

Provider's name: St Hild College

Provider's UKPRN: 10004747

Legal address: The Mirfield Centre, Stocks Bank Road, Mirfield, West Yorkshire, WF14 0BW

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Student protection plan

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

We have identified the following risks to the College, and in each case specified the risk severity and how those risks are mitigated. Given the nature of St Hild and its provision, we do not think that these risks vary according to the specific characteristics of our students. In particular, there is no material difference in the risk whether the student is full time or part-time. In interpreting the risks, it is important to appreciate that St Hild is a founding member of the Yorkshire Theological Education Partnership (YTEP). It is YTEP that is validated by the University of Durham, and so St Hild students receive their validated awards through that partnership.

Risk	Description and risk severity
St Hild becomes financially insolvent and ceases to operate in its entirety	St Hild has been operating for five years delivering courses validated by the University of Durham throughout that period. We currently have free reserves in excess of 8 months operating costs, and for the last three years we have generated a significant surplus income. We have a growing student body, and with OfS registration we anticipate that our number of independent students will increase even further. All of this is part of our clear strategy for growth. We are therefore a financially viable, successful and profitable business. Even if we were to suffer a significant financial shock, we would have the reserves that would enable us to teach out the existing cohort of students. The risk of St Hild ceasing to operate entirely during the course of an academic year is therefore very low. The risk of St Hild needing to close in a planned way is clearly higher. However, in this situation we are committed to teaching out our existing students. In addition, we are members of the wider Yorkshire Theological Education Partnership (YTEP), and it is likely that some of our students could transfer into equivalent courses run by our partner institutions or other TEIs (Theological Education Institutions) if this were necessary. Overall, we consider this risk to be very low.
The Church of England terminates its contract with the University of Durham for Common Awards	The Church of England clearly has an ongoing requirement to train its priests. Therefore, even if it did terminate its contract with the University of Durham this would only be because it is establishing a new contract with another provider or seeking an extension of its own Degree Awarding Powers. In either case, all existing St Hild / Durham students will complete their studies with Durham under teach-out provisions, and any new students would be validated by the new degree awarding body. Therefore, in respect of impact on students or viability of St Hild, we consider this risk to be very low.
The Common Awards scheme of the University	As a constituent member of YTEP, St Hild is currently validated as part of the University's Common Awards scheme. That scheme is a major commitment of the University and currently involves 19

of Durham is discontinued	theological institutions across the UK. As such, it is very unlikely that the scheme as a whole would end prematurely. Moreover, the University is contracted to deliver Common Awards on repeated five-year contracts. This is currently up for renewal in 2027. Even if the University chose to stop its delivery of Common Awards, St Hild and / or YTEP would have the time to seek validation elsewhere and under the terms of our contract with Durham, all existing students would be taught out to completion. We consider this risk to be very low.
YTEP loses its validation with the University of Durham	While this scenario is possible it is unlikely due to the robust, ongoing review processes implemented by the University. YTEP (and therefore St Hild) is subject to both five yearly external periodic reviews and an annual self-assessment exercise. The most recent five-year review took place in 2024 and we are currently awaiting the outcome of that review. Nevertheless, earlier in 2024, Durham University resigned its validation contract with YTEP for a further three years. These processes are designed to identify early any problems with YTEP (or St Hild) provision and to put in place mechanisms to address those concerns. For this reason, an abrupt withdrawal of YTEP validation is extremely unlikely. Similarly, if a periodic review did signal that YTEP was unlikely to have its Common Awards contract renewed then, once again, all current students would be taught out under the existing contract, and YTEP and / or St Hild would have time to find an alternative validation partner. We consider this risk to be low
St Hild loses its status as a member of YTEP	Currently, St Hild is by far the largest member of YTEP, representing 75% of the whole student body across the four centres. As such, St Hild is extremely unlikely to lose its position within YTEP. Moreover, even if it did, St Hild is now sufficiently large that it could probably obtain validation as a TEI under Common Awards in its own right. We consider this risk to be very low
A particular centre no longer operates	Currently St Hild operates through four centres (Mirfield, Sheffield, Online and Lincoln). Sheffield and Mirfield centres are leased by St Hild on three year rolling contracts and Lincoln is provided by Lincoln diocese as part of our agreement with them to train their licensed ministers. All of the locations are long established, ecclesial buildings and therefore the risk of the building no longer being made available to St Hild is extremely low. At the same time, most of our current students are Anglican ordinands recommended for training at these centres by local Bishops. We have established effective working relationships with these dioceses and there is no reason to think that they are likely to change their strategy for theological education in their region. For this reason, we continue to expect a steady and sufficient stream of Anglican ordinands to these centres which makes them viable both for ordinands and for other kinds of students. The digital centre is receiving an increasing number of students. Nevertheless, for obvious reasons it has much lower operating costs and therefore can sustain a much smaller cohort, if required, for much longer. In addition, we have only just been approved for a fully digital award and our digital strategy is to grow this provision over the

	coming years. With the appointment of new staff with a specific remit in this area, we anticipate that this strategy will be successful. We consider this risk to be low
A particular module or programme of study no longer operates	We recognise that with respect to individual modules there is a real risk that they may not be able to run in any particular year. This is unlikely to occur due to lack of staff (see below). However, it is possible that so few students choose a module that it is neither financially nor pedagogically helpful for that module to run. We consider this risk to be moderate. In respect of whole awards, it is extremely unlikely that we would have insufficient numbers for a particular award. St Hild currently delivers a single subject in theology, ministry and mission. The only distinction is whether that subject is studied at level 4, 5, 6, or 7. If a particular award was at risk then the whole institution would be. For this reason, we do not face the challenge that other institutions face of running programmes that may not be viable. We consider this risk to be very low.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

