

University of Cambridge logo

Document cover sheet

Title	Student Protection Plan
Purpose	To provide transparent guidance to applicants and current students of the measures in place to safeguard their academic progress.
Owner	EQPO
Contact within EQPO	Jane Clare
With effect from	September 2025
Next review due	June 2026
Version	V1.2
Comment	Updated to ensure fit for purpose

Provider's name: University of Cambridge

Provider's UKPRN: 10007788

Legal address: The Old Schools, Trinity Lane, Cambridge, CB2 1TN

Contact: Head of Education Quality & Policy Office (educationalpolicy@admin.ac.uk)

Last Updated: June 2025

Student Protection Plan

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, 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.

Course amendments may occasionally be necessary due to staff changes, illnesses, sabbatical leave, or evolving 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 consideration and approval by the University's Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC), ensuring fairness and transparency. The Committee, inclusive of student representatives, is committed to preventing any student disadvantage resulting from course adjustments.

For research students, changes in supervisors, advisors, or support staff may occasionally be necessary due to staff changes, illness, or sabbatical leave. While efforts are made to maintain continuous access to research facilities, it is 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.

While the overall likelihood of identified risks materialising is low, certain student groups (e.g., disabled or international students) may face more significant impacts in the event that the University was, for example, to lose its Tier 4 licence or to close a teaching location. The University would take all reasonable steps to preserve continuity of study, respond appropriately in line with existing procedures, whilst taking account of special circumstances, including mobility issues and educational needs.

¹ [Higher education: guide to consumer rights for students - GOV.UK](#)

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

- a. The University ceases to operate

The risk of the University ceasing operations is considered **extremely low**, given its long history, global reputation, and AAA credit rating, which reflects its financial stability, robust governance, and consistent academic performance. The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **high**.

- b. A college ceases to operate

The risk of a college closure within the collegiate university is considered **very low**. The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **medium**.

In this event, the University will mitigate the impact on students by ensuring they are able to continue on their course of study and facilitating transfers to other colleges.

- c. A faculty or department is closed

This risk is considered **very low**. The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **high**.

The University would not close a faculty or department without undertaking extensive evaluation and strategic planning. Current cohorts would be able to complete their courses without compromising the quality of their education and would be offered ongoing support where necessary.

- d. A course or component of a course is discontinued

The likelihood of this risk is assessed as **low**. The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **medium**.

The University would not withdraw an undergraduate course (Tripos) with current students although taught Masters courses are occasionally withdrawn. This is usually because they have been superseded by a new course which is more responsive to the interests of prospective students and encompasses new developments in the relevant discipline.

The University has established procedures in place to manage the suspension or withdrawal of a course should such a need arise. These procedures utilise a variety of measures to minimise the impact on students, ensuring that current students and offer holders are not adversely affected. 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 both local and central committees on the basis of a robust rationale. This helps to minimise the likelihood of a course being suspended or withdrawn at short notice.

In the unlikely scenario that the University is compelled to suspend or withdraw a course, the following process would be followed:

- i. The proposal would be discussed as the relevant central committees to ensure proper consideration and adherence to university regulations.
 - ii. The relevant faculty or department will engage in effective consultation with student representatives to minimise any impact on students.
 - iii. Following the graduation of all current cohorts and cessation of admissions, the course may be suspended or withdrawn.
 - iv. 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 and would continue to cover the full period during which intermitted students returned and completed their studies. Wherever possible we will 'teach out' existing cohorts causing no adverse impact on their student experience. In the unlikely event that a course closes with little or no notice we will plan to transfer affected students to another provider.
- e. A course loses accreditation
The likelihood of losing accreditation is **low**.
The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **medium**.

If such a loss affects students' ability to practice professionally post-graduation, the University and the relevant faculty or department would work closely with the accrediting body to regain accreditation promptly. If reaccreditation efforts were unsuccessful or immediate action was required, the University would assist affected students to facilitate their transfer to accredited institutions or funding additional examinations as needed.

Our approach to compensation or refunds in these circumstances would depend on an assessment of each student's case and on their individual circumstances.

If the student's circumstances were such that continuing their studies elsewhere or taking further examinations was not feasible, the University would look to provide compensation or refunds to students as appropriate and this would include:

1. Consideration of the time the student had been at the University;
2. Whether the University could offer an alternative course of study or transfer to an alternative course of study within Cambridge, which would provide compensation or part compensation in the circumstances, as well as any exit awards the students would be eligible to receive;
3. Consideration of the student's individual circumstances, which might require compensation over and above tuition fees. We would not require the student to raise a formal complaint, but we would want to understand their individual circumstances.

The student would have the opportunity to raise a complaint about any compensation or refunds offered. Following this procedure, the student would receive a Completion of

Procedures letter and, if they remained dissatisfied, they could raise a complaint with the OIA.

f. A teaching location becomes unavailable

This risk is assessed as **medium** due to the University's extensive estate, comprising over 389 operational buildings, including 51 listed structures.

The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **low**.

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 optimising space utilisation, 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.

When a building requires refurbishment or maintenance, pro-active planning ensures that no students are displaced. Through the work of the Estates Division maintenance is typically scheduled during vacation periods to minimise disruption. However, in the event that teaching cannot take place at the advertised site, the following actions will be taken:

- i. Students will be promptly notified via email through Moodle, the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), about the relocation of scheduled teaching, the reasons behind the change and any adjustments to the schedule.
- ii. 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.
- iii. 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.
- iv. If necessary, teaching can quickly be moved online.

g. Industrial Action

The risk is assessed as **medium**.

The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **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

² [Education Space |](#)

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.

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.
- **Alternative methods of teaching delivery:** Offer alternative modes of instruction, where possible, or self-directed learning materials, to minimise 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.

Further measures, recently approved, will allow some students to graduate if, as a result of a marking and assessment boycott, they were missing marks but had sufficient marks for the Examiners to be certain that they had reached the honours standard, deferring the award of a class until all marks are available. This measure, where applicable, protects the interests of students and maintains academic standards.

By implementing all these measures, the University of Cambridge will minimise 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 with guidance issued by the OIA³ and ensures that students are kept informed and consulted throughout every step of the process.

Consideration would be given to the reimbursement of tuition fees and other costs where other remedies are not suitable. This would require an assessment of each student's individual circumstances.

³ [Briefing note on course, campus or provider closure - OIAHE](#)

The University would ensure a consistent and fair approach by considering cases through the Student Complaint Procedure. Following this procedure the student would receive a Completion of Procedures letter and, if they remained dissatisfied, they could raise a complaint with the OIA.

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 prioritising 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 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 Process⁴. Students may also seek independent advocacy, advice, and support from the Student Union's Advice Service.⁵

⁴ [Student Complaints](#) | [Student Complaints](#)

⁵ [Student Advice Service](#)

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)⁶ to make a formal complaint.

This plan was devised via consultation with Cambridge Student's Union and approved by the General Board's Education Committee with student representatives present.

⁶ Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE