



BACKSTAGE
ACADEMY

Office for Students Registration Documentation
Student Protection Plan 2019-20

Provider Name: **Backstage Academy**
Provider UKPRN: **10036456**

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1. About this Plan

This plan assesses the risks which may impact upon our student's continuity of study at Backstage Academy and outlines the measures we will take to protect their interests. The following paragraphs focus on several scenarios that as a special provider of higher education, we feel it is important to consider in order to demonstrate our preparedness to deal with any risks and the likelihood of them materialising.

2. Assessment of Current Risks

1. Current arrangements with University of Bolton

Backstage Academy has been delivering HE courses through a franchise arrangement with University of Bolton since 2011. The risk that the University would decide to cancel this arrangement is deemed **LOW** since over the period we have cemented and maintain an excellent relationship with our lead provider at all levels (Please see attached letter of support). The University has further demonstrated its confidence by actively supporting Backstage Academy's aspiration to apply for Degree Awarding Powers and in the interim, has agreed to move from a franchise to a validation relationship should our application for registration be successful.

2. Moving from a franchise to a validation relationship with University of Bolton

Should our registration for 2019 be successful, agreement in principle has been reached with Bolton University to move from a franchise to a validation arrangement. At this point, Backstage Academy would assume all the risks associated with continuity of study detailed below. However, the financial risks would also be mitigated since the potential net saving to Backstage from the change of arrangement and direct receipt of tuition fees would be considerable. There is a very **LOW** risk that The University of Bolton would not formalise the agreement in principle; in the event our registration application was unsuccessful we would expect to renew our existing contractual arrangement with the University.

3. Application for Degree Awarding Powers

Should our registration for 2019 be successful, it is our intention to apply to the OfS for New Degree Awarding Powers in the Autumn of 2019). In the interim, the risks indicated below would remain unchanged.

Risk of application failure: We have participated in recent briefing sessions with the DAP team and QAA at OfS and have kept ourselves informed of the DAP process since the publication of the OfS Regulator Framework in February 2018. We believe we have both the capacity, the expertise and the support from our partner institution to make a successful application. However, we are not complacent and Backstage Academy recognises that this is new process and the necessary level and intensity of work needed to ensure a successful application. We therefore deem this risk to be **MEDIUM**.

In term of noncontinuity of study resulting from a failed DAP application, we are confident that the University Bolton would continue the validation arrangements in force at the time and therefore the overall risk to students would be **LOW**

4. Future plans

Backstage Academy has no plans, nor do we have an expectation to close any of our provision in the foreseeable future.

5. **The Estate**

All our HE provision follow a full-time attendance pattern and are based on a single site at Unit 5 Lidgate Crescent, Langthwaite Road, Langthwaite Grange Ind Estate, South Kirkby, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF9 3AP. We have no additional off-site, franchised, work-based or distance learning provision; therefore the overall risk of continuity of study for our students is **LOW** since all our resources are focussed.

6. **Financial Performance.**

Historically the financial performance of Backstage Academy has been, and continues to be, strong. Our financial stability was further boosted by a renegotiation of the franchise fees paid to the University of Bolton from the 2017/18 academic year. We have ensured that sufficient reserves will be available to us to provide a well-resourced learning experience in the event of short or medium-term economic difficulties. Our performance compares well with similar institutions operating in the sector and we consider the financial risk to be **LOW**.

7. **Delivery of component parts of courses**

The risk that Backstage Academy is no longer able to deliver material components of its courses is deemed **LOW** for most of the provision. All our modules are designed to be delivered by integrated teams of academic staff and are not dependent on one individual. In addition, a reliable pool of guest, specialist technical and industry professionals have supplemented the academic delivery since 2011.

For our BA (Hons) Live Visual Design and Production, we deem the risk to be **MODERATE** due to the technologically specialist nature of the field and which is dependent on two members of academic staff to deliver core teaching. However, we have a least two lecturers who could deliver any module/session and so have redundancy in all areas. Despite this, we continue to monitor staffing levels and associated risks carefully.

8. **Industrial Action**

The risk that Backstage Academy may be unable to operate owing to industrial action is **LOW**. Although Backstage Academy does not have recognition agreements with any trades unions, it has established frameworks for consultation and negotiation with staff. It is highly committed to maintaining an effective employee relations culture and working with colleagues to achieve reasonable solutions to any matters that may arise from time to time.

Since Backstage Academy does not follow the national agreement for academic staff, national disputes related to that agreement (for example pay, pensions etc.), would not impact on the operation of the courses.

3. **Measures to mitigate the risks that we consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise**

1. If the University of Bolton were to decide they no longer wanted to be our franchising partner, then under our current contract they would have to provide at least 12 months' notice and as noted above, we believe we would be able to move to a new partner within this period. This would apply if following registration we move to a validation arrangement with the University.

In the unlikely scenario where this was not possible, then the University of Bolton would continue to validate all the existing students' degrees until they had all graduated. We have produced a business continuity model to show that even if this did happen and we could not find a new partner, we would still be able to deliver the courses for all remaining students for the next 3 academic years and remain financially

solvent during the teach out of the course. We have shared this plan with the University of Bolton who have endorsed it.

