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*This document is part of the Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures which govern the University's academic provision. Each document has a unique document number to indicate which section of the series it belongs to.*

## **4B – Programme and Unit Modifications: Policy**

### **1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This policy is intended for Bournemouth University (BU) staff.
- 1.2 In meeting the requirements of the quality and standards conditions of the regulatory framework, this policy outlines the processes for managing changes to existing provision to ensure that programmes leading to a BU award are up-to-date and offer a high-quality academic experience to students, a key component of condition B1. Changes to the approved Programme Specifications and definitive sections of Unit Specifications can only be made as part of a review or through modification.
- 1.3 The procedures outlined in this document give due regard to relevant guidance about complying with consumer protection law.

### **2. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 2.1 **Senate:** to approve new policies or amendments to existing policies relating to programme and unit modifications.
- 2.2 **Education Committee:** to approve new and revised procedures as necessary and to receive updates on modification activity across Faculties. To recommend changes to current policy on modifications to Senate.
- 2.3 **University Research Degrees Committee (URDC):** to recommend proposed changes to policy and regulations and to approve changes to procedures and guidance contained in *8A – Code of Practice for Research Degrees* for approval to Education Committee and Senate.
- 2.4 **Faculty Education Committee** to be responsible for the management and approval of modifications to taught awards and taught credit bearing units on behalf of Education Committee.
- 2.5 **Faculty Research Degrees Committee (FRDC):** to approve modifications to programme and unit specifications for Professional Doctorates (where there are no implications for *8A – Code of Practice for Research Degrees*).

### **3. ACCESSING OTHER RELEVANT BU DOCUMENTS**

- 3.1 All documents can be accessed [here](#)
- 3.2 Other documents with direct relevance to this are:
  - i) 3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure
  - ii) 4A - Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy
  - iii) 4D - Continuing Professional Development (CPD): Policy and Procedure
  - iv) 8A - Code of Practice for Research Degrees

## Policy

### 4 TYPES OF CHANGE

- 4.1 Changes to an existing programme and/or unit of study can only be made in one of two ways:
- **Review** – changes that should be made through the review process are those which are deemed to significantly alter the nature, focus and purpose of the programme, and/or the award title(s)<sup>1</sup> (see 4A Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy and Procedure for the relevant procedure).
  - **Modification** – these are more limited changes which are not deemed to be of sufficient magnitude to significantly alter the nature, focus and purpose of the programme, and/or the award title(s).
- 4.2 An indicative list of changes to be managed through each process can be found in Appendix 1.

### 5 KEY PRINCIPLES OF MODIFICATION

- 5.1 A key principle of this policy is to normally make changes only if the overall effect of the changes is either neutral or advantageous to potential applicants, applicants and/or students. Ensuring that changes are fair and made fairly is therefore an important objective of this policy. Changes can only be made subject to student consultation, consent and communication requirements as set out in this policy
- 5.2 The type of changes that can be made through the modification process are categorised as either 'material' or 'non-material' based on the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) guidance and its definition of course-related material information<sup>2</sup> (see appendix 1 for details):
- **Material changes** are considered to have consumer protection implication and will require consent if they affect continuing students who have already started their course or who have accepted an offer based on the previously-published course information (see section 6.2).
  - **Non-material changes** are other changes to units or programmes. These are not considered to have consumer protection implication and will not require student consent.
- 5.3 Faculties and any committee asked to approve changes under this policy must first consider the framework for delivery in relation to the overall BU proposition and strategic aims and apply relevant guidance on the BU proposition when taking decisions on proposed changes under this policy.
- 5.4 A key aspect of this policy, aligning BU with condition B2 of the regulatory framework, is to actively engage students, individually and/or collectively, in the quality of their educational experience by gathering feedback on all changes through the process of student consultation; this is separate to any consent exercise. Consultation must be carried out in relation to all changes covered by this policy. The purpose of student consultation is to allow opportunities for students to contribute to the development of their academic experience as part of the enhancement exercise and to enable BU to identify and assess the potential impact of proposed changes on applicants and students. In respect of material changes consultation also enables the University to meet its legal and regulatory responsibilities with regard to changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Education Committee approval is required prior to the development.

<sup>2</sup> See page 29 of [Higher education: consumer law advice for providers](#).

