



Bishop
Auckland
College

HE Student Protection Plan

2025 - 2026



Provider's name: Bishop Auckland College

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Bishop Auckland College (BAC) is committed to helping to ensure all higher education students achieve the best academic outcomes from their studies. Events may occasionally occur which mean that unforeseen changes must be made to a programme structure, content, delivery and assessment methods, and planned modules. The Higher Education (HE) and Research Act 2017 and the Office for Students (OfS) conditions of registration requires HE institutions to maintain a Student Protection Plan. This is to protect students' interests in the case of material change, e.g. programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure.

This plan has been prepared in accordance with that requirement, following guidance from the OfS, we involve students in the development, annual review and implementation to ensure that they understand what they can expect from us as a provider, and to give them reassurance that they will be protected in the event of an unforeseen change to their programme. The plan applies to all students registered with Bishop Auckland College on a validated higher education programme from the academic year that their current programme commenced.

This includes but is not limited to Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates / Diplomas, bachelor's degrees, Honours Top-up Degrees and Higher/Degree Apprenticeships with HE qualifications, and Masters programmes.

BAC does not have degree awarding powers and, therefore, programmes delivered here are awarded by its partner institutions.

Our current collaborative validating partner institution(s) are: The Open University. Our current higher education awarding organisation(s) are: Pearson and City & Guilds.

This plan has been developed in consultation with our validating partner institutions and aligns to their student protection plans where appropriate. Students can access the Student Protection Plan via our website at bacoll.ac.uk/HE

Whilst material changes are covered by BAC's Student Protection Plan, other policies may also be linked, and there may be some cases where the validating partner institution and BAC take the decision to use their institution's student protection plan.

Risk To The Continuation Of Study For Students

Risk at BAC is managed effectively using several processes at multiple levels of the organisation. Risks to student continuation are included within these overall risk management processes. At the corporate level, risk is managed through the BAC Risk Register, which is scrutinised, monitored, and reviewed by the Senior Leadership and Management Team (SLMT) and the governing body.

The BAC Risk Register considers risks such as campus closure, withdrawal from academic partnerships and changes in strategic direction.

At the operational level, each programme has a Programme 'Health Check' which identifies key areas that may pose risk to the programme, such as staffing, resources and recruitment. The reviews are monitored by the HE Strategic Leadership Team, HE Academic Board, and the HE Quality and Standards Committee, who then implement actions to mitigate potential risks. In addition, National Student Survey (NSS) feedback also serves to highlight risk in terms of the NSS categories. A bespoke 'RAGG rated' process is in place to address any quality-related issues that are highlighted, thereby minimising quality risks at an early stage before there is a more serious risk to continuation.

This plan has not considered the risks of closure of Bishop Auckland College, as the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) provides assurance to the OfS in respect of this. At the strategic level, BAC recognises that there are risks that could cause disruption to its ability to deliver higher education programmes. BAC mitigates the likeliness of these risks and puts in place measures to ensure that the impact of these risks is minimised, should they occur. These risks are monitored by the Curriculum and Quality Governance Committee, and are identified below:

1. The risk that Bishop Auckland College takes the decision to change its strategic direction away from higher education.

The likelihood of this risk is considered very low. BAC values a diverse portfolio of provision and has a strategic commitment to expand its higher education provision as articulated in our Strategic Plan, which is available to view on our website: bacoll.ac.uk

2. The risk that Bishop Auckland College's Partnerships with its validating partners and awarding organisations are ineffective and/or unilaterally discontinued.

The likelihood of this risk is considered low. BAC has regular meetings with its validating partners and main awarding organisations for their higher education provision, The Open University, Pearson and City and Guilds, at both strategic and operational levels. This ensures that the collaborative relationship between the organisations remains healthy and productive, and any potential issues are resolved before they can impact on the student experience. BAC has a five year Strategic Partnership Agreement with The Open University; an annual centre declaration with Pearson; and City and Guilds, demonstrating commitment to the partnerships from all parties. These formal agreements are reviewed within operational and strategic partnership meetings to ensure they are updated and extended appropriately.

