Policy and Procedures for Boards of Examiners for Taught Programmes – Membership, Responsibilities and Operation

Purpose:
This document sets out the University policy on the membership, responsibilities and operation of Boards of Examiners. It includes information about the role of the Chair, the standard agenda to be followed and issues to be considered by all Boards of Examiners.

Of particular interest to:
All Chairs and members of Boards of Examiners (including external examiners), Associate Deans (Education), Deputy Heads of School (Education), Examination Officers, Faculty Academic Registrars.

Reference points:

1. Membership/constitution of Boards of Examiners

1.1 Each School shall be responsible for ensuring that there are Boards of Examiners which are appropriately constituted, along disciplinary lines, and which ensure the annual consideration and confirmation of module and year results contributing to all taught programmes of study that are under the remit of that discipline. Where appropriate, groups of cognate disciplines may hold a single Board of Examiners.

1.2 Ordinance 7.3 paragraph 2 specifies that ‘The Boards of Examiners shall consist of at least the following members and such other members as may be required by Regulations …: Other Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates

For each course two examiners in every subject or group of subjects, of whom one shall be an external examiner.

1.3 All internal examiners involved in the marking of assignments and examinations that contribute to the programmes of study under consideration by a Board of Examiners shall be members of that Board of Examiners.

1.4 All external examiners for the programmes of study under consideration by a Board of Examiners shall be members of that Board of Examiners. The role is set out in the External Examiners Procedures document available in the Quality Handbook and supplied to all external examiners on their initial appointment.

1.5 Depending on how the Boards are organised, internal and external examiners may need to be members of more than one Board of Examiners. There may be some special groups and boards established by Schools to undertake specific roles (e.g. consideration of special circumstances, or boards with subject representatives to look at first year progression) that may have a more limited membership.

1.6 ‘Internal examiners’ refers to all academic members of staff (full time and part time) plus those other staff required to be involved in the examining process, as determined annually by the School Programmes Committee.

1.7 In the case of collaborative taught programmes, it is the responsibility of the School to ensure that a Board of Examiners is constituted which includes appropriate representation of academic
colleagues from all partner institutions involved in the programmes. It is normally expected that the ‘programme lead’, or other similar officer, from each partner institution shall be a member of the Board of Examiners together with all University internal examiners for the programme and the University-appointed external examiner.

1.8 Under Ordinance 7.3. paragraph 7 the Chair of the Board of Examiners is appointed by the Board. This should be a senior member of the academic staff of the School, who has responsibility for examinations within a discipline or group of cognate disciplines.

1.9 The Associate Dean (Education), working in conjunction with Deputy Heads of School (Education) will nominate academic members of staff to act as Examination Officers in the Faculty. From amongst the Examination Officers, one will be nominated to coordinate any Faculty level activity and to represent the Faculty at University level events. Please see Appendix A for the Examination Officer Role Description.

2. **Attendance**

2.1 External examiners are always expected to attend the relevant Board of Examiners (but see paragraph 2.7). If an external examiner exceptionally cannot attend a meeting of the Board of Examiners this shall be reported in advance to School Programmes Committee and the Committee shall agree and note the alternative arrangements through which the external examiner will exercise his/her responsibilities at the Board – for example by participation by Skype, consultation by telephone or some other effective way. In cases of emergency the arrangements may be agreed by the Chair of School Programmes Committee or the Associate Dean (Education). In those cases where it has been agreed that the external examiner will exercise his/her responsibilities at the Board through other means, the Board of Examiners must receive, and record in the minutes, clear evidence for the views of the external examiner on the appropriateness of marking standards.

2.2 All internal examiners should attend meetings of the Board(s) of Examiners for which they are a member.

2.3 In the case of collaborative taught programmes if representatives from partner institutions are, exceptionally, unable to attend the Board of Examiners in person, they may participate in the Board of Examiners through Skype or other appropriate means.

2.4 In the case of joint honours programmes, there must be appropriate liaison between the disciplines involved and the Boards of Examiners should normally be attended by representatives of those disciplines.

2.5 An Examinations Officer should attend each Board of Examiners which takes place within the School, in an advisory capacity, to ensure consistency of application of University regulations and procedures.

2.6 The Faculty Academic Registrar or their nominee should normally attend each Board of Examiners which takes place within the School to oversee the administrative procedures of Boards of Examiners.

