

Student consultation and notification on course and module changes

1. Student engagement is an important feature of course design and development. Students at Essex are encouraged to be active participants in their education in line with the Education Strategy. The QAA Quality Code includes as a core practice that ‘The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience’. Carrying out and evidencing consultation for certain types of changes also ensures that the University meets the regulations of the **Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)**; this is a legal obligation for the University and a condition of registration with the **Office for Students**.
2. This framework details requirements for consulting and notifying current students over changes being considered as part of the Curriculum Update process. For information on communicating with applicants over course changes departments should consult the relevant Admissions team.
3. A distinction is drawn in this framework between **student feedback** and **documented student consultation**:

Student Feedback

Inviting and acting on student feedback is a key expectation in all educational provision, and it is recognised that departments will do this in a wide variety of ways, both formal and informal.

All course development can benefit from student input and feedback, and those designing and amending courses and modules are encouraged to seek this wherever appropriate. This may include students who have completed a course or module giving suggestions and thoughts on how it could be improved for future students.

Students should also have the opportunity to give in-module feedback which can then be used to make in-year adjustments.

Documented student consultation

However, for certain types of change there is a need for documented consultation **with affected students**. The CMA requires that students are given certain information prior to commencing their studies (this information is called the core material information).

Where a proposed change to a course or module would affect this core material information, consultation forms an important part of the curriculum update process to meet CMA regulations. In these cases, ensuring effective consultation with students before changes are submitted in the annual Curriculum Update process allows students to have an opportunity to comment on proposed changes, and helps to ensure that changes are not surprising to them when they receive confirmation of their course information.

Providing details of student consultation as part of justifications for change ensures that the University can evidence student consultation ahead of changes being submitted.

4. The framework in this document sets out where this applies and where **documented consultation** is required. In these cases, departments should ensure they consult with the student body in the widest possible way ahead of changes being introduced to confirm all students that would be affected have had the opportunity to comment on changes. This will mean students who will be impacted by the change in their next or subsequent years of study. Documenting the consultation allows the department to provide evidence that consultation has taken place and can be used as part of the justification for changes. Departments are required to confirm that consultation has been carried out and evidenced as part of the Curriculum Update process.
5. The minimum requirement for documented consultation is that, to ensure all students have received information about a change, departments should send a direct email to all students affected. This should set out the proposed amendments and give the opportunity for students to feedback on proposals by a certain date. The department should then consider any feedback given and make any alterations to planned changes based on this. Emails can then be provided as evidence of consultation.
6. Departments should also use Student Voice Groups (SVGs): the minimum requirements for the agenda of SVGs states that departments should ensure that new and revised programme developments are sent to the group for consideration. This allows the group to discuss potential changes and feedback can be sought ahead of time via student representatives for discussion at the meeting. Departments should also consider further working with Student Representatives and the Students' Union to gain student feedback.
7. Where a change applies to the material information it must be communicated to all affected students in a format that can be saved and provided as supporting evidence. Where departments choose to consult with smaller groups of students in other ways, for example through focus groups, this should be in addition to using email to contact all affected students and to give them a chance to comment.
8. This framework therefore sets out minimum requirements for documented student consultation. It is not intended to suggest that gathering student feedback, including using the methods required for student consultation, would not be desirable or advisable in other cases. Similarly, it is good and expected practice to inform students of planned changes and of changes that have been made in response to previous student feedback, even where this does not affect core material information.

9. If concerns are raised by students about proposed changes to core material information departments should meet with students and have a full discussion of the issues raised to identify how this could be resolved. Departments should consider in advance what to do if students affected by proposed changes are unhappy with them, including whether alternatives could be offered or if the change could be deferred. In order to meet CMA requirements we need to ensure, wherever possible, students' concerns are fully addressed in order to secure consent and to maintain strong student satisfaction outcomes. Where this is not possible the case should be discussed with the Quality and Academic Development team in the first instance.
10. This framework also details how students receive notification of change. Students confirm that they are aware of and consent to any major changes as part of their annual registration.
11. Please also see separate guidance from Quality and Academic Development on making changes to courses and modules, which includes case studies demonstrating what might constitute significant changes, and which includes details on the approval required for changes.

Framework for student consultation and notification on course and module changes

This table refers to changes made *within standard timelines* as this means that the information is correct at the point of the notification methods shown. Late changes that will alter this information after the standard publication date may require consultation with students even if the same change made before the deadline would not have done.

The table below refers to Curriculum Notifications. These are sent to all students once records have been updated to reflect changes. Emails highlight the updated structure and programme specification; these are also available to students online.

