

Student Protection Plan

Approving committee/post:	Academic Board
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Key contact(s):	Stuart Bell; Yvonne Corcoran
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Provider's name: The Institute of Cancer Research

Provider's UKPRN: 10003324

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The ICR is required by the Office for Students to maintain a Student Protection Plan outlining how we protect our students' interests in the event that a risk to the continuation of studies should arise. It provides an assessment of these risks and sets out what measures we have in place to mitigate those risks which are more likely to materialise. It links to our Refunds and Compensation policy which may be needed where continuation of studies is not possible. It also sets out how we communicate with students about the plan itself and in cases where the plan needs to be implemented.

1. Risk Assessment

The Institute of Cancer Research, London (ICR) is a world-leading higher education institution and a Member Institution of the University of London. We specialise in research and postgraduate education in cancer and have a strategic goal to educate and train the next generation of cancer researchers and clinicians.

The ICR has a long track record in offering MPhil/PhD and MD opportunities across the whole range of our research. We also deliver an established and well-regarded taught postgraduate degree course that provides specialist clinicians with a good understanding of cancer science and research.

Our expertise and success in training and education is confirmed by several independent judgements:

- In REF 2021 – the Government’s evaluation of university research quality – the ICR was ranked second among all higher education providers in the UK that submitted to at least two units of assessment. The ICR was also ranked as the leading higher education provider in the UK for its research in biological sciences in the weighted assessment of research quality, impact and environment.
- In 2022, the Office for Students confirmed the ICR’s status as a World-Leading Specialist Provider. The independent review panel noted the ICR’s longstanding provision of teaching for more than a century, and very significant and vital focus on improving outcomes for patients. The panel commented that the world-leading qualities of the ICR’s teaching staff were evident against all the review criteria.
- Ratings of student satisfaction, from the Advance HE PRES and PTES surveys, are amongst the highest in the UK. In 2025, overall satisfaction amongst the ICR’s postgraduate taught students was 94%, and 85% for research students.

The risk that the ICR would voluntarily cease any of its teaching activities is therefore very low.

The risk that the ICR is unable to continue as a higher education provider (HEP) is also currently assessed as very low. Being an independent postgraduate Member Institution of the University of London, which was founded in 1836, gives the ICR a level of security against sector changes. We actively seek out funding for studentships from a range of sources as well as responding to consultations on and monitoring changes within the HE landscape. We continually monitor student numbers, funding streams and resulting income.

The risk that a supervising member of Faculty specialising in a research project area transfers to another HEP is fairly significant owing to the competitive nature of the scientific research landscape. This is a known risk for the continuation of study for our research degree students, and the ICR has tried and tested operating procedures to manage the risk: these measures are outlined in **Section 2** below.

All risks are monitored at least twice per year by Academic Board via the Academic Risk Register.

The ICR's MSc in Oncology is designed for medically qualified students who intend to pursue a professional career in clinical or medical oncology. We continuously monitor the external environment and any potential changes to provision of postgraduate oncology training arrangements and we maintain strong links with external stakeholders. This underpins the management of the course alongside internal mechanisms to ensure the high quality and clinical relevance of the course. It is judged to be a moderate risk that external factors (such as competing courses or changes in NHS training requirements) would lead to a lack of a critical mass of students for the MSc to continue. However, if that did occur, those registered would receive the learning experience as expected through to completion or the ICR would provide credits for transfer to another course. In the latter case, the ICR would provide refunds for modules not undertaken as per the Refunds and Compensation policy.

The ICR has in place a Policy and Procedure for the Withdrawal of a Programme of Study. This aims to ensure that the wind-down of any programme happens in an orderly fashion,

and that the academic interests of students are protected to the fullest extent possible in the circumstances.

The ICR holds a Student sponsor licence from UKVI, which allows us to welcome students requiring a visa. This is only currently relevant to non-clinical research students on our PhD programme, as students on other courses are employees of the NHS or other UK healthcare organisations. The ICR has mechanisms in place to carefully monitor activities relating to our licence, which enables us to address any potential issues before they become significant concerns. However, owing to the small number of students that we sponsor each year, we recognise that even just one or two cases of non-compliance (e.g. owing to a student exiting a course early but not leaving the country) may place us below UKVI thresholds. Should this occur, we would be eligible for a discretionary track record assessment, which we would expect to pass. There remains, however, a small risk that we could be restricted from offering Confirmations of Acceptance of Studies to new students, without this affecting continuation of study for existing students. In a worst case scenario, where our licence was fully revoked, we would work with students and funders to transfer registration to alternative higher education providers, with compensation considered where a student has suffered demonstrable financial loss as a consequence. However we consider the risk of any impact on continuation of studies to be low.

