

Annex D: Student protection plan

Provider's name: Petroc

Provider's UKPRN: 10004676

Legal address: Old Sticklepath Hill, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 2BQ.

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan:

Student protection plan for the period 2019/20

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

Petroc delivers all of our higher education in partnership with the University of Plymouth, our degree awarding body. Programme design, management of the student experience, quality management and our approach to teaching and assessment are all informed by our strategic relationship with the University. At the heart of our collaboration is the Academic Cooperation Agreement, this legally binding document reflects how both partners need to perform to ensure the quality of the student experience.

Petroc is committed to helping you achieve successful outcomes from your studies. However, there may be unforeseen circumstances, from outside the college's control, which may result in changes having to be made to modules, programmes or even the location where programmes are taught. This Student Protection Plan will be considered and approved annually by the senior management team at Petroc. The Student Protection Plan will be made available to students and prospective students via the college website. The HE Quality team at Petroc comprising the Vice Principal, HE Co-ordinator, Departmental Managers and Head of Quality HE will be responsible for ensuring staff are aware of and implement the student protection plan.

The Student Contract (Higher Education) details the relationship between the student and Petroc, and explains the college's responsibilities and how programmes changes beyond our control may be managed. In the event of any conflict between this plan and the student contract then the student contract shall take priority.

Petroc is committed to communicating any changes to you as early as possible, setting out clear information and options. We will take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption, and to enable you to complete your studies as intended. However, where this is ultimately not possible you may, for instance:

- be offered the opportunity to move to another programme
- be provided with a modified version of an existing programme
- be provided with assistance to switch to a different provider
- be taught at a different location
- be offered a financial refund and / or compensation in accordance with our Refund and Compensation Policy.

In the unlikely event you are required to transfer programme, or are required to move to another institution, there may be implications for your student finance arrangements. If you are affected, Petroc's HE office will contact you and provide detailed information, advice and guidance based upon the plan, the student contract, the refund and compensation policy taking into account your individual circumstances.

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 requires Petroc to have a Student Protection Plan, like this to protect your interests and detail the steps we would take where significant material changes had to take place affecting the quality and / or continuation of your study, such as but not limited to:

- disruption of delivery of HE programme
- industrial action
- the unanticipated departure of key members of college staff
- the cessation of programme delivery
- major changes in year to programme content
- suspension and / or revocation of Petroc's Tier 4 sponsor licence
- changes to the regulatory framework affecting a specific programme and loss of accreditation from regulatory bodies
- a decision to close a college campus
- a loss or restriction to award qualifications from our validating HEI

We will review this plan annually and update and amend as required. We also reserve the right to amend this plan from time to time based on the legal or regulatory change affecting you or us or to include best practice in the HE sector.

Petroc does not accept any liability for any consequential or other economic loss (including loss of profits, loss of goodwill or loss of opportunity) resulting from

any of the matters covered by this plan. Only foreseeable loss will be covered by Petroc.

Working with you – advice and guidance

It is important to note that Petroc will plan for a wide range of scenarios the vast majority of which are very unlikely to happen. The college undertakes risk assessments and regularly reviews them, where we identify risks which are listed on the risk register we take such actions as deemed necessary to mitigate against these risks. The material changes listed above are listed as low risk, however, the following section details the likely actions that would be taken in the unlikely event that any of these significant material changes arise.

Where we anticipate changes which will affect your studies we are committed to:

- Letting you know as soon as possible
- Working with the student representatives from the University of Plymouth Student Union and with student representatives from programmes affected to discuss potential change
- Providing you with advice and guidance on the proposed changes and the options that you have
- Where relevant applying our Refund and Compensation Policy

Significant Material Change

If there was disruption to programme delivery, we would normally consider whether it is practicable to make changes to delivery rather than close or suspend an affected programme. The actions we might take to minimise disruption might include:

- Changing the location of delivery or method of delivery. This might include the use of blended learning.
- Changing the staff delivering a programme, including the recruitment of alternate staff
- Offering you the opportunity to transfer to an alternative programme
- Providing you with the opportunity to access a programme run by an alternative provider within the University of Plymouth partnership, including making arrangements for the transfer of credits and academic progress.

