



Student Protection Plan

1. Introduction

Montessori Centre International (MCI) is a small, specialist provider of Montessori qualifications within Further and Higher Education. Further Education programmes (Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy) are awarded by Crossfields Institute/Cache and Higher Education programmes (BA (Hons), FdA & Cert HE Montessori Early Childhood Practice) are awarded by London Metropolitan University (LMU). MCI is fully owned by the parent company Montessori St Nicholas (MSN) Charity.

MCI is committed to supporting our students to achieve their academic outcomes. The purpose of this Student Protection Plan (SPP) is to provide assurance to our current and prospective students that we have transparent, appropriate arrangements in place to protect the quality and continuation of their study if there were any material changes during their programme; for example a significant change to, or even closure of, one of our courses, or entire institutional closure. The type of event or change which might cause a risk, together with an explanation of the steps the College would take to protect students' continuation of study are set out below.

We are committed to ensuring students are able to complete their studies and will make all reasonable efforts to enable them to do so. This includes:

- a) We will contact students individually by email within 5 working days of the date any applicable change was decided upon or notified to the College.
- b) The email will include links to possible sources of independent advice as relevant to the situation.
- c) We will take account of the different modes of delivery and any differences arising from level of provision when considering the impact of the changes outlined in this plan;
- d) We will always take account of the diversity of our individual students and we will consider their individual needs and circumstances when affected by changes outlined in this plan.

2. Risk Assessment and Risk Management

Montessori Centre International carefully analyses and controls all areas of potential risk to the organisation. These risks are discussed regularly by Senior Management and the Executive team and reported to the MCI Board. The Executive team agree risk ratings for each potential area and allocate measures to mitigate that risk. These risks may be classified as:

- Governance and Management Risks;
- Operational Risks;
- Financial Risks;
- Environmental and External Risks; and
- Law and Regulation - Compliance - Risks.

Risk Management - is the systematic process by which Members of the Board:

- Focus on understanding the risks faced by MCI;
- Make decisions about how to respond to the risks we face; and
- Ensure that reasonable steps are taken to mitigate those risks that would prevent MCI from achieving its strategic objectives

3. Business Continuity

A Business Continuity Plan is in place for the Montessori Group in the event of extended service outages caused by factors beyond our control and to restore services to the widest extent possible in a minimum time frame. The plan identifies vulnerabilities and recommends necessary measures to prevent extended service outages. Detailed responses include the initial response to an incident and the longer-term implementation of measures for a return to operational business.

4. Significant Material Change

a. Changes to Programmes of Study

To ensure that our students have access to the best programmes of study, MCI regularly reviews its portfolio of courses and curriculum content to ensure that it remains current, up to date and meets the needs of employers. The College also actively monitors the impact of changing recruitment patterns and regulatory conditions (e.g. professional or statutory accreditation bodies) on our courses. This enables the College to identify opportunities for enhancement and development of programmes and of the wider portfolio.

For example, MCI needed to make changes to the Diploma to meet the national Early Years Educator requirements to allow our students count on the staff:child ratios in England. This had a positive effect on students giving them a nationally recognised qualification.

The College will continue to make changes to programmes during the course of a student's studies in order to improve the quality, enhance the content, meet the latest requirements of an accrediting body or in response to student feedback. The College will consult with and/or inform students of these changes as appropriate. Where unforeseen events arise that may impact a programme of study we will be open and transparent about the event, the likely impact and the changes we would need to make to protect students and enable them to continue their studies.

In normal circumstances, material changes will not be made to a programme after registration, but if this is necessary students will be informed at the earliest opportunity on the changes and wherever possible their views will be taken into account.

If a material change were made to a programme of study prior to registration the College will contact prospective students to provide information and guidance to help them to take an informed decision on their course of action. This will include their right to seek entry to another College programme for which they may be qualified or to withdraw their application and seek entry to another institution.

Where changes are such that existing students may not be able to complete their current programme, we will ensure in all cases that students may continue their studies at MCI for a “continuity period”, as a minimum of two terms, while solutions are explored. We will be supported in this plan by our parent company, Montessori St Nicholas Charity, who will take reasonable steps to ensure that the College is adequately resourced during any “continuity period”.

b. Resourcing and Staffing

The risk of not being able to deliver whole courses or modules due to staffing or resource issues is low. Staff have a range of skills, experience and expertise to ensure students receive a positive experience. MCI delivers a Trainer’s Workshop annually with the specific purpose of training Montessori teacher training specialists to provide a bank of future tutors and assessors and to mitigate the impact of any loss of specific skill sets that are dependent on only one member of staff. Staff development includes Teaching and Learning in Higher Education for all new members of staff alongside subject specialist professional updating.

