



Student Protection Plan

November 2020

AOU Student Protection Plan
Student Protection Plan for the year 2020/2021

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Student protection plan for the period [2020/2021]

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.

1.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 centres:

The risk of closure of study centres 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 OUPV 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.

2. Mitigating Measures:

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. (Appendix 1-b).

- 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:

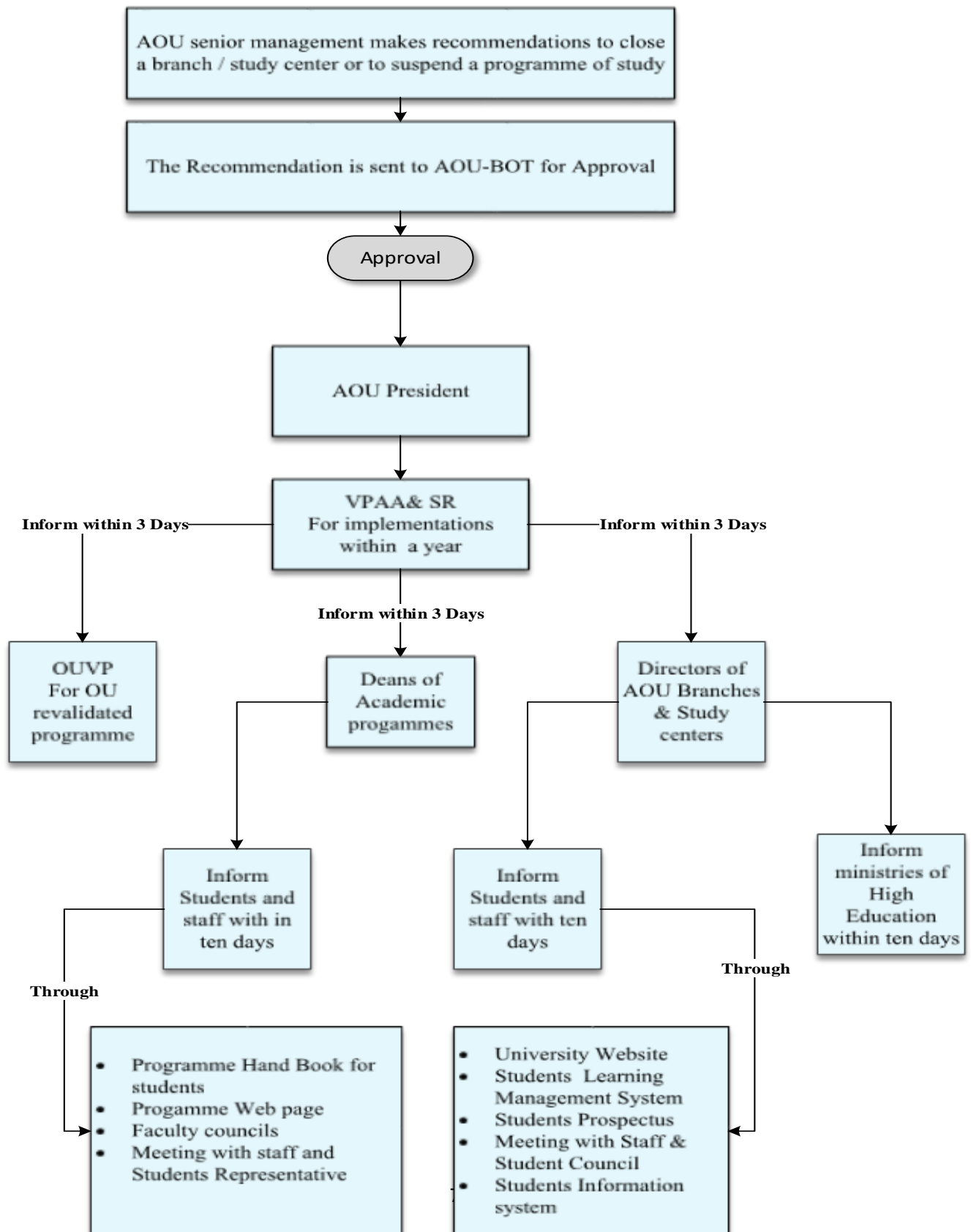
- The Student Protection Plan will be published to our current and future students on the University main website, Learning Management System (LMS) and in the updated student prospectus. The staff will also be made aware of the SPP.

- 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 OUVP for reviewing the plan and providing constructive comments.