- 5.5 The level of consultation required for each change will depend on the nature of the change and the perceived level of risk or adverse impact on students:

Type of change	Who to consult	Typical Methods of consultation (not exhaustive)
<b>Material</b>	All affected students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with students as a group face-to-face.</li> <li>• Online survey.</li> </ul> (All affected students must have a reasonable opportunity to provide views even if more than one type of consultation method is employed)
<b>Non-material</b>	Student Reps as a minimum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-staff forum.</li> <li>• Focus group with Student Reps.</li> </ul>

- 5.6 The feedback from student consultation must be reported to the approving committee. The committee must take the feedback into account appropriately in considering whether to approve a proposed change. In particular, the committee must consider whether proposed changes are fair and likely to be neutral or advantageous to affected applicants and students; and whether there are actions which could be taken in the implementation of changes to prevent or mitigate potential adverse impacts on applicants and students. Consideration should be given to Student Visa holders and any potential impact to their Visa, advice should be sought from the Immigration Advice and Compliance Team.
- 5.7 The results of the consultation should also be communicated to relevant students, including a summary of the feedback received, confirmation of the decision made by the approving committee, a response to significant issues raised and any amendments to the proposal originally submitted for consultation.
- 5.8 Modifications are approved by Faculty Education Committee (and FRDC for credit bearing units within PGR programmes) with the involvement of Academic Quality and reported annually to Education Committee (see appendix 2). Modifications to procedures and guidance contained in *8A – Code of Practice for Research Degrees* are recommended by URDC and approved by Education Committee and Senate.
- 5.9 Modifications to a CPD programme including the creation and approval of units for delivery in an existing CPD programme and/or changes to existing units should be submitted to the approving committee using the forms available in *4D - Continuing Professional Development (CPD): Policy and Procedure*.
- 5.10 Modifications should normally be considered and approved prior to the start of the academic year in which they will be implemented, as per published timescales. Any changes made in the year of delivery will normally require student consent regardless of whether they are deemed material or non-material.
- 5.11 Formal modification is not required where changes are made to the indicative sections of approved programme and unit documentation.

## 6. CONSUMER LAW REQUIREMENTS FOR CONSENT TO MATERIAL CHANGES

- 6.1 The committee considering a request to approve a modification must consider the impact of the modification on students, offer-holders, applicants and potential applicants, including whether a proposal involves changes to information already supplied to students and others and whether a change is fair. This should be done through applying the definition of “material change” in paragraph 5.2 of this policy and considering feedback from consultation carried out in accordance with paragraphs 5.4 to 5.7. Typical examples of ‘material’ and ‘non-material’ changes are provided in Appendix 1.

- 6.2 Student consent is required for a material change where a proposal affects continuing students. The seeking of consent is a process distinct to consultation and should only be commenced after consultation has been undertaken and consultation feedback has been appropriately taken into account by the Head of Department. In considering the consultation feedback, the Head of Department will decide whether to proceed with the process of seeking student consent on the basis of the consultation responses. Where any negative comments or objections are raised during the consultation process, the Head of Department should seek advice from the Chair of the approving committee, Academic Quality, and/or Legal Services. The process of seeking consent will involve directly informing all affected students of the proposed change (referencing the results of consultation as provided for in paragraph 5.7 above) and asking them to indicate consent or objection.
- 6.3 Student consent must be obtained prior to any final approval and implementation of a modification, and after agreement has been obtained from the Head of Department (as per 6.2). Faculties must maintain an audit trail of the student consent process and any correspondence with the students including any potential issues that are raised. The outcome of the consent process must be reported to the approving committee.
- 6.4 For a material change the explicit agreement of more than 50% of affected students must usually be obtained before a change can be finally approved and implemented. However:
- There may be instances where the approving committee considers it appropriate to increase the consent threshold beyond the minimum level (i.e., 50% +1) having regard to the feedback received during the consultation process (see 6.2); and
  - In cases where less than 50% of affected students have responded to the consent request in any way, (i.e., more than 50% of affected students have neither consented nor refused consent), the University may take a risk-based approach to approving the change and decide to make an exception by varying the threshold requirements for student agreement. This may include reducing the approval thresholds in terms of the percentage of affected students required to indicate consent or accepting non-objection (i.e. non-response) as indicating agreement to a change. Any such decision is exceptional and should be made in consultation with Faculty Executive Deans and the Head of Academic Quality (or their nominees) based on careful consideration of relevant available information, including feedback gathered during the student consultation process, the proportion of students responding to the original consent request who objected or agreed and other relevant factors such as how different the final proposal is from the proposal covered by the consultation exercise and whether any relevant history of past feedback in relation to the programme.
- 6.5 In addition, an approving committee may decide that it would be appropriate to seek student consent as a precondition for approval for proposed modifications originally classed as non-material changes under this policy or changes to postgraduate research degrees. This may be appropriate for example where consultation feedback indicates the potential impact of the change on students is greater than originally thought.
- 6.6 Decisions taken under paragraph 6.4 and 6.5 should be taken with appropriate regard to any relevant University guidance. The committee should clearly record the reasons for the decision, noting the factors taken into account.
- 6.7 The approving committee must consider the outcome of the consent process before taking a decision on final approval of a modification. This includes considering any feedback received from students during the consent exercise and the number of affected students refusing consent to the proposed changes alongside the feedback from previous consultation. Where the approval threshold has been achieved, but some students have expressed disagreement, the approving committee should consider whether it is appropriate to take further steps to reduce, mitigate or remove any adverse effects for those students as individuals or as a group and whether it is still appropriate for a change to be approved. Any resulting amendment to the proposed modification may need to be subject to further student consultation. There may

be limits or conditions on any offer made to affected students. Further advice can be sought from Academic Quality and Legal Services.

