



## Part 1: Consumer Protection Legislation: Guidance

- This guidance provides an overview for faculties and departments, of the information that UCL is required to provide as part of its obligations under consumer protection legislation, as outlined in the advice provided by the [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\)](#). In addition, it provides guidance on when and what changes can be made to this information as well as the process for notifying or consulting with applicants, offer holders and current students (if required).
- This guidance should be read in conjunction with Chapter 7 Part B, Course and Module Approval Framework, of the UCL Academic Manual, in particular the relevant sections on course approval and course and module amendment as well as course suspension and withdrawal.

### Material Information regulated by Consumer Protection Legislation

The Competition and Markets Authority issued the updated [Higher education: consumer law advice for providers](#) in May 2023. This guidance provides a list of “material information” which should be provided to prospective students.

Material information is defined in law as “*information which the average consumer needs, according to the context, to take an informed transactional decision*”. From UCL’s perspective this means information which allows prospective students to make an informed decision about their chosen course of study. There are several pieces of information UCL provides to prospective students which is considered material information, including the main location of study and contact hours.

Some material information is also subject to other rules under consumer protection legislation in that it is “pre-contract information”. Pre-contract information is legally binding, must be provided before the acceptance of an offer and should still be accurate at enrolment. Where changes are proposed to material information or pre-contract information, prospective and current students impacted by the change should be notified or consulted as appropriate.

The list below provides a summary of information which the CMA consider to be material information.

- Course title
- Entry requirements, including UK and International qualifications
- Core and optional modules
- Course structure (what modules are studied in each year including year abroad)
- Method(s) of assessment for the course
- Contact hours and workload
- The award to be received on successful completion
- Location of study or possible locations
- Length of course
- Whether the course and provider are regulated and by whom
- Whether the course is accredited
- Any particular terms, such as those in the HE provider’s rules and regulations, that apply to the

course that students may find particularly surprising

- Total course costs (Tuition fees plus extra costs, e.g. for fieldwork, extra equipment or materials, costs associated with year abroad)
- Information for disabled students

Inclusion in the list of material information above does not mean that the course or module amendment will automatically be subject to the processes outlined in Chapter 7 Part B. Section 4 and Section 5 have indicative lists of course and module amendments and their approval thresholds.

It also does not automatically mean that you would need to consult with students. A risk-based approach to consulting with students on changes has been developed and this is mapped out in [Appendix 1](#) of this document.

## Part 2: Course and Module Amendments: Guidance for informing applicants, offer holders and students

### Introduction

This guidance provides an overview of the communications that UCL is required to undertake with applicants, offer holders and students when seeking to make course or module amendments. These requirements form a part of UCL's responsibilities under consumer protection law.

It is strongly advised that the majority of course or module amendments should be made so that they do not affect the current cohort of a course or applicants/offer holders to a course. This is considered best practice for CMA compliance and would mean that it is not necessary to follow a notification or consultation process with applicants, offer holders and students.

### Applying to make an in-cycle course amendment

The majority of changes to courses are not urgent enough to warrant an in-cycle change and are better implemented for the next admission cycle. Where there is an evidenced urgent need to make a change in-cycle (after applications have opened for the course), course teams **must seek permission to initiate consultation with applicants, offer holders and/or current students** through the [course amendment procedure](#). If approved, the course team may commence consultation and subsequently submit their course amendment documents for review with the consultation records.

### Risk Based Approach

If a change is required to a course in cycle, you may be required to notify or consult with applicants, offer holders and current students depending on the type of change. [Appendix 1](#) sets out in detail the action(s) that should be taken for each type of change. This is a risk-based approach which balances the need to mitigate risk to the University (financial risks, reputational risks and complaints) with the need for flexibility to make changes to courses to maintain or improve the quality of the student experience.

The following set of principles has been agreed when developing the risk based approach:

- Notification means providing the applicant, offer holder or current student with details of the change.
- Consultation means providing the offer holder or current student with an opportunity to provide feedback on the change. You must give them a suitable time limit to provide feedback. If negative feedback is received, this should be acknowledged and considered where possible. If any

allowances can be made based on negative feedback, this should be done.

