

## **Student Protection Plan**

Academic Year 2020/21

RNN Group

UKPRN: 10005534

### **Introduction**

To continue to be a registered provider of higher education, RNN Group must publish a Student Protection Plan which sets out how continuation and quality of study will be preserved for current and potential learners if a situation occurs that could affect their continued education. This plan explains how RNN Group will preserve the continuation and quality of study for any potentially affected learners of a known risk. This plan sets out different types of risks that may affect a current or future learner, including the mechanisms in place to support learners and reduce the impact of said risk. This plan has considered the types of learners RNN Group supports, in order to best support our learners.

This plan builds on from our Student Contract, to which all higher education learners are sign-posted to at enrolment. This contract is revised every summer and issued to all current and newly enrolled learners at their enrolment.

If any of the below risks crystallise, to ensure clear information is shared with any and all affected learners – the Higher Education team will make initial contact with the affected learners within a projected timeframe of two weeks.

### **Teach-out**

If a situation occurs where an awarding body is no longer able to meet their obligations in relation to validating any of our provisions, these partners may make a strategic decision to withdraw their validation of current, or all programmes. 'Teach-out' refers to the phased method by which such closures will operate, allowing affected learners to complete their studies before the validation is withdrawn.

If such circumstances were to arise at RNN Group, our priority would be to ensure as many of our learners as possible completed their programme of study to the original timescale and with their original awarding body.

Although the circumstances that can lead to a 'teach-out' are rare, when they do occur, 'teach-out' has historically been achievable and within the original timescale of the learners affected. In addition to a 'teach-out', as an institution, we would look to have the affected programme(s) validated by our other awarding body partners, or a new partner. As RNN Group has a wealth of experience in validating programmes with external partners, this process, if needed, has been deemed low risk. This is due, in part, to having more than one validating partner to validate our academic provision.

### **Risk Assessment**

The terms used in this plan are as follows:

- **Risk** is an event that may occur
- **Chance** is the probability of it happening
- **Level** means the potential impact of the event on RNN Group

## Refund and Compensation Policy

The policy outlines the circumstances in which we will refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to learners and to provide information and support to current and potential learners. RNN Group considers refunds and compensation on a case-by-case basis, with precedent during the consideration phase of a case. As a college, we work towards supporting learners from their initial interest in studying with us, all the way to graduation. As such, refunds and compensation are not common and a last resort when support current and potential learners. The Refund and Compensation Policy may be implemented as a result of any of the risks in this plan occurring.

## Support and Advice

If a risk does occur, RNN Group will take swift and immediate action to support, advice, and communicate to all affected learners. The advice and support given will be dependent upon the type of risk that has occurred. Support plans will be discussed with all affected learners and implemented after discussions have concluded. Communication will be a regular occurrence with all affected learners, with different modes of communication enacted, depending on the type of risk that has occurred.

## Review Process

This plan is available on our website for all current and potential learners to view.

The plan will be reviewed every summer, and the new version will be published on our website prior to the start of each academic year. The plan will also be available on our internal Portal system for academic and support staff to have access to.

The plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be relevant, effective and practical. This review will be supported through termly risk assessments. The risk assessments will be carried out by nominated Higher Education academic staff members who are on the HE Strategy and Quality Group for RNN Group, the Director of Higher Education & Skills, Head of Higher Education, Director of Quality, and student representation from our Student Union. An annual update of the plan will be developed and implemented over the summer, ready for a new academic year start every September.

## General Enquiries and Complaints

For general enquiries regarding the plan, please contact [HEAdmin@rnngroup.ac.uk](mailto:HEAdmin@rnngroup.ac.uk).

Details regarding our Complaints Process can be found on the website.

## Risks

**Risk:** All, or some of, our validating partners withdraw their validation of our provision  
**Chance:** 10%-25% probability  
**Level:** middle – action plan and dedicated team support to resolve risk required  
**Reason:** this risk has occurred recently with the University of Teesside removing their validation arrangements with their partner colleges. To rectify this risk, one of the courses is now on teach-out and the other courses have been validated by another of our validating partners, in-keeping with a continuity of service to our learners. We have more than one validating partner at any time to address this possibility.

