

BEYOND GRAMMATICAL CLARITY: PROCEDURAL RECOVERABILITY IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

University instructions may be grammatically accessible yet leave a reader unable to establish which action an institution permits, requires, or has already completed. This article examines that distinction through procedural recoverability: the ability to identify a warranted next action from the documents and assistance available at a particular point in an administrative process. The analysis follows an elective-module change through six explicitly authored records: a bulletin, an adviser email, a portal instruction, a receipt, a timetable notice, and an access-help notice. A stated rule separates adviser endorsement from Registry approval, requires receipt of a complete request by 17:00 campus time (UTC+02:00) on 20 September 2024, and keeps the existing timetable operative until the effective date in a Registry approval notice. Examining the records against that rule identifies five distinct points at which wording can obscure action: an unnamed approval authority, an endorsement with uncertain scope, a request described as a completed change, a receipt mistaken for a decision, and an assistance route that demands the very login a reader lacks. A contrasting portal example shows why brief wording can be sufficient when the relevant relation is supplied nearby. The article presents a document-specific annotation procedure, a record-to-rule audit, and institutionally faithful alternatives to the problematic instructions. It also specifies how reader research could distinguish the benefits of linking procedural information from the benefits of merely providing more information. The argument assigns responsibility for intelligible administrative action to document chains and authorised service arrangements, not to readers' English proficiency alone.

KEYWORDS: institutional discourse; administrative English; procedural recoverability; authorisation; document chains; plain language

1. THE MISSING STEP IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE INSTRUCTION

"Once approved, complete the change through the portal by Friday" is easy to parse as an English sentence, yet it can remain difficult to follow as an institutional instruction. The reader may not know who can approve the request, which act the portal actually completes, what date *Friday* denotes, or whether the portal remains the only authorised route when login fails. Vocabulary recognition and the ability to act with institutional authority are related, but they are not the same achievement. Even a highly proficient reader may understand every clause while remaining unable to distinguish an eligible application, a successfully submitted request, and an authorised change of enrolment.

The opening sentence is an authored illustration rather than an instruction recovered from an actual university. Its purpose is to draw attention to relationships among institutional acts rather than to isolated lexical difficulties. The dependent verb phrase "once approved" presupposes an approving agent; "complete the change" may describe either submitting a request or implementing an outcome; and "by Friday" requires a reference date and an identifiable event that must occur before the cutoff. A reader also needs to know which institutional communication can be treated as evidence that these conditions have been met. Without those relationships, the most natural interpretation of a sentence need not be the institutionally correct one.

Administrative English merits examination in its own right because university procedures are frequently enacted through messages, forms, receipts, notices, and service interfaces rather than through classroom talk. In a Taiwan-based investigation involving questionnaires and interviews with fifteen administrative employees, Reynolds et al. [1] report differences in staff members' English communication needs and their ways of managing contact with international

students. That population encounters tasks unlike those at the centre of teaching-through-English research. The review by Macaro et al. [2], for instance, addresses English-medium instruction in academic teaching; it does not establish how university offices communicate permissions, pending decisions, service deadlines, or alternative submission routes. Treating all English-medium university communication as classroom communication would therefore leave an important institutional activity insufficiently described.

Work on usable documents already makes clear that syntactic simplicity cannot stand in for successful communication or reliable action. Schriver [3] situates plain-language practice in an extended tradition concerned with reader needs, access, and usefulness. Shoemaker et al. [4] distinguish materials that are understandable from materials that enable action in the specific context of patient education. The present article does not claim to discover that distinction. Its question is narrower: how does a person connect separately authored university messages to determine what has happened, what may happen next, and which authority makes that step legitimate?

Procedural recoverability denotes a recipient's capacity, at a specified point in an institutional procedure, to identify the next justified action, the conditions governing that action, and its immediate procedural consequence by using the communicative resources actually available at that point. "Next action" is not synonymous with clicking a button. It can mean obtaining an adviser endorsement, submitting an application, maintaining an existing timetable, waiting for a Registry decision, or contacting an accessible office for clarification. A decision not to act may be correct; a successfully completed click may be based on an unsupported assumption. These different responses must not be placed in the same category solely because their visible outcomes appear convenient.

The unit of inquiry is therefore an encounter among a person, a particular text, and a particular procedural stage, rather than the isolated readability of a sentence. Analysing that encounter requires knowledge of the rule as it is actually authorised, together with disciplined attention to what the reader can see, reach, or reasonably infer. An analyst who knows the whole procedure must not attribute that knowledge retrospectively to someone who has only received a short email. Conversely, an apparently abbreviated instruction is not defective when a closely associated notice already establishes its meaning.

This article works through one fully specified elective-change case rather than making unverified claims about the prevalence of administrative communication problems across universities. It examines three connected questions. First, which document expressions conceal a difference between institutional acts? Second, what wording and document placement make that difference available without changing policy? Third, what evidence would distinguish the resulting benefit from ordinary gains in information completeness or usability? Answering the first two questions through an authored case permits a closely checked linguistic account. Answering the third requires research with authentic processes and actual readers; that evidence is not asserted here.

2. INSTITUTIONAL WRITING, DECISION AUTHORITY, AND THE CASE DESIGN

2.1. WRITING IS PART OF AN INSTITUTIONAL SEQUENCE

University instructions are not freestanding verbal objects. They circulate among offices, applicants, advisers, interfaces, and information systems whose actions give apparently similar documents very different procedural consequences. Lillis [5] describes writing in relation to the social activities in which it is created and taken up, while Barton and Lee [6] examine how digital texts operate through situated online practices. These perspectives direct attention to an email that enables a later upload, a portal submission that produces a receipt, and a decision notice that permits a new timetable. They do not, by themselves, show that any given institution communicates these relations poorly.

Professional genre research adds a further restriction by emphasizing that documents acquire meaning through the professional and institutional practices in which they operate. Bhatia [7] links specialised documents to the practices and expertise of the institutions using them. The legal or administrative force of a message depends partly on the office that issues it and on the act the office is empowered to perform. Two emails can sound equally affirmative while authorising different conduct. An adviser's statement that a module is academically suitable, for example, need not have the same force as Registry's decision to approve enrolment in that module. A complete interpretation must recover not only positive wording but the institutional limits of its author.

Research on interaction is informative when used with that institutional distinction clearly in view. Heritage [8] examines knowledge and the formation of social actions, and Stevanovic and Peräkylä [9] analyse the rights people have to announce, suggest, or decide future courses of conduct. Knowing whether a change is educationally appropriate and having the right to implement it are separate institutional capacities. The present argument applies

that distinction to written messages, without claiming that an automatically generated university receipt is organised like a spoken exchange.

