

Consumer Protection Law – Self Assessment

Derby College has good regard for consumer protection law. It has set it stall on ensuring strong collabroaive relationships between students and the College so that students have clear and detailed information about what they can expect from the College and the College is clear about the expectations on students both in terms of Academic attainment and within the College generally.

The College's HE Academic Board has oversight of issues relating to Consumer Protection Law and it evidently takes this responsibility seriously. Thus, CMA Guidance has been used to good effect. For example, in 2015 all those engaged in delievering HE across the College (academic, support and leadership) underwent training on the impact of CMA legistaltion and how to inform students after detailed discussion and training took place at HE Academic Board. The training was developed after consultation with the AoC, regional HE Managers to ensure that it was accurate and detailed. All individuals at the College who are new to HE get coaching and mentoring and this CPD forms part of those processes. Furthermore, during this time members of the College Leadership Team met with all HEI partners during to confirm what contractual arrangements by course meant for complaint handling and ensured that this was communicated to programme leaders. After this the College revised its Complaints Policy and specific HE Proceedures. These are communicated to students through the VLE, course handbooks, at induction, and at any time through Student Services.

HE Academic Board agreed to engage legal support to ensure that application and offer information to students was robust. As a result some information regarding terms and conditions were reviewed along with the wording in some offer letters. Where possible the College adopts this approach to ensure that it uses model contracts with students and that terms and conditions are clearly spet out. Indeed, as a result of this activity there has been good engagement with the OIA since the FECs became subscribing institutions. When the College first joined it ensured that a range of managers and student services representatives undertook webinars relating to the impact of the scheme. Moreover, the College invited the OIA to meet with managers at the College to talk through their work and the Good Practice Framework. This has allowed key members of staff to keep up to speed with changes and updates to the scheme and allows for timely dissemination of the information.

To support this the College ensures that information is avalaible in a wide variety of formats, including in the:

- Prospectus, and;
- Online (increasingly through social media);
- Through the KIS (although the College finds that small group sizes surpresses the information avalaible on the KIS);
- Letters to students;
- Copies of policies and proceedures which are made avalaible in a variety of formats and on a range of paltforms including the VLE.

We have used CMA and OIA guidenace to produce standard course information sheets which are populated using online in-house marketing tools which managers sign-off. Once they have generated relevant information it is sent to partners to get a final sign-off. This is all detailed in the College's 'Management of HE Public Information Proceedure' which was established in January 2015 and is reviewed annually through HE Academic Baord. In the past 5 years there have only been three formal complaints to the College about its HE provision and all of these were resolved within 10 working days without any further referral.

At each stage of the cycle applicants and students have clear access to information. When doing some initial research information on course fees, times, content, assessment types and progression opportunities all of the information is available online, in our printed material and links are available through social media. All fee detail is available up front and fees are signed off

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during a robust annual Curriculum Business Planning Cycle which follows a detailed policy and procedure. Prior to this HE Academic Board agrees all fees up to three years in advance of a programme starting. Our website contains enquiry forms so any individual interested in a course can ask any question about it. This information is available at application stage and once students have made applications they receive a letter detailing the next stages of the process, with information about finance, and with further details of who they can contact with questions. As the College takes direct entrants and students from industry the College application form is held within the CRM system and for parity mirrors the UCAS application form so that the College is assured all applicants provide the same information and selection is equally rigorous. All applicants are interviewed. This is a robust two way process where all aspects of the course are discussed. After this an offer may be made. Applicants get details of the offer along with further financial information, and information about support. Any student that declares a disability is contacted by one of our disability officers. Applicants that then accept offers receive an enrolment pack with details of where and when to enrol and what to bring. At enrolment students get details of their induction programme.

The College seeks to allow students to apply to the College by the most accessible means. The website contains information about how to apply:

<https://www.derby-college.ac.uk/careers-courses/how-to-apply?highlight=WyJlbnJvbG1lbnQiXQ==>

The College reviews its HE web pages every year and each course shows details of how to apply. Moreover, the website provides full details of fees:

<https://www.derby-college.ac.uk/university-higher-education-undergraduate>

At the start of the Academic Year all students are written to regarding bursary and support information.

The College initially makes a pledge to offer a course to a student as soon as it starts to promote it. Minimum numbers are published to detail the point at which a course becomes viable to run. Students have access to course information and all students are invited to find out more about a course at an interview event. Once the student has applied they are interviewed and then made an offer. Within the guidance this is the point at which the College enters a contract with the student. At the point of offer information on support, fees, DSAs and other information is sent to students. As is established practice, it is not until students accept, take up an offer and enrol that there is any expectation students pay (or commit to pay) any fees. Once a student has enrolled, the enrolment form, and an additional form (known as an E30 which provides the additional ILR data for HE students the ESFA oblige us to capture), along with details of how funding arrangements will work, constitute the means for the College to begin the process of collecting tuition fees. If at the start of the course the student decides that they wish to transfer or cease their studies there are a range of guidance and refund structures in place. The College completed the statutory transfer or withdrawal information at this time.

Each year the College proactively gains feedback from students on how accurate, timely and relevant information has been to them. All new students are surveyed around their application, enrolment and induction to College and this is detailed in the HE Learner Voice Policy. Questions often reference the indicators in the current B2 Chapter of the UK Quality Code as well as Part C. There are additional questions to ensure students understand where to get copies of things like Academic Regulations. For the past 3 years there has been an improvement in student satisfaction with information they get on their rights and responsibilities and last year 98% of students said it was 'very good' or 'excellent'. Additionally, in every survey students have commented that information regarding enrolment is robust and timely. Feedback about the survey is given to curriculum teams. Training is also given to curriculum teams each year on changes to Academic Regulations through a briefing and sometimes from Link Tutors.

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The process for complaint handling is robust and has been peer reviewed. It is published on the College website, through the HE pages in the VLE and through course handbooks. Individuals are encouraged to resolve problems informally initially (through a rolling action log that teams have) before making the complaint formal.

Compliance with legislation is evaluated every half term through the self-evaluation process. Recently, there have been three areas of work which we are developing activity on. The first relates to potential changes that are coming to online enrolment processes at the College. Currently, two distance learning programmes may need to have slightly different procedures if this goes ahead. There are good levels of planning taking place with the Director of IT should this be the case. Secondly, while external sites such as UCAS have all our standard course information on, through student forums it has been recognised that they could have more detail. Thus in 18/19 a working group is going to undertake this work. Lastly, College's planning systems for fees and dates are aligned to FE processes rather than HE processes and this has caused some issues in the past with timely information for external sites such as the SFE portal. A new 3-year HE plan and additional training for curriculum managers is now in place to prevent any future delays.

In conclusion, the College is aware of its responsibilities in relation to Consumer Protection Law and provides excellent oversight to ensure students are treated fairly and have accurate information.

Strengths:

- There is good oversight of HE resulting in policies and procedures being reviewed annually to take into account any new guidance which has been issued.
- The College has proactively engaged in external advice to ensure processes, policies, terms and conditions are fair.
- The College is alive to good practice in this arena and works hard with students to improve processes.

Areas for Development:

- As we move to more online systems for enrolment, ensuring that the robust processes applied to physical enrolment also apply to distance learning enrolment
- More depth about the College could be provided on sites such as UCAS
- Ensuring the timelines needed to complete College systems match those of external bodies