CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES AND MODULES
POLICY, PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE NOTES

These guidance notes and procedures have been prepared to ensure consistency with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and consumer protection legislation. Their aim is to ensure that the University of Buckingham sets and maintains threshold academic standards for its awards.

The QA Office can provide further guidance on the application of this policy and procedure as required. Any deviation from the agreed procedures would require the agreement from the Chair of the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON MAKING CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES AND MODULES

This can be found in the Terms and Conditions for Prospective Students within the Regulations Handbook.

GUIDANCE NOTES

A. Terminology

The University of Buckingham's educational provision is organised into Programmes and Modules.

A Programme is the prescribed combination of Modules (or other prescribed pattern of study) which, taken together, lead to a degree or other award of the University. Undergraduate Programmes are available through single, joint or combined honours or major/minor routes. Each requires its own Programme Specification and should be treated as a separate Programme.

A Module is the prescribed combination of study supported by lectures and tutorials, laboratory classes or other tuition, which normally constitutes the smallest element of separate assessment. Modules carry a weighting based on the principle of one unit for each ten hours of notional learning time (i.e. the average time it takes a learner to acquire the specified learning outcomes). Undergraduate modules normally carry a value of 15 or 30 units depending upon whether they are taught over one or two terms, respectively.

B. Programme and Module Template Specifications

All programmes and modules should be designed following the University's standard specification templates.

C. External Reference Points

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The FHEQ sets out qualification descriptors that set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study. When preparing or revising a module or programme, it is essential to ensure that all programmes and modules are aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor.

Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to

assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

Subject benchmark statements are available for honours degrees and master's degrees. Where there is no subject specific Subject Benchmark Statement at Masters Level, reference should be made to "Masters Degree Characteristics Statement (September 2015)"

UK Quality Code

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out.

Although the University has prepared its procedures in line with the expectations of the UK Quality Code, staff should refer to certain pertinent chapters when designing their programmes or modules – for example, Part A (ensuring academic standards), and Chapters B6 (Assessment of students) and B4 (Achievement of Students).

Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's)

PSRB's often regulate at the subject area, for example, the General Medical Council decides which bodies are entitled to award UK primary medical qualifications (PMQs), and the Joint Academic Stage Board is the regulator responsible for the validation of Qualifying Law Degrees (QLDs). If the programme or module requires accreditation by a PSRB, then you must ensure in its design and any revisions to it, that the criteria of that body are met.

D. Assessment Design

QAA have provided useful guidance on thinking about assessment design in their 'Understanding Assessment' publication, in relation to building assessment into the course design process, choosing the methods of assessment, and agreeing the amount, timing, and weighting of assessment tasks.

SEEC's 'How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria' provides useful guidance when designing programmes.

Further guidance on assessment design is available here: N:\Quality Assurance\ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK GUIDELINES\Designing Assessment Guidance

E. Disability Guidance to Schools

The University has produced guidance on implementing the Disability Policy in Schools: https://intranet.buckingham.ac.uk/student-welfare/Pages/Disability.aspx

F. External Reviews

Anonymous Subject Specialist Reviews

Higher education providers are expected to "*ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards*" (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter A5). In relation to new programme approval, institutions should "*make use of external participation at key stages...as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate*" (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter B1).

All new programmes and modules must therefore undergo External Review (either by correspondence or through a validation event) before they are approved. To ensure independence and objectivity, formal External Reviews should not be sought from AAC Members, or external examiners currently working for Buckingham, or those who have been an external examiner at the University within the past five years.

For major revisions to programmes and modules, external examiners should be consulted for their comments. On occasion, dependent on the level and type of change and after consultation with the Chairman of the SLTC and the QA Manager, formal external review may be required.

The Quality Assurance Office holds a register of approved External Reviewers in some subject areas, and the Quality Assurance Manager approves all reviewers. Programme and Module Directors are also encouraged to suggest suitable reviewers to the Quality Assurance Office, but they should not approach these reviewers themselves. All candidates will be approached by the Quality Assurance Office to ensure anonymity of responses.

Due to external reviewer's time commitments from their own institutions, Programme and Module Directors are encouraged to discuss External Review requirements with the Quality Assurance Office at an early stage in the approval process.