An inaccessible next step can also create avoidable demands on a user even when the underlying instruction is linguistically transparent. Moynihan et al. [10] divide administrative burden into learning, psychological, and compliance costs in interactions between people and public institutions. University elective administration differs from that research setting, so its findings cannot simply be imported as observed effects on students. Still, the distinction helps identify three different problems: discovering a requirement, understanding the requirement, and obtaining what is needed to satisfy it. Editing a notice may address the first two while leaving the third untouched.

2.2. RECOVERABLE ACTION ALONGSIDE ESTABLISHED DOCUMENT DESIGN

There is no need to treat plain language, usability, genre analysis, and actionability as rival approaches; each illuminates a different aspect of how institutional communication becomes usable. The governing principles in International Organization for Standardization [11] address accessible, usable communication, and Redish [12] organises web writing around readers' purposes and tasks. These accounts already invite attention to actions rather than merely short words. The distinctive emphasis here is an auditable link between a phrase in a specific document, the reader's present stage, an available companion resource, and the rule that licenses the next act.

For example, a judgement that a receipt is simply "unclear" does not specify whether the uncertainty concerns successful transmission, final approval, a timetable's effective date, or an absent route to further guidance. Table 1 summarizes these overlapping perspectives and identifies the decision-specific question applied to the elective-change record. Each is a different relation with a different consequence. A precise annotation identifies the relation, locates the supporting or missing communication, and states which action can legitimately follow. This stage-specific account can be placed alongside established approaches without claiming that those approaches are incapable of finding the same difficulty.

TABLE 1. ESTABLISHED CONCERNS AND THE DECISION-SPECIFIC QUESTION

Area	Central concern	Question asked of the elective-change record
Plain language and usable design	Accessible presentation suited to readers' tasks, knowledge, and needs.	Can this student identify the condition that matters before taking the next step?
Actionability	Whether a reader can work out and carry out an appropriate action.	What visible evidence makes that action permissible rather than merely plausible?
Institutional genre and writing	Documents as stages of organised professional activity.	How does this email, form, or receipt change the standing of the request?
Administrative burden	Learning, psychological, and compliance demands arising during institutional contact.	Is the difficulty caused by missing explanation, an inaccessible route, or a substantive requirement?

Note. These are overlapping emphases, not exclusive descriptions of the cited fields. They do not constitute a psychometric scale.

Three principles govern the readings that follow and delimit what can reasonably be inferred from the authored record set. First, a short label should be judged together with the information accompanying it; concision alone is not evidence of a problem. Second, an answer reached through guesswork differs from one grounded in a visible rule, even when both answers coincide. Third, a communication change is legitimate only when it makes an existing condition more readily identifiable. Removing eligibility requirements, moving deadlines, or replacing a final decision with an adviser recommendation changes the institution's process and requires its own authority.

2.3. SIX RECORDS AND ONE GOVERNING PROCEDURE

The case follows a currently enrolled student seeking to replace one elective module with another during the first two teaching weeks, a procedural setting chosen because several offices and document types must interact before the change becomes effective. The document set consists of six authored items, designated D1–D6: a bulletin, a programme adviser's response, a portal instruction, an automated email receipt, a timetable FAQ, and a public help notice. Table 2 reproduces their complete text. These are not sampled documents, quotations from a named university, staff interviews, or observations of applicants. They are deliberately specified communications that allow close comparison of what the messages state with what the operating rule requires.

That operating rule is given in Appendix A as A1–A6, and its boundaries matter because each document can be

interpreted only against the act that the rule authorises at that stage. The programme adviser may endorse the academic suitability of a proposed module but cannot decide the enrolment outcome. Registry alone decides after considering, among other matters, capacity. The student must submit the current and proposed module codes and an endorsement email. The complete request must arrive by 17:00 campus time (UTC+02:00) on 20 September 2024; the decision itself may follow that date. Until the effective date printed in a Registry approval notice, the current timetable remains operative. A public Records Help form offers an authorised route when login is unavailable, without removing the deadline or the endorsement requirement. All dates, offices, pages, and service arrangements in this case are stipulated for the analysis, not attributed to an existing institution.

TABLE 2. THE SIX AUTHORED MESSAGES USED AS CASE EVIDENCE

Record	Form and encounter	Complete wording
D1	Bulletin circulated on 16 September 2024	“Elective changes close on Friday. Obtain approval before completing the change form.”
D2	Programme adviser’s reply before submission	“The proposed module fits your programme. I am happy for you to go ahead.”
D3	Portal form instruction	“Upload approval. Submit your change by 20 September.”
D4	Automated email after successful submission	Subject: “Elective change confirmation.” Body: “Your request has been received. No further action is required.”
D5	Timetable FAQ linked from the student information page	“Continue with your current timetable until the change is confirmed.”
D6	Public help notice concerning request-access problems	“For problems accessing your request, open a support ticket after logging in to the portal.”

Note. The wording is the evidence under examination and is intentionally preserved verbatim. D4 appears only after successful submission; D6 concerns an access difficulty. Appendix A specifies the operative rule.

The six messages need not all reach the same reader, and their evidential value therefore depends on the encounter in which each becomes available. D4 presupposes a successful submission, whereas D6 may be consulted by someone who cannot log in at all. A reader encountering D1 alone does not automatically know what an adviser or Registry would explain later. For that reason, the comparisons use six explicit encounter positions E1–E6 in Table 3. Each position pairs a current document with companion information that is available or explicitly stipulated to have been consulted. This treatment prevents knowledge held by the analyst from becoming unacknowledged evidence attributed to the reader.

TABLE 3. WHAT IS AVAILABLE AT EACH DOCUMENT ENCOUNTER

Encounter	Position in the procedure	Documents available to the recipient	Access or knowledge boundary
E1 / D1	Before requesting endorsement	D1 and its circulation date.	The bulletin gives no accessible indication of who has approval authority.
E2 / D2	Adviser response received; no submission yet	D1 and D2 together.	Neither record separates endorsement from the subsequent Registry decision.
E3 / D3	Completing the portal form	D2, D3, and the retained bulletin.	No nearby statement specifies a complete-request cutoff or identifies Registry as final decision-maker.
E4 / D4	Submission accepted by the portal	D4 is displayed; D5 exists on a public student information page.	D4 does not link to D5. Consultation of D5 cannot be presumed.
E5 / D5	Considering whether to change timetable	D4 and D5 are expressly read together.	No Registry decision or effective date has been delivered.
E6 / D6	Unable to log in while seeking submission or request access	D6 is publicly visible.	The public no-login form under A6 exists but is not named or linked from D6.

Note. E4 separates what a receipt alone conveys from E5’s stated receipt–FAQ comparison. Appendix A remains available to the analyst, not to every reader.

Availability must also be separated analytically from discoverability, since a resource can exist technically without being exposed along the route a user is actually following. A public page can be accessible through an independent search but absent from the path actually shown to a reader. Neither technical existence nor the analyst’s ability to

find the page establishes that an applicant knew to consult it. Conversely, an accessible link displayed immediately above a submission button may make a shortened button label perfectly sufficient. Those distinctions are central to the evidence, not minor interface details.

