

## PROCEDURE FOR THE APPROVAL OF CHANGES TO EXISTING COURSES

### 1. Introduction to the course modification process

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- 1.1 It is understood that courses are dynamic and are subject to modifications from time to time in order to maintain currency and secure ongoing enhancement. This procedure outlines the way in which changes to courses are approved within the University of Suffolk and its partner institutions. It draws on the expectations of the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (in particular Chapter B8 on programme monitoring and review) and on relevant consumer protection legislation.
- 1.2 The UK Quality Code states that “higher education providers ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to making changes to enhance a programme and that it is possible to introduce enhancements in a timely fashion, taking into account the academic interests of students, to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the change” (*Chapter B8, Indicator 2*). This procedure is designed to facilitate the timely approval of changes to courses, while safeguarding academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities across the University and its partner institutions (including preventing curriculum drift occurring through multiple small changes to courses over time).
- 1.3 A key aspect of the procedure is ensuring that both applicants and students have adequate notice of any forthcoming changes to ‘material information’ about their course, and that they are consulted on the changes where appropriate. Material information is defined in the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) publication [UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law \(2015\)](#) (see paragraphs 4.7 - 4.10) and includes:
- course title and award to be received on successful completion of the course
  - entry requirements and/or criteria (both academic and non-academic)
  - mandatory and requisite modules, and availability of optional modules
  - the composition of the course and how it will be delivered (including balance between different types of contact hours and expected student workload)
  - overall method(s) of assessment for the course (e.g. breakdown between exams, coursework or practical assessments)
  - location(s) of study, including work placements
  - length of course
  - any professional, statutory or regulatory body accreditation
  - total course costs (including tuition fees and other extra costs, for example for field trips, equipment or materials).

- 1.4 Proposals for modifications to modules and/or courses for the following academic year should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team ([validation@uos.ac.uk](mailto:validation@uos.ac.uk)) for final approval by the Head of Quality Enhancement by the published deadline (usually in March for modifications to be implemented from the following September, adapted as necessary for non-standard course start dates). This is designed to ensure that modifications are submitted for approval at least six months before the proposed implementation date (with student consultation completed prior to submission) in order to ensure that students, applicants and other relevant stakeholders are provided with sufficient notice regarding planned changes.

## 2. Types of course modification

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- 2.1 Course modifications can vary in terms of scale and impact, and so for the purposes of this procedure they are grouped into three categories:

- i) **Module updating:** routine minor changes to existing modules, usually to ensure ongoing currency, that:
- ✓ do not alter the substantial character or content of the module
  - ✓ do not affect material information about the course

These changes do not require formal approval or student consultation, but revised module specifications should be submitted to the Validation and Exams team for information (see Section 3 below).

- ii) **Course modification:** changes at module and/or course level that:
- ✓ alter the substantial character or content of the module, and/or
  - ✓ alter the substantial character or content of the course, and/or
  - ✓ affect material information about the course

These changes require formal approval by the relevant School or Learning Network Academic Committee (or equivalent within partner institutions) and the Head of Quality Enhancement in accordance with the procedure outlined in Section 4 below.

- iii) **Major course modification:** more substantial changes at course level that:
- ✓ significantly alter the character or content of the course
  - ✓ significantly affect material information about the course

These changes are normally considered via the course re-approval procedure (see Section 5 below).

- 2.2 Advice on categorisation of proposed course modifications can be obtained from the Head of Quality Enhancement or the Educational Developer.

### **3. Module updating**

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- 3.1 Course teams can make routine minor changes to existing modules without the need for formal approval where the changes do not alter the substantial character or content of the module and do not affect the material information about the course. These type of changes are usually undertaken as part of annual updating processes, and may include:
- minor changes to the indicative content of modules that do not affect overall module learning outcomes (for example to ensure ongoing currency)
  - minor changes to assessment tasks that do not affect the assessment information provided within the module specification (for example changes to essay titles)
  - updates to indicative reading lists
  - change of module leader or module contributors
  - minor editorial changes to correct errors in course or module documentation (for example to address typographical errors, to clarify wording or to address inconsistencies in the documentation).
- 3.2 Once the changes have been made, updated module specifications should be included in the course handbook and submitted to the Validation and Exams team ([validation@uos.ac.uk](mailto:validation@uos.ac.uk)) to ensure that there is an accurate and up-to-date central record in the University's module catalogue.

