

Student Protection Plan



**Harper Adams
University**

**Last reviewed: June 2021
Approved by: Academic Board
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Provider's name: **Harper Adams University**

Provider's UKPRN:10040812

Legal address: Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan: Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services

Student protection plan for the period 2021/22

Our Student Protection Plan is an assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for our students, how those risks may differ based on our students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise.

1. Summary of Context

Harper Adams University is focussed on land-based studies. Set on a 635-hectare farm, we are the UK's leading specialist university tackling the future development of food production and processing, animal sciences, engineering, land management and sustainable rural business.

Harper Adams University has a long history of education and a strong academic reputation. Our location and longevity, along with our traditional asset base, place us in a good position to manage the risks outlined below.

Given the wide-ranging challenges and impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021, we have reviewed the risk ratings and mitigating actions contained in this plan. Any amendments are reflected in this updated document. We have tested wide-ranging approaches and resources to manage disruptions over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, informed by student feedback via well-established consultative channels and new mechanisms such as the Student Voice reports of our Students' Union.

We have indicated the risk of any of the circumstances below occurring (likelihood) on a **low risk**, **medium risk**, **high risk** and **very high risk** basis. Throughout the pandemic we have been undertaking detailed risk assessments of all aspect of university life and the experience of students. Therefore, we have a good understanding of the likelihood and impact of such risks after we have taken mitigating action. Accordingly, we have also assessed risks on a net basis, considering the likelihood and impact on students. These net risk ratings are in brackets in section two below where we describe how we manage our risks. N.B. The risk assessments are as at the date of this review. This policy will remain under review and may be reissued before the annual review date if the situation changes significantly, for example, in relation to the pandemic.

1.1 Course Closures– **Low Risk**

The risk that we are no longer able to deliver courses in our specialised areas in the next three years is low. Application rates to the university are good and the admissions system is managed efficiently. Therefore, the risk that the University might suffer from poor recruitment for its Undergraduate or Postgraduate programmes is relatively low. There is a comprehensive range of promotional activities undertaken in the UK and overseas to assist recruitment and, due to our status and high reputation, industry and government continue to support our work in the form of

industry scholarships, placement offers and specialist grant funding. Based on current levels of demand for our courses, this risk rating remains low.

1.2 Maintenance of Teaching & Learning Quality – Low Risk

There is a low risk that teaching quality might not be maintained at its current high standard which would undermine the value of our awards. We believe this risk is low because the University is currently Gold rated in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and we operate within the Higher Education Quality Assurance (QA) system: our external examiners are satisfied with our courses and our academic standards, and employers have confidence in the quality of our students and graduates, evident through the number and quality of industry placements secured each year and the employability rates of our graduates.

We operate in-house development courses for new teaching staff, including a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning accredited by AdvanceHE. Our comprehensive Quality Assurance Manual provides guidance for staff on our procedures and systems, which are regularly reviewed. We have implemented, at pace, changes to our learning and teaching arrangements, during the pandemic informed by OfS guidance and good practice advice from the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency. We have also provided more training for staff and worked closely with our Students' Union to respond to feedback provided in two specific 'Student Voice' surveys about learning during the pandemic. This has enabled us to evaluate continuously and take proactive steps within the academic year to enhance our arrangements and support.

As a result of these steps and our existing track record, we believe there is a low risk that the University will not maintain adequate student satisfaction. For example, we currently (in the latest results, published in 2020) have an overall satisfaction score in the NSS of 90% which is well above the sector average. We have been ranked 5th in the WhatUni guide for two consecutive years. We continue to maintain close liaison with the Students' Union and student representatives through, for example, the Student Academic Group and our course committees. The Estates and Student Services teams work together to identify priorities for maintaining wider aspects of student satisfaction and student feedback and NSS scores are reviewed independently by our Head of Education Development and Quality Enhancement.

