

DN COLLEGES GROUP

Student Protection Plan for Academic Year 2025-2026

DN Colleges Group (University Campus North Lincolnshire & University Campus Doncaster)
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Executive Summary of Risk at DN Colleges Group

Risk ref.	Risk name	Probability
3.1	Institutional closure	Very unlikely
3.2	Closure of part of a campus	Very unlikely
3.3	The implications of the closure of a programme or other significant material change	Very unlikely
3.4	The revocation of student visa (formerly tier 4 visa) status	Very unlikely
3.5	Loss or restriction of university validation/awarding body approval	Unlikely
3.6	Withdrawal of designation	Unlikely
3.7	Major changes in year to programme content	Unlikely
3.8	Suspension of a programme	Likely
3.9	Disruption to college business – cyber attack	Likely
3.10	Disruption to college business – industrial action	Likely
3.11	Loss of key staff	Likely

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The DN Colleges Group ('the College') is committed to helping to ensure students achieve the best academic outcomes. There may be very rare and exceptional circumstances which mean that unforeseen changes have to be made to modules or programmes (provision for such events is described in the Suspension or Closure of Higher Education Programmes Policy).
- 1.2 The College recognises the requirement to ensure full compliance with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and to observe the Higher Education course changes and closures statement of good practice.

- 1.3 The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and the Office for Students (OfS) requires all Higher Education providers to agree and publish a Student Protection Plan (SPP) to protect students' interests in the case of material change, for example, programme changes, suspensions, closures, or institutional closure. The SPP sets out how continuation and quality of the student experience will be ensured for current and prospective students should an identified risk crystallise.
- 1.4 Such events for the College may be triggered by situations such as (not exhaustive):
- a decision taken to close the institution known as the DN Colleges Group
 - a strategic decision by the Corporation Board to close a campus
 - a strategic decision to either close or not run a particular course in a subsequent year
 - withdrawal of designation for student support purposes
 - major changes in year to course content
 - loss of accreditation from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
 - loss of validation by University partners
 - disruption of College business and continuity
 - the unanticipated departure of key members of delivery staff
 - revocation of the tier 4 sponsor license allowing the recruitment of international students
- 1.5 The Student Protection Plan outlines the types of risk which the College has identified with the potential to materialise and explains the actions which might be taken to minimise their impact. The College has a long-established reputation for providing higher education opportunities to a wide range of student groups and recognises that the range of risks to continuation of study might differ based on differing student needs, characteristics and circumstances. The SPP has the flexibility to account for and protect the interest of all students.
- 1.6 The SPP is associated with the Higher Education Terms and Conditions and Suspension or Closure of Higher Education Programmes Policy, both of which are accessible at www.dncolleges.ac.uk/policies-and-procedures/higher-education.
- 1.7 The SPP will be published on the College websites and Virtual Learning Environment. The College will ensure that staff demonstrate appropriate consideration of this plan when proposing any programme changes through the relevant approvals processes.
- 1.8 The Suspension or Closure of Higher Education Programmes Policy and SPP have been considered and influenced by student representatives.

2 Information and communication of protection measures

- 2.1 The College is committed to communicating any changes to students as early as possible, with clear information and options.
- 2.2 In all cases, the College would seek to ensure that all reasonable steps be taken to minimise disruption to the services which would affect students. The Suspension or Closure of Higher Education Programmes Policy covers steps

such as offering students an alternative course, delivering a modified version of the same course, or ensuring assistance for those students affected to transfer to another institution.

- 2.3 Students will always be treated as individuals with information, advice and guidance based on each individual's circumstances. The College's Higher Education student population is diverse, drawing from the range of widening participation characteristics including (but not exhaustive of): mature students; those in employment; those with caring responsibilities; from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Any changes would always ensure that discussion, communication and support encompasses the specific needs of all students, including those with disability, learning difficulties and those students with mental health issues.

3 **Consideration of risks**

The College has a comprehensive risk management system which highlights and actions risks that could compromise the continuation and quality of study. For this Student Protection Plan, risks have been categorized into very unlikely, unlikely or likely based upon the current and projected institutional position.

Risk 3.1:

Institutional closure

Probability:

Very unlikely

Rationale:

DN Colleges Group financial performance is very strong. The College has 'Outstanding' financial health rating with a low gearing ratio and planned positive cash flows.

Mitigations:

Where the College has no option, other than to close, it would consider a range of measures to protect the student experience including:

- Where possible, closing in a gradual way allowing current enrolled students to complete their studies
- If the above would not be possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers
- (Where appropriate financially) by compensating students who suffer demonstrable, material financial loss suffered as a result of the disruption.
- Merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

Risk 3.2:*Closure of part of a campus***Probability:**

Very unlikely

Rationale:

Positive and sustained relationships with local authorities, schools, community groups and enterprise partnerships, ensuring a presence within each community location. Recruitment is robust across all campuses, with financial investment being made in resources and buildings at these locations.