2. Risk Mitigation

From our risk assessment outlined in **Section 1** above, we deem the most likely situation that may affect continuation of study for our students is that for research degree students if their supervising Faculty member moves their team to another university/research institute, or closes their team. Therefore measures to mitigate this risk are outlined here.

It is worth noting that the nature of the sector and the quality of the research team leaders employed by the ICR means it is not possible to entirely remove the risk that a supervisor may be in demand by other universities or research institutions. However, the process for the allocation of studentships includes a risk assessment of the proposed supervisory team, particularly the lead supervisor.

When a member of Faculty supervising a research student leaves the ICR, we implement the ICR's procedure for such occurrences. Each individual's circumstances are considered in close discussion with the student, along with any conditions on the studentship or student themselves. The best outcome for the student is always the priority. Commonly, arrangements will be made so that the student remains registered with the ICR on their degree programme and appropriate supervisory arrangements are made to support that. Usually the student would continue working on the original research project with the support of an alternative lead supervisor but with arrangements to preserve the original student-supervisor relationship where possible and appropriate. If early in their PhD, the student may be offered the option to change to a different project supervised under a new team. If remaining registered at the ICR, these circumstances would not warrant the triggering of the student protection plan.

On occasion, it may be in the best interests of the student to transfer their registration to the new institution to stay co-located with their supervisor. In these cases, the student's registration at the ICR would cease, and they would instead become registered for a degree programme at the new institution. Where the student's funding is not portable (e.g. it is provided specifically to the ICR), an alternative source of funding would need to be found by the supervisor and/or the new HEI. The student would be supported through the transfer by the ICR's Registry team, with potential for hardship funding to be made available to support relocation if necessary.

If no alternative satisfactory supervision arrangements can be identified for a PhD student, the student has sufficient data to write up, and they are in their first or second year, they will be supported to write up an MPhil.

A PhD studentship would only be terminated as a last resort, when no option for continuing supervision can be found.

For students on a Student visa affected by such changes, support will be provided as appropriate, particularly for those who need to transfer to a new sponsor. The ICR will liaise with the new institution to ensure no interruption to their permission to stay.

As stated in **Section 1**, the operating procedure has been proven effective, and since its introduction we have not had a student who was unable to complete a degree, whether remaining registered at the ICR or transferring to another provider, as a result of their supervisor leaving.

3. Refunds and Compensation

We are a postgraduate-only institution, with a relatively small number of students. Self-funded research degree students are rare, as most receive fully-funded studentships that include tuition fees.

The ICR's Refunds and Compensation Policy details how the ICR manages refunds and compensation, including in cases where continuity of study is not possible. It covers a range of plausible scenarios across both research and taught programmes and ensures that our stance on compensation is fair and clear. However, the policy allows for some flexibility to deal with individual cases as appropriate.

In view of the ICR's low student FTE (just 246 in 2023/24), the financial risk to the ICR posed by the unexpected loss of tuition fee income and/or the refund and compensation policy for students is very low. Tuition fee income comprises just 3% of the ICR's total income. At 31 July 2024, the ICR's total unrestricted reserves were £381m.

4. Communication

We publish our student protection plan on our external website, and signpost to it in the terms of enrolment provided to all students when they are offered a place to study at the ICR. It is also published on our taught course's Virtual Learning Environment and on our intranet.

The size of the ICR means that there is a small central administration team who would be involved in any programme/course changes for which the student protection plan would be one of the key reference documents.

The plan is highlighted to Faculty and senior management teams through the committee process. We review our student protection plan every four years along with other key policy documents. Any changes require approval by the relevant committees and then by the Office for Students. There are student representatives on each of the academic committees so that they will have a chance to review and comment. Any significant changes are taken to the student liaison committees, who were consulted when developing this plan.

We inform our students if there are to be material changes to their course by emailing them directly at the earliest opportunity, making an announcement in person as appropriate and ensuring it is included as an agenda item on the student liaison committee meetings.

We have a range of support systems available for students, which may assist them during any transition if we need to implement the measures in our student protection plan. These include Registry and Senior Tutors, Course Directors, and welfare support such as trained Student Wellbeing Champions and an independent helpline for professional life management and personal support.

If a student wishes to make a complaint about the implementation of this plan, they are advised to consult the complaints procedure as detailed on the ICR website at www.icr.ac.uk/studentpolicies.