



الجامعة العربية المفتوحة
Arab Open University

Arab Open University Student Protection Plan

Academic Year 2021-2022

AOU is committed to provide the best possible learning experience to its students throughout their study period and until graduation. It is keen to maintain a sustainable provision with the minimum possible disruption. As part of its normal functioning, AOU conducts risk assessments on regular basis in order to update its contingency plans and to ensure the continuity of its services to all stakeholders.

An Assessment of the Range of Risks to the Continuation of Study for our Students

In the following we provide an account on the range of risks that may disrupt the university business and the continuation of studies.

A) Risk of Institutional Failure:

AOU has been operating since 2002 across its established branches with the minimum interruption of studies. The risk of institutional failure or that the university will not be able to operate is low due to robust governance structures and sustained financial resources. Our financial performance is reasonably acceptable and the University has in place sound financial policies. It is subject to regular audit through the Board of Trustees Audit committee to ensure that the university have sound action plans and contingency measures to handle any financial issues. External audit cycles provide an extra level of assurance on the university financial status. Being a multi campus university provides an edge for the university where branches with low revenue is supported by bigger branches or from the university common pool. The University applies insurance policies to all its premises, assets, students and staff.

The University governance structure ensures efficient management of the overall provision and effective measures for risk control to ensure the institutional sustainability.

B) Risk of not being able to Offer Validated Programmes/Tracks:

The risk of not being able to deliver validated programmes is low due to sustained high academic quality and because these programmes are in high demand in most of our campuses and the numbers of students joining the programmes are sufficiently reasonable. A close follow up and oversight is maintained to ensure the smooth running of the programme as they are regularly monitored in accordance with higher education requirement in every AOU branch country in addition to OUVF requirements. Before offering any programme of study (undergraduate or post graduate) the university undertakes a detailed feasibility study to ensure the viability, sustainability, and success of the offered programme.

The risk of not being able to run a certain pathway or track of programme is also low. In such case, the impact will be localized and limited to a certain AOU Branch/Campus. Remedial actions will be taken as per the Local Ministry of Higher Education requirements and conditions.

C) The Risk of Closure of Study Centers:

The risk of closure of study centers is generally low, should a decision be taken to stop operations in a specific study centre, the university will assist students in relocating to another study centre

or to the main campus. However, the Arab Open University blended learning system provides a high degree of flexibility where students do not have to attend regularly to campus and 75% of their studies are managed through distant learning. The students can access the online learning management system, student information system and online support services from anywhere at their convenience.

D) The Risk of Closing an AOU Branch:

The risk of closing a local branch is low, the university undertakes regular performance reviews, scenario analysis and internal audits for each single AOU Branch /Campus. Such cases will be dealt with according to the university approved policy. As part of its normal functioning, the university governance follows up closely with AOU Branches/Campuses. AOU Branches conduct an annual SWOT analysis and work closely with the senior management at HQ and other stakeholders to respond to potential threats and take appropriate precautionary measures. The University governance maintains an effective oversight on AOU Branches and HQ offices through the process of AOU bi annual report which is also submitted to the Performance Monitoring Unit (PMU) of the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees audit and executive committees meets twice a year. This process ensures that challenges and risks are identified and dealt with at an earlier stage.

Each Branch is locally licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Therefore, they are also subject to scrutiny through the cyclic quality review visits for licensing and accreditation purposes every few years as per the local bylaws.

E) Changes in Academic Programmes/Modules:

Minor changes may take place to certain modules or courses during the course of the year as per stakeholders feedback. However, major modifications or changes in study plans of any academic programme of study only take place at the point of revalidation. The University has arrangements to ensure that continuing students are not disadvantaged in any way and that transitional study plans are in place.

