



## Centre for Alternative Technology GSE STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN (UKPRN 10021550)

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) is fully committed to enhancing the student experience and to supporting students to achieve their academic outcomes. Therefore this Student Protection Plan sets out what measures CAT has in place to protect you as our students in the event that a risk to the continuation of your studies should arise.
- 1.2. CAT is an environmental charity with strong governance through its board of trustees and senior management team that actively monitors the organisation operations, strategy, and financial stability.
- 1.3. **The risk that CAT as a provider as a whole is unable to operate is low:** CAT undertakes an annual designation process with CETR (ex HEFCW), part of which involves demonstration that CAT is financially stable to operate for the next three financial years i.e. the length of academic study. Our validating partners also carry out ongoing due diligence of our ability to deliver an academic programme as part of our agreement with them.

### 2. General Information about the Student Protection Plan

- 2.1. The Student Protection Plan forms an important part of the student contract and as such will be reviewed annually alongside the terms and conditions and other important policies. The policy will not normally apply to graduates who have already completed their studies at CAT.
- 2.2. Through our student representation structure, we will consult with students when making changes to the Plan. Any changes will be communicated to our students through our standard official communication channels including the full range of accessible formats. The latest version of the plan will always be available on the GSE website.

### 3. University Validating Bodies

- 3.1. The Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) at CAT will use its resources to protect our student's interests and minimise disruption to their studies. CAT's courses are validated through Liverpool John Moores University and University of East London to ensure quality and oversight of provision.
- 3.2. LJMU and UEL also have student protection plans which include support for collaborative providers in the event of course disruption. These plans can be found at <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/-/media/sample-sharepoint-libraries/policy-documents/320.docx> and <https://uel.ac.uk/about/governance/student-protection-plan> respectively.
- 3.3. To ensure that our students have access to the best programmes of study, CAT regularly reviews its curriculum and programme portfolio to ensure that it remains current and meets the needs of employers and industry.

- 3.4. The GSE actively monitors the impact of changing recruitment, postgraduate market and regulatory conditions (e.g. professional or statutory accreditation bodies) on individual programmes and subject areas. This enables the GSE to identify opportunities for enhancement and development of programmes and of the wider course portfolio. In line with our enhancement framework, CAT in conjunction with our validating partners is responsible for determining when programme reviews should take place and when changes will be implemented. As a minimum timescale, programmes are reviewed on a 5 year rolling timescale
- 3.5. From time-to-time unforeseen events may result in the need to make changes to programmes of study which could impact the ability of students to enrol on and complete their chosen programme within the expected timeframe or circumstances. Where unforeseen events arise that may impact a programme of study, we will be open and transparent about the event, the likely impact and the changes we would need to make to protect students and enable them to continue their studies.
- 3.6. GSE is committed to ensuring students are able to complete their studies and will make all reasonable efforts to enable them to do so. This includes:
- In the event of a programme closure the GSE, the default position is to make sure that 'teach out' arrangements are in place for those students already enrolled on the course, ensuring that students are able to continue on your programme of study. 'Teach out' means that the course is still taught to completion for all students who are currently enrolled
  - Should a decision be made which results in the need to trigger the Student Protection Plan students will be informed in writing within 10 working days of the decision being made;
  - We will always take account of the diversity of our individual students and we will consider their individual needs and circumstances when affected by changes outlined in this plan and/or when the plan is triggered;
  - Both LJMU and UEL student protection plans allow for the transfer and completion of degrees through the respective universities
  - We will take account of the different modes of delivery and any differences arising from level of provision when considering the impact of the changes outlined in this plan and/or when the plan is triggered. The blended delivery nature of CATs courses means that existing modules already have a ready library of course materials available. These would be made available to the LJMU and UEL to allow continuity of provision, as close to the original curriculum as possible, through a similar blended or distance learning mechanism.
- 3.7. This Student Protection Plan sets out the measures that CAT has in place to protect students' continuation of studies. The type of event or change which might cause a risk, together with an explanation of the steps the University would take to protect students' continuation of study are set out below. These measures are in addition to the protections that students have under consumer protection law and do not impinge on students' consumer rights.

#### **4. Risks which may Trigger the Student Protection Plan**

##### **4.1. Closure and suspension of programmes**

CAT may wish to close and remove a programme of study from its portfolio. This may be as a result of low recruitment numbers which could negatively impact student experience; changes in employment opportunities which could negatively impact graduate destinations; and replacement following curriculum review, to further enhance the offer to students.

Closure or suspension of a programme means that it will no longer be open for future student registration. Programmes of study will not be terminated until the contractual implications between current and prospective students and CAT can be fully considered.

##### **4.2. Closure of subject areas**

If the GSE planned to exit from a subject area we would follow our normal processes, which would include appropriate consultation. In the event of closure, existing students will be taught out where they are able to complete their studies within an agreed timeframe.

Prospective students will be contacted by the admissions team and will be provided with advice on suitable alternative courses elsewhere.

##### **4.3. Closure or change to a module(s)**

The GSE may at times wish to change a module. It could be because we think that the student outcomes or feedback, changes in staff (e.g. staff departure or unforeseen illness), low recruitment to the module or sudden developments in topic material that require addressing, mean we need to make some modifications or close the module.

Where possible and appropriate the module may be delivered in a distance learning only format, to allow completion of a module, particularly where that module is core to a programme. The GSEs existing policy of providing materials for distance learners already means that disruption in this event would be minimised. If staff became unavailable, then we would endeavour to redeploy existing staff with relevant background to support students and/or recruit a replacement to teach the module.

