

Student protection plan

Provider's name: Imperial College London

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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

The risk that the College as a whole is unable to operate is very low because our financial performance is one of the most robust in the sector. Our surplus before investment gains last year was £82 million and the cash generated from operations was £111 million. These figures were not one-offs; our average cash from operations over the last five years has been in excess of £100 million. Our final financial risk rating from HEFCE was 'low risk'.

The risk that we will be unable to deliver any undergraduate programme in the next four years is low. Our undergraduate programmes are broad based, and represent significant disciplinary areas (Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Life Sciences, the Engineering disciplines and Medicine) in which we have a broad base of expertise and significant numbers of full-time permanent academic staff.

The risk that we will be unable to deliver individual elements of any undergraduate programme is also low (in the case of modules in years one and two of three year programmes and one to three of four year programmes, and in the case of all years of the six year Medicine programme) because there are several members of full-time permanent academic staff who are able to deliver each of these modules.

Final year modules and research projects, particularly in four-year degrees, reflect the research expertise of our academic staff, and are always subject to minor amendments depending on the state-of-the-art of research in the discipline and the availability of individual members of staff. However, the number of full-time permanent academic staff in each of our departments means that the risk that we will be unable to deliver an appropriate mix of modules and projects representing the state-of the art in current knowledge is low.

The risk that we will be unable to deliver taught postgraduate programmes is also low. Taught postgraduate programmes are more specialised, and rely on a narrower range of academic staff than undergraduate programmes. However, our programmes are all in areas where we have sufficient critical mass to continue provision in all but the most unexpected circumstances. Whilst taught postgraduate programmes are opened and closed more frequently than undergraduate programmes, this occurs in a managed way (see below).

The risk that we will be unable to deliver postgraduate research programmes is moderate. Such programmes typically relate to the expertise of one individual academic, and in the event of that individual not being available, bespoke arrangements will be made for their research students.

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

In the event that we are unable to continue to deliver a postgraduate research (PhD) programme, normally where a member of academic staff moves to a different institution, retires, or deceases, we will put in place the following procedures:

- (1) In the event of a member of staff moving to a different institution in the UK, research postgraduate students will often choose to move with their supervisor, in which case we will permit and support their transfer to the new institution. Given the high cost of living in London, this is likely to be financially neutral or positive for the student.
- (2) In the event that the student does not wish to move to the new institution, for example because they wish to obtain an Imperial degree, we will work closely with them to find the most suitable alternative supervisor in the College. It is our policy that all postgraduate research students should have a second supervisor in any case, and this individual will normally be best placed to take over as main supervisor. Often, the original supervisor will continue to take a role in their supervision notwithstanding the fact that they have left the College.
- (3) In the event that the member of staff has moved away from the UK, we will work closely with the student to find the most suitable alternative supervisor in the College. Again, it will often be possible for the original supervisor to continue to play a role in supervision on a remote basis. Where this is not possible, and where the College-based supervisor is not able to supervise the project without additional specialist input, we will identify a suitable individual from elsewhere in the UK to provide additional supervision, at the College's cost.
- (4) In the event that the member of staff is unexpectedly and permanently unavailable (e.g. because of severe ill health or death), we will take similar measures as in (3) above.
- (5) In the extremely rare event where it is not possible to provide suitable alternative supervision, a student in the first year of their programme may be required to amend their research project, in which case the college will provide funding for an additional year of study (remission of fees and living costs at the level published by the College in its prospectus). A student in the second or third year will be eligible for an award at a lower level, or, where this is not appropriate, will be eligible for a refund of their fees.

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

The current College policy may be found at

https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/tuition-fees/public/Tuition-Fee-Schedule-2017-18_Fee-Policies.pdf

We now propose amending this policy to cover continuity of study as follows:

“In the event that the College is no longer able to provide your programme of study, you or your sponsor (depending on who pays your fees) will be entitled to the refund of your tuition fees for the whole programme,”

This is likely to apply only in the most unusual circumstances, e.g. where a PhD supervisor in a highly specialised area dies, or where a student on a discontinued MSc course has fallen so far behind their cohort that it is not possible to preserve the programme for them.

Our level of cash and cash equivalents at the end of the last financial year was £345 million; the lowest year-end balance in the previous five years has been £193 million and this is the point of the year when our cash balances are at their lowest, before tuition fee income for the new academic year is received. Our Treasury Policy requires us to keep a minimum of 50 days' liquidity; this is currently equivalent to £125 million. Actual liquidity days have been far in excess of this in recent years (reported as 139 at the end of last year). With total tuition fees of £233 million in 2016/17, even if the College was to approach the policy limit for liquidity days we would still have ample funding to meet any possible payment related to discontinuity of studies and do not feel insurance for this is required.

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

We will publish our student protection plan on the college website and publish the links in the paper undergraduate and postgraduate prospectus and on the sections of the website aimed at prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students.

We will send our student protection plan to the course leaders of all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and to all research supervisors.

We will include our student protection plan in the documentation made available to staff proposing new courses and amendments to courses.

We will include our students in the development of our student protection plan through Imperial College Union representation on a new Working Group that is being established to take forward the development of our consumer protection arrangements.

In the event that our student protection plan needs to be implemented, we will write to affected students within 10 working days of our becoming aware of the need to implement the plan (e.g. the formal resignation of a research supervisor). This communication will normally be to initiate discussion on the best possible outcome for students on an individual basis. In the unlikely event of our being unable to preserve continuity of study for a whole cohort, the communication will set out our proposed approach for agreeing a solution, normally in conjunction with the student representatives for the Department concerned.

In the event that we need to make material changes to an undergraduate or taught postgraduate course, we will write to students within 10 working days of the decision to make material changes. Except in the most exceptional circumstances, such changes will have already been discussed through our normal mechanisms for liaison with students at course and departmental level.