# Guidance on the Conduct of Boards of Examiners

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**Quality and Academic Standards Office and Registry, May 2017**
1. Precepts

1.1 Authority and powers of Boards of Examiners

Senate has delegated the following authority and powers to Boards of Examiners:

- to determine that degrees, diplomas and certificates can be conferred;
- to determine the classification of degrees;
- to approve pass lists and the progression of candidates to the next stage of their programme of study; and
- to make decisions on outcomes for students who have not met the requirements to progress to the next stage of their programme of study.

The authority to confer awards lies with Senate.

Meetings to decide on progression and degree awards may be conducted separately if required. Where these are held separately, external examiners must be present at the Award Boards but are not required to attend the Progression Boards unless deemed necessary by the School/discipline or relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB).

1.2 Membership and quorum for meetings of Boards of Examiners

A Board of Examiners must be supported by a designated Secretary and comprise the following members:

- a named Convener who is an experienced member of University staff. The Convener will normally act as the Chair of the Board of Examiners and will work closely with the Secretary to ensure that the Board is conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations and policies;
- members of academic staff to represent each of the modules and programmes being considered by the Board;
- external examiner(s) for the programme and constituent modules; and
- the Chair or representative of the relevant Mitigating Circumstances Committee(s).

A Board of Examiners is quorate when the Chair is satisfied that there is an appropriate spokesperson for each of the modules and programmes under consideration. Note that certain professionally-accredited programmes may require representation from the relevant PSRB.

The quorum for Progression Boards is the same as Award Boards (described above) but without the requirement for the presence of one or more external examiners.

1.3 The Chair of the Board of Examiners

The Chair will normally be from within the School and will be an experienced member of academic staff. It is good practice to appoint a Deputy Chair in order to grow the experience base, and also to have an individual who can deputise if the Chair has been involved in cases being considered at the Board (e.g. where the Convener is the lead for one of the programmes being considered at the Board). Where the Board is being convened to consider a single programme the programme leader should not normally act as Chair of the Board of Examiners.

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1 A spokesperson for every module must be present. Such individuals need not necessarily be the module leader.

2 Where Boards of Examiners are considering joint honours programmes at separate meetings, there should be an appropriate balance of representation for each of the subjects.
1.4 Consideration of deferred results

The School Board (or designated subcommittee) has the authority to appoint representative Boards of Examiners to consider deferred results. These Boards may be smaller than the full Boards of Examiners and will hold delegated authority from the full Boards of Examiners. The membership of each representative Board may be decided at the meeting of the full Board of Examiners, when the scope of modules will be known, and must be approved by the Dean or Associate Dean for Quality and Academic Standards or Learning and Teaching on behalf of the School Board (or designated subcommittee). External Examiners need not attend meetings of representative Boards, but must be consulted and advised of outcomes of these Boards. Boards of Examiners will have set out provisional recommendations in each student’s case from which the representative Boards will base their decisions. Minutes of the meetings of representative Boards must be submitted to the next meetings of the Boards of Examiners for approval.

1.5 Pre-meetings of Boards of Examiners

Pre-meetings of the Boards are preparatory meetings that should be held in advance of the main meetings. The purpose and format of pre-meetings may vary slightly between Schools/disciplines but would normally include checking the accuracy of and agreeing the module grades; identification of any units of assessment where scaling may be required; identification of borderline cases; identification of cases where compensation or condonement should be considered; and identification of cases where there is credit insufficiency. Individual mark adjustments, other than those recommended by Mitigating Circumstances Committees, must not be made at pre-meetings of Boards of Examiners. Schools should develop more detailed protocols for pre-meetings so that the purpose and scope is clear to all participants. External examiners may be invited to attend the pre-meetings and this should be agreed between the School/discipline and the external examiners.

If any specific issues arise relating to individual modules or elements of assessment that would require a recommendation for the scaling of marks or other across-the-board adjustments, there should be dialogue with the external examiner(s) in advance of the meetings and consultation with the Director of Academic and Corporate Governance or the Director of Quality and Academic Standards.