Where a module is to be closed or suspended, we would ensure that students be given suitable notice before the academic year started. This information would also be clearly relayed to any prospective students.

##### **4.4. Updating programme content, regulations and policies**

The GSE is committed to ongoing enhancement of programmes and student experience and as a result may wish to make changes to programme content, regulations or policies.

Where material changes (such as changes to the structure or content of the programme) are made the GSE will draw these changes to the attention of students and prospective students as soon as possible. Changes to policies, regulations, terms and conditions which impact students will normally come into effect at the start of an academic year and following the conclusion of process. This will include student consultation.

Where material changes are made to programmes of study prior to registration CAT will contact prospective students to provide information and guidance to help them to take an informed decision on their course of action. This will include their right to seek entry on another programme at CAT for which they may be qualified or withdraw their application to CAT and seek entry to another institution

In normal circumstances, material changes, such as changes in module weeks, will not be made to a programme after registration, but if this is necessary students will be informed at

the earliest opportunity on the changes and wherever possible their views will be taken into account.

If a student reasonably believes that a material change to their programme of study adversely affects them, they may cancel their contract with CAT as outlined in the student Terms and Conditions. Students who withdraw in these circumstances will be awarded the credits that they have already attained through their validating University partner.

The GSE will continue to make changes to programmes during the course of a student's studies in order to improve the quality, enhance the content, and meet the latest requirements of an accrediting body or in response to student feedback. As part of our policy of student engagement the GSE will consult with and/or inform students of these changes as appropriate. Where continuation of study is not negatively impacted upon it is unlikely that the updating of programme content, regulations and policies will result in the triggering of the Student Protection Plan.

#### **4.5. Loss of Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation resulting in withdrawal of associated programmes**

The GSE works in partnership with PSRBs (e.g. Architects Registration Board) and has a successful track record of securing and sustaining accreditation or prescription for its programmes. In the event that accreditation is withdrawn, CAT would work with the PSRB to try wherever possible to secure the option to teach out existing students on the programmes with no impact to their accreditation.

The M.Arch degree is currently prescribed by the Architects Registration Board until May 2027

#### **4.6. Termination of Agreement with Validating University**

As part of its validating agreements with LJMU and UEL, there is a minimum time period for either CAT or the University to terminate the contract. In these circumstances the notice period would be sufficient for CAT to find a new partner if required. However should no suitable partner be secured, recruitment to affected programmes would be suspended and prospective students informed. CAT and the universities would make all efforts to ensure that affected students will still obtain adequate teaching and assessment to complete their programmes. The Universities also have the right to transfer affected students to their own programmes, and/or use GSE teaching materials to complete the programme delivery.

#### **4.7. Loss of specialist facilities critical to the delivery of curriculum (e.g. through fire, failure of IT systems)**

CATs Eco centre has a variety of specialist facilities which would allow for use of alternative facilities in most circumstances. CAT has a risk based business continuity plan which outlines the steps we would take in the event of a loss of essential facilities such as accommodation. In the event of a loss of these facilities these plans would be followed.

As CAT courses are delivered through a blended learning approach, all modules will remain available through a distance learning approach away from the main CAT campus. In the event of local IT failure, the VLE teaching materials are hosted remotely by LJMU and UEL, and regular IT backups are made to secure continuity. The individual impact on students, particularly those with disabilities, in accessing and continuing their studies would be considered and prioritised in these circumstances.

#### **4.8. Loss of individual staff who are critical to research supervision**

The GSE will make every effort to ensure that the student is able to successfully complete their research studies. This will include providing a replacement supervisor within the GSE or supporting a continued relationship with the existing supervisor where possible.

## **5. Refund and Compensation Policy**

- 5.1. CATs Student Fees Terms and Conditions allow for payment of modules on an individual module basis. Therefore, in the event of failure, most students would normally only be impacted by a single module cost. UEL and LJMU have committed to supporting students complete their programme of study as outlined in their student protection plans.
- 5.2. .CAT will refund students who have paid for modules that have not been delivered through either on site or distance learning mode where adequate notice (one academic year) has not been given. This policy includes provision to recognise and compensate students where other alternative arrangements are inappropriate or not available and/or where compensation or refund is deemed appropriate. This refund and compensation policy is applied in a fair and proportionate way ensuring students are not disadvantaged. The policy covers appropriate provision for:
  - Student tuition fee refunds for those students in receipt of tuition fee loans from the Student Loans Company, students paying their own fees and those being paid by a sponsor
  - Compensation for additional tuition fees and maintenance costs where students have to transfer programme or provider which resulted in an impact on the time required to complete the qualification
- 5.3. Where students have made termly fee payments in the event of failure, CAT would recalculate fees on the basis of single module costs and then follow the process in section.
- 5.4. CAT complies with OIAHE and CMA guidance on this matter.

## **6. Complaints**

- 6.1. If you wish to make a complaint about your experience under this plan you should do so by following the GSE complaints policy. Details of which can be found here.
- 6.2. If you have any immediate views, concerns or feedback in relation to this Plan, please contact Adrian Watson Head of School ([adrian.watson@cat.org.uk](mailto:adrian.watson@cat.org.uk)) or Student Support ([student.support@cat.org.uk](mailto:student.support@cat.org.uk))

### **Updates to version 2.0**

- 1.3 Replaced references to HEFCW with CETR
- 3.2 updated links to university student protection plans
- 4.5 change to date of ARB prescription
- 5.3 additional consideration for students paying fees termly rather than by module.

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