Mitigations:

In circumstances where part or all of the campus became unsuitable for student use, the College would consider alternative solutions such as:

- Relocating to a suitable alternative location, including renting spaces within a close proximity and/or installing temporary buildings
- Revising timetabling to allow scheduled teaching to still take place in the College's facilities. This may include student contact sessions extending into longer days or alternative days. The DN Colleges Group has two main campuses and either of these could be utilised for alternative arrangements. Appropriate consultation would normally be conducted with all those affected; appropriate equality impact assessments would also be undertaken
- Delivering programmes using alternative modes such as distance learning or learning blocks. The College would always consider the appropriateness and accessibility. Alternative arrangements will be sourced for students with a demonstratable learning need whom cannot access learning delivered temporarily online.

Risk 3.3:

The implications of the closure of a programme or other significant material change

Probability:

Very unlikely

Rationale:

The College has a comprehensive risk management system which highlights key academic risks. All programmes of study are continually monitored and risk assessed via the Student Experience and Curriculum Impact process, with status routinely being reported to the Senior Leadership Team and college governors.

Mitigations:

Any decision to close a programme or any other significant material change would always have been preceded by comprehensive assessment of the implications, risks and range of potential actions to mitigate those risks. These would include:

- The impact on students
- The strategic consequences including the impact on other courses, collaborative projects and reputation
- Assessment of the approaches towards ensuring the quality of the student experience and academic standards until the completion of the process
- The most effective approach towards consultation with and communication with students
- Ensuring the progression of students who may need to repeat parts of the programme
- The strategy for on-going delivery and support (including areas such as external examiner arrangements, revalidation requirements) during the phasing-out period
- The implications regarding professional body registration (where applicable)
- Notification of prospective students (where applicable).

Risk 3.4:

The revocation of student visa (formerly tier 4 visa) status

Probability:

Very unlikely

Rationale:

DNCG has a dedicated international department which effectively manages international recruitment and ensures compliance with Home Office regulations, including applications of international students, monitoring international student attendance and the academic progress of international students. DNCG was rated as 'good' at the most recent Ofsted Inspection and maintains an 'outstanding' financial status with the ESFA.

Mitigations:

In the event of suspension of Student Sponsor status, DNCG will minimise the any disruption to international students and the student experience, taking all reasonable actions, including:

- Remediating any compliance issues highlighted by the UK Visas and Immigration/Home Office.
- Cooperating and collaborating with UK Visas and Immigration/Home Office to allow international students to complete their current study/programme.
- Providing the opportunity for international students to defer their application or entry to DNCG, until compliance issues are addressed and student visa status is reinstated.
- Continuation of the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment to enrolled international students who are in country, should the licence conditions permit for the length of time permitted; usually 6 months or to the end of the current academic year.
- Providing guidance and support to any affected international students which would allow a transfer to alternative provision at another (permissible) institution.

Risk 3.5:

*Loss or restriction of university
validation/awarding body approval*

Probability:

Unlikely

Rationale:

Long-established successful relationships with regional universities. University partners have conducted successful annual quality reviews across the HE provision. Formal collaborative agreements are renewed, usually on a three-yearly basis, all being currently valid.

Mitigations:

There are formal collaborative agreements with each university partner and centre approvals with the awarding organisations, currently Pearson, CMI, CIPD, and City & Guilds.

The usual termination period is 12 months. In the unlikely event of termination, the College would:

- Ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the resultant disruption to affected students
- Ensure that, as far as possible, changes are made in a transitional manner

Risk 3.6:*Withdrawal of designation***Probability:**

Unlikely

Rationale:

Sustained history of positive engagement with Student Finance England and the Student Loans Company, with robust systems, procedures and dedicated staff in place to ensure compliance with regulations.

Mitigations:

In the event of the withdrawal of statutory student finance for 'Student Support' purposes, the College would take all reasonable steps to minimise the resulting disruption to students by, for example:

- Working with relevant funding bodies to allow enrolled students to complete their year of study
- Where the above is not possible, supporting students to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers
- Where appropriate, financially compensating students who suffer demonstrable, material financial loss as a result of disruption to their studies
- Working closely with all affected students by providing evidence and references, both orally and in writing, in support of continuation of their studies
- Where appropriate, merging with another institution to maintain all or part of the current provision.

Risk 3.7:

Major changes in year to programme content

Probability:

Unlikely

Rationale:

Programmes go through robust and timely processes of validation with universities or awarding bodies to ensure the appropriateness of programme content against sector benchmarks, thus reducing the necessity to alter programmes in year.

Mitigations:

The College will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the programme in accordance with the description applied to it in all published material relating to the year of entry. In the event of major in-year changes to course content the College would ensure that:

- Changes are restricted to the minimum necessary to assure the required quality of experience
- It works with students to ensure all those affected are consulted and communicated with effectively
- Students would be allowed the opportunity to withdraw from the programme
- Students would receive reasonable support to transfer to another programme either within the College, to a partner university or other provider.

