

Minor Modifications Protocol

Introduction

1 The University of Law's Minor Modifications Protocol has been informed by the University's Programme and Campus Design, Development and Approval Policy and the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code for Higher Education, specifically the Advice and Guidance on Course Design and Development. The QAA's Quality Code is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education institutions and sets out how academic standards are established and maintained and how the quality of learning opportunities are assured and enhanced. This document sits within the University of Law's Quality and Standards Code which provides a suite of documents designed to safeguard the academic standards of the University of Law and to assure the quality of learning opportunities offered; this protocol should therefore be read in conjunction with other relevant documents within the code.

2 The University's programme specifications and module descriptor (the definitive documents) represent a form of contract with students, and in some cases employers. This is a form of contract between multiple stakeholders whereby a programme has been approved to provide a particular academic experience appropriate to the subject, students, and sector's expectations and the programme team has undertaken responsibility to deliver and maintain that. Therefore, when a programme team needs or wants to make changes, there is a formal process to facilitate that. This process assures all parties that the changes are in the best interests of the students and/or staff involved in the programme, that the programme remains high quality and in line with academic and/or professional expectations.

3 The University, in discharging its responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, operates effective processes for the approval of modifications to programmes and modules.

4 This protocol sets out the approach the University takes in ensuring modifications to programmes and modules are correctly classified, understood by stakeholders and staff with programme development or programme management responsibilities, and are approved in a way in which is balanced, fair, transparent, and aligned with current sector best practice.

5 This protocol explains:

5.1 The nature and way minor modifications are categorised;

5.2 How the University fulfils the assurance and expectations of the Academic Board in ensuring that the Programme Approval Committee fully discharges its responsibilities in applying appropriate scrutiny of modification proposals.

Key Principles

6 Minor modifications may result from: developments within an academic discipline or professional sector; feedback from students, employers or from external examiners; outcomes of quality assurance processes including annual monitoring and periodic review; changes in professional, statutory, or regulatory body requirements; or the identification of opportunities to enhance the delivery of teaching or assessment.

7 Minor modifications are part of a programme and its constituent module's inherent flexibility and would not be expected to have an impact on the overall programme aims or learning outcomes. Minor modifications usually affect a single module or small number of linked modules; and where the modification is at programme level, the programme as a whole should not be significantly different.

8 Any amendment which has any impact on the information contained within a programme specification or module descriptor must go through the minor modification process.

9 Minor modifications will typically include changes to one or more of the following, and will be considered in the context of University policy and regulation:

9.1 Module level modification:

- Title
- Aims and learning outcomes
- Assessment details
- Credit size
- Pre- and co-requisites
- Indicative content
- Notional Learning Hours
- Any other information contained within the module descriptor

9.2 Programme level modification:

- Module diet (inclusion or removal of a module(s))
- Admission requirements
- Accrediting body information
- Amendments to assessment regulations

9.3 Length of programme (if there is no significant impact on the learning or programme outcomes).

10 In some cases, the number and scope of minor modifications for a programme may justify the application of the University's Major Modification process. The Head of Quality of Assurance/Quality Assurance Manager will advise in this instance. Please refer to paragraphs 21-23 (inclusive) of the Programme and Campus Design, Development and Approval Policy.

11 To clarify, any amendments or updates to modular reading lists do not necessitate a minor modification and can be updated as an 'administrative' amendment only. These changes can be reported to the Programme Approval Committee at the next available meeting, for noting.

Procedural Approach

12 Preparing a modification proposal:

12.1 A proposal for a minor modification must include the following:

- A completed minor modification form (proforma available on Elite as document Q1.2.1 Minor Modification Form). This ensures that the necessary information is available to the Programme Approval Committee to consider, and that it is recorded for future reference.
- The relevant module and/or programme specification amended in a Word document with tracked changes. Any amended documents without tracked changes will be rejected.

13 For certain proposals it may be necessary to provide supporting information to help the Programme Approval Committee make an informed decision. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Comments or endorsement from a relevant external examiner, student representative or PSRB;
- Analysis or modelling of quantitative data such as assessment results or rates of academic progression.

Confirmation of a minor modification

14 All applications for minor modifications to programmes will be considered through a short approval process and will therefore be considered directly by the Programme Approval Committee, which will convene via teleconference.

15 The modification proposal lead will be required to submit the documentation specified in paragraph 12.1, and where necessary, in paragraph 13.

16 Based on the documentation submitted for the committee's scrutiny, the discussion within the Committee and the responses received from the modification lead, the Programme Approval Committee may decide as follows:

- To **approve** the proposal, with or without recommendations as applied by the Programme Approval Panel;
- To set **final-conditions** on the proposal which must be addressed in order for the Programme Approval Committee to grant final approval.

- To **refer** the proposal for further work where there are a number of significant issues to be addressed. This will allow time for the modification lead to consult more widely and fully revise the documentation, which should be considered by a re-convened Programme Approval Committee;
- To **reject** the proposal because of a range of substantive issues which need to be addressed
- To recommend that the modifications are managed via the Major Modification process.

Timescales

17 Unless essential to ensuring that the student experience is of a high quality, or mandated by a PSRB, modifications to modules should not normally be approved less than 6 months prior to the next instance of delivery. Also, for programme level modifications, approval should not normally be approved less than 6 months prior to the next enrolment period. These timescales are to ensure that there is sufficient time to amend documentation, inform students, and implement the modification within the University's systems and processes.

General guidance

18 Staff proposing a modification should consider which groups of students the modification may affect, such as those who are currently intermitting from the programme, prospective students or students who currently hold offers of admission onto the programme. The application for modification approval should clearly articulate the approach which will be taken to fully inform students within affected groups of the modification and any transitional arrangements, if necessary.

19 Where an approved modification will impact students who are either currently enrolled, under an intermission or applicants who have accepted either a conditional or unconditional offer onto the programme proposed for modification, the staff proposing the modification should consider and ensure transparent and accurate information regarding the modification and how, if it all, it may affect them.

20 Final approval of a minor modification will be communicated by the Head of Quality Assurance to all relevant stakeholders, and no action should be taken by any staff until that point.

Record of modifications

21 A full electronic copy of the modification documentation, including any amendments arising as a result of the approved modification process, is maintained by the Academic Registry. The Academic Registry ensures that approval of the modification is reported at the next meeting of the Academic Board and that any

conditions and recommendations imposed by the programme approval committee are actioned within the specified timescales.

Version history:

Version	Amended by	Revision summary	Date
1.0	Head of Quality Assurance and Deputy Academic Registrar	New protocol arising from current programme approval practice, and published QAA Advice and Guidance and from revisions to the Programme Approval Policy.	August 2019
1.1	Head of Quality Assurance	Updated to include reference to modifications to assessment regulations.	August 2019
1.2	Senior Quality Officer	Change to the document coding convention	March 2020
1.3	Quality Assurance Manager	Review, and inclusion of Para 11	November 2022
1.4	Quality Assurance Manager	Clarifications to paragraphs 10 and 17	May 2023