

**General
Dental
Council**

Programme Modification Guidance

For Education Providers

March 2026

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Introduction

Current provider submission guidance

In the [Standards for Education](#), education providers have 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 current [GDC learning outcomes](#) and adapt to changing legislation and external guidance. In addition, the Standards for Education includes a requirement for providers to contact the GDC should any serious threats to delivery of the programme be identified.

Providers planning to deliver a brand-new programme, 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 GDC Submission Form online, providing a Learning Outcomes Mapping Table relevant to the programme, and submitting supporting evidence. Please refer to the [New Programme Submissions for Providers Guidance](#).

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.

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 differentiated approach. This will enable a proportionate level of submission to be made 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 provider internal activities 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, also quality and standards including trends in EE reports or data relating to assessment.
- 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 variations in the names and terminology of such committees/groups may vary, so this is an indication.

In most cases, minor modifications will not have an impact on students meeting GDC Learning Outcomes and can be implemented without notification as indicated in the below submission categories.

Submission categories

Listed below are the three main categories which your programme modification will be assessed against: Minor, Medium and Major. Please note that these lists are not exhaustive and if a provider is unsure, they should contact the EQA team qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org.

Minor modifications: If the programme is subject to minor modification no formal approval is needed - *The provider does not need to inform the GDC EQA Team of the change.*

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

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.*

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 e.g. 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 External Examiner / Reduced number of EE's
- Minor extensions to programmes
- Change to the first intake of programme
- Changing the programme credit value

Major modifications: If the programme is subject to major modification the provider should 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.*

Examples of medium 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
- Remodelling programme from part time to full time
- Replacement of a core module
- Introducing a new, or modifying the style of summative assessment (e.g. 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

The assessment process

Initial assessment

Providers intending to make medium or major modifications to programmes should contact the EQA Team qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org to inform of 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 link to the online [GDC Programme Modification Form](#) will be sent for completion with details of the proposed changes. The relevant sections should be completed, giving a brief overview of the changes made and should be completed within two weeks.

The information provided on the form will be assessed, and an outcome agreed 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.

Additional information

Where additional information or evidence is requested, you 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.

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

Final outcome decision

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

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 your provider file.

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

Monitoring

If after assessment of evidence, it is deemed that there remains a potential risk to the programme, you 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.

Feedback

The EQA team are 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 of our processes; however feedback can also be provided by emailing the EQA team at qualityassurance@gdcuk.org or via telephone.

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