

STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN POLICY

Overview

This Student Protection Plan (hereinafter “SPP”) sets out what measures **The Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life** (hereinafter “OCRPL”) has in place to protect students in the event that a risk to the continuation of their studies arises and also how this will be communicated with them.

Our policy is that in the event of a decision to close a programme we will always protect the students’ interest by teaching out that programme. We do not anticipate that we would be in a position where this was not the case.

Our students are part-time students studying at a distance for a post-graduate degree. Since students are fully registered with a partner university for their degree, currently the University of Stellenbosch South Africa and the University of Pretoria, should OCRPL be subject to risk, the students’ registration and supervision by the universities will not be affected in any way

In the event of the SPP being triggered, one of the Co-Deans will write to the students within 10 working days to notify them:

1. that the Plan is being implemented;
2. who they should contact to discuss their particular circumstances, especially if they have specialist needs; and
3. of sources for advice, support and other information.

Students will be notified of the intended changes, and will be provided with information about where they can seek assistance and/or provide feedback.

Organisational Risks

With regards to the overarching risk of OCRPL not being able to continue operating as a learning provider due to financial or regulatory issues (the likelihood of this has been deemed to be very low), the key mitigating strategies are a governance framework with external and



internal auditing of financial management, strategic decision making and long-term planning, as evidenced by OCRPL's annual report and financial statements together with periodic external assurance reviews.

As stated above, students are fully registered with a partner university for their degree and should OCRPL be subject to risk, the students' registration and supervision by the universities will not be affected in any way

We have considered whether there might be a risk to the student experience from interruption to our activities, for example - a major incident of terrorism, or a flood or a fire. In such event, our students would be protected by our existing business continuity plans, by their registration with our partner universities and by the fact they are learning at a distance.

We have considered whether there is any risk to students from a change of the location of programmes. Since they are studying at a distance with established universities, and since those universities have a good relationship with one another, we expect that any risk to registration with one partner will be taken up by registration with advanced standing with another university in South Africa.

In relation to course closure plans, we are cognisant of our responsibilities under consumer law and we would not close courses once they have been publicised, unless we are confident that the interests of potential students have been protected, for example - through consultation with applicants.

Our programme is for postgraduate research students. We have in place supervision packages of at least two supervisors per student, one from the partner university and one from OCRPL. In the event of a staff member leaving the institution we will be able to continue to provide support and supervision to the doctoral student from our panel of supervisors.

Two organisation-wide risks are relevant to this SPP:

1. inadequate disaster recovery plans for digital resources;



2. and information security failings regarding personal data

Both risks have been assessed as low/moderate as the established mitigating strategies are detailed, fully documented and regularly tested.

Refunds and Compensation

Our policy on refunds and other liabilities (including compensation) is contained within OCRPL's Terms and Conditions, which remains the definitive document on such matters. The following extracts from the Terms and Conditions are provided as a general guide only and do not negate other clauses within those Terms and Conditions.

OCRPL's Terms and Conditions state that "We will refund pro-rata fees / deposits in the case of substantial variation or discontinuation or suspension if students opt to withdraw". Refunds will be made to the body that paid the fees / deposits, whether they are an individual, organisation, or a third-party sponsor.

OCRPL's Terms and conditions also state that "We are responsible for loss or damage that you suffer that is a foreseeable result of our breach of the Terms or our negligence." Such loss may include the payment of additional travel costs or other costs that are incurred by unexpected changes to the location at which the course is provided or the way in which the course is delivered (including if that involves transfer to another provider). In all cases students should begin this process by making OCRPL aware of such circumstances in writing within 30 days of notification of the changes. In order that students are treated fairly and equitably this should be done using our formal complaints process.

This process operates within the guidelines of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), including the opportunity for students to ask the OIA to review OCRPL's handling and outcome of a complaint if a student is not happy with the resolution proposed by OCRPL. In cases where a number of students are affected by the same situation, OCRPL may accept a 'group' complaint to deal with common matters in a consistent and fair way, but this does not negate the right of any individual to also make an individual complaint regarding matters which may apply solely to them.



In considering financial remedy or compensation for loss or distress OCRPL will follow OIA guidance and recommendations. OCRPL will also be mindful of its statutory obligations under the Consumer Rights Act (2015) and the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), as well as its conditions of Registration with the Office for Students (OFS). It will also be mindful of its duties under the Equality Act (2010) in ensuring that continuation of appropriate support takes into account individual circumstances covered by that Act.

As outlined earlier in this document the anticipated risk of non-continuation of studies for students is low. OCRPL has sufficient reserves and resources to underwrite its refund and compensation obligations in the unlikely event they arise. This would include honouring student bursaries in cases where they apply.

Communicating this Plan

This plan will be published online and all students and staff will be notified of where the Plan can be found. We will ensure that all staff are aware of the implications of the plan if and when they are contemplating making modifications to courses (including plans to discontinue recruitment to a course).

Should the Student Protection Plan need to be invoked we will inform all affected students at the earliest possible opportunity and at least 30 days before any substantial changes that may affect a student's continuation. If we need to implement measures in the Student Protection Plan we will ensure that a senior representative of OCRPL will support students both collectively and individually and where appropriate, obtain independent advice.