3. The risk that one of Bishop Auckland College's validating and/or awarding partners is no longer in the position to award HNC/Ds, Foundation Degrees, Degrees and Masters qualifications.

The likelihood of this is considered low. BAC considers it extremely unlikely that any of its partners will lose their degree awarding powers. The Open University, Pearson, City and Guilds have significant and considerable experience in delivering and awarding higher education qualifications.

4. The risk that Bishop Auckland College cannot continue to operate its main campus site, as it is no longer safe or fit for purpose.

This risk is considered low. BAC HE Strategic Management Team is in regular communication with our Estates department, who together ensure that all BAC facilities are safe, accessible and meet the expectations of the student body and validating / awarding partners. Regular audits and checks are undertaken to ensure that there are no health and safety issues or concerns at our BAC campus. BAC commits to providing the best possible facilities for its students and sometimes this may involve relocating delivery of courses. If this was the case BAC would work with students to give appropriate notice and make alternative plans. In the circumstance where there is a closure at a campus with specialist resources, BAC commits to providing alternative facilities that allow the students to complete their programme of study. BAC has invested millions of pounds in the past five years into its facilities and accommodation, which continue to be a priority for the organisation.

5. The risk that Bishop Auckland College can no longer deliver the material components of a specific programme of study.

The likelihood of this risk is considered low. BAC undertakes programme level 'health checks' of all of its HE programmes provision and where necessary has a policy of intervention by the HE Strategic Leadership Team. Teaching is undertaken by experienced and qualified teams, which usually consist of a mixture of full-time and part-time staff, and BAC consults with all validating partners to ensure that they all have suitable include specialist expertise. This enables versatility within the teams to arrange appropriate cover in case of staff absences/ departures. BAC monitors staff retention to ensure that we have the capacity to deliver programmes. In terms of faculty closure, this is deemed low risk as any such eventuality would need significant planning and consultation led by the College Executive Team.

6. The risk that Bishop Auckland College takes the decision to close a specific programme of study.

On occasion it is a necessity for BAC to consider the need to discontinue a programme of study for a variety of reasons. This can include but is not limited to where demand for a programme is low, BAC reserves the right to suspend or discontinue a programme of study. If this did happen, we would work with applicants consider what options are available to the students, including alternative, and appropriate programmes with BAC or its partners. In these cases, existing students will usually be 'taught out' until they complete their planned qualification, and BAC commits to appropriately resource the programme (including staffing) until all students have graduated, subject to academic regulations.

In such cases a formal discontinuation plan is drawn up to ensure that all students can complete their current programme of study. This plan is monitored by BAC and the appropriate validation/ awarding organisation. Students would be consulted through this process and change would only be implemented with the agreement of all students. Programmes are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are current, industry relevant, and provide graduates with the skills required for their next steps and progression. Generally, any changes would be implemented for new students and significant changes would not be made to a student's programme without their express permission.

7. Data loss/Loss of IT services/Infrastructure

The risk of this is increasing given the global rise in instances of unauthorised access to an organisation's IT system. This could lead to the loss of the students' access to their Virtual Learning Environment, library services, and internet connection. This could also prevent the ability for students to access their personal saved work and their ability to submit work online.

Staff undertake regular training to reduce this risk and IT have incident response management procedures, which are reviewed regularly via a range of management meetings including SLMT and Governance. BAC can recover data from backups to mitigate short term severity of incidents. In such circumstances the college would take all reasonable steps to ensure continuity of study.

We take the security of IT systems and data extremely seriously; to protect the colleges IT infrastructure and the data held, all staff are required to use multi-factor authentication (MFA).

In the event of unauthorised access to our IT systems/infrastructure, immediate steps would be taken to isolate data stores and the core business systems. Access to all IT systems for staff and students would be immediately removed. This means that there would be no access to email, Office 365, eTrackr and all other college business systems, from home or on campus. In addition, no networks, including wi-fi, will be available on campus. External work would immediately commence with several external agencies, including the police, to find out what has happened, and the extent of the issues faced.