- 6.8 At the completion of the modification process, Faculties should ensure that affected students are informed of the change, including any differences between the change that they were consulted about and the one that is finally made, where relevant, and the response to any important issues raised by students.
- 6.9 On receipt of confirmation, Faculties and Marketing & Communications should follow the procedures set out in relevant the BU policy or policies for ensuring accuracy of published information to ensure the University is compliant with all information and consent requirements that apply to students, offer-holders applicants and potential applicants under consumer law.

## General

### 7. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

7.1 [The regulatory framework for higher education in England](#)

7.2 [The UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(QAA, 2018\)](#)

### 7.3 Reporting to the Office for Students (OfS)

- 7.3.1 While a key objective of this policy is to ensure that any programme changes comply with consumer protection law, it is possible that certain changes might trigger a reporting requirement to the OfS. All staff involved in implementing this policy should have regard to BU's Reportable Events Procedures.

### 8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Examples of changes made through review and modification
Appendix 2	Flow Chart of Modifications process

## Appendix 1 – Examples of changes made through review and modification

This gives examples of the types of changes made through programme review and modification to indicate whether they would be material or non-material changes within this policy. This is not an exhaustive list of changes in these two categories. Under consumer protection principles “material change” includes any change which would:

- require a significant amendment to the course-related material already published by BU (i.e. where current published information will cease to be accurate if the change is approved);

If a proposed change is not listed in the table Faculties should consider whether it would be considered a material change for this reason.

Faculties are responsible for making an initial decision as to whether a proposed change should be managed through the review or modification process. Academic Quality can provide guidance to Faculties when making this decision.

Reference to “published course information” is to the information relating to a course which is published by BU on the course pages of the BU website and in the BU prospectus.

<b>Changes which are normally managed through a Programme Review process</b>	
The introduction of an additional or alternative award or programme title to a framework or as a stand-alone programme	
The introduction of an additional or alternative award or programme title to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provision	
Change of aims or outcomes of a programme or level	
Extension or change of a programme to involve a new partnership arrangement delivered through the following partnership models: Franchise; Validation; Off-campus; Shared delivery (Education Committee /JET approval is required in this instance)	
Changes to core units that amount to a total credit value of more than one third of a level between approval/review of the programme and its subsequent review	
<b>Modification to taught awards which must be managed through a modification process (this policy 4B)</b>	
<b>Material changes (Consult, consent and communicate)</b>	<b>Non-material changes (Consult and communicate)</b>
Change to a unit assessment, e.g., from exam to coursework, where it affects the overall methods of assessment at a programme-level as shown in the published course information	Change to unit assessment and/or assessment weightings, e.g., from exam to coursework, where it does not affect the overall balance between methods of assessment at a programme-level as shown in the published course information
Change to unit learning and teaching methods where it affects the overall composition at a programme-level as shown in the published course information	Change to unit learning and teaching methods where it does not affect the overall composition at a programme-level as shown in the published course information
Change to overall mode of delivery at a programme-level and/or course duration as specified in published course information on the BU webpages	Change to unit mode of delivery where it does not affect the overall mode of delivery outlined at a programme-level and/or course duration as specified in published course information on the BU webpages
Change to unit title where the change affects the units aims, learning outcomes and/or unit HECoS code	Change to unit title where the change does not affect the units aims, learning outcomes and/or unit HECoS code
Change to unit aims where it fundamentally changes information provided to students in published course information and/or changes the unit title or unit HECoS Code	Change to unit aims where it does not fundamentally change information provided to students in published course information, and/or changes the unit title or unit HECoS Code
Change to unit learning outcomes where the change affects the unit title or unit HECoS code	Change to unit learning outcomes where the change does not affect the unit title or unit HECoS code

Changes to scheduled learning and teaching hours at a unit level and/or programme level	Introduction of new mode of delivery in addition to existing mode of delivery
Addition, substitution, or removal of core units	Changes to option units, including addition, substitution, or removal
Change to entry requirements, including where required by a PSRB	
Change to course location/site of delivery	
Changes to accreditation status of a programme	
Structural changes to a programme, e.g., introduction or discontinuation of intermediate qualifications, progression routes and placements	
Change to credit value and/or level of study	
<b>Modification to postgraduate research degrees which must be managed through a modification process (this policy 4B)</b>	
Annual updates to 8A - Code of Practice for Research Degrees to reflect new award requirements, changes in internal research degree processes and to meet any changes in external requirements	
Additional guidance, or changes to existing guidance, on specific areas of research degree procedures (e.g. guidance on requirements for practice-led research; alternative thesis submission requirements, PhD by publication)	
Modifications to the format, content and processes relating to Professional Doctorates as outlined in the Programme Specification and/or Unit Specifications	

## Appendix 2 – Flow Chart of Modifications process

