

Approaching Decisions on Thresholds of Change

This tip sheet has been developed to help universities determine the threshold of change that is being proposed to an existing program. Are the change(s) small enough to be considered a minor modification? Do they cross the threshold to become a major modification? Or are the proposed changes significant enough to be considered a new program?

It can be helpful to consider whether there is a similar historical decision made by the university and subsequently approved by the Quality Council that can be reviewed. Relatedly, has the university received any previous queries from the Quality Council in response to an Annual Report on Major Modifications that may assist in thinking through the details of the proposed change and determine the appropriate quality assurance process?

This tip sheet contains some advice from the Quality Council that can help to answer these questions. It also includes a table that can be used as a template for the university to track related decisions. The tip sheet has been designed to be used in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Framework's Guidance '[Distinguishing between Major Modifications and New Programs: Examples](#)'.

Some advice to consider:

- Major modifications facilitate changes to existing programs and are an important means to support – and to demonstrate – continuous program improvement. Major modifications are a normal and healthy part of the program life-cycle.
- In most universities, the difference between major and minor modifications is in the type of change being proposed, and the scope and robustness of the review and governance processes that follow. When considering borderline cases, answering "yes" to any of the following might indicate that a more robust process is preferable:
 - Would this modification meaningfully benefit from formal student consultation?
 - Would the modification reasonably shift a prospective student's expectations for the program, such that they might conceivably not have chosen the program if the change were in place?
 - Does the modification introduce an innovation or new type of learning/experience that the program, institution, or both have little or no experience with?
 - Does the modification impact the core "spine" of the curriculum, however that is defined, vs. electives or options?
 - Are the modifications significantly motivated by external accrediting bodies?
 - Do the changes diverge substantially from those foreseen or recommended by the last CPR?
- When considering the degree of change, the context and purpose of the modification should be considered, as well as information about what exactly will be modified. This will facilitate greater clarity on the threshold of change from the initiation of modification through to the Quality Council's review of the Annual Report of Major Modifications (as applicable).

- It is necessary that universities have a process to assist units in considering how program learning outcomes are affected by the modification and provide opportunities for reflection on why or why not PLOs are changing.¹
- For major modifications that are especially complex, it is recommended that universities contact the Secretariat in advance of proposing the change to verify that a change is indeed appropriately considered a major modification rather than a new program.

Advice to consider when completing the Annual Report on Major Modifications:

- When completing the Annual Report on Major Modifications, the ‘Type of Modification’ should accurately reflect the description of the modification.
- For programs undergoing multiple modifications, it is helpful to include a line item for each modification and a line that addresses how the cumulative impact of the modifications remains a major modification.
- Universities should consider that the definitions for credentials at each institution may vary (e.g. Minor, Module, Specialization), and that it can be helpful to the Quality Council if these terms are clarified in the report, where it may impact how a major modification is understood.

¹ Curriculum mapping is a helpful method for assessing the impact of the change on the program’s learning outcomes. For example, consider the curriculum map from the previous cyclical program review and determine if the courses being altered, added or removed are essential for achieving proficiency in a PLO. If so, the change likely constitutes a major modification.