Each area is also well resourced with specialist Montessori teaching materials and equipment. Investment in these areas is on-going, with opportunities to upgrade these each year through the budget planning process. MCI has invested in an annual subscription to an online educational database to ensure students have continued access to a wide range of educational resources.

c. Professional Placement and Apparatus Workshop

Professional Placement: All students studying on the Diploma (EYE), Foundation Degree and Cert HE programmes are required to complete a professional placement in a Montessori setting. An interactive map with over 400 approved professional placement settings is available on the website for prospective students. The viability of securing a professional placement is discussed with applicants and recorded during interview and where a student is located in an area with limited opportunities for placement, it is made a condition of the offer that the student provides written confirmation that an approved setting will host the student for professional placement.

MCI has a professional placement approval procedure to register Montessori settings that meet specified criteria to support students on professional placement. Approved settings are subject to quality assurance checks and those that fail to meet these criteria are removed from the list of approved settings.

Should a setting face closure or receive a ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating during the course of a student’s professional placement, the College will offer assistance to secure a new placement setting.

If a setting withdraws or terminates a placement because of failure to maintain professional standards or considers a student's knowledge and understanding is such as to be a health and safety risk to children, the College is under no obligation to provide a further placement.

Apparatus Workshop: Online students are required to complete an apparatus workshop to gain practical experience with the Montessori materials. Apparatus workshops are delivered at a range of locations across the UK and overseas. The viability of workshop attendance is discussed with applicants and preferences are recorded during interview. Comprehensive information is provided on the website. Once enrolled students complete a workshop preference registration form listing their first and second choice. Whilst every effort is made to provide a place at the preferred workshop the College is unable to guarantee every student a place at their first choice due to limitations on numbers attending. The workshop will be confirmed as soon as possible, but a minimum of six weeks before the workshop starts.

Each workshop has a minimum number of students required to make the workshop viable, so there is a possibility that the chosen workshop will not go ahead. If a decision is made to cancel a workshop, students will be informed as soon as possible and a minimum six weeks before the commencement of a workshop. Students will, as far as possible, be offered their second choice of workshop. Should this not be possible students will be supported in arrangements to attend an alternative workshop.

d. Course Closure & Course Suspension

As a specialist Montessori training organisation, MCI is committed to delivering high quality qualifications in Montessori early childhood practice. The risk of course suspension or course closure is low due to the international reputation of the College and its market position as a leading provider of Montessori qualifications. The parent company Montessori St Nicholas (MSN) Charity are legally committed to ensuring that sufficient financial and other resources are made available to MCI to enable all students on MCI courses to progress to completion of their programme of study.

Course Suspension: If the minimum number of students to enhance the student experience are not recruited for any course, applicants will be kept informed of the situation and any decision to suspend a course entry would be communicated to students a minimum of four weeks prior to the course start date.

Course Closure: In a situation where a strategic decision is made to discontinue a course, MCI is committed to teaching out on those courses and offers to new entrants will cease to be made. Prospective students will be contacted by the admissions team and offered entry to an alternative programme within MCI or offered advice on suitable alternatives elsewhere. The College will cease to publicise the course and cease to make any reference to the awarding organisation. The College will refer to the awarding organisation in documents and handbooks that are made available to continuing students, making it clear that the validation only applies to continuing students.

Programmes of study cannot be closed without the approval of the validating partner London Metropolitan University or Crossfields/Cache in order that the contractual implications between current and prospective students can be fully considered. The validating partner will continue to validate the validated course during the teach out period and recommendations

for award will continue to be made to continuing students who demonstrate the learning outcomes.

If a course is suspended or closed advice and support will be offered to students who have accepted a place on the programme to help them decide whether or not to apply for a different programme at the College or to seek a suitable alternative.

e. Loss of Office for Student (OfS) Registration Status for Student Support Purposes

Registration with the OfS allows UK/EU students to apply for tuition fee and maintenance loans. MCI has successfully maintained designation for student support since 2013 and is compliant with the initial conditions of registration, set by the OfS to feature on the Register of Higher Education Providers.

