

NCCA Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: The National Centre for Circus Arts

Provider's UKPRN: 10001444

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Student protection plan for the period 2023-24

Introduction

The National Centre for Circus Arts (the **National Centre**) is required by the Office for Students (**OfS**) to publish a Student Protection Plan (**SPP**) that sets out the steps that will be taken by the National Centre to protect students in circumstances that might lead to the discontinuation of their programme of study. Possible scenarios that might result in the discontinuation of students' programmes of study, and the steps that would be taken in such situations, are set out below.

The National Centre has an established track record of delivering internationally recognised higher education programmes and professional training to students, and supporting students to pursue careers in circus arts. Building on that track record, this SPP is intended to provide reassurance to current and future students that the National Centre has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure the quality and continuation of their studies.

The National Centre's awards are validated by the University of Kent.

The provisions of this SPP are in addition to students' statutory rights as consumers, which remain unaffected.

The National Centre commits to:

- be open and transparent with students should any risk to the continuity of their programme of study arise, and inform them in a timely manner;
- take all reasonable steps to protect students' studies should a decision be taken to discontinue a programme, or in the event of the closure of the Centre;
- consult with students and consider students' views in a timely manner before deciding to implement any substantial changes to their programme of study or discontinuing it, or the closure of the Centre;
- take into consideration the needs of all students and the impact on them of any proposed changes and any steps taken to protect their interests;
- inform the OfS of any changes that may require a review of this SPP or any of its provisions.

Notification

Should the provisions contained in this SPP need to be implemented, the students concerned will be notified by email in the first instance.

Advice and support will be offered in the first instance by the programme lead.

Complaints

Complaints regarding a programme of study should be raised via the National Centre's Student Complaints Procedure, which is published on our website and conforms to the good practice guidance of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (**OIA**).

Students may also be able to raise a complaint regarding a programme of study with the University of Kent. The provision for refunds and compensation in this Student Protection Plan do not affect students' rights of complaint under the Student Complaints Procedure.

Complaints relating to this SPP should be referred to complaints@nationalcircus.org.uk in the first instance.

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

Risks to Continuation of Study and Likelihood of Those Risks Arising

The risks to the continuation of study for students registered with the National Centre could arise from both internal events and/or external events which may be outside our control.

Internal events might include the following:

Planned closure of the Centre for Financial or Business Reasons

The National Centre is an established institution with a long history of delivering training in the circus arts. It is a registered charity and therefore subject to the Charity Commission regulation and oversight.

The National Centre has in place well established governance and management structures for managing its day-to-day operations, organisational resilience and longer-term sustainability. It is overseen by a Board of Trustees, all of whom are independent. There is internal scrutiny provided by internal auditors and independent scrutiny provided by separate external auditors who assess its 'going concern'. It provides a range of services in addition to higher education, and this diversity of income minimises risk.

Student demand for places is very high, with applications for entry far in excess of the number of available first year places. In 2019-20 there were over 100 applications for 25 places.

The risk of the National Centre deciding to cease to operate for financial or business reasons is low. The Centre is committed to delivering higher education and professional training in circus arts and to making a wider contribution to the artistic and cultural life of the country.

Closure of a programme of study for strategic reasons

The National Centre is a small, specialist institution delivering professionally focussed higher education and training in circus arts, with curriculum development taking place in an incremental and planned manner. It offers only two well-established undergraduate programmes. Consequently, the risk that the National Centre might decide to discontinue a specific programme of study on a timescale that directly affects students already on that programme is very low. In the unlikely event of the discontinuation of a programme of study, it would be planned in such a way to allow current students to complete their studies and would require the formal approval of the National Centre's Academic Board and Board of Trustees.

Where a programme is discontinued, the National Centre would plan to close the programme to new students and 'teach-out' current students (see below). The University of Kent as validator would also oversee the process of programme closure, giving further consideration to the interests of any students affected.

Closure of a programme of study due to low student enrolment

The risk that the National Centre would discontinue or not offer a programme due to insufficient student enrolments or continuation is relatively low. Demand for student places is high and we regularly review the programmes we offer to ensure that they continue to keep pace with student, employer and industry needs.

Significant changes to programmes of study

The risk that the qualification students obtain is significantly different from that for which they enrolled is low, because of the National Centre's approach to programme development, approval and review. The National Centre retains the right to make minor adjustments and improvements to programmes and module content year on year, as part of standard quality enhancement processes and in response to student and employer feedback. Our review and quality enhancement processes are informed by student consultation and we endeavour to communicate planned changes in a timely and helpful manner. These minor amendments or improvements in themselves do not warrant the triggering of the provisions under this SPP. In line with the arrangements for validation of awards, a range of adjustments and improvements to programmes are also subject to scrutiny and agreement by the University of Kent.

