

# Student Protection Plan

## 1. Introduction

### 1. 1. Summary

1.1.1. This **Student Protection Plan** is a student-facing document, of relevance to current and future accredited students. Its purpose is to:

- provide transparent and accessible information on the likelihood of unforeseen substantial course change or closure at St Mellitus College, and on the action which we will take in the event of unforeseen substantial course change or closure at St Mellitus College;
- confirm that we will work with students, ensuring they are consulted on, and kept informed of, unforeseen substantial course change or closure;
- enable us to ensure that student interests are protected in the event of unforeseen substantial course change or closure.

1.1.2. Our **Student Protection Plan** is published online. It is highlighted within, and accessible from our Terms and Conditions<sup>1</sup>, and our offer letters to prospective applicants.

1.1.3. Our modules and programmes are validated by Durham University. As such we are limited as to the extent of changes which can be proposed.

### 1.2. What do we mean by unforeseen substantial course change or closure?

1.2.1. At St Mellitus College, we are committed to helping you achieve the best possible academic outcomes from your studies. We regularly review and update our modules and programmes to reflect the latest developments and research in subject areas, and to respond to feedback from students, external subject specialists, employers and professional bodies. We have clear timelines for making changes to our curricula, which take place in advance of the delivery of programmes, levels and/or modules, as necessary.

1.2.2. However, occasionally events may occur which mean that unforeseen and substantial changes may have to be made to our programmes. We may need to respond reactively to changes in circumstance or the external environment, or we may identify problems with provision and take proactive steps to implement improvements. It is possible that, in some circumstances, delivery of a programme – or substantial aspects of a programme – may not be feasible or viable. We may need to discontinue or combine programmes, or to vary the location of a programme, after delivery has begun. This Student Protection Plan is designed to provide guidance in instances where we reasonably consider such changes to be necessary.

1.2.3. This plan does not apply to more minor changes which may occur – for example, late and/or unforeseen changes to individual module options or timetables in light of, for example, student feedback or staff illness/unavailability – where we have practices for mitigation, and for communicating changes. Similarly, it is not designed to cover situations where circumstances beyond the College's control (for example, flooding or travel disruptions) interfere with our ability to deliver modules or other services in accordance with the descriptions provided. In such

instances, however, we are committed to using all reasonable endeavours to minimise disruption as far as it is practical to do so.

### 1.3 How likely is programme change or closure?

- 1.3.1 Unforeseen changes to, or the closure of, programmes of study are the exception and not the norm. In general, we believe that due to the limited suite of programmes offered, the risks of unforeseen change at St Mellitus College are **low**.
- 1.2.4. **Section 2** of this Student Protection Plan contains a more detailed assessment of the risk that a certain programme might close or change unexpectedly.

### 1.4 What happens if my programme changes unexpectedly?

- 1.4.1 We have identified a series of measures designed to preserve continuation of study in the event that your programme does change unexpectedly. These measures are focussed, in particular, on those areas where we have identified a higher risk of change.
- 1.4.2 The measures outline what we **are doing** or what we **will do** (if we have to contend with unforeseen changes in the future).
- 1.4.3 **Section 2** of this Student Protection Plan contains a more detailed outline of the mitigation which we have, and will, put in place to support you in the event of unforeseen change.

### 1.5 What happens if it is not possible to preserve continuation of study?

- 1.5.1 If we take the decision to close an academic programme and to cease admission to it, we will aim and expect to teach students to the end of their programme ('teach out'), enabling them to complete their studies with us. This is what we have done with every programme closure undertaken to date.
- 1.5.2 In the unlikely event that we closed your programme, and were not able to 'teach out', we would offer you the opportunity to transfer to another suitable programme at the College. We could also provide support (for example, transcripts and records of study undertaken to date) to enable you to transfer to a suitable programme at another UK higher education provider.
- 1.5.3 In the event that continuation of study is not possible, or if continuation of study is preserved but at additional cost, the College has processes for looking at financial recompense. For more specific detail, please refer to our student compensation policy<sup>2</sup>. This policy is underpinned by the College's reserves, as detailed in our annual financial statements<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.6 How will I know if my programme needs to change?

- 1.6.1 Expected and routine changes (e.g. to individual optional modules) are published internally via the student VLE (Moodle) as we enhance your programmes in response to student feedback and developments in research, pedagogy or practice. Information on minor changes will normally be available through weekly Centre emails or Dean's emails in the first instance.
- 1.6.2 Where unforeseen programme closure or change becomes necessary, **we are committed to informing you at the earliest opportunity**. This will normally be in advance of the academic year in which change is due to take place. In the event that this is not feasible (if, for example, the need for major change only becomes apparent mid-year), we will inform you as soon as we are able to do so.

**1.6.3 When dealing with programme closure or change, we will consult affected students, and will keep you informed as we implement change.**

1.6.4 In all instances, academic support will be available from the College and welfare support and guidance will be available from the College's Student Support and Counselling and Chaplaincy services.

