1: Risk Assessment

The Institute of Cancer Research, London (ICR) is a world-leading higher education institution and a college 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 three independent judgements:

- In 2012, The Quality Assurance Agency Institutional Review confirmed that the ICR’s academic standards, and the quality and enhancement of our student learning opportunities meet UK expectations.
- In 2014, we retained the top spot for quality of research in the Times Higher Education league table, based on our performance in the Research Excellence Framework that year.
- In 2015 a HEFCE review of Institution-specific funding, intended to recognise the higher cost and distinctive nature of specialist higher education providers, and the public value that these institutions bring to the sector, confirmed our world-leading teaching and impact of our graduates within our specialist area. Submissions were considered by a review panel of independent members, drawn from those with experience of leading specialist institutions outside England and those with an international overview of the fields in which the institutions operate. The feedback noted that the submission provided a compelling case that:
  - Education and research were a connected continuum.
  - The collaboration with a world-leading cancer care provider gave the critical mass required for the institution to be operating at the very highest level for the discipline.
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 an HEI is also currently assessed as very low. Being an independent postgraduate college of the University of London, with its successful track record of 180 years, gives the ICR a level of security against current 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 HEI is fairly significant due 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.

The ICR's MSc in Oncology is designed for medically qualified students who intend to pursue a professional career in clinical or medical oncology. A risk the ICR has previously identified is failure to recruit target numbers to the course, for example in the case of the development of Specialist oncology courses by other HEIs/Royal Colleges and/or changes in external training environment, such as NHS organisational changes. This risk is managed by ensuring the high quality and clinical relevance of the MSc in Oncology through regular review of module content and course evaluation. We also maintain strong links with the Local Education Training Boards, Health Education England (HEE) and the clinical and medical oncology community. We continuously monitor the external environment and any potential changes to provision of postgraduate oncology training arrangements.

A change in the management of study leave budget for junior doctors is being implemented by HEE in response to the new junior doctor contract. The impact on student admissions to the course is something we are in close discussion with HEE and training programme leads regarding. However, we assess the risk to the continuation of the course as still low.

2: Risk Mitigation

From our risk assessment outlined in Section 1 above, we deem the only situation reasonably likely to occur 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 Tier 4 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. Full time self-funded research students are rare, and most receive fully-funded studentships or fellowships which cover fees. Similarly, students on our only taught postgraduate degree course – our MSc in Oncology – are usually at least part-funded by the NHS trust that employs them.

To date, we have considered refunds on a case-by-case basis, such as where a student has voluntarily withdrawn from our taught course before attending any lectures. Similarly, we would always give a pro-rata refund to self-funded research students whose registration transferred to another institution midway through an academic year, to follow their academic supervisor.

To date, we have not had need of a dedicated refund and compensation policy, and we understand that this is not unusual for other similar institutions. However, over the coming year we will devise a policy that clearly states the ICR's approach to providing refunds and compensation to students across a broad range of scenarios. We will encourage input into this policy from the student representatives on our academic committees.

In view of the ICR's low student FTE (193 in 2016/17), the financial risk to the ICR posed by the unexpected loss of tuition fee income and/or a new refund and compensation policy for students is very low. In 2016/17, tuition fee income comprised £703,000 of the ICR's total income of £124m. At 31 July 2017, the ICR's total unrestricted reserves were £193.7m.

### 4: Communication

We will publicise our student protection plan to current and future students by publishing it on our external and internal website, signposting to it in the student handbooks and the pack of information given to students when they are offered a place to study at the ICR. We will also publish it on our taught courses Virtual Learning Environment.

The size of the ICR means that there is a small central administration team who will be involved in any programme/course changes for which the student protection plan will be one of the key reference documents.
The plan will be highlighted to all supervising Faculty and the senior management team through the committee process. We will review our student protection plan each year along with other key policy documents. Any changes will require approval by the relevant committees. There are student representative on each of the academic committees so that they will have a chance to review and comment. Any significant changes will be taken to the student liaison committees, who we have already consulted as part of the development of 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 needed to implement the measures in our student protection plan. These include Registry and senior tutors, Course Directors, and welfare support such as trained student confidants 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.