

Modification to a Taught Programme

Published Guidelines

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1 Introduction

A modification is a change to a validated programme of study for which primary responsibility, for considering and approving the modification, rests with the Programmes Committee. The terms of reference for the Programmes Committee can be found at

<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/Committees/Senate/Home.aspx>

Modifications to programmes are categorised for procedural purposes as “minor” or “major”. These categories are described in more detail in section 2 which will help to determine which category a modification falls into.

All modifications should be considered and authorised to proceed by the School Board (either via the Quality Standing Panel or Chair’s action where necessary).

For **Minor Modifications**, the Programmes Committee will normally delegate the consideration and approval to the relevant School/Division Board.

For **Major Modifications**, Programmes Committee approval is required and the comments of the relevant external examiner(s) should be sought in support of the modification together with evidence of student consultation.

Minor modifications to the module as defined in section 2 are part of the usual operations and updating of the module content. However consideration should be taken of whether minor modifications affect current students or future cohorts of students and this will impact on the process of consultation, approval and implementation. As a general principle, modifications should be implemented for the next entering student cohort and therefore not impact the current students.

Major modifications as defined in section 2 should normally be planned as part of the periodic review of the programme(s) or can be as a result of institutional strategies such as the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

2 Determining Category of Modification

It is important to reach a balance between developing and encouraging innovation in teaching, learning and assessment methods, and enabling the curriculum and content of modules to be current and relevant whilst ensuring that the critical information upon which applicants and current students make their decisions when choosing a programme of study is accurate and stable. The categorisation of Minor and Major Modifications attempts to reach the balance of enabling development whilst ensuring that students and applicants are informed and where appropriate consulted with about changes that have a direct impact on their decision making process and where necessary processes are in place to ensure that they agree with the changes that are being developed.

2.1 Minor Modifications

The following changes to programmes are examples of acceptable minor modifications. The timeliness of the changes should be within the timeframe that ensures prospective and current students are not affected or if they are affected there are clear plans to ensure that they are consulted with. Minor Modifications are approved by the School Board:

- the addition of individual option modules for a future cohort of students, where this does not affect the overall intended learning outcomes as defined in the programme specification.
- changes to the modules (e.g. to reflect a different emphasis brought to the module by a new or different member of teaching staff or to reflect developments in learning, teaching and assessment methods, or to reflect curriculum and content developments), where these do not affect the overall programme learning outcomes or the balance of assessment methods ie coursework/written examinations/practical examinations or the broad learning and teaching methods (ie scheduled learning and teaching activities, placement or guided independent study) as defined in the programme specification statistics and the summary statement in the Programme Specification relating to the teaching, learning and assessment methods for that programme, as published on the Programme Specification and the University website.
- changes to the mode of delivery of a module or modules (e.g. the replacement of lectures with seminars), where these do not affect the summary statement in the Programme Specification relating to the teaching and learning methods for that programme or the intended learning outcomes.
- Change of the module tutor/programme leader/department delivering the module.
- Rewording of a learning outcome as advised by the external examiner to provide greater clarity to the students.

2.2 Major Modifications

The following changes to programmes normally constitute major modifications. The timeliness of the changes must be within the timeframe that ensures prospective and current students are either not affected or are consulted and informed about changes that affect them. Major modifications need to be approved by Programmes Committee and may require a Standing Approvals Panel to provide academic oversight for the proposed changes:

- the addition of core modules;
- the withdrawal of modules;
- Changes to module title(s);
- the systematic re-structuring of a programme or part thereof due to internal (eg periodic review) or external impact (eg Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements) e.g. the re-definition of modules, changes to credit ratings and changes to levels;
- a change to the programme title and/or award, or the addition of other award routes as part of an existing programme where these have not already been approved (e.g. new points of entry and/or exit).
- a change to the duration of the programme.
- a change in the mode of delivery of the programme (e.g. the introduction of a part-time route or a move from face-to-face tuition to distance learning).
- the addition, or substantive revision, of a work-based placement.
- the addition/withdrawal/modification of modules that results in changes to the intended learning outcomes of the overall programme (as defined in the Programme Specification), and/or a reduction in the range of options within the programme.
- Content changes that affect the intended learning outcomes of the overall programme.
- Changes to aims, learning outcomes or content that have resource implications
- Changes that could be seen to disadvantage students (e.g. reduction of contact hours)

There may be a situation that arises that is beyond the control of the University which results in changes having to be made (also known as a force majeure).

2.3 Modifications to Assessment

The following guidance should be used where a proposed modification concerns student assessment. Departments are advised to contact the Standards and Enhancement Office about proposed assessment

changes. The categorisation of Minor and Major modification is based on ensuring that students are able to make an informed choice.

