Provider's name: SIRM College

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Policies referenced in this document can be found on: SIRM College Policies – SIRM

Student Protection Plan

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.

The Student Protection Plan (the Plan) sets out what measures the College has in place to protect its students, in the event that a risk to the continuation of studies arises. This plan is reviewed annually by the Academic Board and is an integral part of the wider risk management strategy of SIRM. This plan will be implemented with other parts of the risk assessment and management strategy.

SIRM has extensive experience in protecting the quality of study for its students. This Student Protection Plan builds on the SIRM's experience and is intended to assure present and potential learners that we have appropriate measures in place to guard the continuance of their studies with us.

In preparing the Student Protection Plan for 2025/2026, SIRM undertook a risk assessment. This formed part of our ongoing risk management process. The reason was to identify risks likely to crystallise.

We have divided the risk into the following three rating categories, based on Likelihood:

- Low: an event may occur only in exceptional circumstances (possibility at less than 33%)
- Medium: an event may occur (possibility between 34-66%)
- High: an event is expected (possibility at more than 67%)

We have also classified Severity as:

- Minor: would be resolved through day-to-day activity
- Moderate: would be resolved through a dedicated and designated team
- Extreme: would be resolved through input from Senior Management or an external/third party.

The following categories have been used below to support an understanding of risk:

Risk	Likelihood	Severity	Residual Risk
1. Pandemic	Low	Minor	Low
2. The company ceases to operate/financial risk	Low	Extreme	Medium
3. Closure of Campus/change of Location	Medium	Moderate	Medium
4. Discontinuity of Course	Low	Minor	Low
5. Withdrawal of partnerships and/or approval by awarding bodies	Low	Moderate	Low
6. IT Failure	Low	Minor	Low
7. Risks of an Academic nature	Low	Minor	Low
8. Risks arising from a compromised reputation	Low	Minor	Low

The plan offsets what students can expect to happen should a course, campus, or institution close. The purpose of a plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies or can be compensated if this is not possible. Our Student Protection Plan is easily available to current and prospective students and seeks to address specific risks to the continuation of study in a proportionate way.

The measures that we have put in place to mitigate the identified risks are those that we consider to be reasonably likely to protect the student interest.

Within the next section, the risks associated with each category are explored, along with examples of events that may create a potential risk and explains what actions we might take to minimise the impact of these events if they occur.

1.1 Another pandemic

It is our assessment that the risks to the continuation of study for our students relating to a pandemic remain low because we have demonstrated we are able to put in place contingency measures to enable students to complete their studies. This involved taking all of our learning online, which proved highly effective both for students and staff, with no negative impact on student outcomes.

1.2 Company ceases to operate/ financial risk

It is our assessment that our current financial position means the risk we will become unable to operate is medium. Over the last nine years of trading, we have demonstrated year-on-year growth, our current business plan projections indicate this growth is set to continue. This is also documented as part of the commentary submitted through your Financial Tables. The College keeps a sufficient amount in reserve and has sufficient bank overdraft facilities to protect us in the event of a financial crisis.

We rate the medium and long-term financial strength of the College as good. This judgment is based on:

- Positive comment about the balance sheet
- Our self-assessment judges us as good across all areas of provision.
- Strong and growing partnerships with a number of HE and FE providers.
- Continued growth in numbers, supported by our partner college and Pearson.
- Excellent management of staff and physical resources.

We identified no risks likely to risk our long-term financial stability.

1.3 Closure of campus/ change of location

It is our assessment that the risk of SIRM being unable to continue operating at either our Ilford or Leicester campuses is *medium*.

SIRM does not directly own its campus buildings and instead relies on long-term lease agreements. We currently hold secure, legally binding leases (five and ten years respectively). While these agreements provide stability, the absence of direct ownership introduces an element of dependency on external landlords, which is reflected in the medium risk rating.

SIRM has made significant investment in both campuses to ensure that they continue to provide high-quality facilities for learning and teaching. In November 2022, we expanded our Ilford site by leasing the second floor of the building, and there is further scope within the premises to accommodate additional growth.

The combination of reliance on leased premises and the potential for future growth make it prudent to assess this risk as medium. Should circumstances arise that affect the continued use of either campus, SIRM would ensure that *students' individual needs remain central*. This would include continuity of teaching, access to support services, and appropriate measures to minimise disruption to studies.

In case of temporary disruption to learning caused by a short-term issue with the building, we have the option to rent out external rooms at a nearby building. The lease requires the landlord to give 6 months' notice on the lease, so in the unlikely event that we are required to move, there is ample time to find alternative premises, which are readily available in our area.