1.3 Delivery of Material Components of Courses – Medium Risk

There is a risk that we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses due to staffing issues and/or Government restrictions (i.e. isolation/social distancing requirements/closure of businesses providing placement opportunity). As most members of academic staff teach across undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as contribute to short courses and knowledge exchange activities, our integrated approach to staff resources means the risk of not being able to teach elements of courses due to changes in staffing is normally minimal. However, during the pandemic, Government restrictions have heightened the risk that components of courses may not be deliverable as planned.

Managing the impact of the COVID-19 during 2020/21 has highlighted three key risks:

- The possibility that a significant number of staff being unwell or unavailable to teach at one time;
- Students and staff are unable to access the teaching facilities, for example, during government lock-downs;

- Placement opportunities are not available because businesses are closed or insufficiently resourced (including staffing) to accommodate a placement student.

Undergraduate courses at the university include a placement year in industry and there is a generalised moderate risk that this provision might be affected by changes in Government policy/regulation relating to individual industries, loss of placement offers from industry or legal action by students or employers. These risks are addressed by having effective management procedures for student placements, including vetting/approval processes and monitoring of national policies, employers and student placement experiences. We carry out individual virtual engagements with all students on placements and have special procedures for overseas placements, including use of agents in various countries. There is a careful matching of individuals to placement opportunities and our placement procedures are reviewed annually.

Based on this experience and our assessment of the ongoing risks associated with the pandemic in 2021/22 academic year, we have given this a gross risk rating of medium. We have developed a sophisticated and evidence range of mitigating actions to lower the impact of this risk on our students. These are described in section 2.2 below.

1.4 Collaborative Programmes – Low Risk

There is a low risk that problems with our current or future UK and overseas focused collaborative teaching or research arrangements could lead to reputational damage, quality, financial or contractual difficulties. Collaborative agreements are in place and are actively monitored. The University's Quality Assurance Manual sets out expected performance standards. Regular review visits or virtual meetings are held with collaborative partners, both in the UK and overseas. Partner institutions/organisations have undergone due diligence checks, all are in good standing and all provision is subject to annual monitoring.

Management arrangements are monitored by the Collaborative Programmes Management Committee and related financial arrangements are managed by the Director of Finance. Contracts with collaborative partners include provision for protecting students' studies, with a focus on teaching students to completion of their courses.

With the development of blended learning and enhanced and expanded opportunities for remote delivery of teaching and learning and meeting with partners, risks associated with collaborative arrangements have not increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and have potentially decreased.

1.5 Student Route Sponsor Status – Low Risk

The risk is that UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) Student Route visa sponsorship requirements and baseline thresholds are not met, leading to the loss of our licence. This risk is actively managed by a dedicated manager with responsibility for visa compliance, and by the University's senior staff. UKVI conducted an audit in December 2018 and were satisfied with the University's arrangements for compliance. Our sponsorship license is reviewed and renewed annually. There is regular dialogue with admissions staff for all courses and management of visa processes by our representative staff in China and elsewhere. The University keeps abreast of UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) requirements through participation in sector training and network events and prepares for their potential audits.

The University's Human Resources team engages with information / guidance networks and training events in relation to their responsibilities for current and potential staff affected by UKVI requirements. As a result of our consistent performance in annual Basic Compliance Assessments the University is listed as a provider with a 'Track Record of Compliance' which gives additional benefits to our students, such as access to the Graduate Route visa following successful completion of their course. Our most recent Basic Compliance Assessment, undertaken in August 2020, noted that our Refusal Rate was 0%.

1.6 Estates & Infrastructure Risks – Low Risk

We believe there is a low-medium risk that a loss of a building or part of the campus infrastructure will affect negatively our students. We have capacity within our general teaching spaces to find alternative locations. In addition, changes to learning and teaching introduced as part of managing the pandemic (section 2.2) enable us to continue delivery on-line if there was a short-term need to do so. We have specialist learning and teaching resources relating to our farm and animal-handling. If these spaces were not available for a period of time, we would work with our educational and employer partners to utilise their facilities and adjust the timing of relevant classes during the academic year to accommodate them. As a result of the pandemic, we have experience of reviewing and reorganising our courses to manage such disruptions.

