

Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (Collaborative Partner of the Middlesex University)

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Student protection plan for the period [2023-24]

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 Middlesex University (MU) validation of the joint research programme ends on 31 August 2024. Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) is currently in process of finding a new university partner so not only the current programme continues until all registered students and those in the OCMS stage are enabled to complete under the current contract with MU. OCMS' research programme with a new university partner will register all new students admitted in 2023-24. This plan will reflect that change when we have the new partner in place.

OCMS is a relatively small charity focussed on transforming mission through research and scholarship. It aims to achieve its mission through important collaborative partnership with MU towards MPhil/PhD degrees and its non-degree research and study through the Guided Research Programme (GRP) and International Mission Leadership Programmes (IML). In pursuing our mission, we strive to 'put students first' who are from diverse backgrounds and locations around the world.

- The risk that OCMS will no longer be able to deliver some or all of its programmes is low because we have:
 - A robust cash flow together with an adequate reserve to cover unforeseen circumstances. Our accounts are independently audited and an assessment of 'going concern' is made annually and reviewed by the auditors. The OCMS accounts can be scrutinised by the public on the Charity Commission website.
 - a proactive council/board which is committed to supporting the continuity of programmes
 - a strong team led by a Senior Management Team including, the Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer and Academic Dean
 - a motivated team of faculty (FT/PT) and staff representing diverse backgrounds and skills
 - a dispersed team of supervisors and hence not entirely reliant of inhouse FT/PT faculty resources and expertise
 - a coherent practice of supporting MU-OCMS students through a carefully crafted structure of stages (Pre-university/MPhil to PhD Stages)

- o an active student representation and requirements for student engagement in key programme matters such as the Board of Studies (BOS) and the Programme Governance Board (PGB)
- o a clear Complaints and Grievance Procedure that complies with and is approved by AQS/MU (see at:
- o a governance structure that meets good practice standards and ensures decision-making is evidence based and transparent
- The risk that the Office for Students would be minded to take actions that would affect our ability to award degrees is low. We operate within the regulatory frameworks prescribed to us by our collaborative partner, MU, for the degree programmes. As a member of the MU, MPhil/PhD degrees are currently awarded using their degree awarding powers and this institution is also bound by the same stringent regulation and quality standards. In the event that MU failed, while the degree programme will suffer, we would still be able to continue delivering the non-degree study and research as they do not require any external validation.
- The OCMS-MU programme is by research and the only taught component in this is the OCMS Programme for Research Induction (OPRI). The risk that the individual modules of OPRI do not run is negligible because it is facilitated by the integrated teams of academic staff and there is sufficient degree of preparedness in terms of skills and facilities in OCMS to deliver it annually synchronously/asynchronously and entirely remotely if the need arises under crises like Covid.
- The risk of changes to UK regulatory arrangements that affect overseas recruitment of scholars appears to be low given the commitment of MU to maintain and nurture both internal (UK based) and external partnerships.

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

- OCMS' contingency plan submitted to MU early this year (2020) showed its programme largely remained unaffected by Covid since all assessment events including the vivas continued via zoom. In exceptional cases where students in the early stages of data collection were affected by Covid, OCMS will continue to seek extensions for deserving candidates.
- As a lot of the programme is delivered part time with students living abroad, contingencies such as Covid could further limit their physical access to Oxford where they are located. This is mitigated as part of our priorities for this year which involve the continuous development and improvement of the existing programmes especially in view of Covid. This is to be achieved through:
 - o An improved Research Induction programme called OPRI to be offered synchronously and asynchronously. There is sufficient inbuilt flexibility in this to adapt to purely online delivery supported with an LMS and remote and digital access to resources and personnel
 - o Continuous analysis of assessment reports/examination reports in order to better support students (both on and off-line) through the entire course of a student's journey; this involves:
 - Tutorial with mentors

