**Policy on Communication with Applicants and Students**

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# Overview of this Document

This document provides information about seeking express agreement when making material changes to courses and/or modules, as required by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

## Consulting Other Documents

This document must be followed in conjunction with:

* Annex A: Requirements for Taught Courses of Study
* Annex A Appendix A: Requirements for Modules
* Assessment Regulations Framework
* Principles of Compliance with Consumer Protection Laws

# Introduction

* 1. This policy sets out the University’s approach to communicating with applicants and students on changes that may affect their education, including when the change will conflict with information previously made available to them.
	2. This information may have been provided through the University website, UCAS website, in material made available with an offer letter, or via any other means.
	3. The policy is also intended to help students understand the kinds of changes that they may encounter during their studies, and the level of consultation that they can expect depending on the nature of the change.
	4. This policy applies to consultation with students at all levels and on all modes of study, including undergraduates, postgraduate taught and research students, and students studying by distance learning. It also applies to communication with prospective students who have applied, been offered and/or accepted a place to study at the University.
	5. For the avoidance of doubt, this policy applies only to academic issues and the broader educational experience of students but not to changes to non-academic facilities and services such as accommodation and sport (where alternative processes would apply).

# Purpose of Student Communication

* 1. The purpose of student communication is to provide as accurate and complete information as possible and, where applicable, collect feedback from various groups of students who may be affected by a change.
	2. The communication process described in this policy should be considered as the minimum communication required, and consideration should be given to whether additional communication is appropriate in the circumstances.

# Communication with Applicants

* 1. Where the proposed revisions to the course and/or module(s) result in changes to material information, including course suspensions and withdrawals, the Division must seek express agreement from all prospective students (applicants that submitted an application and applicants that already accepted the offer), normally by informing them of the changes.
	2. No applicant should be contacted before the change has been fully approved, as set out in Annexes B and C, as applicable.
	3. The expectations relating to communication with prospective students about changes to courses and modules are detailed on KentNet[[1]](#footnote-2).
	4. The communications to all affected prospective students will generally take place electronically[[2]](#footnote-3) and will include the rationale for changes, benefits and/or disruption as a result, mitigation planned for any disruption, and clear information about the University’s complaints process.
	5. Where communication with prospective students takes place, all those affected by the change should be included and have the opportunity to respond by the given deadline.
	6. When communicating a change which is not considered to be particularly significant (e.g. the impact on prospective students may be either advantageous or neutral), no response from any prospective student will be considered as their agreement to the change.
	7. For more significant changes (where the impact is potentially disadvantageous, such as suspending or withdrawing a course, losing/withdrawing accreditation to the course, changing the location or a provider of the course[[3]](#footnote-4)), additional communications (e.g. via a phone) and attempts to contact any applicants may be required[[4]](#footnote-5).
	8. All communications with applicants, and their responses, must be recorded by the Division and kept for audit purposes.

# Communication with Current Students

* 1. Where the proposed revisions to the course and/or module(s) result in changes to material information, the Division must seek express agreement from all current students that will be affected by the change.
	2. The expectations relating to communication with current students about changes to courses and modules are detailed on KentNet[[5]](#footnote-6).
	3. The communication with current students involves a consultation stage before final proposals are confirmed and decisions are made, as part of its purpose is to shape those plans and decisions. It should also be concluded prior to requesting a CMA Risk Assessment.
	4. All those affected by the change (including students on intermission, ‘Year in’, Year Abroad, Year in Industry, Placement Year, repeaters and resitters) should be included in the consultation and given reasonable timeframes and clear contacts to respond/raise concerns.
	5. Collated feedback to this communication should be analysed and the Division should address the concerns that are raised and, where necessary and possible, adjust the proposal.
	6. The consultation with all affected students will generally take place electronically and will include the rationale for changes, benefits and/or disruption as a result, mitigation planned of any disruption, and clear information about the University’s complaints process.
	7. When communicating a change which is not considered to be particularly significant (e.g. the impact on students may be either advantageous or neutral), a lack of response from any student will be considered as their agreement to the change.
	8. Consultation via Student Voice Forum, in isolation, will not be accepted as appropriate means of express agreement, unless the Division responsible for the changes can ensure that all affected students have attended the Forum, and can provide the evidence of this.
	9. For more significant changes, where the impact is potentially disadvantageous, see section 5, below.
	10. All communications with current students and their responses, must be recorded by the Division and kept for audit purposes.

# Detrimental Changes to Offer

* 1. In rare circumstances, it may be necessary to implement changes that are unavoidable and detrimental to prospective and current students. Such changes may include:
* suspending or withdrawing a course
* losing/withdrawing accreditation to the course
* changing the location or a provider of the course

N.B. This list is not exhaustive.

* 1. No current students, regardless of their status at the University, should be contacted in advance where the proposed changes may be seen as detrimental (see 5.1 above).
	2. The affected students can only be contacted when the mitigation plan has been approved by the University, as it is likely that such changes would result in a high-risk level.

# Complaints Procedure

* 1. Prospective and current students have a right to submit a complaint if they experienced any issues related to their rights as consumers.
	2. This complaints procedure applies to applicants that have submitted an application, applicants that have accepted an offer, and enrolled students. It is also applicable to both full-time and part-time students, students that have deferred their studies, intermitting students and students on year abroad/industry or year-in courses.
	3. The affected prospective students and current students would normally have an opportunity to raise any concerns regarding changes made to their degree course as part of the consultation stage and/or in response to the express agreement communications. Such concerns will be raised directly with the responsible Division.
	4. If it is not possible to resolve concerns early through discussions with the Division, or the student has not been provided with the opportunity to raise any concerns to the Division, the student can then proceed to raise a formal complaint to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office[[6]](#footnote-7).
1. See [Communication with Applicants and Students](https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/education-qaco/SitePages/communication-with-applicants-and-students.aspx) on KentNet (available to Kent Staff only) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Via KentVision Applicant Portal [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The list is not exhaustive [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Divisions are strongly recommended to contact the Head of Admissions for guidance [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See [Communication with Applicants and Students](https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/education-qaco/SitePages/communication-with-applicants-and-students.aspx) on KentNet (available to Kent Staff only) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See the [Student Conduct and Complaints Office webpages](https://www.kent.ac.uk/student-services/student-conduct-complaints-office) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)