Changes to Programmes and Modules Procedures and Guidance Notes

CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES AND MODULES
APPROVAL PROCEDURE

Annual Monitoring and Quinquennial Review processes provide the opportunity for Programme and Module Directors to evaluate provision, and establish where changes need to be made. Changes may be proposed as a result of student or external examiner feedback; analysis of student retention, progression and achievement; developments in the field of study; or resource and staff changes.

Proposers will be expected to demonstrate for minor and major changes how these amendments are either beneficial for students, or, if they are not planned for, how they are necessary due to circumstances outside of the University's control. Current or affected students should be invited to comment on all major changes.

1. **SCOPE OF PROCEDURE**
    1.1 This procedure covers all modules and programmes that lead to the award of academic credit and/or contribute to a higher education award at Level 4 or above in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Proposers of provision set below Level 4 in the FHEQ and/or not leading to the award of academic credit are still required to:
    1.2 Consider the guidance referenced in this procedure, along with any relevant national benchmarking criteria when making changes to provision and to ensure good practice.
    1.3 Present the proposals for changes to the School Learning and Teaching Committee (or equivalent) for comment, scrutiny and recommendations for approval, and to ensure that the appropriate recording and sharing of decisions and documentation. SLTCs are to report to ULTC about these items.

    1.4 This procedure covers the approval of temporary and permanent changes to programmes and modules, and provides a proportionate process dependent on the classification of the change (editorial, minor, major or review). However, programme and module directors are minded to consider the impact of cumulative changes on the academic standards and quality of student learning opportunities.

    1.5 It does not include changes to individual students programmes of study based on personal circumstances (for example, modification to slow track programmes or amendments based on accreditation of prior learning). The procedure for approval of these changes is covered by the General Regulations for First Degrees.

2. **TIMING**
    2.1 Wherever possible, changes to modules should normally take place within the annual planning cycle i.e. following annual review and the receipt of external examiner reports, and in good time before teaching begins. Where major changes are being made to provision, programme and module directors will need to consult with the Quality Assurance Office as soon as possible to help categorise the changes and establish if external review is required. Students should also be consulted on, and given due notice of, changes being made to modules and programmes.

    2.2 Modules must not be amended or approved while teaching of the module in question is in process.

    2.3 If necessary, and where circumstances are outside of the University's control (such as the sudden departure or illness of a key member of staff), amendments to programmes and modules can be approved under Chairman's action, provided that the appropriate paperwork is completed and submitted to the next full meeting of the Committee; and that registered students are informed as soon as is practical.

3. **COMMUNICATION AND RECORDING OF INFORMATION**
    3.1 Consultation between Programme Directors is key to ensure that the implications for programmes delivered by multiple Schools are considered. School Quality Administrators to meet termly to facilitate this discussion; but Programme Directors are also encouraged to use the 'Programme Directors' email distribution list to consult on changes.

    3.2 Along with publication of course and programme information to current students and staff, the University also makes returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency for the Key Information Sets. The University is expected (by the Quality Assurance Agency and the Competition and Markets Authority) to ensure the information it makes available to prospective and current students and staff is accurate and trustworthy; and

Changes to Programmes and Modules Procedures and Guidance Notes

that any changes made to programmes and modules are carried out fairly and transparently under the law. The University follows its Published Information Policy in this regard. **Staff involved in making changes to provision are therefore required to ensure that record keeping of all changes is carried out as prescribed below.**

3.3 Following the approval of Changes by the School Board of Study, School/Quality Administrators are responsible for informing current and prospective students of agreed changes by Week5 of each term. This is to provide students and staff with enough notice to action changes (for example, for timetabling and option choices) before the next term begins. The Quality Assurance office are responsible for circulating to all students the changes approved in the 'Curriculum Bulletin' during Week 5 of term, and in the 'Handbooks Bulletin' during each vacation period.

4. CLASSIFICATION OF CHANGE

4.1 Programme and module directors to categorise change in accordance with the 'Category of Change' examples and guidance. Administrators and academic staff are required to consult with the Chairman of the School Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality Assurance Manager if it is not clear how a change should be categorised, to ensure consistency of practice and the development of this guidance.

