

Procedures for the Operation of Examination Boards

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Examination Boards

1. Introduction

- 1.1 These procedures relate to the operation of Examination Boards for taught provision at the University.
- 1.2 An Examination Board must be appointed to consider all academic credit conferred by the University, and for every course leading to an award.
- 1.3 The University operates a tiered Examination Board structure of Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and Progression and Award Boards (PABs) for taught provision. The terms of reference, composition and quoracy requirements of MABs and PABs are detailed within these procedures.
- 1.4 The Faculty/ School Education Committee recommends the appointment of officers and members of MABs and PABs to the Education and Students Sub-Committee on behalf of the University Education Committee for formal approval. Markers who are not members of the Board have the right to be in attendance.
- 1.5 The Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and Students, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise, or the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global and Civic Engagement, or any other officer approved by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and Students may Chair, or observe, any Examination Board across the University.
- 1.6 An independent observer from Academic Services may attend all Examination Boards to ensure independent presence and provide advice and guidance on the application on the Progression and Award regulations. Where attendance by a member of Academic Services is not possible, advice and guidance on the application of the regulations may be sought by correspondence.
- 1.7 Examination Boards will be scheduled in accordance with the annually published marks calendar. Schools may exceptionally schedule undergraduate and postgraduate PABs with a different timing or remit, for example where the course start and/ or end date differs from the standard University calendar.
- 1.8 Guidance materials and common templates will be updated and published annually by Academic Services.
- 1.9 For provision delivered by Partner institutions, the University will allocate a senior member of University faculty, nominated by the University Education Committee, to Chair each Examination Board. The standard MAB and PAB terms of reference should be followed, and composition and quoracy should mirror the University's. Membership of MABs and PABs must be reported annually to the University, and should be drawn from equivalent roles within the Partner institution. An independent observer from Academic Services will attend all Examination Boards at Partner institutions.

2. Links to other Policies and Regulations

- 2.1 Other relevant University Policies, regulations and procedures may need to be referred to in order to operationalise these procedures:

- Exceptional Circumstances Policy and Procedural Guidance
- Procedures for Marking, Moderation and Feedback
- Academic Appeals Regulation

3. General Principles

- 3.1 Marks confirmation by MABs and consideration of marks arrays by PABs and assessment outcomes by PABs is conducted anonymously by candidate number rather than name. Where the conferral of the award embeds a professional qualification that requires a fuller discussion of individual performance, an exemption from this requirement may be sought.
- 3.2 The discussions of MABs and PABs are strictly confidential (this does not preclude publishing decisions or providing students with a rationale following a published decision).
- 3.3 Members of examination boards must declare any personal connection with a student either in advance to the Chair of the examination board or at the meeting before the student is considered. The member must withdraw from the meeting while the student in question is being considered.
- 3.4 Advocacy is not permitted on behalf of students about whom a member of the examination board has special knowledge (such as Academic Personal Tutor). Board members' knowledge of exceptional circumstances affecting students should not be discussed regardless of whether a student has made an exceptional circumstances claim or not.
- 3.5 Examination boards will follow the University's Progression and Award Regulations and associated approved derogations, applying discretion in a consistent manner.
- 3.6 Examination boards will confirm the outcome for all students, however, discussion is only required where indicated by the particular array of marks.
- 3.7 Decisions of the Examination Board are collective and reached by majority after deliberation.
- 3.8 Where an Examination Board cannot reach a consensus decision on a matter of academic judgement, the Chair will make a final decision taking into account the views of the External Examiner/s and this will be accepted by the Examination Board as final.
- 3.9 Decisions should be taken in formal scheduled meetings of the Board and can only subsequently be changed in exceptional circumstances. In the exceptional circumstance that a matter arises outside of the formal meeting cycle, an extraordinary meeting of the Board, or sub-group, will be convened, where practicable. Chair's action may be used in limited circumstances.
- 3.10 The Examination Board is responsible for the judgements of any of its sub-groups and decisions taken by Chair's action. All decisions taken by an Examination Board sub-group or Chair's action will be reported into the next meeting of the Board.