Appendices

Appendix I.A

AOU Risk Assessment Matrix (AOURAM)

Type	Risks Likelihood		Impact/Severity of consequences				
			1 Very low	2 low	3 Moderate	4 High	5 Very high
	Likelihood	Certain (5)	5	10	15	20	25
		Likely (4)	4	8	12	16	20
		Possible (3)	3	6	9	12	18
		Unlikely (2)	2	4	6	8	10
		Rare (1)	1	2	3	4	5

AOU Control Risks Matrix

Type	Inherent Risks Likelihood		Impact/Severity of consequences				
			1 Very low	2 low	3 Moderate	4 High	5 Very high
	Likelihood	Certain (5)	5	10	15	20	25
		Likely (4)	4	8	12	16	20
		Possible (3)	3	6	9	12	18
		Unlikely (2)	2	4	6	8	10
		Rare (1)	1	2	3	4	5

Inherent Risk:

Refers to the possibility of adverse effects coming out of a situation or at work within a particular environment before any action has taken place to change or control the environment.

Control Risk:

Refers to the possibility of adverse effects coming from flaws in the hierarchy of controls.

Hierarchy of Controls:

- Directive
- Preventive

- Detective
- Corrective

Risks are evaluated according to the likelihood of occurrence and severity of consequences.

Likelihood of occurrence:

- Almost certain: expected to occur
- Likely: could happen sometime
- Moderate: could happen but not likely
- Unlikely: could happen but rare
- Rare: could happen, but probably never will

Severity of Occurrence:

- 1.very low (Insignificant)
- 2.low(Minor)
- 3.Moderate(Tolerable)
- 4.High(Major)
- 4.Very high (catastrophic)

Risk Range and Expected Impact

Impact	Overall Inherent Risk Rating Range
Very High	20-25
High	15-18
Moderate	10-12
Low	6-9
Very Low	1-5

Appendix I.B

The Policy of Closing a Branch or Freezing / Suspending an Academic Programme at the Arab Open University.

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Introduction

The Arab Open University (AOU) is committed to providing academic programmes of the highest quality to its students and to securing human and financial resources necessary to integrate the learning and teaching processes from the admission of students until the completion of the graduation requirements stipulated in the university regulations and bylaws. It also seeks to enhance the confidence of the local community in the countries hosting University branches. The AOU is also keen to secure everything necessary to maintain its continuity.

In case the University faces challenges related to the continuity of one of its branches, or to any of its academic programmes, because of factors beyond its will that hamper its continuation to function, even in the minimum acceptable drive to achieve its mission and objectives without any negative effects on the university as a whole, the terms and conditions of this policy shall be rendered active. They attempt to organize the freezing or suspension of any of its programmes or the closure of one of its branches or its study centres.

This document is divided into two parts:

- The first part includes the steps and procedures for freezing / suspending an academic programme offered by the university.
- The second part contains steps and procedures for closing a branch of the Arab Open University.

Article (1): Nomenclature

This document is called **“The Policy of Closing a Branch or Freezing / Suspending an Academic Programme at the Arab Open University.”**

Article (2): Definitions

The following words and terms wherever mentioned in this Bylaw shall have the following meanings:

University	Arab Open University
President	University's president
Board	University Board of Trustees
Headquarters	The headquarters of the university
Branch	University in the country of the branch
Rector	Rector of the branch country
Deanship	Deanship of specific academic programmes
programme	Accredited academic specialization for a degree
suspend a programme	Suspending the admission of new students for a specified period of time in that program
Stopping a programme	Admission of new students to that programme is closed permanently
Closing a branch	Permanent closure of admission of new students to this branch

Part I: The policy of freezing / suspending an academic programme offered by the university

Article (3): Freezing an Academic Programme

A. When an order to freeze an academic programme is issued, the following measures shall be taken:

1. The concerned Deanship shall be responsible for preparing the plan for freezing the academic programme based on the reports documented by the University's higher administration accompanied by the approval of the Board of Trustees, which clarifies the existence of a real problem facing the continuity of the said programme at the current time.
2. It is the responsibility of Headquarters to inform the branches offering the Programme of the decision to freeze it formally and explain the reasons which led to this action. HQ must also

circulate the plan prepared with its explanation, stressing the necessity of adhering to it as soon as it is endorsed by the concerned parties.

3. 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 decree shall be suspended until further notice.

4. The branch management must inform all students enrolled in the frozen programme formally, and in full transparency. They ought to be informed of the University's plan to freeze it, as well as the freezing period, if possible, through all available means of communication.

5. Awareness bulletins and information workshops for students enrolled in the relevant programme shall be issued/held to explain and clarify what they are entitled to and how the suspension plan shall facilitate and accelerate the process of their graduation from that programme.

6. The University shall be keen to provide possible alternatives, on the academic level, for students enrolled in the concerned programme by facilitating their transfer to another programme if they so desire in accordance with the admission requirements of the new programme.