2.4. A RULE-TO-EXPRESSION ANNOTATION PROCEDURE

Each document encounter is examined using a written record that identifies the reader's stage, the expression under scrutiny, the relevant provision of A1–A6, the other messages currently available, at least two plausible readings when the wording permits them, and the consequence of choosing one reading rather than another. The record also states what the message must convey and where that information is required. This yields a checkable account of a specific decision instead of a global rating of textual quality.

1. **Establish the authorised rule.** Name the responsible office, eligibility criteria, required evidence, deadline, decision-maker, status changes, and alternatives. A rule cannot be assumed merely because a staff member might conventionally follow it. Where the authoritative rule is disputed, record that uncertainty rather than silently resolving it.
2. **Define the recipient's position.** Specify which acts are already complete, which document is being read, and which other resources are visible, linked, blocked, or known to have been consulted. Do not attach information that becomes available only after the action currently being considered.
3. **Locate the critical expression.** Identify the specific noun, directive, time reference, status label, or prerequisite that governs action. State the institutional act or evidence item to which it ought to refer.
4. **Distinguish the obstacle.** Mark separately a required fact that is absent; wording compatible with two consequential interpretations; conflicting messages; a helpful resource whose route is not exposed; or a clearly understood requirement that cannot presently be satisfied. These conditions can coexist but need separate explanations.
5. **Identify the warranted next step.** Compare the reader's currently available evidence with the authorised rule. Record whether the materials support submission, waiting, maintaining existing arrangements, seeking clarification, or declining to act. Do not replace a missing warrant with an analyst's intuition.
6. **Draft wording tied to the actual rule.** State only the relation needed at the current stage, checking that the new wording does not change eligibility, required evidence, office authority, receipt time, effective date, or access arrangements. If the service itself must change, classify that as an administrative rather than textual intervention.
7. **Retain alternative readings and disagreements.** Record the reasons for divergent interpretations. The fact that two analysts agree on a label is not evidence that real readers act in that way; direct reader evidence would be needed to make that claim.

D3 provides a compact illustration of the procedure because its noun phrase *approval* can plausibly point to two institutionally distinct acts. The reader is preparing a submission after receiving D2, while D3 says "Upload approval." Appendix A1 identifies the programme adviser's endorsement email as acceptable evidence before submission, and A4 assigns final approval to Registry after submission. The noun "approval" is therefore capable of pointing to two institutionally distinct acts. The currently accessible D2 does not explicitly confine "go ahead" to making an application. The annotation identifies an uncertain referent and an uncertain scope, rather than attributing any particular misunderstanding to an actual student. A wording change that calls for "the adviser's endorsement email" addresses the evidence relation without awarding the adviser Registry's powers.

The procedure does not flag every absent organisational detail, because only omissions capable of changing a reader's warranted next action are analytically consequential here. An omission matters only when knowing the detail could alter a decision, determine what evidence is accepted, change the interpretation of a deadline or status, or enable necessary assistance. A user need not know how Registry internally allocates tasks in order to wait for its decision. An analyst also must not insist that every common term be defined where the accompanying text already explains its function. These limits keep the reading focused on consequential relationships rather than general verbosity.

3. WHERE THE ELECTIVE-CHANGE INSTRUCTIONS LOSE THEIR PROCEDURAL CONNECTION

3.1. D1 AND D2: APPROVAL IS NOT A SINGLE ACT

D1 instructs the student to “Obtain approval before completing the change form.” D3 subsequently repeats the same noun in “Upload approval.” Nothing in those two expressions identifies the approving office, distinguishes documentary endorsement from final authorization, or states what exactly is being approved. Yet A1 and A4 divide responsibility: the programme adviser can endorse academic suitability before submission, and Registry makes a separate final decision after assessing the application, including capacity. If a reader treats “approval” as a completed authorisation to move modules, the reader crosses from the first act to the second without evidence that Registry has made any decision.

The ambiguity cannot be corrected merely by substituting a simpler noun because the underlying problem concerns institutional reference rather than vocabulary difficulty. “Get permission” still leaves the holder and scope of permission unidentified. A useful first message would say that the student must obtain *an endorsement email from the programme adviser* before submitting the request. D3 can then refer back to the same named evidence item. A student who sees these linked descriptions can distinguish a document to upload from an administrative outcome that remains pending. The improvement consists in identifying an actor and a documentary object rather than in reducing vocabulary difficulty.

D2 makes the distinction especially important because its positive tone can be interpreted as permission to proceed beyond the adviser’s actual authority. The adviser writes, “The proposed module fits your programme. I am happy for you to go ahead.” The first sentence clearly concerns educational suitability. The second sentence contains no object identifying what the recipient may now go ahead *and do*. In E2 the reader can consult D1, but D1 is precisely the message that fails to define approval. The pair therefore permits two materially different completions of the adviser’s statement: proceed with a request for Registry to decide, or proceed with the actual module change. Only the first follows A1 and A4.

The difference concerns the action conveyed by an affirmative email and the institutional scope of the person who sends it. It does not imply incompetence, unhelpfulness, or inaccurate English on the part of a hypothetical adviser. In many institutional settings such wording would be harmless because a recipient already knows the office’s limited remit. That knowledge, however, is not supplied by E2 as defined. The correct record of E2 is an unresolved permission boundary, not an observation that users normally misunderstand advisers.

A complete but economical alternative is: “I endorse the proposed module as academically suitable for your programme. You may use this email to submit your elective-change request to Registry. Registry will decide whether the change is approved.” Each clause has a distinct purpose. The first states the adviser’s judgement; the second identifies the document’s use; the third preserves the later office’s authority. It supplies the link D3 needs without changing A1–A4. A version that said “You may now change modules” would be shorter but institutionally inaccurate.

3.2. D3: THE SUBMITTED OBJECT IS A REQUEST, NOT AN ENROLMENT CHANGE

The language of D1 and D3 also compresses several distinct procedural objects into the single word “change”. A student may request a change; Registry may later approve it; and enrolment and timetable arrangements may take effect on a specified date. These are not interchangeable states. D3’s instruction to “Submit your change” is especially consequential because it appears next to the act of submission itself. The portal receives a request and its supporting evidence under A2. It does not instantly perform a transfer to the proposed elective.

A form instruction that reads “Submit your elective-change request” resolves the immediate object of submission and prevents the act of sending data from being mistaken for implementation of the requested outcome. Naming the current and proposed module codes also tells readers what information the office expects. The distinction matters even if a student enters the right data and uses the correct button: the act of entering and sending the information is not evidence that the desired outcome has been authorised. Keeping the terms “adviser endorsement”, “request received”, and “Registry approval” separate makes the process intelligible without requiring every message to repeat all of the internal office steps.