**1.7 What happens if I am not satisfied with the College's response to unforeseen change?**

1.7.1 The College has a Student Complaints Process<sup>4</sup>. This has an informal aspect – where we will work with you to try and mitigate and address concerns – and a second aspect where, if you are unhappy with our informal action, you may submit a formal complaint to the College. If, having exhausted the College's internal complaints processes, you are unsatisfied with the outcome, you may complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), the external regulator for higher education complaints. Further details are available online<sup>5</sup>.

**1.8 How is this plan reviewed?**

1.8.1 The plan will be reviewed annually by our Executive, with any proposed changes reported to our Common Awards Management Committee as necessary. Students are represented at this committee.

## **2. Risk and Mitigation**

### **2. 1. Institutional Risk**

2.1.1. We are confident that the risk that St Mellitus College as a whole is unable to operate is **low** due to:

- our healthy financial position;
- our clear strategic direction;
- our rigorous, structured approach to risk management and business continuity planning;
- the high quality of our programmes, academic standards, and student outcomes.

2.1.2. **Our financial position is healthy.** Our annual financial statements show that we have sufficient cash reserves.

2.1.3. **Our strategic direction is clear.** The St Mellitus College vision and strategy which, held at Board level, enable us to secure the College's future as we prioritise delivering an excellent educational experience in a sustainable way.

2.1.4. **Our approach to risk management and business continuity planning is structured and rigorous.** Operational risk registers are reviewed regularly at a senior level providing a mechanism for the escalation of any issues which might impact business continuity to our Board of Trustees.

2.1.5. **We provide a high-quality education, delivering excellent student outcomes while maintaining core academic standards.** The high quality of the education which we provide, and the strength of our standards, are evidenced by student outcomes and all recent external reviews. Our

most recent Periodic External Review was conducted by the Church of England National Ministry Team. The overall outcome was 'confidence', and the report can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/smc-per-report.pdf>

## 2.2. Risks to Centres

- 2.2.1. We are taking a strategic approach to evaluating the teaching, library, office and social facilities at each of our centres. This is enabling us to plan for building developments over the coming years with the aim of enhancing the student experience. Therefore, the risk that some programmes will no longer be delivered at their original centre is **low**.
- 2.2.2 Each of our centres are based in ecclesial buildings which are overseen and maintained by local stakeholders and independently financed. The college does not hold any responsibility for the upkeep of these buildings, which are well-established and have been in regular use for decades.
- 2.2.3 Each of our centres operate at the invitation of local bishops. Local Advisory Boards meet regularly to assess the theological training needs in their region. The potential associated risk is that local bishops alter their strategy for theological training in the region. On account of relationships forged and the proven success of the model of training we consider this a **moderate** risk.
- 2.2.4 We have agreements about long-term access to and use of the building facilities for teaching, office, library and study space which are reviewed annually. The potential associated risks are local stakeholders asking us to vacate the premises but we have a minimum of a year's notice which would give us suitable time to find alternative locations locally, we therefore consider this a **low** risk.
- 2.2.5 Should a major incident take place at one of our centres leading to inability of use of a property, we have business interruption insurance which would allow us to rent short term space in other nearby buildings, providing time to make alternative long-term provision. We therefore consider this a **low** risk.

## 2.3. Risks to Programmes

- 2.3.1. As detailed in our Terms and Conditions, our programmes require a minimum number of applicants to make delivery viable. The risk that we are unable to deliver particular programmes due to number of applicants is **moderate** and in the current environment we are alert to the potential increased risk in this area. In the event that a programme does not receive adequate numbers of applicants, prospective students will be offered either to postpone their year of entry or to transfer to an alternative programme subject to meeting the admissions criteria for entry requirements.
- 2.3.2. Sustainability is core to programme approval, curriculum development and departmental planning. Our programmes are not wholly reliant on individual staff for core provision, with modules often team-taught. In the event that we faced particular staffing challenges, we would seek to make use of our relationships with visiting lecturers. The risk that we are unable to deliver specific programmes – or material aspects of specific programmes – in relation to staffing provision is therefore **low**.
- 2.3.3. In the event of programme closure, we will seek to ensure that students can be taught out to complete their programme as expected. In the unlikely event that a teach out is not possible, we will offer students the opportunity to transfer to another suitable programme at the College.

2.3.4. Programmes of study for part-time students dovetail with those offered to full-time students and students join together for taught classes with minimum cohort sizes being cumulative. We therefore consider that the risks to part-time studies are no different from those to full-time studies, and vice-versa.

## 2.4 Risks to Validation

2.4.1 Our programmes validated through Durham University are part of the Common Awards scheme, an agreement between the Church of England and Durham University which we, alongside 20 other TEIs, participate in. We therefore consider the risk of loss of validation of programmes by Durham University is **low**.

2.4.2 As we are partnered with a validating university, loss of validation is very unlikely and therefore the risk is **low**.

## Document Information

Prepared by: Tilly Bacon, Chief Operating Officer  
Version Number: 1.4

Approval Date: 14 June 2018

Approved by: Exec

Date of Last Review: July 2025

Date of Next Review: July 2026