There is low risk of major IT disaster involving cyber attack, loss of information or use of central hardware or associated inability to operate IT services, leading to disruption to teaching and other core activities. IT security arrangements and IT fire risk management systems are in place. The University's Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity Plan for IT systems is regularly reviewed, along with insurance arrangements.

There is a low risk of failure to comply with statutory requirements with regard to buildings and estate management with subsequent impact on students. This risk is managed by regular reviews of legislation requirements and regular inspection of relevant facilities and systems. The University's Health & Safety Committee reviews key facilities and systems.

1.7 Biohazards Low-Medium Risk

Prior to the global pandemic we rated the risk of an outbreak of communicable disease and consequent harm to students and/or staff as low to moderate. The University's medical service, as a matter of routine, monitors student health risks and Student Wardens monitor first year student health in conjunction with the Head of Student Services. There is a Meningitis procedure in place, with training provided for the Wardens and staff. Appropriate catering services policies and procedures are also in place. Biosecurity precautions are in place on the University farm and a H1N1 Flu risk procedure is available. As a result of the pandemic we now have mature mechanisms established and significant experience of managing the spread of infections within our halls of residence and across the campus. We also have a close working relationship with our local Health Protection Hub. Given the infection rates and ongoing restrictions of COVID-19, we rate this risk currently as low-medium.

1.8 University Closure– Low Risk

There is a low risk that the University as a whole will be unable to operate and need to close. This is because our financial performance is satisfactory. Our financial forecasts and related financial

strategic plan are approved by our Board of Governors and received annually by the OfS. We have a track record of managing our cost base and managing fluctuation in student numbers, changes that can be problematic for the financial sustainability of some universities. The risk of falling student numbers is moderate. Given the government is reviewing its strategic priorities grant and other financial support for universities, there is a risk that income may decline. The risk of a significant reduction in income with subsequent impact on students is assessed as a medium. The risk is managed by regular monitoring of financial performance with active management of expenditure and budgetary control. We maintain regular dialogue with government officers on funding proposals and monitor government strategy and funding policy developments.

We set out in section 2.5 what mitigation we would put in place if, in exceptional circumstances, the University was no longer able to operate as a financially viable organisation.

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

Please provide an evidenced statement of the measures you have put in place to preserve continuation of study for your students in those areas where you consider the risk to be increased.

2.1 Course Closures (Net risk rating: Low)

Whilst the likelihood of this risk occurring remains low, we continue to operate arrangements that would mitigate the impact of such an event on our students. We have a course closure procedure to ensure we appropriately manage teach-out arrangements, for example, if we closed a course because of changes in the land-based sector we serve or if student demand decreases.

We subscribe to the Higher Education sector's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures. We reserve the right to withdraw optional modules, for which the number of students electing to study that module is fewer than five, for educational and financial reasons. Where this revision occurs, students will be guided on appropriate alternatives, in keeping with their career aspirations.

Where students proceed with part-time studies, which includes any 12-month period in which they study fewer than 60 credits, including for reasons of postponement on approved grounds, we reserve the right to make programme changes to the later stages of their studies, in order to maintain sufficient student enrolments to support a vibrant learning experience and financial viability. Such changes would not affect the approved title or intended learning outcomes of the intended award but might affect the availability of specific modules or detailed changes to assessment or tuition arrangements.

2.2 Delivery of Material Components of Courses (Net risk rating: Low-Medium)

Minor changes to courses. The University may make minor changes to courses to reflect changes in relevant laws, regulatory requirements and established practice in higher education to continuously enhance its education to meet the needs of successive cohorts of students. This might result in modest changes to the indicative content of individual modules or to the detailed assessment arrangements for specific subjects. These changes will not affect the degree title awarded, accreditation privileges, placement requirements or the intended learning outcomes of the award.

More significant changes to courses. Any significant changes will be made in consultation with existing student representatives and will be informed by advancements in understanding a discipline, student and employer feedback or professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. This is in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 3.8 of the University's Academic Quality Assurance Manual.