Lexical consistency by itself can therefore be misleading when the repeated word conceals a change in procedural status. Repeating “change” in the bulletin, portal, and email receipt might appear stylistically neat while disguising changes of status. On the other hand, differentiated labels permit the reader to ask the right question at the right stage: Has an adviser endorsed my application? Has Registry received it? Has Registry approved it? From what date can I

use the new timetable? Those questions follow A1–A5 and correspond to separate documentary events.

The surrounding context may already make abbreviated wording adequate when the decisive relation is supplied visibly within the same encounter. Suppose the portal places the following notice immediately above its submission button: “Submitting sends a request to Registry; your enrolment stays unchanged until the effective date in a Registry approval notice.” If the button beneath reads “Submit your change”, the reader has the necessary distinction in the same encounter. The short label can be interpreted correctly through the adjacent statement. This contrasting case, N1, is an authored comparison and not a report of a tested portal. It demonstrates that the decisive unit is the complete encounter, not the button label taken out of context.

N1 would not, by itself, resolve every possible issue. A student deciding whether to submit before a cutoff would still need the applicable receipt time and evidence requirement. Its adequacy is specific to the distinction between request submission and enrolment effect. That narrower judgement prevents the analysis from treating an entire interface as effective merely because one of its short expressions is supported by a nearby explanation.

3.3. D1 AND D3: THE DEADLINE GOVERNS RECEIPT OF A COMPLETE REQUEST

Dates are another form of procedural reference because their practical meaning depends on both a temporal anchor and the event governed by the deadline. D1 says that elective changes “close on Friday” and was circulated on 16 September 2024. With that date visible, a recipient reading the bulletin promptly could reasonably associate Friday with 20 September. It would be inaccurate to conclude that “Friday” is always unclear. Its vulnerability is conditional: the text may later be forwarded or detached from its dated heading. A relative time phrase does not carry its original temporal anchor wherever it travels.

D3 narrows the date to “20 September”, but it gives no year, time of day, or time-zone convention and still leaves the governing event unspecified. More importantly, it does not identify *what* must have happened by then. Under A3, Registry must receive a complete application by 17:00 on 20 September 2024 at campus time, UTC+02:00. The electronic receipt timestamp determines timeliness. There is no requirement that Registry finish deciding the application by that moment, and A3 grants no automatic extension. Treating the due date as the date on which the elective transfer must already be complete would confuse an applicant’s obligation with a later institutional act.

The authorised rule can instead be stated directly: “Registry must receive your complete request, including both module codes and your adviser’s endorsement email, by 17:00 campus time (UTC+02:00) on 20 September 2024. Registry may send its decision after that date.” The first sentence provides a testable submission condition; the second prevents receipt and decision from being conflated. Neither sentence promises acceptance, available module capacity, or an extension. An office choosing to offer late consideration would need to authorise and announce such a policy separately.

The time-zone detail matters when a student is away from campus, travels across regions, or uses a device displaying a different local time. The wording “campus time (UTC+02:00)” removes the need to guess which clock governs the submission. At the same time, that detail does not guarantee that every student can meet the deadline. Someone who has understood the precise requirement but cannot obtain the endorsement in time faces an operational obstacle rather than a linguistic misunderstanding. Rewording the deadline must not disguise that distinction or create an entitlement absent from A3.

It also matters which event the system records as the authoritative receipt event. A3 identifies the receipt timestamp rather than the student’s time of clicking “send” as the timeliness criterion. If a real institution used a different event, its notice would need to reflect that rule. This case is deliberately explicit because an apparently precise clock time can still be operationally misleading if the action it governs is undefined. Precision in date formatting and precision in institutional reference must travel together.

3.4. D4 AND D5: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT CAN SOUND LIKE A FINAL DECISION

D4 has two distinct communicative layers that pull the reader toward different procedural interpretations. Its body says “Your request has been received”, which is a report of an arrival event. Its subject, however, says “Elective change confirmation”, a description capable of suggesting that the desired change itself has been confirmed. The final sentence, “No further action is required”, adds a broad instruction with no stated limit. These words need not be false as a statement about whether the same request must be sent again, but they leave open which part of the student’s activity is considered complete.

For a student deciding whether to attend a different module, that omission has an immediate practical consequence. A4 assigns the final decision to Registry and treats an automated receipt as evidence of reception only. A5 further

provides that the current timetable remains binding until the effective date in a Registry approval notice. Neither D4's subject nor the existence of its body can replace that notice. A reader who changes timetable immediately after receiving D4 would therefore act without the authorisation A4–A5 require, even though the message sounds conclusive.

D5 is more cautious because it directs the reader to “Continue with your current timetable until the change is confirmed.” E5 expressly allows D4 and D5 to be viewed together. In that encounter, the overlapping use of “confirmation” is problematic because D4 has already used the term in its subject line. The two records can invite a cross-document inference that a receipt is the confirmation D5 anticipates. A consistently labelled sequence would reserve “received” for the portal's automated acknowledgement and “approved” for Registry's separate decision, with the latter supplying the effective date. The issue is not a prohibition on the ordinary English word “confirmation”; it is the absence of an identifiable status transition attached to that word.

A receipt faithful to A4–A5 could instead read: “Registry has received your elective-change request. This email confirms receipt only; it does not approve the change. Registry will issue a separate decision. Until the effective date stated in a Registry approval notice, continue with your current timetable.” This wording does four things in order. It establishes the completed event, denies an unwarranted inference, identifies the future decision-maker, and states the interim action. A shorter status panel could convey the same relationships; its adequacy would depend on what the student actually sees in the interface.

It would be tempting to add “Do not submit again” to this receipt in the interests of practical guidance. That instruction might be sensible in many universities, but A1–A6 do not specify a ban on duplicate submissions or what should happen if a second application arrives. Adding the prohibition would go beyond clarification and create a rule without an identified authority. The alternative text therefore confines itself to what the governing specification supports. The same restraint applies to promises that Registry will decide within a given number of days: no such interval appears in A4.

The presence of D5 on a student information page is also not equivalent to a direct instruction or link in D4. In E4 the FAQ can be found publicly, but the automated email does not direct the student to it. An analysis of the email must not silently assume that every recipient consults the page. E5, by contrast, explicitly examines the combined reading and can discuss the interaction between the labels. Maintaining that distinction separates message content from real or presumed navigation.

3.5. D6: THE HELP ROUTE REQUIRES THE ACTION THE STUDENT CANNOT PERFORM

D6 directs someone having difficulty “accessing your request” to “open a support ticket after logging in to the portal,” thereby making successful authentication a prerequisite for assistance. For a reader who can log in but cannot locate a previously submitted form, the instruction might be workable. For the E6 reader, whose problem is an inability to log in, the precondition makes the prescribed help path unusable. The reader can understand the English perfectly while being unable to comply. An evaluation limited to the transparency of the sentence would miss the practical obstacle.

