UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Education Quality and Policy Office

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
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Student Protection Plan

Introduction

This Student Protection Plan explains the steps the University will take, and the mitigations it has in place, to protect students' ability to continue and complete their studies if a risk to delivery emerges. It applies to applicants and current students and is designed to be clear, fair and uphold students' rights as consumers[1]. It should be read alongside the student complaint process and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) scheme.[2]

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.

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

[2] Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE

Our overall approach to assessing risk

We identify risks to continuation of study and rate both their **likelihood** (how likely they are to happen) and **impact** (how disruptive they would be). Some risks are very unlikely overall, but may have **differential impact** on particular groups, including disabled students and international students (e.g., if student visas were affected). Where that is the case, we put in place additional mitigations that reflect specific needs of those affected students.

The Current risk landscape (University-wide)

This section of the plan outlines the main categories of risk and our assessment of both the likelihood of that risk materialising and the impact on our students if it does. For each risk there is a short explanation of why it has been given the likelihood and impact rating cited. A table summarising the risks, mitigations and details on whether refunds/compensation may apply is available at the end of this document.

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 overall likelihood of this risk is assessed as **low**. However, there is currently an elevated risk of course withdrawal with respect to the Veterinary Medicine Tripos: further details and information specific to that course can be found in Appendix A.

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

   In the event that the University ceased admissions to an Undergraduate course, a teach-out plan would be implemented to support current students in completing their studies.

   Taught Masters courses are occasionally withdrawn at the end of the academic year. 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 scenario that the University is compelled to suspend or withdraw a course, the following process would be followed:

i. The proposal would be discussed by 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 endeavour to transfer affected students to another provider.

e. A course loses accreditation
The likelihood of a University course losing accreditation is **low**. There is currently an elevated risk with respect to the Veterinary Medicine Tripos: further details and information specific to that course can be found in Appendix A.

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 by funding additional examinations as needed.

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)[3] 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, if 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 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, the following
measures will be implemented to mitigate the potential impact on students:

- 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.

3 Education Space |

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 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.

h. Suspension or revocation of the University's Student visa sponsor licence
The risk is assessed as **low.**

The impact on students should this risk crystallise would be **medium/high** for overseas students.
The University operates centrally managed policies and processes to ensure UKVI sponsorship duties are met and to reduce the likelihood of sanctions. The University recruits a substantial number of international students annually and has an established and consistently strong record of compliance with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) sponsor requirements.

In the event that the University's licence was suspended or revoked, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to students, including:

- Work with the UKVI to seek arrangements that allow current students to complete their studies
- Where possible, support transfers to an alternative provider
- Maintain clear student communication and signpost independent advice
- Apply compensation and refunds where students suffer demonstrable, material financial loss.

3. Compensation

We recognise the significant financial commitment students make in undertaking higher education. Where continuation cannot reasonably be preserved, or where students suffer demonstrable, material financial loss because of disruption we caused (and where other remedies are not suitable), refunds/compensation may apply. This section clarifies how we decide.

3.1 Triggers (examples)

- Teaching/assessment is cancelled and cannot be delivered or reasonably substituted (e.g., permanent course withdrawal without teach-out).
- Accreditation loss that prevents professional registration and where transfer/additional exams are needed.
- Sponsored visa impacts where our status changes and continuation cannot reasonably be preserved.
- Faculty/department closure where transfer is required, or unavoidable extra cost is incurred

3.2 What may be covered

- Tuition fee refunds (typically pro-rata where teaching cannot be delivered or reasonably substituted).
- Reasonable additional costs that you incur due to the disruption (e.g., travel to an alternative provider/location where necessary, professional exam fees required due to our change, administrative costs linked to visa changes).
- Nontuition impacts where individual circumstances mean additional compensation is justified (e.g., disability related costs).
- We will not require you to raise a formal complaint in order for us to consider compensation, but you may use the complaints process if you disagree with our decision.

3.3 How decisions are made

- We assess each case individually, considering time on course, whether a suitable alternative or transfer is available, and personal circumstances.
- Decisions are made in line with this Student Protection plan and relevant consumer law.
- Students will receive a written decision; after completing our process, you may take your case to the OIA if dissatisfied.