4.2 Once a change has been classified, the relevant procedure below should be followed for the approval of that change.

5. CATEGORY 1 - EDITORIAL

5.1 Programme or module director to amend documentation and report amendments to School/Quality Administrator.

5.2 School Administrator to make necessary amendments to eVision, update all affected Programme Specifications in the Curriculum Handbooks (including those from other Schools), and ensure that current students are informed as soon as is practicable. Normally this is no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

6. CATEGORY 2 – MINOR

6.1 Programme or module director to consult with relevant staff, including in other academic departments whose programmes are impacted, and contact School/Quality Administrator

6.2 Proposer to ensure that Approval of Changes Request Form is completed and submitted, with supporting documentation (including module and programme specifications with tracked changes) to the next meeting of the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

6.3 School/Quality Administrator to ensure that Summary of Curriculum Report is updated and submitted to the next meeting of the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

6.4 SLTC to make a recommendation to the School Board to approve, reject, or agree amendments, and report to ULTC.

6.5 School/Quality Administrator to make necessary amendments to eVision and all affected programme calendar entries in the Curriculum Handbook (including those from other Schools), and ensure that current students are informed no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

6.6 The Quality Assurance Office are responsible for circulating to all current students the changes in the 'Curriculum Bulletin' during Week 5 of term, and in the 'Handbooks Bulletin' during each vacation period.

7. CATEGORY 3 – MAJOR

7.1 Programme or module director to consult with relevant staff, including in other academic departments whose programmes are impacted, and contact School/Quality Administrator

7.2 Proposer to seek comments from external examiner and current/affected students on proposed changes, and consult with Chairman of SLTC and QA Manager to establish if any additional external review should be undertaken.

7.3 Proposer to ensure that Approval of Changes Request Form is completed and submitted, with supporting documentation (including module and programme specifications with tracked changes) to the next meeting of the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

7.4 School/Quality Administrator to ensure that Summary of Curriculum Report is updated and submitted to the next meeting of the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

7.5 SLTC to make a recommendation to the School Board to approve, reject, or agree amendments, and report to ULTC.

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7.6 School/Quality Administrator to make necessary amendments to eVision and all affected programme calendar entries in the Curriculum Handbook (including those from other Schools) and ensure that current and prospective students are informed no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

7.7 The Quality Assurance Office are responsible for circulating to all current students the changes in the 'Curriculum Bulletin' during Week 5 of term, and in the 'Handbooks Bulletin' during each vacation period.

8. CATEGORY 4 – CUMULATIVE CHANGES AND RE-REVIEW

8.1 Programme and module directors should be mindful of the cumulative impact of a number of individual changes, and should therefore ensure that these are properly recorded and evaluated during each annual review process.

8.2 If the Chair of the School Learning and Teaching Committee, in consultation with the Quality Assurance Manager, consider that either proposed amendments on their own, or proposed amendments in light of previously enacted changes ('cumulative changes') are at a level that the academic standards of the award or the quality of the learning opportunities for students (and therefore the ongoing relevance and validity of the programme) are affected then the programme or module should undergo re-approval under the New Programme and Module Procedure.

8.3 Proposers are required to outline transfer/teaching out arrangements for current and prospective students where programmes are re-approved.

8.4 Proposers are required to undertake any review/redesign in accordance with the University's policy (Clause 9.1 of the Admissions Terms and Conditions), including informing current students and applicants, and making alternative arrangements.

9. STUDENT CONSULTATION

9.1 As detailed above, some changes to provision are likely to be the result of responding to student feedback, and proposers should confirm this in their request.

9.2 Student committee representatives on SLTCs also have the opportunity to contribute to discussions regarding changes to provision.

9.3 Registered students should be consulted on major variations to modules and programmes when such amendments are prepared for consideration and approval by the relevant deliberative committees of the University.

9.4 All registered students should be informed by the School/Quality Administrator of editorial changes as soon as is practicable and normally no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

9.5 All registered students should be informed by the School/Quality Administrator as soon as is practicable for any changes being approved by Chairman's actions because of circumstances that are outside of the University's control.