External events might include the following:

Ability to award validated degrees

Students at the National Centre receive degrees awarded by the University of Kent. The National Centre has a long-standing relationship with the University of Kent and has consistently met the necessary quality assurance and academic standards requirements set by the University. The risk of losing validation of one or more programmes of study on a timescale that directly affects students already on that programme is very low.

Unplanned Closure for Financial or Business Reasons

The risk that the National Centre finds itself unable to continue to operate due to changes in the external regulatory or funding environment is assessed as being relatively low. The National Centre has a risk management process, disaster response, and business continuity plans in place; these are regularly reviewed. The National Centre is overseen by a governing body comprised entirely of independent members. There is internal scrutiny provided by internal auditors and independent scrutiny provided by separate external auditors who assess the strength of internal control frameworks and risk management processes.

Unplanned Closure of the National Centre due to Acts of God or force majeure

The risk of the complete closure of the National Centre due to fire, flood or other 'Act of God' or *force majeure* having an impact on the quality or delivery of programmes of study is assessed as being low. This is because our London location and our positive and close working relationship with other performing arts schools gives us a range of options to mitigate the risk that our building is unusable, for example through fire or damage.

Loss of Highly Trusted Sponsor visa status

The risk that we lose Highly Trusted Sponsor visa status, meaning that we could no longer sponsor international students, and which would have an impact on the Centre's financial viability, is low. Our small size and engaged curriculum mean that we would quickly spot any problems in attendance or engagement, and deal with these accordingly. This risk would impact particularly those students who need a visa to study in the UK.

Loss of OfS registration

The risk that we lose OfS Registration, through failure to comply with conditions of registration, and therefore cannot guarantee continuity of study, is low. Our small size enables a strong focus on compliance by the Board of Trustees and our executive team are closely engaged in the OfS process. The University of Kent, as our validator, also has an interest in ensuring our students can complete their studies.

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 of a decision being taken to discontinue a programme of study for strategic, academic or other reasons while students are pursuing that programme, one or more of the following steps would be taken by the National Centre to protect those students:

Teaching Out

Whenever possible, the National Centre will make arrangements to 'teach- out' current students where a decision has been taken to phase out a programme of study. The programme will be closed for the purposes of the recruitment of new students. This means that we commit to ensuring programmes of study can be completed by all currently enrolled students within existing timeframes determined by programme and academic regulations. In the event that a decision is taken to discontinue a programme, the arrangements which are proposed for students affected will be considered by, and may be subject to the agreement of, the University of Kent as our validating institution.

Transfer of Study

Where teaching out is not possible, the National Centre will investigate whether students can transfer to a similar programme offered by another higher education provider. (Our unique status means that this might be in another country via our membership of the international federation of professional circus schools, FEDEC.) If such a transfer of study is possible, then the National Centre will take all possible steps to facilitate the transfer to the other higher education provider, including for example the provision of a record of academic achievement to date.

Highly Trusted Sponsor status

If we lost our Highly Trusted Sponsor status, we would seek to support students who had to leave the UK to continue their studies, using remote delivery and in partnership with other performing arts schools where possible, including transfer of study to another institution.

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

Refunds and Compensation

Details of the National Centre's arrangements and policy concerning refunds and compensation under this Student Protection Plan is set out in the attached 'Refund and Compensation Policy'.

This Student Protection Plan sets out possible situations where the National Centre will no longer be able to preserve continuation of study for one or more students, or where there has been disruption to a course of study. The Student Protection Plan identifies such situations as being of low risk. However, in the event of the Student Protection Plan being activated, the National Centre will implement its Refunds and Compensation Policy.

In the event that one of the situations / events identified in the SPP were to occur and the Student Protection Plan be activated, the National Centre will liaise as appropriate with the University of Kent as validator to ensure a fair outcome for students in all circumstances with regard to refunds and compensation.

Notwithstanding that the National Centre will take proactive action without requiring students to lodge a formal complaint, students who wish to make a request for a refund or compensation under the Student Protection Plan may do so by contacting complaints@nationalcircus.org.uk.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your Student Protection Plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan through our website and publicity materials for student recruitment and through our programme handbooks. We will make sure that relevant staff are aware of its provisions through one-to-one briefings.

We will annually review the Student Protection Plan in conjunction with our course representatives at student-staff liaison committee meetings.

Should we need to implement our Student Protection Plan, we would inform all students by email and discuss this with them in their course groups.