Appendix A6 specifies a workable and already authorised alternative: a public Records Help page with a form that requires no student login. Its category is “Elective change—cannot access portal”. The student enters the current and proposed module codes and attaches the adviser's endorsement; the form sends the application to Registry, and the receipt time has the same standing as portal receipt. It is not a waiver of the endorsement requirement or the deadline. Thus, the appropriate response to E6 already exists in the case's rule, but D6 gives no name, link, or direction that exposes it to the locked-out reader.

The wording can be made precise without inventing any additional service or altering the existing deadline and endorsement requirements: “If you cannot log in, use the public Records Help form. Select ‘Elective change—cannot access portal’, enter your current and proposed module codes, and attach your adviser's endorsement email. The same submission deadline applies. If you can log in but cannot find a request, use the portal support ticket.” This divides two kinds of trouble according to the action each user can perform. The page name and option are part of A6, not a conjectured service offered by an actual university.

The analysis must distinguish a blocked requirement from a hidden alternative because the two conditions call for different institutional responses. In E6, a person may accurately recover the instruction “log in before requesting help” and still be unable to execute it. That is an infeasible prerequisite. The absence of a visible route to the authorised no-login form is a separate discovery problem. If the reader already knows how to access that public form, the discovery problem disappears, although login remains unavailable. If the form itself does not function, a correct link will not restore the ability to submit. A web-service fault then requires operational intervention rather than another

paragraph of explanatory English.

Research on repair helps clarify why assistance should be treated as part of communicative activity rather than as evidence that the user has failed to understand a transparent system. Dingemanse et al. [13] describe recurrent ways conversational participants identify and resolve trouble across languages. Kendrick [14] details formats used in other-initiated repair in English conversation. A university support route differs from talk in its speed, structure, and organisational responsibilities, but the studies show why seeking clarification is a legitimate communicative action. An institution that directs readers to a channel they cannot reach deprives them of a practical means of making that action effective.

3.6. THE EVIDENCE IN THE SIX RECORDS, CONSIDERED TOGETHER

No single linguistic or procedural defect explains the case as a whole. D1 and D3 obscure who endorses and what is submitted; D2 blurs endorsement and permission; D4 obscures the difference between an acknowledgement and an outcome; D5 uses a status word capable of referring back to the receipt; and D6 conceals an existing route that is usable when login fails. The specific relationship changes with the stage of the process. Treating all six as examples of “bad English” would obscure why the texts matter and which institutionally legitimate remedy belongs to each.

Table 4 records the relevant expression, the authorising rule, the action that can legitimately follow, and the connection missing from the stated encounter. It also shows why the records should not be treated as six independent observations: D3 inherits D2’s underspecified authorisation, and D5 may be interpreted with D4’s subject line in view. The table is an audit of the authored messages against A1–A6, not a numerical estimate of reader error.

TABLE 4. RECORD-TO-RULE AUDIT OF THE ELECTIVE-CHANGE CHAIN

Item	Expression under examination	Governing provision	Warranted action at this stage	Missing or unstable connection
D1	“Obtain approval”; “Friday”	A1, A3, A4	Seek an adviser endorsement; submit a complete request by the stated cutoff.	The approving office, type of approval, and full receipt deadline.
D2	“go ahead”	A1, A4	Use the endorsement email to apply; await Registry’s decision.	The permitted act is submission, not implementation.
D3	“Upload approval”; “Submit your change”	A1–A3	Upload the endorsement and submit both module codes.	Required evidence, request status, year, cutoff time, and governing time zone.
D4	“change confirmation”; “No further action”	A4, A5	Recognise receipt; await a separate decision and keep the current timetable.	Receipt is not approval and cannot establish an effective date.
D5	“until the change is confirmed”	A4, A5	Maintain existing timetable until the date in a Registry approval notice.	The confirming event and its authority are not named.
D6	“after logging in”	A2, A3, A6	If locked out, use the public Records Help submission route with the required evidence.	An available no-login route is not exposed at the point of need.

Note. Each row identifies a logical relation within the stated case. It is not a record of observed student interpretations or response frequencies.

The audit also reveals two important protections against overinterpretation. First, an apparent difficulty can vanish when the encounter supplies an adjacent explanation, as in N1. Second, even a fully explicit rule may be burdensome or impossible to satisfy in a particular person’s circumstances. The ability to name the next authorised step is analytically separable from the time, permissions, technology, or documents needed to complete it. Both distinctions are required if institutional communication is to be assessed without unfairly attributing every problem to text or reader.

4. MAKING EACH DOCUMENT CARRY THE INFORMATION NEEDED AT ITS STAGE

A reliable communication chain does not require six copies of the complete policy; it requires each message to make visible the relation that matters at the stage where its recipient must act. It requires different messages to state the relationships that matter when their recipients must act. The bulletin must introduce the endorsement requirement, the request deadline, and the fact that Registry decides. The adviser’s email must make clear what the endorsement permits. The portal must identify the evidence and data to transmit. The receipt must distinguish arrival from approval. The timetable notice must specify the event and date that permit a timetable change. The help notice must name an accessible alternative before login becomes a prerequisite.

This allocation is not merely stylistic because the timing and location of information affect whether a user can act on it. A student who has not yet applied cannot use a receipt to learn what needs to be uploaded. Similarly, a login problem cannot be solved by advice contained behind the unavailable authentication screen. Locating information in the document or route accessible *before* a decision is part of the communication's function. Redish [12] emphasises writing that responds to readers' actual questions; here the question includes both the required fact and the time at which the reader needs it.

The difference between text editing and changing institutional policy must remain visible throughout any revision process. Table 5 distinguishes four interventions using the case rules. A short synonym may improve presentation without supplying a missing fact. Naming an existing authority or evidence item makes a rule explicit. Aligning status labels across messages prevents a received request from being treated as an approved change. Removing adviser endorsement or inventing a new submission service would change the procedure and is not something a writer can authorise by altering a sentence.

TABLE 5. CHANGES TO WORDING COMPARED WITH CHANGES TO THE ELECTIVE-CHANGE PROCEDURE

Type of change	Example from the case	Institutional significance
Expression and presentation	Replace “prior to submission” with “before you submit” wherever that phrase is used.	Changes readability but supplies no unstated requirement or authority.
Explication of an existing condition	Say “programme adviser’s endorsement email” in place of “approval”.	Identifies the acceptable A1 evidence without altering who decides under A4.
Alignment between messages	Describe D4 as a receipt and reserve approval terminology for Registry’s decision.	Maintains the distinct status transitions required by A4–A5.
Change to an institutional rule or service	Remove endorsement, move the A3 cutoff, or build a new unauthenticated submission channel.	Alters obligations or service access and requires institutional approval.

Note. A6 already supplies a no-login route. Making that existing route visible is an editorial and navigational change; creating it from nothing would be an operational one.

Appendix B sets out a complete entry notice and receipt based on A1–A6. The entry notice spells out the application prerequisites, both submission routes, the receipt cutoff, Registry’s later decision, and the timetable condition. The receipt has a narrower responsibility: establish that an application arrived, deny any implication of automatic approval, and tell the student to retain the current timetable until the specified event. These messages should be judged by whether each permits a justified decision at its encounter, not by whether one is uniformly shorter than the other.