1.6 Mitigating Circumstances Committees

Meetings of Mitigation Circumstances Committees should normally be held in advance of the pre-meetings of the Boards. Guidance on the conduct of Mitigating Circumstances Committees is provided in Section 7 of the Assessment Policy for Taught Provision and in the supplementary guidance for staff and students available at:

https://www.dundee.ac.uk/governance/policies/mitigatingcircumstances/

1.7 Compensation and condonement in relation to the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

The University’s Assessment Policy for Taught Provision sets out statements about compensation and condonement. The Assessment Policy states:

‘In considering approaches to compensation and condonement, Boards of Examiners should also consider any accreditation requirements of relevant professional or statutory bodies (PSRBs) regarding compensation or condonement. These may:

3 The term ‘mark adjustments’ does not encompass the correction of any administrative errors.
Quality and Academic Standards Office and Registry, May 2017

• restrict or prevent application of compensation or condonement; or
• require additional procedures, e.g. submission of additional, specific information to the Board of Examiners.'

Boards of Examiners must be provided with appropriate information on the requirements of the relevant PSRBs in relation to consideration of proposals for compensation or condonement.

2. Operation of Boards of Examiners

2.1 Process guide

Registry have developed a process guide that summarises the communication between Registry, Schools/disciplines and Boards of Examiners for the determination of module grades and degree classifications. This is shown in Appendix 1.

2.2 Preparation for the meetings of Boards of Examiners

School Managers are responsible for the appointment of Secretaries to Boards of Examiners and ensuring that administration of the process is robust and secure, and that the external examiners have all of the information that they require. Although tasks may be delegated, there must be clarity about who is responsible for what. Ultimate responsibility lies with the School Managers. The preparatory arrangements for Boards of Examiners include the following:

• ensuring that the external examiners have appropriate access to the assessment samples agreed between the programme leaders and the external examiners;
• keeping a record of the student work that has been sampled;
• responding to any queries from external and internal examiners about the operation of Boards of Examiners;
• arranging meetings between students and external examiners;
• collating the module grades and relevant data to be considered at the pre-meetings and main meetings of Boards of Examiners;
• collating the recommendations of Mitigating Circumstances Committees for consideration by the Board;
• preparing agendas for the meetings, in consultation with Chairs and programme leaders, and issuing to Board members;
• providing external examiners with venues (and directions), dates and itineraries well in advance of the main meetings;
• arranging hotel accommodation, hospitality and making travel arrangements for external examiners where required; and
• arranging venues and catering for the meetings.

2.3 Conduct of the meetings of Boards of Examiners

2.3.1 Format

Boards of Examiners are formal meetings and must be conducted in a manner appropriate to the importance of the meetings. Formal minutes of the meetings must be taken by Secretaries to the Boards and ratified by the Boards, and retained for a period of 5 years after the graduation (or withdrawal from the University) of the candidates under consideration. Electronic copies of the minutes must be sent to Registry so that records are held centrally in
a systematic way.\textsuperscript{4} The draft minutes should be sent to Registry within two weeks of the meetings of the Boards of Examiners. The confirmed minutes should be sent to Registry once they have been ratified by Boards of Examiners.

There should be clear agendas set out for the meetings. Although agendas will vary depending on the programme(s), disciplines and Schools the following areas should normally be included:

- attendance;
- apologies for absence;
- confirmation of quoracy;
- declaration of any personal interests or conflicts of interest;
- minutes of the previous meeting;
- matters arising from the minutes;
- University policy on assessment and programme assessment regulations;
- PSRB requirements (where relevant);
- external examiners’ reports and associated correspondence/action from the previous year;
- any assessment issues arising from the pre-meetings of Boards of Examiners or other internal discipline-level meetings;
- progression and classification lists;
- sign off by the external examiners; and
- oral feedback from the external examiners.

It is important to allow sufficient time at the end of the meetings for external examiners to provide oral feedback on the programme(s), particularly with a view to enhancement. The types of areas they may wish to comment on include curriculum design, innovations in the delivery of the programme, the approach to online learning and assessment, assessment types, innovations in assessment, the use of assessment criteria, the approach to providing feedback to students, the approach to internal moderation of assessment and student support. They are, of course, at liberty to comment on any area that they wish.

University policy requires anonymisation of candidate information at meetings of Boards of Examiners. The Secretaries to the Boards, who are not members of the Boards and may not engage with academic decision-making, will hold a copy of the data that contains the identities of the candidates. The anonymisation may be lifted once the decisions have been made.