CHANGES MADE ON A COURSE OR DEPARTMENT LEVEL			
Change	Is documented consultation with affected students required?	How are students notified of changes?	Further notes
Course structure (core and compulsory modules to be taken)	Yes as this affects core information provided to students.	Students are sent their Curriculum Notification communication by Quality and Academic Development in May, setting out their course structure and programme specification following curriculum update.	
Course aims and outcomes	Yes for a significant change as this affects core information provided to students. If the change is not significant then documented consultation is not required.	Students are sent their Curriculum Notification communication by Quality and Academic Development in May, setting out their course structure and programme specification following curriculum update.	Whether a change is significant should be considered in light of the impact on the course, student learning and the information that students would have considered before selecting their course.

CHANGES MADE ON A COURSE OR DEPARTMENT LEVEL

Change	Is documented consultation with affected students required?	How are students notified of changes?	Further notes
<p>Information on the following factors across the course and/or department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall methods of assessment ▪ Number and type of contact hours, student workload ▪ General information about level of experience or status of staff delivering the course 	<p>Yes for any significant change as this affects core information provided to students.</p>	<p>These would be updated by departments in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment overview, which is included in the Curriculum Notification communication sent out by Quality and Academic Development in May.</p>	<p>This refers to information at the course or department level, and would not necessarily be updated as the result of changes to individual modules. Any change of approach across a department, course or subject would, however, need to be consulted upon.</p>
<p>Changing the modules available in option groups or changing the option groups available in a course structure</p>	<p>No, this does not affect core information so documented consultation is not required.</p>	<p>Students are sent their Curriculum Notification communication by Quality and Academic Development in May, setting out their course structure and programme specification following curriculum update.</p>	<p>Care should be taken when a large number of optional modules are removed or changed at once as this could be seen as significantly changing the course. This would then require consultation as it would affect core information.</p>

CHANGES MADE ON A COURSE OR DEPARTMENT LEVEL

Change	Is documented consultation with affected students required?	How are students notified of changes?	Further notes
Accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory organisations	If this is appropriate given the nature of the change.	The department should inform students of any change to their accreditation of their course as soon as this is confirmed.	Consultation may not be appropriate, depending on the nature of the change and whether it can be altered, but students should be informed at the first possible opportunity if the accreditation of their course changes.
Course award (e.g. BA, BSc) or course title	Yes as this affects core information provided to students.	Students should be notified by departments, following consultation, and informed of the options available to them. Departments should only communicate approved decisions following consultation.	This should be done as a change applying to current students only exceptionally.
Changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Duration of course ▪ Location of study ▪ Fees and extra costs 	Yes as this affects core information provided to students.	Students should be notified by departments, following consultation, and informed of the options available to them. Departments should only communicate approved decisions following consultation.	This should be done as a change applying to current students only exceptionally.
Other terms and features that students might find surprising	Yes as this affects core information provided to students.	Students should be notified by departments, following consultation, and informed of the options available to them.	This should be considered in the light of factors that students will have considered and information they were provided when selecting their course.

CHANGES MADE TO MODULES

Change	Is documented consultation with affected students required?	How are students notified of changes?	Further notes
Changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Module title ▪ Credit value 	Yes as this affects core information provided to students.	Students are sent their Curriculum Notification communication by Quality and Academic Development in May, setting out their course structure and programme specification following curriculum update.	
Aims and outcomes	No , changes for a single module do not affect core information so documented consultation is not required.	This information is included when the Module Directory is published for the forthcoming academic year in May.	Care should be taken over changes that could be seen as significant to students, e.g. removing key topics, which might alter core information. If changes are being made across a course that could be seen as significantly altering it then this would affect core information and affected students should be consulted.

CHANGES MADE TO MODULES

Change	Is documented consultation with affected students required?	How are students notified of changes?	Further notes
<p>Changes to module assessment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weighting of exams to coursework ▪ Weighting of reassessment exams to coursework ▪ Timing or length of exam ▪ Weighting between existing approved coursework items ▪ Addition or removal of an assessment type 	<p>No, this does not affect core information so documented consultation is not required.</p>	<p>This information is included when the Module Directory is published for the forthcoming academic year in May.</p>	<p>If changes are being made across a course that could be seen as significantly altering it then this would affect core information and affected students should be consulted.</p>
<p>Amendment to, or addition/removal of, requisites</p>	<p>No, this does not affect core information so documented consultation is not required.</p>	<p>This information is included when the Module Directory is published for the forthcoming academic year in May.</p>	<p>Any resulting change in course structure would constitute a core change (see row for course structure). Adding requisites that would limit student choices after the students would already have taken or not taken the requisite modules should only be done exceptionally.</p>
<p>Changes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Term delivered ▪ Availability of module (e.g. outside option, study abroad) ▪ Other items in the Module directory with no impact on information identified as core 	<p>No, this does not affect core information so documented consultation is not required.</p>	<p>This information is included when the Module Directory is published for the forthcoming academic year in May.</p>	

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