4. Module Assessment Boards (MAB) terms of reference, composition and quoracy

MAB Terms of Reference: Marks assurance

- (i) To receive and approve minutes of the previous meeting of the Board, and to receive a report of decisions made by Chair's action, or any approved sub-group since the last meeting.
- (ii) To confirm and maintain standards of assessments for all modules for which the MAB is responsible in conjunction with the Board of Study and the External Examiner(s).
- (iii) To confirm marks for each module for which the MAB is responsible. Assuring the marks allows credit to be accrued where the pass threshold has been met for students who are not registered for an award with the University and allows a resit to be offered to these students, where appropriate. The mark achieved at resit may be uncapped for such students, in proportion with the accepted exceptional circumstances.
- (iv) To recommend action to be taken in the case of question papers where there are errors or assessments about which there are evidenced major concerns. The Chair of the MAB will consult the relevant External Examiner before making recommendations to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) for approval to remedy the situation. The Chair will also report the matter to the Board of Study responsible for the module management to ensure the issue is not repeated for future cohorts.
- (v) To recommend action to be taken in cases where academic judgement concludes that an assessment has been unexpectedly easy or difficult, or where students within a cohort may be markedly advantaged or disadvantaged by their particular choice of modules. The scaling of marks, in line with University guidance, may be considered in such situations. The Chair of the MAB will consult the relevant External Examiner before making recommendations to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) for approval to remedy the situation. The Chair will also report the matter to the Board of Study responsible for the module.
- (vi) To exceptionally recommend proposed outcomes for approval by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) in all cases where external moderation has not been conducted on a module, to ensure that progression and award decisions are not unduly delayed. All such cases must be reported to University Education Committee and Senate.
- (vii) To transmit marks for modules to the Student Administration Office (SAO) who will ensure they are available to the appropriate PABs.

MAB Composition:

- Faculty Assessment Lead (or appropriate alternate nominated by Associate Dean for Education and Students);
- Deputy Chair (nominated by the Associate Dean for Education and Students, in consultation, usually for a minimum of three years);
- A representative group of the internal Markers of the assessments to be conducted by the examination board;
- the External Examiner(s).

MAB Quoracy and attendance:

For the MAB, the minimum quoracy is the Chair, Deputy Chair and two other examiners. External Examiners are not required to attend meetings but should be available for consultation if necessary.

MAB Agenda

School's must use the University's common MAB agenda.

MAB minutes

School's must use the University's common MAB minute template, which will be reviewed and published annually with supplementary guidance.

5. Progression and Award Boards (PAB) terms of reference, composition and quoracy

PAB Terms of Reference: Progression and Award

Schools will have an Undergraduate and a Postgraduate PAB Examination Board

- (i) To receive and approve minutes of the previous meeting of the Board, and receive a report of decisions made by Chair's action, or any approved sub-group since the last meeting.
- (ii) To determine, in accordance with the rules and procedures determined by University Education Committee, whether students for certificates, diplomas or degrees have satisfied the rules for progression from one stage of the course to the next.
- (iii) To recommend to the University Education Committee the award, or intermediate exit award, of certificates, diplomas or degrees to those students who have satisfied the assessment requirements for these awards. Where an External Examiner has exceptionally not been consulted regarding award decisions as required, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) will review and approve the awards recommended, to ensure that classification is not unduly delayed. All such cases must be reported to University Education Committee and Senate.
- (iv) To make academic judgements in relation to accepted Exceptional Circumstances Claims and to grant further resits as sits or a repeat stage, in accordance with the regulations, to allow students a fair chance to demonstrate academic ability.
- (v) To consider academic performance and award academic credit, in accordance with the University's Progression and Award regulations, and to apply the discretionary assessment regulations.
- (vi) To determine whether a student's overall performance may allow the award of academic credit via condoned credit in the final stages of an award.
- (vii) To determine the resit or repeat requirements, in accordance with the University's Academic Framework and Progression and Award Regulations, in the event of failure of a stage or the award.
- (viii) To confirm withdrawal of students who have exhausted assessment attempts, exceeded the maximum period of registration, or otherwise not met the academic requirements to continue the course.
- (ix) To agree what actions the Chair, or any approved sub-group, may take on behalf of the Board.
- (x) To report to the Faculty/ School and University Education Committee annually at the beginning of Semester 1, on the conduct and outcomes of previous year's assessments.

- (xi) To award prizes in accordance with School prize criteria.