2.7 The quorum for the Board of Examiners is:

a. the Chair of the Board of Examiners
b. the Examinations Officer
c. the Programme Lead
d. the Director of Programmes or nominee
e. at least four other internal examiners¹
f. the external examiner(s) (unless, in exceptional circumstances, School Programmes Committee has approved alternative arrangements for external examiner contribution to the Board)

2.8 The Deputy Head of School (Education) and the Faculty Academic Registrar should be advised immediately if a Board of Examiners is inquorate. If the Board is inquorate, either (i) the meeting

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¹ Where a programme has fewer than four other internal examiners the number of internal examiners required for the quorum shall be one third of the number of internal examiners plus one – normally rounded up.
may continue but any decisions made will remain provisional until confirmed by a Board of Examiners which is quorate, such meeting to be arranged at the earliest opportunity; or (ii) the meeting shall be postponed and reconvened at the earliest opportunity when a quorum may be secured. Where an external examiner is unable to attend the Board of Examiners but alternative arrangements have been approved by School Programmes Committee, they will be regarded as present for the purpose of confirming the quorum.

2.9 For September Supplementary Boards of Examiners and Boards of Examiners for Parts I and II continuing students, the membership is formally the same as for the Summer Board of Examiners. It should be agreed in advance with the relevant External Examiners whether they wish to attend these Boards of Examiners. If they do not attend they must nonetheless be involved in verifying marking standards and confirming progressions and award decisions. For Supplementary Boards of Examiners it is recognised that given the timing of these Boards, some members may be unable to attend. There should be a minimum attendance requirement specified by School Programmes Committee– e.g. the Examinations Officer and the appropriate Directors of Programmes.

3. The role of the Chair of the Board of Examiners

3.1 The role of the Chair of the Board of Examiners is to ensure that the Board of Examiners which they chair carries out its responsibilities in a fair, transparent and impartial manner and in accordance with relevant University and programme regulations and procedures. The Chair ensures that members have the opportunity to contribute to discussions and that business is conducted collegially. It is also the role of the Chair to check the draft minutes of the Board of Examiners before they are circulated to other members. The version cleared by the Chair is known as the 'unconfirmed' minutes. Minutes remain 'unconfirmed' until formally approved and signed by the Chair at the next meeting of the Board of Examiners.

3.2 The Chair is empowered to take action on behalf of the Board of Examiners outside the meeting where a matter is urgent or where for some reason the Board of Examiners does not have sufficient information or is for some other reason unable to take a decision at the meeting. It is good practice that, where such matters are identified in advance, the Board of Examiners should formally empower the Chair to take action and record this in the minutes. Action taken will be noted at the next meeting of the Board of Examiners for confirmation and should in the meantime be reported to School Programmes Committee.

4. Pre-Board

4.1 For each discipline or group of cognate disciplines, a pre-Board is to be convened prior to the Board of Examiners to scrutinise the marks and to ensure that marks profiles are complete and no errors or anomalies of the classification or progression formulae have disadvantaged individual students. The Pre-Board discussions should be carried out without revealing student names. A summary note should be kept of any changes being recommended to the Board of Examiners. The pre-Board will report to the Board of Examiners, but is not intended to duplicate the work of the Board of Examiners.

5. Special Considerations Board

5.1 Each Board of Examiners must have an appropriate Special Considerations Board established for consideration of special circumstance cases. The Special Considerations Board must meet prior to the Board of Examiners and make specific recommendations on the cases considered. However, the Board of Examiners will not discuss individual cases from the Special Considerations Board.

5.2 Special Considerations cases must be handled in accordance with the Regulations Governing for Special Considerations (including Deadline Extension Requests) for Taught Programmes and Taught Assessed Components of Research Degrees.

6. Academic Integrity Cases

6.1 The University regulations and procedures for consideration of cases of suspected breaches of Academic Integrity must be followed as set out in the Calendar and the Quality Handbook.
7. Roles and Responsibilities of Boards of Examiners

7.1 Each Board of Examiners is responsible for the setting, approval and marking of all items of assessment relevant to the programmes of study or parts thereof under its remit, within the relevant University policy and guidance on assessment matters.

7.2 Each Board of Examiners is responsible for the consideration and final determination of module and year results for all taught programmes of study that are under its remit, for ensuring that the standards of awards are maintained and that all the requirements for assessments that contribute to the gaining of an academic award are fulfilled, as set out in the relevant regulations. All progression and classification decisions must be taken in accordance with the regulations for Progression, Determination and Classification of Results: Undergraduate and Integrated Masters Programmes; the regulations for Progression, Determination and Classification of Results: Postgraduate Master's Programmes (for new students starting in the 2018-19 academic year) or the regulations for Progression, Determination and Classification of Results: Standalone Master's Programmes (for continuing students who started before the 2018-19 academic year), except in those instances where AQSC has approved exemptions to these regulations for specific programmes. Approved exemptions are specified in the relevant programme regulations and set out in the University Calendar.