\textbf{2.3.2 Responsibilities of Chairs of Boards of Examiners}

Conveners of Boards of Examiners normally also act as Chairs and for the purpose of this guidance the roles are conflated. Where the roles are separate, Schools must ensure that there is clarity about respective responsibilities. The Chair is in charge of managing the conduct of the meeting, and responsibilities include the following:

- to ensure that Boards are quorate and are convened in accordance with University policy (see the University’s \textit{Assessment Policy for Taught Provision});
- to ensure that any personal interests or conflicts of interest are declared and managed;
- to ensure that Boards are provided with the relevant information including the grade sheets, recommendations from Mitigating Circumstances Committees, programme regulations, programme assessment protocols and the University’s \textit{Assessment Policy for Taught Provision};

\textsuperscript{4} From AY 2016/17
• to ensure that the rules described in the University’s Assessment Policy are applied correctly and to clarify any aspect of the Policy;
• to consult with the external examiners and ensure that their role as described in the University’s Policy and Code of Practice on External Examining of Taught Programmes is adhered to;
• to ensure that all candidates are given fair consideration and are treated in a consistent manner;
• to ensure that inappropriate information, such as details about individual students or members of staff, is not revealed by any member of the Board;
• to ensure the anonymisation of candidate information;
• to ask Boards to consider the recommendations of the Mitigating Circumstances Committees;
• to take a vote on any difficult cases where it is not possible to reach agreement; and
• to sign off the agreed grade sheets and to ensure that they are signed by external examiners.

2.3.3 Responsibilities of Secretaries to Boards of Examiners

The Secretary should be an experienced member of administrative staff. The Secretary is not a member of the Board and should not take part in any discussions about academic performance of candidates or take part in voting. Responsibilities include the following:

• checking the grade sheets in advance of the Board meetings to ensure the information is accurate and clearly displayed;
• taking a note of the decisions taken at pre-meetings of Boards of Examiners and having the note available for the main meeting if required;
• ensuring that all members have copies of the anonymised grade sheets;  
• holding a copy of the non-anonymised grade sheets;
• taking the attendance and note any absences or discrepancies;
• taking minutes that contain all of the decisions taken at the meetings and noting the comments made by the external examiners on good practice and areas for development;
• counting and recording any votes;
• providing the Chair with advice on procedures and the avoidance of any procedural irregularities (e.g. inappropriate application of rules or policy);
• ensuring that grade sheets are signed by the Chair and external examiners;
• providing the external examiners with expenses claims forms and a reminder to complete the annual report form;
• sending the signed grade sheets to Registry;
• retrieving all confidential materials from Board members and ensuring that the materials are destroyed; and
• providing Registry with a copy of the draft minutes of the meetings within two weeks and a further copy of the minutes after they have been approved by the Boards of Examiners.

2.3.4 The role of external examiners at Boards of Examiners

External examiners are provided with guidance about their role as part of the appointment process. The guidance makes it clear that external examiners are not the final arbiters for

5 Where grades are being shared with the Board using a projector and screen it is not essential for members (other than the Chair) to be provided with paper copies unless this is requested.
decisions taken by Boards of Examiners. Whilst their opinions are listened to, fully considered and recorded, decisions are taken by the Board as a whole.

2.3.5 Minutes of meetings of Boards of Examiners

Minutes should be professional, clear and understandable to other readers. They should not name individual candidates nor should they ascribe comments to individual members of the Boards. They should include: a record of who was present; any apologies or discrepancies; confirmation of quoracy; a record of any declarations of personal interests or conflicts of interest and how these were managed; a note of the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting; a note of matters arising from the minutes; a note of any discussions about the external examiners’ reports from the previous year; a note of any assessment issues arising from the pre-meetings of Boards of Examiners or other internal discipline-level meetings; a record of the decisions made on progression and degree classifications; a record of any compensation or condonement applied; a record of the recommendations of Mitigating Circumstances Committees and any resulting decisions on compensation, condonement or mark adjustments; a record of any vote by the Board and the outcome; and a note of the oral feedback from the external examiners. The minutes should include reasons for specific decisions made by Boards.
Appendix 1

Determination of module grades and degree classifications: process guide

*European Diploma Supplement*