In accordance with the University's Admissions Policy, applicants will be advised by the Admissions team of any significant changes to a course since an offer was made. Such changes may include a change in a professional body's recognition of a programme, a change in the award title or major changes to the curriculum (considered to be a replacement of at least three compulsory modules over the duration of the programme) or significant revisions to placement requirements.

If these changes are due to be made before a course commences, prospective students may contact the University to end the contract, with no financial liability. If significant changes to a course are to be made after starting the course and, exceptionally, students wish to withdraw, they will be permitted to do so and will be supported in finding an alternative course to which to transfer.

Very rarely, a course is suspended or withdrawn before it enrolls students. In deciding to suspend or withdraw a course for new enrolments, the University considers the financial viability of programmes and the vibrancy of the likely learning experience if there are very small numbers of applicants. Where a course is not certain to run, at a relevant point in the admissions cycle, the University will advise applicants of the criteria for a course to run at the time an offer is made, and the timing of the decision to confirm that the programme has met the criteria.

If students proceed with an application for a course which may be subject to suspension or withdrawal, the University will inform the student at the earliest opportunity of any decision to suspend or withdraw the course. In this event, the relevant Admissions team for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes will make every effort to provide assistance to help applicants find an alternative course, based either at Harper Adams University or elsewhere and, for undergraduate students, will advise on the UCAS procedure to follow.

If the University were to lose a Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) approval for a course, such as that from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) or the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), students will be able to move to another course or choose to receive an amended version of the course. Alternatively, the University will give advice and guidance to the student about changing to another provider.

In the event of sudden or unexpected loss of staff, which affects courses, the University will seek to replace staff as soon as is reasonably possible. This may mean re-allocating appropriate staff from other duties to ensure that courses can continue to operate. Where this is not possible and courses need to be postponed or closed, the measures cited above will apply.

In the event that students need to change their course or move to another provider, student finance concerns may need to be resolved. The University's academic services teams will be informed of students affected and will provide advice, information and guidance related to individual circumstances.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have been actively managing risks associated with disruption to in-person teaching sessions due to staff and/or students self-isolating/being unwell and because of national lock-downs. As a result of these challenges we have developed our arrangements concerning:

- Videoing and sharing lectures on the Learning Hub to be accessed at a time that suits students; and associated training materials to help students use effectively these learning resources.
- Developing other on-line learning materials and resources.
- Changing delivery modes (blending in-person and digital on-demand and/or timetabled classes) and re-ordering of learning and teaching events e.g. timing of practical classes postponed due to lock-downs.
- Changing assessment types and timings and amending progression regulations to allow more flexibility for the benefit of students.
- In more exceptional cases changing some learning outcomes for individual modules, or a level of study, to shift some activities into the future before the end of the course.

Other mitigations we considered but did not need to implement were: awarding alternative awards or assisting students to take credits and complete their studies elsewhere.

2.2 Collaborative Courses in the UK & Overseas

In the event that students enrolled on collaborative courses with partner organisations (UK or overseas) are affected by changes, closures or other material reasons, the same measures as described above will apply where the changes are evidently the responsibility of Harper Adams University. If the changes or closures etc. are evidently the responsibility of the partner institution/organisation that institution/organisation will be responsible for making new arrangements and/or refunding course fees, should this prove to be necessary.

We undertake due diligence of prospective partners and routinely review existing partners in terms of their financial viability and fit with our mission and educational strategy. The development of digital communications means that it is now easier for us to engage with partners at a distance for our review work. Likewise, the development of our on-line learning and teaching and related resources means that we are now better placed to support students studying with a partner some distance from our campus. In the unlikely event that a partner ceased trading, we would offer the students the opportunity to study at our campus or assist them to secure a place with another provider.

2.3 Student Route Visa Sponsor Status

In the event of the University losing its Student Route Sponsor status, or having this temporarily suspended, it will take all reasonable steps to reduce the impacts on services and students. We will work with UKVI to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study/programme and seek to allow students already in receipt of a visa based upon an allocated CAS from the University to enrol for their studies. Students planning to travel to the university will be able to postpone their application pending the resolution of the Student Route Sponsor Status issue. If the University is unable to resolve the Student Route Sponsor difficulty, and loses its status permanently, we will give all reasonable assistance to students in changing to another provider.

