Changes to Programmes and Modules

1. Scope and purpose

1.1 This policy sets out the University of Southampton's framework for the approval, management, and oversight of changes to taught programmes and modules, and to taught assessed components of research degrees. It provides guidance on the classification of changes as material, or non-material, and outlines the responsibilities, approval processes, and governance arrangements associated with each type of modification.

1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that programme and module changes are managed consistently across the University, support the enhancement of academic provision, maintain academic quality and standards, and protect the interests of applicants, offer holders, prospective students, and current students.

1.3 The policy applies to all taught programmes and modules. It should be used by Programme Leads, Directors of Programmes, School Programmes Committees (SPC), Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) Teams, and other relevant stakeholders involved in the design, review, approval and implementation of programme and module changes.

1.4 If the proposed changes will impact programmes delivered at multiple locations, the School must discuss the proposed changes with the academic leadership in each delivery location and achieve broad agreement from all parties.

2. Material Change

2.1 The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) defines a material change to a university course as any significant alteration that affects the course's content, structure, or delivery methods. Material changes include:

2.1.1 changes to the title, aims or learning outcomes of a programme;

2.1.2 significant restructuring or redesign of a programme;

2.1.3 changes to the location of study, removal of an attendance mode or a delivery mode (part time/fulltime, in person/online);

2.1.4 changes to the length of the course or the award to be received upon completion;

2.1.5 removal of an accreditation or a change to the awarding body.

2.2 Information about changes of these kinds is crucial for students to make informed decisions about their education and should be communicated clearly and promptly.

2.3 To ensure the University is compliant with CMA guidance and the University's consumer protection obligations, the impact of each modification to a programme needs to be assessed to ascertain its impact on key stakeholders. The Changes to Programmes and Modules Table provides an overview of the most common reasons for changes to modules and programmes and the associated classification as to whether these are material or non-material.

2.4 The Programme Lead and/or Director of Programmes, in consultation with the Chair of SPC, will determine whether a proposed modification constitutes a material or non-material change. Where a change is classified as material, appropriate communication and consultation with current students, applicants, offer holders and prospective students must be undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out in the Changes to Programmes and Modules Table.

3. Student Voice

3.1 SPCs must ensure that current students are adequately informed of proposals to make amendments to their programme of study.

3.2 Depending on the nature, materiality or scale of the change proposed, it may be necessary to consult formally with the wider student body and in some cases, to receive their agreement to proceed. Further, for material changes, it may be necessary to inform or consult offer holders or to inform applicants.

3.3 The University has a commitment to working with students as partners. It is therefore expected that changes to individual modules would consider student feedback and attainment and that students would be involved from the design stage of changes to Parts and programmes. The extent of the student contribution

may range from a discussion at the SSLC to a co-design process depending on the scale of the proposed changes.

4. Record Keeping

4.1 SPCs should keep a log of all changes to programmes and modules. This should record the nature of the change, the approval date, the date from which the change applied, the reason for the change and details of any notification, consultation or co-design with students, The record should have a level of detail proportionate to the complexity of the change but may refer to other documentation such as Programme Enhancement Action Plans, SSLC minutes, minutes of programme team meetings, external examiners' reports, notifications from PSRBs etc. which have formed part of the papers presented to SPC.

5. Strategic and Previously Approved Changes

5.1 Changes made for the following reasons do not require any additional approval. However, they may still require actions to meet the expectations of the CMA, ensuring compliance with consumer protection law:

5.1.1 Changes approved during a Programme Quality Review and included in the Programme Enhancement Action Plan do not require further approval. SPCs are responsible for monitoring the implementation and operation of such changes.

5.1.2 Changes that are being implemented to better align with the University's Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) Framework as described in the Quality Handbook. SPCs are responsible for monitoring the implementation and operation of these changes and for reporting on framework compliance to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee via the Annual Monitoring process.

5.1.3 Changes required to align with recommendations from University Strategic Projects do not require further approval. SPCs are responsible for monitoring the implementation and operation of these changes and for

reporting on framework compliance to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee via the Annual Monitoring process.

5.1.4 Changes proposed following an amber rating from a Programme Health Check. SPCs are responsible for monitoring the implementation and operation of these changes and for reporting on their effectiveness to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee via the Annual Monitoring process.

5.1.5 Changes proposed following a red rating from a Programme Health Check. A red rating based on education quality triggers a Programme Quality Review. The review panel will be responsible for approving the action plan and monitoring its implementation. SPCs will report on its effectiveness to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee via the Annual Monitoring process.

6. Administrative Changes

6.1 Some small administrative changes to module or programme documentation do not require formal approval or recording. These changes can be made by contacting the CQA team and include:

- Minor typographical amendments/rewording of module profile/presentational issues;
- Annual updates to reading lists for students;
- New module lead;
- New programme lead;
- New external examiner (approved via the external examiner nomination process);
- A change in the department responsible for teaching a module.

7. Changes to Modules

7.1 Changes to modules arising from annual review, maintenance, and enhancement activity by Module Leads/Teams which do not significantly affect the aims, learning

outcomes or overall structure of the programme, can be approved by the Director of Programmes or Chair's Action by the Chair of the SPC. These changes should be logged as described in section 4.

