

## Student Protection Plan

Provider's name: Cliff College

Provider's UKPRN: 10007912

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### Student protection plan for the period 2024/25–2025/26

#### **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 College as a whole is unable to operate

Cliff College is exposed to the current financial fragility of the Higher Education sector. The factors of increased costs, reduced income, and limited cash reserves could combine to create a scenario in which the College is no longer financially viable as a whole. In the current uncertain climate, the likelihood of this risk is considered to be moderate, but is strongly mitigated by the College's relationship with the Methodist Church in Britain and the College's strategy and business plan, reducing the risk to low. If, at any point in the future, the College had no option other than to close, it would undertake this in a managed way, over a sufficient period of time to allow current students to complete their studies at Cliff or transfer to another institution to do so. The severity of impact on students if this situation transpired would be high.

##### The College loses its validation arrangement with the University of Manchester and is no longer able to offer the programmes on which students are registered

The likelihood of this risk is considered to be low; the severity of impact on students if it transpired would be high. The College has a collaborative agreement with the University of Manchester which was renewed for another five-year period in 2024, after a successful periodic and institutional review. The collaborative agreement provides a termination clause under which, if validation were removed, the University would allow the College to continue teaching either to the end of the academic year or to the completion of studies for all currently registered students. If this termination clause were ever to be enacted, the College would work with the University and with other alternative institutions to ensure that students were able to complete their studies at Cliff or transfer to another institution in order to do so.

##### The College does not recruit sufficient students and must close one or more of its validated programmes

The likelihood of this risk is considered to be very low; the severity of impact would be high for students with an offer of a place, and moderate for existing students. The College has recently redesigned its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and now has just a single programme at each level in order to maximise cohort numbers and student experience. The programme structure and the high proportion of part-time students at the College means that even should there be a low intake year, the small number of new students would be able to join the existing student body. As a small and specialist provider, the College is familiar with small classroom sizes and has a very low minimum viability number for individual units on the academic programmes. The decision to close one of its validated programmes would only result from consistent low recruitment, and this would have been identified and addressed early as part of each programme's annual review. The risk of repeated insufficient recruitment would particularly impact part-time students, whose studies extend over a longer period, and so are more exposed to the potential impact of dwindling numbers and programme closure.

### Staffing changes mean that required subjects/units are unable to be delivered

Due to the size of the provider, Cliff College is reliant upon a small number of faculty to teach its programmes. Unexpected faculty changes are therefore likely to have an impact on short-term provision, which would be addressed by immediately engaging the College's wider network of subject experts and practitioners. The College's review and redesign of its academic programmes in recent years has brought clarity to the number of subjects and disciplinary foci required to cover the College's curriculum, and this now shapes the College's faculty recruitment strategy. The College intends to deliver all required curriculum via its permanent faculty members (rather than sessional staff), meaning that any unexpected staff changes would lead to an immediate recruitment process. The risk that students would not be able to continue their studies as a result of staffing changes is therefore reduced from moderate to very low. Due to the College's management of faculty and development of a network of sessional staff, the impact of staffing changes on the student body would be moderate.

### The suspension or withdrawal of the College's UKVI student sponsor licence

The College complies with all UKVI requirements and tracks the engagement of its sponsored students to ensure they continue to meet the requirements of their visa. The risk of the suspension or removal of the College's licence for compliance is therefore low. In the event that the College's student sponsor licence were to be withdrawn, Cliff would work proactively with affected students and accepted applicants to minimise disruption and work to enable them to complete their studies either by studying with the College online, or by transferring them to an appropriate alternative institution which is able to sponsor their visa. The severity of impact of this for students requiring a visa would be high.

### Withdrawal of designation for Student Finance

The College is committed to adhering to the terms of its agreement regarding the financial support of students, and the risk of this as a standalone event is low. If, at any point, it is judged there is a breach, the College would commit to work with the Office for Students to put in place steps to resolve such a breach to avoid de-designation. In the exceptional event of the withdrawal of designation, the College would work with affected students to minimise disruption to their studies either through securing alternative financial support where possible, or by supporting them to transfer to another institution where they can continue to receive Student Finance. The severity of impact on students in receipt of Student Finance would be high.