- Applicants and Offer holders should always be given the option to withdraw their application or transfer their application to another course when you notify them of any changes.
- If “express consent” is required, this means that we need to receive confirmation from the offer holder or student in writing, in person or in an online meeting that they are agreeing to the change. We need a record of their consent to allow the change to be made. “Express consent” must be received from all affected parties for the change to go ahead. A suitable alternative must be agreed for all students who respond stating they do not consent to the change. A record should be kept of the responses and of the agreed alternative.
- All communications to applicants, offer holders and students regarding changes should be clear and provide sufficient rationale for why a change is being made.
- Where possible, for changes which affect a current cohort, students on the course should be allowed to complete the course as originally agreed to and any changes which are considered beneficiary should be provided as an option which they can agree to.
- Whenever changes are made, the prospectus, departmental websites and offer holder course summaries should be updated to ensure that they include accurate information about the course.
- Course amendments are classified in our academic regulations as major, moderate or minor. This is informed by the level of scrutiny required based on the extent of the proposed change, rather than the concerns related to CMA compliance. Therefore, the CMA risk attributed to an amendment may not correspond to the major, moderate or minor classification. The risk levels are shown in [appendix 1](#) and should be taken into account before starting the course amendment process. For clarification of the type of amendment you are making, please see part B of Chapter 7.

### **Changes required by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies**

Where changes are required by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, it is necessary to notify applicants, offer holders and current students of these changes as soon as possible. As part of this notification they should be provided with information of the alternatives should they not agree to the required changes. These may include offering the course on a non-accredited basis or offering an alternative award. Any questions regarding this should be sent to [apqs@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:apqs@ucl.ac.uk).

### **Changes which would impact additional costs**

Additional costs are other costs which students need to pay either before or during the course of their studies which are not included in their tuition fees. For example, this could be costs for travel to undertake fieldwork (which makes up a compulsory part of the course). Additional costs are considered pre-contract information by the CMA and these should be accurate on the prospectus when published. Where changes are made to additional costs, for example increasing the number of compulsory fieldtrips, which happen after the close of copycall and would increase the amount a current student would need to pay, the department would need to cover the difference for those individuals, and you would need to notify them that this would be the case.

### **Contacting applicants, offer holders or current students**

#### **Applicants and Offer Holders**

Check the matrix below and if you need to notify/consult with applicants and offer holders, you must contact the relevant Senior Admissions Officer for the course and provide them with the relevant text to be sent out to the applicants/offer holders by email. If you have any questions about the content of the message and would like advice, please contact [srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk) before sending to admissions. The emails sent to applicants and offer holders plus any responses should be included in the paperwork

for the course amendment process.

All communications to applicants and offer holders should include the process of transferring to another suitable course or withdrawing their application. In practice, when proposing changes to a course, you should be mindful of application deadlines set by external bodies such as UCAS. It may be extremely difficult for applicants or offer holders to transfer their application where courses are already full (at UCL or at other providers) and you should consider this in the context of making a late amendment. If it is necessary to ask for feedback, they should be given an appropriate time frame (as set out in [appendix 1](#)).

### **Current Students**

All affected students need to be contacted regarding the change. Depending on the type of change, we may require their “express consent”, or we may accept that no feedback in the appropriate time is a suitable agreement. However, this should be made clear in the communications with students regarding the change. The appropriate timeframe and whether consent would be required is set out in [appendix 1](#). All communication with students should be recorded as well as their responses and should be included in the paperwork for the course amendment process.

There are various ways to communicate the changes with current students, these are set out below.