In the event that a safety or security incident occurs, the College's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Framework is brought into effect. In the event of emergencies that impact students, communications would be managed through business continuity plans to provide information on the available access to our facilities.

We have comprehensive insurance cover in respect of all risks, including property and business continuity, to ensure it has sufficient resources to sustain the provision of education in the event of a serious incident at any of its campuses.

1.4 Discontinuation of course

We consider the risk of our students being unable to complete their courses to be low. The risk we will be unable to offer courses attracting sufficient numbers of students to make them viable is also low, with demand always exceeding available places.

The performance of all our course teams is monitored through a monthly performance review process against an agreed set of key performance indicators. This covers education and financial performance measures. Additional support is put in place for those students for which a specific support need is identified.

The risk of an individual module not running is low for a compulsory module and low for an option module. If we are unable to run a module due to the viability of student numbers or the availability of staff, we decide the earliest possible opportunity. We would let the students affected know in advance of the decision and offer a suitable alternative module. However, with such large cohorts, this is extremely unlikely. Any changes would follow the College's Student Transfer Policy. The risks of students being unable to complete their studies because of a module not running are low.

The most likely cause of discontinuation is through a course closure. This is likely to occur when a course reaches the end of its marketability due to a trend of falling recruitment or changes within the field of study. We believe this unlikely as our curriculum plan covers areas of high demand. If this were to happen, there would be ample opportunity to give applicants and students notice of the change. This

would coincide with a replacement by a new course within the same subject area as the closed course. We have a commitment to the teach-out of the curriculum to the students registered on the closed course.

Our plan for dealing with the closure of a course includes arrangements for communicating with applicants who accepted a place. Applicants who accepted a place on a course which is then closed, but have not commenced study, will be offered advice and support. This is to help them decide whether to transfer to a different course with us or to seek a suitable alternative at another provider. Where they choose another provider, we will work with that student to broker the transfer.

We would also work closely with students who are on a course closed to new applicants. This is to ensure they are supported in their studies so they can complete their qualification. In some cases, this support might include a transfer to another course. The risks to students being unable to complete their studies on courses closed to new applicants are low.

The risks we are no longer able to deliver material components of our courses is low. We have protections in place for the students affected. The College makes any material change in accordance with the College's Student Transfer Policy. A key requirement of the Student Transfer Policy is a requirement to consult the students affected by the change.

We regularly review our academic provision through our Annual Course Monitoring process. This is to maintain academic standards and to ensure our courses keep up to date. These reviews may result in changes to course provision. We have Course Modification procedures and agreed timescales to inform students of such changes.

The risk we decide to discontinue a course before students have completed it is very low as we would plan such a change to allow current students to complete their studies. We would also take steps to minimise the impact on their studies and fully consult with the students.

The risk we do not have the staff to teach our programmes is low. We successfully recruit qualified staff to teach our courses. We provide programmes to support and develop our staff. We work to ensure our teaching staff have, or study for, teaching qualifications. The College also has a bank of skilled and well-qualified sessional teachers to provide a further layer of cover if needed. Additionally, we have a number of employers who are happy to provide expert input to sessions.

Considering staffing requirements forms part of our processes for approving new courses and modules. There is an annual planning process where we consider teaching requirements based on courses to be offered and the number of students planned. This means we are able to identify and take action relating to staffing in advance of the new academic year.

1.5 Withdrawal of partnerships and/or approval by awarding bodies

This risk that an awarding body may withdraw its accreditation or validation is judged to be low. This is because the College is fully aware of and up to date with the requirements needed in order to be accredited by such bodies. We have processes in place to regularly review and renew such accreditation. We will work with our awarding organisations in order to mitigate against and reduce any risk of a particular course withdrawal. Our staff are highly experienced in the management of awarding bodies and college/ university partnerships.

If in the very unlikely event that an awarding body or college/ university partner withdraws its accreditation, the College would provide an option to 'Teach Out' to its current students and would work out the details with the partner/awarding body. Any prospective closure, in case of withdrawal, would be done systematically and through a phased process so that all affected students can complete their studies.

The Pearson Academic Management Review visits for the last three years have not required us to take action or respond to any recommendations.

1.6 IT failure

The risk that students would be unable to complete their course because of a failure of IT infrastructure is low. We have operational, tested, and robust IT business continuity arrangements in place. We run IT crisis simulation exercises once a year to ensure we can address risks to the continuity of our systems. Critical data and services are mirrored across our two campuses.

