigating actions and processes implemented by the University to reduce and address risks.

- Low: 1 – 6
- Medium: 7 – 12
- High: 13 – 20
- Very High: Over 20

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

- Risk Name: A location is no longer available for teaching
- Likelihood of Risk: 3 – Medium
- Impact of Risk: 2 – Minor
- Overall Risk Assessment: 6 – Low
- Key Affected Student Groups: Students with accessibility needs may face challenges if alterations are made with short notice. The University prioritizes timely notification for these students and offers support for travel arrangements to and from alternative locations.

Description of Risk:

This risk is assessed as having a medium likelihood due to the University's extensive estate, comprising over 389 operational buildings, including 51 listed structures. Maintenance and refurbishment are essential for the successful operation of these buildings in facilitating teaching and learning.

However, the impact of this risk on students is deemed minor because the University is well-prepared to provide suitable, accessible alternatives should a location become unavailable. With ample space and proactive building maintenance schemes in place, the University ensures minimal disruptions to teaching activities.

The University's Programme Board for Education Space (PBES)² is dedicated to optimizing space utilization, fostering innovation in educational spaces, and enhancing information infrastructure to support an exceptional education-focused estate. The University provides detailed information regarding its Estates Strategy.³

Risk 2

- Risk Name: Alteration to or withdrawal of a component of a course
- Likelihood of Risk: 2 – Low
- Impact of Risk: 1 – Insignificant
- Overall Risk Assessment: 2 - Low
- Key Affected Student Groups: Prospective students and offer holders

Description of Risk:

The risk of alterations to taught courses, which could negatively impact students, is scored as low. Minor and major alterations are sometimes required to maintain the University's high educational standards and are made in consultation with students, often in response to student feedback. Faculty or departmental justifications for alterations may include evolving course objectives, regulatory requirements from accrediting bodies, or the need to align courses with strategic plans and/or to eliminate redundant provisions.

Minor alterations, such as changes to paper titles, are scored as low on the likelihood of risk scale. These alterations are frequently undertaken to improve the student experience or to provide clarity regarding course elements. They undergo a light-touch approval process because they are not considered material changes and are unlikely to adversely affect student learning.

Major alterations, although less likely to occur, could have a greater impact so require committee approval and a minimum lead time of 18 months. The University ensures that any such alterations do not disadvantage current students or compromise teaching resources.

Unless immediate alterations are deemed necessary, the University aims to introduce changes only for new student cohorts. Current students are informed in advance of any alterations, and discrepancies between alterations and published information are addressed promptly. Prospective students have the opportunity to raise questions about modifications with the relevant faculty or department before making the decision to study at Cambridge.

The risk that the University may be unable to deliver essential course components is assessed as low. Modules are designed to be taught by integrated teams of academic staff, reducing dependency on individual lecturers. Scrutiny of new courses by the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee ensure that no paper/module or course relies on one person to teach it. Additionally, robust quality assurance procedures, including oversight by the Education Quality and Policy Office, Faculty Boards and the General Board's Education Committee, ensure academic quality and standards are maintained.

² [About PBES | Education Space \(cam.ac.uk\)](https://www.cam.ac.uk/about-pbes/education-space)

³ [Strategic Framework | Estates Division \(cam.ac.uk\)](https://www.cam.ac.uk/about-pbes/estates-division)

Risk 3

- Risk Name: Suspension or withdrawal of a course/ course element
- Likelihood of Risk: 2 – Low
- Impact of Risk: 1 – Insignificant
- Overall Risk Assessment: 2 - Low
- Key Affected Student Groups: All students

Description of Risk:

The likelihood of this risk is assessed as low. The University would not withdraw an undergraduate course (Tripos) with current students. However, the University has, very occasionally, rescinded a taught master's course (an MPhil, MRes or MSt). This is typically due to the content of these courses being more responsive to the interests of prospective students and new developments in the relevant disciplines.

The University has established procedures in place to manage the suspension or withdrawal of a course should such a need arise. These procedures utilize a variety of measures to minimize the impact on students, ensuring that current students and offer holders are not adversely affected by any changes. The studies of any current students and offer holders should continue as expected, with the course being withdrawn only for future cohorts.