Students Affected	Assessment Type	Timing of the assessment	Length of examination (time). Length of written task (words) (as appropriate)	Change in the weighting of different elements of assessment
New cohort or future student (pre recruitment cycle)	Minor	Minor	Minor	Major
Mid recruitment cycle	Major	Major	Major	Major
Future stage for current students	Major	Major	Major	Major
Current students – same stage*	Major	Major	Major	Major

*Such changes must only be made in very exceptional circumstances such as events outside of the control of the University.

3 Impact of Modifications Affecting Current Students

It is normal practice to implement modifications with a new cohort of students (i.e. a cohort new to the programme of study). If a department wishes to implement a modification for a current cohort, in most cases, it will be dealt with as a major modification and in this case Programmes Committee approval is required. In a small number of scenarios the changes are considered to be Minor and School Board approval is sufficient (eg. the addition of optional modules without the withdrawal of a module; the rewording of a learning outcome as advised by the external examiner to provide greater clarity to the student).

The reason for treating the majority of modifications affecting current cohorts as ‘major’ is not to prevent such modifications taking place but rather to ensure that the consultation and notification processes are in place. This is important, given that a modification could compromise the previously specified student experience and serve as grounds for a student to complain or appeal. Moreover, as the relationship between a University and its students is considered in law to be contractual in its nature and constrained by consumer law (the student contract), a student whose programme is modified could, in theory, take legal action against the University.

A modification that affects a current cohort is likely to be approved if:

- the academic department can provide evidence that no student involved will be disadvantaged by the change. That is, the change is minor and either neutral or advantageous in terms of its impact on the student experience (and consequently unlikely to provide grounds for a complaint, appeal or legal action – or any such move could be dismissed as unreasonable). For example minor modifications that allow new research to be brought to the curriculum, that enable innovative learning, teaching and assessment methods to be introduced, or that specifically address the concerns of students, external examiners, or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) will normally be approved.
- all students involved have been consulted and have given their consent for the change. Written consent from all students is likely to be a requirement in cases pertaining to changes to the assessment regime or assessment regulations. As far as is practicable, departments should ensure they give sufficient time for: students to voice their concerns/consent; recording the students’ view;

and if applicable informing all students of the modifications approval and implications for their studies.

Occasionally, circumstances may arise where programme changes that could have a negative impact upon a current cohort of students are unavoidable (e.g. because of unforeseen staff changes at short notice). In such a scenario, a department should, as a matter of urgency and through the Head of School and/or the Academic Coordinator, consult with the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) and/or the Academic Registrar. It is then essential to devise a plan that protects the interests of the students by ensuring that the impact of any modifications to the programme are minimal and that the student experience is not compromised. The department may be asked to take action to prevent a similar situation arising in future.

The Change Approval Form requests information including:

- the method of student consultation
- how student feedback will be gathered following consultation; and
- what the process will be to inform students about the implications/implementation of any approved changes

Consultation with current students about proposed modifications that will affect their programme of study is **mandatory** and requires written confirmation from the students, accepting the change, this can be obtained via the Staff Student Liaison Committee and the student representative thereof.

4 Modifications Affecting Prospective Students

Modifications affecting prospective students must be handled carefully if the University is to avoid complaints and legal action.

Individuals apply to the University on the basis of the information available to them at the time of application eg in the prospectus, in department advertising material, on the website and in Programme Specifications. Prospective students must be informed at the earliest opportunity of any major changes to a programme made between the time the offer of a place is made and enrolment is completed. The Programme Specification document is sent to the student with the offer letter and this process begins in November preceding enrolment in the subsequent September. Changes that affect the content of the Programme Specification document that are approved after November are minimal, justified, controlled and the process of communication to prospective students forms an important part of the implementation process. It is essential to advise prospective students of the options available in the case of major change (including the chance for individuals to change their minds about their place on the programme). Major changes would include withdrawal of modules, changes to module titles, major alterations to the teaching, learning and assessment arrangements for the programme and a change in the status of the programme, for example the withdrawal of PSRB accreditation. All of the above information is included within the Programme Specification and this is part of the material information upon which the prospective student is making their decision.

If the intention is that any proposed change(s) will have an impact on Prospective Students and the admissions cycle is underway, the programme team should consult the Student Recruitment and Admissions team about proposed modifications. It is essential to agree the process for notifying Prospective Students with the Student Recruitment and Admissions team **before** presenting proposed changes to the School Board and/or (if relevant) Student Staff Liaison Committee.