PAB Composition:

- Chair (Faculty Assessment Lead, or appropriate alternate nominated by Associate Dean for Education and Students);
- Deputy Chair (nominated by the Associate Dean for Education and Students, in consultation usually for a minimum of three years);
- Faculty Portfolio & Curriculum Lead/ Faculty Educational Enhancement Lead;
- Faculty Student Experience Lead;
- a representative group of the internal markers of the assessments to be conducted by the board;
- the External Examiner(s).

PAB Quoracy and attendance:

Where a final award is to be made, the PAB must meet in full. The quorum is the Chair, Deputy Chair and at least one third of the appointed members of the Board. At least one External Examiner should be present at each PAB where an award is made. Attendance at a PAB where a final award is not to be made may be reduced to a minimum of the Chair and Deputy Chair and at least one member representative of the internal markers. Where a PAB is held in two consecutive sittings, both meetings must be attended by the Chair, the Deputy Chair, at least one External Examiner and at least one representative member.

PAB Agenda

School's must use the University's common PAB agenda.

PAB minutes

School's must use the University's common PAB minute template, which will be reviewed and published annually with supplementary guidance.

6. Examination Board Chair's Action

6.1 The MAB or PAB may delegate authority to the Chair, in consultation with the appropriate External Examiner/s as required, to take Chair's action on behalf of the Examination Board. Chair's action may be used in exceptional circumstances where no meeting of the Board is scheduled within a reasonable time. Such circumstances usually concern individual students, and may include:

- to receive late or held marks for an individual student which were previously unavailable to the Board;
- to remedy an identified error or other procedural irregularity within the assessment process;
- to enact a decision made by another University Panel or body after the main PAB, for example, where an academic misconduct penalty is applied or an academic appeal is upheld.

6.2 Chair's action may only be used to confirm straightforward outcomes within the regulations, which follow the Faculty/ School strategies employed at previous meetings of the Examination Board.

- 6.3 Decisions which are not straightforward, require exceptional approval, or where there are serious concerns about an error or other procedural irregularity within the assessment process should not be resolved by Chair's action. In these circumstances, the Chair has the right to reconvene the Examination Board or a subgroup of the Board. The Examination Board will then review its decisions, taking account of the new information and revise decisions as appropriate.
- 6.4 Chair's action must not be used to alter the academic judgment of the previous meeting of the Board, unless new information is available through a formal route, for example exceptional circumstances.
- 6.5 The outcome of all decisions made by an Examination Board Chair's action must be reported to Academic Services and be reported to the next meeting of the Board, and recorded in the minutes.

7. Reconvened Examination Board

- 7.1 The Chair may reconvene an Examination Board in full, or via a sub-group, to reconsider the decision made where new information is received which was not available at the time of the previous meeting. Such circumstances may include:
- The status, return date and re/sit requirements for intermitting/ temporarily withdrawn (TWD) students;
 - to remedy an identified error or other procedural irregularity within the assessment process which is complex, or requires exceptional approval to reach a satisfactory outcome;
 - to enact decision made by another University Panel or body after the main PAB, for example, where an a Faculty/ School Student Progress Panel has recommended permanent withdrawal, where an academic misconduct penalty is applied or an academic appeal is upheld and the case is complex, or requires exceptional approval to reach a satisfactory outcome.
- 7.2 The standard MAB or PAB terms of reference will apply to a reconvened Examination Board.
- 7.3 The quoracy for a MAB to reconvene will be as per the minimum quoracy requirements of a MAB.
- 7.4 The minimum quoracy for a reconvened PAB sub-group will be the Chair, Deputy Chair, at least one External Examiner (as required for decisions at the level of the award) and at least one member. In making any award the PAB should ensure equity in application of any discretionary decisions with those considered at the main PAB. For Online Distance Learning Courses, award decisions may be made for any candidate at a reconvened PAB, providing the quoracy requirements for a reconvened PAB are followed.
- 7.5 The outcome of all decisions made by a reconvened Examination Board sub-group must be reported to Academic Services and be reported to the next meeting of the Board, and recorded in the minutes.

8. Pre-meetings of Examination Boards

- 8.1 It is recommended that a pre-meeting of the PAB is held to determine the recommended strategy to be applied in cases where the Board has discretion and decide which candidates should be drawn to the attention of the Board and External Examiners for discussion.
- 8.2 Membership of the pre-meeting should be consistent with that of the main meeting, but there are no quoracy requirements and External Examiners are not required to attend.
- 8.3 Pre-meetings should be conducted anonymously by candidate number rather than name.

