

# Course and Unit Modifications Policy and Procedures

## 1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1. This document sets out the policy and procedures for making modifications to the approved versions of Course and/or Unit Specifications between initial approval of the course and its subsequent review. This includes Apprenticeship Courses and Courses delivered under an Educational Partnership arrangement.
- 1.2. The policy ensures course content can be kept up to date, while maintaining approved course outcomes. This policy has been developed to take account of the following reference points:  
**External**
  - Office for Students Conditions of Registration
  - Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018), particularly the Advice and Guidance on course design and development (Quality Assurance Agency)
  - UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law (2015) (Consumer Competition and Markets Authority (CMA))

### Internal

- Course Design Framework

## 2. Key responsibilities

- 2.1 **Course Leaders** are responsible for managing the modification process, completing the relevant documentation for committee consideration and ensuring appropriate communication with current students or apprentices at all stages of this process, including communicating outcomes and revised documents to current learners and relevant External Examiners, other Schools/ Centre affected by the change, and liaising with Marketing to ensure the course pages on the website and other published information is updated. They are responsible for ensuring that all processes relating to Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) required in connection with a modification are completed.
- 2.2 **Admissions**, within Registry are responsible for all communications with applicants and offer holders at all stages of this process.
- 2.3 **Academic Standards and Quality Committee** (ASQC) considers and where appropriate approves, modifications to courses and units, or notes those changes which, as outlined in this policy, may be approved by Course Steering Committees or by Course Leaders.
- 2.4 **Course Steering Committees** consider recommendations for modifications, recommending these to ASQC for approval or, where permitted within this policy, noting, or approving and reporting to ASQC for note.
- 2.5 References in this policy and procedure to any University officer shall include their properly appointed nominee.

## 3. Introduction

- 3.1 Following the approval or re-approval of a course it is important that courses and units remain up to date in response to advances in the academic discipline, research, the identification of opportunities to enhance the delivery of teaching or assessment, student or apprentice feedback, Professional Statutory Regulatory Body and External Examiner feedback and ongoing course and unit monitoring activities. The modifications process recognises that there is a need for balance between the transparency and continuity of information provided to applicants and learners, and the need for continuous improvement of the quality of the course and / or associated units, in the interests of learners and staff, and to ensure ongoing compliance with the Office for Students Conditions of Registration.
- 3.2 Modifications are changes to an approved course or unit which are proposed between scheduled periodic reviews of the course and which do not alter the nature, focus and purpose of the course, and/or the award

title(s). All modifications require formal approval, which is obtained through one of the procedures outlined below.

- 3.3 Normally modifications requiring ASQC approval should be presented to the committee at its May meeting for consideration; other than in exceptional circumstances (for example if an error has been identified) all changes should be approved by 31 July annually. Whatever the level of modification, these should normally be implemented from the start of the next academic year (for January start courses, from the next January).
- 3.4 It is the Course Leader's responsibility to understand the requirements of all relevant PSRBs and ensure that the relevant procedures for reporting, and if necessary seeking approval for, changes are followed.
- 3.5 Where modifications are proposed to units that are delivered across more than one course, each course must agree to the change and be modified accordingly. The relevant modification form must list all the courses which use the unit concerned, and show that the 'fit' of the modified unit in each course has been considered. An email confirming agreement to the changes from the Course Leader for each affected course should be included with the modification form. If the modification is not appropriate for all courses concerned, the modified unit should be approved as a separate unit with a distinct unit title/code and the course(s) in which it will be used must be clearly specified. The unit must be delivered separately in its old form for courses for which the modification is not appropriate. Course Teams other than the lead Course Team must ensure that the same consultations occur in relation to the proposed changes, e.g., External Examiners, students.
- 3.6 During the approval or review of a course, units may be changed which are offered in other courses not being reviewed at the same time. Under this circumstance *either* the unit must be delivered in its modified form for the course that has been reviewed/approved and delivered separately in its old form for pre-existing courses, *or* the courses(s) not currently under review must be modified to include the changed unit, (In which case the relevant Course Modification Form should be completed in the normal way with the required supporting evidence).
- 3.7 The Quality team are responsible for maintaining a log of all modifications approved or noted by ASQC