Concision matters because students and staff must locate information quickly, but omission has a substantial cost when it removes the identity of the evidence, responsible office, deadline event, or status change. Repeating A1–A6 in every email would also have costs: crowded messages, duplicated maintenance, and a greater risk that separately maintained copies fall out of alignment. A workable practice is to identify the decisive relationship locally and link to the authoritative details where they are needed. The form should not merely direct readers to a comprehensive policy page without indicating why that page contains information important before submission.

Document owners must additionally verify that the named services and routes are operationally available under the conditions described in the text. A public form is not a repair pathway if its link is broken, it silently redirects to login, or it fails to accept required supporting files. The entry notice cannot truthfully offer the A6 alternative unless the service works as described. Checking the link, its accessibility, the form’s required fields, the confirmation that follows, and the treatment of receipt time is therefore part of the institutional responsibility represented by these messages. This operational check is distinct from deciding whether the English is clear.

There are limits to how specific an instruction can become without exceeding the authority of the office issuing it. If Registry retains discretion after reviewing module capacity, a truthful notice must say that a decision remains pending rather than promise success. If a student cannot supply the required endorsement by the cutoff, a communicator must not invent an extension to avoid disappointing the reader. In such circumstances the next justified action may be to request clarification about any authorised alternatives while continuing to comply with the known rule. Good administrative writing provides a dependable account of what is known and unknown; it does not manufacture certainty.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE ENGLISH AS RESPONSIBILITY SHARED ACROSS THE INSTITUTION

The elective-change case involves English-medium university communication, but its difficulty is not reducible to English as an additional language or to the linguistic proficiency of the applicant. A new student who speaks English fluently may have no reason to know that Registry and programme advisers possess different powers. Another student with more limited English but extensive knowledge of the same institution may immediately recognise a receipt as distinct from approval. The authored record set supplies no comparison of those readers and cannot establish which group would encounter more difficulty. It does, however, show why unfamiliarity with a procedure must not automatically be diagnosed as a deficiency in the recipient's language proficiency.

The mechanisms identified here can arise in administrative communication in any language. A missing approving agent is missing regardless of the language used to ask for "approval"; an unlinked help form remains hard to discover even when its own text is readable; and a receipt still cannot confer authority that its sender does not possess. The English-medium setting gives the analysis a particular lexical, pragmatic, and professional purpose, but it is not evidence of a uniquely English or uniquely multilingual communication problem. Assertions about different linguistic groups would require comparative data, independently assessed language skills, and attention to prior procedural experience.

Piller [15] places linguistic diversity in relation to unequal participation and access to social resources. For university administration, this suggests that the distribution of the effort required to locate a rule deserves attention alongside the readability of a message. The student can reasonably be expected to provide the required module codes, secure the prescribed endorsement, and respond to an authorised decision. That expectation does not justify hiding the office that can approve a change or placing the only visible help route behind the authentication step that has failed. Responsibility for those relations lies with the offices that design the process, issue the communications, and operate the service.

Staff education can address the same problem from the writer's side by making institutional authority and document function explicit during drafting. Reynolds and Yu [16] describe an English course for university administrative personnel developed with attention to staff-identified workplace demands. A related exercise would ask representatives of the programme office, Registry, digital-services team, and help desk to trace a single application from D1 through the actual decision and identify what each office's message makes visible. The key teaching task would be to distinguish writing on behalf of one's own authorised role from wording that appears to speak on behalf of another office. This does not require staff to abandon familiar correspondence patterns; it requires the patterns to communicate their institutional limits accurately.

Students can likewise practise identifying the scope of a communicative act rather than treating all positive institutional language as equivalent permission. Instead of treating the politeness of "I am happy for you to go ahead" as the primary instructional target, a task can ask whether the response permits submission or actual enrolment. Another task can ask what evidence supports the statement that the request was received and what further document is needed before attending the proposed elective. Those questions connect pragmatic interpretation with the consequences of documentary action. The review of instructed pragmatics by Taguchi [17] supplies a basis for investigating contextualised instruction, although it does not establish that these particular activities improve performance in university offices.

Recognition of consequential uncertainty should be taught and assessed as a legitimate achievement rather than treated as failure to reach a quick answer. If D2 does not identify whether the adviser's permission extends beyond an application, a reader who asks "May I submit this request now, or has the module change already been approved?" has correctly identified a consequential distinction. Treating that question as failure merely because it is not a final administrative action would reward unsupported certainty. A polished English response asserting that the change is complete would be less defensible than a cautious question that accurately locates the unresolved authority.

Multilingual resources may assist rather than invalidate this interpretation, especially when the difficulty lies in relating institutional acts rather than decoding vocabulary. Li [18] argues for understanding language practices through meaning-making across named languages and other resources. A reader might consult peers, compare an interface with a translation, or explain a question in a preferred language. Those activities can be appropriate means of understanding an instruction. But a translation cannot supply an omitted Registry decision or reveal a hidden form unless someone has the underlying institutional information. Support materials should therefore retain recognisable portal field names alongside accessible explanations and preserve the same evidence, time, status, and authority relations across language versions. Their usefulness needs to be checked in the actual service rather than presumed

from translation alone.

A professional-development task based on the six case records can therefore be made specific and auditable. Participants first classify D2 as endorsement, D4 as receipt, and the separate Registry notice anticipated under A4 as the only final decision. They then identify the event governing the A3 cutoff and the event governing the timetable under A5. Finally, they draft directions for a locked-out applicant using A6 without introducing exceptions. Each answer must cite the operative provision and the message that makes it available to the student. Such an exercise directs attention to institutional reasoning as well as lexical choice, while making no claim that its educational benefits have already been measured.

6. WHAT EVIDENCE WOULD ESTABLISH THE EFFECT OF THESE DOCUMENT RELATIONS?

6.1. FROM AUTHORED RECORDS TO OBSERVABLE ENCOUNTERS

The analysis of D1–D6 establishes that multiple institutional actions can remain compatible with the wording of a small document chain unless the governing rule and stage-specific relationships are supplied. It does not establish how readers commonly interpret actual university messages. Demonstrating that a particular connection causes practical difficulty requires three bodies of evidence that must remain distinguishable: an authoritative description of the institution's process, a faithful record of what information the reader could access at the time, and the reader's interpretation or conduct. None can be substituted for another. A staff member's account of intended policy cannot establish what a page actually displayed, and a reader's uncertainty cannot by itself prove that a particular phrase caused the uncertainty.

A study in a functioning institution could follow several procedures with different decision structures, including elective changes, placement applications, and equipment reservations. Each procedure would need a complete documentary chain: dated public notices, staff emails or approved templates, relevant forms, automated messages, help routes, and actual decision notices. The researcher would record where a user encounters each item, what is visible before an action, which information requires login, and whether linked content is accessible. Document versions must be captured because later edits could otherwise be mistaken for messages seen by earlier users. Both relatively smooth and problem-reported procedures should be included to avoid selecting only examples that appear to confirm the argument.