**Risk:** we are unable or no longer intend to operate as a whole due to our financial performance  
**Chance:** 0%-10% probability

**Level:** major – Governance and Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required  
**Reason:** the risk of being unable to operate due to financial instability is low because our current financial situation and ranking. RNN Group’s financial performance has remained good, including two successful mergers between three colleges.

**Risk:** loss or suspension of other regulatory licences (e.g. Home Office) or loss or suspension of accreditation from regulatory bodies (e.g. QAA)

**Chance:** 10%-25% probability

**Level:** major – Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required

**Reason:** RNN Group continues to remain knowledgeable of all requirements and regulations needed to remain compliant with all regulatory licences and bodies we are associated with. Continued CPD training of our staff occurs regularly to ensure knowledge is up-to-date. Policy reviews occur annually to ensure processes are also compliant.

**Risk:** we become unable to charge higher amount fees, damaging our financial stability

**Chance:** 0%-10% probability

**Level:** major – Governance and Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required

**Reason:** RNN Group has had a published Access and Participation Plan since 2016 (Dearne Valley), in 2017 (RNN Group), and another in 2018 (RNN Group). We are aware of the requirements needed to complete an Access and Participation Plan and have the mechanism in place to support the action plan associated with the agreement. The Plan has been submitted to the Office for Students for the 2020/21 academic cohort and is awaiting approval.

**Risk:** all or part of our campus is permanently closed

**Chance:** 0%-10% probability

**Level:** middle – action plan and dedicated team support to resolve risk required

**Reason:** with the current development of a Higher Education building, funded in part by the LEP, our physical space for offering Higher Education provision is deemed low in likelihood of negatively impacting learners. RNN Group has three colleges and five sites within the Rotherham and Bassetlaw areas, therefore, the College is able to move provision between sites if necessary.

**Risk:** we lose key equipment or facilities

**Chance:** 0%-10% probability

**Level:** major – Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required

**Reason:** there is only a minimal threat to losing a significant amount of specific equipment usage for our curriculums. RNN Group has three colleges and five sites that have alternative equipment on hand. The shipment and sharing of equipment and facilities is of low risk to our students. The College also has positive relationships with external local providers, indicating arrangements for equipment usage in the short term is another viable option for the College.

**Risk:** non-completion of delivery of course/programme/service

**Chance:** 0%-10% probability

**Level:** major – Governance and Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required

**Reason:** this risk is considered unlikely because we give our learners a ‘teach-out’ commitment via the validation agreements we have with our validating partners. Although our delivery model will inevitably change shape, these improvements are gradual and usually occur over a long cycle and so have little to no impact on the learners concerned. Similar to ‘business as usual’ improvements, we also consider the same

risk resulting from unplanned changes to be unlikely because viability and sustainability are planned in advance so are unlikely to occur. The College has a cash reserve which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students from whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study. This risk will be addressed in our Refund and Compensation Policy.

**Risk:** permanent or temporary loss of some key staff members at any one time  
**Chance:** 25%-40%  
**Level:** middle – action plan and dedicated team support to resolve risk required  
**Reason:** unplanned loss of staff out of our control is a realistic possibility at any given time.  
**Structure:** Loss of staff may impact upon our delivery. Our response will depend on the nature of the problem and whether it is a planned or an unplanned event. In either situation, RNN Group will assess the situation and create an implementation plan to support learners and recruit new staff quickly. We will seek temporary or permanent replacements internally and/or externally. We have a list of academic staff on an internal employment agency system who cover a range of subjects. The College has also worked with external employment agencies in the past and this can be utilised in this instance. Cooperation opportunities with other institutions for cover in emergency circumstances is also a viable option. These staff can support covering provision as we recruit a permanent, or temporary, replacement

**Risk:** short-term interruption or damage to IT infrastructure  
**Chance:** 25%-40%  
**Level:** major – Senior Leadership Team support to resolve risk required (dependent on type of risk)  
**Reason:** this risk is considered possible given the global threats to cybersecurity and the issues of integrating systems after company mergers  
**Structure:** RNN Group will respond to the problem, based on the level of the risk that occurred. Action plans of various potential risks are developed and ready for action, when needed. Speed, efficiency, and communication strategies are ready for various risk occurrences. We will structure the timing of implementation of any plans to minimise disruption to teaching and learners. We will also consider alternative means of academic delivery where available. Resilience measures in the College's IT department and cross-training of IT support knowledge are key examples of how the College's IT Department has planned for potential risks to the IT infrastructure.