#### 4. Level 1 modifications: subject-level knowledge updating at unit level

- 4.1 Minor changes to unit content (the 'what you will learn' section of the unit specification) where there is no impact on the learning outcomes of the unit or course and reflects changes to keep abreast of current knowledge, and/or where this is needed to meet the requirements of PSRBs should be proposed by the Unit Leader by means of an amended unit specification marked with 'track changes' and a Level 1 modification form. Such changes may be approved by the Course Leader.
- 4.2 Level 1 modifications are considered low-risk and do not normally require student / learner nor External Examiner consultation.
- 4.3 For units that are delivered across more than one course the Unit Leader must consult the Course Leader for each affected course to confirm agreement to the change, and evidence this on the Level 1 modification form. **Course Leaders may object to a change only if it is likely to have a significant impact on each course.** In case of disagreement the relevant Course Leaders should liaise to reach an agreement on whether or not the modification should progress. If no agreement can be reached but the course owning the unit considers the modification to be essential the modified unit should be approved as a separate unit with a distinct unit title/code and the course(s) in which it will be used must be clearly specified. The unit must be delivered separately in its old form for courses for which the modification is not appropriate.
- 4.4 Level 1 modifications do not alter the version number of a unit specification but the date the modifications are approved, and the academic year from which they apply must be recorded on the specification by the Unit Leader.
- 4.5 Once they have approved the change the Course Leader should:
  - E-mail this form and amended unit specification to the Secretary for the relevant Course Steering Committee (CSC) and the Academic Governance Administrator, for inclusion on the CSC and ASQC agendas for note.
  - Ensure the Unit Specification is updated in the light of approved changes, and is provided to the Quality team for storage in Registry.
  - Ensure the amended unit specification is published on the VLE for learners.
  - Ensure that all affected courses are advised when the changes have been approved and that they are given access to the final version of the amended unit specification.
  - Liaise with Marketing to ensure that website course pages and offline material is updated (this must be checked although it is unlikely that level 1 modifications will affect the course pages).

## 5. Level 2 modifications: minor modifications that can be approved by Course Steering Committees

- 5.1 Changes to units which do not alter the substantial character or content of the unit are Level 2 modifications and are considered medium-risk. These may be considered and approved by the relevant Course Steering Committee. An accumulation of several Level 2 modifications in combination may need to be considered through the Level 3 modification process. Course Leaders should therefore seek advice from the Quality team to confirm the appropriate modification approval process.
- 5.2 In most cases the scope of Level 2 modifications is indicated by means of an asterisk in the unit specification template<sup>1</sup> and include modifications to:
- i. Pre/Co requisites
  - ii. Unit aims and overview
  - iii. Assessment component description
  - iv. Formative assessment and feedback
- 5.3 Changes to update or clarify the following sections of the course specification are also considered Level 2 modifications **where the substance of the information remains unchanged:**
- Teaching and learning methods and assessment methods
  - Outline of course content
  - Placement, work-based learning or other special features of the course
  - Employment progression route
- 5.4 For all Level 2 modifications the Course Leader must ensure that relevant External Examiner(s) are consulted and that there is appropriate consultation with learners (see Section 11). External Examiners are particularly encouraged to reflect on whether the proposed modification(s) help ensure that the content and context of teaching and assessment is appropriately inclusive and reflects the diversity of learners, and help to mitigate attainment gaps.
- 5.5 The Course Leader should submit the proposed Level 2 modification for consideration by the relevant Course Steering Committee (CSC) using the relevant Course Modification Form, with supporting documentation as required (see Section 6).
- 5.6 CSC will consider the proposal and either approve the change, refer it back to the team for more work, or reject the proposal. The CSC must be satisfied that all supporting evidence is complete and adequate, that a valid case has been made, and that the modification is appropriate.
- 5.7 Following CSC approval, the relevant Course Leader is responsible for:
- Providing the relevant documentation to the Secretary of ASQC, for submission to ASQC for note.
  - Ensuring that Course or Unit Specifications are updated in the light of approved changes, and providing the final version of the amended document(s) to the Quality team for storage in Registry.
  - Ensuring amended unit specifications and course specification are published on the VLE for learners
  - Liaising with Marketing to ensure that all relevant online and offline material is updated.
  - For unit changes, ensuring that all affected courses are advised when the change has been approved and that they are given access to the final version of the amended unit specification.
- 5.8 The Quality team is responsible for:
- Publishing approved versions of amended **course specifications** and Unit Specifications in the relevant internal repository and for notifying Marketing, Admissions, Student Records, the Course team and any other relevant parties that the new specifications are available. The approval confirmation will set out the action required of each relevant team and service.