- Seminars/lectures on methodologies and skills
- TPI
- Thesis Writing Workshops
- A refreshed VLE/LMS fit for purpose for all our students
- A Digital Research Officer and a librarian with ability to help students access digital resources both on the UniHuB of MU and resources across the world, including in the Oxford libraries
 - o Provision of facilities for the online assessments of student starting with the admissions interviews, transfer, dean's review, to the practice viva
 - o Facility for the completion of all actions involved in the appointment's supervisors, approval of examiners, right to work and final MU examinations via zoom and/or other online platform
- In the unlikely event of some of our staff/faculty leaving the institution, OCMS will still be able to run the programme until key positions are filled since we rely mainly on external teams for supervisory support of research students. Our board and the SMT are flexible enough to address gaps in the staff team quickly and efficiently.
- The risk of changes to UK regulatory arrangements that affect overseas recruitment of scholars is mitigated by our collaborative partner, MU's standing as a public university. However, even the regulations restrict movements of students, its impact on students is likely not to be serious. This is because majority of OCMS scholars are already in employment and are therefore engaged in part time research mostly in their home countries; they are thus not in need of long-term student visas. Their primary sources are largely generated (in case of qualitative researches) in their own local contexts and so whilst there is a brief residency requirement as agreed jointly with MU, students are able to access resources locally or via the online MU and/or other platforms.
- We have system in place that allows us to mitigate the risks that may be posed by the reduction in the number of research students where this is intended to improve the quality of the programme and attain balance between the degree and non-degree programmes. This system includes:
 - o An Admissions committee and its policy at <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Admissions-Policy.pdf>
 - o The strategic intentions policy approved by the board of OCMS
 - o in case of student grievance and complaint concerning their educational experience, any matter regarding academic and/or administrative support or other services provided by OCMS etc., the policy that is easily accessible to all students at <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Grievance-and-Complaint-Procedure.pdf>
- The privacy and security of student data is important to OCMS; the details of this policy can be accessed at <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DATA-PROTECTION-POLICY-FOR-GENERAL-USERS.pdf>

- In the unlikely event of OCMS becoming unable to continue delivering the Research Degree Programme, the current supervisory teams can easily be maintained. If OCMS staff members are able to continue to advise their candidates, they could be appointed as Associate Faculty or supervisors. If keeping the current supervisory team is not possible, then it is understood that the School of Law will re-assign the candidates to a new supervisory team, after consultation with both the student and the team. Clearly well before such an unlikely scenario:
 - OCMS will cease to promote or process student enrolments; amend website details for their provision, and remove/refrain from further use of the MU logo.
 - OCMS will make available for MU: student details, Academic staff details, programme material details and access to any virtual learning resources needed for the sake continuity
 - OCMS will work with MU to support the transition process for students and staff as far as possible
 - all enrolled students, partner staff and placement providers, external examiner will be fully informed of the change
 - all assessment processes will continue to be managed virtually where possible and appropriate
- The Trustees of OCMS recognise their responsibility to identify, review and manage major risks the charity is exposed to. To this end, the trustees review the risks on an annual basis using a risk assessment tool. This is designed to assess and then mitigate any unacceptable risks in order for the charity to be in the best position to fulfil its vision and mission

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

OCMS and its financial state is regularly assessed alongside academic quality by competent staff and a proactive board. The annual statement of accounts is audited independently and available publicly on the Charities Commission website. This means the financial health of OCMS is transparent to all stakeholders.

OCMS is a small charity and has limited funds at its disposal and so refunds and compensations will not be possible. However, OCMS is committed to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to complete their studies. This commitment extends to students in the UK and to students working part time (majority). OCMS will inform MU promptly of any events that arise that require implementation of any of the provisions of this plan, and will promptly implement the provisions of the plan when events set out in the plan take place.

In the unlikely scenario when OCMS needs to cease functioning, OCMS will ensure that arrangements for existing students are maintained or the students are enabled to transfer to a suitable alternative programme at MU or elsewhere to complete their award. Such a transfer will happen over a specified period thus affording time to address all issues involving student registrations in a systematic and orderly manner. Such a transfer or closer (partial or full) will be incorporated in a plan of action to happen over 1-3 years so the transition is smoother. OCMS will make sure the student transitions to the awarding body or another suitable institution take place over a set period. OCMS will commit to this process even if it has to function for a period with a skeletal staff team.

For all scholars who register for the first year of OPRI before the University registration, the normal principle of a 14-day money back guarantee will be in place and a refund will be issued only if:

- o Students who intend to withdraw request it within the 14-day cooling off period;
- o Students requesting refund should not have accessed or started the course.
- o The 14-day cooling off period begins from the students pay the fees before the start of OPRI.
- o Once a student at this stage withdraws, their access to the programme will be removed and they will not be able to access any part of the course, take part in any tests.
- o After the 14-day period you will no longer be eligible and won't be able to receive a refund.

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

We will publicise our student protection plan in the following ways:

- On our website ocms.ac.uk as an externally facing document.
- We will make clear reference to the Student Protection Plan in our terms and conditions, shared with applicants prior to them accepting their offer of a place of study.
- We will ensure the Student Protection Plan is made part of the enrolment process.
- We will share this information with all of programme heads including the Admissions Tutor, Stage Leaders, Student Representative as part of their ongoing awareness.
- We will ensure this is clearly identifiable on the student facing webpages of our website.
- Student engagement is critical to the ongoing development of this plan. We will work with our Student representative and through the Board of Studies/Programme Governance Board (which has both externality and student representation built into them) to:

- o keep things updated and all concerned informed of changes or cancellations as soon as this decision is made
- o ensure that students are aware of the rights as stipulated in this plan,
- o ensure students have access to advice should they require support.