LEARNER RELATED POLICY: STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

This policy is annually reviewed to ensure compliance with current regulations

Approved/reviewed by	
Approved by: **Deputy Principal** Reviewed by: **Assistant Principal: Student Experience, HE Quality Manager**	
Date of next review	**November 2024**

This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex, Sexual orientation and Disability

1. Document Control

1.1. Document Details

Title	Student Protection Plan
Author	Heather Marks / Cary Edwards / Abid Hussain
Version	2.0
Date	November 2023
Status	Published

1.2. Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Comments
1.0	November 2022	Gill Bush	Definitive Release
2.0	November 2023	Heather Marks / Cary Edwards / Abid Hussain	Definitive Release

1.3. Distribution

Name	Email	Organisation
All Staff	Uploaded to SharePoint, College website	Boston College

Student Protection Plan

Our Student Protection Plan addresses the potential risks for students studying a Higher Education qualification at Boston College, and outlines what processes are in place at the College to reduce these risks.

1. Overview of Boston College and general risks for students

Boston College views the provision of Higher Education (HE) as a vital component of its curriculum offer to serve the local community and holds the view that HE provides a framework within which it can address the local and regional skills agenda, raising aspirations of both staff and students. Boston College has provided HE since 1987 and has, over this period, continuously developed practice and processes which are student focused. In December 2011, the College was approved for direct funding by Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE), now replaced by the Office for Students, and in September 2012, the first cohort of directly funded full-time students commenced their studies.

Boston College is a medium sized General Further Education (GFE) College with the main site located near to the town centre of Boston in Lincolnshire. The College plays an important role in the life of the town and makes a significant contribution to the local economy in a number of ways. Offering in excess of 400 courses, it has more than 7000 students over the age of 14 and employs over 400 staff. It works closely with local businesses to help meet their skills needs and has established a reputation as being at the forefront of new developments. It makes a major contribution to the local community and is wholly committed to the principles of equality and diversity. Boston College was the first college in the UK to work in partnership with the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) to teach students about modern day slavery and labour exploitation. The College is also at the forefront of mental health and wellbeing for staff and students through a national project with the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust. The College takes part in Hello Yellow (World Mental Health Day) and actively supports wellbeing for students and staff.

Boston College is a college that aims to transform people's lives and has aspirations to be outstanding. The College's rural location, the dispersed nature of its students, and the distance between the College and alternative providers, present challenges in providing accessible and viable provision across the full spectrum of the curriculum. As well as creating physical obstacles to participation and delivery, rural isolation has, historically, had a significant impact on educational aspirations. HE participation rates in the Boston and South Holland districts are in the lowest quartile, and to challenge low participation rates the College is actively engaged with the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) Lincolnshire Consortium (LiNCHigher) and undertakes a wide range of activities to promote the benefits of HE to prospective students.

The College works closely with local schools to promote learning opportunities post 16 and to support all education providers to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks.

All further education colleges in the country have been scrutinised for financial stability and future viability under a national programme of area-based reviews. Those that are deemed likely to experience financial difficulties have been strongly encouraged to merge to form larger, more resilient colleges. The Lincolnshire Area Review in February 2017 confirmed that Boston College should remain independent.

The College's Ofsted inspection in October 2017, confirmed the quality of provision at the College remains good. These commendations evidence the rigor and robustness of finances and quality assurance at the College.

Serving local community needs, and responding to the national agenda, is an integral part of the College's ethos and is articulated in the mission and vision statements – *"To ensure that all our students achieve their brilliant 'best' for their employers, their communities, for themselves and for the future.* (Mission) *"Brilliant Today, Better Tomorrow".* (Vision). The College remains ambitious to grow its curriculum offer and to serve the changing needs of the local community.

What does this mean for students?

For students that plan to study at the College, the external and internal indicators of risk to the performance and future of the College highlight that:

- The risk that the College would not be able to operate is very low, because of the established position within the local community, its financial position and the confidence placed in the College by the Area Review and Ofsted inspection.

- The risk that the College would not be able to offer provision because of campus closure is very low. The College's main campus has a range of buildings which are used to deliver a broad curriculum but can be dedicated to specific curriculum delivery as required. This enables the College to be flexible and responsive to change and to mitigate risk to students.

2. Our student body

The College's current HE student population in 2022/23:

- 81% English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- 72% female
- 47% under the age of 21

The College is working in partnership with LincHigher to promote HE to underrepresented groups, namely, male students, BME students and care leavers. Differences in recruitment and achievement based on EDI characteristics are monitored throughout the year in HE Quality Assurance Committee (HE QAC) meetings, and through completion of Programme Area Quality Improvement Plans (QIP).

The College offers support to all students via Learner Services, and this includes counselling and careers advice and guidance. To ensure there is specialist support for students studying on HE provision, the College works in partnership with Randstad Student Support. Student voice is a very important aspect of the College's procedures and practice, and there are a range of forums and meeting structures to ensure that processes and practice reflects the student voice. The HEQAC endeavours to have student representation, and a range of forums and surveys are completed during the academic year to ensure we have wider student consultation to understand student experience and develop practice in response to student feedback. The College's Student Protection Plan is tracked and reviewed at the HEQAC and will be presented annually for review at a student forum. It will also be reviewed annually as part of the annual review of HE Performance at the Quality and Standards Governors Committee.