Although the resilient design of our IT infrastructure should make this risk significantly low, there would also be swift engagement of external specialist advice to further strengthen the IT infrastructure against attacks of this nature in the future. The main aim would be to quickly implement specific technical and organisational measures to protect the confidentiality, availability, and integrity of the data held.

8. Other risks considered:

- All validating / awarding partners are considered secure in their capacity to validate qualifications and loss of their awarding capacity is low risk.
- BAC operates both full-time and part-time programmes and there are no current plans to discontinue either mode of study. The risk of such discontinuation is therefore considered to be very low, given the established nature of these programmes and mode of study.
- In the event of any proposed Industrial Action, BAC has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with the appropriately recognised trade unions. We are highly committed to maintaining effective employee relations, this culture is promoted by the collaborative work with trade union colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to matters that may arise from time to time.

Where industrial action does occur, the College will seek to:

I. Ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible;

II. Take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring that any disruption is minimised, and students are not, as far as is possible to determine, disadvantaged by the action.

- BAC shall not be liable for failure to perform any obligations under the terms and conditions of study if such failure is caused by any act or event beyond BAC's reasonable control ("force majeure event"). If a force majeure event did occur, it will take all reasonable steps to minimise the disruption to its students.

Business Continuity Planning

In addition to all of the mitigation described for each of the specific risk examples above BAC have a rigorous and robust Business Continuity Plan. This plan includes core information about the roles and responsibilities of our dedicated Emergency Planning Committee. This document identifies the key personnel and procedure for activating the plan and the College's strategic and operational approach to an emergency situation. Its message underlines the College's total commitment to the protection, care and wellbeing of our staff, students and the community for whom we all share responsibility.

We have considered whether there might be a risk to the learner experience from other forms of interruption to our activities - for example, a major incident of terrorism, or a flood or a fire. We are confident that in such an event our learners would be protected by our existing Business Continuity Plan. The plan is tested on an annual basis with the College Operational Team, through 'Disaster simulation' training, including the ability to work remotely and utilising alternative campuses. This is led and managed by SLMT and is overseen by our dedicated Health and Safety team, and ultimately the Board of Governors. We have considered whether there is any risk to learners from a change of the location of programmes.

Measures To Mitigate Risk

BAC considers the overall likelihood of any of the above risks to materialise to be low. The risks identified within BAC's risk management processes are all considered to be low, or very low. However, in the case of programme closure, or any of the risks identified above materialising, BAC will undertake all reasonable measures to ensure that students can complete their chosen programme of study. BAC's approach in the case of the discontinuation of a named award aligns to all awarding partner requirements and regulations. The below diagram details the process followed to ensure that student continuation is ensured in the case that BAC is no longer able to deliver a programme. This process is applicable across all risks BAC has identified. BAC recognises that 'one size' will not always fit all, and so will consider a range of options and measures to protect student experience.

Bishop Auckland College Preserving Continuation Process Diagram

Throughout all stages of the process, BAC recommends students access independent advice through the National Union of Students or Citizens Advice.

1. Teaching Out

If BAC closes or suspends a programme of study it will, under most circumstances, continue to teach students until completion.

2. Continuation At Another Institution

If BAC is unable to or chooses not to teach out a programme, it will (in consultation with the students concerned) work with other UK HE providers to find an alternate programme for affected students to complete their studies.

3. Exceptional Refund And/Or Compensation

Where all other options have been exhausted BAC will provide a refund and/or compensation to students in-line with the BAC Fee Policy (POL-A-02).

BAC operates a few programmes which could be considered "niche", with few comparable programmes at other providers. However, as there are no programmes in which BAC is the sole provider, in the event of discontinuation of one of these programmes, BAC anticipates that arrangements could be made with relevant other HE providers. In the circumstance that a student wishes to change programme, BAC will support the student in facilitating the change. If the alternative programme is at a different provider, BAC will liaise with the new provider to attempt to ensure that appropriate credit is given for studies already completed.