F) Risk of not being able to Secure Accreditation or to Renew Local Licensing:

The risk of not being able to secure accreditation or to renew local licensing /approval is low. Throughout the years of its operation, AOU has managed to secure both international and local accreditation. The university works within a robust quality assurance framework which has been carved by QAA-UK bench marks and the Open University -UK standards. Accordingly, there is in place sound policies and procedures that organize and control the university processes and procedures. AOU is subject to close scrutiny from the OUVP and periodic reviews from the local accreditation authorities. Audits and reviews help the university to act and respond to any identified issues that may lead to loss of accreditation or suspension of an academic programme.

G) The Risk of Disruption of Student Studies:

The risk of disruption of student studies is low to moderate depending on the socio-political setting in each AOU campus. Political turmoil, civil unrest, environmental and Health conditions in addition to other force majeure circumstances that may locally affect a specific university campus. In such cases the university will implement its risk management policy and business continuity plan.

Mitigating Measure

It follows from the above that the risks are generally low in relation to the factors that could affect the continuation of studies such as campus closure, suspension of academic programme or loss of approval and licensing. However, we recognize that if risks are to be materialized, the impact will be undesirable and therefore the university has a well-developed approach to address the impacts. The Arab Open University will maintain close consultation with the Open University in all aspects that are related to the OU-validated programmes and the registered students of these programmes. Mitigation measures and detailed action plans will be developed jointly. The flexible provision and the well-established distant and online learning platforms provide a further way of mitigating the risks to the continuation of studies of a particular course or programme and during exceptional circumstances and at times of crises.

Implementation of the Plan

- In the unlikely event where the university needs to close one of its campuses or discontinue offering one of its academic programmes, AOU policy for Closing a Branch or Freezing / Suspending an Academic Programme will be fully implemented.
- The admission of new students to the relevant programme in all branches offering it at the beginning of the semester following the issuance of the freezing/discontinuation decree shall be suspended until further notice.
- Where possible and as a general rule, closing will be gradual to allow continuing students to complete studies at the University.
- If the above is not possible, the students will be supported to transfer to another programme of study or another AOU campus.
- Students registered in the OU validated Programmes will be dealt with in consultation with the Open University Validation and Partnership (OUVP).

Compensation & Refunds

In the unlikely event that an AOU Branch is no longer able to preserve continuation of study. The students in that specific branch will be compensated as per the Local Ministry of Higher Education relevant policies and directives. As a general rule, various AOU campuses will be subject to the local Ministries of Higher Education policies for refunds and compensation.

AOU allocates sufficient financial reserves to deal with any emergencies including students special cases. The University has in place insurance arrangements in each of its campuses. These include University Buildings, assets (including staff & students). AOU is expected to inform the local Ministries of Higher Education and the Open University on possible closure of a campus or a suspension of a study programme at least one year before implementation.

Activation of the Plan

As soon as the closure/suspension decision is taken, the University management shall officially undertake the task of officially announcing this closure and informing students of this decision through official information channels. The concerned authorities prepare leaflets and awareness workshops for enrolled students to explain and clarify what they are entitled to and what they should do in accordance with the approved closure plan in order to facilitate and accelerate the process of their graduation. The AOU would consult with the OU if a closure impacts on students registered on OU-validated awards.