If MCI's registration with the OfS is ever removed, depending on the circumstances, the College will appeal the decision/make a new application for registration in order to comply with the requirements for Student Fee Support at that time. In any interim period, the College will automatically apply for "teach out designation", allowing eligible existing students to continue to access student tuition and maintenance loans, for the remainder of their studies with MCI. The College may also explore the alternate option of operating as a franchisee of a validating body or another provider, in order to restore access to student support. It is thus anticipated that de-designation, in itself, is unlikely to have a material effect upon current students eligible for student loans; Disability Support Allowance and / or Childcare Grants.

f. Institutional Closure

The risk of institutional failure for MCI is perceived to be low and is monitored through risk management protocols. Where the College has no option, other than to close, it may consider measures such as those below to protect the student experience:

- Where possible to close in a gradual way, over a period that would allow current, enrolled student to complete their studies at the College
- Where the above is not possible, in supporting student to transfer to appropriate programmes at other providers and (where appropriate financially) by compensating students where, because of disruption to their studies, they may suffer demonstrable, material financial loss.

In all instances of transfer, MCI will assist each affected Student individually through the facilitation of transfer onto other programmes of study at MCI or onwards to a similar institution for continuation of studies, if requested.

It is our belief that although the circumstances giving rise to the need for transfer such as course closure; 'teach-out'; alteration to course conditions or access to study arrangements, are rare, when they do occur, continuation of study will usually be realistic and achievable.

In such cases we would seek to protect continuation of study by offering a transfer on to a similar or replacement programme or by giving support to transfer to an alternative supplier (for example, providing certification of credit or a record of academic achievement). Where

this occurs, we will offer individual tutorials with Academic and/or Welfare staff as required to discuss personal implications of such a transfer.

Should a Student wish to decline any proposed transfer option; MCI will waive its right to the necessary notice period in order to facilitate a smooth and timely transfer to another provider. Any advance payments will be refunded as in accordance with our Refund and Compensation Policy.

For entrants mid-year or mid-course, through APL or similar, MCI provides a dedicated staff member to support the application and induction process and access to the full (relevant) year's virtual learning environment materials with Academic support as necessary to ensure Students are up-to-speed as soon as possible.

5. Refund and Compensation Arrangements

As part of its Terms and Conditions for students MCI operates a Refund and Compensation Policy which is available to prospective students on the website and to registered students in on the virtual learning environment.

In exceptional circumstances, requests for refunds that fall outside the Refund and Compensation Policy criteria are considered by the Head of Education and Head of Finance on a case-by-case basis in response to the circumstances presented. In the same vein, compensation will be considered on a case-by-case basis and awarded, without prejudice, in accordance with the Office of Independent Adjudicator's Remedies and Redress Leaflet (April 2018).

It is recognised that if the College is no longer able to preserve continuation of study for one or more students, affected students should receive a refund of fees and appropriate compensation in accordance with this policy. This has been identified as a low risk due to the factors described above.

MCI 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 at the College. 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.

Reference to the College no longer being able to preserve continuation of study means that the College has terminated or intends to terminate a programme of study. This can apply to an individual has been offered or accepted a place before being able to register as a student or to a student who is registered on a programme but has not completed their studies.

If the College is not able to preserve continuation of study, a refund and compensation plan will be put in place, relevant to the circumstances of the particular termination. This will include 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;

The refund and compensation plan will include appropriate provision for:

- maintenance costs;
- lost time;
- additional tuition costs;
- travel costs as a result of relocation of provision.

Relevant guidance published by the Office for Students and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education will be taken into account in preparing any such plans.

6. Consultation and Communication

The Student Protection Plan is reviewed annually alongside the terms and conditions and other important policies. Through our student representation structure, we will consult with students when making changes to the plan. Any changes will be approved by the Academic and MCI Boards which have student representatives as members.

The latest version of the plan will always be available on the website for the benefit of prospective students.

A summary of the plan and a link to the full document will be included in Course Handbooks issued to students at the start of their course and uploaded on Meeting Point which is updated regularly and available to students throughout their course.

The College will ensure that all students and staff are aware of the Student Protection Plan through its committees (namely Academic Board and Education Advisory Committee). We will ensure that staff are aware of the implications of our student protection plan when they propose course changes and the plan will be made available in the policies and procedures section of the online tutor area.

7. Complaints

If students wish to make a complaint about your experience under this plan, they should do so by following the MCI complaints policy.

Date of Revision	13 th January 2020
Author(s)	Director of Learning/ Director of Academic Quality
Approved by	Academic Board; MCI Board
Date of next review	July 2020