

# **Programme modifications: A guide for education providers**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Current provider submission guidance

The [Standards for Education](#) give education providers a framework to manage the quality of their programme(s). This includes a structure for ensuring that changes made to the programme and curriculum continue to meet GDC learning outcomes and adapt to changing legislation and external guidance. The Standards also include a requirement for providers to contact the GDC should any serious threats to the delivery of a programme be identified.

Providers planning to deliver a new programme, or a different level of qualification that is vastly different to their existing offering, are required to complete a full new programme submission. This involves completing:

- The new programme submission form
- A learning outcomes mapping table relevant to the programme, and
- The submission of supporting evidence, as outlined in the providers guidance for submissions.

Where a revision to a qualification will involve a major change, or a significant restructure of the delivery of the qualification, the GDC must be contacted and advised of the changes in writing. This is to ensure that GDC learning outcomes continue to be met.

## 1.2 Rationale

Where providers want to make changes to programmes, clarification is needed as to whether the level of proposed change warrants a full new programme submission. The programme modification process provides a formalised, consistent and differentiated approach. This will guide the right level of submission detail that reflects the nature and scale of the proposed change. The guidance will describe the criteria for major, medium, and minor changes, and when to inform the GDC of changes to programmes.

Key internal activities from providers that can lead to programme modifications are:

- Periodic programme review – conducted every five+ years for ongoing approval through monitoring of quality and standards and compliance. Internal provision is reviewed in subject clusters, and changes only apply to the next student intake.
- Programme and module approval - ensures appropriate academic standards are set and maintained.
- Curriculum review – review of the viability and validity of taught programmes, and the quality and standards, including trends in external examiner (EE) reports or data relating to assessment.
- Taught programme modification (minor) – for example, changes of programme director or EE.
- Taught programme modification (major) – significant changes to programmes.
- Annual review of programmes - changes to units and confirmation of specifications.
- School scrutiny events.

These activities are carried out by a range of committees including Academic Registry and School Directors, Academic Board, Curriculum Quality Assurance Committee and Executive Boards, undertaking various detailed stages of review and extensive scrutiny. Some providers divide modifications to taught programmes into two categories: major and minor. For example, minor modifications can be approved by the Faculty Education Committee before being sent to Quality, Standards and Enhancement for routine processing.

Major modifications generally require sign-off from the Programme Development and Approval Sub-Committee. Complex modifications will usually be referred to full Committee scrutiny. We acknowledge the names and terminology of such committees/groups may vary, so this is only an indication.

In most cases, minor modifications will have no impact on students meeting GDC learning outcomes and can be implemented without notification as indicated in the below submission categories.

## 2. Submission categories

Listed below are the three main categories which a programme modification will be assessed against: minor, medium and major. These lists are not exhaustive and if a provider is unsure, please contact the GDC's [Education Quality Assurance \(EQA\) team](#) for any questions or further information.

**2.1 Minor modifications:** No formal approval is needed if the programme is subject to minor modification. **The provider does not need to inform the EQA team of the change.**

2.1.1 Examples of minor modification include:

- Addition of an optional module(s)
- Change to the title of a core or optional module
- Introduction of new lectures and lecture material
- Providing additional study days for students
- Changing formative assessments
- Changing methods of feedback from students and patients
- Withdrawal/removal of an optional module.

**2.2 Medium modifications:** If the programme is subject to medium modification, the nature and scope of change may flag that a discussion or additional evidence is needed. **The provider must inform the GDC of the changes made.**

2.2.1 Examples of medium modification include:

- Changing the learning objectives (not GDC learning outcomes)
- Change to the delivery method of a core or optional module
- Introducing new methods of course delivery, for example new software
- Modifying the course timetables (but maintaining clinical hours)
- Change to the programme title
- Changing the method of establishing the pass mark for summative assessments
- Restructuring or removal of an existing summative assessment
- Changing of EEs / reduced number of EEs
- Changing of course director, programme lead or head of school
- Minor extensions to programmes
- Change to the first intake of the programme
- Changing the programme credit value.

**2.3 Major modifications:** If the programme is subject to major modification, the provider must provide evidence of how these fit into the current programme, with a full rationale for change. **The provider must inform the GDC of the changes made.**

2.3.1 Examples of major modification include:

- Change to programme award
- Addition of an award
- Removal of an award
- Changing the awarding authority

- Changing the length of the programme/revised delivery timeframe, such as:
  - increasing or decreasing weeks of study by more than 10%
  - 2 years to 3 years, 3 years to 4 years, DN 1 year to 6 months
- Remodelling a programme from part time to full time
- Replacement of a core module
- Introducing a new, or modifying the style of, summative assessment (for example, short answer to single best answer)
- Significant increase in student numbers
- Significant decrease in staffing numbers
- Revisions to work-based/placement modules or significant revisions to outreach
- Multiple simultaneous medium modifications to an existing programme.

### 3. The assessment process

#### 3.1 Initial assessment

Providers intending to make medium or major modifications to programmes should contact the [EQA team](#) to inform them of any planned changes at the earliest possible opportunity. An acknowledgement email will be sent within 5 days of receipt, and a member of the EQA team may contact you to discuss.

The GDC will send providers the [programme modification form](#), which will need completing with details of the proposed changes. The relevant sections should be completed, giving a brief overview of the changes made and sent back to the EQA lead assigned to the activity within two weeks.

The information provided on the form will be assessed, and an outcome decided based on the scale of the proposed modification (minor, medium or major).

Documents submitted will be initially reviewed by the EQA lead and may be subject to further assessment by education associates for assurance, overall assessment of risk, and a final assessment decision. Possible outcomes from this stage of the process are:

- The evidence gives assurance that GDC Standards for Education/learning outcomes will be met.
- The evidence does not give assurance that the GDC Standards for Education/learning outcomes will be met, and further information is required.

#### 3.2 Additional information

Where additional information or evidence is requested, providers will be required to submit this within a period of two to four weeks, demonstrating how the Standards for Education/learning outcomes will be met.

The assessment will be concluded on the information already received if documents are not submitted within the requested timescales.

#### 3.3 Final outcome decision

Additional information or evidence will be assessed, and a final outcome decision will be made on the programme change.

If assurance has been achieved, providers will be sent a formal approval email with any additional findings or recommendations, and the programme modification recorded in the provider's file.

If assurance has not been achieved, providers will be sent a formal email with details of the identified risk areas.

## **4. Monitoring**

If, after the assessment of evidence, there remains a potential risk to the programme, providers will be advised that it will be subject to further monitoring. Alternatively, the changes made to the programme will be monitored as part of the next monitoring cycle or at inspection, whichever is the earliest.

## **5. Feedback**

The EQA team is committed to improving the way we work with providers and would greatly appreciate any ideas about how our procedures, documentation and communication methods can be improved. We include the collection of feedback at the end of all our processes. However, feedback can also be provided at any time by emailing the EQA team at [qualityassurance@gdcuk.org](mailto:qualityassurance@gdcuk.org) or via telephone on 020 7167 6110.