

Code of Good Practice: Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes of Study

TQA Manual - Introduction and Contents

[Implementation: for all with immediate effect]

[Partner Institutions: All partner institutions delivering programmes validated by the University of Exeter are required to observe this code of good practice.]

1 Introduction

- 1.1 External Examiners must be appointed for all programmes delivered by Colleges. The procedures outlined in this document are applicable only to taught programmes of study. External Examiners are formally responsible to the Senate of the University.
- 1.2 The responsibilities of External Examiners and Boards of Examiners are set out in the [Ordinances](#) of the University. The Ordinances are made by Council to amplify the meaning of the Statutes which sit above them.

2 Membership and responsibilities of the Board of Examiners

- 2.1 In accordance with Ordinance 3 every examination for a Degree, Diploma or Certificate of the University, whether taken at one sitting or in parts, is directed by a Board of Examiners.
- 2.2 In accordance with Ordinance 3 para 2, the membership of every Board of Examiners must include at least one member of the academic staff of the University and at least one External Examiner.
- 2.3 In accordance with Ordinance 3, paras 3-4, Boards of Examiners are appointed each year by the Senate on the recommendation of the Board of the Faculty of Taught Programmes.
- 2.4 In accordance with Ordinance 3, para 1, the members of the Board of Examiners are jointly responsible for the setting and marking of papers in their own subject or subjects.
- 2.5 It is the responsibility of the Board of Examiners to make recommendations relating to the making and classification of awards. Exam Boards should confirm all marks received but should not alter marks as a result of discussions at the meeting. The Board will classify awards in accordance with the [Undergraduate Degrees and Awards Assessment Procedures](#).

2.6 The External Examiner is expected to sign the final mark sheet as a confirmation of agreement with the decisions taken and awards recommended by the Board of Examiners.

3 Meetings of Boards of Examiners

3.1 The external examiner(s) shall normally be present at any meeting of the Board at which recommendations are made for the award of degrees, diplomas or certificates. When, exceptionally and for good reason, this is not possible, the external examiner's absence must be approved by the Dean of Faculty. Under such circumstances, the Chair shall ensure that the external has been fully involved in agreeing marks and that there is at the meeting a written record of the external's marks and recommendations on classifications and failures. If absent, the external shall be consulted by telephone or some other effective means about distinction, first class, and failing decisions before the pass list is signed.¹

3.2 No person other than a duly appointed member of the Board and its Secretary may be present at a meeting of a Board of Examiners.

3.3 The quorum for the attendance of members at a meeting of a Board of Examiners shall be observed as follows:

- (a) The quorum for a meeting shall be half the appointed internal members, rounded up, plus an external examiner.
- (b) Colleges shall decide on those staff involved in the assessment of a module/programme to be nominated for membership of a Board.
- (c) The full Board at its principal end-of-year meeting(s) may delegate subsequent action to a group smaller than the Board. This group shall always include the relevant external examiner(s).
- (d) The delegation of such powers in respect of referred and deferred examinations shall be a default item on the main Board's agenda.
- (e) Board members not present at a meeting shall make a contact point available.

3.4 Meetings of Boards of Examiners should carry the following default agenda:

- Apologies for absence
- Minutes of the previous meeting
- Matters arising on the minutes
- Receipt of University and College assessment conventions
- External examiners' reports and associated correspondence/action from the previous year