Additionally, any action to withdraw or suspend a course must be approved by local teaching committees and central committees, and a robust case must be presented. This helps to minimize the likelihood of a course being suspended or withdrawn at short notice. Furthermore, an unplanned closure of a course has been excluded from this risk register, as the risk likelihood was considered negligible.

Risk 4

- Risk Name: Industrial Action
- Likelihood of Risk: 4 - High
- Impact of Risk: 3 - Moderate
- Overall Risk Assessment: 12

The likelihood of this risk is scored as medium. Industrial action has the potential to result in the cancellation and/ or rescheduling of lectures and examinations. Extended strikes may result in delays to graduation timelines and academic progression. The impact of industrial action may vary depending on the course and the students' stage of study. For example, final-year students nearing graduation may be particularly concerned about delays in their academic progression and future career prospects. The University has effective mitigation measures in place to protect the student experience and the University's rigorous academic standards.

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

Risk 1

- Risk Name: A location is no longer available for teaching
- Likelihood of Risk: 3 – Medium
- Impact of Risk: 2 – Minor

- Overall Risk Assessment: 6 – Low

If a building requires refurbishment or maintenance, proactive planning ensures that no students are displaced. Through the work of the Estates Division⁴ maintenance is typically scheduled during vacation periods to minimize disruptions. Additionally, the University's Estates Team works diligently to identify potential issues ahead of time and implement necessary repairs or renovations with minimal disruption to teaching activities.

However, in the event that teaching cannot be conducted at the initially designated site, the following actions will be taken:

- Students will be promptly notified via email through Moodle⁵, the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), about the relocation of scheduled teaching and the reasons behind the change. This communication will provide clear instructions on where to go for classes and any adjustments to the schedule.
- An alternative location will be provided to students, aiming to be in close proximity to the original site while maintaining teaching quality. Efforts will be made to ensure that the new location is accessible and equipped with necessary facilities for effective learning.
- In case of prolonged unavailability, efforts will be made to ensure teaching is consistently held at an alternative location. This may involve securing temporary facilities or arranging for classes to be held in nearby buildings.
- If necessary, teaching can quickly be moved online.

Risk 2

- Risk Name: Alteration to or withdrawal of a component of a course
- Likelihood of Risk: 2 – Low
- Impact of Risk: 1 – Insignificant
- Overall Risk Assessment: 2 - Low

In most cases, if there is an alteration to the course, all current students and offer holders will continue their courses as planned. The change will then be phased in for future cohorts. The University ensures regular updates to the online prospectus, to maintain accurate information for students.

Should the University be unable to deliver a component of the course advertised to students, the following steps will be taken:

- Obtain approval from all relevant committees for any alterations to the course
- Encourage effective consultation with student representatives by the Faculty or Department to minimize impact
- Promptly inform students of any alterations to the course
- If changes affect offer holders, the University will follow this process:
 - a) If the information in the prospectus, on the website, or via other media, becomes incorrect, the University will communicate changes to Undergraduate courses with students via colleges, or via the Graduate Admissions Office or Faculty or Department if the change affects postgraduate students. Websites will be updated accordingly.
 - b) Provide information through durable mediums like email or letter.
 - c) Allow students the option to withdraw from the contract if they no longer wish to attend the University due to the changes, without stating reasons.

⁴ [What we do | Estates Division \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Moodle | Student Systems \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

It is important to note that course changes are rarely made at this stage, and are typically driven by external examiner and student feedback, developments in research and consultation to enhance future cohorts' learning experiences. For all changes a robust taught course modification process is followed⁶.

The University collaborates with the faculty or department to ensure no adverse impacts on students due to alterations, and that replacements for withdrawn elements are robust and suitable. Changes affecting regulations will be published in the *University Reporter*⁷.

Education Monitoring and Review (EMR) is a quality assurance process which monitors and reviews the University's courses on a bi-annual basis⁸.