If key academic staff involved in the delivery of a programme are unavailable

This may happen as the result of long term sickness, retirement, death or staff leaving Petroc at short notice. Where possible we will:

- Seek to fill vacancies as quickly as possible, by assigning responsibility to other current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience or by recruiting externally to avoid disruption.

If industrial action affects your studies:

Petroc has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with our recognised trade unions. As an institution we are committed to creating a positive employee relations culture, on this basis we work with our trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that arise from time to time.

On the rare occasion industrial action does occur, we will seek to:

- ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible
- take all reasonable steps to fulfil our responsibilities to you ensuring that any disruption is minimised and that you are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action, this may include teaching through blended learning.

If we need to make major in-year changes to the content of your programme:

We will make all reasonable endeavours to deliver your programme in accordance with its description in our prospectus for the academic year in which you begin your programme. However, in the unlikely event major in year changes to a programme occur we will ensure that:

- we restrict changes to a minimum;
- when changes are proposed you are notified and consulted
- Where necessary you have the opportunity to withdraw from programme and are offered reasonable support to transfer to another programme with an alternative provider.

If we cease delivering a programme or change the mode of delivery.

- Where possible we will enable you to complete your programme of study, we call this teaching out. So if we have started a programme in year 1 we will teach out this cohort of students even if we decide we will not offer this programme of study in future years. In doing this we will carefully manage our approach to staffing and other resources to any potential disruption is minimised.

- In the rare event it is not possible to teach out a programme then we would consider the options for you to transfer programmes or transfer to complete your studies at another provider.
- If you have applied through UCAS or directly to Petroc but have not yet enrolled, you will be notified that it is our intention not to offer a programme. We will where possible provide you with the advice and guidance to find a different programme at Petroc or find an alternative provider for your chosen programme of study.

If our Tier 4 Sponsor Licence is suspended or revoked:

If our Tier 4 Sponsor status is suspended, we will take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to you by, for example:

- working with UKVI to allow you to complete your year of study or programme
- allowing you to enrol and commence your studies, if you are already in receipt of a visa based upon an allocated CAS from Petroc
- offering you the opportunity to postpone your application pending the resolution of the suspension.

If the University of Plymouth revokes our academic cooperation agreement and prevents Petroc from awarding University of Plymouth qualifications.

- we would teach out all existing cohorts of students, ensuring you had the opportunity to complete the qualification onto which you enrolled.
- ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner
- ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise disruption to you

If part or all of the campus closes, or is forced to close for a significant period of time

- Relocate provision to an alternative suitable location
- Revise the timetable to allow all scheduled teaching to take part in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions delivered outside of normal teaching hours. If we are forced to adopt this approach we will consult you and undertake equality impact assessments to assess the effect on students.
- Consider the use of differing delivery modes such as distance and blended learning.

In the event that any of the above apply when you are a student studying at Petroc, or if for any other reason caused by our omission or default, you are unable to reasonably continue your studies then our Refund and Compensation Policy will apply.

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

As an institution Petroc's financial position is robust, its financial health as moderated by the Educational Skills Funding Agency is classified as "good". In respect of the most recent financial statements for the year ended 31st July 2017 an audit opinion of "unqualified" was provided by the college's external audit providers (Mazars LLP) with the college continuing to be regarded as a "going concern" On the basis of these external judgements, and the strong financial management provided from within the institution the risk that Petroc would be unable to operate due to our financial position must be viewed as very low.