## 6. Level 3 modifications: major modifications that must be approved by ASQC

- 6.1 Modifications that are of a more substantial nature and likely to have a significant impact on existing or prospective learners or provision are Level 3 modifications and are considered high-risk. An accumulation of several Level 3 modifications in combination may need to be considered through the periodic course review process. Course Leaders should therefore seek advice from the Quality team to confirm the appropriate modification / review approval process.. In reaching this determination the Course Leader and the Quality team will also take into account whether the scale of changes that have occurred to the course since its approval or last review may necessitate the holding of a full course review before the proposed modification

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<sup>1</sup> In older unit specification templates, material marked as indicative

may be made.

6.2 In proposing modifications Course Teams must give careful consideration to the impact of the proposed changes on learners, applicants and potential applicants, including those with protected characteristics, and ensure that appropriate and documented consultation takes place where required (see Section 11 below).

6.3 Examples of Level 3 modifications are:

- i) addition, substitution or removal of core units to a total credit value of up to one third of a level between approval/review of the course and its subsequent review;
- ii) addition, substitution or removal of optional units (not all optional units may be offered each year and this does not require a modification – however this must be made clear to prospective applicants, applicants and learners in course material).
- iii) changes to the learning outcomes of a unit or course.
- iv) changes in the credit value and/or level of units; confirmation must be provided that there remains the correct distribution of Levels in accordance with the FHEQ, UK Credit Framework and the University Course Design Framework.
- v) change to unit learning outcomes; changes to unit delivery methods or assessment methodology;
- vi) changes to unit summative assessment details;
- vii) changes to allocation of learning time (workload) for a unit;
- viii) change to a unit title;
- ix) change to course composition, including contact hours (e.g., replacement of contact time by tutor-guided or independent study), and learner workload;
- x) structural changes to a course, e.g., introduction or discontinuation of intermediate qualifications, progression routes, addition or removal of a placement unit, addition or removal of Student Exchange opportunities;
- xi) changes to the site of delivery for the course – for example to offer an existing course in a new location (permitted for new cohorts only)<sup>2</sup>;
- xii) addition of an alternative delivery mode, e.g., to allow an already approved full-time course to be delivered in part-time or distance learning mode<sup>3</sup>;
- xiii) new course start dates e.g., to move a course from a September to a January start or vice versa (permitted for new cohorts only).

6.4 This is not an exhaustive list and colleagues should consult the Quality team in case of doubt.

6.5 Changes made to assessment must not alter the overarching strategies and balance of assessment methods agreed when the course was approved.

6.6 The Course Leader must ensure that relevant External Examiner(s) are consulted about the proposed change and that there is appropriate consultation with learners (see Section 11). External examiners are particularly encouraged to reflect on whether the proposed modification(s) help ensure that the content and context of teaching and assessment is appropriately inclusive and reflects the diversity of learners, and help to mitigate attainment gaps.

6.7 The proposal should be considered by the relevant Course Steering Committee and, if agreed should be recommended to ASQC for consideration/approval.

6.8 It is the responsibility of the Course Leader to submit the documentation to the ASQC Secretary for consideration and to ensure that the documentation submitted is complete and accurate.

6.9 ASQC will consider the proposal and either approve the change, refer it back to the team for more work, reject the proposal or determine that a periodic course review is required. The ASQC must be satisfied that all supporting evidence is complete and adequate, and that a valid case has been made that the modification is needed.

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<sup>2</sup> Proposals for changes to the site of delivery should be discussed with the Quality team in advance, as depending on the nature of the proposal this may require additional action and a full course review.

<sup>3</sup> Proposals for an existing course delivered on campus to be delivered as an online course should in the first instance be discussed with the Chair of ASQC and Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) to determine the extent of changes required and therefore whether this may proceed as a modification or whether a full course consideration process is required.

6.10 If the decision is to reject the proposal the Course Team will be given feedback and invited to discuss the outcome with the Chair and Secretary of ASQC to consider whether there are other options for reaching the desired outcome.

6.11 Following ASQC approval:

- The Quality team will communicate the outcome to the relevant Course Leader and to Registry.
- The Course Leader is responsible for:
  - ensuring that Course and Unit Specifications and Course Summary are updated in the light of approved changes, and for providing the updated version to the Quality team for storage in Registry and, for Course Specifications, for publication on the VLE and website.
  - advising Marketing of the change and for ensuring that all relevant website and offline material is updated, including drawing specific attention to the changes made.
  - ensuring that amended unit specifications are published on the VLE for learners.
  - informing learners of the change, including any differences between the change that they were consulted about and the one that is finally made, and the response to any important issues raised by learners during the consultation.
  - for unit changes, ensuring that all affected Course Leaders are advised when the change has been approved and that they are given access to the final version of the amended unit specification.
- Admissions within Registry is responsible for communicating the changes made to the course to current applicants and offer holders.
- The Quality team are responsible for:
  - publishing approved versions of **course specifications** and Unit Specifications in the relevant internal repository and for notifying Marketing, Admissions, Student Records, the Course team and any other relevant parties that the new specifications are available. The approval confirmation will set out the action required of each relevant team and service.