9.6 All registered students should be informed by the School/Quality Administrator of all minor and major changes no later than Week 5 of the preceding term in which the variation shall take effect.

9.7 All applicants holding offers should be informed by the School/Admissions Administrator of major changes no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

9.8 The Quality Assurance Office are responsible for circulating to all current students the changes in the 'Curriculum Bulletin' during Week 5 of term, and in the 'Handbooks Bulletin' during each vacation period.

Changes to Programmes and Modules Procedures and Guidance Notes

CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES AND MODULES
CATEGORY OF CHANGES

The following provides examples of the category of changes only and given the variety of potential individual, multiple and cumulative changes that may be made to programmes and modules, it is not an exhaustive list. Administrators and academic staff are required to consult with the Chairman of the School Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality Assurance Manager if it is not clear how a change should be categorised, to ensure consistency of practice and the development of this guidance.

CATEGORY 1 – EDITORIAL
The changes are categorised as those that have no or very little impact. Examples include:
1. Changes to library or other learning resources, or set texts
2. Change of module or programme director
3. Change of term of delivery (providing it remains appropriate for the stage of the degree and there are no regulatory issues with levels – otherwise make major)
4. The order of lectures within a term has changed
5. Typographical corrections and clarifications
6. Administration or staffing arrangements have changed
7. Assessment briefs have changed (e.g. number/split of exam questions)

CATEGORY 2 – MINOR
These changes are categorised as changes which do not alter the nature, focus and purpose of the programme or module. Examples include:
1. Change to a module or title (where content and learning outcomes are unaffected)
2. Minor changes to the module or programme content and aims (where learning outcomes are not affected)
3. Minor changes to the module learning and teaching strategy (where learning outcomes are not affected)
4. Changes to the module assessment weighting of +/- <=15%
5. Minor change to the Student Engagement Hours distribution for a module
6. Adding an optional module to a programme.
7. New programme entry points are created. – N.B: The closure of entry points should be approved under the 'Closure of Programmes' procedure, and arrangements for affected applicants outlined.

CATEGORY 3 – MAJOR
These changes are categorised as changes which alter the nature, focus and purpose of the programme or module. Examples include:
1. Changes to the learning outcomes of a module or programme
2. Minor changes to module or programme content, aims, learning and teaching strategy where learning outcomes are affected.
3. Changes to the method of assessment in a module either to ensure it aligns better with the learning outcomes or as a result of revised learning outcomes.
4. Changes to the module assessment weighting of +/- >15%; and all programme wide assessment weighting changes
5. Major change to module or programme content, assessment method, aims, learning and teaching strategy and student engagement hours distribution.
6. Removal of an optional or core module to a programme.
7. Adding a core module to a programme
8. Change to pre-requisites, or designating a module as core, compulsory or optional
9. Change to the credit value or level of a module – confirmation must be provided that there remains the correct distribution of Levels in accordance with the regulations across all affected programmes of study.
10. Changes have regulatory or progression implications, and changes to programme regulations* **(NB these must ALSO be approved by ULTC)**
11. Change to programme or final award title
12. Changes which affect 25% or more of the total programme credits
13. Changes that impact on the recognition of the programme with any relevant PSRBs
14. Any collection of Minor changes that warrants classification under the definition of Major changes.
15. Addition of new programme pathway (including the creation of a new programme combining existing major and minor streams, or the addition of a new mode of study – e.g part time or distance learning).

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CATEGORY 4 – CUMULATIVE CHANGES AND RE-REVIEW

These changes are categorised as at a level that the academic standards of the award or the quality of the learning opportunities for students, and therefore the ongoing relevance and validity of the programme are affected.

The splitting of one module into two, or combining two modules into one will be treated as a new module under the New Programme and Module Approval Procedure.

If the Chair of the School Learning and Teaching Committee, in consultation with the Quality Assurance Manager, consider that either proposed amendments on their own, or proposed amendments in light of previously enacted changes ('cumulative changes') are at this level then the programme should undergo re-approval under the New Programme and Module Procedure.

Proposers are required to outline transfer/teaching out arrangements for current and prospective students where programmes are re-approved.

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