The governing rule would need independent confirmation through official process documents, service specifications, and interviews with responsible offices. An interview alone may reveal how staff think the system works without resolving whether that understanding is authorised. Where policy, interface behaviour, and staff accounts conflict, the discrepancy should be recorded as an institutional uncertainty. A text cannot be declared faithful to the rule if the rule itself is unsettled. Such a case may be analytically valuable because it reveals an organisational coordination problem, but it must not be counted as evidence of a writing defect alone.

Recipient evidence could be obtained through consenting observations of routine tasks, screen recordings with appropriate privacy controls, explanations of intended actions, and later interviews about choices already made. Each method answers a different question. Observations show what the person actually did in the encounter; subsequent explanations can reveal reasons and uncertainties; transaction records can establish whether the request reached the intended office. Think-aloud protocols may expose reasoning but can also prompt unusually careful reading and should not be confused with unaltered routine practice. Researchers should document any mediation, translation, or peer assistance used, rather than automatically defining unaided English reading as the only legitimate means of understanding the service.

Participant characteristics should separate English proficiency from familiarity with the relevant institution and its procedures so that one resource is not used as a proxy for the other. Nationality, first language, and length of enrolment are poor substitutes for direct assessment of those two resources. Someone may know university life in general but not this institution's authority structure, while another person may have recently completed exactly the same application. A balanced sample would vary language experience and local procedure experience independently where feasible, so that one is not mistaken for the other. Explaining a decision in a language a participant can use comfortably may also be appropriate, provided translation and coding are documented carefully.

6.2. COMPARISONS THAT DISTINGUISH INFORMATION FROM PLACEMENT

A useful test must separate the effect of adding missing facts from the effect of linking already available facts directly to the decision they govern. Merely comparing D3 with a longer and more informative portal notice cannot do that. The longer version would differ in amount of content, clarity of reference, and perhaps visual salience. Any advantage could follow from one or several of those changes. The central question is whether connecting a fact to the action it governs helps when the competing message contains the same fact.

Four versions can be specified for a controlled reading task in order to separate information quantity from decision-linked placement. In the first, participants receive the D1–D6 wording appropriate to an encounter. In the second, sentences undergo surface editing but retain the same information. In the third, the complete A1–A6 facts relevant to the encounter are stated at the precise point where the reader must decide and are explicitly tied to the next act. In the fourth, those same facts are shown with comparable prominence and length, but arranged as separate background statements without clearly identifying which one authorises the current action. The third-versus-fourth comparison directly examines the value of the relation between fact and act; the first and second help interpret more general gains from clarity or additional information.

D3 illustrates how the facts can be held constant while their relation to the required action is varied. A linked instruction could say, “Upload the programme adviser’s endorsement email with both module codes to submit your request. Registry, not the adviser, decides whether the change is approved.” The information-matched alternative could place “Programme adviser: academic endorsement” and “Registry: final decision” in an adjacent information panel while keeping “Upload approval” beside the form. Both versions convey the same office distinction. The difference is whether that distinction is attached to the object the student must upload. The alternative would have to be carefully designed so that length, visual attention, and other incidental features do not drive the comparison.

The main outcome should be the *justification* of the selected action rather than task completion alone. A participant should identify what to do next, what document or rule warrants the action, and what remains undecided. A successful click, by itself, is insufficient evidence of an accurate interpretation. Someone may upload D2 simply because it is the only positive email available, without knowing that it represents adviser endorsement; someone else may appropriately decline to change timetable because no Registry approval has arrived. Their procedural reasoning differs, even if a simplistic completion measure would classify the first as success and the second as inaction.

Table 6 specifies response distinctions that an independent reader could apply to the elective-change decisions. These are decision categories anchored to A1–A6, not observed participant frequencies or an established testing instrument. Explanations accompanying choices are essential, particularly for distinguishing a correct action reached by chance from a correctly justified action. When the explanation does not support any definite judgement, the responsible coding decision is to record insufficient evidence rather than infer understanding or confusion.

TABLE 6. DECISION CATEGORIES TIED TO THE CASE’S AUTHORISING RULE

Response category	Elective-change example	Evidence needed to assign the category
Warranted action	Submit the current and proposed module codes with the adviser’s endorsement because Registry will decide later.	Choice and explanation match A1, A2, and A4.
Correct act without a supported reason	Upload D2 solely because any affirmative email seems to count as approval.	The uploaded item is acceptable, but the stated authorisation is missing or mistaken.
Justified uncertainty or clarification	Ask whether “go ahead” authorises the application or an actual change of module.	The reader identifies a consequential unresolved relation; accessibility of a help route is assessed separately.
Understood requirement that cannot be met	Identify the A3 deadline and A1 endorsement rule but lack the endorsement by the cutoff.	The explanation is correct and the obstacle is practical rather than referential.
Unwarranted action	Treat D4 as final Registry approval and immediately follow the proposed timetable.	The action contradicts A4–A5.
Insufficient evidence	Give only “I would click continue” with no recoverable grounds.	Neither knowledge nor guessing can be reliably established from the response.

Note. These are analytical response descriptions, not data from enrolled participants. Their use with actual participants requires piloting and independent coding.

Independent coders should apply the response categories without seeing treatment labels wherever that is practicable,

preserving a record of initial judgments before adjudication. Any wording that reveals a condition should be documented as a limitation on masking. Before adjudicating disagreements, the investigators should report where coders differed and why. Coder agreement alone would show that the categories can be applied consistently; it would not establish that linking instructions changes recipients' actions. Similarly, favourable reader judgments of clarity would not substitute for a demonstrated ability to distinguish endorsement, receipt, and final approval.

Task allocation should account for the fact that a reader who sees several versions of the same elective-change problem can learn the correct answer from an earlier encounter and carry that knowledge into later conditions. Different but comparable procedures can be assigned across conditions and their order counterbalanced. Repeated decisions from one participant are not statistically independent, nor are decisions about the same procedure necessarily independent of that procedure's distinctive difficulty. An eventual analysis should respect both dependencies, report uncertainty for the main linked-versus-information-matched comparison, and distinguish planned from exploratory contrasts. Specific sample numbers or detectable effects cannot responsibly be asserted before the tasks and preliminary variation have been examined.

6.3. DISCONFIRMATION, ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS, AND BURDEN

An advantage of the fully linked instruction over D3 would not by itself establish that relation-placement is a separate source of benefit, because the linked version may also differ in informational completeness. The added factual material might be enough. If the linked version and the information-matched version produce comparable justified decisions, any observed improvement over D3 may chiefly reflect the provision of complete information. If simple surface editing performs equally well for readers who already know the rule, elaborate stage-by-stage explication may be unnecessary in that setting. If independent coders cannot reliably distinguish justified uncertainty from a mistaken answer after the governing rule is made explicit, the response categories need reconsideration.