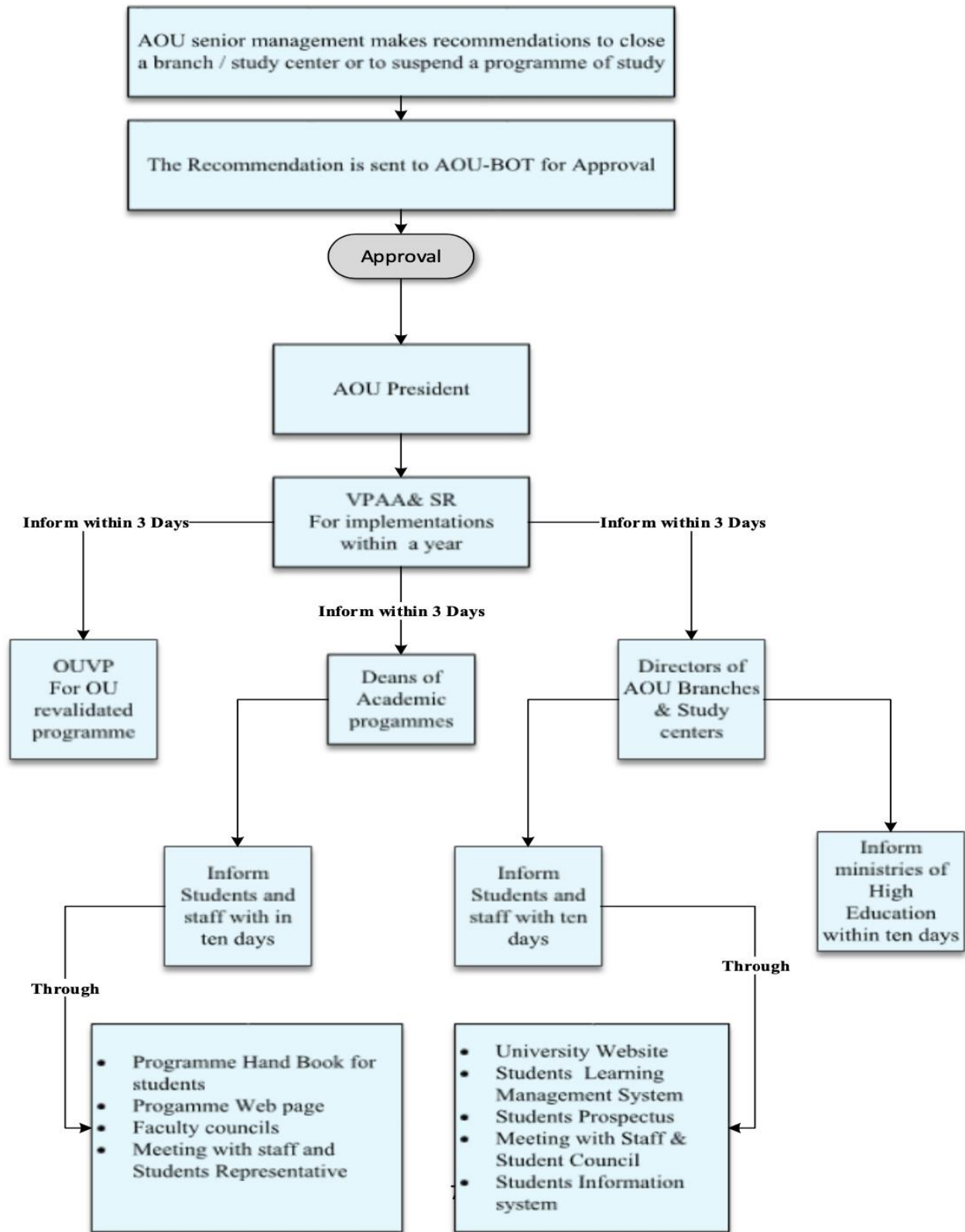
Communication of the Plan

- The Student Protection Plan will be published to our current and future students on the University main website, Learning Management System (LMS) and in the updated student prospectus. The staff will also be made aware of the SPP.
- The staff will also be informed of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes. This will take place during staff meetings as soon as it is approved with the programme's deanship.
- Material changes to any academic programme will be approved during programme revalidation. The students will be informed about the changes and the scheduled date for implementation. Usually changes will take place at the beginning of the following semester from revalidation and approval.
- The students will be informed through the University formal channels e.g. university website, LMS and programme handbook.

Review of the Plan

Upon the approval of our Student Protection plan by OUVF, AOU will be reviewing the plan annually at the beginning of every academic year, we will be keen to involve some representative of the student council in the review process.

Communication Flowchart



Acknowledgement

In preparation of the AOU student Protection Plan, the relevant policies and procedures of the University were observed. Literature on similar plans from Higher Education Providers and the Office for Students (OFS)- UK were reviewed.

AOU would like to thank Ms.Catherine Bland, Senior Quality Manager at OUVF for reviewing the plan and providing constructive comments.