### **4. Course modification**

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- 4.1 Where course teams wish to make more significant changes at module and/or course level that alter the substantial character or content of the module and/or course, or affect the material information about the course, these require formal approval by the relevant School or Learning Network Academic Committee and the Head of Quality Enhancement by published deadlines.
- 4.2 These type of changes include:
- change of module title
  - introduction of a new / replacement module
  - withdrawal of an existing module
  - change in level, credit weighting or mode of delivery of a module
  - change in module status (e.g. optional, requisite, mandatory)
  - changes to pre-requisite modules
  - change in module learning outcomes
  - change in assessment methods or in assessment weightings within a module (including changes of component type to/from core)
  - changes in the study hours breakdown for a module

- minor change of course title (with no substantial change in course content)
- amendment of course aims and/or learning outcomes
- addition or removal of a named exit award
- revisions to entry requirements / criteria
- changes to professional accreditation requirements or removal of PSRB accreditation
- addition of a sandwich year
- introduction of a new part-time mode of delivery to an existing full-time course, or vice versa
- change in course duration
- change of mode of delivery for the course to online or distance learning, where a significant proportion of the existing course is already delivered online and the course team are experienced in online delivery
- conversion of an existing course into a higher or degree apprenticeship, where no major changes to the existing course are required in order to meet the relevant apprenticeship standard.

4.3 Existing students should be consulted on any proposed material changes to modules and/or courses that will affect them. This consultation should take place in accordance with the processes outlined in Section 6 below. The course team should also seek the views of the external examiner for the course regarding the proposed change, and consult with Registry Services to ensure that the proposed change fits with regulatory and system requirements.

4.4 It is important to remember that a change to a module that is shared by several courses may have a wider impact than first envisaged. Where changes may affect courses outside the originating School, other relevant course teams should be consulted on the proposals.

4.5 The proposed change should be submitted to the relevant School or Learning Network Academic Committee (or equivalent within partner institutions) for approval using a 'course modification form', which is available on the course approval, modification and review pages on the University website. The completed form should be sent to the Validation and Exams team for a form number to be allocated at least ten working days before the relevant committee at which the form is being considered. The form should detail the name of the module and/or course undergoing change, the nature and rationale behind the proposed change, the expected date of implementation and any delivery or resource implications.

4.6 An updated module specification, definitive course record and other relevant supporting documentation should be submitted with the form, using tracked changes to highlight any proposed variations. Where there is a proposed change in course duration and/or delivery model, this should include a delivery timetable. For higher or degree apprenticeships,

supporting documentation should also include a mapping against the relevant apprenticeship standard, an updated student handbook, and a new or updated employer handbook outlining the way in which the course will be delivered and managed from an employer's perspective. The course change summary (available within the Course File on MySuffolk) should also be submitted, so that the cumulative effect of the proposed modification and any previous course modifications can be considered. This is intended to help guard against curriculum drift.