#### **Current Students – Notification or Feedback only**

- Email all students on the course with details of the amendments (asking for feedback if required)
- Online meeting with all affected students and provide details on how they can submit feedback and the timescales
- In person meeting with all affected students and provide details on how they can submit feedback and the timescales

#### **Current Students – Express Consent required**

- Email to all students asking them to provide a response by email
- Email including a link to a Microsoft form or other polling link asking students to provide a response within the allotted time for feedback
- Online meeting with all affected students where a Microsoft form is shared or a poll in MS Teams to gather feedback – a record should be kept of attendance and answers from each student to ensure all have responded
- In person meeting with all affected students and collect a signed list of agreement, share an MS form, poll or ask students to send a follow up email of agreement – a record should be kept of attendance and the answers from each student to ensure all have responded

#### **Students who do not consent to the change**

A suitable alternative must be agreed for all students who respond stating they do not consent to the change. A record should be kept of the responses and of the agreed alternative.

All efforts should be made to obtain “express consent “(if required) from all students within the allotted time frames, however if there are difficulties, these should be discussed with SRS Compliance and a risk-based decision will be made on the best course of action for the change.

The above is not an exhaustive list and departments can use their own initiatives to ensure all students are communicated with and responses are recorded. If you have any questions or concerns about contacting or obtaining consent from applicants/offer holders/current students, please contact [srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk) .

**SRS Compliance Team**

## Appendix 1: Risk Level Matrix

The matrix below details the risk level for changes which affect material/pre-contract information through the course amendments process. It includes where communication is required, the type of communication and the timeframe for obtaining this for applicants, offer holders and current students. Timeframes for consultation responses or requests to withdraw/transfer applications are included in **bold**.

Please note the below information, for the following changes:

- Entry requirements **should not** be changed once you have applicants/offer holders as it would not be fair. The only exception is where this would be required by a PSRB or other external body.
- Changes to location – for example, a move across Bloomsbury does not count as a change of location, but moving all teaching from Bloomsbury to UCL East for the year would be considered a change.

**Changes to material or pre-contract information which mean what is published on the prospectus page is no longer accurate** will always result in at least the very least notification of applicants, offer holders and current students. Applicants and offer holders should always be given information about how to withdraw or switch to an alternative course and who to contact. In addition, offer holders should always be given the opportunity to provide feedback where we do not require their express consent.

**PRSB changes** – where changes are required by a PRSB, applicants, offer holders and current students will always be notified and the reasons for the change must be explained. Applicants and offer holders must be given the opportunity to transfer to an alternative course or to withdraw their application.

**Exceptional circumstances** – Where changes should not be made in cycle, if there are exceptional circumstances, such as an unplanned event (i.e. staff unavailability or building access) please contact the SRS compliance team for advice.

**MATRIX**

Please note that not all the information included in the “Information being changed” column would necessarily constitute a course amendment under UCL regulations, please refer to part B of chapter 7 to see the level of scrutiny required for the change. The below matrix captures the requirements from a consumer law perspective and the requirement to communicate with relevant groups. If you have any questions, please contact [srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk).

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
High	Entry requirements/criteria (both academic and non-academic and an indication of the standard/typical offer level criteria)	<b>Where required by PRSB: Notify only.</b>  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	<b>Where required by PRSB: Notify only.</b>  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	N/A

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
High	Core modules for the course	<p>Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Offer holders must give their express consent for this change to take place.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to respond.</b></p>	<p>Core modules should not be changed for current students unless absolutely necessary. If a change needs to be made which is not required by a PRSB, you will need express consent from students.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to respond.</b></p> <p>If all students do not consent to the change, you will need to keep the original core module as is.</p>
High	The award to be received on successful completion of the course and, if relevant, the awarding body or institution;	<p><b>Where required by PRSB:</b> Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p><b>Where required by PRSB:</b> Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	Should not be changed during current students' study.

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Medium	Length of the course	<p>Duration – notify only.</p> <p>If a placement or period of study abroad was added, this should be added as an option if you have applicants already. They should be notified that the option is now available.</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Duration – notify only.</p> <p>If a placement or period of study abroad was added, this should be added as an option if you have applicants already. They should be notified that the option is now available.</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>If a change is made during study, this should be optional for current students and therefore they can be notified. i.e. now they have the option to have a year abroad or a placement year.</p> <p><b>2 weeks to respond.</b></p>
Medium	Course name (no changes to content)	<p>Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Current students should be offered the possibility of completing with title they enrolled on. If required by a PRSB they should be given the option to graduate without accreditation with title they enrolled on. Express consent must be received from all affected students.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at the discretion of department to respond.</b></p>