9. Examination Boards for standalone modules

- 9.1 Where credit is awarded for a module which does not contribute towards a course or an award of the University (a standalone module), the recommendation to award credit can be made either at the Examination Board of the owning School, or by a designated Examination Board (for example, International Summer School).
- 9.2 The standard MAB or PAB terms of reference will apply.
- 9.3 The standard MAB or PAB composition and quoracy requirements will apply, however, no External Examiner is required to be present at an Examination Board exclusively considering standalone modules, as no award is being recommended.

10. Resit Examination Boards

- 10.1 The standard MAB or PAB terms of reference will apply to Examination Boards meeting to consider resit opportunities.
- 10.2 The quoracy for a Resit MAB or PAB will be as per the minimum quoracy requirements of a Board, however, at least one External Examiner should be available for immediate consultation, but is not required to attend if procedural compliance has been confirmed at the main meeting of the Board.

11. External Examiner involvement and attendance at Examination Boards

- 11.1 It is recommended that External Examiners are communicated with in good time to:
 - (i) let them know that they are a full member of the MAB and the PAB, and are all expected to attend the main meetings of the PAB, to participate in the work of the board and the final award of students (including exercising discretionary powers);
 - (ii) let them know when the meetings will take place and remind them of the main purpose;
 - (iii) clarify that at least one External Examiner, who has also attended the main PAB, is should be available for immediate consultation, but is not required to attend the PAB following a resit opportunity, where an award is made;

- (iv) clarify that External Examiners are invited but not required to attend the PAB meetings which solely consider progression, or the MAB where marks assurance takes place;
- (v) request, if possible, contact details (telephone or email) of all External Examiners for the day of the meeting where they are not able to attend, as a precaution in the unlikely event that the recommendation of the subject specialist External Examiner is required to advise on an area of academic judgement. In such cases, it remains highly desirable that the subject specialist External Examiner is involved (remotely) in this discussion and that they are in agreement with the proposed outcome.

12. Role of the Chair of the Examination Board

12.1 The Chair of the Examination Board (MAB or PAB respectively) is responsible for the following:

- convening the meetings of the MABs and PABs
- agreement between the Chair (or deputy) of the examination board and the Chairs of Boards of Study the allocation of modules to MABs, ensuring that all elective modules owned by the School are assigned to a MAB
- convening the School PAB at School level and including all courses owned by the School.
- ensuring that the examination board functions in accordance with its *Terms of reference*
- ensuring the effective conduct of business
- ensuring that a PAB annual report is drafted for consideration by the Faculty/ School Education Committee in Semester 1

13. Role of Deputy Chair of the Examination Board

13.1 A Deputy Chair should normally be appointed for all Examination Boards (MABs and PABs). In the exceptional absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair will take over the responsibilities of the Chair. The Deputy Chair will assist the Chair in convening the meetings and ensuring smooth functioning.

13.2 The Deputy Chair of the PAB is responsible for:

- Being the main point of contact with the External Examiner/s including:
 - (i) Ensuring that each course has at least one External Examiner appointed to it in advance of the academic session. Where a course has more than one External Examiner a lead External Examiner should be appointed as part of the appointment process.
 - (ii) Providing briefing and induction materials in accordance with the Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses – to include a list of courses/modules to be examined and their aims, objectives and learning outcomes; a copy of the previous External Examiner's report; a copy of the latest annual course review; the names of course and module convenors and tutors; all relevant marking criteria.
 - (iii) Ensuring that the External Examiner externally moderates an appropriate sample of the assessments in accordance with the core duties set out in the

Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses and the Procedures for Marking, Moderation and Feedback.