7.2 Such changes should be:

- readily implemented by the School, without significant additional resource, staffing, or operational requirements;
- not in conflict with existing University frameworks, policies or regulations;
- not disadvantageous to current students;
- not involving substantial change to programme structure, curriculum content, or learning outcomes.

7.3 More extensive changes to groups of modules which collectively affect the structure, curriculum content or learning outcomes of a programme or Part should be treated as changes to a programme.

7.4 A change to a module which affects the assessment of an additional competence standard must be reported to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee.

8. Changes to Programmes

8.1 The level of approval required for a modification to a programme not covered by the exemptions in section 5 will depend on its scale, risk and impact. Where significant modifications to a programme are planned, the Programme Lead should consult the Deputy Head of School (Education), the Associate Dean (Education) and the Head of Quality, Standards and Accreditation to determine the appropriate approval route.

8.2 Where the proposed modifications:

- substantially affect the programme structure, curriculum content, learning outcomes or material information;
- have implications for student experience, completion rates, satisfaction;
- have significant implications for resourcing, or planning;
- change material information already provided to applicants or offer holders;

- have a demonstrable impact on current students, including implications for future option choices or programme pathways;
- conflict with existing University policies, frameworks or regulations;

appropriate consultation with students and other relevant stakeholders must be undertaken and in some cases a Programme Quality Review may be required.

8.3 Programme Teams planning significant modification to a programme or Part where they would benefit from expert support for one or more aspects of their plans may, following consultation with the Head of Quality, Standards and Accreditation, request a Programme Quality Review.

8.4 A change to a programme which affects the assessment of an additional competence standard must be reported to Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee.

9. Timing, Notification and Consultation

9.1 Current students:

9.1.1 Non-material changes to modules such as the title, content, learning outcomes, syllabus or assessment strategy for individual modules can be notified to students through publication of the programme catalogue for the next academic year. Changes agreed after the publication of the programme catalogue should be communicated directly to all affected students on the programme.

9.1.2 Material changes to Parts or programmes must be published to all current students in the programme catalogue for the next academic year. Prior to this there must be consultation with all current students who will be affected. For example, changes to Part III require consultation with students in both Parts I and II. Care should be taken to include in the consultation students who have paused their study, student undertaking external repeat and students on placement. All queries and objections raised by students should be responded to although an absence of response may be taken as acceptance. Where unanimous agreement with students cannot be reached,

the proposed changes should be referred to the SPC for decision. SPCs should consider:

- whether if known at the time of application the changes may have affected the decision of the student to apply for or accept a place on the programme;
- whether the changes are on balance advantageous or disadvantageous for students;
- whether there could be flexibility in how or when the change is applied to different groups of students;
- whether the changes should be associated with a new programme code, allowing students who do not accept the changes to continue to study on the existing programme.

9.2 Offer Holders and Applicants:

9.2.1 The University has an annual timetable for updating programme and module documentation and for issuing material information to offer holders and applicants. Where changes to programmes and modules are approved by the published deadlines, they will be included in the information for applicants and offer holders and in general this is sufficient to meet the expectations for notification of changes. The exception is changes that affect features of a module or the programme specifically used in programme marketing, for example: field trips, site visits, work placements and student mobility opportunities. For activities that have been specifically presented as attractive or unique aspects of the programme during recruitment activities, specific communication to offer holders and applicants is required.

9.2.2 Where material changes are approved after the deadlines for inclusion in the information for applicants:

Offer holders:

9.2.3 should usually be notified sufficiently early in the admissions cycle to allow them to change their minds about accepting their offer without significant disadvantage. Their right to do so should be made clear to them.

Notification is required for all such material changes, as these may reasonably be expected to affect the decision of an applicant to accept the offer. SPCs are responsible for identifying the need to notify offer holders. All communication with offer holders should be made in consultation with the Recruitment and Admissions team.

9.2.4 Where material changes to programmes are exceptionally and unavoidably made late in the admissions cycle leaving offer holders with limited options for finding alternative courses, the Associate Dean (Education) and the Recruitment and Admissions team should be notified immediately and their advice on communication, support and alternative offers must be followed.

Applicants:

9.2.5 must be notified as soon as the changes are approved. Notification is required for all such material changes, as these may reasonably be expected to affect the decision of applicant when considering whether to accept an offer. Communication should be made in consultation with the Recruitment and Admissions team and should include a summary of the proposed changes, including a short rationale and a link to the updated programme documentation.

9.3 A non-exhaustive list of example changes to modules, groups of modules and programmes and an assessment of their materiality and guidance on the expectations for notification and consultation is given in the Changes to Programmes and Modules Table.

9.4 Presentations, digital and hard copy marketing material for prospective applicants should be accurate at the time of use and with amendment to reflect changes to programmes and modules made as soon as they have been approved.

9.5 Any change to a programme or module which affects the assessment of an additional competence standard must be communicated to all current students, offer holders and applicants who may be affected by the change.

9.6 Although it is not a requirement to notify offer holders and applicants of enhancements and additions to programmes, it may be beneficial to applicant

conversion to do so. All communications to applicants should be made in consultation with the Recruitment and Admissions team.

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