## 7. Modification Documentation – Level 2 and 3 Modifications

7.1 All proposals for Level 2 or Level 3 modifications must be submitted on the relevant Course Modification Form. Additional documentation in support of the change should be attached as follows:

- Changes of wording within existing Course Specification(s) and amended Course Summary (course summaries, while part of the Course Specification documentation are for internal use only and not published for learners/stakeholders) with all proposed changes tracked.
- New Unit Specifications or existing Unit Specifications with all changes tracked.
- Agreement from the Course Leader(s) of other courses affected by the modification (as applicable).
- Evidence of consultation with and written comments from relevant External Examiners.
- Evidence of consultation with and written feedback and agreement from learners (see Section 11).
- CMA Significant Change Form (as applicable).

## 8. Corrective changes

8.1 It may be necessary to make corrective changes to Course and/or Unit specifications, for example to:

- Correct typographical errors.
- 8.2 Make a factual change (such as adding reference to an additional course within which a unit will now be offered).
- Update links or editions of approved text learning resources.

The Course Leader should consult the Quality team to confirm that a corrective change, rather than a modification, is appropriate.

8.3 Corrective changes can be made without committee approval but the Course Leader must record the changes made in the modification record on the relevant template. Where a unit is delivered for more than one course the responsibility for making such changes rests with the Course Leader for the course for which the unit was initially approved.

8.4 The Course Leader must provide a copy of the amended document to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance) and ensure the updated version is made available to learners and to the Course Leaders for all courses of which an amended unit forms a part.

## 9. Creation and approval of units for addition to the Professional Development Framework

9.1 Proposals for the addition of new units for delivery within the Professional Development Framework should be submitted by the Framework Leader to ASQC for consideration/approval, using the Professional Development Framework unit approval form and accompanied by:

- A unit specification using the approved template.
- An amended version of the course specification.

9.2 Modifications to existing units within this Framework should be taken forward in line with the relevant sections of this Policy as appropriate to the nature of the modification to be considered.

## 10. Change of Course Title

10.1 Schools may wish to recommend a change to the title of an existing course if, for example

- recruitment on the current course title has been unsuccessful or has fallen year-on-year.
- there is evidence that either the current course title does not accurately reflect its content, or that another title would reflect the content better.
- there is evidence that there is growth in the market for the new course or pathway title.

10.2 Proposals for changes to approved course titles require approval by the Executive. This process may be used only if the proposed change of title does not involve any change to the course content, aims or learning outcomes (for example, a change proposed primarily for marketing purposes). The proposal should not involve amendment to existing course or unit specifications (other than amending references to the title itself) or to course content. **If the course title change forms part of a broader set of course changes this is likely to require a full Course Consideration process.**

10.3 Where applicable relevant PSRBs should be consulted, and confirmation of their acceptance of their support for the proposed change should be submitted with the request form.

10.4 The Course Leader must consult the Admissions Manager and Assistant Registrar (Statutory Returns and Compliance) about the impact of any change and the timings for taking this forward.

10.5 Titles cannot be changed once there are offer holders on a course, and will not normally apply to existing learners, unless **all learners** on the existing course consent to accept the proposed change.

10.6 Once the change is approved reference to the course title within relevant unit specifications may be amended without further approval.

## 11. Situations beyond the University's control

11.1 There may be a situation that arises that is beyond the control of the University which results in requirements for changes to be made to a course or units.

- Where this occurs and affects a single course the modification process should be followed as far as possible.
- Where the situation is more wide ranging the Vice-Chancellor may invoke Emergency Regulations and the situation will be managed in accordance with the provisions of those regulations and in line with the HSU's Student Protection Plan.

## 12. Consumer law requirements: information provided to learners, applicants and potential applicants

12.1 To meet the information requirements that apply to learners, applicants and potential applicants under consumer law, the impact of modifications on these groups needs to be considered. A modification may be regarded as 'significant' in terms of consumer law if it:

- is a change to one of the items of material/pre-contractual information provided to learners, applicants or potential applicants as specified by the CMA (which includes the Course Specification);
- potentially has a negative impact on a group of learners; or
- could influence (or could have already influenced) decisions that a potential applicant, offer holder or learner would make.