1.7 Risks of an academic nature

Risks of an academic nature are judged to be low. This is because of the tight internal controls on student performance and a hierarchy of quality challenges and support throughout the organisation, with monthly Quality and Performance Meetings in place. Self-assessment and quality improvement planning are embedded and working well across the College and data is readily accessible, timely, accurate and used well by all staff. Regular updates on student performance are provided to the Senior Leadership Team.

1.8 Risks arising from a compromised reputation

Risks of compromised reputation are judged to be low. SIRM knows that managing reputational risk begins with recognising that reputation is a matter of perception. Our overall reputation is a function of our reputation among our various stakeholders - students, employees, employers, regulators, partners, and the communities in which we operate. Our strong positive reputation among our various stakeholders results in a strong positive reputation for the company overall, which is tightly managed.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise.

If any of the risks we identify in this plan crystallise, we will act swiftly. As part of our response, we offer suitable advice and support to those affected. The nature of the advice and support will vary from risk to risk and depend on the identified impact. We will develop our response in consultation with the Students' Body. In doing so, we will provide as much notice as possible in the circumstances.

2.1 Pandemic

As with the previous pandemic, should another pandemic occur, we would closely monitor the advice from Government and others, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of students and staff. Our delivery continues to have an online element, and all indicators suggest teaching is good or better online and student progress remains strong.

2.2 Company ceases to operate/financial risk

SIRM continues to grow as a business. All business plan recruitment targets were met this academic year, and cash is in line with budget forecasts. Our balance sheet and reserves provide a stable financial base, and we plan to generate positive net cash flow from operations for the foreseeable future.

SIRM's owners (the Owners) agree that they are ultimately responsible for the obligations of SIRM to its students. Emergency funding is already in place through a pre-agreed overdraft facility. If this was not sufficient for SIRM to be able to meet its financial obligations, the Owners agree, guarantee, and undertake to provide emergency funding. This would be called upon when a lack of financial funds puts at risk SIRM's ability to continue to deliver to its students.

2.3 Closure of campus/ change of location

In case of temporary disruption due to sudden damage to the premises, SIRM has an option to rent external rooms at a nearby location. In unusual circumstances of losing the lease, SIRM will use the time before the premises are handed back to find other appropriate premises for the delivery of programmes. SIRM has no plans in future to close down its current site. The response to any associated problem would depend on the nature of the nature of the event. In all cases, special consideration would be given to the individual needs of the students.

2.4 Discontinuation of Course

Once a programme is established and the College has developed an understanding of the demand for places, business decisions linked to the delivery of these programmes each year reflect on historical patterns of recruitment. Should a decision be taken to cease to offer an established programme it will be based on the pattern of recruitment and will be made in good time to ensure that current students have the opportunity to complete their programmes and prospective students receive clear communication regarding the College's decision to close the programme, in line with our student protection plan.

We have a continuous staff development programme to ensure that we grow our expertise. We also have a strong track record of recruiting and retaining excellent staff. We operate a progression planning system to ensure that trained staff are available throughout the taught and management sectors of the College. In the event of staff shortages, we would look to utilise our bank of associate staff.

2.5 Withdrawal of partnerships and/or accreditation by awarding bodies

Our contracts with current awarding partners have a 'teach out' clause which would prevent any impact on enrolled students. An alternate course would be in place once that arrangement had ended. The information would be published on the College website and any students who had enquired or applied for the programme would be contacted with full details.

SIRM is fully aware of and is up to date with the requirements of its awarding bodies and institutions and has processes in place to review and update its systems regularly and to provide data to meet approval and partnership requirements. The College has an appropriate and current Quality Assurance policy and processes along with a designated lead for the quality assurance process. A Quality and Performance Management Group also monitors and advises on partnership and awarding body requirements and monitors the outcomes of centre visits and inspections by external bodies including Pearson, City and Guilds, TQUK and partner colleges. Feedback from external examiners and external quality assurance visits is also monitored by Programme Managers, the Academic Board and the Quality and Performance Management Group, with actions for enhancement included in the programme and whole College action plans.

The College will seek to work with a range of awarding organisations and partnerships in order to mitigate against and reduce any risk of a particular course withdrawal. The Principal and senior management team are experienced in managing partnerships with awarding bodies and academic partners.

Our stakeholders also carry out their due diligence checks linked to SIRM compliance and standards regularly including undertaking audits that ensure our processes and procedures are robust and meet awarding body and organisation requirements. Our Board robustly challenge and scrutinise all aspects of academic performance.

