Modification to a Taught Programme

Issued by Standards and Enhancement
Office **2023/24 Edition**

Updated May 2022

1   Introduction

The University's modifications procedure enables changes to be made to an approved module or programme of study. Modifications may result from developments within the academic discipline, feedback from students or from external examiners, outcomes of quality assurance processes including annual monitoring and periodic review, changes in Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements, and/or the identification of opportunities to enhance the delivery of teaching or assessment.

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 found at
http://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/Committees/Senate/Home.aspx

The modification procedure has been designed to support the University to maintain the academic quality and standards of its awards whilst supporting the continuous enhancement of the student learning experience. The procedure has taken account of external reference points and was designed in the context of clear external expectations regarding the level of information which the University must make available to applicants and current students as well as how any changes to taught provision are communicated to these groups. As such, this procedure has been developed to take account of the following external reference points:

- 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)
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015), Standard 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process)
- UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law (2015) (Consumer Competition and Markets Authority (CMA))

Programme design and modification will also take account of University and/or Faculty strategies, with particular reference to the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

It is recognised that there is a balance between the need to make accurate information available to applicants, offer-holders and students and the need for the University's curriculum, teaching and assessment of programmes to be continuously improved. Where possible, and where the benefit to students of any proposed modification has been clearly demonstrated, a pragmatic approach will be taken in the application of this procedure.

Modifications to programmes are categorised for procedural purposes as Category A, Category B and Category C. These categories are described in more detail in section 2.

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 **Category A modifications**, the Programmes Committee delegate the consideration and approval to the relevant School/Division Board.

For **Categories B and C 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.

Category A modifications to the module as defined in section 2 are part of the usual operations and updating of the module content. However, you should consider whether the modifications affect current students or future cohorts of students and whether this impacts on the process of consultation, approval and implementation. As a general principle, modifications should be implemented for the next entering student cohort and therefore should not affect the current students unless there is a clear benefit to current students such as provide greater clarity or adding additional modules for example.

Category B 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. There may however be unforeseen reasons why such changes are required such as additions of a new core module or duration of a module due to curriculum updating. Normally Category B modifications should not impact on current students but may impact on applicants.

Category C modifications that are complex in nature or due to the scale of change and will normally require an approval event to be arranged. Normally Category C modifications should not impact on current students but may impact on applicants.

2   Determining the Category of the 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 students make their decisions when choosing a programme of study is accurate and stable. The categorisation of 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.

2.1   Category A Modifications

The following changes to programmes are examples of Category A modifications which are approved by the School Board:

- the addition of individual option module(s), where this does not affect the overall intended learning outcomes as defined in the programme specification;
- changes to the modules or provision of enhanced clarity (e.g. to reflect updated PSRB emphasis or 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) provided on the Programme Specification and on the University website;
- Rewording of a learning outcome as agreed by the external examiner to provide greater clarity to the students.

2.2   Category B Modifications

The following examples of changes to programmes normally constitute Category B 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. Category B 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 from core to optional, 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 and/or the modules;
- a change in the mode of delivery of the programme (e.g. the introduction of a part-time route or a move to online delivery of the complete programme);
- 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;
- Content changes that affect the intended learning outcomes of the overall programme;
- Changes to aims, learning outcomes or content that have resource implications.

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   Category C Modifications

Where there are instances of a range of modifications that are complex in nature, are of a large scale and/or will require changes to the approved Programme Specification they may be classed as Category C Modifications and are likely to be subject to the Programme Approval process which can be found at the following link

https://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/PDA/Programme-Approval-Process/Home.aspx#gsc.tab=0

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) although if the change is to correct an error, is a requirement of a PSRB or is clearly of benefit to the current cohort of students eg introduction of additional optional modules, the changes may be approved for implementation for current students by the School Board.

On occasions, when Category B changes affect current students, it is important that the process of consultation is undertaken in a timely manner and in order to ensure the management of communications all Category B changes require Programmes Committee approval by delegated authority of the Chair where appropriate.

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

- the School can provide evidence that no student involved will be disadvantaged by the change. That is, the change is either neutral or advantageous in terms of its impact on the student experience (and consequently unlikely to provide grounds for a complaint or appeal). For example: modifications that allow new research to be brought to the curriculum; that enable innovative learning, teaching and assessment methods to be introduced; updates that have been informed by the Industry Advisory Board; or that specifically address the concerns of students, external examiners, or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) will normally be approved;

- the students involved have been consulted about the change. Written consent from the students is likely to be a requirement in cases pertaining to changes to the assessment strategy. As far as is

practicable, Schools should ensure they give sufficient time for informing students of the modifications and implications for their studies.

Where there are instances that demand changes to be implemented which are beyond the control of the University, a School should, with the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Academic Operations) and/or the Academic Registrar, devise a plan that protects the interest of the students as far reasonably practicable.

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.** Communication and confirmation may be via the Staff Student Liaison Committee and the student representative thereof.

4   Modifications Affecting Prospective Students

Individuals apply to the University based on 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 changes to a Programme Specification 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.

Category B and C changes which affect the content of the Programme Specification document that are approved after November should be minimal, justified, controlled and the process of communication to prospective students forms an important part of the change implementation process.

It is essential to advise prospective students of the options available in the case of significant change to their programme of study (including the chance for individuals to change their minds about their place on the programme).

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 the proposed modifications so that the process for notifying Prospective Students can be determined.

5   Other Relevant Policies and Procedures

All policies and procedures are available on the University website on the Policy Zone at the following link:
http://www.bolton.ac.uk/studentinformation-policyzone/Home.aspx
Of particular relevance are:
    The Student Protection Plan
    The Student Complaint Procedure
    Programme Suspension and Closure Policy and Procedure

The Module Change Process Guide is available for staff at the following location:
https://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/PDA/ADA/Home.aspx#gsc.tab=0

Document Ref Modifications to a Taught Programme V2	
Version Number	V2
Version Date	*June 2022*
Name of Developer	Hilary Birtwistle
Policy Owner (School/Centre/Unit)	Standards and Enhancement
Person responsible for implementation (post holder)	Head of Quality Systems
Approving Committee/Board	Education Committee/Senate
Date approved	Newly created procedure approved by Senate 2015 V2 June 2022 Education Committee V2 June 2022 Senate
Effective from	To be implemented with immediate effect
Dissemination method (e.g. website)	Web pages
Review Frequency	As required
Reviewing Committee	Education Committee
Consultation History (individuals/groups consulted with dates)	Members of Standards and Enhancement Office; Education Committee Consultation Group
Document History (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	Newly created policy and refreshed procedures in light of CMA and Consumer Rights Act 2015 V2 June 2022 is updated to reflect experience.