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Medium	Number and type of contact hours that students can expect (e.g. lectures, seminars, and whether these will be online or in person, work placements, feedback on assignments)	<p>Changes in contact hours per week – notify only unless this is a significant change (e.g. An additional days worth of study – seek guidance from srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk)</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p> <p>Change to mode of study i.e. online/in person - we would suggest that this change was not made within the cycle.</p>	<p>Changes in contact hours per week – notify only unless this is a significant change (e.g. An additional days worth of study – seek guidance from srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk)</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p> <p>Change to mode of study i.e. online/in person - we would suggest that this change was not made within the cycle.</p>	<p>Contact hours should not be changed for current students. Changes to mode of study (i.e. online/in person) should not be made within the cycle.</p>
Medium	The expected workload of students (eg the expected self study time)	<p>Major changes to the content which results in major changes to expected workload – notify only.</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Major changes to the content which results in major changes to expected workload – notify only.</p> <p><b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>This should not be changed for current students.</p>

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Medium	The overall method(s) of assessment for the course, for example by exams, coursework or practical assessments, etc (or a combination of these)	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Consult with current students, only if changes would change what is advertised in the prospectus. Express consent must be received from all affected students.  <b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to respond.</b>

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Medium	Location of study or possible locations, which should also include the likely or possible location of any work placements to be undertaken (where known)	<p>More than 50% of the course will now be taught in a different location – notify only.</p> <p><b>4 weeks recommended but can be 2 weeks at discretion of the department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>More than 50% of the course will now be taught in a different location – notify only.</p> <p><b>4 weeks recommended but can be 2 weeks at discretion of the department to withdraw/transfer application.</b></p>	<p>Location changes should not be made in course unless necessary. The module catalogue needs to be clear on the location of optional modules.</p> <p>If a change in location needs to be made such as from Bloomsbury to UCL East. Express consent must be received from all students.</p> <p><b>4 weeks recommended but can be 2 weeks at discretion of the department to respond.</b></p>
Medium (if made non-condonable)	Non-condonable/condonable modules	N/A information not available at application stage.	<p>Notify only.</p> <p><b>2-4 weeks at discretion of</b></p>	<p>If making a module non-condonable, express consent must be received from all students.</p>

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Low (if made condonable)			department to withdraw/transfer application.	If making a module condonable - notify only.  <b>2-4 weeks at discretion of department to respond.</b>
Low	Likely optional modules, including whether there are any optional modules that are generally provided each year	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	<b>*Changes should be made before students choose their optional modules*</b> Current students should be notified which optional modules have changed. Be mindful of information provided on the prospectus and in offer holder summary before making changes.  <b>2 weeks to respond.</b>

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Low	Additional costs students are likely to incur, for example for field trips, equipment, materials, bench fees or studio hire.	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	If a compulsory element of the course is changed that would add costs for the student during the course, the department should cover the cost for the students and notify them of the change.
Low	Important information about the course	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Not required.

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Low	Important information about the course	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	<u>Addition of an interim qualification</u>  Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to respond.</b>  <u>Removal of an interim qualification</u>  Should not affect current students – the course would need to be taught out with all existing interim qualifications. Interim qualifications could only be removed for applicants or offer holders.
Low	Important information about the course	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	<u>Addition of a mode</u>  Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to respond.</b>  <u>Removal of a mode</u>  Should not affect current students. The course would need to be taught out in all the available modes. Modes could only be removed for applicants or offer holders.

Risk Level	Information being changed	Applicants	Offer Holders	Current Students
Low	Important information about the course	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only.  <b>2 weeks to respond.</b>
N/A	Accreditation information	Notify only - provide full explanation of why change is taking place.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only - provide full explanation of why change is taking place.  <b>2 weeks to withdraw/transfer application.</b>	Notify only - provide full explanation of why change is taking place.  <b>2 weeks to respond.</b>  If there is no option to teach out current cohort, this will trigger UCL's <a href="#">Student Protection Plan</a> .