7.3 At the beginning of the meeting members of the Board of Examiners must declare any personal interest, involvement or relationship with any candidate on any module or programme under consideration. The Chair has the right to ask the member to withdraw from the meeting at any point should this become necessary. The declaration of interest, including a ‘null return’ where applicable should be recorded in the minutes.

Standard Agenda

7.4 All Boards of Examiners will follow a standard agenda as set out below. Boards of Examiners may, where applicable, consider additional items – for example, issues relating to professional competence.

- Conflicts of interest.
- Minutes of previous Board of Examiners.
- Report on Chair’s action since the previous meeting, including the outcomes of appeals and academic integrity rulings.
- Response to previous External Examiners’ reports.
- Summary statistics of modules, plus report on any scaling undertaken.
- Summary report from Special Considerations Board (no individual cases).
- Summary of Academic Integrity cases.
- Report from the Pre-Board (no individual cases).
- Report of distribution of degree classifications and trends through time.
- To receive Assessment Grids setting out marks and results for finalists and continuing students.
- Report on outstanding appeals and academic integrity cases
- Prizes etc.
- Comments from External Examiners, including good practice in learning, teaching and assessment and the enhancement of learning opportunities (in particular any issues relating to the Institutional enhancement theme for the year) and any other observations.

7.5 Each Board of Examiners shall confirm the recommended results from the Assessment Grid clearly indicating recommendations:

- for final awards, including any relevant classification
- for progression from one stage of a programme to the next
- for interim/exit awards where appropriate
- for Repeat/Referral where appropriate
- for resubmission where appropriate
- for termination of programme where appropriate
- for any awards/prizes to be made (unless this is the responsibility of School Programmes Committee).

7.6 As required by Ordinance 7 and in accordance with Indicator 9 of Chapter B7 of the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, the external examiner(s) present at the Board of Examiners and the
Chair will be required to sign the Assessment Grid which records the recommended results from the Board. The purpose of the external examiner’s signature is not to confirm that he/she agrees with every individual assessment decision, but that he/she is satisfied with the conduct of the assessment process. This should be recorded explicitly in the minutes of the Board of Examiners.

7.7 Procedures to be followed in the event that an external examiner is unwilling to provide endorsement are set out in the External Examiner Procedures document.

Confidentiality

7.8 Chairs and examiners must not speak to students about their detailed performance or provide students with results before the official date for the release of marks. Decisions are reached by the Board of Examiners as a whole, and staff should not enter into discussions with students about the details of those decisions. The confidentiality of the meeting should be recorded in the minutes.

8. Minutes of the Board of Examiners

8.1 All Boards of Examiners are required to keep formal minutes of their proceedings. The purpose of the minutes of Boards of Examiners is to record decisions, to summarise any discussion relevant to those decisions (where this is required to give a context or rationale for the decision, or to establish precedents), and to capture for further consideration any areas of discussion or requirements for future action. Guidance on the writing of minutes for Boards of Examiners is available in the Quality Handbook. All due care must be taken to ensure the security of these minutes/records.

9. Scrutiny of Postgraduate Masters’ Degrees

9.1 The Board of Examiners will convene at the completion of the programme to approve the awards. The Board of Examiners may also convene to consider the taught component of the programme in June to identify candidates needing to refer or repeat modules from the taught component of the programme. Where this does not take place, it should be made clear to students that marks released in June are provisional until the final Board of Examiners. Procedures for the PGT Board of Examiners should follow the same process as outlined above for undergraduate students.

10. Boards of Examiners and Faculty Education Committees: Approval of Recommendations for awards

10.1 The Faculty Education Committee finalises decisions on progression and awards (for ratification by Senate – see paragraph 10.6).

10.2 The Chair of the Board of Examiners will ensure that the Assessment Grid setting out the results recommended by the Board of Examiners is passed to the Faculty SAA Assessment Team for report to Faculty Education Committee. In the case of recommendations for final or interim exit awards the SAA Assessment Team will produce the Recommendations for Awards List based on the Assessment Grid.

10.3 There must be an identifiable time gap between the meeting of a Board of Examiners and finalising decisions by Faculty Education Committee (or Chair’s action).

