

Self-assessment on guidance on consumer protection law

1. Approach to ensuring compliance

1.1 City of Portsmouth College (CoPC) undertakes, warrants, and represents that it will comply at all times with Consumer Protection Legislation and any requirements and guidance of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in relation to all provision of Higher Education courses to students.

1.2 The details included in this self-assessment have been fully referenced and checked against the authoritative document published by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in March 2015 entitled 'UK Higher Education providers – advice on consumer protection law'.

1.3 CoPC not only views consumer legislation as vital in protecting students, but also in maintaining confidence and the reputation of the College. Together with providing a supportive learning environment, reliance on the validity of published information is a crucial aspect of our relationship with students.

1.4 The College review its practices, policies, and regulations for dealing with students on a regular basis and make amendments as necessary to ensure full compliance. Through our meetings structure and internal mechanisms, as well as through staff training sessions, CoPC engages with all staff and curriculum areas to ensure that messages shared with the public are accurate and informative.

1.5 In its collaborative agreements and partnerships with awarding bodies, external institutions in the field of Higher Education, and other registered providers, City of Portsmouth College provides reasonably requested assistance in response to all issues related to Consumer Protection Legislation, including complaints raised by individual students, operational partners or the CMA.

1.6 Ultimate responsibility for all issues involving Consumer Protection Legislation and verifying that the College respects all aspects of consumer law lies with the Chief Operating Officer.

2. Providing information to students: research and application stage

2.1 CoPC provides prospective students with information on courses, course structure, course fees and assessment methods, through a range of materials, including programme specifications with advice also being available as required on finance, disability funding and support for special educational needs.

2.2 In the specific context of Higher Education courses provided under a subcontracted or franchised arrangement with the University of Portsmouth, the College makes sure that the University is afforded the opportunity to review and amend any student-facing documentation in advance of its publication to ensure consistent compliance with Consumer Protection Legislation by CoPC and the University.

2.3 Whilst the College does not currently list on UCAS, application information and processes are easily accessible and transparent. Application forms are available via the website and completed online.

2.4 In order for prospective students to be appropriately informed before making a decision regarding commencing a Higher Education course at CoPC, various facilities and procedures are in place:

- up front, clear, timely, accurate and comprehensive information is provided
- students have online access to full details of HE programmes on offer at the College, including course structure and relevant fees/costs
- HE programmes are regularly promoted at College events, such as Open Evenings, and through social media posts
- prospective students can also phone or come to the College in person in order to speak directly to relevant staff about HE provision
- information provided is always accurate, clear, unambiguous and easily accessible
- all details necessary for students to make informed decisions are included

2.5 The arrangements above ensure that material information is available at each stage of the process from investigation to application and from offer to enrolment. Details made available on an equal basis through these sources cover:

- course title and award
- entry requirements, tuition fees and student finance information
- modules included in the programme (core and elective)
- overall length of course
- delivery arrangements (number of days in college each week)
- assessment methods
- employer support and enrichment opportunities (including work placements)
- additional costs related to the course

2.6 The urban context of Higher Education provision at City of Portsmouth College is reflected in the relatively high proportion of students from disadvantaged groups, as focused on by OfS objectives. We recognise this fact and make sure that the images and comments in our publications deliberately reflect the diverse nature of our intake.

2.7 HE programmes at City of Portsmouth College attract applicants of all ages and with diverse motivations to study. Our provision is inclusive, increases access to higher-level qualifications and broadens the range of students partaking in Higher Education. In this very true sense, the College therefore makes a valuable contribution to widening participation.

2.8 Crucial to the process of supporting prospective applicants in making informed decisions is, however, the dissemination of clear information about all Higher Education courses, both at CoPC and throughout the country. It is important to foster an appreciation of the overall experience of university education amongst young people looking to progress and this ambition is facilitated through the College's involvement with schools across the area and CoPC 16-18 students in the Southern Universities Network, the local version of the nationally recognised scheme for raising aspirations to higher-level study.

2.9 As with applications for other College courses, CoPC provides a thorough and personalised service to HE applicants, inviting all of them to an interview, often with the course leader. Wherever possible, this face-to-face discussion takes place on site, so that applicants can view the CoPC campus and our HE facilities, as well as meeting key staff; however, if distance is an issue, a phone or videoconference interview can be offered as an alternative.

2.10 The interview complements the detailed information provided in publications by giving all applicants an in-depth insight into HE study at CoPC. It is also an opportunity to identify any learning support needs, explain more about bursary options and the tuition fee loan application process, as well as giving advice on local accommodation and answering specific questions about the course.

3. Providing information to students: offer and enrolment stage

3.1 Offers are made to applicants following a successful interview, with a full explanation of the terms and conditions relevant to Higher Education study at CoPC and the particular course in question. Attention is brought to all fundamental and important items, so that their significance is not overlooked.

3.2 Should it be anticipated that certain details of the course may be open to change after the offer is accepted, this would be made perfectly clear to students at the time of offer and their agreement sought. If changes become inevitable that had not previously been predicted, students holding an offer would be informed about this eventuality immediately and prior to enrolment.

3.3 When an offer of a Higher Education place is made, students have the opportunity to review before accepting. The terms strike a reasonable balance between meeting the College's responsibilities and upholding the rights of students.

3.4 Any aspect of the terms and conditions that could impact on specific groups of learners would be highlighted on an individual basis. All prospective students naturally also continue to have full access to programme information and personalised advice, whilst deciding whether to accept the offer from City of Portsmouth College or to pursue their interest in another provider.

3.5 Once having accepted the offer of a place on an Higher Education programme at CoPC, applicants retain the statutory right to alter their decision, but are integrated into College systems and receive notification of any summer activities relevant to their course, as well as the necessary pre-enrolment information, including suggested reading lists and an enrolment appointment for early September, when they will be formally contracted to the College and the specific Higher Education programme.

3.6 Deadlines for the payment of fees and all College policies concerning withdrawal are made clear to applicant students, including the processes set out in the CoPC HE Refund and Compensation Policy.

4. Conclusion

4.1 City of Portsmouth College is fully apprised of consumer protection law and having taken the appropriate advice from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Association of Colleges (AoC) and our awarding bodies, we are confident that our procedures for Higher Education programmes are fair to students and comply fully with this legislation.