3.4 Financial capacity and insurance

- The University maintains robust financial security and Professional Indemnity insurance. We will meet all reasonably foreseeable claims for refunds/compensation where liability is established.

4. Communication

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.

If any part of this Student Protection Plan needs to be enacted clear and coordinated communication plans will be developed and implemented to ensure that all stakeholders - students, staff, colleges, accrediting and regulatory bodies, and external partners - are informed in a timely, accurate, and consistent manner.

If you are a student, depending on the scenario, we will use some or all of the following methods:

- Direct email to your University address with plain English summaries, what is changing, when, and what you need to do.
- Moodle announcements for modules/units (including timetable/location changes).

- University website pages for updates to the SPP and public information; Key Issues Bulletin for staff.
- Department/Faculty briefings and web pages for course specific updates.
- Town halls/meetings with student representatives for Q&A.
- Signposting to the Office for Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (student complaints process), the Students' Union Advice Service, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for external escalation after completion of procedures.

Communications will specify: the decision, rationale, timing, mitigations, support routes (including accessibility/visa advice), any financial remedies that may apply and named contacts

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 Process[4]. Students may also seek independent advocacy, advice, and support from the Student Union's Advice Service.[5]

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

4 Student Complaints | Student Complaints

5 Student Advice Service

6 Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE

Summary of Risks, mitigations and where refunds/compensation may apply

Risks marked with an * may have a differential risk level with respect to the veterinary medicine course. See Appendix A for details

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigations	Refunds/Compensation potentially applicable?
University ceases to operate	Extremely low	High	Institution level teach-out and or transfer agreements with sector partners and regulators	Yes -where continuation cannot reasonably be preserved and there is demonstrable financial loss
A College ceases to operate	Very low	Medium	Transfer to and alternative College with continuity of study and tailored support	Yes – Case-by -case basis if unavoidable additional costs arise
A faculty/department is closed	Very low	High	Teach-out for all current cohorts	Yes where continuation at Cambridge is not possible and transfer is required or if unavoidable costs are incurred
A course or a course component is discontinued	Low overall*	Medium	Teach-out for all current cohorts/component replaced by more current provision	Yes – if teaching cannot be delivered or reasonably substituted
Accreditation is lost	Low overall*	Medium	Rapid remediation plan with the accreditor. Transfer to accredited provision and or funding of additional accreditation exams where appropriate	Yes – where accreditation loss impacts professional registration and transfer or additional exams are required
Teaching location becomes unavailable	Medium	Low	Provide alternative accessible locations; move online if necessary	Limited – only where unavoidable additional costs are evidenced
Industrial Action	Medium	Medium	Clear communications, alternative delivery specific measures to protect progression and graduation	Yes – if teaching cannot be delivered or reasonably substituted
Student route sponsor licence suspended/revoked	Low	Medium/High	Engage with UKVI to seek arrangements which permit students to complete, support transfers where needed, provide access to independent advice	Yes – Case-by -case basis if unavoidable additional costs arise

Appendix A: Veterinary Medicine — Understanding the risks and how we are managing them

1. Why the Veterinary Medicine course is included in this section

The University has identified some specific, higher than usual risks affecting the Veterinary Medicine programme. These risks sit above normal University-wide risks and relate to two main areas:

Accreditation — making sure the course continues to meet the standards set by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and by European accreditation bodies.

Potential material changes to the course — due to ongoing educational, operational, estates and financial challenges that may require parts of the programme to change.

We want to be clear about what these risks are and—most importantly—how we are planning for them so that your progression, wellbeing, and professional routes remain protected.

2. Accreditation status and recent history

- The Cambridge Vet Med degree is currently under conditional accreditation with the RCVS.
    - This followed a visit in May 2024.
    - A follow-up visit in September 2025 recognised that substantial progress had been made, but some standards still needed further evidence.
    - A further focused revisit is planned for October 2026.
- The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) has given a "pending accreditation" outcome.
    - A focused revisit is due in February 2026.
    - Both RCVS and EAEVE processes have time-bound requirements, which means the University must meet certain standards by set dates.

3. Why there is a higher risk of course changes

In February 2026, the University's General Board reviewed the future of veterinary education at Cambridge. They considered detailed analysis from the School of Biological Sciences and the Department of Veterinary Medicine. The full statement is available online (General Board meeting about veterinary education at the University of Cambridge | University of Cambridge).