Sharing information with prospective and current students is important because there is a range of material within the public domain that students can access. The College acknowledges the importance of publishing information that is accurate and reliable. Public information on the College website, and within the brochures helps prospective students to make informed decisions about where, what, when, and how, they will study. Policies are shared with students on the College website, and on a dedicated HE Team page. The College strives to publish information in a timely manner, and to ensure information is accurate, fair, and reasonable. The College seeks to ensure that prospective, and current students have access to reliable information about HE courses. The Student Protection Plan is an important part of the information that it shares with students. It will be accessible for prospective students on the College's website from the point of enquiry, and additionally held on the HE Team page for students to access once enrolled. It will be signposted, along with other relevant HE policies, to all newly enrolled students as part of their induction to college.

3. Our Curriculum

The College has well established course approval and monitoring instruments in place to develop new provision and monitor current provision. Each academic year Directors of Learning (DoL's) undertake a curriculum review and planning process. The curriculum planning, and course approval process, is designed to reduce the risk that courses will be offered for students without due care and attention being paid to the financial viability of the course, and to marketplace intelligence. Existing provision is monitored for viability and student experience is reviewed through systematic quality assurance with analysis being presented for scrutiny at a range of committees and boards. Directors of Learning produce quality improvement plans each academic year and these are monitored by the College's Deputy Principal during performance monitoring review meetings. The structure for planning and monitoring provision ensures that risk can be mitigated, wherever possible, to ensure student experience is unaffected. Provision is planned and timetabled with the rurality of the College in mind as this can adversely affect student experience through long travel times and associated financial expenditure.

Risks to student experience may occur if student numbers reduce during the duration of a course. However, the College has, and always will, deliver the full qualification to very small cohorts of students, adopting a 'teach out' approach. The 'teach out' approach ensures that all students are able to study and gain their qualification.

Managing the risk of curriculum with potentially low student numbers resides with programme area managers, the Deputy Principal, and Assistant Principal Strategies are in place to ensure 'teach out' is sufficiently flexible and responsive to student need to enable all remaining students to achieve their qualification. This would include adapting teaching and learning delivery between blended, online and face to face learning.

Curriculum validated by a Higher Education Institution (HEI)

The College has worked in a range of successful collaborative partnerships with HEIs for the past 30 years. Currently the College has collaborative arrangements with one HEI. The respective HEI undertakes due diligence when entering into a partnership which covers both academic quality and standards, and financial probity. These processes require a rigorous review of the College's standards and viability. Once established, partnerships are subject to regular monitoring and review. The respective institutions sign a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) which protects student during their studies and any changes to the partnership is managed through the MoC to ensure the student experience is not compromised.

What does this mean for students?

The robust approval and monitoring systems that operate within the College indicate:

- The risk is low in relation to the College marketing a course to students without rigorous checks and balances occurring that ensure the course is viable

- The risk is very low that low student numbers would result in course closure because the College is able to offer flexible delivery models, though Microsoft Teams which can support distance learning

- The College would ensure that 'teach out' strategies are developed in consultation with students to identify which model would meet their learning needs (for example blended learning via Teams)

- Provision offered through HEIs are bound by clear mandates and students' outcomes are protected

4. Our financial commitment to students

Refund and Compensations

Refunds are only made when a course is cancelled by the College. All decisions about refunds should be referred to the Chief Operating Officer.

What does this mean for students?

Refund of fees will be considered in the following circumstances:

- Where the course is cancelled prior to commencement due to low enrolment.
- Where a course is cancelled by the College after commencement.
- They are eligible for the course to be fully funded by the ESFA at the point of enrolment.
- They subsequently become eligible for a student loan to pay their course fees.
- They subsequently receive sponsorship for payment of course fees.
- In the unlikely event that there is a disruption or withdrawal of the programme of study for Higher Education students.
- Where a learner is unable to continue due to a change in circumstances due to medical reasons, the College may consider a refund upon application with supporting valid medical evidence.
- The course or trip is cancelled by Boston College.

Compensation

The College seeks to follow sector good practice in compensation and refund policies. Student compensation and refunds are based on the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) indicative compensations bands for distress and inconvenience: i.e. 'Moderate' up to £500, 'Substantial' between £501 and £2,000, and 'Severe' between £2,001 and £5,000, with categories that define what is deemed to be Moderate (some short term distress and inconvenience), Substantial (unreasonable changes that result in substantial distress and inconvenience) and Severe (where the proposed alternative requires a clear material disadvantage to a student and there is no appropriate or possible practical remedy).

Compensation may be considered in instances where a student has been disadvantaged and/or the College has had opportunity to resolve a complaint relating to student experience and has failed to act on it. For more information and examples relating to the bands for compensation please see:

https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2275/putting-things-right-february-2019.pdf

Instances of non-continuation of courses are highly unlikely and the College is fully committed to a "teach out" approach for courses once they are commenced. However, the College holds working cash reserves which are sufficient to provide refunds and compensation should this occur.