- (iv) For hard copy submissions, providing External Examiners with the sample of internally moderated assessments including the comments of internal markers on marks assigned and feedback to students.
 - (v) Dispatching sample of assessments with completed batch mark sheet, and including relevant materials such as question-papers for unseen exams; generally keeping accurate records of what has been sent to the External Examiner.
- Seeking the approval of the External Examiners and signing off examination papers to ensure that they meet the standard required by the Student Administration Office and ensuring appropriate contacts are available during an examination:
 - (i) Seeking approval from the Faculty/ School Education Committee where an examination paper or other heavily weighted assessment task has not been signed off by the External Examiner.
 - (ii) Proof-reading prior to finalising and final checking of any printed papers.
 - (iii) Ensuring that the rubric refers to any handout that should apply to the examination paper.
 - (iv) Ensuring that copies of rubrics are sent to the School Administrator or nominee and the Student Administration Office (for an campus exams) and that any significant changes in format or rubric of question-papers are flagged to the Student Administration Office (for on campus exams).
 - (v) Ensuring that the final proof-read versions of question papers are sent to the Student Administration Office (for on campus exams) in the prescribed format by the appropriate deadline and that any model answers are removed.
 - (vi) Ensuring that the person responsible for the exam is available for consultation, at the time of the exam(s), including evenings and weekends, and for providing the appropriate Officer in the Student Administration Office with a contact telephone number (for on campus exams).
 - (vii) Investigating complaints on question papers and/or via the conduct of examinations report, supported by the Chair of the Board of Study.
 - ensuring that the following information is published to students and examiners in a timely manner:
 - (i) rubrics for all examination papers including resit papers where these differ
 - (ii) changes to the format of examination question papers including resit papers;
 - (iii) updated and approved versions of relevant marking criteria against which marking should be undertaken.
 - ensuring the preparation of marks arrays, including relevant calculated mean marks, for students on courses falling within the remit of the PAB are presented appropriately, in respect of:
 - (i) stage-to-stage progression;
 - (ii) consideration for final award, and where relevant, classification.

14. Role of External Examiners at Examination Boards

- 14.1 The detailed duties of External Examiners are set out in the *Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses* which can be accessed from the following URL: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/externalexaminers>.
- 14.2 External Examiners are required to confirm the appropriateness of the application of the marking and internal moderation processes, based on the assessment outcomes, and where appropriate confirm that any Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements related to assessment have been met. They should not act as additional Markers on a par with internal examiners in any circumstances. See Procedures for Marking, Moderation and Feedback for more information regarding moderation.
- 14.3 In their independent capacity External Examiners have the power to:
- (i) Review proposed assessment tasks and make recommendations for improving the structure or content of the proposed module assessment including examination paper or other heavily weighted assessment.
 - (ii) Request and obtain reasonable access to assessed parts of any course, including evidence about a student's performance on a placement.
 - (iii) For hard copy assessments, agree with the Deputy Chair of the PAB and the Chair of the Board of Study requirements for a suitable sample of assessments for external moderation drawn from the internal moderation process in line with the Procedures for Marking, Moderation and Feedback.
 - (iv) Review and critique the outcome of the internal moderation process, based on the assessment outcomes in the sample.
 - (v) Not endorse the outcome of the internal moderation process.
 - (vi) Request that the decisions of the PAB are consistent with the requirements of any PSRB.
- 14.4 Limits of External Examiners' powers:
- (i) Where an External Examiner is unwilling to endorse the outcome of an individual student at the PAB, the final decision rests with the Chair of the PAB and not the External Examiner. Where such action is taken, the Chair must report the fact to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) immediately. External Examiners retain the right to make a separate confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor on such occasions.
 - (ii) External Examiners are not involved in participating in decisions relating to misconduct, except indirectly as a member of an examination board.

15. Role of Secretary to the Examination Board

- 15.1 The secretary to the Board (MAB or PAB respectively) is responsible for the following:
- (i) Ensuring that the agenda and papers are compiled in accordance with University guidelines and shared securely with members of the Board, including External Examiners.
 - (ii) Keeping an attendance list and noting apologies for absence.
 - (iii) Keeping an accurate record of the decisions made by the Board, and rationale where these are not in line with pre-agreed strategies.
 - (iv) Confirming the accuracy of the official minutes of the Board with the Chair.
 - (v) Ensuring that the official minutes of the PAB meeting are finalised as soon as possible and passed to the Student Administration Office. The candidate name

should not normally be included to ensure anonymity. This process should be completed no later than fourteen days after the meeting of the board.

- (vi) Ensuring the External Examiner has signed the Statement of Procedural Compliance (as required).
- (vii) Providing the outcomes by the published deadlines to Academic Services.
- (viii) Maintaining an accurate record of decisions taken outside the meeting for onward reporting, for example by Chair's Action.