Risk	Mitigation measures
A particular module is no longer viable	In this circumstance, we would seek to postpone that module for a year with a view to running it the following year when two years' worth of students may make the module viable. Indeed, there are a number of modules that run on a biennial basis precisely for this reason. At the same time, and with the permission of Durham, we also intentionally combine some academic years in some modules (with differentiation being delivered in some class activities and in assessments). This further enables us to run modules that otherwise might not be viable. If despite biennial provision and combined academic years, a module remains non-viable due to low student numbers, the College will inform the students at least one month before the start of the unit. We will then work with students to identify alternative module choices that will enable them to complete their awards and still achieve the ILOs for their programme. One of the options that students may choose in these circumstances is an independent learning project in which the student still studies the same area that would have been addressed by the module, but does so under the direct supervision of an individual tutor. This route has often proved popular with students even when a module has been viable as it affords them greater flexibility in regard to the precise area of study. An alternative to this is that students simply swap the years in which they study particular modules so that the module they wished to study in one year is replaced by one they had planned to study the following year. This is possible because under Durham regulations it is possible

	to take a certain number of credits from the level above the level in which the student is currently studying. Finally, St Hild operates a team-teaching approach. Our academic staff are highly adaptable and no individual module is entirely dependent upon just one member of staff. If we were to lose staff that had responsibility for a particular area, it would be a straightforward matter to replace them either with an existing staff member or a contracted tutor as required. Given all this, there is no risk that students will be unable to achieve their chosen award for this reason.
A particular centre no longer operates	If a centre closes because the particular building in which we are operating is forced to close or because our contract with the owners is terminated then St Hild will make every effort to find an alternative building in that location where provision can continue. As already noted, we have rolling three-year contracts with our centres and so we would have ample time to find an alternative venue in the vicinity should our contract be terminated. Our business interruption insurance would also cover us for any additional rent that might be incurred should the lack of building access be due to unforeseen circumstances such as a flood. We have excellent relationships with the relevant dioceses and churches in the regions and therefore we are likely to be able to find an alternative ecclesial building to accommodate us should either of these eventualities occur. We consider it very unlikely that a centre would close due to unviable student numbers. Nevertheless, if we realised that this was likely then in the first place we would stop recruiting to that centre. We would seek, as far as is reasonably possible, to teach out the current cohort in their current centre. If that were not possible then we would offer the students the opportunity of completing their studies either via our digital campus or via our other centre. If the only option was teaching in our other centre then we would reimburse the students for additional receipted travel costs to that location as per our refund and compensation policy below.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

Our refund and compensation policy is available as a separate document, and is reproduced in full below:

St Hild Refund and Compensation Policy

This policy is designed to address the unlikely (and unwelcome) scenario that St Hild is unable to continue or complete the delivery and assessment of a programme of study for any individual student. We recognise that it is possible that there may be circumstances in which a pathway, programme or centre may be required to close. In such circumstances, we have in place a student protection plan in which alternative avenues of study are available to students both within St Hild and in other YTEP

partners. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when such alternative study arrangements are inappropriate or not wanted by the student. This policy, therefore, sets out the terms under which refunds and compensation will be provided. This policy is replicated in our Student Protection Plan.

Scope

This policy only applies to students on higher education courses validated by the University of Durham. It is only applicable to students who have started their studies and, in particular, who have begun to pay fees or have had fees paid for them. If a student has paid some or all of their fees, but has not yet started studying they will receive a full refund of all monies paid if their programme is cancelled.

Tuition fees

In the unlikely event that during the course of an academic year a programme is closed or St Hild ceases to operate entirely and where no arrangements to teach out are in place, St Hild will arrange to transfer funds relating to fee income to the institution to which the student transfers to complete their study. This will take place on a pro-rata basis according to the balance of the academic year that remains. If the student cannot or does not wish to transfer then St Hild will reimburse the student or their sponsor for the for the tuition fees paid for that academic year.

If it is a centre or pathway that is closed then the student will be offered the opportunity of completing their studies at another centre (including digital) or on another pathway. If they choose to reject these options then no reimbursement will be provided.

Changes in location

If a programme, pathway or centre is closed and the student incurs additional costs (eg travel or childcare) by virtue of their transfer to a new centre then the College will reimburse the student for receipted costs up to a maximum of £100 per week for a maximum of two years (undergraduate) or three years (postgraduate). The amount of reimbursement will be reduced for part-time students.

Student bursaries

Where the College has committed to offer a student a bursary for the duration of their studies, the College will commit to continue this support by paying this amount towards the costs of a parallel programme at another institution.

Reserves

Funds to pay any compensation will be provided from the College's reserves

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

We will publicise our student protection plan in the following places:

- On our website in the sections that deal with applications
- On our Moodle learning environment

We will reference our student protection plan in our application form.

We will email all existing students to inform them of the plan, and where it can be located.

We will ensure that all staff are made aware of the implications of the plan by discussing it at our team meetings and by circulating it to all relevant staff.

Existing student representatives were involved in the development of this plan through their contributions at the Formation Committee meeting held on 22nd July 2022. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis at Formation Committee, thereby providing student representatives an opportunity to comment on the adequacy of the plan each year.

If any provision in this plan requires activation then the relevant Lead Student Representatives will be informed as well as any individual students involved at least one month (change of module) and one term (change of centre) before the change occurs. At the same time, the relevant Vice Principals will offer face to face meetings with any students involved to explain the consequences of any change, and how we as a College can mitigate them and support students in navigating any changes.

If involved students involved and/or student representatives wish to complain about the implementation of the plan then, in the first instance, they can do so by writing to the respective Vice Principal for Mirfield, Sheffield or Online.

If the student is not satisfied with the response they receive then the student may enact the various stages of the College's complaints policy. If the student remains dissatisfied then they may raise the issue with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>