Risk 3

- Risk Name: Suspension or withdrawal of a course/ course element.
- Likelihood of Risk: 2 – Low
- Impact of Risk: 1 – Insignificant
- Overall Risk Assessment: 2 - Low

The standard procedure in the event of a course suspension or withdrawal is to 'teach out' existing student cohorts. This means that all current students and offer holders will continue their studies as planned, causing no adverse impact on their student experience. In the unlikely scenario that the University is compelled to suspend or withdraw a course, the following processes will be followed:

- Any proposals to suspend or withdraw the course must be approved by the relevant central committees to ensure proper consideration and adherence to university regulations.
- The relevant faculty or department will engage in effective consultation with student representatives to minimize any impact on students.
- Course recruitment will be suspended, preventing any new prospective students from applying.
- Following the graduation of all current cohorts and cessation of admissions, the course may be suspended or withdrawn.
- Students who choose to intermit their studies (take leave from the University) will be supported to continue and complete their studies under the 'teach-out' arrangement. This support will be tailored to individual circumstances, ensuring that each student's needs are met.

Risk 4

- Risk Name: Industrial Action
- Likelihood of Risk: 4 - High
- Impact of Risk: 3 - Moderate
- Overall Risk Assessment: 12 - Medium

In the event of industrial action to mitigate the potential impact on students, the following measures will be implemented:

- Clear Communication: Ensure timely and transparent communication with students regarding any potential industrial action, its expected duration, and its potential impact on lectures, examinations, and academic resources.

⁶ [Taught course modifications | Education Quality and Policy Office \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Cambridge University Reporter |](#)

⁸ [Education Monitoring and Review \(EMR\) | Education Quality and Policy Office \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)

- Alternative methods of teaching delivery: Offer alternative modes of instruction, where possible, or self-directed learning materials, to minimize disruption to students' academic progress.
- Engagement with Stakeholders: Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including student representatives and trade unions, to negotiate and mitigate the impact of industrial action on students while ensuring their statutory rights and interests are safeguarded.
- Monitoring and Review: Continuously monitor the situation, assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures, and adjust strategies as necessary to address emerging challenges and support student well-being and academic success.

By implementing these measures, the University of Cambridge will minimize the adverse effects of industrial action on students and uphold its commitment to providing a supportive and conducive learning environment.

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

In the event of any disruption to the continuity of study, whether due to course changes or closures, the University undertakes a thorough review to identify alternative provisions for affected students. This process aligns closely with the guidelines outlined in HEFCE's "Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures"⁹ ensuring that students are kept informed and consulted throughout every step of the process.

Understanding the significant financial commitment undertaken by students when selecting and attending higher education institutions, the University is deeply committed to ensuring that students impacted by any disruptions receive appropriate refunds and compensation for any losses to which they are legally entitled. This includes reimbursement for tuition fees and any associated costs incurred due to the disruption.

Moreover, in addition to prioritizing student welfare, the University maintains robust financial security measures, including holding Professional Indemnity insurance for all claims made against the University. With these safeguards in place, the University will meet all reasonably foreseeable claims for refund or compensation.

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

The University's commitments to students at Cambridge

The University will publicise the student protection plan to both staff and students via the University website. Faculties and Departments will be made aware of updates via the Key Issues Bulletin. The plan will be regularly reviewed and aligned with the University Key Risk Register to ensure it is fully comprehensive.

The University will inform students of alterations to their courses by maintaining an open and transparent dialogue. It will always aim to notify students in a timely manner. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the University aims to inform students of any

⁹ [Statement of Good Practice - GuildHE](#)

material changes to courses at least six months prior to the alterations being implemented.

Crucially, the University will continue to recognise that Cambridge provides education to students from diverse backgrounds with a variety of responsibilities and accessibility needs. As such, the University will seek to support the full range of student needs and will keep communication lines with students open to ensure they are able to seek support where necessary.

If a student requires advice or support or wishes to make a complaint, they should contact a responsible officer (information available in handbooks) in the first instance or access the website for the Office for Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals which contains information on the Student Complaint Process¹⁰. Students may also seek independent advocacy, advice and support from the Student Union's Advice Service¹¹

If a student has exhausted the internal complaints processes and feels that the issue has not been resolved or the outcome is unfair, they can also contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)¹² to make a formal complaint.

¹⁰ [Student Complaints | Student Complaints \(cam.ac.uk\)](https://www.cam.ac.uk/students/your-studies/complaints)

¹¹ [Student Advice Service \(cambridgesu.co.uk\)](https://www.cambridgesu.co.uk)

¹² [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE](https://www.oiahe.org.uk)