Guidance on the operation of Boards of Examiners meetings

Summary

The document provides guidance information relating to the operation of Boards of Examiners meetings. It has been updated to provide additional guidance related to the minutes of decisions and recommendations made by local Boards of examiners, in parallel with the introduction of templates to standardise the minutes produced by these Boards. The guidance supports Professional Services staff in running board meetings and producing effective minutes with consistent wording across schools and faculties.

- Minutes are the official and definitive record of the Board of Examiners
- Minutes are used in appeals and complaints and may end up with the OIA or used in legal cases
- Minutes are sent to external examiners and academic colleagues
- Students are permitted to see the minute about them on request

Scope

To be followed by to staff who sit on or support Boards of Examiners

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Superseded documents

- Administrative processes to support the Boards of Examiners

Related documents

- TEMPLATE School Board of Examiners minutes, and agenda
- TEMPLATE Faculty Board of Examiners minutes
- The Code of Practice and Regulations for Taught Programmes, especially
  - Section 18: Boards of Examiners and
  - Section 20: Roles Responsible for Determining Progression and Awards
- Examination regulations relating to plagiarism and exam cheating
- Policy for external examining of taught programmes

Keywords

Board, Examiners, Examination, Exam, Minutes
Guidance on the operation of Boards of Examiners meetings

The following guidance is provided to support the assessment process and the operation of Boards of Examiners meetings. Staff should be familiar with the Code of Practice and Regulations for Taught Programmes (http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/codeonline.html) in particular:

- Section 18: Boards of Examiners
- Section 20: Roles Responsible for Determining Progression and Awards

and Examination regulations relating to plagiarism and exam cheating.

The Policy for External Examining of Taught Programmes, which can be found together with related forms at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/academic-quality/assessment/exexs/, should also be read in conjunction with this guidance.

1. Mark handling

1.1. Schools should have written procedures detailing the workflow of all assessment marks. Such procedures should include details about how work is received and receipted (if not submitted via Blackboard); how it is tracked through the marking and moderation process and how it is kept secure.

1.2. Schools should also have clear written procedures for the handling of marks: how marks are received and entered into the system, how they are checked or sampled and how provisional mark information is released to students. All these procedures should identify points of responsibility/accountability at each stage.

1.3. Initially, these procedures should be submitted to Faculty for sign off by the relevant Faculty Education Manager (FEM). FEMs will work with School staff to facilitate the exchange of good practice across Schools and Faculties (where appropriate) in developing these procedures. Any changes to established procedures should be discussed with the FEM before changes are implemented.

1.4. The agenda of the School Board of Examiners should contain a standing item to confirm that approved procedures have been followed. Any significant change to the procedure should be explained to the School Board of Examiners and minuted.

2. Preparation for the Board of Examiners meeting

2.1. The accurate preparation of an exam board is should include, but is not limited to:

- Scheduling School Boards to fit with Faculty Boards of Examiners, with reference to deadlines for paperwork, and for mark entry
- Booking of rooms, refreshments, travel etc.
- Ensuring adequate academic representation and external examiner presence
- Preparing and carefully checking paperwork (mark profiles, ECC reports, recommendations for cheating or plagiarism, signposting of material that has been shared with the External Examiner and any additional information)
- Pre-briefing with the Chair or similar
- Highlighting complex cases for advice in good time
3. **Roles: the Chair of the Board & professional service staff supporting the Board**

3.1. See the Code of Practice and Regulations for Taught Programmes Section 18: Boards of Examiners and Section 20: Roles Responsible for Determining Progression and Awards for information on membership and quorum of a Board of Examiners.

3.2. The Chair is responsible for managing the conduct of the meeting, confirming an accurate record of the meeting, and taking Chair’s Action.

3.3. Appropriate professional services staff support the board and attend to answer queries and take minutes. It is recommended that these are not the same person as it is difficult to do both at the same time. The minute taker should sit next to or near the chair to enable communication or queries during the meeting.

3.4. Professional service staff’s relationship with the Chair is key; they should be clear on roles and expectations. As a minimum they must meet with the Chair before the meeting to run through the board arrangements and discuss any missing information, complex cases or queries.

3.5. The Chair must sign off both the agenda and the minutes of the meeting.

4. **Agenda**

4.1. The Board of Examiners agenda must contain the following items as a minimum:

- Attendance and apologies
- Chair’s Report
- Report(s) of Exam Incidents
- Report(s) of any instances of Scaling
- Reports of Plagiarism and Exam Cheating
- Assurance of Mark Handling (Schools only)
- Recommendations for student awards/progress.

All items are included in the template for minutes.

