Gloucestershire College

Quality Controlled Document

Policy: **Higher Education: Student Protection Policy** **Date: September 2026**

Approved by: **Principal and Chief Executive**

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1. Introduction

Gloucestershire College offers a range of Higher Education courses across several academic areas. The College is committed to helping to ensure that students achieve the best possible outcomes from their studies. Our focus is very much on employability; on the provision of professional, technical and personal skills that are needed to drive our economy and maximise the employability and prospects of our students.

As part of an annual curriculum review, the College will ensure that appropriate plans are in place to support the timely introduction and publication of new HE courses and any removal of existing HE courses to new entrants. This planned approach aims to ensure that the College HE offer is updated and continues to meet the needs of students and employers. A primary concern is to ensure that existing students are not impacted and that course publications reflect changes in a timely manner for applicants.

Rarely, but on occasion, events may occur which mean that unforeseen changes will have to be made to modules or courses. Major changes or closures are the exception and not the norm. This policy sets out the College's approach and priorities in such circumstances.

2. Student Protection Principles

For students studying for an HE qualification, Gloucestershire College will apply the following principles:

2.1 The College will undertake an annual assessment of any existing or emerging risks to the continuation of HE courses over a 3-year period. Based on that review and in accordance with Office for Students registration conditions, it will outline in the Student Protection Plan (published on the College website) any risks that are likely to materialize, along with specific plans to ensure the protection of student interests.

2.2 The College recognises that the impact of changes to the continuation of study will be different for students with different backgrounds, needs, characteristics and circumstances. This includes but is not limited to students sharing particular protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010). When implementing any measures to protect continuation of study the College will consider these diverse needs, particularly when supporting and communicating with students.

2.3 The College recognises that students invest a lot of time and energy into their studies and will ensure that there are clear processes in place in the event of material changes, which include clear arrangements for informing and consulting with students. Agreed practices will be referenced in the College's HE Terms &

Conditions, which will be available to students at all stages of the application and enrolment cycle.

2.3 In the event that an HE course is being closed to new entrants, the College will use best endeavours to continue to teach current students to the end of their course ("teaching out").

2.4 In the event of a temporary material change to the provision of an HE course caused by unforeseen circumstances, the College will use all best endeavours to mitigate disruption to students.

2.5 The College will support the wider HE sector and will consider how it might be able to minimise the impact on students by offering support in the event of course or provider failure elsewhere.

3. Risk Assessment

As part of the annual review of the College's HE offer, the HE Strategy Group will ensure a full assessment of risks to the continuation of HE course delivery. The risk assessment will review the likelihood of risks materializing in a future 3-year period. The HE Strategy Group will update the Student Protection Plan, including agreed plans to minimise the impact and disruption to students. The updated Student Protection Plan will be published on the College website. The HE Strategy Group will also consider and progress changes to College policies and procedures if required.

4. Current Students

In line with the principles outlined above, the College will use best endeavours to enable current students to complete their HE course ('teaching out'). This is the College's preferred option and the College will always prioritise consideration of plans to offer completion of study. This includes making plans to enable students who have intercalated to complete their studies. The College will always consult with the validating institution or awarding body to collaborate in the development of options to be presented to students.

Where permanent material changes are proposed, the College will:

4.1 Engage with current students who may be impacted, as soon as practicable and consider individual circumstances in compiling options for students.

4.2 Present options to current students (including those whose enrolment is on hold but have not yet completed) in a clear and accessible manner, providing all information, advice, guidance and support to enable them to make informed decisions. This will include signposting to independent advice and guidance according to the needs of students. .

4.3 Focus on the maintenance of the standard of academic provision and the student experience throughout the period of enrolment, as far as is practicable. In particular the conditions should be maintained to enable the stated learning outcomes in the relevant course specification to be achievable by the students who are affected.

4.4 Be clear about how to transfer credit and academic progress, in the unlikely event that the College presents options for current students to consider transfer to other providers.

4.5 Consider individual circumstances, applying the refund policy and considering compensation where students experience financially disadvantage, as outlined in the Tuition Fee Policy.

5. Applicants

In the event of a course closure, suspension, material changes to course content or delivery location, all communication with applications should be via the Admissions Team. The Admissions Team will ensure that appropriate communications, advice and guidance will be given to applicants according to whether offers have been accepted. Applicants who have accepted offers should be informed, when the closure or suspension process has been completed, of their options to transfer applications to another course within the College, or another institution.

Applicants who have been made offers, but have not yet accepted them, may be advised that a closure or suspension request has been made. Such applicants should be advised that the offer of a place is suspended until a final decision has been made and will be withdrawn if the request is accepted. They should be advised that they may choose another course with the College or another institution.

6. Support

All reasonable steps will be taken to minimise the disruption to students affected by course closure or a significant permanent material change, for example:

- Offering affected students the opportunity to move to an alternative course;
- Delivering a modified version of the same course;
- Providing assistance to switch to a different provider.
- Applying the College's policy in relation to refunds and compensation, according to individual circumstances.

The College's Student Support Services will be notified of those students affected, by VP Curriculum & Quality. Student Support will then contact the affected students to provide information, advice and guidance based on their individual circumstances. This will include offers of individual guidance sessions and discussions around the options that are available.

In consultation with academic staff, the Student Support team will have regard for students with different needs, characteristics and circumstances and will apply the most appropriate methods of communication and support.

7. Timing

7.1 As part of the regular process of curriculum review and strategic planning, courses may be identified for closure. In this event, courses will not be included on the College's website or be available to applicants. Decisions will also be planned to coincide with prospectus type print production, as far as is practicable. The discontinuation of courses will be managed to enable the teaching out to affected students.

As part of strategic or curriculum review, a change of course location may be planned; a move from one campus to another. The College currently delivers HE courses based at our Gloucester and Cheltenham campuses. This will be organised to have minimal impact on

students and will usually only be considered as a possibility at the beginning of an academic year. The College will use best endeavours to give 6 months' notice of any such change of location.

7.2 There may be unforeseen circumstances where it is necessary to close, suspend or materially change a course within a foreshortened timescale. Material changes however might only be for a temporary period or circumstances could result in a permanent change.

Examples of unforeseen circumstances could be the loss of key or specialist staff, or disruption to College activity resulting from unexpected conditions.

In the case of the loss of specialist staff, the College will use best endeavours to provide at least 1 months' notice to students and will work to mitigate disruption by arranging suitable handover and replacement staff to enable continuation of study

The College will ensure that students are given the fullest information, advice and guidance to enable them to make well-informed decisions in these events. The College will, through curriculum and support staff, ensure that they update and keep students informed on progress in managing temporary circumstances. Where permanent material changes are implemented, the College will follow the policy outlined above in paragraph 4.

The College has a comprehensive Business Recovery procedure that will be put into place in the event of a major incident, the failure of business systems and disruption to normal activities.

Approved by: Karen Morris
Date for Review: September 2027