



# **Course and Module Changes and Student Consultation**

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**Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships  
Department of Student and Academic Administration**

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# **Course and Module Changes and Student Consultation**

## **1. Introduction**

It is a strength of UK Higher Education that courses and modules are systematically reviewed, ensuring the academic provision is dynamic, challenging and offers a world-leading student experience. As part of this, courses and modules are regularly updated to incorporate new developments. In accordance with the expectations of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the University requires certain changes to courses and, where relevant, modules to have been through a consultation process with students before they are approved through the **Course Modification, Course Structure Change** or **Module Modification** processes.

This paper provides guidance to Course Leaders and Module Coordinators on when and how to conduct this consultation with students. Further guidance can be sought from your Associate Dean (Academic) and Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships (ASQP), Department of Students and Academic Administration (DSSA) at [asqp@port.ac.uk](mailto:asqp@port.ac.uk).

## **2. The Academic Contract**

When an applicant researches a course on an official website, or hears about a course at an Open Day, this information forms part of the contractual information when the applicant accepts an Offer. This is then followed with further contractual information about the course in the form of the Course Specification, Module Specification, Course Handbook, etc. Some information about a course is regarded by the CMA as Material Information (see section 3). If Material Information is changed after an applicant/student has accepted a course Offer, then the terms of the 'contract' with the student have potentially been changed. Where this is the case, institutions are required to consult with students, and where relevant applicants, on proposed changes to the course.

## **3. Material Changes**

Material Information is defined in the CMA publication *UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law (2015)* (paragraphs 4.7 - 4.10) and includes the following in relation to courses, and where relevant, units:

- course title
- award
- length of course
- the composition of the course and how it will be delivered (including balance between different types of contact hours and expected student workload)
- mandatory and requisite modules, and availability of optional modules
- overall method(s) of assessment for the course (e.g. breakdown between exams, coursework and/or practical assessments)

- location(s) of study, including work placements
- professional body accreditations and requirements

#### **4. Consultation with Students**

Proposed material changes to courses and modules which are part of the **Course Modification, Course Structure Change or Module Modification** processes must include a consultation exercise with students and applicants, where relevant, before being approved. **Annex A** provides a guide to the different types of material changes, the over-arching process by which the changes are taken forward, and whether there should be consultation with students. It is important to remember that in some cases it will be academic judgement as to whether a change to a module creates a material change at course level. Please note, notwithstanding requirements for student consultation on material changes, it is good practice to engage students as co-developers and partners in curriculum design and evaluation.

Departments, via Course Leaders, may choose to organise consultation of material changes with students at course level rather than module level; this should be agreed at Faculty or Department level. It is crucial that communications with students clearly identify the reasons for the proposed changes and the anticipated benefits of them, including if the changes are a result of previous student feedback or a requirement of a professional or other legal body. Depending on the type of material change, consultation with students may take the form of an individual email to the student's University email account or it may be an item for discussion with the Course Reps at the next meeting of the Student Staff Consultation Committee (SSCC) and Board of Studies (BoS). The SSCC and BoS minute templates include an agenda item on module/course changes and consultation with students. To supplement these formal routes to engage students, it is also good practice to form events such as focus groups and workshops with students to consider curriculum changes.

For clarity, it is not appropriate to announce changes via a news board or similar when all students on the course need to be consulted. In cases where all students on the course are written to, they must be given a minimum of 10 working days to feed back any comments on suggested material course/module changes. **Annex A** sets out the minimum threshold for consultation.

Students are being invited to offer feedback on any material course changes, and not to 'approve' or 'agree' with the proposed changes. However, there may be cases whereby some students express strong views against the proposed changes. In such cases, the proposed changes, along with the student feedback, should be considered by the Course Leader and Head of Department, in consultation with the Associate Dean (Students) and Associate Dean (Academic), to consider further and agree if or how the change should be taken forward.

Where all students are consulted on a material change, evidence of the consultation process with students must be recorded on the Electronic Document Management (EDM) Course File or Module File, as appropriate.

**Annex B** provides example emails to students which may be used and adopted by Departments as appropriate and **Annex C** provides an example of a Google Form which could be used to gather student feedback. Faculty/Department Offices may organise the communication methods with students as they see fit.

## **5. Communications with Applicants**

All material changes identified in **Annex A** will be communicated to applicants to the course by the University Admissions Centre only, once the change has been approved through appropriate channels. The University Admissions Centre will contact applicants at set points in the year, being January, April and September.

## **6. Further Advice and Information**

It is important that Module Coordinators and Course Leaders seek advice from their Associate Dean (Academic) if they are not clear whether a proposed change to a module or course will require consultation with students. It is therefore critical that consideration of any changes to modules or courses are planned well-ahead of the relevant process deadline.

Faculty Offices will provide their departments with a Faculty-relevant timeline which meets the University's overall deadline for the Course Structure Change process, which incorporates a consultation period with students.