10.4 If there are no contentious issues following a Board of Examiners then acceptance by the Faculty Education Committee may be enacted through Chair’s action as the Faculty deems fit. Such action must be reported to the next proper meeting of the Board. However, where there are exceptional circumstances which have necessitated the Associate Dean (Education) taking on the role of Chair of the Board of Examiners in addition to that of Chair of the Faculty Education Committee, the results recommended by the Board of Examiners as encapsulated in the Recommendations for Awards list, must be approved by a full meeting of the Faculty Education Committee, and may not be approved only by Chair’s Action. Accountability in decision-making is ensured through this reporting.
10.5 The Recommendations for Awards lists shall be signed by the Chair of Faculty Education Committee to signify approval by the Committee. (In the absence of the Chair, Faculty Education Committee may nominate an alternative signatory).

10.6 If any of the decisions reached by the Board of Examiners are controversial a meeting of Faculty Education Committee must be held.

10.7 The signed Recommendations for Awards list should be sent by the Faculty SAA Assessment Team to the SAA Examinations Awards and Graduation (SAAEAG) Registry Team. The SAAEAG Registry Team prepares the University Awards memorandum for transmission to the President and Vice-Chancellor, who signs the University Awards Memo to signify approval of the awards on behalf of Senate (as set out in the Statement of Senate’s Delegated powers and Related Matters). The SAAEAG Registry Team produces award certificates, diploma supplements and confirmation of award letters for transmission to students. Paper copies of the signed Recommendations for Awards lists are retained in the SAAEAG Registry in perpetuity, as a historical record and particularly for the purpose of responding to requests for the verification of awards.

10.8 The process set out in paragraphs 10.4 – 10.7 above shall also be followed when decisions regarding Awards are recommended on Chair’s action on behalf of the Board of Examiners.
Appendix A

Examinations Officer – Role Description

Examinations Officers are appointed by the Deputy Head of School (Education), in liaison with the Head of School and the Associate Dean (Education), to co-ordinate and manage the academic examination procedures for a School or a defined discipline group. They are responsible for ensuring that they run in a smooth, effective and consistent manner, in consultation with the Deputy Head of School (Education), the Director of Programmes, the Faculty Assessment/Administration & Assessment Team Leader, and other SAA staff as required.

Each Faculty will nominate one Examinations Officer who will represent the Faculty at any University wide discussions or events which discuss the operations of assessment and examinations.

The role will take responsibility for:

(a) having a thorough and up to date understanding of relevant regulations regarding progression, referrals, and repeats;
(b) ensuring consistency of approach to Board of Examiners practices across the discipline(s) for which they are responsible;
(c) liaising with SAA staff to ensure that deadlines for preparation of assessment documentation (exam papers, model answers etc.), and for marking of scripts are communicated to academic staff with adequate notice and by appropriate means;
(d) liaising with SAA staff to ensure that the dates and times for examinations and for Boards of Examiners are communicated to academic staff and external examiners with adequate notice and by appropriate means;
(e) organising and overseeing the preparation of exam papers in line with the University’s policy for the Proof-Reading of Examination Papers and discipline requirements;
(f) ensuring that all comments on examination papers are responded to suitably;
(g) in accordance with the University Calendar (http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/exams-regps.html) paragraph 5: ensuring that appropriate nominees of the Associate Dean (Education) are available during the whole of the examination period and remain on campus until each day’s examinations have been concluded, including those held on Saturdays. This responsibility includes maintaining a contact list valid during each examination for those responsible for the examination paper and facilitating effective contact with them during examinations;
(h) drawing up a schedule of second marking and moderation responsibilities for all relevant examination papers;
(i) attending relevant Special Considerations Boards;
(j) liaising with SAA staff to ensure the assessment grids are completed with correct and complete marks, attending relevant pre-Boards and identifying modules and cohorts of sub-cohorts where student performance is likely to warrant discussion at the Board of Examiners;
(k) attending Boards of Examiners and presenting the recommendations of the Special Considerations Boards, Academic Integrity panels and pre-Boards to the Board, leading discussion of cohort/sub-cohort performance on identified programmes or modules;
(l) acting as a source of advice to the Board of Examiners, including External Examiners, on regulatory matters; notifying Boards of Examiners and External Examiners of changes to regulations;
(m) informing academic colleagues on procedures for communication of marks to students, including issues relating to confidentiality and GDPR.
(n) liaising as necessary with other campuses or examination centres (including UoSM) regarding examination matters;

(o) contributing to discipline, school, faculty and University conversations about the enhancement of processes connected with examination.