2. In the unlikely event that Backstage Academy should had no option other than to close we would consider:
 - where possible closing in a gradual way over a period that would allow current enrolled students to complete their studies with Backstage Academy
 - where gradual closure is not possible, supporting students:
 - a) to transfer to the University of Bolton (as the lead provider) as per the franchise agreement;
 - b) to transfer to appropriate programmes of study at other providers;
 - c) where appropriate, finically compensate where because of disruption to their studies, the suffer demonstrable, material financial loss
3. As a member of the Production Park group insurance scheme, we benefit from the business continuity insurance policy that is place, This means that should anything happen to the existing Backstage Academy estate or the technical equipment key to deliver of our provision, funds would be made available to ensure we can lease apricate space/equipment to continue to operate while new premises are built or located.

However, we have planned contingency measures should part or all the Backstage Academy estate become unsuitable for activities involving students, including:

- relocating our provision to an alternative location. This may include negotiating the use of other spaces within the wider Production Park estate, hiring spaces fore course delivery (where possible as close to Backstage Academy as possible) and/or installing temporary buildings if practical.
 - amending timetables to enable all scheduled teaching to take place in the available facilities. This may include student contact sessions being held outside normal hours. Where such an approach is taken, appropriate consultation will be conducted with all the stakeholders who msay be affected; appropriate equality impact assessment will also be undertaken.
4. To mitigate against the risk of not being able to deliver certain aspects of our courses we have significantly increased our academic staffing levels over recent years (from 12.1 FTE in 2015 to 18.4 FTE in 2018) and intend to increase this level further over the next 3-5 years

We design our modules and courses so that they are not dependent on any one individual and are taught by multiple members of our academic staff. In addition to this, we encourage all staff to attend various CPD courses on the latest technology taught on every course, further increasing the overall knowledge base of the academic team and reducing the reliance on any one individual.

We also have a strong pool of industry specialist visiting lecturers who have worked with us since 2011, many of whom have expressed an interest to work more with us in the future (either by joining as a permanent member of staff or increasing their subcontract hours

5. In the event a decision was taken to close an individual course, then Backstage Academy would follow the University of Bolton procedures for programme withdrawal/closure. We are currently developing our own procedure for the withdrawal of programmes as part of our proposed New DAP application.

6. If we are no longer able to deliver elements of specific undergraduate course, Backstage Academy will endeavour to develop and deliver alternative components of the course to ensure the continued achievement of the course's specified learning outcomes.

4. Information about our refunds and compensation policy in the event that we are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

We do not foresee any scenario where we would not be able to preserve continuity of study. However, if any course could not be continued and could not be taught out, we follow the University of Bolton's policy for refunds and compensation, which adheres to UUK principles and is to be found on their website at this location: <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/01/Student-Complaints-Procedure-2018-19.pdf> and as an appendix to this document (Appendix 1).

To demonstrate our preparedness for registration, we have developed and approved our own Refunds and Compensation Policy for student recruited from 2019 onwards. (attached)

Over the period from December 2014 to December 2017, Backstage Academy has increased its reserves by £593,908 as it has matured as an institution and this positive trend is forecast to continue as outlined in our Financial Commentary.

Aside from intercompany loans from Production Park, we have only minimal external debt (small operating leases/HP finance) and have a commitment from Production Park that it will not seek repayment of any loans unless Backstage Academy is in a position to repay them.

Our financial forecasts show the institution generating increased cash reserves year on year, as well as also paying down future Production Park loans. Should circumstances change, the amount to be repaid to Production Park could decrease, generating additional cash reserves to ensure they are enough to provide any financial redress for those students adversely affected who may need financial support even though we have not identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study.

5. How we will communicate with students about our student protection plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and prospective students by including a link to the policy on our website and advise students of the policy at an early stage should the risk of course or site closure significantly increase. We will incorporate reference to this Plan in our future Conditions of Enrolment documentation.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our Student Protection Plan when they propose course changes by incorporating the need to advise students into our documentation and procedures.

6. How we will work with current students in developing our student protection plan.

This Student Protection Plan and accompanying Refunds and Compensation Policy have been modelled on the existing arrangements with the University of Bolton (which was agreed following consultation with their student body) and adapted to the context in which Backstage Academy operates. Both this plan and policy were presented to Backstage Academy Student Representatives as a single draft document and endorsed at a meeting held on 7 November 2018.

Annual review of the Plan will be considered by Academic Board, the membership for which includes student representation.

7. Arrangements to communicate with affected students should we need to implement our student protection plan

Should key aspects of our SPP need to be implemented we will inform our students via email, student representatives for the affected provision, social media groups and open meetings as appropriate. We will ensure appropriate provision for students with disabilities and any special communication needs, recognising that some SLC and other external procedures may be complex and obscured in technical language.

We will give students adequate notice when we need to make significant material changes to their courses and following consultation with the Students Reps, we will seek to always do this as well in advance of changes (with particular attention in relation to substantial changes to the date or location of any assessment arrangements). We will advise students that this might not always be possible due to circumstances beyond the control of the institution. We will in each case however consider what is in the best interests of the majority of students.

If we need to implement the measures in our Student Protection Plan we will always seek to communicate clearly with students as to the nature of the changes, the actual or potential impact on them, the reasons for the changes and what their options are. Individual support on academic aspects will be provided by personal tutors and pastoral support will be available through our Student Services team including specialist psychological support from our on-site Student Wellbeing Officer (a trained psychotherapist registered with the BACP). Working closely with the University of Bolton's Student Services Funding Advisors, we will be available to help students understand the funding implications of any transition in recognition of the complexities and uncertainties that such changes can entail.

We will put in place arrangements to allow our students to have access to independent advice where appropriate if we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan in relation to changes of institution.