In considering the appropriateness of the modification the Course Team needs to consider whether the change is fair, and whether mitigation should be offered if it may have an adverse effect on learners in general or a particular group of learners. Further advice may be sought from the Quality team if required.

12.2 To meet these requirements, it is therefore important that:

- consultation with learners is undertaken, and evidence of learner consent is gathered where appropriate. The reason for the consultation will normally fall into one of two categories: (a) consultation to determine whether a change should be made, (b) consultation to determine how to manage the impact of a change.
- timely communication of the changes to learners, applicants and potential applicants takes place.

12.3 As well as complying with consumer law, consultation with learners is important so learners can contribute actively to the development of their academic experience. They can provide valuable feedback about possible changes on the basis of their experience. Course Leaders are therefore strongly encouraged to discuss proposed changes with learners, and seek their feedback, even where formal consultation/consent is not required under this policy.

### 13. Consulting with Students about Modifications

#### Current learners

13.1 If the proposed modification involves changes to information already supplied to learners, learners must be consulted about the proposed change.

13.2 The Course Leader is responsible for managing the learner consultation process, and should ensure that all reasonable efforts have been made to obtain learner support to any proposed changes.

To ensure that all affected learners have the opportunity to provide comment on a proposed course modification, students should be emailed the proposed modification clearly setting out the rationale. Learner consultation may additionally be undertaken through Student Representatives, Student Experience Committee, student focus groups, and in-class discussion.

13.3 All learners affected by the proposed change should be consulted, i.e, all cohorts who will ultimately experience the modification as part of their course. It may also be beneficial to consult with learners who may not be affected by the modification but who are on the non-modified iteration of the course to gather their feedback on the proposal based on their experience.

13.4 Learner consultation must include repeated attempts to contact learners. Course Leaders are recommended to use multiple ways to engage learners in the consultation process.

13.5 Learners must be given a **minimum of ten working days** to respond to any consultation.

13.6 Provided that there have been repeated attempts to contact learners through a variety of means, non-response may be taken as consent where learners are informed that this approach will be taken. When consulting on changes with learners in writing it is suggested that the following text is included: *"Please confirm that you are happy with these changes. If you do have concerns or are not willing to consent to them, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can consider your concerns. If you do not respond by the deadline given, we will consider this as your consent to the change proposed. Therefore, if you have concerns or do not consent, please ensure that you submit a response to make this clear."*

13.7 Course Leaders should keep a record of discussions held with learners and copies of any consultation correspondence with learners including any potential issues that are raised and responses to these. The outcome of the consultation and consent received must be reported to the relevant committee, and attached to the relevant modification form.

13.8 Where less than 100% sign up is achieved during the consultation process, and where the proposed modification is identified as a significant change in respect of consumer legislation as set out in para 11.1, the CMA Significant Change Form should be completed and attached to the relevant modification form as part of the process for considering the modification.

13.9 CSC and ASQC must take the feedback from learner consultations into account appropriately in considering whether to approve a proposed change.

### Applicants/potential applicants

- 13.10 If the proposed modification involves changes to information available to potential applicants (for example on the website or at open days) the information should be amended and the nature of the amendment and date it was made highlighted in a manner which can be easily identifiable and understood by potential applicants.
- 13.11 If the proposed modification involves changes to information provided to applicants and / or offer holders, they must be directly informed of the change and their consent to the change must be secured when they accept an offer.
- 13.12 If the proposed modification involves changes to information provided to offer holders who have already accepted the offer, they must be directly informed of the change and their consent to the change must be secured at enrolment (as enrolment establishes a second contract between the student or apprentice and the institution). This will be managed as part of the enrolment declaration
- 13.13 Admissions within Registry are responsible for all communications with applicants and offer holders at all stages of this process.

Version:	3.2
Approved by:	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Reference source	UK Quality Code. UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development; External Expertise, Student Engagement Competition Marketing Authority : UK higher education providers - advice on consumer protection law Helping you comply with your obligations 12 March 2015 CMA33  Examples from other institutions used as source material (in particular Bournemouth University and University of Southampton)
Date approved	
Effective from	September 2024
Review date	2024/25
Target	Course Leaders, Unit leaders, Registry, members of Academic Standards and Quality Committee
Policy location	Latest Policies webpage
Equality Analysis	No direct impact, the process provides opportunity to highlight any issues specifically related to students with protected characteristics.