Those results would not make good document design unimportant; they would simply narrow the claim about which feature produced the observed benefit. They would narrow the claim that this particular form of relation-focused analysis adds explanatory value beyond established approaches. Conversely, a clear advantage for linked information when facts and layout are held constant would provide evidence that placement relative to the decision is consequential. It would still need replication across different procedures and readers before being treated as a general property of English-medium administration. A single elective-change exercise could not support claims about universities as a whole.

Completion and experienced administrative burden must also remain analytically separate because a successful transaction can still involve substantial avoidable effort. Jilke et al. [19] address the measurement of administrative burden in a social-welfare setting and thereby help distinguish burdensome experience from a service's recorded outcome. A student might eventually submit successfully only after several frustrating attempts, while another might correctly discover that submission is not permitted and stop. Counting successful submissions alone would wrongly favour the first situation. University-specific assessment of burden would need its own validated or suitably examined measures; those developed in other institutional contexts should not be assumed automatically transferable.

Even clarification frequency requires careful interpretation because a more accessible service may make previously suppressed questions visible. A clearer help route may increase questions by allowing people who were previously blocked to reach an authorised office. Such an increase is not necessarily deterioration. The relevant evidence is whether questions address consequential uncertainty, whether the answer is accurate and accessible, and whether the student can then decide to proceed, wait, or decline. A reduced help-desk count without information about suppressed access or unsupported assumptions would be a weak indicator of communication quality.

7. CONCLUSION

Understanding the words in an administrative instruction does not always establish what a person is authorised to do with those words in an institutional procedure. In the elective-change case, a programme adviser's endorsement, a student's application, the portal's receipt, and Registry's decision are separate acts with separate consequences. D1–D6 reveal how familiar terms such as “approval”, “change”, and “confirmation” can make those acts appear interchangeable. The stated receipt cutoff and public access alternative further show that a date or help instruction cannot be assessed independently of the event or prerequisite it governs.

The analysis suggests a practical standard for administrative writing: the recipient should be able to identify the act required at the current stage, the documentary or institutional authority for performing it, and the status that will

follow. That standard does not demand maximum detail in every sentence. The adequately supported short button label in N1 is a reminder that surrounding information can make concise wording sufficient. Equally, a perfectly expressed rule does not remove a genuinely restrictive deadline or supply documents that the reader lacks. Text design and institutional service design must be evaluated together but not conflated.

For English-medium university administration, the immediate implication is to examine chains of writing across offices rather than isolated messages or the linguistic skills of applicants alone. Students and staff need reliable distinctions between endorsement, receipt, decision, and implementation, with a usable way to seek authorised clarification. The next phase of inquiry is to test those distinctions against actual encounters and to compare explicitly linked instructions with information-equivalent messages. Until such reader evidence is available, the claim remains a document-grounded account of how institutional language can support or obscure the next justified action, not a measured effect on university users.

A. OPERATING RULE FOR THE AUTHORED ELECTIVE-CHANGE CASE

The following provisions are part of the study materials, not an account of an actual university policy. They establish the authorised actions against which the messages in Table 2 are examined. No analyst may infer exceptions or permissions beyond these provisions merely to make an instruction easier to follow.

A1. Eligibility and academic endorsement. A currently enrolled student may request one elective-module change during the first two teaching weeks. Before applying, the student must obtain the programme adviser's endorsement of the new module's academic suitability. An email expressing that endorsement is acceptable evidence. D2 is stipulated to satisfy the endorsement requirement.

A2. Required submission. The student supplies the current and proposed module codes together with the adviser's endorsement. The ordinary submission route is the portal's *Elective change* form. Sending the form creates an application for consideration; it does not itself alter enrolment.

A3. Deadline. Registry must receive a complete request by 17:00 campus time (UTC+02:00) on 20 September 2024. The recorded time of receipt establishes whether the application is timely. Registry may decide a timely request after the cutoff. No automatic extension or exception is specified.

A4. Final decision. Registry is the sole authority for approving or rejecting the requested change and includes a capacity check in its determination. The adviser's endorsement concerns academic suitability only. An automated receipt confirms arrival but not approval. Registry communicates its decision through a separate approval or rejection notice.

A5. Timetable. The existing timetable remains in force until the effective date named in a Registry approval notice. If the application is rejected, the existing timetable remains unchanged. A receipt cannot be used to infer an effective date.

A6. Public route when login fails. A public *Records Help* page includes a form that does not require student login. The applicant selects *Elective change—cannot access portal*, enters the current and proposed module codes, and attaches the adviser endorsement. The form submits an alternative application to Registry; its receipt timestamp has the same status as a portal submission. This route does not relax A1 or A3.

The circulation date of D1 and the date in A3 have been chosen to make the temporal references unambiguous to the analyst. They must not be interpreted as evidence that a named institution had these rules in September 2024. The rule is a fixed point of comparison within the authored case and is not an empirical record of staff conduct.

B. STAGE-SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CONSISTENT WITH A1–A6

The two specimen messages below place the relevant dependencies at the point where a student needs them. Their form and wording are original instructional examples tied to Appendix A. The names of offices and web pages belong to the authored case; an institution using comparable messages would have to confirm its own policies and working routes.

Entry notice: Apply for an elective-module change

Currently enrolled students may request one elective-module change during the first two teaching weeks. Obtain an email from your programme adviser stating that the proposed module is academically suitable before submitting your application. The email is evidence of endorsement, not Registry approval. Open *Elective change* in the portal, enter your current and proposed module codes, and upload the endorsement email. Registry must receive the complete

request no later than 17:00 campus time (UTC+02:00) on 20 September 2024. If you cannot log in, open the public *Records Help* page, select *Elective change—cannot access portal*, enter both module codes, and attach the endorsement. This form does not require student login, and the same receipt deadline applies. Registry will assess the application, including module capacity, and issue a separate approval or rejection decision; the decision may arrive after the submission deadline. Submitting a request or receiving an automated receipt does not change your enrolment. Continue with the current timetable until the effective date in a Registry approval notice. A rejection leaves that timetable unchanged.

Automated email: Elective-change request received

Registry has received your elective-change request. This email confirms receipt only; it does not approve the change. Registry will issue a separate decision, which may arrive after the submission deadline. Continue with your current timetable until the effective date stated in a Registry approval notice. If Registry rejects the request, your existing timetable remains unchanged.

The entry notice includes application requirements and the accessible submission alternative because they govern action before the student sends a request. The automated email need not repeat the entire application procedure. Its task is to identify what has happened and what has not yet been decided. Neither message promises approval or creates a restriction on duplicate applications that is absent from A1–A6.

Study Materials and Ethical Considerations. Not applicable.

Data Availability. No new empirical dataset was generated for this article.

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