

HE Refund and Compensation Policy 2021-22

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1. BACKGROUND

Northampton College delivers a range of HNC/HNDs primarily as a high quality, low cost progression route for its Level 3 students and students who prefer smaller group sizes and closer tutor support. As the College does not offer accommodation almost all students are local and not relocating to the area. In case of reduced numbers or other circumstances threatening the viability of a course the College will make all attempts to allow students to complete their course at the College and continue to teach out all current enrolled students. As such the risk that a HE student will not be able to complete their programme at the College is very small.

2. SCOPE AND RATIONALE

This policy sets out the terms of compensation that the College will consider paying to HE students who are affected by the withdrawal of a programme of study by the College. In circumstances where the College ceases to deliver a HE programme of study, and students have already enrolled on that programme, the College will consider financial compensation for affected students where they are forced to withdraw from the College.

Northampton College has published a Student Protection Plan which sets out how continuation and quality of study will be preserved for registered and enrolled students if a risk to their continued study crystallises. The Student Protection Plan is designed to assure all students that the College has appropriate arrangements in place to protect continuation of study.

This policy covers all HE students of the College. It covers: students in receipt of a tuition fee loan from the Student Loans Company; students who pay their own tuition fees; and students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor. In all cases, tuition fees and other costs will only be refunded to the original fee-payer/sponsor (whether Student Loans Company, individual student or sponsor of a student).

The College considers refunds and compensation to be a remedy of last resort and is committed to using its best endeavours to ensure all students are able to continue and complete their studies. It is however important to explain how the College will refund or compensate students if the College is unable to preserve that continuity of study.

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis

3. PROGRAMME CLOSURE

In the event of programme closure, the College will treat communication and consultation with students registered on the programme as a priority. As a minimum, the College will:

- ensure all students on the programme receive the College award (for example, certificate or diploma) that recognises the stage they have reached;
- offer those students advice and support to help them decide whether or not to transfer to a different programme at the College or seek transfer to a suitable alternative provider to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- offer to pay reasonable travel costs to cover at least one visit per student to such an alternative provider;

4. REFUNDS

Refunds will be made where it is necessary to close a class due to insufficient numbers or where the attendance of learners is made impossible or inappropriate by some action of the college. Should this action prove necessary, the refund will be processed as part of standard procedures, there should be no need to contact the college to request this action.

In the event of a course closure, refunds will not be paid to those learners who have:

- Voluntarily left the course.
- Not attended for a period of four weeks prior to closure without previously agreeing a period of planned absence with their course tutor.

Refunds will not be made for any personalised kits or materials which are being retained by the learner or any registration fees which have been paid to another party by the college on behalf of the learner. The college will honour requests for a refund made in writing within 14 days of enrolment, where a student or their sponsor changes their mind and they withdraw from their programme of study.

Students ordinarily should not expect any fee refund if they are receiving adequate online learning and support.

Fees will not be refunded where course closure is temporary or due to circumstances beyond our control, including but not exclusive to fire, flood or other force majeure, adverse weather conditions, failure of public utilities or transport systems/networks, restrictions imposed by the government, terrorist attack or threat of, epidemic or pandemic disease, temporary staff absences or changes including those due to industrial action.

5. TRANSFERS

In the event of programme closure, causing a student to transfer to another HE course at another HE institution then the College will pay the difference in fees if the new course is charged at a higher fee rate.

6. COMPENSATION

Compensation will be provided when a recognisable loss is suffered by the student as a result of Northampton College not meeting its obligations to the student, such as non-continuation of study. In the event of programme closure, the College will treat communication and consultation with students registered on the programme as a priority.

This normally falls into two categories, either: (a) recompensing the student for wasted out-of-pocket expenses they have incurred, which were paid to someone other than Northampton College, such as travel costs, or (b) an amount to recompense for material disadvantage to the student arising from a failure of Northampton College to discharge its duties appropriately. Should a disruption to or non-continuation of study be unavoidable, we will seek to provide compensation in kind by offering a suitable alternative provision. Where this is not possible we will, where appropriate to the individual circumstances:

- ensure all students on the programme receive the award that recognises the stage they have reached;

- offer advice and support to help them decide if they should transfer to a different programme or transfer to a suitable alternative institution to complete the programme which is to be terminated;
- offer to pay reasonable travel costs to cover at least one visit per student to an alternative provider where non-continuation of study at Northampton College is confirmed;
- put in place a compensation plan relevant to the circumstances of the particular termination that includes provision for a refund of tuition fees and compensation in respect of additional costs reasonably incurred by students as a result of the termination, any change of programme and any relocation;
- provide any refunds due to the individual in line with the Refunds section above
- ensure that any such plans prepared will take into account relevant guidance published by the Office for Students, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and Universities UK good practice.

The college's priority will always be to ensure that students receive the education experience outlined in college course information (whether on-line or in hard copy format) and their learning agreement. Where as a result of an investigation through the Complaints Policy and Procedure it is concluded that this has not been the case appropriate financial or other compensation may be offered. The college is cognisant of OIA guidance on considering whether it is appropriate to recommend compensation payments to higher education students for distress and inconvenience and will refer to their guidance when developing individual compensation plans.

For a refund or compensation request in response to an issue or problem with your college course the Complaints Policy can be found on the College website and should be followed. In each case, you should explain in detail the issue/problem experienced and why you believe that you are entitled to a refund. If the issue/problem is substantiated you may receive a refund if this is deemed the appropriate resolution, subject to the authorisation of the Executive Director of Finance & Corporate Affairs. If the claim is not substantiated you can appeal referring back to the Complaints Policy.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF REFUND & COMPENSATION POLICY

The College is financially robust and maintains significant cash reserves. The College target is to achieve a current ratio in excess of 2.0 (excluding deferred capital grants) which is sufficient to provide funds for refunds and compensation for those students for whom we have identified an increased risk of non-continuation of study. For the reasons given above we anticipate both the number of students and the likelihood of non-continuation to be extremely low.

8. PAYMENTS

Refunds will normally only be made to the bank and account holder (or other financial institution) that originally paid the tuition fee and will not be paid in cash. This applies whether the student is in receipt of a tuition fee loan from the Student Loans Company, pays their own tuition fees or has their tuition fees paid by a sponsor.

9. EXTERNAL REFERENCES

This policy has been designed with consideration of the guidance published by:

- The Office for Students
- The Office of the Independent Adjudicator
- CMA - UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law

10. RELATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- HE Student Protection Plan
- HE Student Terms and Conditions
- Access and Participation Statement
- College Complaints Policy