The Board confirmed that the University will continue to admit students to the Veterinary Medicine course, but also agreed that:

- More detailed analysis, including input from external experts, is needed to explore future models of veterinary education at Cambridge.
- The Vet School must proceed with the financial and operational reorganisation of clinical services to ensure sustainability.

- Immediate cost-saving measures identified by the Department should be implemented without delay.

These factors mean there is an elevated risk that some elements of the course may need to change.

4. What happens if accreditation risks materialise?

If the RCVS or EAEVE decide that standards are not met, the University already has a plan to protect your education and your progression toward registration. The University would:

4.1. Immediately engage with regulators

- Submit a clear and targeted remediation plan with dates, evidence requirements, and actions (e.g., addressing case mix, placements, facilities).
- Increase monitoring of teaching, case exposure and learning outcomes, including dashboards to identify issues early.

4.2. Protect your route to professional registration

- If additional exams or assessments are needed to meet RCVS requirements, the University would fund these where they arise as a result of changes we have made.
- If accreditation timelines cannot be met, we would support transfers to accredited providers, taking into account your stage of study and individual circumstances.

4.3. Safeguard your learning and wellbeing

- Maintain specialist-led teaching wherever possible.
- Provide extra clinical skills sessions, placements or simulations to make up for any shortfalls in case exposure.
- Offer tailored pastoral, careers and financial support.

4.4. Financial remedies

If you incur material, evidenced costs because of accreditation-related changes we caused (e.g., required travel for transfer, external exam fees), you may be eligible for refunds or compensation.

5. What happens if material course changes are required?

If significant changes to the course become necessary—either through University decisions or as a requirement from accrediting bodies—the following steps would be taken to protect current students:

5.1. Teach-out guarantee

- All current students would be able to complete their Cambridge degree.
- Quality assurance and accreditation engagement would be strengthened, including planning for “terminal accreditation” if this becomes necessary.
- A senior oversight group would monitor staffing, curriculum, learning outcomes, assessments and student experience intervening quickly where needed.

5.2. Transfer and early-exit options

- The University would explore transfer agreements with accredited providers.
    - Because vet courses differ widely, not all transfers will be possible, but we will support students individually—especially those in clinical years.
- For some students, an early exit with a Cambridge BA after three years may be the right choice, supported by both academic and pastoral advice.

5.3. Staffing and clinical provision

- The University will maintain sufficient specialist staff to support your learning and mitigate any loss of staff through retention plans and contingencies.
- If needed, external providers will be contracted to deliver placements or case exposure with Cambridge retaining oversight of quality and assessment.

5.4. Regulatory and accreditation compliance

- The University would agree a terminal accreditation or de-accreditation framework with RCVS/EAEVE, including thresholds, case mix expectations and reporting.
- Transparent engagement with the Office for Students (OfS) will continue throughout.

5.5. Communication and support

- You will receive regular updates via email, town halls, Faculty/Department pages and dedicated information hubs.
- Clear contact points will remain available for advice—including Student Support Services, the Students' Union Advice Service, and the OIA where needed.

5.6. Financial remedies

Where continuation at Cambridge cannot be maintained, or if University-driven changes cause unavoidable additional costs (e.g., transfers, mandated external exams), refunds and/or compensation may apply.

6. Communication plan

If any of the above risks become active, the University will:

- Send **r**egular email updates to all current students and staff
- Hold Q&A briefings at key points (e.g., after regulator updates or major decisions)
- Publish public updates on the University website when decisions or significant changes occur
- Provide easy ways to give feedback, with visible "you said — we did" responses to show how your input is used

7. Refunds and compensation

Refunds/compensation will be assessed individually, taking into account students' circumstances.

They may apply when:

A transfer to another accredited provider is required

- Pro-rata tuition fee refunds where teaching cannot be delivered or reasonably substituted
- Reimbursement of reasonable additional costs such as:
    - Travel to a transfer location
    - External exam fees required because of University-driven changes

Teaching changes cause unavoidable extra costs

- Targeted support for reasonable additional costs (including accessibility or visa impacts) where these arise because of University changes

This list is not exhaustive; the University will consider all reasonable, evidenced cases.