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

In addition to mitigations mentioned above, Cliff College has put in place a number of specific measures to address the risks posed to the continuation of studies of its students.

### Statement of Support from the Methodist Church in Britain

Cliff College is one of two training hubs of the Methodist Church in Britain, and is the only higher education institution wholly owned and governed by the Church. The College is dependent upon a core annual funding grant from the Church to support its operations. The College has a statement of support from the Connexional Council of the Methodist Church in Britain, recognising the Council's ongoing responsibilities 'to maintain, administer and develop the work of Cliff College', including supporting the College financially.

### Development of strategy and business plan

Mindful of the changing nature of Higher Education in general, and theological education in particular, the College is refreshing its strategy and business plan to reflect emerging opportunities to increase revenue and efficiency across the whole of the College's operations to mitigate against financial uncertainty. The College's strategy also includes the managed sale of investment properties in order to establish appropriate cash reserves for the College to reduce reliance on day-to-day business for its liquidity.

## Memorandum of Understanding with Nazarene Theological College

The College has renewed a memorandum of understanding with Nazarene Theological College (NTC), whose programmes are also validated by the University of Manchester. In the event of programme or institutional closure, this MoU identifies a commitment from NTC to actively support Cliff students in transferring their studies to NTC, if they so choose. Close collaboration between Cliff College and NTC makes this MoU meaningful, because the two institutions share an understanding of the nature of our student bodies and there is sufficient overlap between our validated programmes to enable credit transfer.

### **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**

The Cliff College Refund and Compensation Policy is attached to this document. This policy sets out the approach taken by the College in the event that continuation of study is no longer possible. In the event that refunds and/or compensation are necessary, it ensures that students are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged due to diverse needs (such as mobility or educational need) if transferring to an alternative provider.

In the event that the closure of the College triggers this Student Protection Plan, the assets of the College (currently valued at circa £10m) are deemed to be sufficient to cover the financial implications of this refund and compensation policy. The relationship between the College and the Methodist Church in Britain would enable the liability of the refund and compensation policy to be met with cash pending the sale of the College's assets in the event of College closure.

The current strategic disposal of investment properties will establish cash reserves of over £1m which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation for our students in the event of programme withdrawal.

### **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

- by publishing it prominently on our website in the sections relating to all validated programmes;
- by sharing it with applicants as part of the admissions process; and
- by including it within the student-facing policies within the College information section of CliffX, the College's learning platform.

We will ensure that staff are aware of our Student Protection Plan by including a discussion of it annually at the Academic Board, and ensuring that reference to it is made in any proposed programme changes.

Our students have been represented in the production of this Student Protection Plan by the Student President. This plan is included in the documents provided as part of induction for student programme representatives, and it will be reviewed annually at the Board of Studies meeting in the second semester, and by the College's Governing Body, the Cliff Committee.

Material changes to our programmes may occur as part of the annual programme review process. In this case, changes will be communicated to students as part of their student programme representative feedback, following the annual programme review.

Should we need to make a material change to our programmes of sufficient magnitude to implement this Student Protection Plan, students would be notified at the earliest possible opportunity. This would be undertaken through direct emails, as well as notifications via student programme representatives and the Student President. Under such circumstances, our priority would be to ensure that our students are aware of the change, the potential impact on them, and the options available to them. In all cases,

we will give students at least 90 days' notice when we need to make material changes to their programme.

If we need to implement the measures in this Student Protection Plan, we will do the following to support students collectively and individually:

- provide financial, academic and pastoral advice and guidance through our student welfare and tutorial teams;
- work with other providers – and particularly with the University of Manchester and Nazarene Theological College – to identify appropriate programmes for students who wish to continue their studies by transfer;
- provide careers guidance to those students who wish to access it at this point;

liaise with the Students' Union at the University of Manchester to provide details of the situation so that students can receive access to relevant advice and guidance.