Protection For Students With A Disability Or An Inclusion Need

BAC recognises that it regularly recruits a significant number of students who identify as having a disability or an inclusion need. As such, it invests significantly in support for these students to ensure that they have an equal chance at success on their chosen programme of study. If continuation cannot be preserved for students with disabilities or inclusion needs, BAC will work with any other institutions that are involved in preserving continuation to ensure that equivalent provision is in place for the student. BAC will also consult with the students themselves to seek to find a mutually agreeable solution.

Refunds And Compensation

BAC has a Fee Policy (*POL-A-02*), which outlines for students and applicants' arrangements for the cost of tuition fees for BAC-delivered HE programmes. This details circumstances where refunds may be considered and how a student can apply for consideration of a refund and (if eligible) compensation. The Fee Policy also outlines the 14-day 'cooling off' period for HE students. Both policies are available through the HE Section of the BAC website: bacoll.ac.uk/HE

As detailed in the policy, refunds will only usually be granted if all other avenues, including 'teaching out' or continuation at another university have been exhausted. In all cases of material change, BAC will work with affected students to implement measures that ensure that the student is not adversely affected. This may include provision for travel, accommodation, childcare or financial support to enable the continuation of support for additional learning needs.

In the case that a student is in receipt of a BAC-managed student bursary, BAC will continue to honour the bursary for the duration of the agreed programme of study. Compensation for maintenance costs and time lost, or compensation for additional tuition or maintenance costs at another institution will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. However, BAC will usually cover any costs over and above those that students would reasonably expect if they had continued to study at BAC.

Communicating The BAC Student Protection Plan

Publicising the Plan

Our Student Protection Plan is published on our website, under the higher education section. Students and staff should always refer to the version of the Student Protection Plan on the BAC website to ensure that they are referring to the most recent version. In addition, staff are instructed to draw the students' attention to the plan during their annual induction (and at enrolment at the start of each academic year), it is listed on the Induction Checklist and it is included in the pre-contract information provided to all students who have been offered a place on a HE programme of study. The plan is made available to staff via the staff portal on the intranet. Changes to regulation and policy at BAC are communicated to staff through mandatory Higher Education Continuing Professional Development (HECPD) events. These are held at least twice per term.

Updating and review

The BAC Student Protection Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis, considering all current risks, and any associated policies, procedures and documentation to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. If revisions are required this would be done in consultation with students and presented to the HE Student Representatives Forum before consideration at Senior Leadership and Management Team, HE Academic Board, HE Quality and Standards Committee, and Curriculum and Quality Governors Committee, and finally reported to the OfS. As students attend each of these forums' students will be given the opportunity to input into the further development of the plan and be a voice on the approving committees.

Informing and consulting students if implementing this Plan

As we do not have our own degree awarding powers, our validating/awarding partners retain responsibility for modifications to existing programmes. When considering changes to a programme of study, BAC follows the processes and procedures of its partners. When material changes are proposed to a programme or the BAC Student Protection Plan is implemented, each student affected will be contacted at least 30 working days prior to implementation to explain the changes, and engagement and consultation with individual students will take place. Material changes to a programme will only be implemented if all students on the programme consent. When implementing this plan, BAC will endeavour to consult with all individual students, face to face where possible. In most cases, no steps will be taken under the plan, until such consultation have taken place.

Independent advice

In the case that the measures identified in the BAC Student Protection Plan are implemented, students are advised to seek independent advice through the National Union of Students: nus.org.uk

Complaints

If a student wishes to make a complaint about the BAC Student Protection Plan or its implementation, it should be made through the complaints process as outlined in the BAC Complaints Policy and Procedure. This policy is available on our website: through the Policies and Procedures page of the BAC website: bacoll.ac.uk/Complaints



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