- Declarations of interest
 - Pass and classification lists, with recommendations from mitigation committees or their equivalent regarding appropriate medical evidence
 - Progression lists, referrals/deferrals, with recommendations from mitigation committees or their equivalent regarding appropriate medical evidence
 - Delegation of powers (see 8(d) above)
 - Oral review by the external examiner(s)
- 3.5 A default agenda is not exclusive and further items should be added for a particular meeting as Board business requires.
- 3.6 The University considers anonymity at Boards of Examiners to be desirable. Since decisions on the treatment of mitigating circumstances are made by mitigation committees anonymity of students should be observed when Boards are considering marks. Boards may consider students by name once marks have been agreed as a further means of checking prior to final decisions.
- 3.7 All Boards of Examiners are required to keep formal minutes of their proceedings, recording results (as an attachment if more appropriate) and the reasons for recommendations relating to cases requiring discussion, including reference to any documentary or other evidence as appropriate.
- 3.8 Summer Boards of Examiners meetings should normally be held before the end of the summer term or at the latest by the end of the first week of the vacation.
- 3.9 It is not the responsibility of a Board of Examiners to make recommendations about the consequences of failure; this is the responsibility of the Deans(s) of the College(s) involved who shall, after due consultation within the College(s), submit recommendations to the Faculty Board. [This formulation reflects a legal judgement which required that processes of academic assessment should be clearly separated from those concerning the consequences of failure.]
- 3.11 Where a postgraduate programme involves both the examination of work arising from the programme and a dissertation, the Board shall recommend in respect of the course work, but the recommendation in respect of the dissertation may be made directly to the Faculty Dean jointly by the internal supervisor and the external examiner.
- 3.12 In the case of a referred examination a recommendation may be submitted without a formal meeting of the Board of Examiners, but must be considered by both the internal marker and of the Chair of that Board.
- 3.13 It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that all evidence relevant to any decision of the Board is available to the Board in documentary form; mitigating evidence considered by a mitigation committee or equivalent should only be presented to the Board with the explicit permission of the relevant student.

4. **Examination Boards for Flexible Combined Honours (FCH)**

- 4.1 The Board of Examiners is nominated by the FCH Board of Studies and appointed by the Board of the Faculty of Taught Programmes on behalf of Senate.
- 4.2 The Board of Examiners is chaired by the FCH Director.
- 4.3 The FCH Board of Examiners consists of academic staff representatives from each subject area teaching FCH students. Other members of staff who are members of the Board of Studies may attend as observers without voting rights. The Chair of the FCH Board of Studies is an ex officio member.
- 4.4 FCH will have an External Examiner appointed by Senate who will have experience of the operation of Modular/Flexible Combined Honours systems. The function of the External Examiner will be:
- to be a member of the FCH Board of Examiners
 - to advise on the conduct of the Board of Examiners and on the operation of the conventions
 - to advise on the regulations and processes of the degree

The FCH Board of Examiners processes confirmed final marks for modules. Hence Colleges must ensure that the mark recorded in SITS when the FCH Board meets is final and agreed by the relevant subject Examination Board. The mark will not be subject to revision at the FCH Board of Examiners. Nevertheless, the FCH Board of Examiners reserves the right to make an award higher than that indicated by a student's profile of final marks, provided there is mitigation and/or other exceptional circumstances. All such cases should be fully documented and minuted.

5 **Viva Voce Examinations**

- 5.1 Where Colleges and their Boards of Examiners wish to retain *viva voce* examinations, they must publish a written policy on the use of such examinations in taught programmes.
- 5.2 The policy must be included in a College's student handbook(s) or otherwise drawn to the attention of students and should address the following issues:
- The role of the viva in the assessment/classification process
 - Who has the authority to call a student for a viva
 - On what criteria students are selected for a viva
 - Whether attendance is compulsory or voluntary
 - The notice given to the student
 - The procedures followed and documentation produced

5.3 The following procedures are suggested as minimum operational standards for the holding of *viva voce* examinations:

- (a) A viva should be held if requested by an external examiner or requested by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and agreed to by the external examiner.
- (b) The criteria for the selection of students for vivas must be clear and consistently applied.
- (c) Students must be given individual notice of a viva no later than 5pm on the day prior to which the viva will take place. All students should be made aware of the date upon which vivas will be held no later than a month prior to that date.
- (d) The student's programme should have prepared the student for the viva.
- (e) Students must be briefed by the Chair of the Board of Examiners or a member of staff nominated by the Chair before the viva.
- (f) At least one internal examiner should be present with the external examiner throughout the viva.
- (g) The viva should not normally extend beyond 45 minutes; if it does, there must be a 15-minute break and an explanation of the extended examination must be noted by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and reported to the Board.
- (h) No student should receive a worse outcome as a result of the viva.
- (i) Students should have the right not to attend a viva without prejudicing his or her position.
- (j) Notes should be kept of the purpose of the viva, the questions asked and, where appropriate, any assessment criteria used. The recommendation from the viva must be minuted by the Board of Examiners.

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Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor

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¹The handling of Board of Examiners business by telephone or video-conferencing is permitted within the terms of the Data Protection Act. If in so doing the transactions are recorded for future reference, the recording must be stored securely.

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