- 4.7 In considering the proposed modification(s), the School or Learning Network Academic Committee (or equivalent within partner institutions) should seek to verify that:
- ✓ there is a sound rationale for the change
  - ✓ the proposed change (and the cumulative affect of earlier changes) is not of such significance to warrant further and more detailed scrutiny via the course re-approval process (see Section 5)
  - ✓ adequate consultation has been undertaken with relevant stakeholders (including students and external examiners)
  - ✓ the academic integrity of the course and the quality of student learning opportunities is maintained or enhanced, in line with relevant external reference points.
- 4.8 Approval may be conditional upon the course team undertaking further work on the proposal or submitting additional information to address any concerns raised by the committee. The course modification is not formally approved until any conditions have been addressed to the satisfaction of the committee. Final approval may, where agreed by the committee, be via Chair's action.
- 4.9 Upon approval by the School or Learning Network Academic Committee, the course modification form should be submitted to the Head of Quality Enhancement, via the Validation and Exams team ([validation@uos.ac.uk](mailto:validation@uos.ac.uk)), for final sign-off by the published deadline. The Head of Quality Enhancement reserves the right to refer the proposal to the Quality Committee for more detailed consideration where necessary to benefit the decision-making process. Where an academic link tutor is appointed by an academic school within the University to oversee provision at partner institutions, the Head of Quality Enhancement will consult with the link tutor on the proposed change. Where relevant, changes may also require approval from professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- 4.10 Once approved by the Head of Quality Enhancement, the change is reported to the Quality Committee for information. Updated module specifications should be included in the course handbook and submitted to the Validation and Exams team, to ensure that there is an accurate and up-to-date central record in the University's module catalogue. The Validation and Exams team should also be provided with any other updated course information to include in the course file. Students should be formally notified of the change(s) by the Module or Course Leader, and applicants notified where necessary via the Admissions team (or equivalent at partner institutions).

## **5. Major course modification**

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- 5.1 Where course teams wish to make major changes that significantly alter the character or content of the course and/or significantly affect the material information about the course, these may need to proceed to course re-approval in accordance with the *Procedure for the re-approval of existing courses*.
- 5.2 These type of changes include:
- a significant change of course title (reflecting substantial change in course content)
  - changes to course aims and/or learning outcomes that significantly alter the character or content of the course
  - change of mode of delivery for the course to online or distance learning, where a significant proportion of the existing course has not previously been delivered online and/or the course team are inexperienced in online delivery
  - a change to an accelerated degree
  - conversion of an existing course into a higher or degree apprenticeship, where significant changes to existing course content and/or delivery methods are required in order to meet the relevant apprenticeship standard
  - where a large number of course and/or module modifications (as per Section 4 above) are required or have been made since the last course re-approval, which have a significant cumulative effect on the character and/or content of the course.
- 5.3 Course teams should consult with the Head of Quality Enhancement regarding significant changes of this nature. The Head of Quality Enhancement may consult with internal and/or external academics before deciding whether the proposed change should proceed through the course modification process (in accordance with Section 4 above) or requires course re-approval.

## **6. Student consultation processes**

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- 6.1 To protect students' interests and ensure compliance with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and the corresponding CMA guidance, existing students should be consulted on any proposed changes at module or course level that will potentially affect the material information about their course. All students who may be affected should be consulted. For example if the proposed change is to a Level 6 module, Level 4 and Level 5 students who will subsequently be studying that module should be consulted in addition to any Level 6 students who will be affected by the change.
- 6.2 Where timescales permit, the proposed change should be discussed with student representatives for the course and other relevant stakeholders via the Course Committee. In addition, all students potentially affected by the proposed change should be consulted by the Course Administrator (on behalf of the Course or Module Leader) via email. This should be supplemented by a notification of the proposed change on the Learn course area (or equivalent within partner institutions). Students should be provided with a

minimum of 20 working days in which to raise any concerns, either directly to the Module or Course Leader or via their course representative (allowing sufficient time for their course representative to pass any comments on to the Module or Course Leader by the deadline). If students do not reply, their agreement to the change is assumed.

- 6.3 In the event that affected student(s) express any concerns about the proposed change, this should be discussed at the Course Committee if timescales permit. In addition, a meeting should be organised between the student(s) concerned and the Course and/or Module Leader(s) to discuss the concerns. If the issue cannot be resolved, then it may be necessary to involve the Students' Union in order to support continued discussion and to reach an agreement on the proposed way forward. It is important to ensure that any proposed change that has the potential to disadvantage a student should not be enforced, and therefore it may be necessary to introduce changes on a phased basis to protect current students' interests.
- 6.4 Course modification forms should clearly detail any concerns expressed by students and how these were resolved. Course teams should note that these records (including feedback submitted by students and any associated notes of meetings with students) may have to be provided to external agencies if a student makes a formal complaint about their experience at the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions, and therefore the documentation should be retained for a period of ten years.