## Annex A

### Student Consultation of Material Changes Guide

#### Colour key

Consult with all students	Consult with students if the change will affect existing students. These types of changes are typically phased in and affect new entrants only.	Consult with students if the module change <b>significantly</b> changes the overall course. Consultation is via Course Reps, SSCCs and BoS.
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	Type of Material Change	Process	Do I need to consult with existing students?	Extent of student consultation	University Admissions Centre inform applicants
1	Removing Core/Option unit	Course Structure Change	Yes	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
2	Adding a Core unit	Course Structure Change	Yes	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
3	Change in status from Option to Core	Course Structure Change	Yes	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
4	Change in Core Module Mode e.g. from/to campus/DL	Course Structure Change	Yes	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
5	Change in Core Module credit volume	Course Structure Change	Yes	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
6	Change of Course Title	Course Modification	If the new course title will affect existing students	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
7	Change of Award	Course Modification	If the new award title will affect existing students	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes

	Type of Material Change	Process	Do I need to consult with existing students?	Extent of student consultation	University Admissions Centre inform applicants
8	Length of Course	Course Modification	If the change in course length will affect existing students	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
9	Add a compulsory placement/ Sandwich year	Course Modification	If the change in course will affect existing students	All students on the course who will be affected by the change	Yes
10	Change in Core Module Learning Outcomes	Module Modification	If it significantly changes the course Learning Outcomes	Course Rep, SSCC and Board of Studies	No (This will be a YES if course Learning Outcomes are significantly changed – Course Leader to advise Admissions Centre)
11	Change in Core Module Assessment	Module Modification	If it significantly changes the overall course assessment balance	Course Rep, SSCC and Board of Studies	No (This will be a YES if course Learning Outcomes are significantly changed – Course Leader to advise Admissions Centre)
12	Change in Core Module study hours or change in the nature of study activities	Module Modification	If it significantly changes the overall course study hours	Course Rep, SSCC and Board of Studies	No (This will be a YES if course Learning Outcomes are significantly changed – Course Leader to advise Admissions Centre)
13	Suspension of Intake	Course Modification	No	N/A	Yes
14	Adding an Option unit	Course Structure Change	No	N/A	No

## Annex B

### Initial e-mail for consultation:

**Subject: Important: Consultation on proposed changes to your course**

**Text:**

**Important: Consultation on proposed changes to your course**

Course Code: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Course Title: xxxxxxxxxxxx

**Dear 'Charlotte'**

I am writing to inform you of some changes to your course for the 20xx/20xx academic year that are intended to further develop your course.

We would value your feedback on the proposed changes, which are outlined below. You can do this by clicking on **this link**, where you will be able to leave your anonymous feedback.

Feedback must be submitted by <date in 10 days-time>, after which I will communicate the outcome of the consultation to you by e-mail.

Kind regards,

<course leader>

The proposed changes are:

**Proposed change 1: <Short title>**

*Choose one of and insert in <short title> section above:*

- *Addition of a core module– give modulecode and title*
- *Removal core/optional (amend as appropriate) module– give modulecode and title*
- *Modulestatus change from option to core – give modulecode and title*
- *Modulecredit change (e.g., new modulecreated e.g. 2 x 30 credit moduleto 1 x 60 credit) – give modulecode, title and the proposed credit change*
- *Modulemode change (e.g., from/to taught/DL) – give modulecode, title change and proposed mode change*

**Why are we proposing this change?** *Short positive rational and explanation.*

**Proposed change 2 etc – repeat as above**

**Initial e-mail for follow up:**

**Subject: Important: Outcome of consultation on proposed changes to your course**

**Text:**

**Important: Outcome of consultation on proposed changes to your course**

Course Code: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Course Title: xxxxxxxxxxxx

**Dear 'Charlotte'**

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the consultation of the changes to your course for the 20xx/20xx academic year that are intended to further develop your course.

Following our consultation with all affected students, we would like to inform you of the following outcomes:

**Proposed change 1:** <Short title>

*Choose one of and insert in <short title> section above:*

- *Addition of a core module– give modulecode and title*
- *Removal core/optional (amend as appropriate) module– give modulecode and title*
- *Modulestatus change from option to core – give modulecode and title*
- *Modulecredit change (e.g. new modulecreated e.g. 2 x 30 credit moduleto 1 x 60 credit) – give modulecode, title and the proposed credit change*
- *Modulemode change (e.g from/to taught/DL) – give modulecode, title change and proposed mode change*

**Why are we proposing this change?** *Short positive rational and explanation.*

**Outcome:** *This change has been approved/not been approved to start in the 20xx/20xx academic year.*

**Proposed change 2:** *etc - repeat as above*

Kind regards,

<course leader>



## Annex C

This is an example of a student feedback form for course and module modification that would be sent out to students through an emailed link.

### Course Modification - Student Feedback Form

As part of our annual review and evaluation of your course provision, taking into consideration student and external examiner feedback as well as the reflections of the course team delivering the curriculum, the following positive changes have been proposed for your course:

Change:  
Rationale:

Change:  
Rationale:

**\* Required**

**Name**

Your answer

**Student number \***

Your answer

**Comments in regards to Change 1 \***

Your answer

**Comments in regards to Change 2 \***

Your answer

**SUBMIT**

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside of University of Portsmouth Staff. Report Abuse - Terms of Service - Additional Terms

The information provided by the student would be sent back to a secure spreadsheet (see Image 1) that only the course leader/ moduleco-ordinator would be able to access. Students would be asked to provide their Student ID number as a required field so that we can reply to any concerns or feedback they supply, if applicable. Students will not be able to see any other students' feedback.

**Image 1**

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Timestamp	Name	Student number	Comments in regards to Change 1	Comments in regards to Change 2
2	6/2/2017 15:55:07	Lisa White		Yes I support the proposed change	
3	6/6/2017 9:55:06	Lisa		Yes please	
4	6/6/2017 15:47:43	test		1234 i dont like the proposed unit	
5	6/6/2017 15:48:19	test 2	1234567		
6					
7					
8					
9					
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11					
12					
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24					
25					

Once the student has completed the form, the spreadsheet will automatically update to show the new feedback.