5. **Consideration of students for award or progression**

5.1. When considering a student for award or progression, the initial Board of Examiners will receive and consider the following:

- The mark profile of the student for the units on the programme (and a provisional decision based on the profile from the business objects report)
- A report from the Extenuating Circumstances Committee
- Any recommendation regarding cases of academic misconduct
- Any recommendation regarding self-certified absence from an exam
- Students who are not receiving the award for which they registered (i.e. lower award, downgrade)
- Students classified outside normal classification rules (e.g. missing credits, Aegrotat)
- Where applicable, the units (and therefore marks) that have been impacted by any industrial action, in particular highlighting where a mark profile is incomplete and what mitigation has been applied thus far (from the records kept by schools).
5.2. If there has not been any disruption to a student’s assessment from industrial action, the initial Board of Examiners will make a recommendation to the Faculty Board of Examiners regarding the award of a qualification or a student’s progression, in the normal way.

5.3. If disruption has been experienced by the student, the initial Board of Examiners will refer to guidance from the Academic Quality and Policy Office.

6. Minutes of Boards of Examiners

6.1. Minutes are the official and definitive record of the exam board. You should consider the potential audiences for the minutes when recording decisions:
   - Minutes are used in appeals, complaints and legal cases, and may go to the OIA
   - Minutes are sent to external examiners and academic colleagues
   - Students are permitted to see the exam board minute about them on request

6.2. Minutes for Board of Examiners meetings must be retained for 10 years after creation.

6.3. Templates for Boards of Examiners are available for use. Text within square brackets [is provided for explanation and editing].

6.4. Whilst recommendations for awards must be considered anonymously, the records of both the School and Faculty Boards of Examiners should be written so that students can be identified e.g. by student ID. This makes for greater efficiency and reduces the risk of error in post-exam board procedures such as notification by letter and appeals.

6.5. Minutes of the School Board of Examiners must include a record of the explicit approval of the marks received and must clearly record details of decisions, with supporting rationale, including any changes to marks, and recommendations relating to cases of extenuating circumstances, impact of industrial action (if any), plagiarism or exam cheating.

6.6. Minutes of the Faculty Board of Examiners must clearly record all recommendations approved, and the details of decisions made, with supporting rationale, including when a recommendation has been amended, and any discretionary decision made by the Board relating to cases of extenuating circumstances or degree classification.

6.7. Minutes must be signed off by the Chair of the Board of Examiners. The definitive version of the minutes must be held at Faculty level.

6.8. For each case discussed (i.e. complex cases, not straightforward progression/award) during the Board of Examiners meeting the minutes should record:
   - Input e.g. extenuating circumstances, record of industrial action impact (if any), penalties for plagiarism or exam cheating
   - Considerations, including any regulations that apply
   - Decision as to whether any mitigation already applied is sufficient or insufficient, or impact of penalty is proportionate to the offence
     - Confirmation of recommended mitigation AND/OR
     - Definition of any further mitigation to be applied, or adjustment to be made. This will include anyone requiring an extension to complete written work (e.g. dissertations)
   - Outcome – the recommendation about progression or award and classification
If the case is particularly complex, you should record fuller details of the discussion, to inform the Faculty Board of Examiners.

6.9. Example UG minute (not tabulated)

[note that insertions for information in square brackets would not be included in minutes]

Student 1234567. ECs – Severe/Chronic [input]
Remove late penalties for UNITAAAAA and UNITBBBBB due to ECs [decision & consideration]
Disregard 25% component of UNITXXXXX for classification purposes as disproportionately low. This brings the unit average to 63. [decision, consideration, outcome]
Disregard UNITYYYYY ‘0’ non-submission for classification purposes. This gives average of 64.4. [decision, outcome]
Successful, award degree: 2:1. [overall outcome]

6.10. Example PG minute (tabulated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID</th>
<th>Credits to Date</th>
<th>Recommendation [outcome]</th>
<th>Rationale [input, considerations, decision]</th>
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<tr>
<td>12121234</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Successful, Award Postgraduate Certificate</td>
<td><strong>MSc Education</strong> – Student has decided to leave the programme and is eligible for the award of Postgraduate Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56565678</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Resubmit dissertation as 2nd attempt (for a capped grade)</td>
<td><strong>MEd Educational Leadership, Policy &amp; Development</strong> - Student failed dissertation at the first attempt with a ‘D’ grade which was confirmed by two internal markers and ratified by an external examiner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98989876</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Successful, award MEd Education (Individually Constructed Programme)</td>
<td>Awarded a Diploma in Science &amp; Education in 2012 (all awarded grades were a C) – returned to complete dissertation only</td>
</tr>
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6.11. Tips for production of minutes:

- Do write clearly, in full sentences; this is a formal document
- Do not include questions or unresolved queries; use the pre-briefings or take advice
- Do write fully about complex cases; take advice from Faculty staff or the Chair
- Do not wait to write up minutes; minutes should be completed within 3 working days, or by the Faculty deadline
- Do prepare minutes in advance and take a laptop to the meeting
- Do not use minutes to express opinions, pass judgement or apportion blame
- Do use the same terminology as the regulations and refer to the specific regulation being applied
- Do not refer to ‘decisions’ in School Board of Examiner minutes; the School Board makes recommendations and the Faculty Board of Examiners makes decisions
7. Recording outcomes recommended by the School Board of Examiners

Flow diagrams to show options for the progression and completion of students in taught modular programmes are provided in Annex 10 of the Regulations & Code of Practice for Taught Programmes.

