CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES OF STUDY: POLICY ON CONSULTING AND INFORMING STUDENTS

1. This policy has been developed to provide guidance to departments on the circumstances in which students should be consulted concerning proposed changes to programmes of study.

2. It is often necessary and/or desirable for operational reasons or on academic grounds to make changes to programmes of study that will affect students already studying on the programme concerned. The necessity for and/or desirability of change needs, however, to be balanced against students’ expectations concerning their programmes of study that are derived from the University’s Prospectuses, and pre- and post-entry information provided to them. The information provided to students, for example programme or departmental handbooks, must indicate that programmes of study may be liable to change and must set out the circumstances in which students will be consulted about such changes. These are as indicated in Section 4.

3. In certain circumstances proposed changes to a programme of study may only be introduced if all the students on the programme who would be affected by the changes have assented in writing to the proposed changes. Circumstances in which the assent of students is required are:

   (a) When it is proposed to change the name of the award or of the programme of study.

   (b) When a radical change to the teaching and learning strategy or the assessment regime for the whole programme is proposed which would very significantly alter the nature of the programme. This might include, for example, if it were proposed to move to a problem-based learning approach for the whole programme, or from wholly continuous assessment of students to a completely examination-based regime.

   In such circumstances departments must write to all students affected informing them of the proposed changes and asking them to confirm (or otherwise) their assent in writing. Any student who objects to the proposed changes cannot be forced to accept them, although it may sometimes be possible to implement the changes for students who agree to them while retaining the existing arrangements for students who have lodged an objection.

4. **Consultation** of students about proposed programme changes must take place:

   (a) When the proposed changes represent major changes to a programme (i.e. changes which amount to 25% or more of the programme content or
structure, or which change the learning aims and outcomes of the programme.)

(b) When the introduction of a new mandatory or required module is proposed, for example the introduction of a compulsory dissertation or fieldwork module.

(c) When the withdrawal of a mandatory or required module is proposed.

(d) When exemption is sought to the requirement to provide a re-sit opportunity affecting registered students.

Departments are free to determine how they conduct the consultation with students. It might be appropriate, for example, to email all the students concerned inviting feedback on the proposals, or to hold an open meeting at which students can offer comments. The consultation process selected must target those students who will be affected by the proposed changes. In submitting the changes for approval (by the University Academic Standards Sub-Committee in the case of (a) and (d) and by the appropriate Faculty committee in the case of (b), (c) above) information must be provided by the department concerned about the method of consultation used and the outcomes of that consultation. The Academic Standards Sub-Committee or the appropriate Faculty committee will take into account this information when considering the approval of the proposed changes.

In respect of (d) above, if exemption is sought from the requirement to provide a re-sit opportunity, students already registered on the module must be consulted on the proposed change; this should include any students who are undertaking a placement or year abroad and, where possible, any students who have suspended their studies.

5. It is not necessary to consult students over minor changes to programmes, i.e. changes which amount to less than 25% of the programme content or structure, and which have no effect on the learning aims and outcomes of the programme. Such changes might include the withdrawal of an optional module or modules or a change to the content of a module. Students must, however, be informed of all minor changes.

6. In relation to prospective students, the QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education, section 10 (Recruitment and Admissions), precept 5 states:

“Institutions should ensure that prospective students are informed of any significant changes to a programme made between the time the offer of a place on the programme is made and registration is complete, and that they are advised of the options available in the circumstances.”

The University’s Prospectuses indicate that the information provided within them about programmes of study may be liable to change. They include the following disclaimer:
"The University will use all reasonable endeavours to deliver programmes and other services in accordance with the descriptions set out. However, the University reserves the right to make variations to the contents, entrance requirements and methods of delivery, to discontinue programmes and to combine and merge programmes, if such action is reasonable considered to be necessary by the University. If the University discontinues any programme, it will use reasonable endeavours to provide a suitable alternative.

If, following acceptance of the student's application, the programme is substantially varied from that described in the prospectus, the student is entitled to withdraw from the programme. In the event of such withdrawal an appropriate refund of programme fees will be made."

When, however, information has been provided to prospective students about a programme of study and major changes to that programme are then proposed before the students are admitted to the University, departments should contact prospective students who have accepted an offer of a place to inform them of the changes. Admissions Tutors should be prepared to offer advice about alternative programmes, should this be requested.