In the unlikely event that an awarding body or partner withdraws its accreditation, the College would take forward a 'Teach Out' option for its current students. Any prospective course closure, in case of withdrawal, would be done systematically and through a phased method so that all affected students

can complete their studies. We understand that the circumstances leading to the need to teach-out are exceptional and would be managed and delivered in a way to ensure student learning is not adversely affected.

2.6. IT failure

We have a fault-tolerant, cloud-based, IT Infrastructure. Contracts are in place to assure the continuity of our IT services.

In the case of needing to change IT supplier, SIRM would manage the structure and timing of such change in order to ensure minimum or no disruption to studies. We would also consider alternate means of delivery during the implementation by making the best use of alternate or unaffected systems. In the case of third-party involvement, we would work to minimise or manage disaster recovery systems jointly.

2.7. Risks of an Academic nature

Where updates or suggestions for amendments to content are made, for example, substitution of modules, changes to module contents or assessment activities, these will be discussed by the Academic Board which includes student representation, before being passed to the validating partner or awarding body. Meetings are also held with relevant student cohorts to gather their feedback. SIRM undertakes not to make any changes to programme content within 3 months of the start of the first academic year affected.

Changes to regulations and policies may be prompted by the validating partners and/or awarding bodies and organisations and will be considered by the Quality and Performance Management Group and Academic Board. Revised regulations shall only apply to students enrolling after implementation of agreed revisions unless changes are not deemed significant. As a result, different regulations may apply to different cohorts on a programme and will be documented in the Programme Handbook for each individual cohort.

New or revised policies shall apply to all students from the start of the academic term following approval by the College's Academic Board, with a proviso that for the remainder of the current academic year, no student may be treated disadvantageously in comparison with the previous policy.

The recruitment strategy accounts for all planned events (redundancies, restructuring, end of contracts) and unplanned events (unexpected death, illness etc). In either case, an impact assessment would be carried out immediately and the gap filled with the help of multiple methods as explained above.

SIRM keeps all key teaching and learning resources on its Moodle VLE in the form of course outlines, lesson plans, lecture notes and presentation slides, articles case studies etc. Such resources are safely kept online with only authorised access to staff and students, wherever applicable. The website and Moodle have a regular backup through the cloud.

2.8 Risks arising from a compromised reputation

The College understands the sensitivity of negative publicity and has put in place staff responsible for ensuring that marketing and business development activities are closely monitored, and that website documentation is accurate. All published information about SIRM provision is reviewed by the Academic Board and authorised by the SLT.

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 the continuation of study

The SIRM Refund and Compensation Policy can be found on the College's website.

The financial status of the College is such that it has cash reserves that are sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for students were we to identify any with an increased risk of non-continuation of study. The risk of not being able to preserve the continuation of the study is very low.

Students who have to incur additional travel costs will also receive compensation to cover additional costs as appropriate. In most cases, other local providers are available to offer students the opportunity to continue with their studies. Student bursaries are assessed and provided where there is an identified need.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

We will publicise our Student Protection Plan to current and future students via the SIRM website and within induction materials, given to students after enrolment in HE courses.

We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes to ensure that changes to courses do not have a detrimental impact on students. This will be provided through training within staff Induction and CPD events for those staff who teach on HE programmes. The Student Protection Plan along with all relevant policies such as the HE Information Approval Policy will be available on the staff intranet.

If key aspects or content of the Student Protection Plan require action or revision, the Principal will notify stakeholders in writing ten working days prior to any action being taken or revisions to the plan made. Once they have been notified, stakeholders will receive information on who they can contact. Where student provision is to be changed or discontinued, discussions would take place with the Student Governors and Class Representatives led by the Principal, and comprehensive student consultation will also be undertaken and led by the Principal.

We will review our student protection plan within the Academic Board, which is attended by the lead HE student representative.

Our students will be involved in our review through student voice meetings and directly through discussions with the Principal. We will inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course both by email and through discussion within their tutorials and with tutors.

We will endeavour to give students 30 days' notice when we need to make material changes to their course, though we would perceive this to be extremely low risk and will honour any arrangements made with enrolled students when possible. If we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan, we will use our extensive student support process to support students collectively and individually.

Through our Student Welfare services and with support from partnership HEIs, we will put in place arrangements to ensure that our students have access to independent advice if we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan.

We will review our student protection plan annually in consultation with the HE Student Forum and the staff T&L Committee, the plan will then be approved by the Academic Board. Students will be able to

gain additional advice and guidance from services at our partner colleges as appropriate, including in relation to any risks to the continuation of their programme of study. In terms of complaints, SIRM's Student Complaints Policy also includes guidance on access to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.