7.1. Undergraduate

Cases may be split into the following categories and recommendations made accordingly:

- Students with Extenuating Circumstances Committee
- Students with cases of academic misconduct
- Students with self-certified absence from an exam
- Students who are not receiving the award for which they registered (i.e. lower award, downgrade)
- Students classified outside normal classification rules (e.g. with missing credits, Aegrotat)

Where possible please use the following suggested wording for consistently recording outcomes:

- Passed, to progress
- Successful, award [state classification]
- Conditional progression, to take assessment only for [unit] in the following year
- Conditional progression to undertake different unit [unit] with teaching in following year
- Repeat year
- Required to withdraw, no award
- Required to withdraw, award [state award e.g. CertHE, DipHE]
- Supplementary year (attendance) [specify as 1st, 2nd or 3rd attempt] for [unit]
- Supplementary year (keeping in touch) [specify as 1st, 2nd or 3rd attempt] for [unit]
- Sit exam(s) as a first attempt in [month/year] for [unit]
- Sit exam(s) as 2nd attempt in [month/year] for [unit]
- Retake coursework as 2nd attempt in [month/year] for [unit]
- Retake coursework as a first attempt in [month/year] for [unit]
- Extension to coursework deadline to [date] for [unit and coursework detail]

In exceptional circumstances e.g. industrial action, supporting guidance for recording discussions and the impact on outcomes will be provided. One additional outcome might be that decisions are deferred until any missing marks are available.
7.2. Postgraduate

Cases may be split into the following categories and recommendations made accordingly:

- Students who have failed more than half the credits points of the taught element at the first attempt and are therefore required to withdraw
- Students who have failed resits/resubmissions
- Students permitted an exceptional third sit/submission due to extenuating circumstances
- Students who failed exams/coursework/unit but are eligible to resit/resubmit
- Students now eligible to progress to the dissertation or next stage
- Students meeting criteria to resubmit dissertation
- Students NOT meeting criteria to resubmit dissertation
- Students exiting for other reasons
- Students choosing to withdraw, eligible for an exit award
- Research students eligible for the Postgraduate Diploma in Research Methods
- Other student cases for the Faculty Board of Examiners to note

Where possible please use the following suggested wording for consistent recording of outcomes:

- Passed, to progress
- Successful, award [state award]
- Required to withdraw, no award
- Required to withdraw, award [state award]
- Postgraduate Diploma in Research Methods (eligible students only)
- Resit/Resubmit as 2nd attempt in [month/year]
- Sit/submit as 1st attempt in [month/year]

8. Notification of outcomes to students

8.1. A formal notification of outcome should be provided to all students whose cases come before a Faculty Board of Examiners.

8.2. Degree Finalists will be formally notified of their result following the meeting of the Faculty Board of Examiners. This will normally be via the Portal or Blackboard.

8.3. The Faculty Office will write to students whose cases are presented to a Faculty Board of Examiners as appropriate. Letters must include as standard the name of the Board that considered the case, the date of the meeting, the decision made, whether any regulations apply and any requirements or special considerations. Where applicable the letters should contain details of the appeal process, the appeal deadline and sources of advice or support, both academic and pastoral. Schools may supplement these letters with further assessment detail as required by the Faculty Board of Examiners.
9. Faculty Boards of Examiners

9.1. As stated in regulations, the purpose of the Faculty Board of Examiners is to:

- Approve the marks, as presented to it by the School
- Approve any action to mitigate the effect of extenuating circumstances on a student’s performance in assessment (including the conferring of an Aegrotat award)
- Agree penalties for alleged cases of cheating or plagiarism, in accordance with the Examination Regulations
- Ensure that the proper procedures have been carried out and decisions are consistent with respect to the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes, such that fair and consistent outcomes are achieved, particularly with respect to complex cases, across all schools. In this, the faculty board of examiners shall not question the academic judgement of the initial examination board, but shall ensure the proper procedures are carried out, in accordance with Ordinance 17
- Monitor trends and any major deviations from norms faculty-wide
- Approve progression outcomes and award results and confer students
- Consider any ‘exceptional’ action, as recommended to it, in respect of progression or award outcomes

9.2. Guidance on exam board processes and minute style is equally applicable to the Faculty Board of Examiners.

9.3. The Faculty agenda will not include marks handling or external examiner feedback. The agenda will include consideration of trends and statistics, and potentially of prize nominations.

9.4. The Faculty Board of Examiners agenda must contain the following items as a minimum:

- Attendance and apologies
- Chair’s Report
- Report(s) of Exam Incidents
- Report(s) of any instances of Scaling
- Reports of Plagiarism and Exam Cheating
- Student awards/progress
- Trends and statistics

All items are included in the template for minutes.