7. The AOU shall be committed to abide by the conditions of the Ministry of Higher Education in each hosting country where the relevant programme is offered, especially in matters related to how such cases are dealt with in accordance with active rules and regulations which organize similar processes.

8. The University and the concerned Deanship shall ensure the continuity of offering the courses of the frozen programme, and take all necessary measures to complete the educational process until the completion of the academic plan and the graduation of students in accordance with the regulations in force. These must not be inconsistent with the time limits indicated in the approved freezing plan.

B. If the program in question is derived from the Open University in the United Kingdom, and in addition to what is mentioned in item A above, the University is committed to dealing with students enrolled in that programme according to the agreement concluded with the OU in this connection.

C. Students enrolled in a suspended programme may not sue the University at the moral or material level as long as the University is committed to offer the courses

of the approved plan and ensure that students graduate accordingly

D. In the event that it is decided to suspend a program in a specific branch, the above provisions of item (A) of this Article shall apply in coordination with the concerned branch's management.

Article (4): Suspending an Academic Programme

A. When a decision to suspend an academic programme is issued, the following measures shall be taken:

1. The Deanship shall be responsible for preparing the plan for the suspension of the academic programme concerned based on reports issued by the AOU higher management coupled by the approval of the Board of Trustees, which clarifies the existence of a real problem facing the continuity of the programme.

2. It is the responsibility of AOU Headquarters to inform the branches offering the programme of the decision to suspend it formally and explain the reasons.

This should be accompanied by the circulation of the suspension plan prepared together with its explanation and the necessity of adhering to it as soon as it is approved by the concerned parties.

3. The admission of new students to the relevant programme in all branches offering it shall be suspended at the beginning of the semester immediately following the suspension decision.

4. The branch management must inform all students enrolled in the discontinued program formally, transparently of its intention to suspend the programme via all available means of communication.

5. The concerned branches must issue bulletins and hold workshops for students enrolled in the programme to explain and clarify what they are entitled to in line with the approved suspension plan which seeks to facilitate and expedite their graduation from that programme.

6. The University must show keenness to provide possible alternatives at the academic level for students enrolled in the programme who are willing to transfer to another one in accordance with the admission requirements of the new programme.

7. The AOU shall abide by the regulations and bylaws adopted by the Ministries of Higher Education in each country where the programme is offered concerning programme suspension rules.

B. If the programme in question is derived from the Open University UK, and in addition to everything mentioned in article "A" above, the University shall be committed to dealing with students enrolled in the concerned programme in accordance with its agreement with the Open University in this connection.

C. Students enrolled in a discontinued programme may not sue the University at the moral or material level so long as the University is committed to offering the courses and ensuring that students graduate accordingly (needs legal review)

D. The above provisions of item (a) of this Article shall also apply to study centres if the closed branch includes such centres.

Part II: The policy of closing a branch of the university

Article (5): The closure of an AOU branch

A. Upon issuance of a decision to close an AOU branch, the following measures shall be taken:

1. The Headquarters and the management of the branch concerned shall prepare the closure plan for the branch based on reports, documented by the Higher Management and approved by the Board of Trustees, which show the existence of a real problem facing the continuity of the branch.

2. Upon issuance of the closure decision, the admission of new students to the relevant branch shall be suspended at the beginning of the following semester. The tasks of the concerned branch shall be restricted to completing the learning and teaching of students enrolled in the relevant branch in accordance with the approved plan.

3. As soon as the closure decision is taken, the branch management shall officially undertake the task of officially announcing this closure and informing all students of this decision with transparency on all information channels. It also adopts measures aiming at facilitating students' graduation.

4. The concerned branch prepares leaflets and awareness workshops for students enrolled in it 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.

5. The University shall be keen to provide possible alternatives at the academic level for students enrolled in the branch who wish to transfer to other branches, if they so desire.

6. The University shall be committed to the regulations and policies of the Ministries of Higher Education in the state hosting the branch concerned, especially in dealing with similar cases.

B. If the branch concerned is accredited by the Open University in the UK and the programmes offered are derived from it, and in addition to everything mentioned in item **(A)** of this article, the University shall be committed to dealing with the students enrolled in these programmes.

C. Students enrolled in a branch under closure may not sue the University at the moral or material level as long as the University is committed to offering its courses in line with the approved plan and to ensuring that students graduate accordingly.

D. If the branch has educational centers and decides to close any of them, the paragraphs of this article shall apply, and the center is treated as a branch.

Article (6): General Provisions

A. The University President, Vice-Presidents, Branch Rectors, Deans of Academic Programmes and Admission and Registration Departments shall be responsible for the enforcement of provisions under these regulations.

B. The University Council shall decide on cases not stipulated in these regulations.