As stated previously Petroc operates across three campuses two of these Barnstaple and Tiverton are owned by the institution, and are core to the requirement to deliver post 16 education to the communities of North and mid Devon. The majority of our HE provision is taught at our University Centre situated at our Brannams Campus. Petroc currently leases this property from PAL Properties South West Limited. The existing lease is on a fully repairing basis and extends to 2045, the lease has break options in 2025, 2030 and 2035. At present there are no intentions to exercise a break option. The risk that higher education could be disrupted over the next 6 years due to a change in usage for any of our campus could only be viewed as very low.

If a campus was unavoidably unavailable due to some unforeseen incident such as fire or flood a business continuity plan exists and is updated on an annual basis to ensure that higher education programmes would continue with minimal disruption to students and staff.

As an institution, Petroc recognises that the demands and challenges of teaching Higher Education are subtly different from those of teaching Further Education. Consequently a quality system has been developed to support excellence in the delivery of Higher Education. Post holders exist, responsible for HE quality, and HE Teaching and Learning whilst a planned series of continued professional development activities specifically aimed at HE staff occur on an annual basis. These managerial approaches undoubtedly have improved the quality of our HE programmes and the HE student experience. However, as a relatively small provider of HE these approaches do create vulnerabilities regarding a dependence upon key academic staff and specialist knowledge. It is recognised that increased staff turnover or long term absence due to sickness could have a disruptive impact on the student experience.

Consequently a risk register exists and is updated on a continual basis to moderate the potential disruption to programmes. When validating programmes and creating timetables programme managers are required to identify a minimum of two staff capable of teaching each elective, whilst at each academic stage it is our aspiration that no individual lecturer should be responsible for more than 40 credits.

The vast majority of academic staff and all programme managers working on HE programmes have a full time or fractional contract and are therefore required to provide the institution with 60 days' notice if they wish to resign, thus giving college management adequate time to source an appropriate replacement. Our average class size for our HE programmes is 10. It is therefore unlikely that any student will be taught a group with excess of 20 learners. Indeed It is more likely that a student might study in a very small group, which might be viewed as financially unviable. As part of our strategic alliance with the University of Plymouth, Petroc is committed via our academic cooperation agreement to teach out any programme we commence upon. So if a programme started in year 1 with 6 students and due to unforeseen circumstance 3 students were forced to withdraw during year 1, Petroc would continue to deliver the programme through year 2 if an FdA programme.

However, in stating the above we recognise that some students may be unwilling to study in a very small group. Therefore as part of the Devon Colleges groups which includes South Devon College, Plymouth College and Exeter College all HE students have the right to transfer to a partner institution at the successful conclusion of a stage with previous grades being accredited.

As part of our HE provision Petroc offers a number of Higher and Graduate Apprenticeships. These apprenticeships comprise either an FdA programme or BSc programme as part of the apprenticeship standard or framework. These programmes are taught on a part time basis over 3 or 4 years. It is possible that an apprentice could lose his or her job whilst studying for such a qualification. In such circumstances Petroc would commit to enabling the student to complete the appropriate stage of their degree qualification, free of any additional cost. So if a student lost their employment during their first 6 months on programme Petroc would support them to achieve stage 4 of their programme and if successful enable them to transfer onto stage 5 as a fee paying student.

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

A refund and compensation policy is available to all applicants and students at <https://www.petroc.ac.uk/higher-education/public-information>.

Petroc has cash reserves of £3.5 million which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified as having an increased risk of non-continuation of study. However as stated previously Petroc would not anticipate the cancellation of any programmes.

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

The Student Protection Plan is accessible to students and potential students via the college website. As a student or a student applying for a place at Petroc, the student protection plan will be discussed with you at interview and will also form part of your induction process.

As a student you will be given the opportunity to attend programme committee meeting to discuss. Programme Committee meetings are held twice every year, and give staff, support services and students the opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of all programmes and offer improvements. The student protection plan and any potential alterations to the student protection plan will be an agenda item at all Programme Committee Meetings. The student Protection Plan will then be debated at the HE Forum thus giving the students to review and influence the plan.