Risk 3.8:*Suspension of a programme***Probability:**

Likely

Rationale:

Robust system and processes in place to ensure the review of programme recruitment, the quality of the educational experience and financial viability of delivery.

Mitigations:

The College would always take a suspension or closure decision as a last resort. The Suspension or Closure of Higher Education Programmes Policy provides further detail. Any material impact would be mitigated by:

- Communication with current students to provide assurance that they would not be adversely affected by the decision and would be able to complete their studies at the College
- Consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments
- Future applicants will be notified in accordance with UCAS deadlines, allowing time for students to source an alternative suitable programme.

Risk 3.9:**Probability:**

Disruption to college business – cyber attack Likely

Rationale:

Robust systems in place to monitor and address cyber-attacks, however, global challenges to cyber security and their increasing complexity present a risk to the student experience.

Mitigations:

The College continues to address this significant risk through the emerging DN Colleges Group Digital Strategy. This working group is led by the Chief Operating Office. The College takes cyber security very seriously and implements all reasonable safeguards to combat any attack; including

- Scheduled and communicated updates to software, at times planned to cause the least disruption to students and staff
- The continual monitoring of potential cyber attacks
- Firewall maintenance
- The regular backing up of college systems and databases.

Should a cyber-attack occur, the college would seek to minimize disruption to the student experience by:

- Following the best practice guidance from CREST (<https://www.crest-approved.org/about-us/who-is-crest/>)
- Verifying systems have been recovered and accounts/data recovered from backups
- Assessing any other similar systems that may be deemed vulnerable
- Notifying relevant stakeholders
- Ratifying recovered backups
- Implementing any further protection that needs to be put in place is to be implemented.

Risk 3.10:**Probability:**

Disruption to college business – industrial action Likely

Rationale:

DN College's Group has clear structure and procedure for consultation and negotiation with trade unions and maintains strong links with local and regional union representatives. DN College Group has a positive precedent of achieving reasonable solutions to issues that arise through consultation with trade unions.

Mitigations:

Where industrial action might occur, the College would seek to:

- Ensure that normal operations and services are maintained as far as possible
- Take all reasonable steps to fulfil its responsibilities to students in ensuring minimal disruption for students

Risk 3.11:

Loss of key staff

Probability:

Likely

Rationale:

Despite significant investment in staff retention measures, unplanned loss of staff is outside of the control of the college, particularly given relative rates of pay in some industry sectors. The risk is currently greater in Engineering and Construction.

Mitigations:

The College would always maximise the best endeavours to mitigate any impact emerging through the loss of specialist staff. The College would:

- Seek to fill gaps as quickly as possible. This may include moving current members of staff with appropriate skills and experience to cover in the short term or recruiting externally
- Use the strong relationships with university partners to agree short term sharing of specialist staff or to recruit from their post graduate resourcing pool
- Draw upon its permanent fractional post-holders to temporarily increase their hours
- Where the institution cannot avoid closing a programme, the policy as outlined in section 4 would apply.

4 Refund and compensation policy

- 4.1 DN Colleges Group views refunds and compensation as a remedy of last resort. The College would exhaust all measures to preserve continuation of study should any of the risks identified in the SPP materialise.
- 4.2 The DN Colleges Group Higher Education Terms and Conditions – Admissions is available at www.dncolleges.ac.uk/policies-and-procedures/higher-education and includes the circumstances in which the College would refund tuition fees and other relevant costs.
- 4.3 Refunds for students require the authorisation of the Principal or Director of Finance and would apply where students are in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company, where students pay their own tuition fees or whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.
- 4.4 The College would adopt a (senior level) case by case basis approach towards any other form of compensation including: the payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course; commitments to honour student bursaries and compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study. Such decisions would be formally approved through Senior Leadership Team and Group Executive Team meetings.
- 4.5 The College has significant cash reserves which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study. Furthermore, the College has Professional Liability insurance cover through Zurich Insurance to cover circumstances where the risk might crystallise and the College would no longer be able to preserve continuation of study. The following extract summarises:

“The insurer will indemnify the insured in respect of all the sums which the insured may become legally liable to pay as damages arising from breach of professional duty by reason of any negligent act, error or omission committed or alleged to have been committed by an employee in providing the Services and for which a claim is first made against the insured and is notified to the insurer during the period of insurance. In addition, the insurer will pay Costs and Expenses.”

5 Review of the Student Protection Plan

- 5.1 The Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.
- 5.2 The College Risk Register includes a Higher Education section which identifies the key risks across the portfolio. The SPP will be reviewed in line with the overarching HE Risk Register.

6 Enquiries and complaints

- 6.1 Please contact qualityHE@dncolleges.ac.uk for any general enquiries relating to this document.
- 6.2 The HE Student Complaints Procedure is available at www.dncolleges.ac.uk/policies-and-procedures/higher-education for reference in circumstances where this is required.