2.4 Insurances & Estates Risks

In the event that the University's operations are interrupted by unforeseen insurance or estates circumstances and students are affected, the University will apply its Emergency Response Plan and consider whether it is feasible to make changes to course delivery, rather than closing or suspending a course. These changes may include altering the staffing of a programme as appropriate to

requirements, amending the location or mode of delivery, postponing some course delivery, potentially giving students the opportunity to transfer to another cognate course or, if necessary, offering students' guidance and advice on transferring to another appropriate provider.

As above, the development of our on-line learning and teaching and related resources means that we now have a suite of delivery options to support students studying remotely should parts of the estate be unusable for a period.

2.5 University Closure

In the very unlikely event that the University needs to close completely, it will consider merging with another institution in order to preserve teaching and protect courses of study. If a merger is not possible, the University will strive to close gradually in order to protect enrolled students and enable them to complete courses of study. If gradual closure is not possible, students will be supported in changing to courses at other providers. If affected students suffer evident, financial loss they may be compensated under the terms of the University's Refund and Compensation Policy.

In the event that the University's courses were no longer approved by Government for student support, through the Student Loans Company, resulting in the withdrawal of statutory student finance, the University will take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to students via the following types of measures:

- Allowing enrolled students to complete their courses of study via negotiation with the funding bodies.
- If this is not possible, students will be supported in transferring to programmes at other providers wherever appropriate.
- Students may be financially compensated to the extent of the course fees paid if it is evident that they have incurred financial losses due to termination of their course of study.

2.6 Significant Events Affecting the University

These may include, without limitation, strikes, lock-outs or other industrial disputes (whether involving the workforce of the University or of any other party), civil commotion, malicious damage, compliance with any law or governmental order, rule, regulation or direction, accident, breakdown of plant or machinery, a fire, a flood, a pandemic, a storm or default of suppliers or sub-contractors.

If such events affect students and their courses of study, the University will assist students as far as reasonably possible to reduce the impact. Measures that might be taken will include those cited in the above paragraphs in relation to making alternative arrangements and amending provision to minimise disruption. Students may be financially compensated to the extent of the course fees paid if it is evident that they have incurred financial losses due to such significant events.

3. Refund of tuition fees & other relevant costs

Our primary objective is to provide the services as offered to students and make necessary adjustments to ensure they complete their studies successfully. In the very exceptional circumstances where this is not possible we have arrangements in place to consider full or partial refunds. Information about the policy we have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to students, and to provide compensation, where necessary, in the event that we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study, can be found at:

- [Link to the Harper Adams University refund and compensation policy \(PDF\)](#)

4. Information about how we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students by informing them of it as part of their contract with the University and placing the policy on the University website and in our Student Handbook.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose new courses and course changes by noting the plan in the Quality Assurance Manual guidance relating to proposed course changes, developments and reviews.

We will periodically review our Student Protection Plan by sharing it with the Student Academic Group, which includes student representatives from all course areas. The plan will be discussed and adapted in the light of student comments and feedback.

Any significant changes to course delivery and aspects of the expected student experience will be subject to consultation with students, the Students' Union and staff representative groups.

In the event of campus closure, partial campus closure or closure of courses, the University will consult with students, staff and other stakeholders affected to ensure appropriate impact assessments are carried out. In accord with UCAS deadlines/guidance, prospective and future applicants will be notified, providing sufficient time for applicants to identify other suitable courses.

We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course by emailing/writing to students directly, publicising changes on our Virtual Learning Environment and via notifications on student notice boards/display screens around campus. We will give students as much notice as possible when we need to make changes and, wherever possible, students will be consulted in advance of any changes which may affect them. We will also inform students of all available sources of advice, guidance and support from relevant University services and staff to assist them in the event of changes.